

Born in 1718 in Haddam, Connecticut, the third son in a family of nine. He studied for a while at Yale College, being expelled for some trivial offence. From 1743 to 1747 he served as missionary to the Indians. He died of tuberculosis in 1747. His diary, begun in 1740 and continued until the time of his death was edited by Jonathan Edwards.

His Conversion Experience

"I was from my youth somewhat sober and inclined to melancholy; but do not remember anything of conviction of sin worthy of remark until I was, I believe, about seven or eight years of age. Then I became concerned for my soul and terrified at the thoughts of death; and was driven to religious duties; but it appeared a melancholy business, that destroyed my eagerness for play. And tho, alas, this religious concern was but short-lived, I sometimes attended secret prayer and thus lived at ease in Zion, without God in the world and without much concern as I remember until I was above thirteen years of age. In the winter of 1732 I was aroused out of this carnal security; by I scarce know what means at first; but was much excited by the prevalence of a mortal sickness at Haddam. I was frequent, constant and somewhat fervent in prayer and took delight in reading, especially in Mr. Janeway's Token for Children. I felt sometimes much melted in the duties of religion. took great delight in the performance of them and sometimes hoped that I was converted or at least in a good and hopeful way for heaven and happiness.I was also exceedingly distressed and melancholy at the death of my mother in March 1732. But afterwards my religious concern began to decline and by degrees I fell back into a considerable degree of carnal security, though I still attended secret prayer.

About the 15th of April 1733, I removed from my father's house to East Haddam, where I spent four years, but was still without God in the world, though for the most part I went a round of secret duty. I was not much addicted to the company and amusements of the young; but this I know that when I did go into such company, I never returned with so good a conscience as when I went. It always added a new sense of guilt and made me afraid to come to the throne of grace, and spoiled those good frames with which I was wont sometimes to please myself.

About the latter end of April 1747, being full nineteen years of age, I removed to Durham to work on my farm, and so continued for about one year, frequently longing from mere natural principles for a liberal education. When about twenty years of age I applied myself to study, and was now engaged more than ever in the duties of religion. I became very strict and watchful over my thoughts and actions and concluded that I must be sober indeed because I designed to devote myself to the ministry.

Sometime during April 1738 I went to Mr. Fiske's and lived with him during his life. I remember he advised me wholly to abandon young company and to associate myself with grave, elderly people; which counsel I followed. My manner of life was now wholly regular and full of religion, such as it was; for I read my bible more than twice thru in less than a year, spent much time every day in prayer and other secret duties, gave great attention to the word preached and endeavored to retain it.

Sometime in the beginning of winter 1738, it pleased God, one Sabbath morning as I was walking out for prayer, to give me on a sudden the sense of my danger and of the wrath of God, so that I stood amazed and my former good frames presently vanished. From the view that I had of my sin and vileness I was much distressed all that day, fearing that the vengeance of God would soon overtake me. Thus I lived from day to day in great distress. Sometimes there appeared mountains before me to obstruct my hopes of mercy, and the work of conversion appeared so great that I thought I should never be the subject of it.

At times I grew remiss and sluggish without any great conviction of sin for a considerable time together: but after such a season convictions seized me more

violently. One night I remember in particular, when I was walking solitarily abroad, I had opened to me such a view of my sin that I feared the ground would cleave asunder under my feet and become my grave and would send my soul quick to hell before I could get home. Though I was forced to go to bed lest my distress should be observed by others, which I much feared; yet I scarcely durst sleep at all, for I thought it would be a great wonder if I should be out of hell in the morning. And thought my distress was sometimes thus great, yet I greatly dreaded the loss of convictions and returning back to a state of carnal security and to my former insensibility of impending wrath; which made me exceedingly exact in my behavior lest I should stifle the motions of God's Holy Spirit. Again when I discerned my convictions to grow languid and thought them about to leave me, this immediately alarmed and distressed me.

The many disappointments, great distresses and perplexity which I experienced, put me into a most horrible frame of contesting with the Almighty, with an inward vehemence and virulence finding fault with his ways of dealing with mankind. I found great fault with the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, and my wicked heart often wished for some other way of salvation than by Jesus Christ The thoughts of the strictness of the law or the sovereignty of God would so irritate the corruption of my heart, that I had so watched over and thought I had brought to a good frame, that it would break over all bounds and burst forth on all sides like floods of waters when they break down their dams.

Being sensible of the necessity of deep humiliation in order to attain to a saving interest in Christ, I used to set myself to produce in my own heart the convictions necessary in such a humiliation; as a conviction that God would be just if he cast me off forever, that if ever God bestowed mercy on me it would be mere grace, though I should be in distress many years first and be never engaged so much in duty, and that God was not in the least obliged to pity me the more for all past duties, cries and tears.

After a considerable time spent in similar exercises and distresses, one morning while I was walking in a solitary place as usual, I at once saw that all my contrivances and projects to effect or produce deliverance and salvation for myself were utterly in vain, I was brought quite to a stand as finding myself utterly lost. I had thought many times before that the difficulties in my way were very great; but now I saw in another and very different light that it was forever impossible for me to do anything towards helping or delivering myself. The tumult that had been before in my mind was now quitted and I was somewhat eased of that distress which I felt while struggling against a sight of myself and of the divine sovereignty. I saw that I had been heaping up my devotions before God, fasting, praying etc. pretending and indeed really thinking sometimes that I was aiming at the glory of God; whereas I never truly intended it but only my own happiness. I saw that I had never done anything for God. I had no claim on anything from him but perdition on account of my hypocrisy and mockery. I continued thus as I remember it in this state of mind from Friday morning till the Sabbath evening following (July 12, 1739) when I was walking again in this same solitary place, where I was brought to see myself lost and helpless as before mentioned. Here in a mournful melancholy state I was attempting to pray; but found no heart to engage in that or any other duty. I thought that the Spirit of God had quite left me; but was still not distressed; yet disconsolate as if there were nothing in heaven or earth could make me happy. Having been thus attempting to pray - though as I thought very stupid and senseless - for nearly half an hour; then as I was walking in a thick dark grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any external brightness, for I saw no such thing; nor do I intend any imagination of a body of light, somewhere in the third heavens or anything of that nature; but it was a new inward apprehension which I had of God, such as I had never had before. I had no particu-

apprehension of any one person in the Trinity; either the Father, the Son or the Holy Ghost; but it appeared to be divine glory. My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable to see such a God, such a glorious divine Being; and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied that he should be God over all for ever and ever. I was so swallowed up in him that I had no thought about my own salvation and scarce reflected that there was such a creature as myself.....I continued in this state of inward joy, peace and astonishment, till near dark without any sensible abatement. I felt myself in a new world, and every thing about me appeared with a different aspect from what it was wont to do. At this time the way of salvation opened to me with such infinite wisdom suitableness and excellency, that I wondered I should ever think of any other way of salvation; and was amazed that I had not before dropped my own contrivances and complied with this lovely, blessed and excellent way..... The sweet relish of what I then felt continued with me for several days almost constantly, in a greater or less degree..... But not long after I was again involved in thick darkness and under great distress, yet not of the same kind with my distress under convictions. I was guilty, afraid, ashamed to come before God. But it was not long before I felt true repentance and joy in God.

Excerpts from Brainerd's Diary

October 18, 1740 In my morning devotions my soul was exceedingly melted and bitterly mourned over my great sinfulness and vileness. I never before had felt so pungent and deep a sense of the odious nature of sin as at this time. My soul was then unusually carried forth in love to God and had a lively sense of God's love to me. And this love and hope at that time cast out fear. Both morning and evening I spent some time in self-examination to find the truth of grace, as also my fitness to approach God at his table the next day; and thru infinite grace found the Holy Spirit influencing my soul with love to God as a witness within myself.

October 19 In the morning I felt my soul hungering and thirsting after righteousness. In the forenoon while I was looking at the sacramental elements and thinking that Jesus Christ would soon be set forth crucified before me, my soul was filled with light and love so that I was almost in ecstasy; my body was so weak I could scarcely stand. I felt at the same time an exceeding tenderness and most fervent love toward all mankind; so that my soul and all the powers of it seemed as it were to melt into softness and sweetness. But during the communion there was some abatement of this life and fervor. This love and joy cast out fear and my soul longed for perfect grace and glory. This frame continued till the evening, when my soul was sweetly spiritual in secret duties.

October 20 I again found the assistance of the Holy Spirit in spiritual duties and life and comfort in religion through the whole day.

October 21 I had likewise experience of the love of God in shedding abroad his love in my heart and giving me delight and consolations in religious duties and at the remaining part of the week my soul seemed to be taken up with divine things. I now so longed after God and to be freed from sin that when I felt myself recovering and thought I must return to college again, which had proved so hurtful to my spiritual interest the year past, I could not but be grieved and thought I had much rather have died; for it displeased me to think of getting away from God. Before I went I spent several other precious seasons of communion with God.

(The diary at this point becomes very fragmentary. From January 1741 until April 1742 nothing is extant, two volumes having been destroyed at Brainerd's bidding. A note by himself at the beginning of the next volume states that "the spirit of devotion running thruout is the same." He mentions some "imprudences and indecent heats". Another note adds "Towards the end of January 1741 I grew more cold and dull in religion, by means of my old temptation, viz. ambition in my studies. But through divine goodness a great and general Awakening spread itself over the college about the latter end of February in which I was much quickened and more abundantly engaged in religion.

April 1, 1742 I seem to be declining with respect to my life and warmth in divine things; and have not had so free access to God in prayer as usual of late. Oh that God would humble me in the dust completely before him! I deserve hell every day for not loving my Lord more.

April 2. In the afternoon I felt in secret prayer much resigned, calm and serene.....Sometime past I had much pleasure in the prospect of the heathen being brought home to Christ and desired that the Lord would employ me in that work; but now my soul more frequently desires to die and be with Christ. Oh that my soul were wrapped up in divine love and my longing desires after God increased! In the evening was refreshed in prayer with hopes of the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world.

April 3 Was very much amiss this morning and had a bad night. I thought if God should take me to himself now my soul would exceedingly rejoice. Oh that I may always be humble and resigned to God and that he would cause my soul to be fixed on himself, that I may be fitted both for doing and suffering.

April 4 My heart was wandering and lifeless. In the evening God gave me faith in prayer and made my soul melt in some measure and gave me a taste of divine sweetness. O my blessed God! Let me climb up near to him and love and long and plead and wrestle and stretch after him and for deliverance from the body of sin and death. Alas! my soul mourned that it should ever lose sight of its beloved again.

April 6 I walked out this morning to the same place where I was last night and felt as I did then (preceding entry omitted by J. Edwards) but was somewhat relieved by reading some passages in my diary and seemed to feel that I might pray unto the great God again with freedom, but was suddenly struck with the damp from the sense I had of my own vileness. Then I cried to God to cleanse me from my exceeding filthiness, to give me repentance and pardon. I then began to find it sweet to pray; and could think of undergoing the greatest sufferings in the cause of Christ with pleasure; and found myself willing, if God should so order it, to suffer banishment from my native land among the Heathen that I might do something for their salvation in distresses and deaths of any kind. Then God gave me to wrestle earnestly for others, for the kingdom of Christ in the world and for dear Christian friends. I felt weaned from the world and from my own reputation amongst men, willing to be despised and to be a gazing stock for the world to behold. It is impossible for me to express how I then felt. I had not much joy but some sense of the majesty of God, which made me as it were tremble.

April 7 I had not so much fervency, but felt somewhat as I did yesterday morning in prayer. At noon I spent some time in secret with some fervency but scarcely any sweetness; and felt very dull in the evening.

(The above entries taken as they come from the beginning of the exist- in regular diary are typical specimens. Early in the spring of 1743 he began his work among the Indians. An entry under the date of May 18 of that year gives his reaction and some facts about the conditions. The previous entries give nothing except in regard to his feelings.)

May 18 My circumstances are such that I have no comfort of any kind but what I have in God. I live in the most lonesome wilderness; have but a single person to converse with that can speak English. Most of the talk I hear is either Highland Scotch or Indian. I have no fellow-Christians to whom I may unbosom myself, or lay open my spiritual sorrows, with whom I can take sweet counsel in conversation about heavenly things and join in social prayer. I live poorly with regard to the comforts of life: most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty pudding etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw, my labor is hard and extremely difficult, and I have little appearance of success to comfort me. The Indians have no land to live on but what the Dutch people lay claim to; and these threaten to drive them off. They have no regard to the souls of the poor Indians

and by what I can learn they hate me because I have come to preach to them. But that which makes all my difficulties grievous to be borne is that God hides his face from me.

(The following has been chosen almost at random from a later portion of the Diary.)

June 27, 1745 Visited and preached to the Indians again. Their number now amounted to about forty persons. Their solemnity and attention still continued and a considerable concern for their souls became apparent among numbers of them. My soul rejoiced to find that God enabled me to be faithful and that he was pleased to awaken these poor Indians by my means. O how heart-reviving and soul-refreshing it is to me to see the fruit of my labors!

June 28 The Indians being now gathered, a considerable number of them from their several and distant habitations, requested me to preach twice a day to them, being desirous to hear as much as they possibly could while I was with them. I cheerfully complied with their request and could not but admire the goodness of God, who I was persuaded, had inclined them to inquire after the way of salvation.

In the evening my soul was revived and my heart lifted up to God in prayer for my poor Indians, myself and friends and the dear church of God. Oh how refreshing, how sweet this was!

June 29 Preached twice to the Indians and could not but wonder at the seriousness and strictness of their attention. Saw as I thought the hand of God very evidently and in a manner somewhat remarkable making provision for their subsistence together in order to their being instructed in divine things. For this day and the day before with only walking a little way from the place of our daily meeting, they killed three deer, which were a seasonable supply for their daily wants and without which they could not have subsisted together in order to attend the means of grace. Oh how refreshing it is to see them attend with such uncommon diligence and affection with tears in their eyes and concern in their hearts!

June 30 Preached twice this day also. Observed yet more concern and affection among the poor heathens than ever; so that they even constrained me to tarry yet longer with them, although my constitution was exceedingly worn out.

July 1 Preached again twice to a very serious and attentive assembly of Indians; they having now learned to attend the worship of God with Christian decency in all respects. There were now between forty and fifty persons of them present, old and young. I spent a considerable time discoursing with them in a more private way, inquiring of them what they remembered of the great truths which had been imparted to them from day to day, and may justly say it was amazing to see how they had received and retained the instructions given them and what a measure of knowledge some of them had acquired in a few days.

July 2 Was obliged to leave these Indians at Crossweeksung, thinking it was my duty as soon as my health would admit to visit those at the Forks of the Delaware. When I came to take leave of them and speak particularly to each of them they all earnestly inquired when I would come again and expressed great desire of being further instructed. Of their own accord they agreed that when I would come again, they would all meet together during my continuance with them and they would use their utmost endeavors to gather all the other Indians in those parts who were yet more remote.