

The Church of the Shrunken Heads

Jim Elliff

I could walk to the museum when I was a boy in Kansas City. Of all the wonders I saw there, the shrunken head was the most alluring. I could envision how it was made to shrink. It was inset in the wall, blackened, menacing, exotic, jaw-dropping, and . . . fake.

It was years later that scientists discovered that 80% of the shrunken heads displayed around the country were not human heads, but those of monkeys or sloths, or the mere handicraft of an enterprising native made from goatskin. Obviously, the one I used to see was a fake, for it was eventually removed. Who would remove a shrunken head if it were authentic? I was an older man before I read the story, the disappointing story, that destroyed my childhood fantasy.

But what was fake in the museum, is real in the churches. See it with the right kind of eyes—rows and rows of tiny heads attached to oversized human bodies, not nodding, not responding, not listening, not following, not knowing—shrunken and sullen dead heads. See them at home, never learning, never attaining, only staring, endlessly staring into the television or electronic device. They are on display at your local church.

A Head Full

Young Jonathan didn't want a shrunken head. Jonathan Edwards was only 20 when he penned this resolution:

Resolved to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently as that I may find and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.

Unlike most of us who make resolves, Edwards lived out what he wrote over his next 38 years, becoming, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, “the greatest theologian and philosopher of British American Puritanism, stimulator of the religious revival known as the ‘Great Awakening,’ and one of the forerunners of the age of Protestant missionary expansion in the 19th century.”



There is only room for one person to be the greatest. And, even to Edwards, becoming the greatest was not his ambition. But he did wish to be a faithful student of the Bible. That's something all of us can be.

Steadily, Constantly, Frequently

Shrunken heads do not form because of failure of desire as much as from failure of discipline. An empty, shrunken head is that way because of the mental atrophy that comes from inactivity. It's the steady, constant, frequent intake of the word of God that grows the man or woman of God. You won't know everything immediately, nor will you apply it all. But, over time, pressing on each day to learn and grow, much will change for the good. I promise it. And, like Edwards, you don't have to aspire to be the greatest. Leave that to God to decide. You *do* have to be faithful to learn what God has to say . . . and, if you are a believer, you will *want* to do that.

- Are you faithfully attending the meetings of God's people designed to help you grow?
- Are you faithfully picking up your Bible and reading to understand and to be changed?
- Are you faithfully to ask deeper questions in order to learn?

I'm often humored by young men or young women who have high aspirations, yet make no efforts to attain them. No good comes from a desire without a discipline. The desire has to make your mind *work*.

Plainly Perceive Myself to Grow

You can tell when you are growing. Others can tell it also. "Let your progress be made known to all," Paul told young Timothy.

William Carey, the noble 18th century missionary to Burma, once said, "*I can plod*. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything." Can you plod? If you can, it will make all the difference. Determine *now* how you will begin to grow that head, and heart.

“Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2
Peter 3:18

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