



DAVID BRAINERD 1718-1747

David Brainerd was a young Puritan minister who ministered to the American Indians in eastern Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey colonies during the 1700's. He was orphaned as a teen and was converted at age 21 during the Great Awakening. He attended Yale, but was expelled for a disrespectful comment about one of his professors. Later, he prepared for the ministry to work with the Indians. Brainerd poured out his life in ministry to Indians, writing that he wanted "to burn out in one continual flame for God." He wrote this in his diary:

"All my desire was the conversion of the heathen, and all my hope was in God. God does not suffer me to please or comfort myself with hopes of seeing friends, returning to my dear acquaintance, and enjoying worldly comforts."

He had many offers to become a church minister, but he was committed to working with the Native Americans despite his own severe health problems. He eventually founded a Native American Christian community in New Jersey where he constructed a church, school, carpenter's shop and infirmary. Unfortunately, he became too ill to continue ministering and died of tuberculosis in the home of Jonathan Edwards at age 29.

Much of Brainerd's influence on future generations can be attributed to the biography compiled by Jonathan Edwards and first published in 1749 under the title of *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*. This is the most reprinted of Edwards's books and has never been out of print. Thus it has influenced subsequent generations, mainly because of Brainerd's single-minded perseverance in his work in the face of significant suffering. Brainerd's writings contain substantial meditations on the nature of illness, suffering, and service. He has inspired many missionaries such as William Carey and Henry Martyn, who went to India, and Jim Elliot, the twentieth century missionary who gave his life ministering to the Auca Indians.

Brainerd's life also played a role in the establishment of Princeton College and Dartmouth College. Brainerd Hall at Yale Divinity School was named after him, the only building on the campus to be named after a student who was once expelled.