

TO HIS ADOPTED
DAUGHTER

BETSY

LETTERS

BY

JOHN NEWTON

Twenty-one letters to his adopted daughter

(John Newton had no children of his own. These twenty-one letters were written to his *adopted daughter Betsy*, when she was away at school.)

Letter 1

September 8, 1779

My dear child,

I was glad of your letter, for we were just thinking of you, as it seems you were of us, that it was a long time since we heard from you. When you want a letter from me, you must write—if I send you one for one, I think it will be pretty well.

Richard died about two weeks ago, and I buried him and three others within a week. All four were rather young people, that is, about thirty years of age. Last Sunday evening I preached a funeral sermon for Richard; the text was [Genesis 49:19](#), "*Gad will be attacked by marauding bands, but he will attack their heels.*" That short verse contained his history; and I hope it contained yours likewise. The first part is sure to you if you live; you will meet with many troops of sins, fears, cares, and troubles, which will fight against you, and seem at times almost to overcome you—yes, overcome you they certainly would, if you were to fight them in your own strength. If you do not seek and love the Lord Jesus, you would be destroyed by them. But I cannot bear to entertain such a thought; surely you must, you will love him!

You hear a great deal of his beauty and goodness; believe it, for it is true; and that a great deal—is but little of what ought to be said of him. But pray him to show himself and his own love to your heart; then you will love him indeed! All the world would love him—did they but rightly know him. Well, if you love the Lord Jesus, you will certainly overcome at last; and then you shall have the crown of life, and all the happiness which is contained in the promises made to those who overcome, in the second and third chapter of Revelation. My dear child, pray to him, and never be content or satisfied until you feel your desire and love fixed upon him. Nothing less will content me for you. If you should behave to me and your mamma with the greatest tenderness, affection, and attention as you grow up, (as I hope you will, and you yourself are sensible you ought,) still I would weep over you, if I saw you negligent and ungrateful towards the Lord. We love you, and would do much to show it—but we could not, we dare not, be *crucified* for you. This was such love as Jesus only could show; judge what a return it calls for from you. Not to love the Lord Jesus—is the height of wickedness and the depth of misery! "If anyone does not love the Lord, that person is cursed!" [1 Corinthians 16:22](#)

Believe me to be yours.

Letter 2

October 22, 1779

My dear child,

You may well expect to hear from me; but you will hardly expect a long letter, if you remember what little leisure time I have in London. Almost every day loads me with debt to you—and brings me letters which I am not able to answer; but my dear *Betsy* is never forgotten. We have been here two weeks; the Lord gave us a pleasant and safe journey. Your mamma has been, upon the whole, comfortably well. I need not tell you that we are situated in the midst of so much noise and smoke. But here I can have no garden; no pretty walks among trees and fields; no birds but such as are prisoners in iron cages, so that I pity them, for all their singing.

But the same sun that shines there, is often to be seen at London; and the Lord Jesus, like the sun, is in all places at once. Go where we will, we are not far from him, if we have but eyes to see him, and hearts to perceive him. My dear child, when you look at the sun, I wish it may lead your thoughts to him who made it, and who placed it in the sky, not only to give us light—but to be the brightest, noblest emblem of himself. There is but one sun, and we need no another—so there is but one Savior; but he is complete and all sufficient, the Sun of Righteousness, the Fountain of life and comfort; his beams, wherever they reach, bring healing, strength, peace, and joy to the soul. Pray to him, my dear, to shine forth, and reveal himself to you. Oh, how different is he from all that you have ever seen with your bodily eyes! he is the Sun of the soul, and he can make you as sensible of His presence—as you are of the sun-shine at noon-day; and, when once you obtain a clear sight of him, a thousand little things, which have hitherto engaged your attention, will in a manner disappear.

As by the light of opening day,
The stars are all concealed;
So earthly beauties fade away,
When Jesus is revealed.

I entreat, I charge you, to ask him every day to show himself to you. Think of him as being always with you; about your path by day, about your bed by night, nearer to you than any object you can see, though you see him not; whether you are sitting or walking, in company or alone. People often consider God as if he saw them from a great distance—but this is wrong; for, though he is in heaven, the heaven of heavens cannot contain him; he is as much with us as with the angels; in him we live, and move, and have our being; as we live in the air which surrounds us, and is within us, so that it cannot be separated from us a moment. And whatever thoughts you can obtain of God from the Scripture, as great, holy, wise, and good, endeavor to apply them all to Jesus Christ, who once died upon the cross, for he is the true God, and eternal life, with whom you have to do; and, though he is the King

of kings, and Lord of lords, and rules over all—he is so condescending and compassionate, that he will hear and answer the prayer of a child. Seek him, and you shall find him; whatever else you seek, you may be disappointed—but he is never sought in vain.

Your very affectionately

Letter 3

April 8, 1780

My dear child,

I have heard of you several times since I received your letter, which I wished to answer before. I would be thankful that you are well, and I hope you are happy, that is, in the common sense of the word; for, strictly speaking, happiness is not to be found here. I hope, however, you are cheerful, thankful, and, in some degree, satisfied with your lot. And, in order to this, I would wish you to look round you, and see how many children are sick, while you are well; poor and destitute, while you are provided, not only with the *necessities*—but the *comforts* of life. How many, again, are exposed to hard and unkind treatment, whereas you are noticed and caressed, and have kind friends abroad and at home. Once more, consider how many are brought up in ignorance and wickedness, have nothing but evil examples, and, it is to be feared, will go from bad to worse as they grow up; while you have the advantage of good education and good examples, and are placed where you can hear the precious gospel, by which the Lord gives faith and salvation to those who seek him.

Then ask yourself *how* it is, or *why* you are better off than they? And I hope there is something within you that will tell you, whatever the reason may be—that it is not because you are better in yourself, or deserve better things than others. Your heart is no better; you likewise are a sinner; you were born with a sinful disposition, and, though you are a child, you have sinned against the Lord; so that, had he been strict to mark what is amiss, he might justly have cut you off long ago. The only reason why you are so favored, must be the Lord's mercy and goodness. He pitied you when you did not know how to pity yourself; and in His providence he removed you from a place where you would probably have remained ignorant of him; and he placed you under our care, and made you dear to us, that we might feel a pleasure in doing everything in our power to promote your welfare. And I hope that you and we shall have reason to thank him that you came to us.

The days are growing long, the summer is coming, and among the many pleasant days of summer, there is one which I hope will bring you home. I believe you to be glad to come, and we shall be glad to see you—I hope you will like the house. There are green trees in front, and a green field backwards, with cows feeding in it; so that it has some little resemblance of the country.

Your mamma sent you a cake, which I hope you received; and, if you did, I suppose it is all gone by this time—for they say, you cannot eat your cake and have it. It is a true saying, and full of meaning. Look at all that appears good and pleasant in this world; could you call it all your own, it would last but a little while, and when you go into another world, the remembrance of what you had in this world, will be but like remembering you once had a cake—but it is gone, quite eaten up. But it is not so, my dear child, with respect to that feast which *Jesus* prepares for poor sinners. The pleasures which he gives are repeated from time to time, and are pleasing even when we reflect on them. And, in the other world, when earthly pleasures will be quite ended, those who love him shall have pleasure without interruption and without end, rivers of pleasure at his right hand for evermore! May the Lord bless you, and keep you. It is one of my pleasures while here to think of you, to feel for you, and to write to you as

Your affectionate.

Letter 4

August 3, 1780

My dear child,

You may be sure your mamma and I were very glad to hear that the Lord preserved you from harm, and that you were safe and well at _____. I wish you to have a deep impression on your mind, that your *safety*, whether abroad or at home, or the continuance of your *health* from one hour to another, is not a matter of course—but the effect of the care and goodness of him who knows we are as helpless as sheep, and condescends to act the part of a shepherd towards us. May you learn to acknowledge him in all your ways, to pray to him for his blessing, and to praise him daily for his mercies; and then you will do well.

This is a great privilege, which distinguishes us from the beasts of the field—they likewise owe their preservation to his providence; but then they are not capable of *knowing* him or *thanking* him. There are many young people who are contented to live without God in the world; but this is not only their *sin*—but their *shame* likewise. They thereby renounce the chief honor they are capable of, and degrade themselves to a level with the beasts! But let it not be so with you. Pray to the Lord to teach you to love him; and, when you think of him, fix your thoughts upon Jesus Christ, upon him who conversed on earth as a man. The great God has manifested himself in a way suited to us, as weak creatures and poor sinners. God is everywhere present; but only those who look to him in Christ—can love, trust, or serve him aright. When you read our Savior's discourses in Scripture, pay attention as if you saw him with your own eyes standing before you. And when you pray, assure yourself, before you begin, that he is actually in the room with you, and that his ear is open to every word you say. This will make you serious, and it will likewise encourage you, when you consider that you are not speaking into the air, or to one who is a great way off; but to One who is very near you, to your

best Friend, who is both able and willing to give you everything that is good for you.

My advice to you will be chiefly with respect to your religious concerns and your moral conduct. But there are other things belonging to your mamma's province. She wishes, as you grow up, you may not appear to a disadvantage when compared with other young women; and, indeed, if you should be everything she wishes you to be, you will do honor to the school you come from.

I think you are in general willing to oblige her, and I am persuaded a little care and resolution on your part, would soon make it easy and familiar to you to follow the *example* she sets you, as well as the *advice* she gives you. I hope therefore, for her sake, for mine—and especially for your own sake, that you will endeavor to be notable. It was a grief to me that my time was so unavoidably taken up, that I could spare but little to converse with you; but we agreed, you know, to make it up by letters. It is now your turn to write, and I shall be glad of a long letter from you soon, in which I wish you to open your mind, to tell me what you think, feel, hope, fear, or desire, with the same freedom as if you were writing to one of your school-fellows.

The Lord bless you, my dear child, and give you to increase in wisdom and grace, as you increase in years. Always think of me as

Your very affectionate father.

Letter 5

November 1, 1780

My dear child,

I congratulate you that you are now within a month of December, when you will begin to count the days, and to see the vacation peeping over the head of a short interval. I may congratulate your mamma, and myself likewise, (provided you come to us improved as we wish you,) for we long to see you, and have done so every day since you left us.

Your mamma is often indisposed—but seldom very ill, at least not long together; but both she and I have many feelings with which we were not acquainted when we were young like you. The advantages of youth and health are seldom rightly known at the right time. It is indeed a mercy if, when we are growing old, we have some proper sense of the *folly* and *vanity* we indulged in early life, and can be ashamed as we ought, to think how many opportunities we neglected; how many talents we mis-improved. Yet, repentance cannot *recall* the day which is past. It is my frequent prayer that you may be wiser than I was at your time of life; that you may have grace to remember your Creator and Redeemer while you are yet young. Depend upon it, my dear, whenever you really know the Lord, you will be sorry you did not know him sooner; whenever you experience that pleasure which is only to be found in loving and serving him, you will wish you had loved and served him (if possible) from your very cradle.

I have no news to tell you; but one thing I can assure you, which, though you have often heard, I hope the repetition will be always pleasing to you, I mean, that I am your very affectionate friend, and feel for you as if I was really and truly your father.

Letter 6

January 10, 1781

My dear child,

I tell many of my friends abroad, that my time is so much taken up, they must not expect me to write to them; and yet I have offered to begin a new correspondence with you, though you are in the same house with me. I would have you take notice, and I believe you will, of this, among many other circumstances by which, as occasions offer, I take a pleasure in showing you that I dearly love you, and long to contribute everything in my power to your improvement and to your satisfaction; and I persuade myself of the hope I form of a suitable return of love and attention from you, will not be disappointed. The Lord, in his good providence, gave you to me, as a gift, and committed you to me as a trust; at the same time, he gave me a great love for you; and, whatever we do for those we love, we do with pleasure.

I thank you for your letter of yesterday. It encourages me to hope that the gracious Savior is knocking at the door of your heart. I doubt not but you write what you think and feel—yet there is more meaning in your expressions, than either you or I can fully comprehend. You are, as you say, a sinner—a *young* sinner, and yet a *great* sinner. It is not your case alone, we are all born in sin; but to be sensible that you are a sinner, is a mercy afforded but to few children at your age. May the Lord keep the persuasion alive in your heart. But the word *sinner* includes so much, that a whole long life will hardly suffice to give you a full sense of it. Thus much I hope you know already, that a *sinner* needs a *Savior*; and that Jesus is the Savior of all sinners who seek him. I commend you to him; if he has taught you a little, he will teach you more. Put yourself simply into his hand, and wait patiently his time; he works powerfully—but for the most part gently and gradually. You know the sun does not break out upon us all at once in the dark night; there is first a glimmering dawn in the sky, which gives us notice that he is coming, and prepares us for his appearance. By degrees that faint light grows brighter; we see clearer and further; it becomes broad day, and after that the sun rises.

Your part is to pray to him, to hear his Word, and to listen with attention when you hear it preached. I trust you will find your light increase, and your difficulties abate—I wish you to be as cheerful as possible. Cheerfulness is no sin, nor is there any grace in a sullen countenance. On the other hand, I would not have you light or giddy with levity; it will hurt your own spirit, and hinder you from the pursuit of what, in your serious moments, you most desire. I know your natural spirits are changeable; sometimes they are highly volatile—I would have you correct them by thinking you are a sinner. Sometimes you are grave enough; but,

if you feel uneasy, then try to think what a Savior you read of. Be sure you do not indulge a hard thought of him, as though he were severe, and stern, and ready to harm you. Form your ideas of him from the accounts the evangelists give you, that he was meek and lowly when upon earth, full of compassion and gentleness, ready to pity, to heal, to help, and to teach all who come to him; and they will tell you that he had in particular a great love for children. He tells you so himself. You read how he took them in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them. When you think of this, shake off gloomy thoughts, speak to him in your heart, and say, *Lord, bless me too!*

One of the best methods of keeping free from uneasy, troublesome thoughts, at least of lessening them, is to be always employed. Strive and pray against indolence, look upon it as a hurtful, yes, a sinful thing. Read in English and French, write and work. Your mamma and I will be both willing you should diversify these employment's as may be most agreeable to your own inclination; but we wish not to see you idle. Now is the time of life for you to acquire useful knowledge, that you may make yourself agreeable, and that you may be useful and qualified to fill up that station in the world which the Lord may allot you. I will gladly assist you as much as I can, in what falls under my department; but you know I have but little time. God has given you a good capacity, and therefore the less assistance will be necessary, if you are not lacking to yourself.

You may depend on our doing what we can to make you happy. If we seem to cross your wishes sometimes, or not to comply with your desire—you may be sure we have some reason for it. You shall go out with us, as often as we think it will be proper and right; and we shall not leave you at home for our own pleasure—but because it would not be good for you to be too much abroad. We expect and hope you will be ruled by a *hint* or a *word*; and then you will find us studious in contriving how to make everything as agreeable as possible to you. Because you desired a letter soon, I have written thus much, although I had other things to do, and it is preaching morning. I shall hope for a letter from you very much. May the Lord bless you.

I am, my dear child, your affectionate father.

Letter 7

October 17, 1781

My dear child,

I send you the *first* letter—in the future you must not expect me to write but in answer to yours. We wish to hear soon that you are well, and that you like your situation. I do not wish you to like any place so well as home—on one account you ought not; for it is impossible any people should ever love you so well as your mamma and I do; and therefore you are bound to love us dearly, and that will make you love home; and the more you love home, the more diligent you will be in the improvement of your time at

school. For your return to us must, in a great measure, depend upon yourself; it is no pleasure to us to send you abroad. I thought for a day or two the house looked awkward without you, and I miss you a little every day still; but we are forced to part with you for your own good.

I cannot bear the thoughts of your growing up like a tall weed; I want you to appear like a pretty flower; and it is observable that the best of flowers in a garden would in time degenerate into tawdry weeds if they were not cultivated—such is the importance of education to children. The Lord has been good to you; he has given you good understanding and natural abilities—and much that is engaging in your disposition. It would be a great pity that, with all these advantages, you should prove only a weed. To prevent it, I was obliged to transplant you from London to H____, where I hope you will thrive and flourish, increasing in wisdom and favor as you increase in stature.

I have written you many letters in a religious strain, which I hope you have preserved, and will now and then read them over, the more willingly perhaps, because your papa wrote them. I would not overdo you upon this subject; though the truth is, this is my chief desire for you, that you may know the Lord and love him; if not, though you were accomplished and admired beyond any of your age, and though you could live in all the splendor of a queen, I would weep over you! I would lament your birth, and the day when you first came under my care. But I know that I cannot make you truly pious, nor can you make yourself so. It is the Lord's work, and I am daily praying him to bless you indeed. But he has a time; until then, I hope you will wait upon him according to your light, in the use of his appointed means, that you will make conscience of praying to him, and reading his Word, and hearing when you have opportunity. I hope he will enable you to behave obediently and affectionately to your governess, and in a kind manner to all around you, so as to gain their love and esteem. I hope you will likewise carefully abstain from whatever you know to be wrong, thus far I may hope you can go at present; but I do not wish you to affect more of piety in your appearance, than you are really conscious of. There is some danger of this in a family where a religious profession is befriended. Young people are apt to imitate those about them, and sometimes (which is abominable) to put on a *show of religion* in order to please, though their hearts have no concern in it. I have a good hope that the Lord will teach you, and guide you, and that the many prayers and praises I have offered on your behalf will not be lost.

When I began my letter, I did not mean to write half so seriously, I rather thought to find something to divert you; but you are very near my heart, and this makes me serious. I long to come and see you; but it cannot be yet, nor can I say when—but I shall bounce in upon you some day when perhaps you are not thinking of me.

I am, my dear, your very affectionate.

Letter 8

November 10, 1781

My dear child,

When your mamma and I come to see you, it must be on a Monday, for more reasons than one; which it is not necessary for you to know—and, as there is but one Monday in a week, something or other may prevent oftener than I wish. However, I promise to think of you when I cannot see you. Sometimes we talk of you. "Christmas will soon be here; then we shall have her at home, and then who knows but she will be so improved, and behave so nicely, that we shall be sorry to part with her again." When we talk thus, I hope you will make good what we say.

Lately, for about a week, I was attacked by a company of pains. Some seized my face and teeth, some took possession of my back, and some got into my sides; but they are all gone now, and they did me no harm. You know little about *pains* and *cares* yet. You are now at the time of life when you are especially called upon to remember your Creator and Redeemer, and have the greatest advantages for doing it. But, if your life is spared, to you likewise the days will come when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them." But I hope long before they come, you will have some experience of pleasures which do not at all depend upon youth or health, or anything that this world can either give or take away. Seek the Lord, and you shall live; and you have not far to seek for him—he is very near you; he is all around you; about your bed by night, and your path by day. He sees, he notices all you say and do. But I do not wish you to conceive of him so as to make the thought of him uneasy to you. Think of him according to the account the evangelists give of him when he was upon earth; how gracious, compassionate, and kind he was.

If he were upon earth now, would you not wish that I should lead you to him, that he might lay his hands upon you and bless you, as he did the children which were brought to him? If he were here, and I could go with you and say, "Lord, bless *my* child likewise!" I am sure he would not frown at you and say, "Take her away, I will have nothing to do with her." No, my dear child, he has promised, them that come to him he will never cast out. Go to him yourself; though you cannot see him, it is sufficient that he sees and hears you. Tell him, that you hear and believe he is a Savior to many, and beg him to be your Savior too. Tell him it was not your own choice—but his providence, that removed you from C____, and put you under my care, which gave you an opportunity of knowing more of his goodness than you would otherwise have done; and beg of him to give you his grace, that the advantages you have had may not aggravate your sins—but lead you to his salvation; and do not let a day pass without thinking on his sufferings in Gethsemane, and on Mount Golgotha. Surely his love to poor sinners, in bleeding and dying for them, will constrain you to love him in return; and, if once you love him, then everything will be easy, and you will account it your greatest pleasure to please him.

I thank you for your letter. I conceive a hope from it, that you will improve in your writing. I wish you not only to write a good hand

—but a good letter; and the whole art is to write with freedom and ease. When you take your pen in hand, pop things down just as they come to your mind; just as you would speak of them without study. Tell me something about the fowls in the yard, or the trees in the garden, or what you please, only write freely. May the Lord bless you, I love you dearly, and wish you to believe me to be

Your affectionate father

Letter 9

My dear child,

Mrs. ___ died on recently, and was buried yesterday. I had often visited her during her illness, and was at her funeral. She was well a few months ago—but a consumption soon brought her down to the grave. But, though she was young, she was not sorry to leave such a poor world as this. I always found her happy and cheerful, though her illness was very painful. She suffered much by cold sweats; but she said, a few days before her death, that it would be worth laying a thousand years in a cold sweat, for one hour's such happiness as she then felt. "Oh," she said, "if this is dying, what a pleasant thing dying is!"

I think my dear child has told me, that you are often terrified at the thoughts of death. Now, if you seek the Lord, as Mrs. ___ did, while you are young, then, whenever you come to die, you will find that death has nothing terrible in it to those who love the Lord Jesus Christ. He has disarmed death, and taken away its sting; and he has promised to meet his people and receive them to himself, when they are about to leave this world, and everything they loved in it, behind them. You have the same advantages that Mrs. ___ had; like her you are placed under the care of those who wish well to your soul; the Scriptures, which made her wise to salvation, are put into your hand likewise, and you also have the opportunity of hearing the gospel. She was exhorted and encouraged from a child, to pray to the Lord for his grace—and so are you. I hope you will do as she did; and the Lord who was gracious to her, will be gracious to you; for he has promised that none who seek him, shall seek him in vain.

Your conscience tells you that you are a sinner—and that makes you afraid. But, when the Lord gives you faith, you will see and understand, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Then you will love him; and, when you love him, you will find it easy and pleasant to serve him; and then you will long to see him who died for you! And, as it is impossible to see him in this world—you will be glad that you are not to stay here always; you will be willing to die, that you may be with him where he is.

In the mean time, I hope you will pray to him, and wait for His time to reveal himself to you; endeavoring to avoid whatever you know to be wrong and displeasing to him; and sometimes, I hope, you will feel your heart soft and tender, and serious thoughts and desires rising in your mind; when you do, then think, "Now is the Lord calling me!" And say as Samuel did, "Speak, Lord, for your

servant is listening." He does not call with all audible voice—but he speaks to the heart in a way not to be described by words. When we are grieved and ashamed for our sins; when we are sincerely affected with what we read and hear of him, of his love, his sufferings, and His death; when we see and feel that nothing but his favor can make us happy—then we may be sure the Lord is near.

I believe you have too much sense and honesty to make a *profession* of religion, further than your *heart* is really engaged, in order to please your fellow-creatures. But, on the other hand, I would not have you backward to open your mind to me on religious subjects. I know you are not without convictions, and though all convictions are not right—yet true religion always begins with convictions. We must know we are sick, before we can prize a physician. If I live to see you a partaker of the grace of God, one of the chief desires of my heart will be gratified; this would please me more than to have your weight in gold, and therefore you may be sure I often pray for you.

I am your affectionate father.

Letter 10

August 1, 1782

My dear child,

Do not think we forget you; our love would reach you were you a hundred times further from us than you presently are; but we are very much taken up. Monday your mamma was ill in bed all day; she is pretty well now—but P ___ is very bad indeed—worse I believe than ever you saw her, and we can hardly attend to anything but her. Then again poor Mr. B ___ was hurt by a mad ox, about ten days since; his life has been in great danger—but now we hope he will recover. I visit him every day, and that takes up a good deal of my time.

I am thankful that the Lord preserves you in health and safety. I hope you are thankful too. When you see anybody sick, or hurt or lame—I would have you think it is of the Lord's goodness, that their case is not yours.

Sin has filled the world with sorrow; all the calamities you read or hear of, or see with your eyes—are the fruits of sin! And, as you are a sinner, you might suffer what others do! It is only the Lord's mercy that preserves you, and provides you good things which many others have not.

You know many children are brought up in poverty, meet with evil treatment, and have no parents or kind friends to take care of them. But, though the Lord removed your parents before you were old enough to miss them—He took care to provide you a home with us; He inclined us not only to receive you—but to love you; and now your needs are all supplied. And, besides this, you have been and are instructed and prayed for every day. You have great reason to be thankful indeed, and I hope you will pray to the Lord

to give you a thankful heart—for you cannot have it—unless He gives it to you. I hope you will say from your heart—

Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God has given me more.

Oh, it is a great blessing to be sensible that we deserve nothing from God but eternal misery—and that all the good we receive is from His wondrous mercy, and then to know that all this mercy we owe to the Lord Jesus, who died for us, that we might live and be happy.

There's never a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan.

When you understand this, you will love him, and then you will be happy indeed; then it will be your pleasure to please him, and then, putting your trust in him, you will be preserved from anxiety and evil.

Your affectionate father

Letter 11

August 10, 1782

My dear Betsy,

How vain are all things here below! "Vanity of vanities!" says the preacher. And you, and I, and your mamma, may say so likewise; for we all counted upon seeing you last Sunday. We listened at the door—and peeped out of the window—but no Betsy came! Now we will venture to expect you next Sunday.

Indeed, it is not amiss that you should now and then meet with a hindrance—that you may learn, if possible—not to count too much on what tomorrow may do for you—and that you may begin to feel the impossibility of being happy, any further than your will is brought into submission to the will of God. In order to learn this—you must have your own will frequently crossed. And things do and will turn out, almost daily in one way or other—contrary to our wishes and expectations.

When such disappointments happen—most people fret and fume! They are angry and impatient! But others, who are in the Lord's school, and desirous of being taught by Him—get benefit by these things, and sometimes find more pleasure in yielding to His appointments, though contrary to their own wills—than they would have done, if all had happened just as they had desired!

I wish for you my dear child, to think much of the Lord's governing providence. It extends to the minutest concerns. He rules and manages all things; but in so secret a way, that most people think that He does nothing. When, in reality—He does ALL!

He appointed the time of your coming into the world. And the day and hour of your coming home from school to us—totally depends

upon Him likewise! Nor can you safely travel one step of the road—without His protection and care over you!

It may now seem a small matter to you and I, whether you came home last Sunday—or are to come home next Sunday. But we know not what different consequences may depend upon the day—we know not what hidden danger you might have escaped by staying at school last Sunday. The Lord knows all things! He foresees every possible consequence! Often what we call disappointments, are really mercies from Him to save us from harm!

If I could teach you a lesson, which, as yet, I have but poorly learned myself—I would teach you a way to be never be disappointed. This would be the case—if you could always form a right judgment of this world, and all things in it.

If you go to a bramble-bush to look for grapes—you must be disappointed; but then you are old enough to know that grapes never grow upon brambles. So, if you expect much pleasure here in this world—you will not find it. But you ought not to say you are disappointed, because the Scripture plainly warned you beforehand, to look for crosses, trials and hindrances, every day. If you expect such things—you will not be disappointed when they happen!

"The LORD does whatever pleases Him—in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths!" [Psalm 135:6](#). "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb—and naked I will depart. The Lord gave—and the Lord has taken away! May the name of the Lord be praised!" [Job 1:20-21](#)

Letter 12

October 15, 1782

My dear child,

It is rather to your disadvantage that I have lately corrected a mistake I had made. I thought you were but twelve years old last birthday; but I read in a blank leaf of the great Bible, that my child was born June 22, 1769; consequently you are now in your *fourteenth* year. Therefore, to keep pace with my ideas and wishes, you ought to be a whole year more advanced in improvements of every kind than you are, a whole year wiser. Some things which I might think very tolerable in my child, supposing she was but twelve years old, will seem but rather so, when I know she is thirteen; and some things of another sort will be quite unsuitable at the age of thirteen, which might be more excusable if you were but twelve. You see, my dear child, you must use double diligence to fetch up this year, which we have somehow lost out of the account. You have a year less for improvement, and are a year nearer to the time in which you will begin to appear like a young woman than I expected. I know not but I should have been pleased to find that I had made a mistake

on the other side, and that you were a year younger than I had supposed you.

As it is, I shall hope the best—I do not complain of you. As I love you dearly, so I have much comfort in you—and I trust you will pray to the Lord for yourself, as I do for you, that he may give you his grace, and wisdom, and blessing—then I know you will do well. But sometimes, when I consider what a world you are growing up into, and what snares and dangers young people are exposed to, with little experience to help them, I have some painful feelings for you.

The other day I was at the harbor, and saw a ship launched—she slipped easily into the water; the people on board shouted; the ship looked clean and mirthful, she was freshly painted, and her colors flying. But I looked at her with a sort of pity, "Poor ship!" I thought, "you are now in port and in safety; but before long you must go to sea. Who can tell what *storms* you may meet with hereafter, and to what hazards you may be exposed; how weather-beaten you may be before you return to port again, or perhaps you may return at all!" Then my thoughts turned from the ship to my dear child. It seemed to be an emblem of your present state—you are now, as it were, in a safe harbor; but by and by you must launch out into the *world*, which may well be compared to a tempestuous sea. I could even now almost weep at the resemblance. But I take courage, as my hopes are greater than my fears. I know there is an infallible Pilot, who has the winds and the waves at his command. There is hardly a day passes, in which I do not entreat him to take charge of you. Under his care I know you will be safe. He can guide you, unhurt, amidst the storms, and rocks, and dangers, by which you might otherwise suffer—and bring you, at last, to the haven of eternal rest!

"He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm!" [Luke 8:24](#)

"Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water—and they obey Him!" [Luke 8:25](#)

I hope you will seek him while you are young, and I am sure he will be the friend of all whom seek him sincerely; then you will be happy, and I shall rejoice. Nothing will satisfy me but this; though I should live to see you settled to the greatest advantage in temporal matters, except you love him, and live in his fear and favor, you would appear to me quite miserable. I think it would go near to break my heart; for, next to your dear mamma, there is nothing so dear to me in this world as you. But the Lord gave you to me, and I have given you to him again, many and many a time upon my knees, and therefore I hope you must, and will, and shall be his.

I hardly know any accomplishment I more wish you to attain, than a talent of writing free and easy letters—and I am ready to think, if you could freely open your mind to me, you might inform me of something I would be glad to know, or you might propose to me some things which now and then trouble your thoughts, and

thereby give me an opportunity of attempting to relieve, encourage, or direct you. For these reasons, I have requested of your governess to permit you now and then to seal up your letters to me and your mamma without showing them to her. I have asked this liberty for you only when you write to us; nor even then always—but at such times as you find yourself disposed to write more freely than you could do if your letters were to be seen before you send them. I have likewise told her, that I would desire you to be as careful in writing as if she was to see your letters, and not send us *pot-hooks and hangers*, as they say, because you know she will not inspect your writing. Under these restrictions she has promised to oblige me; and I take it as a favor, for I am well aware that, in general, it is by no means proper that young people at school should write letters from thence without the knowledge of their governess. But yours has so good an opinion of you and of I, that she is willing to trust us, and I hope we shall neither of us make an improper use of her indulgence.

I am, with great tenderness, my dear child, your very affectionate father

Letter 13

January 27, 1783

My dear child,

Lack of leisure *time*, and not lack of *inclination*, prevented my writing; and I now take the first opportunity that has offered since you went from us. If I had no more correspondents than you have, you would hear from me very often; nor can I expect to hear from you so often as I wish, because I consider that you likewise have your engagements; and though, perhaps, I am not willing to allow that your business is so important as some of mine, it must, and ought, for the present, to take up a good deal of your time. You have not only reading, and writing, and arithmetic to mind—but you work sprigs and flowers, and maps, and cut bits of paper to pieces, and learn a strange language, so that you are very busy to be sure; for *idleness* and *sauntering* are very great evils, and doors by which a thousand temptations and mischiefs may enter.

Your mamma and I are very well pleased with you, on the whole; your affection is not lost upon us; we think we can perceive an improvement in you, and we believe the things in which you yet fail, proceed rather from *inattention* than from the lack of a desire to please us; and we have a good hope that, as you grow older, you will outgrow that heedlessness which you sometimes discover. You are not yet a woman—but neither are you a child; you are almost fourteen, and at that age a certain degree of *thought* and *foresight* may be hoped for, which it would have been unreasonable to expect from you some few years ago. It has pleased God to give you a capacity for improvement; and, as you see we are so situated, that neither your mamma nor I can bestow that time and attention upon you, when you are at home, which we would wish—that I hope you will make the best use you

possibly can of the opportunities you have at school. It is no pleasure to us, that you should live so far from us, for we love you dearly, and love your company; but it is what we submit to, for your education.

You desired me to send you news, when I should write; but I have little to tell you. The public news you will hear, I suppose, from twenty people—it is very important. The Lord is about to give us the blessing of **peace**. Neither you nor I can tell the value of this blessing, because we have not known the lack of it. It is true, we have heard much talk of *war*, and we have heard of the calamities which war has occasioned; but we have heard of them as things which have *happened at a distance*—had we lived in America we would probably have *seen* and *felt* them! We would have seen towns, villages, and houses in flames! We would have heard the groans of widows and orphans around us! We would have had everything we call our own—torn from us, and perhaps have been glad to hide ourselves in the woods to save ourselves! Such has been the lot of thousands in the course of the war. If you remember the chaos, confusion, and terror, which prevailed at the time of the riots, it may give you some apprehension of the case of those who live in a country which is the seat of war. Our apprehensions were over in a few days; but they live in such alarms, or greater, from the beginning to the end of the year.

I hope, therefore, you will be thankful to God, if he is pleased to sheath the *sword of war*, and to put a stop to the devastations and the slaughters which have so long prevailed. Though you yourself have not been a sufferer, I wish you to cultivate a *sympathetic* and *benevolent* spirit, a disposition to *compassionate*, if you cannot *relieve*—the distresses of others. This, next to the grace of God, is the brightest ornament of human nature; or rather, when genuine, it is one of the best *effects* and *proofs* of grace. It was the mind of Jesus the Savior—and those who love him, will in a degree resemble him, and they only. A hard-hearted, unfeeling, selfish Christian is a total contradiction!

When you think what multitudes of mankind are suffering by war, famine, sickness, storms, earthquakes, and other calamities, let it lead your thoughts to the evil of sin, which brought all these other evils into the world. But what is sin? I endeavored to tell you last Sunday, from [Jer. 2:11](#). Sin is presuming to do our own will—in opposition to the will of God, who is our Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor. By sin we attempt independence from our Creator, affront the authority of our righteous Lawgiver, and are guilty of base and horrid ingratitude against our greatest and kindest Benefactor!

If you could form a 'little creature' and make it live—and if it hated you and opposed you, slighted your kindness, and took a pleasure in displeasing you—would you not soon be weary of it, and, instead of feeding and taking care of it, be provoked to tread it under your feet? But, oh, the patience of God—though He could destroy rebellious men much more easily than you could kill a

loathsome spider—yet He waits to be gracious, and has so loved them as to send his own Son to die—that they may live!

Sin has not only filled the world with woe—but it was the cause of all the woe that Jesus endured. He groaned and wept, and sweat blood, and died upon the cross—only because we had sinned! May I live to see you duly affected with the evil of sin—and the love of Jesus! There is nothing more that I desire for you!

I am, my dear child, your most affectionate father

Letter 14

March 8, 1783

My dear child,

It would please me if I could either visit you or write to you, or both every week. But it cannot be; I am behind-hand with everybody. Yet I think I send you six letters—for your one letter. You stare at that; but if you please count the *lines* in one of your epistles, and the letters in every line, and then compare it with one of mine—you will find that *you* receive many more words and letters than you return!

You say that you are afraid of death—and I do not wonder why. For you are a lost sinner! But I hope to see you a believer, and then you will not greatly fear death, while it is at a distance; and, whenever it comes very near, you will not fear it at all. Mr. ____ is gone, and so is Mr. ____ , and neither of them was more afraid of death than you would be afraid to board a coach that stopped at your gate to take you home to us. Jesus died to make death *safe* and *comfortable* to us. Balaam was an evil man— but he spoke well when he said, "*Let me die the death of the righteous!*" Make that prayer for yourself; it is a good one, though short. Entreat the Lord to number you among the righteous, that you may *live* their life; then your *death* will be like theirs.

The Scripture in many places speaks of the righteous and the wicked, as the only two classes of people—which divide and comprehend all mankind. And yet it tells us that there is none righteous, no not one! That is, there are none righteous by nature—sinners are made righteous by the grace of God. The grace of God teaches them to understand what they read in Scripture, of the Savior, and of their own need of a Savior. When they put their trust in him, their sins are forgiven them for his sake; and, when they rightly consider his *love* to them, and his *dying* for their sakes—they learn to love him in return.

All who love him, must and will hate what is evil. They learn to resemble him, and study to please him; and thus they are not only accepted as righteous in the Beloved—but they are really made so; the love of righteousness is implanted in their hearts; they believe what the Lord says, they heartily strive to obey his commands, to avoid what he forbids; they place their happiness in his favor, and in doing his will. They cannot but speak of their Savior, and what he has done for them; they love to hear others

speak of him, and they love to hear those ministers who preach much concerning him.

But their religion does not all consist in *talking* and *hearing*; they are upright, gentle and loving; they imitate him who went about doing good. The evil tempers of self-will, impatience, pride, envy, anger, and malice, are fought against; they cannot allow themselves in such things; if they feel the rising of such things in their hearts, they are grieved and ashamed, and are glad to fly to the throne of grace for mercy and help against them. On the other hand, they no longer seek pleasure in the *vanities and follies of the world*—they have better things to mind. These *trifles* they lay aside; as we forsake, when we grow up, the play-things which pleased us while we were children.

But you must not expect all this at once. Look at a great tree—an oak, for instance. How tall it is! how wide its branches spread! and if you were to dig, you would find it has deep and wide-spreading *roots* in proportion! Yet this great tree sprang from a little acorn; but not like a mushroom, in a single night—it has been years in growing! And had you watched it every day, you would hardly have perceived that it grew at all. May I not hope that there is at least a little seed of a gracious desire already put in your heart? If so, may the Lord, who alone could *plant* it, *water* it with his blessing, and cause it to increase! If not, it is my daily prayer, that it may be so; and I hope it is your prayer for yourself. I pray that you may live and die with the righteous—it is said of them, They have hope in their death; and that, when they see him approach, they shall say, "Oh, death! where is your sting?"

Your mamma and I love you dearly, and hope we shall always have reason to love you more and more.

I am your affectionate father

Letter 15

May 12, 1783

My dear Betsy,

I have just now received your short and sweet letter; and, having nothing to prevent me, I begin my answer to it immediately.

The snow does not often cover the ground in the neighborhood of London so late as the 8th of May; but it has been so sometimes. One reason you were surprised at the sight is, because you are young, and this is the first instance, perhaps, in the few years you have been able to take notice. You will meet with many other things as you grow up, which will surprise you for the like reason; for lack of experience, you will not expect them. We expect flowers on the ground in May, and not snow—so those pleasures, the prospects of which present themselves to your mind, and appear at a distance as beautiful as we usually conceive a May morning to be, when we talk of it in winter, will not always answer expectation. When the time comes, something which you did not think of, unseasonable as snow in May, will come with it, and you

will be surprised and disappointed; especially at first, and until you are used to these changes. By the time you are as old as I am now, you will not wonder so much; and I hope, long before that, the Lord will teach you to profit by such things.

It is necessary that we should find all to be uncertain and unsatisfying in the present world, or we would be contented with it, and not think of the eternal world. One reason why young people are but seldom serious is, because the world appears so pleasing and so promising. They expect roses without thorns, and May without snow. The Lord make you wise early, that you may remember and seek him now in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, (for come they will,) when you will find no pleasure in them.

Such days have come very early to Miss B ____ . I wish, if it were practicable, that all the misses in all the schools in London could see her. What are the pleasure and gaiety which the most are thinking of, now to her, shut up as she is, in the bloom of life, unable to move herself, and with pain her constant companion day and night! I have been much affected with looking at her; but I believe I shall not see her long. Within these three days she has been much worse. I was with her twice yesterday; and I have been with her again this morning. The doctors think she cannot live many days; and she thinks so too. I am glad to find that she is not unwilling to die. If her affliction has been sanctified to lead her heart to the Lord, then, instead of greatly *pitying* her—we shall *rejoice* in her behalf. It is better to be sick or lame, or full of pain, and seeking after him—than to live what is commonly deemed a *happy life*, without God in the world.

Cannot you contrive to put your lines in a little closer together? Your paper looks like a half-furnished room. I want a good long letter; I care not what it is about—just so that you write easily. You read sometimes; cannot you find something in your books to tell me of? You walk sometimes, and without doubt look about you. Take notice of anything that strikes your eye; make some reflection or observation upon it, and then put up your thoughts very safely in a corner of your memory, that you may send them to me the next time you write. I love a long letter, especially from you, because I love you a great deal.

Adieu! *May the Lord bless you*, is the prayer of your affectionate father

Letter 16

May 19, 1783

My dear child,

If you drop a tear or two when you are informed that your aunt C ____ is removed from this world of sin and sorrow—I have no objection; but I do not wish you to shed many, nor is there just cause for it. If we could see her now, she would surely say, "*Weep not for me—I am fully happy!*" Yes, she knew and loved the Lord; she lived in his faith and godly fear, and died in his peace and

favor; and now she is before the glorious throne! She had her share of trials in this life—but they are all over now—she fought the good fight—and the Lord made her more than conqueror. Now she has received the conqueror's crown, and is singing the conqueror's song.

Methinks, as dearly as I love you, I could bear to part with you likewise—if I was sure that the Lord had set his seal of love upon your heart, and thereby marked you for his own. If he has not done this already, I hope he will. If he has not yet taken full possession of your heart, I hope you are sensible that he is standing, as it were, at the door, and knocking, waiting to be gracious to you. The door of the heart is not easily opened. The love of *sin*, of *self*, and the *world*, are so many bolts, which are too strong for us to remove by our own power. Yet he can open it easily, (because all things are easy to him,) and, by a sweet constraint of love, force himself an entrance. I hope you are willing that he should do this; and that you are not willing to do anything on your part that may grieve him, and cause him to withdraw and leave you to yourself. You cannot do much—you can, indeed, do nothing spiritually of yourself. Yet there is something for you to do; you are to wait, and pray, and long for his blessing. You are to read his Word, and to endeavor to make it the rule of your conduct, so far as you understand it. You are to attend to his voice in your conscience, and not willfully allow yourself in what you know to be wrong. This is the path in which my heart's desire and prayer is that you may walk at present; and then in due time the promise shall be fulfilled to you which says, "Then shall you know—if you follow on to know the Lord!" [Hos. 6:3](#).

We had some weeping at home upon this occasion. But the Lord is very good. Your mamma has been supported, and is pretty well.

I long to see you, and especially now, that we may read Mr. Gray's Elegy together. I hope we shall be permitted to be with you on the famous exhibition day, and I please myself with the thought, that you will appear to advantage. I wish for your own sake, that you could get the better of that trepidation which discomposes you when the eyes of company are upon you. But it is a fault on the right side, and much better than a bold, pert, self-confident carriage, which is very disgusting in some young people; but there is a medium which I wish you to aim at.

I am your affectionate father

Letter 17

June 11, 1783

My dear child,

I thank you for your last letter, which pleased me and your mamma very much. We thought it well written, and well expressed. Take as much care as you please, *how* you write; and use as little study as you please, *what* to write. When you are surrounded with the beauties of nature, you need not puzzle yourself with thinking what to say first; but set down first what

first occurs to your mind—when you have written that, something else will offer. Try to write just what you think, and write as often and as largely as your many important businesses will allow; for nothing but practice will give you a habit of writing easily—and practice will do it. We could fill up as large a sheet as you, with repeating how much we love you; I hope and believe there is no love lost on either side. Love will make you desirous to please and oblige us, and love will prompt us to do everything in our power to oblige and please you; and so I hope we shall go on loving and pleasing as long as we live.

We often think of Monday night, when we hope to come and see your exhibition. I would like to come over and read the Elegy with you once more; but I know I shall not be able, and I believe it will not be necessary. I doubt not but you will do it very well, especially if you can get the better of your fear and trepidation. But I had much rather see you a little timid, than see you assuming and affected, as some young people are. I could wish you to have just so much feeling when you begin, as might intimate a respect for the company; and then that you should enter into the spirit of the poem, so as in a manner to forget everybody present, until you have finished. There is a great beauty in the cadence and melody of the verse, if you can hit it off without over-doing it. If you understand and can feel the subject—you will express it properly.

I hope the Elegy will likewise lead you to some profitable reflections for your own use, and which may excite your thankfulness to the Lord. To him you owe your *capacity*, and to him likewise you are indebted for the advantages you have of *cultivation*. It is possible, that among the children we meet half naked in the streets, there may be some who might have been amiable and admired in life, if they had been favored with the helps which the good providence of God has afforded you. But they grew up, poor things, in ignorance and wickedness, after the example of those among whom they live. And though you would not have been like these—yet it is probable you would not have been, as you now may, and I hope will be, if the Lord had not sent you to us. Though you were deprived of your own parents when you were very young, perhaps no child, in such a case, has had less cause to feel the loss; because the Lord not only made us willing to take care of you—but gave us, immediately on our receiving you, a tender affection for you, as if you had been our own child; and from that time your welfare has been a very principal object with us. You have been guarded against the *follies* and *vanities* which might otherwise have taken an early possession of your mind; and you have been acquainted with the means of grace, and the blessed gospel. I trust the Lord has a gracious design to lead you to himself, by all these favorable circumstances in which he has placed you; for, without this, everything you can learn or attain, would be but of little worth. I wish, indeed, to see you possessed of every accomplishment you can acquire at school; but nothing will satisfy me for you, but the saving grace of God.

I am your very affectionate father

Letter 18

July 29, 1783

My dear Betsy,

You seem to take it for granted, that I must always write first; and you see I very readily submit, in hopes that when your great and many important businesses will permit, you will at least oblige me with an answer—for it will give your mamma and me, and your cousin, pleasure to know that you are well.

While you were a little girl, we used to place you with your back against the wall, by the fire-place in the parlor, and compare you with your former marks, that we might notice how much taller you grew from one half year to another. According to present appearances, you are likely to be sufficiently tall, and to shoot up apace. I need not measure, for I can perceive by a glance of the eye, that you are grown every time you return to us.

But I am watching your growth in another sense with more attention —I wish I could say with more satisfaction. I wish to see you outgrow a certain *childishness*, which once looked very pretty in you—but is by no means so pleasing in a person of your years, and of your size; I think I may add, of your sense too, for I know the Lord has given you a good measure of understanding and natural abilities; so that with a proper degree of attention and application, you are very capable of attainment suitable to your gender, and your situation in life. I love to call you my *dear child*, and shall probably call you so as long as I live, because there is something to me in the sound of the word *child*, expressive of the tenderness and affection I feel for you; but I would not always have you a child in the common sense of the word. I hope you will not think I am angry with you, and I hope you will not be angry with me, for giving you this hint.

I love to see you cheerful, and a little occasional volatility in a young person favored with health and full of spirits, is very tolerable; but then I would have you remember, that it is high time that a measure of thought, and steadiness, and attention, should begin to mark your general deportment. Your dear mamma, at your age, was capable of superintending the affairs of the family, and was actually called to it; and you are now old enough, if you will do yourself justice, to take a great deal of care off from her hands when you are at home; you have it in your own power to shorten the term of your living away from us. I am glad that though you like your school very well—yet you like your home better; and I am sure we shall be glad when we can think it no longer necessary to keep you abroad, for we love your company, and it is principally for your own sake that we are constrained to part with you. But they say, a word to the wise is enough, and therefore I shall add no more in this strain.

You heard several of my sermons on Mary and Martha. Last Sunday night, I finished the subject by speaking on "*Only one*

thing is needful!" This is a sentence which I pray the Lord to write upon your heart. Many things are necessary in their places; but one thing is absolutely needful. It is right that you should be diligent at school, obedient and obliging to your governess and teachers, and endeavor, by a kind and gentle behavior, to gain the esteem of your school-fellows and of the whole family—a regard to the *one thing needful* is very consistent with all this. But though you were beloved by everybody that knows you—you cannot be happy except you know and love the Lord.

The *one thing needful*, therefore, is to seek him, and his favor, which is better than life; and if you seek him, he will be found by you. You are a sinner, and need forgiveness. You have many needs, which he alone can supply;. You are growing up in a world which is full of sins, snares, troubles, and dangers. Will you not cry to him then, "My Father, you are the Guide of my youth!" You have encouragement to seek him, for he himself both invites and commands you to do it; and if obligations and gratitude can prevail, there is no friend like him, whose mercies are new every morning, and who died upon the cross to redeem us from misery. I commend you to his blessing.

Your cousin is much as she was; she sends her love to you. I believe she loves you dearly, and I believe you love her. I hope you will both love each other as long as you live upon this earth; and that afterwards you will meet in the kingdom of love, and be happy together in heaven forever. Mamma sends her best love. I am often thinking of you, and praying for you, and always desirous to show my love in deed and in truth.

Your affectionate father

Letter 19

October 16, 1783

My dear child,

I hope you will now be able to rest yourself; for you have had a very busy time since mid-summer. So much visiting and running about has, I hope, given you a right relish for the retirement and regularity of school. What a pretty place you are in, and what a pretty time of life it is with you, if you can but think so, before trouble and care have received commission to disturb you.

I could wish that all my letters might afford you both pleasure and profit—I would make you smile sometimes, and always endeavor to do you good. At present I must write a little upon the subject of *temper*. I do not think your temper a bad one. Your mamma and I are always ready to give you a good character, and it pleases us that we can say that you are, in the main, affectionate and obliging. But we sometimes observe that in you, which we could wish nobody took notice of but ourselves; or rather, that you would strive to get quite the better of it, that we, who love you so dearly, might be no more grieved. It is a certain self-willed *impatience*, which disposes you, when your inclinations are overruled, or when anything is desired of you which does not

exactly please you—to pout, frown, and alter your countenance, so that you often appear to a disadvantage in company. You do not seem to find, or to think of finding, a pleasure in giving up a thing to please your mamma—but had rather have your own way. Now if you sit down and consider how much we love you, and study to oblige and please you, I hope you will strive against this impatient temper. I call it so, because I do not believe it is owing to a lack of affection and gratitude on your part—but rather the effect of a something in your natural temper, which, if you strive against, I hope you will be enabled to overcome.

Besides what you owe to our love and tenderness, I can give you a further reason why you should attend to this point. I have told you repeatedly, and I tell you again, that your cousin's coming to live with us, will not make the slightest alteration in our love for you. You are still, and will be, our own dear child; we have love enough for you both. But in the outward expression of our love, something must, of course, depend upon behavior. We are sometimes obliged, though with reluctance, to reprove and contradict you; now we cannot reprove her, because she never gives us an opportunity. In the seven months she has been with us, I never once knew her to argue with us, nor have I once seen a cloud upon her brow for a single moment. She watches our looks, and if she perceives the slightest hint that anything she proposes is not quite agreeable to us, she is done with it in a moment, and gives it up with a smile; which shows that it costs her nothing—but that she really prefers pleasing us—to the pleasing herself. Now you must allow, my dear, that this behavior is very engaging. I wish you to be equally engaging, and not to seem to come short of her in anything.

Have you heard of your good friend, Mrs. ___ 's, illness? They have no expectation of her recovery; nay, perhaps she is dead before this time. How well she seemed when we dined there but lately! So uncertain is life—even young people have no assurance of continuing here; but I hope you will pray as David did, "Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life." [Psalm 39:4](#), and that the Lord will hear your prayer. When you come to know him as your Lord and Savior, you may sing Simeon's song. And we cannot enjoy life with true comfort, until we are delivered from the fear of death.

I am your very affectionate father

Letter 20

October 23, 1783

My dear child,

When I showed my last letter to your mamma, I thought she looked as if she was almost unwilling that I should send it; but she did not say so, and therefore it went. She is unwilling to give you pain, and so am I. But I persuaded myself you would take it (as I meant it) as a proof of my love. Now and then I must gently give

you a word of advice—but it will always be much more pleasing to me to *commend*, than to *find fault*. Your welfare is very near my heart, and I feel a warm desire that your behavior, in every respect, should be such as to engage the esteem and affection of all who know you. I remember, when you were a little girl at Northampton school, I once told you, in a letter, that when the Lord, in his providence, sent you to my care, I received you as his gift; and in the pleasing hope of being an instrument in his hand of doing you good, I found such affection for you, that I would not part with you for your weight in gold. And though you are much heavier now than you were then, I can say the same still.

Mrs. W ___ had been ill some days before I heard of it, and then I was told she was at the point of death. This information, with some hindrances and difficulties in the way, prevented my going to ___, so that I did not see her. She was an old and kind acquaintance, and though of late years I was not often in her company, I feel that I have lost a friend whom I loved.

Such is the state of this world. If we live long in it, we must expect to see our friends drop off one after another, as the leaves at this season of the year fall from the trees. But the pain which Christians feel at parting with their Christian friends, is alleviated by two considerations:

first, that now that they are gone, they are much more happy than they could be here; and secondly, we hope before long to be with them again, and to share in their songs and joys before the throne of God.

This, my dear child, is the desire of my soul for you, that while you live, and when you die, you may be the Lord's. Nothing but this will satisfy me. And for this I often pray. My thoughts and prayers are often employed for you, when perhaps you are asleep. I cannot make many very particular requests for you, because I know not what is best for you; but when I pray that you may have wisdom and grace to seek and know the Lord, and that he will be graciously pleased to be your Savior and Shepherd, and the Guide of your youth—I am sure I do not ask amiss. I have a cheerful hope that he will put you among his children, guide you through this wilderness world by his counsel, and afterwards receive you to his glory; and that he sent you to me, that you might have the benefit of those means of grace and instructions, which by his blessing will be effectual to make you wise unto salvation.

Though he alone can work in you to will and to do according to his good pleasure—yet there is something incumbent on you. He has said, "Those who seek me—shall find me." You must therefore seek him; and he is not far from you. He is about your bed, and about your path. Yes, he is still nearer. I hope there are seasons when you can perceive him knocking, as it were, at the door of your heart. Do not you at times perceive something within you bearing witness to the truths of his Word; warning you of the evil of sin, reminding you of death and eternity, and stirring up your

desires towards himself? At such times you may be sure the Lord is near. He made the heart, and he knows how to affect it.

Such warnings and calls from his good Spirit, I can recollect when I was a child younger than you; I can remember getting into corners by myself, and praying with some earnestness, before I was eight years old. Afterwards, alas, I proved rebellious, I cast off his fear, and would have my own way; and thereby I plunged myself into abundance of sin and misery. But I hope you will be more obedient. Think of him as often as you can; make a point of praying to him in secret, remembering that when you are most alone, he is still with you. When you pray, endeavor simply to express your needs and feelings just as if you were speaking to me. Fine words and phrases, some people abound in; but *true prayer is the genuine language of the heart, which the Lord understands and accepts, however brokenly expressed*. The woman of Canaan only said, "Lord, help me!" The publican's prayer was almost as short, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" And both were heard!

The Bible, or the New Testament, is frequently used at school, as a school-book; and children often think no more of it than just to read their appointed lesson. But I hope you will consider it as *God's book*, and when you take it in hand, open it with reverence, and read with attention, as you think you would if you expected to hear him speak to you with an audible voice from heaven. The plainest and most affecting part of the Bible, is the history of our Savior in the evangelists—read it often, that you may be well acquainted with it. I pray him to enable you to understand what you read. Surely when you read *who* he is, *what* he did, what he suffered—and what he has promised to poor sinners—you will, you must, love him! And if you once love him, you will study to please him. The Lord bless you. Give our love to your governess, and all friends.

Believe me to be your very affectionate father

Letter 21

October 30, 1783

My dear child,

Though I lately sent you a long letter by the post, which I hope you received on Tuesday, I must write again. I take a new pen and a sheet of gilt paper, that I may, in the best manner I can, make you a return for your letter which I received yesterday. I would not delay long to let you know how much your mamma and I were pleased with it. It is a great happiness to us that we are well assured of your desire and intention to oblige us; and we hope not to be behind-hand with you.

We are very far from thinking your temper is bad; the manner of your answer is a proof to the contrary. You may sometimes need a word of *advice* or *admonition*; I believe even this will not be often necessary; and when there is occasion, my affection will prompt me to offer it with so much tenderness, that it shall look as little

like reproof as possible—and I hope and expect to find many more occasions for commending than for reproofing you.

Should it please the Lord to spare your cousin, a time will come when you will live together, and, I believe, love each other dearly. I would certainly wish you to imitate her in anything that you see is commendable; and there will be other things, I trust, in which you may be a pattern to her. Thus you may be mutually useful to each other; and we will love you both, and rejoice in you both. We shall not love you a hair's breadth the less than we would have done—if we had never seen her.

Indeed, I cannot be sufficiently thankful to the Lord, that when he was pleased in his providence to put two children under my care, they should be both of such an amiable, affectionate disposition, as would win my love if they had been strangers, and not so nearly related as you and your cousin are to us. And though I consider you both now as my own children—yet you are still my eldest, and my having a second, will be no prejudice to your birth-right.

I have not a bit of news that I can think of to send you. Your mamma is pretty well, and your cousin likewise; but she is much confined, for if the weather is either wet or cold, we cannot venture her abroad. She does not seem to want to go out, except to church. When we are going there, it is some trial to her to be left behind; but she is satisfied, because she thinks her aunt is the most proper judge whether she can go with safety or not.

You, my dear, are favored with health, and I hope you will be thankful for it. Your cousin, and twenty other young people I could name, know the value of health—by the lack of it. The Lord can make sickness a blessing when he is pleased to send it; but still a good state of health is a great privilege. If your life should be prolonged, it may be a good while before increase of years makes a sensible change in your constitution—but you will feel it at last. When you see an old woman tottering about with a stick, consider that she was once as young as you are now, and probably her spirits as lively, and her limbs as agile as yours. Suppose it may be fifty years before you are like her—such a space, which seems long before-hand, will seem very short when it is past, and there is hardly one in fifty of your age, that will be alive fifty years hence.

Dangers stand thick through all the ground,
To push us to our tomb;
And fierce diseases wait around,
To hurry mortals home.

How just, therefore, and important is that advice, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come!"

And whom should we remember—if we forget him? Our Creator is our Redeemer! [Isaiah 54:5](#). He is the Savior, the Lover of souls, who assumed our nature, that he might be capable of dying for

us. Shall we not remember him who endured agonies, and sweat blood, and hung upon the cross—that we might escape the misery we have deserved, and be made the children of God?

I commend you to his love, and pray him to write his name upon your heart. We all join in love to you.

Believe me to be your affectionate father