It is commonplace that one of the most important figures in American Christian history is Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). His contribution to the heart and mind of American Christianity was recognized in some quarters during his lifetime, lay dormant for a good number of generations during the nineteenth century, and resurfaced with a passion in the late twentieth century.

Now, if time spent in preparation and study is an adequate indicator, Edwards considered his most important pastoral task to be the preparation and delivery of sermons. This is seen in his own reflections on the task and his prodigious sermon work. Yet, scholarly reflection on Edwards’ preaching in general and his funeral sermons in particular has been relatively meagre. In every generation, Christian ministers have been called upon to minister comfort in the wake of death’s shadow. In the Western tradition this ministry has usually been accomplished by means of a funeral ritual and historically an important aspect of that ritual has been a sermon. Jonathan Edwards was no stranger to such sermons, preaching at least twelve sermons during his ministry. This monograph examines one of these sermons, one that must have been particularly difficult to preach: Youth is Like a Flower that is Cut Down, a sermon that Edwards preached following the death of his daughter Jerusha in 1748.

The monograph that you have before you has passed through several stages. It began as a fountain-pen sketch on a note pad over dinner in May 2007. By the following May it was a completed Master’s thesis. One year later it has taken the form that you now see here. As I have learned over the past two years, a writing project is both a solitary and community affair. An hour here, a half-day there, and soon enough a month has passed as one is locked in the basement away from family, friends (and sunlight). Yet there are many people who contributed sig-
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Debbie Branit, made several visits at crucial points in the writing process
to free their son-in-law from his responsibilities and made it possible to
finish chapters on time.

I wish to dedicate this monograph to my wife, Tracy, and my son,
Jonathan. They were generous in allowing dad to camp out in the base-
ment or at the library to write and providing much needed breaks to
watch Star Wars and drink hot chocolate. Your small acts of service were
more meaningful than you know.

This work is humbly presented to the ever-growing bibliography of
Edwards studies. If it proves to be useful in understanding this part of
Edwards’ life, I will be gratified. But this monograph is chiefly intended
for pastors, who, like Edwards, labor weekly to shepherd their flocks
safely through the steep heights and deep valleys of life, often carrying
wounded lambs on their shoulders. If Edwards’ ministry strengthens
you to carry them a few steps further, my goal in writing will have been
accomplished. Soli Deo Gloria.

Joseph C. Harrod
Louisville, KY
July 2009
ENDNOTES