Serious Reflections on Time and Eternity!

John Shower, 1657-1715

Of the Changeable State and Short Duration of Earthly Things; Especially of Man.

When I consider that yesterday was the conclusion of the last year, and that I now am entered on another year; it is seasonable to reflect on the mutable condition, and short duration of all things in this world, which are measured by time. That as they have their beginning, so they have their end; and that the distance, or space of time between the one and the other is very little.

Let me not then, O my soul, rejoice and please myself too much in new enjoyments, remembering that death may be at hand, and my end is certain.

Many who were rich and flourishing the last year, may be reduced to poverty and deep distress, before the end of this year. Many who are now in a capacity to relieve others, within a few months, or a shorter space, may be objects of other men's charity. The thing which has been, is that which may be; and that which has been seen in one year, may happen in another; so easily, so quickly may a change be made!

Riches may unexpectedly change their owners, and borrow wings of a thousand accidents, with which to fly to Heaven for a new disposal.

They therefore who possess, should be as if they possessed not; for the fashion of this world passes away. Innumerable casualties may effect that change, which no human art or skill can possibly foresee or hinder. Afflictive unexpected evils attend us everywhere! We cannot promise ourselves tranquility for a day, much less one year to come. They lay in wait for us on every side, enter at every crevice, and commonly overtake us, when we are least apprehensive of their approach! Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble: he comes up as a flower, and is cut down; he flees as a shadow and continues not. What then are riches, beauty, strength, and honor, to a person who is but a shadow himself! How false is the hope of man, and how frail is all his glory!

One day can make an end of all his riches and honors! And yet what solicitude, care and labor, to get what we desire of these things (though often we do not need them) and then to keep what we have gotten, and then to increase it, and then to defend it, and at last to enjoy it—and in a moment it is snatched from us, or we from it! His life is but a vapor, on which they all depend; then how much less are they? To how speedy an alteration are they subject! What numberless instances of this, does one years experience furnish!

What saddening disappointments and unexpected calamities have befallen many since last year! And multitudes who are now at ease, and think their mountains too strong to be removed—shall meet with sharper trials before the end of this year. Alas! How few consider or believe it, until they find it so? All men should count upon trouble and disappointment, suffering and sorrow in this world. He who has the least share of trouble, is reckoned the most prosperous man; and yet he knows not how soon his portion or troubles may be doubled. We reckon our joys, by the absence of some degrees of sorrow and calamity that others meet with. But before the end of this year, our condition may be as disconsolate as theirs.

O my soul! Though I know this to be true; though I cannot, I dare not deny it—yet how difficult is it to conquer the love of this world, and of this body, to that degree I ought! To undervalue the interest of a short, a mutable, uncertain and troublesome life—in comparison of the permanent possession of an everlasting good! Though I know that what is earthly and temporal must needs be thus changeable and fading; and that it is as true of man himself as of anything under the sun; yet how do I forget what man is!

Man is not only mutable in his state, his body, and his life—but in his mind too, so as to love and hate, to choose and neglect, to delight in, and abhor, such things at one time as he did not before. He does not pass the same judgment, nor retain the same affections at one time as at another. How do I live, as if all this were as certainly false—yet I know that it is unquestionably true. I often admire, love, fear, trust in man, as if he were the direct contrary to what he is, and seek for immortality upon earth, and act as if I were assured of it, and were not liable to any change; though I acknowledge and know the contrary. Though the last years experience, and the observation of every day does convince me of it; though all history, and all the records of the grave attest it; though all mankind in every age have found it so; though it is a manifest and notorious truth, legible in the various changes and calamities, but especially in the dust and ashes of all who have lived before us (our graves being often made of our predecessors dust, and the earth we bury in, having once been living) yet how little is it believed, how seldom considered!

The confirmation of it which one year gives us, has little influence on our hearts or lives, with respect to the next year. We ought therefore to accustom ourselves to these thoughts, before such changes happen, to which our final change shall ever long succeed.

They will be less efficacious, if they never admitted until our minds are oppressed and feebled by the weight of affliction. We shall then want that vigor of reason which should co-operate with the remedy; and which, if used beforehand, would help to support and stay our minds under all subsequent revolutions. For those considerations may be able to fix and stay our minds under changes, that may not be sufficient to recover and raise our spirits after they are dejected and fallen.

Of the change in men's inclinations, opinions, and actions which one year shows!

How observable this is in others—and how much more discernible in our selves. Honor and reputation and health and riches—how uncertainly they are preserved, and how easily they are blasted.

What a discovery does one year make of the mutability of man, not only of his outward condition, but of the man himself—his temper, his practice, his inclinations, his aversions, etc. He is never the same—every breath of wind turns him to another shape. We despise today, that which we admired yesterday. And tomorrow hate the object of our present love. We begin friendships, and cancel them for slight reasons. Often a mortal enmity gains our tender affection. The very persons who are in one year our darling friends, and possibly deserved to be so—may yet be our open enemies the next year, and seek our ruin. Lord! What is man? How deceitful and mutable is the heart of man! We know not what other men are, or will prove to be until a trial comes; and we are equally ignorant concerning ourselves until an hour of temptation.

How patiently do we think we could bear afflictions until we feel them!

How partial and mistaken a judgment do we make of our wisdom and strength in reference to the future!

We counsel others to submission and resignation in the most difficult trials, and wonder they complain so loudly. But we ourselves despond and sink under half of their burden; and send up our more impatient murmurs to Heaven, when God thinks fit to prove us by a lighter stroke.

We censure and condemn others, who are in a higher station, and are called to more difficult work than we; when by a little advancement, and the like temptations, we discover that we are as bad as they! Those who were reputed humble, temperate and religious, when they have been exalted higher—become proud sensual, and ungodly. Had some been told twelve month ago, what now they are, and speak, and act—they would have made Hazael 's answer: "Am m I a dog, that I should do this?"

A change in the public affairs of the state, and by that means of particular interests, or some alteration of our own private circumstances (calling us to new duties, and exposing us to new temptations) reveal us more to ourselves, and to other men, than was expected, and proves us to be very different from what we appeared to be!

Such a change, for instance, as from poverty to riches, from sickness to health, from obscurity to honor, from privacy to a public charge, etc. or on the contrary. Men cannot bear the weight of temporal happiness, and riches and honors make us to be other men than before we seemed to be.

How weak a thing is man! He cannot carry his own desires, without falling under them! He cannot prosper in his designs, without being changed in the temper of his mind, upon every success. So true is it that man in honor is like the beast that perishes; and changed ordinarily for the worse, as to serious religion. May we not fear, that some, who a year ago dared not live a day in the neglect of private and family devotion, do now omit it, for many days and weeks together?

Under the afflicting hand of God, or some apprehensions of an approaching change, or sense of guilt upon great transgressions, the convictions of sin are lively, conscience is sensible and awake, affections warm, resolutions strong, etc. But alas! How soon does the case alter! Our spirits cool, our zeal abates, our good purposes unravel and die, and come to nothing. By degrees we return to folly, and boldly venture on that sin which we lately trembled at—through the lack of continued sharp afflictions, or of a serious awaking ministry, and friendly faithful admonition; or through the temptations of vain company, and the remaining power of fleshly lusts. So that we falsify our most sacred promises and resolutions, violate our holy vows, cancel the bonds of God upon us, allow the devil to re-enter and prevail to take possession of our hearts, and yield ourselves an easy prey to his temptations, until our latter end be worse than our beginning!

Oh what a change does one year let us see! In persons as well as things! In ourselves as well as other men! And as it is with man himself, so with everything that he values himself upon, or for which he is esteemed by others. Even his esteem and reputation is also changeable and uncertain. Not to instance in

 riches, but in what is nobler, learning, and the improvements of the mind by study; how soon may the violence of a disease disturbs or stupefies the brain to that degree, as shall reduce the greatest scholar to the pitied condition of a fool or madness! And where is his reputation and renown, in such a case?

But much less than that will blast the fairest reputation, with the far greatest part of the world: it may be lost by unwary mistakes, by false reports, by envy and malice, by the subtle hatred of enemies, or by the weakness and credulity of friends, (who will listen to every backbiter's story) or by one or two indiscretions of the man himself. No man can be certain to secure his reputation while he lives; much less after he is dead. Who can content all men, however godly he lives? And who is well spoken of by all when he is dead? Who is so esteemed, that some do not despise him?

How vain and faulty is an ambition to be talked of after we are dead, which will be but by very few, and that very differently, and but for a little while. There is no remembrance of former things, neither shall there be of things to come, with those who shall come after, [Ecclesiastes 1:11](https://ref.ly/Eccles 1.11;niv?t=biblia). For how short a while do the proudest monuments last, that are set over the rotten flesh and bones of many, to preserve their memory? God has promised, it is true, that the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance; but it must be understood so far only as the frame and state of this world, and the revolutions and vicissitudes of time will permit.

But what good can it do us, farther than the interest of God's glory, and the good of others is concerned in it? The blessed will not need it, and the damned have no advantage by it. And no endeavors can be certain of success: for people will talk of us as they please; and their opinions very often change from one extreme to the other. He who has the loudest fame, shall only be talked of a little longer than his neighbors; and that by a few dying men, that must themselves be before long forgotten.

how small a part of the inhabited world is acquainted so much as with the name of the greatest men in Europe? How different and contrary are men's opinions and discourses of them, where they are known and talked of? How many holy and excellent persons are buried in oblivion, or misrepresented as unworthy to live on earth, whose names will be found in the book of life? Our life is yet as mutable and uncertain as any of theirs. The time is hastening when we shall be too old to live much longer, but at any time we are old enough to die.

Our breath is in our nostrils, and though there is time enough for for us to breath out, we have no assurance that we shall have power to breath in again.

Of the Uncertainty of Living for Another Year.

The vanity of this life—the swiftness of time. How time should be improved.

I now begin another year—but what assurance have I to outlive it? I cannot say how soon my sovereign judge may call me hence, and summon me to appear before his righteous bar. O let me not defer my necessary preparation for death, which may be nearer than I imagine! Let me mind the great things first, which are of absolute necessity to be done before I die. This perishing body which I have pampered and indulged, at the expense of so much cost and time—may be putrefying in a silent grave, before half this year be past! Lord! Bless this thought, to awaken my diligent endeavors to secure the blessedness of eternity! May I mortify the desire of great things for myself, in future years, by the considered possibility of dying before the end of this year! Let me look into the graves of others, and consider that this may quickly happen to me, and must before long be my own case. Let me think what this body will shortly be, when it has been six or eight days separated from my soul—How vile? How loathsome? That I may despise the beauty, and be dead to the pleasures of the body, which so easily, so suddenly, so strangely may be changed! There is no glass is more brittle, no bubble more vanishing, no ice more dissolving, no flower more fading, no shadow less substantial, no dream more deceiving, no sound more transient—there is nothing more vain and more uncertain than life, on which all other things in this world depend!

My days are as nothing, says Job, though he lived over two hundred years. There is hardly anything very frail and fading, mutable and uncertain, but God in scripture sets forth the vanity of life by; as if he would teach us by it, from the light of every perishing object, which our eyes behold, to reflect on our own mortality. We sleep every night, in the outer chambers of death: and in some diseases sleep, which is the image and picture of death, is taken away, to give place to the original, and make way for death.

Every year, every week, every day, every moment—we are hastening to our final change; which may overtake us before we are aware. Every day we lose some part of our lives; in our very growth from infancy to manhood, our life decreases and grows less. Every pulse and breath tells us we are hastening to the end of our time on earth, and calls upon us to dispatch our work. Every word we speak, is formed of that breath whereby we live; and we may not live to pronounce another sentence, but the lamp of life may be extinguished and blown out by a sudden blast! Everything we do, carries away some sands of our little hour-glass of time; and how little may remain? Or how soon may the glass be broke? Our souls are in our bodies, as a little air enclosed in a thin bubble; how easily is that broken, and then where are we? How many who are now alive, in health and vigor, who deliberate on their food and drink, and are get plenty of air and exercise, to maintain themselves in health, and please themselves with the dream of years to come—shall never see another new-years-day? We many not live another month, or week or day?

Many have promised themselves great things in the future, but died before night! Let me not say, I shall not die this day—when I may die this hour. Every man's death is appointed by God, and cannot be changed. Death is final, there is no amending an untimely death.

When I lie down to sleep, I hope to rise stronger and fresher, and fitter for work. But I know that I may rise no more. May not my name be on the roll of those who shall be called to give my afinal account, at least some time this year? Let me not then neglect or foolishly delay my principal business. Let me not be mindless of death, which is inevitable, and the time of it altogether uncertain. Ought not my first and chief care be employed to make my peace with God, (he alone can be my happiness; to his final judgment I am hastening; his favor alone can give me support and joy in a dying hour; to his mercy I must trust, when I leave this world;) that he may mercifully receive my soul at death and be my everlasting portion! Do I know my life is thus vain and transient, and shall I not seriously improve it to such a purpose?

Shall these thoughts leave no impression upon me? Do I breathe continually in this element of vanity and death, and yet remain insensible of so near a change? Shall these thoughts pass away as a vanishing cloud, and distill no softening drops on my soul?

Shall the image of death, which meets me everywhere, be only like a dream that startles and scares a little, but is presently gone, and no more considered? O! let me now remember to make God my friend, and secure a saving interest in his eternal mercy, while the day lasts; yes, while my reason and understanding are free, and not disturbed and clouded by fear and pain, and the disorders of the body, as commonly they are in sickness—if God should grant me that warning, which yet I may not promise myself to have, for I may be cut off by a sudden stroke, before the end of this year, which I an now beginning.

And how great and necessary a work have I to do in so short and so uncertain a portion of time? Endless joy or misery, will be the consequence of spending this present time.

My ignorant soul must be instructed,  
my carnal heart must be renewed,  
many false opinions must be unlearned,  
many sinful customs must be changed,  
many powerful lusts must be mortified,  
many strong temptations must be overcome!

Many graces must be be obtained, exercised, strengthened and preserved—to please and serve, and to gratify a holy omnipresent God, my sovereign; and express the thankfulness of my heart and life to Christ my Savior!

Is all this nothing? Is not all my short and fleeting time too little for such a work? To prepare for a safe and comfortable death in order to a blessed eternity?

Of the Seeming Difference Between So Many Years Past, and the Same Number of Years to Come.

When I look back on the preceding years of my life, how easily can I grasp them all at once? They are even as yesterday when it is past.

But so many years to come has something great and vast, which fills my thoughts, and affects my mind, after another manner. Such is the difference between past enjoyments, and the expectation of future. Let me suppose the same term and duration of years, and yet how different are my apprehensions of what is past, and of what is yet to come! Things past by a remembrance of some remarkable passages, when they happened, seem to be present with me: but not knowing what may happen in the same number of years to come, I have nothing whereon to fix my thoughts. Or the reason of this difference may rather be, that men in this degenerate and necessitous state (with unsatisfied desires reaching after happiness, and sensible nothing present can afford it, and knowing by experience that nothing past could have done it, are eagerly desirous of felicity. Because we know not but what is to come may procure it, we hope it will; which makes the time seem long by reason of our expectation and desire of good. Whereas the foresight of evil, and the expectation of that, some years hence, makes the time rather seem short and near at hand: so many years to come, in the expectation and desire of good, are long and tedious; such hope deferred makes the heart sick; even though it is of that sort as must needs fail our expectations.

Prepare me, O Lord! For what your unerring counsel shall please to order, as to the remainder of my time on earth. Do not allow me to count upon a great number of years to come, since this year, for anything I know, may be my last! Do not allow me to expect rest and happiness in this world, which nothing temporal can afford. This poor world is not the state or season, wherein, by any promise of God, I am encouraged to hope it.

If fifty or sixty years to come, is thought so great a matter, and really is so, as to our stay on earth—then oh! what apprehensions ought I to admit concerning an endless, everlasting state! Especially being as certain of the latter, after death, as I am uncertain about the former; whether so many years be yet to come before my death. Let me not hereafter be so preposterous in any concern, cares and fears, as to be anxious for tomorrow, and yet be thoughtless of eternity.

The Little Portion of Our Time on Earth; Considered, by a Computation of the Life of Man, from the Number of Years and Hours.

Think, O my soul! How short is that life at longest, made up of years and months, and days; such little parts, and yet in number few. Well therefore may it be expressed, as I find in holy writ by years that may soon be numbered. When a few years are come, says Job, (or the years of number, as in the original) I shall go the way, whence I shall not return. By the years of a hireling, which were not above three, [Isaiah 16:14](https://ref.ly/Isa 16.14;niv?t=biblia). We usually compute threescore and ten years, to the life of man; let me suppose four score. The bed with most employs one half; and hardly one in thirty does reach the age of seventy years. And they who live to such an age, do yet complain how soon it is done. Ignorant childhood and foolish youth, and infirm old age—may be supposed to take up a third part of that time. In either of them very little of the great ends of life are answered. We ordinarily begin to reckon our lives from our birth; whereas for a good while after we know not whether we are alive or not, but are beholding to others to make the account for us.

When we first come to the steady use of reason, or what we call the years of discretion; how few are there but from the prejudices of education, from the corruption of human nature, from the lack of experience, from the infection of bad company—how few, I say, spend their younger years in those things, which afterwards they are ashamed of, when experience has taught them mature wisdom.

How great a part of our remaining time is taken up in the necessities of nature, about food and clothing, and in lawful cares, to support the body? And how much more than needs, in pampering, dressing and adorning the body? Out of the small remainder, how much is employed in the concerns of a family and near relations, in particular callings, in necessary civil business, and in getting, keeping or improving an estate? Besides all the time that is spent in recreations, visits, unprofitable discourse, impertinent thoughts, journeys, sickness, and innumerable other occasions, some allowable, some unavoidable, and many needless! After this, how little time remains wherein to cultivate and improve our minds, by languages, arts and sciences, or the knowledge of a trade, etc. how little then after all, may we say, is left for the matters of the eternal soul? For devotion to God, and serious preparation for the eternal world?

Alas! How small a number of years make up the life of man! And how small a portion of that is employed about the principal business for which we were born, and for which we live?

We divide time into past, present and future: but the past is not now ours; the future is not yet ours, and the present now is past, before the sound is pronounced.

And yet this is all the time allotted us, wherein to secure the blessedness of eternity. How many hours more of our little time might be improved, than commonly are by the best of people?

In every year there are 8775 hours: if we allow the greatest half for sleep and necessary attendance on the body, and take but 4000 hours for our work and business of consequence: how poor an account can most men give of all these 4000 hours in every year? Not one hour in seven, not one in ten, is ordinarily devoted to God, and the purposes of piety. Should it not affect us, seriously to consider this?

Especially if we remember, at what an uncertainty we are—and how small a number of days and hours do yet remain. This year, this month, this week, this day or this hour, may be my last! What an unsuspected accident or a sudden disease may do, I know not: but this I know, that there is scarcely anything that has not killed somebody: a hair, a feather, a vapor, a breath has done it! When the apostle James asks the question: What is your life? He answers, it is even a vapor, that appears a little while, and then vanishes away

Of the Redemption of Time.

How precious and valuable a treasure time is, and will be thought to be, when it is too late.

Is the life of man so short and fleeting, our days on earth so few, and so uncertain—then how careful should I be to manage every hour; endeavoring to match the swiftness of time by my celerity and diligence to improve it? I can have no business of greater or of equal importance to mind, than to secure the happiness of my soul in the eternal world. And shall I lavish my time, and lose my pains on unnecessary or foolish things? What will all other business signify in the end, if eternal realities are neglected? Is there any interest more weighty, that calls me from such work? Is there anything else that so well deserves my time? Is there anything that may be put into the scales, or weighed in a balance against this? Shall eternity, which comprehends all time, have the least share of my time allotted for its concerns? How little a part of my time has been hitherto employed in such work! How reasonable, how necessary is it to redeem the little inch of time that yet remains, but hastens to an end? For as there is no covenant to be made with death, so no agreement for the stoppage and stay of time. It keeps its pace whether I redeem and use it well or not.

The greatest part of our life is designedly employed to avoid death; we eat and drink, and sleep, and labor, and rest—that we may not die; and yet even by these we hasten to death. Every breath, every pulse, every word leaves one less of the number which God has appointed for me, and carries away some sands of the hour-glass of time; and yet how little care is taken to employ time well? We seldom value time, until we can no longer use it to any advantage; and though we know that time can neither be retarded in its motion, or recalled when past, yet of nothing are we more wasteful, than of time.

Yes, how many complain of it as a burden, and know not what to do with their time, are exceedingly at a loss wherein to employ it, what to do to be rid of it? But alas! How near is death, when they shall think nothing too dear to purchase some few grains of that sand, which now seem too many, while they are passing through their hour-glass? How sad will be the review of our lost and ill-spent time? How different an opinion of its value shall we have on a sick-bed, or when our time and hope is gone?

How many weeks, and days, and hours, O my soul, have I trifled away in sloth and idleness, in foolish mirth, and hurtful company, in vain thoughts and impertinent discourse, in excess of sleep, and needless pastimes, feastings, inordinate care to adorn the body, or gratify the sensual appetite? All that time which is past is irrecoverable; and the little remainder quickly flies away. How quickly will it be gone? How soon, how suddenly may an unexpected stroke of death conclude it?

And yet this is the only opportunity I shall ever have to make my peace with God, and prepare for the everlasting world. Did we consider it as we ought, we would not foolishly throw away so much time in trifles and impertinent things, or what is worse! How much more time might we redeem than commonly we do? To how much better purpose might we use it? How much more work might we do, were we never idle, or did not loiter? We might walk much further—did we not often stand still, or go out of our way.

How little do we consider the account of our time which we must shortly give to God? Oh that such a thought might effectually persuade me to redeem it!

That I may not tarry until the end of time to know the worth of it! Let me not undervalue it, while it is given to me to be used—that I may not eternally regret my folly, when time shall be no more!

God calls me to diligence and labor; the work he calls me to is excellent, and the reward glorious. Time is given to me to know, and love, and serve, and obey God, and enter into eternal life; and shall I yet be idle? Do I indeed believe in eternal realities, and yet delay and loiter, and waste my precious hours in vanity? I am going into eternity, and entering into the eternal world, and know that I must be in Heaven or Hell forever—and have I time to throw away? Am I fit to die, and to appear before my judge—or am I not? Am I made fit for Heaven by pardoning mercy, and sanctifying grace? Have I the pledge of the Spirit to witness and assure me of it? Is my interest in the promise of eternal life as firm, and my evidence of it as clear as it may be made? Am I not conscious to myself, that much of this necessary work is yet to be done? Shall such an unprepared soul as mine, be careless and indifferent how I spend my time?

Of the Ordinances of Day & Night, Summer & Winter, Seed Time & Harvest.

Their order and succession of time, established by God, is the effect of infinite wisdom and goodness. What they may teach us?

When I consider the beginning of another year, I can hardly avoid reflecting of its several parts, summer and winter, spring and fall, day and night, and their alternate turns. This calls me to observe and admire his eternal power and godhead, wisdom and truth who is the great author of this admirable variety; who has fixed the earth in the skies, and hanged it on nothing. He settled the luminaries of Heaven for excellent ends: the sun to rule by day, and the moon by night, thereby to distinguish times and seasons, to separate day and night, winter and summer, and consult the convenience of man and beast by their due succession.

The day is God's, the night also is God's. God makes summer and winter—how wonderful is their order, beauty and constant course, that when the sun withdraws, and the shadows of the evening cover the earth with darkness, to conclude the day; the moon and stars supply the place of the absent sun during the night. And that though they differ in length, yet gradually lessen until they are both equal at the years end, and have made the same circuit. How excellent a work of God is that quick succession day and night to one another?

The supposition of a perpetual night, is a dismal gloomy thought. O! What will the everlasting darkness of the infernal prison be!

The sun by day enlightens the earth, directs our motion, guides our way, governs our work, awakens industry, warms the earth and air, gives life, and vigor, and fruitfulness to all things under the sun, and makes the whole inferior creation to rejoice! The sun is and emblem of God's universal goodness, who is kind to all his creatures. How admirable is its luster! How glorious is its light! How loudly does it proclaim his power and wisdom! God made the sun, and the other lights of Heaven, by his powerful word, and preserves them hitherto by his daily providence! If God is now so glorious, contemplated in his works, considered in the luster of the created sun, viewed only through the windows of sense—then how much more glorious will he appear hereafter, when we shall see him face to face, and nothing interpose between us and his incomparable light!

If my eyes dazzle to look upon the meridian sun—then in what inaccessible light must he dwell, who is the father of lights? If this lower world, the common receptacle of his friends and enemies, has so much of his glory given them by the heavenly bodies—then what a place will Heaven be, where there shall be no sun or moon nor need of any, but the glory of God shall lighten it, and the lamb be the light thereof!

While I thus consider the sun and the day—I must not think the night is useless, which reveals another part of the heavens, not discernible by day—namely, the stars and planets, refreshing the earth, cooling the air, giving necessary rest to the creatures etc. Their order, motions, aspects, oppositions, influences, are all useful, and instructive. The agreeable mixture of light and darkness, and the regular succession of day and night within a few hours, are exceeding wonderful and advantageous. In other parts of the world, where the sun beams are more direct and its heat more excessive, God has made amends by the length of the night; and in the more northern parts, where the influence of the sun is weaker, the days are proportionably longer.

So good is God to all his creatures, in all parts of the world! As the morning and evening answer to the day of twenty four hours; so does spring and autumn to the twelve months of the year, that we may not pass immediately from one extreme to another; but gradually be disposed for so great a change, as is between summer and winter, and winter and summer. So merciful and gracious, and infinitely wise is God in all his works! We cannot say that one part of the year is more necessary than another. The winter is as useful for the good of the universe, as the summer. In summer we are supplied with what is necessary to maintain us in winter. The perfect situation of the sun, seems much to contribute to it. If the sun had been at a farther distance from us, our earth would have been in a manner desolate; because the influence of the sun could not have been considerable. If the sun had been nearer, the earth would have been burnt up. The excellent order which the sun has now obeyed for over six thousand years, is also wonderful.

Let us note the daily progress of the sun. What a subject is here to admire the power, goodness, wisdom, and faithfulness of God! Lord! What is man, for whom you do all this! Every year the day dies into night, the summer into winter, and herbs and plants lose their beauty and verdure, and shed their blossoms. May I not hence learn to consider and prepare for my own approaching change? In prosperity, health, and ease, and life—may I expect, and make provision for trouble, sickness, pain, and death. As every wise man in summer would prepare for winter; and work with all his might, while it is called today, while the light continues, because the night of darkness is at hand, when none can work!

Of Evils to Be Expected in this Year.

See the wisdom and mercy of God, in concealing from us the knowledge of future events!

[Job 14:1-2](https://ref.ly/Job 14.1-2;niv?t=biblia), "Man is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure!"

Not only few and uncertain—but evil likewise are the days of the years of my life—may everyone say, with the patriarch Jacob. A sufficient portion of evil for every year may well be expected, when our Lord tells us, there is a certain measure allotted for every day. [John 16:33](https://ref.ly/John 16.33;niv?t=biblia), "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows!"

Sufficient to the day is the evil of it. Not only is our life short, but troublesome, and full of vexation. We cannot sing a requiem to our souls when one great calamity is past; for we know not, in this region of changes, but another, a greater calamity may be at hand. One messenger of ill news may succeed and out-do another, as it was with Job.

We come weeping into the world in a most helpless forlorn state; and if we escape the dangers of infancy, and the casualties of childhood; and after that endure the snares and follies of youth, we are tossed upon the waves of time and chance, and sadden and disquiet ourselves with a thousand griefs and sorrows, by inevitable and unexpected troubles; though we increase the number of needless cares and fears, and discontents; until at length a sudden stroke arrests us, we groan, and then die!

Who can give a catalogue of the afflictions and calamities, perplexities and disappointments, encumbrances, crosses, and harmful accidents of human life? By means whereof millions are disconsolate and sad, mourn and complain, weep and sigh, and from day today are fed with the bread of affliction, and the water of adversity. Not to mention men's fluctuating restless thoughts of heart, frustrated desires, baffled projects, defeated purposes, which bring vexation.

A good share of these troubles cannot be avoided; and yet very few can be particularly foreseen. Who could prognosticate a year ago—the mercies or the evils, which have happened since? Public and private, personal and relative, to the countries, cities, families and persons we are concerned for?

Who can certainly foretell the events of this ensuing year? God has intermixed good and evil in the life of every man. He has set prosperity against adversity, says Solomon, to the end, that man should find nothing after him, [Ecclesiastes 7.14](https://ref.ly/Eccles 7.14;niv?t=biblia)—that he may not know what shall come next, whether a prosperous or a calamitous event.

What a change may be made in a year by the mere happenings of human events? By the treachery of friends, or the malice of enemies, or the more immediate hand of God? We know not what shall be on the morrow, much less what a year may produce! Because whatever may be disposed to happen, from natural causes, or civil counsels, may be altered by a particular decree of providence.

Prepare me O Lord! For all the calamities and sorrows, your infinite wisdom shall think fit to exercise us with this following year. And by your merciful providence, and gracious conduct, cause them to work for our good; furnishing us with suitable strength and wisdom, to acquiesce in your good pleasure, and obey your will. Let me follow you, as the father of the faithful, though I know not where you will lead me; knowing the wisdom and faithfulness of my Guide, let me therein be satisfied, though I know not particularly what course You will steer.

I thank you, O heavenly father, that you have reserved the knowledge of future times and seasons to yourself, and hide events from men; lest by considering them certain, we should presume in case they are good; or should despairingly afflict ourselves, by foreseeing the evil we know, to be inevitable. Did we certainly foreknow the good that would befall us, we would not trust in you to bring it to pass, or heartily implore your care and assistance. Did we foresee the evils we shall suffer, before they overtake us—we sould be overwhelmed with despair.

Many a mother who rejoices at the birth of a son, would mourn to foresee what a man, what a son he will prove. Such an increase of knowledge would increase our sorrow; such a prescience would transport and discompose us, by unseasonable joys and sorrows, born out of time. This would make us remiss in our duty to you; and weaken our dependence on your own unerring wisdom, truth, and power!

The Supposition of Dying this Year, Should Be Improved.

The consequence of redeeming time, and providing for eternity farther pressed. The folly of elder people is condemned and checked from the example of children. It is advisable to familiarize the thoughts of death, and to imagine beforehand what apprehensions of things we shall then have.

The longest life is but a day multiplied; and who can certify or assure me, which will be my last? He alone who was God as well as man, could say: My hour has not yet come. All of my life given me to resolve this question: Whether I shall be in Heaven or Hell forever?

And have I any time to lose, and squander away, as superfluous?

It is no unreasonable supposition to make, that I may die this year! Let me admit that thought, and imagine myself on a bed of sickness, wearied with pain, and ready to leave this poor world. The physicians have left, despairing of my recovery. My family and friends are around me weeping. All things are in a doleful melancholy posture, suited to such a state. I feel within myself the portent of death; expecting the final stroke, in an hour or two more.

What is then the value of

 sensual pleasures? Can I then relish or savor them?

What then is honor to me, who shall never more go abroad to receive it? Will it then comfort me to have lived in respect and applause—if my heart was not humble under it, and the honor of God promoted by it?

Can riches and a great estate support me, when I am on the verge of eternity? In that hour will it be any satisfaction, to have made a stir and noise for a few years upon earth, to be talked of for a while longer than other men? Are these the things my dying thoughts will be most concerned to reflect on? These honors, these pleasures, these possessions, offered to a dying man, would rather upbraid than tempt him. They come too late, as a prince's pardon to a man whose head has just been cut off.

Die I must, and appear before my judge, to answer for all that I have received and done in the body. Fool that I was, (shall I then too justly say to myself,) not to have considered this much sooner—not to have provided for death and judgment and eternity! My sins stare me in the face, my conscience tells me I am not ready for that dread tribunal. I have lived as a stranger to such thoughts as now I cannot refuse, and which should have been admitted sooner. But if to such a state any hope of mercy may be granted, (though it be unspeakably little,) yet I cannot promise myself any such warning by sickness.

The sleeping virgins were called at midnight, and so may I! Where can I pitch my tents on earth to be secure against a sudden death! Lord! Make these thoughts effectual to prevent my loss of precious time, which at such a season, will be esteemed precious, though now it is not. O how swift, how short is my time of trial here on this earth!

How difficult, how important a work is it to prepare for an everlasting state! What is all this world, how little, how mere a nothing—to a departing soul! Shall I after such reflections, continue to pursue shadows, and please myself with empty dreams?

When being so near my final judgment, the common wisdom of a man requires me to mind it in good earnest; and be more solicitous about it than for anything temporal! O in what manner will death open my eyes, by shutting the windows of sense! How shall I then see the nothingness of all temporal things, and the reality of what is eternal!

We sometimes laugh to see the vanity of little children, who are greatly pleased with painted toys, and busily employed with trifles. It extorts a smile to see them eager, and industrious, and mightily concerned in their childish sports: to see them fight or weep for little things which we despise: to observe with what solicitude and care they'll make a little sand castle, which three moments after they themselves pull down, or would otherwise tumble of its own accord.

We laugh at these, but should weep over ourselves, as the greater and elder fools; who are every whit as silly, yes infinitely more. Considering that we know the frailty of our present life, and can look beyond the grave to the eternal world—yet misspend our precious time on trifles; and please ourselves with what is so unsuitable to our age and state; and allow our desires to yearn for trifles; and our greatest diligence, care, and zeal to be exercised on impertinent and vain things; that are perishing in themselves, and can contribute nothing to our eternal welfare. Is it not thus with reference to all that men toil and labor for, to the neglect of their immortal state?

The voluptuous person will not refuse the present gratification of his sensual appetite, because he is uncertain of another day. Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die. Should not the same motive quicken my diligence in a better work? And because my Lord may come suddenly as a thief in the night, immediately prepare to meet him?

Let me now therefore, O my soul! Look forward to the end of life and time! And so let me esteem and seek, and choose, and do everything in the first place, which then I shall wish I had! Let me do nothing now, which I truly believe I shall then be ashamed, or sorry to reflect on: that by thinking what a condition I shall then wish to have my soul in, I may now provide myself, much better than I have done hitherto. That while I am in the greatest probability of living, I may suppose my death to be near, and so not dare to do anything, but what I would or might do, if I were in the present expectation of death. To this end, let me go down to the potter's house, descend to the consideration of my mortality, and dwell among the tombs; remembering the Egyptians built themselves better tombs than houses, because they were to dwell longer in them. Let every nights repose, serve as a memorial of my last sleep! And let my bed be for the model of my coffin! This is the only way to be dead to this world; to be able to judge of things now, as we shall do after death, according to immutable eternal truth.

The Brevity of Life Considered as the Fruit of Sin.

There are but three ways of leaving this world, as Abel, Adam, or Enoch. A diligent improvement of time farther pressed—and the neglect of it bewailed.

The shortening of our days is the fruit of sin. All the funerals that have ever been in the world, have been caused by sin. We die because we have sinned, and yet we would not sin as we now do, if we keep in mind that we must die. From the first transgression of Adam, we derive our death; and therefore some of his posterity lived longer than he—this proves that the lengthening of our days is the peculiar gift of God; and yet it is such a gift as was more desired formerly, than since the appearance of Christ. For we read of none in the New Testament, since life and immortality is brought to light by the gospel, who desired a long continuance here on earth. Were we delivered from sin, the sting of death—by having made our peace with God in the blood of Jesus—then death would not be frightful, or put on such a ghastly mask, as to most it does. But we are uncertain of our justification, we waver between hopes and fears as to our final sentence; and are conscious to ourselves that we are not ready for our great account. This makes death so terrible—considering it with all that it is inevitable; the way of all the living. For though the curse is removed, and the sting be taken out by our blessed Savior; so that the souls of believers are safe, and shall not be touched by the second death—yet God has not taken away the stroke of death from the body.

Though the Christian is assured of deliverance from Hell, he is not exempted from the grave, as his passage to Heaven.

Prepare me, O Lord! By the free remission of all my sins; and make me fit for the blessed inheritance, by sanctifying grace; and then your time is best; your holy will be done. No matter then, whether my death is violent, or what we call natural. It will be one of the two, for I cannot expect to be translated, by a miraculous change, as holy Enoch was, and as they shall be, who shall be found alive in the world, when our glorious judge shall come again.

There are but those three ways of leaving earth—and the three first men of whose departure we read in scripture, are instances of all three.

Abel died a violent death,  
Adam died a natural death,  
and Enoch was taken up into Heaven.

The variety and order of their departure, as one observes, is very admirable, and deserves to be considered. For all mankind must follow one or other of those three examples. Every man or woman that is born into the world, must leave it by one of those three ways; either be cut off by a violent death, as Abel, the first man who died: or die a natural death, as Adam did, who was the second man who died: or be translated, as Enoch, who was the third we read of.

But though I know that within a few years at farthest I must leave this world by one or other of these ways; though I have been dying ever since I began to live; am dead to the last year, and to all the preceding portions of my time; and know that what remains will quickly pass and be gone, after the same manner; yet how have I over-loved this body, as if I should never live out of it! How have I set my heart and affections on this world, as if I should never remove to another! How have I trifled away my precious time and life, as if death would never come!

That few do seriously admit such thoughts is too evident, by the general course and practice of their lives. For to what hazards do men expose themselves? What pains will they take? What inconveniences will they bear? With what unwearied industry will they toil and labor, to get a little money, or honor in this world, though they know not but they may be called out of it, before the end of this year! And yet the same persons are remiss and slothful about a future life! They are negligent and unconcerned about an eternal state! They are careless and indifferent, yes sottishly stupid—about the welfare of their immortal souls. Henceforward, O my soul! Whatever other others do, let me resolve to live in the expectation of death, which I know is certain, and may be very near.

Of the Expectation of Another Life.

The vanity and misery of man in his best estate, if there is no eternity.

The satisfactory removal of that supposition by the thoughts of God, and of eternal felicity in his blessed presence.

Let me retire a little, O my soul! And think what a world this is; what men design and seek, and do and suffer; with what false and feigned joys they are pleased, being only happy by comparison; and with what real sorrows they are afflicted; what innumerable disappointments, sicknesses, (and as troublesome remedies,) dangers, labors, pains, and calamities of all sorts, multitudes groan under, and loudly complain of. And what trifling unworthy ends are pursued by all who do not seriously seek eternal rest? And how often frustrated? And besides, consider the cares that disquiet us, the errors that deceive us, the many temptations that assault and overcome us; how busy we are about vanities; how often dejected, and melancholy for the breaking of a mere bubble; how eager and industrious to pursue a mere shadow; how active and in earnest to destroy ourselves, and one another. And then reflect on the malice, and cruelty, the filthiness, and impiety, and great corruption, which abounds everywhere; whereby God is dishonored, and provoked to anger? After this,

 what a theater of tragedies must this world appear? What a hospital of sick, and diseased, and insane people? How would I be tempted to say: Lord! Why have you made all men in vain? If I could not look . . .  
from this sea of troubles—to the haven of rest;  
from this dark prison—to the region of light;  
from this deceitful, troublesome, and defiling earth—to a blessed, everlasting Heaven.

For truly, if there no no world but this, every man in his best estate in this world, is altogether vanity! Selah. "LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is. You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath"! [Psalm 39:4-5](https://ref.ly/Ps 39.4-5;niv?t=biblia)

It is a certain undoubted truth, the prefixed truly tells us so; and that it deserves to be well considered, we learn from the concluding Selah, every man is vanity. Not the inferior parts of the creation only; but man the lord of all: and every man, every Adam from himself, to the last man that shall by ordinary generation descend from him. Not the ignorant, poor, or wicked only, but all the individuals of this human species. Young or old, strong or weak, beautiful or deformed, rich or poor, high or low, good or bad, (in respect of the body, and this present life,) everyone is vanity! Suppose a man in his best estate—not in helpless infancy and childhood, or in decrepit old age, not in pain, and poverty, and disgrace; but in his most settled, most flourishing, most envied, and admired condition upon earth; in the midst of strength, and mind, and honor; when at best, as to body, and mind, and outward circumstances; when he looks fairest, when he shines brightest; in the height of all his glory, with the greatest likelihood of a continuance; yet then he is but vanity! In his frame, in his temper, constitution, inclinations, actions, and employment—he is a mere shadow, an empty, mutable, inconsiderable thing, and not to be accounted of. His heart, his head, his imaginations, reasonings, desires, purposes, projects, hopes, and fears—are all vanity; and altogether vanity, in all the parts, and kinds, and particulars of it. He not only may be, but he is so, in his best estate! If this world is his best; if this world is his all, and nothing more to be expected after death.

And how should such a reflection strike me to the heart, to suppose that after a few years are ended, I must return to my first nothing, and my very being be swallowed up of eternal death! What satisfaction can I then take in any present enjoyments, if an eternal annihilation is at hand, when I must bid adieu forever to all that I now possess? What delight can I have in the ordinary comforts of life, with this belief, that within a year or two, it may be tomorrow—I shall sink into the dust, and exist no more? What pleasure in anything with this dismal expectation? The more flourishing my condition is in this world, the more would I dread to lose it, if nothing better, nothing at all, can be enjoyed after death.

Some philosophers have ignorantly urged such a consideration as an antidote against the fear of death; but the admission of it may rather deprive a man of all the comfort of life. What then is the advantage of a wise man above a fool? The exercise and improvement of our noblest faculties would render us more miserable than others, if nothing be expected, and certain, when this life is over. Not only sensual, but intellectual pleasures would be disturbed and destroyed by such thoughts; that very shortly, the next year, or day—I must disappear; and all my enjoyments and hopes be utterly and forever lost along with my very being. Were the case thus, (which such consequences evince it is not,) it were better for most men they had never been born; whether their condition here be prosperous, or afflicted. For what comfort or quiet can any man have in plenty and prosperity, when this frightful apprehension of an approaching end is ever present? And what consolation can it yield a man who is afflicted and calamitous, and yet loves his life above all things; to think that he shall not cease to be miserable, but by ceasing to be?

And what is become of all religion, if such a thought is entertained? All devotion to God is thereby extinguished, all the restraints of vice removed, the flood-gates of impiety opened, the encouragements of virtue, the rewards of holiness; the suffering for righteousness sake—are all at once taken away!

Lord! Confirm my belief of the invisible future state of rewards and punishments! And let not worldliness and infidelity dampen my zeal in your service, or rob me of the comforts of this life, which, if I have any solid ones, must suppose the hopes of a better life.

Let others therefore, O my soul! Who expect not an everlasting Heaven beyond the grave—place their affections on earthly things and mind this world, as if there were nothing better, nothing other. Let those who doubt, or disbelieve the promised rewards of eternity, take up with what they must shortly leave, and labor for the bread that perishes.

But since I profess to believe and seek life everlasting—let me daily entertain myself with the hopes of it, and let all the flattering dreams of what is desirable upon earth, give place to nobler and better thoughts—to eternal delights. Let me derive my principal joy from the promise and expectation of that future felicity, and endeavor nothing more than a fitness to partake of it.

O my God, my God! You are my life, and joy, and portion! In you, and in your love—all my desires, and hopes are answered, and all my needs supplied. However evil this world is made by sin, yet you are the infinite and supreme good. How mutable, how uncertain, however perishing are all sublunary things; yet you are the rock of ages, the fountain of everlasting life, and have appointed the eternal world, when this is ended, wherein you will be better known, and loved, and served, and honored, and communicate yourself more abundantly than now—to those, the desire of whose souls is towards you, who believe and love you, who partake of your image, and are devoted to your fear.

The assurance of this and nothing else, will answer the objection of the present vanity and misery we are subject to!

The Consideration of the Death of Others.

Especially of relations, friends, and acquaintances, how to be improved. What instructions we may learn by the sight of a dead carcass, or a deaths head, and the usual motto on it: and what by the death of holy persons, to quicken our desires to be as they.

Has divine patience added one year more to the number of my days, when so many others were removed by death the last year?

Others, whom a few months since I knew in vigorous health; wiser, stronger, more likely to live, and to answer the ends of life than me; some of them, my near relations, and useful friends; in whose converse I took delight, and promised myself advantage by their company and examples; but they are taken, and I am left. Your holy will, O Lord! Is done: and they, who were prepared, are infinite gainers by this my loss.

Quicken my preparations by following their piety, to meet them in your heavenly kingdom. Let your longsuffering lead me to repentance; and suffer me not to slight your warning by the death of others, to expect my own. Lord! Cure my earthly mindedness, and practical unbelief; and by all such admonitions of your providence, teach me to possess, and use this world, as knowing that I must shortly leave it; and let not the thoughts of my mortality wear off, as soon as the funeral of my friends is over.

Every year some of our acquaintances drop into the grave. We attend them thither, and lament, it may be, for a few days, their departure and removal. But we do not consider, that others will before long, do the same for us; it may be before this year is ended. Oh how soon do we forget our deceased friends, and ourselves, who are likewise dying! We count upon a long life, which we cannot reasonably expect! We hug the enjoyments of this transitory world, as if our present state would last forever! Will nothing but our own death effectually convince us of our mistake and folly in this particular?

Though the arrows of death fly continually round about us; sometimes over our heads, when superiors are taken away; sometimes fall at our feet, when children and servants, and inferiors die; sometimes on our left hand, when an enemy is cut off; and while I am pleased with that, in that very hour, it may be, another arrow on our right hand strikes the friend of our bosom and delight.

Can we see all this, that great and small, high and low, friends and foes are all vanity, and drop down dead round about us; and shall we not consider, that we are as vain as they, and must shortly follow? Shall we not by a Christian chemistry extract spirits out of these dead bones? And by these examples learn the end of all men, and lay it to heart?

Whenever I see the funeral of another, let me think thus with myself: why might not I have been that man or woman, who is now carried to the grave? If we had been compared a few days since, it is probable I would have been thought as likely to have been his monitor, by dying first, as he mine. By such an improvement of these warnings, the request of the rich man to Abraham were in great measure granted; for it is a call from the dead that speaks loudly to us, to consider ourselves, and prepare in time for so great a change: and say, as the prophet to Hezekiah, set your house in order, for you shall die!

Can we look upon a deaths-head, and not remember what we shall shortly be? May not much be learned from its common motto? I am that which you shall shortly be, and have been that which you are now: that is, I have been as mirthful and jocund, as brisk and merry, as proud and vain, as rich and great, as careless and secure, as honorable and as much esteemed, as beautiful and as well beloved, as witty and as learned—as you are, or can be now. I valued myself as much upon my estate and trade, and health, and beauty; upon my education, profession, employments, abilities, friends, family etc. as you have ever done, or can do. I lived in ease and pleasure, in mirth and jollity; I minded the world as much, and indulged myself as much in sensuality; and was as careful for my body, pampered and pleased my flesh as much as you, and thought as little of a sudden death, and prepared as little for such a change, as you do. But now my dry bones are looked upon with contempt and scorn, and you shall shortly return to dust, and be as vile as I am.

It cannot but affect us, did we consider it, to see so many snatched away in their youth, and outward prosperity; and in the midst of their sin and folly, without any visible signs of true repentance: or in terrible anguish and horror for their past sins: and yet how few do take the warning, carefully to prevent the like unhappiness? O Lord! Preserve those strong convictions, those serious thoughts, those holy resolutions, those lively apprehensions of the life to come, of the evil of sin, and the terrors of your wrath, which the sight of dying persons has at any time awakened in my soul!

O the eloquence of a dying sinner, to persuade to repentance! Even when he has lost his speech, and lies gasping, and trembling, on a bed of sickness; breathing out his last faint breath, and passing into the eternal world, to answer for the crimes and follies of a wicked life!

Lord! Revive these thoughts upon my soul, and let me feel the power and influence of them, in the hour of temptation, and in every time of need! And let the consideration of the death of believers, the blessedness they are thereby entered into, and the holiness they are possessed of—quicken my desires and diligence to prepare to follow.

When I think where they are, and what they are doing, what is their work, and what their state, what their continual employment, and what their enjoyments; and how different from ours—I cannot but wish to be with them; to be as they are, and do as they do, to know and love and praise God as they. They are not hindered by such a clog as this body is to us; or tempted by their senses, appetite and imagination, to sin against him: they complain not of a seducing flesh, unruly passions, low and disordered thoughts, of temporal afflictions, spiritual desertions, the snares of the world, and the malice and subtlety of the devil. We who are pilgrims and travelers are exposed to these difficulties and storms which they are freed from. They are now rejoicing in the light of God's countenance, and shall never more question his love—while we are in tears and sorrows, groaning to be delivered.

But think, O my soul! That they were lately such as we are now!

They were members of the militant church, before they entered into joy and triumph. They had their conflicts and difficulties, their hour of temptation, and time of trial, as we have ours. They were slandered, and persecuted, and saddened, and disappointed, as their followers are. They went to Heaven the same way, and got the victory after the same manner, by repentance, and faith, and humble persevering obedience. They were once imperfect as we are now; and complained of the body of sin and death, and struggling's of unmortified lust, as we do: and were sometimes in the dark about their interest in the promise, and walked heavily under the hiding of God's face, and endured temptation, even as we. And as we have nothing to do, or suffer, but what they met with—we have the same encouragement that administered to their support. We have the same God and Savior, the same way and rule, the same assistance, by the aids of his Holy Spirit, offered to us! We the same promises, and the same rewards proposed, which they enjoyed, first in faith and hope, and afterwards in fruition.

Yes they passed through the dark valley, and so must we. Their earthly tabernacle was dissolved, and so must ours be. We must expect to go the same way to rest and glory; and wait God's time for our admission. We must finish first the work which God has for us to do and suffer—and then all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, we shall grieve no more, we shall sin no more, but be as the angels in Heaven, or as the spirits of the just made perfect!

What Influence the Consideration of Eternity Would Have upon Our Hearts and Lives, If Soundly Believed and Considered.

Especially if the supposition of our dying this year is annexed to it.

With what humility, mortification, and self-denial, what seriousness, watchfulness, and resolved constancy, would every Christian live on earth, did he act always under the influence and power of a confirmed faith concerning the life to come! We would not then grudge at a little labor, or boggle at a few difficulties in our way. What though I meet with injuries and affronts, hardships and inconveniences; being now in a foreign country, and every day I live, one day's journey nearer my eternal home! Shall I not patiently bear momentary sorrows, while I believe I am hastening to eternal joys? Did I look more to the everlasting world, would I not make the pleasing of God, in order to my eternal welfare, the great business of my life?

Should I not serve the Lord with more fervency of spirit, and be better fortified against the fears of man, who can but hurt and kill the body, nor even that, without the permission of God?

Should I not order all my affairs, answer all temptations, mortify inward lusts, live in the exercise of grace, and in circumspect persevering obedience, in order to it?

Should I not watch more over my heart, and lips and ways, be more diligent to trim my lamps, to be more crucified to this world, more careful to call myself frequently to an account, and renew my repentance?

Would not my converse be more useful and edifying, my discourses more savory and full of piety, my prayers to God more humble and earnest, my charity to men more sincere and extensive, and my preparations every way more suitable to such a faith, and to such apprehensions of an everlasting state?

Could we carry the thoughts of eternity about with us every day, and often admit them in our civil and secular affairs, did we repeat it frequently to ourselves, at least every morning, as soon as we are awake—that we are near eternity; this grain of incense would perfume the whole temple; and be an antidote against inward lust, and impure thoughts, against the infection and defilement of bad company, and the snares of worldly business, and do much to prevent vain and sensual actions, and to cure vain affections.

Did we believe it, and believe it near—would we not take as much pains to secure eternal life, as we see men do to get riches? Should we not use the same diligence, care, and circumspection, the same prudent foresight, watchfulness, and perseverance, to prevent everlasting destruction—as others do to provide against poverty, and to live in plenty a little while on earth? Should we not rejoice as much in the promise and hopes of Heaven, as others do in the prospect and expectation of some earthly advantage?

Lord! I confess and bewail the weakness of my faith. How often have I concluded, and said, that Heaven alone is the place of happiness, and yet my carnal heart is too much affected with earthly things! How often have I resolved, (upon the conviction of the certainty of the eternal world,) to mind this less, and to affect and seek it no more as I have done! And yet my foolish heart is hankering after it still. O crucify my affections to things below! And let the believing thoughts of the next life, render me victorious over all the temptations of this. Pardon and cure the staggering trembling thoughts of my unbelieving heart, by greater measures of a lively faith. O that my desires may be strong and urgent; and my diligence and steadfastness in the way of truth, be some way analogous to eternity. Let me live only for eternity, hope for nothing but eternity, design and intend nothing as my chief end, but eternity—and seek and mind nothing in comparison with eternity! Did we believe it, how would everything in this world be looked upon as eligible, or fit to be refused, as it is like to be a help, or a hindrance, with reference to eternity! We should then endeavor to do nothing unfitting of such an expectation.

Considering this world as our passage, and the invisible future world as our abiding country, where we are to dwell forever; whatever we meet with here, whether sweet or bitter, easy or troublesome, pleasing or ungrateful—we should not much matter, but as it relates to hereafter.

And were I certain I would have no longer time of trial in order to this eternal state, than this one year, which is now begun: if a messenger from God should convincingly assure me of it; what would I not do to prepare for death, and secure the interests of eternity? With what remorse and deep repentance should I reflect on the follies of my past life? With what importunate cries should I beg forgiveness? How patiently would I bear calamity, for so short a time? How little would I value the favors or frowns of men? How circumspect would I improve every season of doing and receiving good? How careful would I be to avoid temptation, and how resolute in resisting it?

Did I truly believe I had no longer time to live on earth, than this one year at most—how insipid would be the offer of carnal mirth, vain pastimes, sensual diversions, idle company, etc.? How would I value every hour, every inch of my little time, under the apprehension that eternity is at hand? O my soul! Shall I make no provision against the possibility of such a case? Is not my change as certain, as if it were this year, as if it were tomorrow? Though I am not certain it is so near—but it may be. Let me then seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness. Let me fix it well, and make it clear, that I have secured my great concern, and am ready for a sudden summons to eternity!

How a Godly Man May Improve and Encourage Himself under the Supposition of Dying this Year—even in the Most Uneasy and Undesirable Circumstances.

I may die this year! Then all my cares and fears, if I am rich—and all my sorrows and calamities as to this world, if I am poor—will die too!

I may die this year! Then I shall have no more enemies, no more sickness, and which is infinitely better, I shall sin no more.

I must shortly die—it may be this year: there is no other way to come to a blessed eternity, but by dying. My Savior has died for me, and I shall never see death. He lives, who was once dead, yes he lives for evermore, and has promised, that I shall be with him to behold his glory! He has the keys of death and Hell. He is the resurrection and the life. He has removed the sting of death; and I need not fear a conquered enemy.

If I die this year, I must leave the company of all my dearest friends on earth; but I shall go to better company above. If my dearest friends are the friends of Christ, we shall shortly meet again, and love one another in a better manner than now, and never more be parted.

I may die this year! Then my friends and enemies may die too. Let me enjoy the one as mortal dying persons, that must before long leave me, or I them: and not fear the other, who may so soon perish, and quickly be incapable of doing me or others any harm.

I may die this year! Then let me not then think much of temporal sufferings, of any evils which may so soon be over. Oh what would condemned sinners in the eternal world give to be able to believe and say so of their sufferings!

I may die this year! Then can I wonder that I am sometimes sick and in pain, and that my body is out of order? I am mortal, and dwell in an house of clay, which must shortly molder into dust! Is it anything strange, that such a cheap building does sometime shake, and need repair, and threaten a dissolution? It is a greater wonder, that I am any time well. It is a greater wonder, that such a body, compounded of so many little parts, and so easily disordered by innumerable accidents, should be in health, is hardly less to be admired, than that an instrument of a thousand strings should be kept in tune so long. I thank you, O heavenly Father, for the many advantages of sickness:  
to weaken the power of sin,  
to humble my pride,  
to cure my worldliness and sensuality,  
to keep me from wandering from You,  
to empty me of self-conceit,  
to awaken the consideration of death and judgment,  
to impress the thoughts of the vanity of this world, and the eternity of the next world,  
to assist me to mortify the flesh,  
to rule my passions,  
to exercise patience,  
to quicken prayer,  
to try my faith and love,  
to excite my diligence to redeem time,  
to convince me of the worth and uncertainty of time, and thereby promote my preparations for my final change.

The great apostle by dying daily, had as many victories over this world, as he lived days.

Oh that I might so far walk by the same rule, as every day to think of providing for my last day! And in health to do that which in sickness I shall wish I had done!

I may die this year! Then it may be by some tedious painful sickness, or some troublesome and loathsome disease. But God has promised that his grace shall be sufficient; he will make my bed in my sickness; and put his everlasting arms under me for my support; and not allow me to be tempted above what I am able. He will increase my patience and carry me through the pangs of death, and the dark valley, and when heart and flesh fail, be the strength of my heart, and my portion forever!

I may die this year! Then what if it should be by a hand of violence; if for righteousness sake, in defense of the truth, for a good cause, and a good conscience, and my peace is made with God, and I am accused for doing well, or innocent of the evil which is laid to my charge; there is ground enough for encouragement and support. Thousands of my betters have met with the like, whose names are precious and renowned. Innumerable Christians have died by the sentence of a judge, with more cheerfulness and joy, than others, or it may be, than they themselves, would have done, by the sentence of the physician.

The torture of many diseases is unspeakably more formidable, as to the mere pain. But the righteous Lord who loves righteousness, will clear my integrity, if it may best subserve his own great and holy ends: at least he will stand by and help me, when all forsake me; and if he speaks peace, and give inward consolation—then who can speak trouble? And his final judgment, which is near at hand, will distribute rewards and punishments to all, according to their works.

Suppose farther, that I should lack a sepulcher, after death. There is nothing I could better be without. If God receive my soul, and will raise my body at the last day, whether it putrefies underground, or above it, is no great matter. Those who are alive will be more concerned in that, than I shall be; graves are for the sake of the living rather than the dead. The sun, the rain, the air, birds, beasts, worms, will all contribute to give me burial, if men deny it.

The only difference is, that it will be a little longer before I am buried. If my soul rests in the bosom of my Savior, and by persevering in the love and practice of the truth, I have secured my reputation with wise and good men—then I need not be solicitous what become of my body. My almighty judge will raise a glorious body for me, like his own, and reunite it tO my soul; as easily, as certainly, as for any of those, whose bodies were preserved in caves and vaults, in strong sepulchers, and under stately monuments.

I may die this year! Then I shall not then have the satisfaction to see my children or nearest kindred educated and provided for, settled and disposed of. But is not the ever-living God the same? Cannot he as well take care of them when I am gone, as now? Cannot he answer all my prayers after my decease? And exercise that fatherly care, wisdom, and love, which shall dispose of their conditions, save them from temptations, and supply all their needs, and exceed all my desires, in reference to them? Cannot he fulfill his covenant promise from generation to generation, to the children's children of those who fear him? O how weak is my faith, that cannot trust God in so common and plain a case!

Lastly, I may die this year! Then I shall not live to see the ruin of the anti-Christian kingdom, and the accomplishment of many excellent promises, which concern the rest, and peace, and purity and glory of the churches of Christ on earth in the latter days.

But have I not deserved by my provoking unbelief, ingratitude, and disobedience, to die in the wilderness, and not behold the promised land, or see the peace of Jerusalem? And will not the struggling's of Satan to support Babylon, infer a dismal night of darkness and distress, before the expected morning of deliverance? So that it may now, if ever, be truly said, henceforth, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! And if God will take me to himself in the eternal world, I cannot possibly be a loser—even though I should not see the beginnings of a new Heaven, and a new earth, in this.

However I rejoice in hope, and pray incessantly for the resurrection of the witnesses, and the rebuilding of Zion, and the more plentiful effusion of the Spirit, (the great comprehensive promise of the later times) to effect a glorious kingdom for Christ on earth. My faith assures me, that I shall hereafter see the son of God revealed from Heaven, clothed with majesty, sitting on a cloud, leading the heavenly host, raising the dead by his powerful voice, summoning all the world to appear to judgment, gathering his elect, and finally destroying death, and him who had the power of it, the devil, condemning the wicked to everlasting destruction, but acquitting, honoring, and rewarding his poor members, with infinite and eternal blessedness!

Of Dying in a Foreign Country, and of Dying Young.

Considerations proper to reconcile the mind to both.

I may not live to the end of this year; God in his providence having called me abroad—I may never see my native country again. Let me still remember, O my soul! That wherever I am, I am traveling towards the grave, and passing to the eternal world. That I may live in all places, as a pilgrim and stranger here on earth; with affections suited to my condition, becoming one who is traveling in a strange land. Let me bear the inconveniences I may meet with in this world, as strangers in their travels are accustomed to do. Let me not repine at the ill accommodations of an inn, where I am to lodge but a night or two: but encourage myself with the assurance of better entertainment at home, when my pilgrimage is ended, and my journey over. One of my dearest holy friends; and fellow travelers, (whose memory will be ever precious, with those who knew him) quickly arrived to his journeys end, and is entered into rest early. Which of his companions shall next follow, we know not, or how soon.

Lord! Make me apprehend the nearness of my death in every place: and if I am prepared for dying, no matter where it be. There is no one country farther from the presence of God than another. The whole world may be considered as one great house, and the several kingdoms and countries of it, but as different rooms in the same house. They who tarry at home are no more exempt from death, than they who travel abroad.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; I can go nowhere to be out of his territories, I shall still tread upon my father's ground. I had rather be an Israelite in a wilderness with the presence of God, than a courtier in idolatrous Egypt. Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God, was banished from his own country; and should I never set foot again on my native soil, there is no reason of murmuring against my God, who has dealt thus with many of his favorites. And while I have been in a strange land, he has not allowed me to feel the needs and necessities, and heart of a stranger. Among a people of a strange language he can, and does provide for me all things richly to enjoy. I may set up my Ebenezer, hitherto has God supplied all my needs!

The presence of my gracious father is everywhere the same: in some measure, blessed be my God, I have hitherto found it so. And may I not rejoice in God in a desert, though all the world should forsake me; though all the world should be against me? Should I have no other friend or helper; is not God, an infinite God enough?

And without his favor and presence, what can all this world do for me? If I am sick, and in danger of death, among my relations and friends, if the comforts of the almighty do not refresh and delight my soul, they cannot: and if I do not lack these in my last agonies, no matter in what part or corner of the earth, I breath my last. If . . .

the Word and promise of God are my foundation,  
a holy hope is my anchor,  
Christ is my pilot, and  
Heaven is my country  
—then I shall not fail of being landed there at last. Do not allow me to forsake you, O heavenly father, while I live! And do not forsake me in my last hour—let it come when, and where you will! If my blessed Savior will receive my departing soul at death—then I am not solicitous in what country, or part of the earth it is.

And that I may not be unwilling in the flower of my age and time, in youth and strength, to leave this world—let me think often, that no one age or part of life is more privileged against the stroke of death than another. If I have done my work early, as my deceased fellow traveler had—is it not better to receive the blessed recompense, than to tarry longer, in a world of sin and suffering, absent from the Lord? Shall I not thereby escape a multitude of temptations, sins, and sorrows, which others by living longer are exposed to? If my peace is made with God, what should make me willing to live at this distance from him? What should render this world so desirable, where God is so dishonored, where I am so often tempted to displease him, and so often yield to such temptations?

And may I not fear lest I should fall into such scandalous and grievous sins, that may bring a public reproach on the gospel of Christ, and sadden the hearts of all my acquaintances who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity? By dying early, I shall contract less guilt, and commit less sin, and see and feel less sorrow than others who live longer. And though I should maintain my integrity, yet in this world my highest love and obedience to God, and my sweetest communion with him, is but imperfect. How many impediments and diversions do I daily meet with, that deaden my heart to heavenly contemplations and affections? What disappointments, and sorrowful disasters, to convince me that this poor world is not the place of rest and happiness? What smart afflictions may some of my relations prove? What dangerous snares may attend me in the remaining portion of my time? What opposition and hatred from men may the steadfast professing of the truth, and fidelity to God expose me to? What public national calamities may I have my share in? etc.

But if I consider old age itself, which we do desire to reach; what and how many are the infirmities and griefs, and troublesome circumstances which attend that state, which dying young will prevent? Are not most men who reach a very great old age, helpless objects of pity? They are a burden to themselves, and to all about them? And (which commonly happens,) may I not then be as unwilling to die, as at present? As loath then to leave the world as now, though in a manner it will have left me? For how many old men, past the relish of sensual pleasures, are yet inordinately fond of a longer life!

Have I not been told by heathens, as well as Christians, that it is not the length of time, but its improvement, that does really make a long life? If I have answered the ends for which I were born, it is not too soon to die. No man ever miscarried as to his everlasting interest, because his life was short. He who is prepared for death, he who dies in the Lord has lived long enough, and should thank God for a speedy call to the possession of that felicity, which the holiest saints on earth desire and breath after!

Gideon lost nothing by returning from victory, while the sun was yet high. He has fought long enough, who has gained the victory. If I have wrought but a few hours in a vineyard, and done but a little service for my Lord and master; and yet am dismissed, and rewarded, before the rest of my fellow laborers; shall I repine, and think my Lord does not befriend me? If he has any farther service for me, he will prolong my days, and make me diligent, I hope, and contented. Otherwise I pray he would make me ready to die, and make me willing, and desirous to depart this life! For to be only content to die, that I may be perfectly holy, and fully blessed, is methinks too low for a Christian who acts like himself, believing the certainty of his avowed principles and hopes, and knowing that while we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord.

The Contemplation of Our Approaching Death May Assist Us to Mortify the Lusts of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life; to Cure Carnal Ambition, and Promote Contentment.

All that is in the world, says the apostle, is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The dust and ashes of our own mortality duly considered and applied, will help to deaden and extinguish each of these.

By pride of life, we lift up ourselves against Heaven, and despise our Maker.

By the lust of the flesh, we over-love and indulge the body, and study to gratify the sensual appetite.

By the lust of the eyes, our desires are immoderate after temporal and external goods.

The thought of our approaching end has a tendency to oppose and mortify these lusts; to humble us before God; to take us off from the inordinate love of the body; and to moderate our passions to earthly things.

It may help us against pride, by showing us the infinite distance between the eternal self-sufficient God, and such poor dust as we; who are but of yesterday. If he does not uphold us, and maintain our souls in life—we shall be laid in the dust tomorrow. It will mind us of his justice against sin, the parent of death, and of all the miseries of our mortal state; and convince us of our weakness to resist his will, or avoid his wrath.

As to our fond affection to the body, death may instruct us, that it deserves not to be so much accounted of. Death will open our eyes to discern the preference of our immortal souls, and what concerns them, to the interest of a perishing body. It may convince us, that we are cruel and unkind to our very bodies, by over-loving them, because we thereby contribute to their eternal sufferings: and so teach us to love and use our bodies, as servants to our souls in this world; and as expecting to share in glory with them, after the resurrection.

Death may also help to moderate our desires after earthly good, and so cure the lust of the eyes, by letting us see the vanity, uncertainty, and short duration of these things, and their insufficiency to make us happy, and give us true contentment!

The thoughts of an approaching death may, if anything will do it, damp the mirth of the luxurious epicure, and strike him into a fit of trembling, as did Belshazzar's handwriting on the wall. It may reveal the distraction of living in pleasure, and of care to please the senses, and the fleshly appetite, when the end is so near. death may likewise check the folly of ambitious designs: that men should make so much ado to get into slippery places, from whence they may so easily fall. Where being puffed up with vain applause, they forget themselves, and their latter end, until their life, and glory expire together.

Where are now the great, and mighty, and honorable, who have made such a noise in the world? What is now the difference between the dust of an Alexander or Caesar—and that of their meanest slaves or captives? Could their dignities and earthly glory preserve any of them, from the stroke of death, or the judgment of God, or without repentance, from his condemning sentence?

Think, O my soul! How little it will shortly signify, whether I have been known and honored among men or not; any farther than God may be glorified by it.

How should it suppress vain glory? To think of being one day esteemed, and worshiped, reverenced, and applauded by dying men, and laid in the grave the next? Let me rather seek that glory and honor, to which immortality is annexed: and labor to be accepted with God, at whose bar I most be judged, endeavoring to keep the testimony of a good conscience; and then it is not much concern to me, whether I pass through good report or evil report. No contempt, or frowns, or threatenings of men need then discourage me. Though I should be trampled on by the foot of pride, while others are happy in a dream for a little while—it may be that they have a prosperous passage to damnation. I will rather thank God for delivering me from their temptations, and giving me the opportunity, and call, to hasten my preparations for a better world.

Let God dispose of my condition here, and reputation too, as best shall please his sovereign will. Only let him be pleased to keep me holy, and to preserve me from everlasting shame and confusion of face, after the general resurrection, and final judgment. Grant me a portion now in your approving love, and own me for yours at last, in the great and terrible day of reckoning; that then I may hear the blessed sound, and enter into my Lord's joy!

The Same Argument Considered Farther, as Dissuasive from Worldliness, and Earthly Mindedness. And as Proper to Confute the Vanity of Long Projects, and Great Designs for this World.

Are the years of my life but few, and are they hastening to a end, and may this year be my last? Let me not then greedily covet riches and abundance, and waste my little time to scrape together large provisions for many years to come; when I have no assurance to see the end of this year! Is it consistent with such a belief—to toil from day today, that I may lay up that which I must so soon leave? This would be as if I hoped to spend an eternity here on earth, and in the mean while neglect the one thing necessary for eternity. Am I not upon the shore of eternity? May not the next tide carry me off? And shall I spend my whole life in diversions from the main business of preparing for eternity? Have I nothing else to do, but to gather sea-shells all of my life, (if they were pearls, the absurdity would still be the same,) and pile them in heaps, until I am snatched away past all recovery? Shall I be regardless of an eternal state, and run the hazard of being undone forever, by solicitous care about

 pretended necessities for a long abode on earth? Much less for superfluities; when I am not certain of the possession, this one year? Shall I magnify and admire what is so soon to be parted with? Shall I value myself upon these things, so as to despise those that have less, and envy such as have more? Shall I allow my mind to be distempered, and my passions immoderate on every change of these things? Though I know besides my own mortality, that to enforce the argument, there is a principle of corruption in all these things!

Our very manna here in a little while will reek!

Our bread, which is the staff of life, will molder!

Our richest garments will wax old, and rot!

Our silver and gold will rust!

The greatest beauty will wither!

Everything that is earthly, will decay and perish!

Shall not this teach me to sit loose from all such things? Can I imagine, that in my last hour it will be easier to part with much, than little?

Would it be better in the day of judgment, to have a great estate to answer for, than a lesser one?

We read concerning the patriarch Abraham, (who rightly understood the transitory nature of riches, and his own mutable condition,) that the only purchase he made with his riches, was a grave! He chose to take possession of the land promised him rather by a mark of his parting with it, than of his possessing it.

Did I think oftener and more seriously, O my soul—of tarrying here but a little while; I would more easily be persuaded, that a little of this world were sufficient to carry me through it. I would consider that my heaven-born soul is made and designed for an endless world! I would not so eagerly to pursue and seek what is suited only to the body, for a little while, and whereof a little with contentment will be sufficient.

The same reflection may be useful to contract our thoughts to present duty; that we may not perplex our minds with long designs and projects; which if we die this year, will come to nothing!

Our great business in this world is adapted to the little portion of time, which is allowed to us. Not that good designs for the public benefit, may not be begun by one, and finished by others: or that we are not obliged prudently to provide for those who shall come after us, by attempting many things of probable advantage to posterity.

But considering the shortness and uncertainty of life, not only should the most necessary things be first minded, and not put off by prosecuting such designs, as may somewhat signify to others, when we are dead. Consideration and faithful counsel would in this case have prevented the fruitless expense of many men's time and money; which if otherwise employed, might have turned to good account to themselves and others.

And this heightens our folly, that while we pursue great projects in reference to this world, and die without effecting them—our preparations for eternity are neglected! And so we are suddenly cut off in the midst of our folly, and all our thoughts perish! How easily, how soon may they do so! The difference and distance between death and life, being no more than that of a candle lighted, from its being blown out; and if it is exposed to all winds, how quickly may that happen?

The Consideration of the Certain near Approach of an Everlasting State Amplified, and Applied—to Enforce a Holy Life.

In this world we begin a year, and quickly come to the end of it. And before long the little number of our years, and days, will be expired. But when death conveys us into the eternal world, the day of eternity shall never be closed with an evening! Of how fearful consequence is that death, by which an eternity must be decided! What attention, what seriousness, what diligence, what care, does the decision of so important a matter call for!

Eternal! What will be the next word, O my soul! How much am I concerned to know it! Will it be blessedness, or misery? Will it be life or death? This one word, Eternity! is the joy of angels, and the horror of devils. It is the unspeakable delight of blessed saints, and the confusion and despair of condemned sinners.

At the creation of the world, time got the start of us, and was five days elder than we; but our immortal souls shall endure beyond the utmost limits of time, and last as long as the everlasting Father, of whose duration there is no end. Shall I then exist and live, though my body perishes and sees corruption? Shall my soul, my self exist beyond the grave, in felicity or misery, and that forever and according to my present actions? What am I then most concerned to mind? What am I to choose? What am I most to fear, to wish, to do?

What is a shadow of honor and reputation, among dying men?

What are a few drops of fleshly pleasure for a moment, compared to eternal rivers of pleasure, at God's right hand?

What are the sufferings of an hour or two, compared to the pains and anguish of eternity?

What can the world, the flesh, or the devil give me, comparable to eternal life?

What can I suffer in the way of holiness, that may be set in the balance against an everlasting Hell?

And yet how often, O my soul! How boldly, how unconcernedly, how foolishly do I hazard the one, and forfeit the other—for the sins and vanities of this fleeting world! Whereas one prospect of eternity should make everything that is temporal, appear little in my eyes—even the highest elevation of earthly greatness, abundance of riches, the great affairs of business, and employments of the world, pomp, and splendor, and reputation, and all that now pleasures the senses, and the vanity of mankind.

Oh that I could but live, as believing and expecting an eternal state!

As having it in my eye, managing all my affairs with a visible reference to it; manifesting to all the world by my behavior and deportment, that I do in earnest believe it certain; for be it never so certain, if I do not apprehend, and consider it as such, it will no more affect me than a fable. Neither is it enough to consider it as certain, but as near: for the most weighty, the most terrible things, apprehended as at a great distance, will little move me. Thinking of the long interval between the advantage of being exempted from such evils for so long a time, will please me more than such distant calamities will affright me.

Let me therefore endeavor to impress the consideration of eternity, as at hand, more deeply on my heart—that I may walk, and live, discourse, and pray, and conduct myself in everything, as near an unchangeable state. Am I not convinced that this is certain, from the nature and operations of my soul, from the reflections of conscience, from the righteousness of God in his government of the world, from the present unequal distributions of good, and evil by his providence, and from the plain and frequent assertions of his revealed will?

I have nothing to object, nothing to reply; but I find a necessity of inculcating and urging the consideration of it in order to its influencing of my heart and life.

I find it needful to reflect often, how near I am to such an endless state: that in one instant, by death, I enter upon it; and that this instant may be as near me, as my next thought! That the holy Scripture describes the two contrary conditions after death, (and every man and woman in the world shall share in one of them) as both everlasting.

Heaven is described by:  
eternal life,  
eternal glory,  
an incorruptible crown,  
an unfading crown of glory,  
an incorruptible inheritance,  
a house eternal in the heavens, etc.

Hell is described by:  
unquenchable fire,  
a prison whence no escape,  
eternal damnation,  
everlasting burning,  
everlasting punishment,  
everlasting destruction,  
a worm that never dies,  
wrath that is ever to come,  
blackness of darkness forever and ever! etc.

Think, O my soul! That in one of these two contrary states, I must abide forever:  
  in endless joy—or endless sorrow;  
  in the blessed presence of God in Heaven—or forever with the demons in Hell!

Whoever you are that read this, apply it seriously to yourself—it is your own case. Yes I tell you from God, that holiness of heart and life is absolutely necessary to the former, and that without it you shall never see his face, but be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of his glory!

Is this an unquestionable truth? O let me consider it, until I feel the power and efficacy of so important a principle! Let the impression be deep and lasting! Let it pierce and enter into my very soul . . .  
to cool the heats of lust,  
to quench sensual and earthly desires,  
to mortify all inordinate affections to this world,  
to fix my resolutions to mind and seek eternal life with all my heart!

These are not difficult and perplexed niceties, which wise and holy men differ and disagree about. They are not metaphysical subtleties, which few can understand. They are the express word of God, and the daily dictates of my own reason and conscience, which all Christians, and almost all men in their wits, except in an hour of great temptation, confess and own; or whether they will or not, are forced to expect and fear, if they are not in a condition to consider them with a joyful hope.

Lord! Cure the unbelieving doubts concerning these great realities, which notwithstanding the plainest evidence, the devil may at any time suggest! Let a confirmed faith, be the reality of what is thus future, that my soul may be influenced by them, as it is accustomed to be influenced by things present! Let it be the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen—as if the day of judgment were already come, and there were no intermediate time to pass between this and that.

O eternity! Eternity! The more I consider it, the more unfathomable I find it.

Unchangeable blessedness—or remediless, endless torments!

An eternal blissful day—or everlasting horror, darkness, and despair!

Life—or death; glory—or destruction; to last as long as the immutable living God!

None of the patriarchs who lived longest, arrived to the period of a thousand years, which in comparison of God's everlastingness is set forth but as one day. But strictly considered, millions of years and ages have no proportion with eternity; because no multiplication of them will amount to eternity. Whereas one hour has some proportion to a hundred thousand years, because a certain number of hours will amount to so many years. But no number of years or ages, ever so often multiplied, will make up eternity; as no subtraction of millions of years will lessen it. Eternity will be still to come, and will ever be to come.

When innumerable myriads of ages are past, eternity shall then only seem to begin; because when as many more ages are over, it shall be as far from an end. Oh that the thoughts of eternity may be powerful and prevailing above all others! That I may judge of everything by its relation to it, by its influence upon it!

Choose now, O my soul! Whether everlasting joys, or miseries, shall be your portion! But consider well, that your eternity is concerned in your present choice: and that this choice must be pursued with steadfastness and constancy, as long as I live. What are a few years to prepare for an eternal state? Were we obliged to spend several hundred years in serious humble preparation for it, with the greatest strictness and severity of life, during all that time—it were infinitely less than to spend an hour or two in preparing for the greatest dignity and employment on earth, which can be enjoyed but for a few years at longest. For to these an hour has some proportion; but a hundred or thousand years have no proportion with an everlasting duration.

Therefore to consider how many years of toil, and pain, and diligence, many bestow on the probable prospect of some temporal good, should reprove and shame my negligence and remissness in providing for eternity!

The Punishments of the Damned Considered as Intolerable, and Everlasting, and as Unquestionably Certain. What the Reflection upon Hell-torments, May and Ought to Teach Us.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the entrance into the way of life, as it is ordinarily one of the first means to awaken the soul to a serious concern for eternity. Let me therefore first consider the endless punishment of the wicked, in the eternal world, before I enter upon the ravishing prospect of the blessedness of Heaven, promised to the righteous.

With what serious trembling should I think of the terrors of an everlasting destruction, which our Lord shall be revealed from Heaven to render, to all who know not God, and obey not the gospel. When the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment; as the righteous into life eternal.

The dreadfulness of that punishment, the endless duration of it, joined to the consideration of its unquestionable certainty, deserves the most attentive thoughts of every man, who loves his soul, and would manifest he does so, by securing his greatest interest.

The description of that misery, under insupportable and eternal torments, demands more than a transient view, because no words can sufficiently express the horror of that state.

What is it, O my soul! To be banished from the blessed sight and presence of God forever, and all the impressions of his holy image and likeness? And to know that this is the fruit of my own choice—that I lost it by my own fault and folly—that I deserved to lose it; that the sentence is as just, as it is irrecoverable? Who can fully imagine the dismal despair of a condemned sinner, under this anguish of a guilty self-accusing mind? While under the stroke of God's almighty revenging justice, with a more distinct view and knowledge than now, of God and his excellencies, of himself and his own vileness and malignity, which must greatly increase his rage and torment.

Add to this, his being enraged by the accusations and cries of wicked acquaintances, and relations; and his being mocked, and insulted over, and tortured, by malicious damned spirits; with a clear understanding of that glorious felicity he despised, refused, and forfeited; with a deep sense of his former madness in preferring the sinful pleasures and advantages of this world; and this after so many warnings, and invitations, and calls from God, to have prevented it; never to be diverted one moment from the consideration, sense and feeling of his misery, and the duration of it; to have all his passions let loose with the greatest violence, and nothing to satisfy them; and continually to preserve a Hell of wickedness and horror in himself; and to endure the reproaches, convictions, regrets, and stinging reflections of conscience, the gnawing worm, which shall never die—who can conceive the unspeakable misery of such an accursed state?

So great calamity, and yet everlasting! How long does one day or night now seem, to a man under some violent racking pain, in any one part of his body, though he is under the means for cure, and have his friends about him to pity, comfort, assist him, with the hopes of ease in a little while, and the certain knowledge that it cannot last long?

Oh what then will be the dismal state of tormented sinners in Hell! How infinitely must it exceed the most terrible idea we can now frame of it! To languish out a long eternity in that gulf of darkness and despair, under unpitied and intolerable torments, without intermission, or hope of end!

Miseries without measure!

Judgment without mercy!

Pains and sorrows intense, and yet endless!

Without the least support or relief, relaxation or remedy, diminution or change!

Without a drop of comfort, without a moments rest, without the smallest beam of light, or the least glimmering of hope!

Perpetually dying, and never dead!

Under unsufferable wrath, which yet will be forever, wrath to come!

Seeking death, and never able to find it—but eternally to endure all that calamity, which the conjunction of death and life together can render dreadful!

What groans and cries will these thoughts, and these sufferings wring from their hearts? But no refuge will then be found, no excuses admitted, no prayers, no entreaties will then prevail; no tears move pity. He who made them, will show them no mercy, and he who formed them, will show them no favor. It is forever! FOREVER that is the killing word that breaks the heart of those hopeless prisoners in the place of torment! When once delivered over to that prison of God's wrath, they shall no longer have a glimmer of hope. The vain hopes of sinners shall then be ended in eternal desperation! Hell will be full of those who once hoped they should never come there! Hell will be full of those who despair of deliverance from thence; but shall suffer exquisite pains that cannot be numbered, or measured, or endured, but that every minute of an hour will seem a whole year, and yet must eternally be endured by miserable sinners, who will not be wise in time to prevent such an intolerable eternal portion! O my soul, let me descend into v v, that I may not descend there when I die, and be shut up forever in God's prison, the place of endless torment!

Might we but suppose, that one of those miserable souls did let fall but one tear every thousand years; and if after he had by this means wept so much, as that his tears would equal the drops of water in the whole sea—his misery should have an end. This would be some hope, this would be some comfort. But alas! After all those years, his misery will be as far from an end, as when he first began to feel it. It will then be but the beginning of sorrows—which will never, never, never end!

Think, O my soul, that this is the portion of the sinners cup; this is the wages of sin, and the certain doom of final impenitence and unbelief. It is no melancholy dream, but the express repeated word of God, and Christ, the holy prophets and apostles, and the voice of reason too, supposing but the immortality of the soul, and the power of self-reflection—the punishment of sinners must needs be everlasting, as carrying continually a Hell within them; unless God works a miracle to prevent it, which there is no ground to imagine he will, or shadow of reason why he should.

God has pawned his truth, and his eternity, to execute this sentence of his threatened wrath. He is a God of infinite mercy, it is true; but he has told us how far his mercy shall extend. He will not exercise one attribute, to the dishonor and the disparagement of the rest.

That obstinate and impenitent sinners, shall thus perish, is not because the goodness and mercy of God are not infinite, but because his other perfections are so—namely, his holiness, justice, truth, sovereignty, and wisdom. Was it wisdom and goodness to annex such a penalty to the violation of his law; and can it be inconsistent with them, to inflict his threatened wrath? Shall we suppose God to uphold his dominion and government by a falsehood? To keep the world in awe by the threats of such punishments, as shall nowhere, never be executed? Is it unlikely, that God should exercise so much severity? And is it not as improbable, that his repeated word and oath should prove false? Is it not a righteous thing with God, as the governor of his world, thus to punish the obstinate despisers of his grace? Who slighted his authority, disobeyed his law, affronted his sovereignty, derided his power, denied his truth, contradicted his holiness, and joined with the devil, to pull him from his throne; who abused his patience and long-suffering, and scorned all his threatenings; who thrust away their own happiness, and would not take warning; who burst all his bands asunder, and broke through all obstructions; and would not be stopped in their course of vanity and folly, or so much as consider their danger; who rejected his calls to repentance, and refused his mercy, when it was offered; and preferred a lust before his favor, and the pleasures and profits of this world before the heavenly glory; and notwithstanding all the methods of his grace, and the checks of his providence, and of their own conscience, they will go on, they will die?

Let me, O my soul, adore the sovereign justice of God in all his judgments; and tremble at the threatenings of that eternal wrath, which so few consider or believe, until it is too late.

Let the foresight and the fear of such an intolerable endless punishment, be a means to save me from it!

Let me herein read the evil of sin, and learn to abhor and avoid it.

Let me pity, and warn, and counsel, and pray for those of my relations and acquaintance, who live in sin, and run the hazard of this eternal ruin.

Let me not envy the foolish mirth, and momentary prosperity of the wicked, whose present joy must before long expire, and an everlasting destruction follow in its place. How short is the joy of the hypocrite! The triumph of the wicked is but for a moment!

Let me fear and dread everything that leads to this dismal outcome, and improve everything that may help me to escape it. And by consequence, let me less value all the good and evil of this present life; judge of all things by this light; be patient under temporal calamities, and thank God that it is not Hell; and thank him more, that present sufferings do help to save me from eternal sufferings!

Whatever I suffer in this world, let my condition be ever so dark and sad and afflicted—it is not, it cannot be such, but that every one of the damned would think it an infinite happiness to exchange with me, and be as I am. Let me think of those exquisite and eternal flames, to cure my impatience under the sharpest trials and afflictions I may now suffer!

Did I believingly consider an everlasting Hell, I would not think much trouble of anything that is required to prevent it. The severest exercises of religion, the strictest temperance, the nicest chastity, the largest charity, the greatest self-denial, all the hardships of repentance and mortification, and continuance therein to the death, though for many years more than I am like to live—would be reckoned easy, as well as just, if set in the balance against the eternal torments of the damned.

What will not men do and suffer to prevent a temporal death? They will endure a painful course of surgeries, and are content to be cut and scared, and to suffer anything almost to save their lives. But how little will they do to be saved from the eternal wrath to come! One would think that they would have no rest, or peace, or be able to live a quiet hour, until they had made some provision against the hazard of this eternal destruction: and look upon all men as their friends, or enemies, according to the help, or hindrance, they received from them, in reference to it.

But the direct contrary is everywhere apparent. Men are careless and secure, jovial and merry in the way that leads to Hell. They esteem, and love, and choose that company that will help to bring them to this place of torment. Yes, such is their stupidity, and strange perverseness, that they will not allow to be told of their danger. If you tell them, that by such a course, or such an action, they will lose so much money, or their lives will be in danger—they reckon it an obligation, will take it kindly, and return thanks to you. But when they are told, by such courses and actions they will lose their souls, and the favor of God, and the hopes of Heaven, and must perish forever; this they will not receive, they despise the message, and scorn and hate the messenger; and are displeased and angry at such faithfulness.

O bless the Lord, O my soul! For any good hope through grace, of escaping this intolerable and endless misery! And let all that is within me bless his holy name. I have deserved the same endless and unsupportable wrath, which thousands are now under, and shall be under to all eternity; but he did not allow me to fall into it. To be delivered out of those torments after many years misery, would be thought an admirable and unspeakable kindness; and is it not a greater favor never to be thrown into Hell, which I have so often deserved?

How grateful would a damned person be, to be freed from those flames, and placed in the same condition I now am in? What a life of serious, self-denying obedience would he lead? And has not God done more for me? Am I not more indebted to his goodness? He has kept me out of Hell, and offers me heavenly glory upon reasonable, honorable, and easy terms. Blessed be God, I may yet escape the wrath to come!

Let me heartily compassionate the delusion of those multitudes of deceived, perishing souls, whose eyes are blinded by the god of this world; who will not believe it, until they are convinced by the flames of that fire which shall never be extinguished. Yes, when I read, or hear of ten or twenty thousand men slain in a war—let me think of it with other apprehensions than formerly I was accustomed to do. Considering that many, it may be, the most of these shall never more have any comfort or mercy; fearing lest the same sword or bullet that gave them their mortal wound, has fixed them under God's everlasting wrath; and that by dying, they are undone forever.

In very many other cases, belief of this would rectify my opinion, and direct my actions, if seriously considered and improved. This would make me think of death under another notion, than it is commonly considered. For without the consideration of Hell annexed to it, death is not so very formidable, but that heathens have been able to despise it.

But consider death as a passage to eternal misery, as the gate of Hell, as the end of all comfort to a wicked man, and the beginning of an endless calamity—and nothing can be imagined more dreadful to a guilty unholy soul.

Some of my acquaintances, it may be, who died this last year, are now among those hopeless, despairing wretches! If they were permitted to come, and tell us what they suffer, and what they know:  
what a terrible consuming fire God is;  
what vanity, lust and folly, brought them to this place of torment;  
what diligence they would advise us to, while in a state of hope, to prevent the like.

If we have any love and kindness for ourselves, any compassion to our own souls; what a change do we think it would work upon us? But if we will not hear Moses and the prophets, Christ, and his apostles—then neither would we believe, though one came from the dead.

The Eternal Blessedness of Heaven Considered as the Perfection of Holiness, to Quicken Our Desires and Endeavors after Greater Fitness to Possess It.

Does one year after another hasten me to the end of time? And does the blessedness of eternity depend on the communications I now receive from God—and on the preparations I now make, and the fitness I can now attain for eternal felicity in the presence of my God and Savior? O, with what intenseness of mind, should I now prosecute that glorious object! With what unwearied diligence should I run the race that is set before me, lest I fall short of the incorruptible crown of life? How should everything be undervalued and rejected, that would divert, retard, or hinder me from pursuing this end?

O Lord! Be not a stranger to my soul in this distant wilderness state!

Let me see more of your light!

Let me be transformed more into your image!

Let me experience more of your love!

Let me feel more of your vital presence, and quickening spirit!

Let the divine life in my soul be more powerful!

And may the characters of your likeness be more legibly stamped upon it!

By the daily exercise of faith, and hope, and holy affections, carry me through this world—until my pilgrim state is over, and you have brought me to perfect everlasting holiness! And let the believing fore-thoughts of it, until all the powers of my soul with joy, and wonder, desire and love!

Give me, O Lord, to think a rightly of the heavenly glory; as a confirmed state of perfect holiness; of heavenly light, love, liberty and joy; with the satisfying vision of God, in the face of Christ, and his impressed likeness; dwelling forever in the direct and steady view of his transforming glory; with complete conformity of the soul to eternal goodness, truth and love, as its perfection; esteeming nothing, desiring nothing but that God and Christ may be glorified with an entire subjection to his will, adherence to him; rest and confidence in him, swallowed up in the love, admiration, and praise of God, and our Lord Jesus, living in joyful repeated acts of subjection, adoration, and acknowledged dependence; ravished to behold the glory of God in the face of Christ, to see his blessed image perfect in every one of the saints, when all the present blindness of our minds, the errors of our judgment, the perverseness of our will, the disorder and rebellion of our passions, the remaining aversation from God, and disaffection to him, which in this world we complain of, shall all be done away. The flesh shall no more lust against the spirit; or the law in our members against the law of our minds; but an everlasting tranquility and holy peace take place; a peace which passes all understanding, without any outward temptations, or inward causes of disquiet.

Our corrupted nature shall no more cast forth mire and dirt as now; we shall have no more vain or wicked thoughts, no more sinful fears, or foolish hopes. No more unfitting passions, unruly desires, sensual inclinations, earthly affections, feeble, slothful, spiritless duties, dead and heartless prayers, or cold thanksgivings. But as we shall then know God without error, and see our Lord Jesus face to face—so we shall love him without reserve, more than now we can imagine, and serve him without dullness and distraction, and praise him without weariness; the spiritual acting's of our souls shall have no allay of dross. And thus shall we be with him, and admire and enjoy him without end.

Thus when death is swallowed up in victory; and what was imperfect is done away, and what was corruptible and mortal, has put on immortality; then God in Christ shall be all in all: and when it is truly and perfectly so, then it is Heaven. The blessedness whereof is inconceivable. The blessings are as many and great, as they have powers and capacities to partake of blessedness; so will it be in Heaven.

A word, though commonly used as little understood, as holiness; will hereafter be fully and delightfully understood by the blessed saints; as the malignity and intrinsic evil of sin shall be, by the damned spirits.

Oh, that I might now feel more of this heavenly life, begun and carried on in my soul, by a farther participation of his holy image, and conformity to his will! By more vital effects of his indwelling spirit in my soul, forming it to be a temple to himself, for his own delightful residence! That forgetting that which I have received, I may still be covetous, and desirous of more; forgetting what I have attained, I may press on with a holy eagerness and fervency towards the mark!

When I seriously examine my own heart, had I nothing else to prove the weakness of my grace, and the sinful remainders of unbelief—but the low desires, and few comfortable thoughts, the seldom joyful prospect of this blessed state—how sad an evidence were it of my low attainments, that I breathe with no more impatience, after that blessed, holy rest, in the enjoyment of God and Christ; and labor no more in preparing for it?

When we profess to believe that all the desires of our souls shall be fixed on him, and filled with him, as our infinite and supreme good; and all the expectations of faith and hope, swallowed up in endless admiration, gratitude and joy; being fully satisfied, and at rest in the presence and vision of God; without the least inclination or desire of change. And by consequence, there will be no need of novelty, as now, to give a relish to our happiness.

All happiness in this world is by comparing a man's present condition, with his past, or with that of some inferiors. But the intrinsic good, felicity, and joy of Heaven, will need no such foil to set it off; no such comparison to make it prized. The blessed spirits will never lose the lively sense of that low and miserable condition, from which they were raised to so great a glory; and so will ever equally rejoice in the happiness of their glorification and wonderful change. And what was at first delightful, will forever be so; and not be disdained or lessened by a continuance; as it happens in this world, from the emptiness, shallowness, and vanity of the creature—a desire for variety and change, proceeding always from a sense of lack.

But holy souls shall never be weary of seeing, loving and enjoying God; his blessed presence will afford us undecaying and endless satisfaction; and pleasure, never to be interrupted, or abated, and never to cease. The blessed object is absolutely infinite, and so will be always new to a finite understanding; and continual fresh communications from his infinite fullness, must needs make our subjective happiness to be always new, and eternally such.

Let me by such thoughts quicken and excite my diligent endeavors, after a greater fitness to enjoy so great a bliss. And to that end, consider whether any of those happy souls, who have finished their course, and obtained the prize—do now regret their utmost diligence, patience, and perseverance, during their short abode here on earth, to secure the blessedness of an endless life. No! They are far from repenting the time they spent, the trouble they were at, the care they used, the difficulties they met with, the sufferings they endured; to conflict with the world, and the flesh, to resist temptation, to watch over their hearts, and words, and ways, to work out their salvation, to please God, and be faithful to him, etc.

They find to their unspeakable comfort, and everlasting joy, that Heaven makes amends for all they could do or suffer in order to their coming thither. Yes, they find that they were not diligent, and humble, and patient, and circumspect enough.

They find that they did not love God, and seek his glory, redeem their time, and improve all their talents and opportunities of doing and receiving good, and give up themselves entirely to prepare for Heaven, to that degree they should have done.

They find by the transcendency of the blessed recompense, that it deserved infinitely more than the most active, zealous Christian upon earth ever did.

Lord! Quicken my resolutions and endeavors by such thoughts as these? Inspire my sluggish, carnal heart, with holy light, and life, and zeal, and fervor! That looking to the things which are not seen, which are eternal—I may lay up a good foundation against the time to come, and so lay hold of eternal life!

But alas! How much have I neglected the great duty of holy meditation? How little skill and experience have I in it? How tasteless and insipid oftentimes are my thoughts of God! How confused and unsteady! How little pleasure or advantage have I by contemplating his highest excellencies? Yet methinks, could I but retain the same awakened, lively thoughts of Heaven, and eternal life, which sometimes I have had; might I continually feel the sweet and sacred influence, as for a little season I have sometimes felt it—how little, how truly a nothing, would all this world be to me! How comparatively weak, would be its strongest and most alluring snares, to draw me off from God! With what an unshaken mind could I refuse and resist them! With what an unconcerned indifference could I look upon all its most charming glory!

Could I maintain such a frame of spirit, as I have sometimes had for a little while, in the serious contemplation of divine mysteries, in fervent prayers, and other solemn duties of religion; when the acts of faith were strong and lively, my heart set on fire with love to God, and holy breathings after him; admiring his matchless grace to fallen sinners, (and to my soul in particular) when he brought me to the very suburbs of Heaven, (though alas! How seldom!) by the delightful thought of what the blessed spirits above enjoy, in being where Christ is, and beholding his glory; when I was ready to say within myself, 'it is good to be here; this is no other than the gate of Heaven; oh, when shall mortality be swallowed up of life!

But when I thought at any time to fix and settle in such sweet contemplations, how quickly did my lazy backward heart fly off! How soon did the flame decay and die away! How soon did I find myself fallen down to earth again! Sunk down from the bosom of my Lord, presently forgot myself and Heaven, to dwell among the pots, and embrace a dunghill!

'Twas not on my own wings, O Lord! That I soared so high; but I hope by the breathings of that Holy Spirit of light and love, who blows when, and where, and how long he wills. Who gave me at any time any such first fruits of the spirit; who convinced me of the certainty of the heavenly inheritance, by a lively believing foresight of it; who made me earnestly desire the wings of a dove to be gone, and appear before God in Zion; who made me pant and groan to be delivered, and to be with God and Christ, with inexpressible desire and joy, inconceivably mixed with sighs and groans. O my God! Let not this experience be only such a taste of the powers of the world to come, as is consistent with final apostasy! Only the seeming zeal of the stony ground! The rapturous joy of a hypocrite! From the power of imagination, and a heated fancy; from the workings of mere natural self-love; upon mistaken apprehensions of God, and a false opinion of Heaven.

But by the holy effects, let me be assured of the cause and principle; that it was of God! Teach me from the sweetness of a spiritual communion with God now in any of his appointed ordinances, to argue to myself what that most ravishing satisfaction will be, that the enjoyment of God in Heaven will afford the soul. Our holiness is now imperfect, to what it shall be: and therefore our consolation, peace and joy, is but in part, and incomparably less than we are assured it will be, when we shall be admitted to behold the glory of the Lord. It is now at most, but as the break of day, compared to the luster of the meridian sun. But if in this low imperfect state, we can sometimes obtain so near a view of his glory, and feel such sweet communications of his grace; then how much more of this consolation and joy is reserved to Heaven?

If in this pilgrim state, the gifts and graces, and comforts of the Holy Spirit are so refreshing—then O! what has God prepared beyond the grave, for those who love him? If now he sometimes sheds abroad his love in our heart, after such a manner; how much better shall I love him, and feel the influence, and evidence of his love to me, when I shall be with him, and see him face to face! If the apprehensions of this future blessedness, do now encourage, raise, and animate my drooping soul: O, what shall I know and see? And how shall I rejoice, when the veil is removed? If a sacramental communion with God and Jesus Christ, be sometimes so sweet, and so affecting; what will the blessed communion with God, and all his saints above amount to; when I shall sit down with all the children of God, in the presence of the bridegroom, at the last great supper of the lamb in glory! If the pledge of our inheritance be so reviving—then what will be the full possession of it? If the hopes of that glorious day, by holy meditation, be so transporting—then what will be the end of our faith and hope? If a grape or two in the wilderness, be such a cordial—then what will be the whole vintage in the land of promise?

Shall I after all this, forget my own experience, and run from God and Heaven, to embrace or seek a perishing toy? Shall I hide myself with Saul, among the stuff and lumber of this world, when God is calling me to a glorious crown? Are you, O my soul, a king's son, an heir of Heaven, an expectant of such great felicity, and yet stoop so low? Shall I hope for Heaven, and yet grasp this earth, and hug the vain appearances of earthly good? Shall I hope to be like to God; (and oh how glorious a hope is that!) to partake of his image, and live eternally with him—and yet be solicitous, anxious, and disquieted about honor and money, and temporal toys, and mightily concerned about the momentary gratifications of the flesh, and the enjoyments of this world?

Are you a pilgrim and stranger here, and traveling home to the heavenly country—and yet eager and passionate about earthly things? Should a heart that is set upon Heaven, (or may be so, and ought to be so) should it burn with such common fire, and neglect the inconceivable riches and pleasures, and immortal honors of the other life, and the dawning's of that glory upon my soul, by the foretastes of it in this life? How great is the disproportion between the heavens and the earth? How vast is the circumference of the one, and how small a point the other? How many thousand miles does the sun travel in the heavens, while it passes but one inch upon a dial? Oh that my affections were carried to heavenly things, with a swiftness somewhat answerable to the glorious object; let their motion to earthly things be rather slow and insensible, like that of the sun on a dial.

Since I profess to believe, and wait for the heavenly glory, should I not live, as seeking such things, as expecting such a glory? Are careless and indifferent thoughts, sleepy heartless prayers, faint and weak endeavors, befitting in such a case? Shall I not mend my pace, and double my diligence in my preparatory work? When I can believingly foresee the blessed recompense; waiting for that everlasting light of the sun of righteousness, which no eclipse shall ever darken or obscure; for that eternal glorious day, which shall never be closed with an evening. When I shall see the face of God in Christ, and be like him, participate more of his image, rest in his love, and dwell forever in the light of his countenance, according to the prayer and promise of my blessed Savior.

And ought not such a glorious prospect to sweeten the bitterness of all our intermediate sufferings? We are now oftentimes in heaviness and sorrow; but eternity will be enough for an interrupted joy! When we shall exchange:  
all our troubles, for everlasting rest;  
our prisons, for perfect liberty;  
our poverty, for the riches of God;  
our darkness, for light;  
our discord, for love;  
deformity, for beauty;  
our weaknesses and present languishings, for strenth and vigor;  
our folly, for wisdom;  
our disgrace, for glory;  
our sickness and pain, for eternal ease and health;  
the carnal life, for the angelical life;  
our imperfection and pollution, for consummate holiness;  
our sighs, and tears, and sorrows, and complaints—for triumphant everlasting praise;  
our losses, affronts, disappointments, perplexities, fears, groans, and death—for crowns and scepters, hymns and hallelujahs, light and life, and bliss unutterable; and such great things as are fit for us to hope, but too great to be now particularly understood and talked of; while we know but in part, and see through a glass darkly. Yes, it seems as if it were not lawful to utter them, [2 Corinthians 12.4](https://ref.ly/2 Cor 12.4;niv?t=biblia). and now they cannot be expressed, or fully known; for eye has not seen, or ear heard, or can it enter into the heart of man to conceive that prepared glory.

A Devout Meditation upon [Psalm 73](https://ref.ly/Ps 73;niv?t=biblia).

Verse 25. "Whom have I in Heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you!"

What is there in Heaven or in earth, O Lord; but your presence to be valued, loved, desired, chosen, sought, or delighted in? There is nothing in either world desirable without you, nothing certainly above you, nothing in comparison with you.

In you alone I trust;  
on you I depend;  
in you I repose my confidence and hope;  
from you I expect all my felicity and salvation.

What ever I can lose, yet with the continuance of your favor, which is my life, I have still enough. With that I am rich, without it I am poor and miserable.

And if I lack the love of God, all that Heaven and earth can give besides, will not make me happy. In you, therefore, I would terminate all my affections, all my devotions! There is nothing of Heaven to be had on earth, but in your favor, image and love, and the reviving sense of it. All the Heaven I expect hereafter, it is in the more full and immediate communications of these in your blessed presence. I can desire nothing upon earth; I can enjoy nothing in Heaven, but you! Both here and there, you are, and shall ever be my all-sufficient satisfactory portion, my everlasting all!

None else can be the portion of my soul. Nothing else can fill up all its wants, answer all its cravings, be suited to all its capacities, appease and charm all its restless motions, and give fulfilmengt to all its desires, and be the proper object of all its affections.

What is there else can justly claim my love, or pretend to my supreme affection in comparison with God? You are alone the proper center of it. Your infinite and incomparable excellencies, deserve my choicest love; and your numberless mercies and benefits, challenge it as a just debt; as a piece of homage due from all, and of special gratitude also from me. Oh that I could love you above all things; who alone is worthy of all my love! O that divine love might be the ruling principle within me; to inspire all my thoughts, to regulate all my desires, to set all the powers of my soul on work! O that it might take the full possession of my heart, and so animate and order all my actions to please him whom my soul loves! If as yet I cannot say with your apostle, Lord; you that know all things, you know that I love you. Yet I can say, Lord, you know that I would love you! You have provided for our happiness, by that first and great command of loving you with all our hearts, and souls, and strength. But alas! How backward is my sluggish carnal heart, to this delightful exercise?

Though I have so oft been told that God is love, and that he who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God in him; O shed abroad your love into my soul! That I may feel the vital power and influence of it, and live continually in the love of God, and that nothing may ever be able to separate me from it.

Whom have I in Heaven or earth, to hope in, but you? I expect more from creatures, than they can or will perform; but God can do for me more abundantly than I can ask or think. He exceeds my largest thoughts, and out-strips my highest expectations. No man was ever disappointed, who made you his hope.

When I meet with crosses, and wrongs, unfaithfulness, contempt, hatred, and persecution from men, I need not wonder; I was never told by God, it would be otherwise here on this poor earth. Did I look for less from creatures, and expect more from God; did I reckon this world to be a state of trial, and not a place of rest and satisfaction; then my faith and my desires would be stronger with respect to God and Heaven; and temporal calamities and disappointments less afflictive and vexatious.

And what is there, O Lord, in Heaven, or in earth, my soul can desire besides you? Is there anything desirable, but as it is yours, of you, and from you, and bears some impression of your excellence, or brings some intimation of your love? And what can I reasonably desire; what that is worth desiring, or having, but you are able to be, and do, and give?

In whom, or what, shall I rejoice, but in you, O Lord! Shall I solace myself in transitory goods, that slip between my fingers, and perish in the using? Or shall I relish carnal joys, which pollute and debase the soul; when I may and ought to rejoice in you at all times, as the only source of perfect everlasting joy. Let me then stir up my drooping, desponding, unbelieving heart, to rejoice in God; who takes pleasure in the cheerful service and obedience of his children; who delights in those who delight in him.

Is not delighting in God, a most essential, vital part of religion? Should it not be my constant frame? Has not God sufficiently provided, that it may be so? Can I say and believe, that God is the portion of my soul; that he is my God, and I hope to live with him forever, and not rejoice? Or can I consider the grace of the new covenant, the matchless love of Christ, and the precious promises of the gospel—and not see reason to rejoice? Yes, does my soul love God, and endeavor to please him—and is not the very act and exercise of holy love, mixed with unspeakable sweetness?

Whom is there in Heaven, or in earth, or Hell, that I ought to fear, but you? You have a voice in all the designs of men and devils; a hook in their nostrils; a bridle in their mouths—to make them fulfill your pleasure, and in everything accomplish your sovereign decree.

Is there any other, in whom I may repose my trust, but in you, O Lord, the rock of ages?

The might of your power,  
the unsearchableness of your wisdom,  
the righteousness of your nature,  
the stability of your truth,  
the riches of your grace, and  
the immutability of your promise  
—are a sure foundation for my soul to trust to, and rely upon. Your Word stands firm forever: and the truth of your ability, and readiness to help, in every time of need—endures the same throughout all generations. At all times, and in all places, my soul may trust in you, and find relief. And they who know your name will do so; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting kindness and strength; to answer all my doubts, to supply all my needs, to fill all my desires. May not God take it unkindly, that I trust him no more?

And is it not a criminal unkindness that I give him not the glory of all these excellent attributes, which are the grounds of trust; by a constant, steady, entire dependence on him for all that I need?

I have none in Heaven but you, O Lord; as the object of my invocation and worship. Let others have recourse to new mediators, and call upon other God's; I will make mention of your name, and of your righteousness only. And ask of you whatever I need, for the sake of your Christ, my only adorable mediator. Him you hear always; with him you are always well pleased. I honor the holy angels, as glorious attendants about your throne: and bless you for them, as ministering spirits, for the good of your servants. But I dare not invoke, or worship them, because they are fellow servants. On the same account I honor the memory of departed saints, but neither invoke them, or pay them religious worship. Your glory, you will not give unto another. I have no precept in holy scripture to direct, no promise to encourage, no example to authorize the invocation of any other but you; in whom I believe, and trust, [Romans 10:14](https://ref.ly/Rom 10.14;niv?t=biblia).

Having such a God in Heaven, then what can I need on earth? His eyes behold me,  
his wing protects me,  
his hand supplies me,  
his grace provides for me.

I can lack nothing that is good: unless I should need something which God, the infinitely blessed and all sufficient God, cannot bestow. If you are the portion of my soul, then all my enemies cannot make me miserable—unless they can void Heaven of the presence of God, hinder his care, bind up his hand, or obstruct his love. But though my enemies cannot, I fear my sins may. They alone can separate between God and my soul. And considering the multitude and aggravations of them, and your unspotted holiness and justice; I should have too much reason to fear and tremble, yes, and utterly despair, if I had none in Heaven but you. But your word assures me that I have a

 mediator there; and a faithful and a compassionate high priest, Jesus Christ the righteous: whom you have exalted to be a prince, and a Savior, to give repentance and remission of sins; who lives forever in Heaven, to make intercession, until he has brought me there, to behold his glory, and partake of it.

That glory, O Lord! You have reserved for Heaven: in this world we only desire, believe, and hope to enjoy it. Whom have I in Heaven but you?

That is the place of fruition. What can I desire upon earth? This world is the place of desires, as the other of full enjoyment. Most of that which men call enjoyment in this life, consists but in desire. Desire or lust is all that is in the wicked world. [1 John 2:13-15](https://ref.ly/1 John 2.13-15;niv?t=biblia). The riches of a covetous worldling makes him desire more; and the great mystery of intemperance is to create and increase desires; and desires of another kind are the portion of godly men in this world. O that I could breathe after a state of perfect fruition in Heaven with more importunate desires! Who will give me to be in Heaven with you? On earth I desire nothing. Let me, O my soul!

Think of Heaven, as such a place, or state of blessed enjoyment! Speak of it, seek it, long for it, prepare for it, as such. Let Jesus Christ, who is the desire of all nations, (through whom all divine communications are made to fallen sinners) be the great object of my present desires and love! Let me desire nothing but as in him; and for him; that believing his word, obeying his law, adoring his person, imitating his example, trusting his promise, constrained by his love, partaking of his image, filled with his grace, and comforted by his spirit—my meditations of him may be sweeter, and my love stronger; and I may have nothing more left to desire for myself, but that God who has raised and exalted him, would keep alive my faith, and hope, and holy desires, until he has made me fit to be with him; and after having guided me by his grace, and spirit, and councils, here on earth—would receive me to his most blessed and glorious presence in Heaven! Amen, amen.

The Glorious Appearance of Christ to Judgment, Considered as Certain.

The terror, and astonishment, confusion, and despair of wicked Jews and professing Christians—to behold their judge, and hear his condemning sentence to everlasting destruction!

When our blessed Savior shall appear to judge the world, I read that it shall be in his own glory, the glory of his father, and of the holy angels. If by the glory of his father, is meant that of the divinity, as the original and author of all things in nature, as the almighty creator of the world; and by the glory of his holy angels, is understood that of the legal administration, the law being given by the disposition of angels; and by his own glory, that of the gospel, as he is the Messiah; that in the glory of all these, he shall come to judgment: we have a summary account of the three different revelations which God has made of himself to mankind; by the light of nature; that of the law, and the more manifest one of the gospel—according to which every man is to be judged at the last day.

The we cannot distinctly tell what or how great our Lord's glory will then be; we may be certain, it will be suitable to the dignity of his royal person; suitable to the grandeur of his father's majesty; with the splendor of a triumphant prince, who is heir of all things, and has all power in Heaven and in earth committed to him; the great Lord of both worlds, head of angels and men: and suitable to his glorious office, as mediator, and the appointed judge of the living and the dead.

If at his transfiguration his face shone, and his clothing was white and glittering—then how much more splendid will his coming in glory be?

When the bodies of his saints shall be seven times brighter than the luster of the sun? And if his members shall then be so glorious, how transcendently more so will their head, their Lord appear? If the delivery and promulgation of the law, on mount Sinai, was accompanied with such circumstances of terrible majesty, then how much more may we suppose the great assize will be attended with, when he comes to judge for the violation of the law, and the contempt of the gospel.

And if even Moses did then exceedingly quake and fear, what will be the consternation and trembling of the wicked world at the coming of Christ? When he shall be revealed from Heaven, in flaming fire, with a glorious retinue of his mighty angels, as so many bright stars around the more glorious sun of righteousness. The lights of Heaven shall be eclipsed; the visible sun shall veil its blushing head as infinitely out-shone: the present glory of the creation will be all benighted, by reason of his transcendent brightness.

Yes, the heavens shall be wrapped up as a scroll; the elements melt away with a mighty noise: the earth and all its will works be burnt up; and the whole universe as one great bonfire—to adorn the triumph of our Lord's appearance. And this is ushered in by the voice of an archangel, proclaiming his approach: and the voice of God supplying the use of a trumpet, to raise the dead, and possess mankind with a solemn reverence of their judge.

Thus in triumph, as a conqueror, and a judge, shall he come again, who once appeared in the form of a servant to be judged and condemned by man. Then he was called king in scorn: now he will appear as much above all earthly and human greatness, as once he stooped for our sakes beneath it. Then the contempt of nations, and no way esteemed desirable, when he came from the womb of his virgin-mother: now the terror of the world, when he comes again from the right hand of his father. No more to be subject to a state of baseness, but to render vengeance to all, who know not God, and obey not the gospel: and to be glorified in his saints, and admired in, and by all them that believe.

He was put to shame in the days of his flesh, made himself of no reputation, and accounted unworthy to live. But when he comes again, he will put on a garment of vengeance, to repay fury to the enemies of his cross, and make his wicked despisers rise again to shame and everlasting contempt! They that once bowed the knee to him in mockery, and shook their heads at him in derision, shall then see every knee bow before him, of things in Heaven, things in earth, and under the earth; angels, men, and devils in subjection to him as Lord and king.

Pilate, who condemned him as his prisoner, shall appear before him as his rightful judge. The false-witnesses, who accused him of blasphemy, shall be impeached by one another, and their own guilty consciences, before his bar, with the other Jews, who once dragged him before their tribunal—and be confounded to stand before his judgment seat.

His crucifiers shall behold him on a throne of glory, whom they nailed to an infamous cross!

They shall be astonished to behold him sitting at the right hand of God, whose hands they bound, whose body they scourged, whose side they pierced.

Those who crowned him with thorns, shall (with all the world) behold him with a crown of glory!

Those who spit on him, and smote him on the face with the fist of wickedness, shall have their own faces covered with confusion.

Those who approved his condemnation to death, as a criminal, shall be sentenced from his mouth, as their judge, to everlasting destruction!

Those who scourged him, as a malefactor, shall be beaten with many stripes.

Those who made him stagger under the weight of his cross, shall sink under the guilt and punishment of despising it.

Those who nailed him to the accursed tree, between thieves and robbers, shall be sentenced to endless punishment in much worse company.

Those who gave him gall and vinegar to drink, shall not be able to get a drop of water to cool their own tongues!

Where then shall the wicked and ungodly of the Christian world appear—who crucify the son of God afresh, since he has declared himself to be so, by his resurrection, and the mission of the Holy Spirit?

If the Jews shall have a sorer condemnation than ignorant heathens, who never heard of Christ, never saw his miracles, or were informed of his doctrine—then how shall we escape? For he will come again as a conqueror, and a judge, and not as a sufferer and a surety, as he came at first; and though he was numbered with transgressors, and made his grave with the wicked, at his first appearance—he shall hereafter be attended with the shouts of angels who excel in strength, and the joyful acclamations of his saints, glittering as the light, and paying homage to him as the judge of the living and the dead.

He, whom we have despised—shall then be encompassed with a dazzling glory that will confound us.

He, whom we have affronted—will be clothed with a majesty that shall astonish us.

He, whom we have offended—shall be armed with power, and with wrath to punish us. All who continue to lift up the heel against him, shall then be made his footstool. All who refuse to kiss the scepter of his grace, shall be broken in pieces by his iron rod!

The holy scripture frequently and expressly assures us, that he will thus come again, and for these ends. He is exalted, and gone to Heaven, as the head of his church, and the king of glory! The heavens are to contain him until the restitution of all things. By his providence, and by the Holy Spirit, he now carries on the designs of his sin-atoning death: and when these are accomplished, he will appear, to the joy of believers, and the confusion of the wicked. He is entered as our forerunner, within the veil, to prepare mansions, and to take possession for us, and will not always leave us in this dark and defiling world.

He who knows our sorrows, and hears our prayers, and bottles our tears—takes notice of our groans, and in all our afflictions he is afflicted. Being reconciled by his death, at his first coming—we shall be saved by his life, since he lives to make good his word of coming again.

How comfortable is the news of it! How joyful will be the meeting, to such as expect and prepare to see him! When the sea and the graves shall yield up their dead, and all the prisoners of hope lift up their heads, arise, go up, and meet the Lord in the air, and ascend with him to the heavenly glory!

But who can express how dismal a sight this will be to the secure, and the impenitent, to all who die in their sins? To behold their judge (who formerly offered to be their Savior) upon a glorious throne, and all the children of Adam summoned before his tribunal! To have nothing to answer against his charge, and no way to escape his condemning sentence! They despised him as a lamb offered in sacrifice to take away the sins of the world: but shall no longer do so, when he comes as the lion of the tribe of Judah, to devour and destroy the enemies of his cross. Now they will not own him for their Lord, but shall then find he is so, by the vengeance he will execute. As a Jesus, as a Savior—they rejected him, making light of his salvation, despising his mercy, refusing his grace. But the neglected gospel will then be a more killing letter than the law. He who by his ambassadors does now entreat sinners to be reconciled—will then be as deaf to their entreaties, as they have been to his. Because they would not turn at his reproof, hearken to the call of his word, and obey its voice—they must hear the sentence of condemnation, and feel the execution of it, whether they will or not! Yes, the blood of his cross will upbraid, accuse, and plead against them. And whatever foolish evasions they now make, to continue in their false security, they shall then be speechless, and self-condemned.

Nothing will be able to hide them from the amazing presence of their judge, or from the wrath of the lamb. He then will inflict an intolerable and righteous vengeance, an everlasting destruction, upon all the ignorant and ungodly! The greatest, the stoutest, the boldest of them, shall then be humbled, and stand before Christ's tribunal, upon an equal level with the meanest; seized with horror, filled with guilt, anguish, and despair; and find, to their eternal confusion, that the judge is no respecter of persons, but every man shall receive according to his works. The mighty shall not be spared for his greatness, nor the lowly man for his poverty.

O fool! O wretch that I am! Shall many then say, who now brave it out in pride and vanity, unconcerned about a future judgment! Not to be persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, which I was so often warned and foretold of!

What refuge of hope can I now fly to?

What can I do to escape, to die, to exist no longer?

I would have no compassion on my own soul; I would not so much as consider its danger. I shall now find none from Christ—I can expect none! His mercy is gone, and gone forever! I am lost, undone, tormented, and must eternally be so! O the amazement, horror, and despair of self-condemned sinners in that day of God's vengeance!

O my soul! What is there of greater consequence, or of greater certainty from the word of God, than that I must appear to judgment, when Christ shall come again. Lord, teach me to believe it firmly, to consider it often, to lay it seriously to heart, to act under the influence and power of it as long as I live; that at the great resurrection from the dead, I may lift up my head with a joyful hope, and find the judge to be my friend, my advocate, my Jesus—and not my enemy and destroyer.

Meditations of the Glory of Christ in His Glorified Saints

And of the thankful admiration of believers when he shall come again from Heaven, which shall be continued to all eternity.

The terror of our Lord's appearance to judgment cannot be greater to the wicked, than the comfort and joy of it will be to the saints.

When they shall see him whom their souls love, ascend with him to Heaven, and be welcomed, according to his promise, with those endearing words: Come, you blessed children of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world. It was for your sakes I assumed flesh, lived on earth, and died on the cross, to purchase this glorious kingdom for you, which I now come to give you the possession of. It was for this I prayed and suffered on earth, for this I interceded ever since in Heaven. I was heard in that prayer, accepted in those sufferings, and my intercession granted, that where I am, you may be also, to behold my glory. Come therefore, good and faithful servants, enter into your Lord's joy!

O what ravishing words will these be! What an ecstasy of love and kindness is implied in them! What matter of rejoicing may it now give me, to admit the hope, that my blessed Savior will say such words as these to me, and bid me stand upon his right-hand, among his redeemed sheep! O what an exulting frame of soul will such expressions raise! How shall all my doubts and fears and sorrows be scattered in a moment, and cease forever!

O glorious day! When my blessed Lord shall thus publicly acknowledge me for his own redeemed child, and plead my cause against all the accusations of Satan, and the malicious calumnies of all his instruments! When I shall be able to say of all my sins and sufferings, as my Lord upon the cross: It is finished, it is finished! My warfare being accomplished, being more than conqueror over all, through him who loved me, and died for me—and now has come to wipe away all tears from my eyes—all being the fruit of his meritorious death. Then shall I have nothing more to fear, or wish, or beg. I shall offend, provoke, and dishonor him no more; or by my folly and scandal discredit his holy name and gospel. But by consummate holiness be fitted to rejoice in his presence and love, and celebrate his praise forever. I shall never more lament his absence, and never see a cloud on his face, or a frown in his look anymore. Now I must wait and pray, struggle and strive, labor and suffer, desire and expect, believe and hope, etc. But then perfect rest and holiness, love and joy, vision and fruition, bliss and glory, unutterable and everlasting, shall take place! All the attributes of God, all the wonderful perfections of Christ, will then be glorified in believers, and admired by them. His invariable truth will then be honored, which they trusted to, and waited for; for now they shall know and find they did not wait in vain. They hoped in his Word, and ventured their salvation upon it; and now they shall receive the end of their faith and hope, infinitely beyond what they ever expected or believed!

The glory of divine wisdom will then appear, when the constitution, administration, and design of the mediator's kingdom shall be fully known, in the admirable order and beauty of every part of it, with the exact tendency of all the particulars to one glorious end, and the whole undertaking crowned with so blessed an outcome. What is now a mystery even to believers themselves, and has a veil upon it, shall then no longer be so—all the riddles of God's grace and providence shall be plainly understood.

O how transporting a view must it needs be, when the glory of all the divine attributes which God intended to accomplish, in and by Christ, shall be manifest to his redeemed saints. The whole method of our salvation will then appear to be the fruit of unsearchable wisdom, when we shall all see the reality and substance, and entire scheme, of all that God designed in and by him; all that was typified of him, and foretold concerning him, in the Old Testament. How will it all appear to be the manifold wisdom of God! [Ephesians 3:10-11](https://ref.ly/Eph 3.10-11;niv?t=biblia).

As in uniting Heaven and earth together in the person of our mediator; and accomplishing many gracious promises; satisfying justice, and at the same time showing mercy; manifesting infinite grace and kindness by shedding of blood; conquering death by dying, and disarming the law by obedience to it, etc. afterwards subduing the world to the faith of the gospel, by the foolishness of preaching; making men wise to salvation by the knowledge of the cross; and spreading that faith the more, by all the opposition made against it, etc. how wonderfully will a clear view of these things discover, and glorify the wisdom of God.

But the love and grace of Christ; the infinite goodness and compassion of God, will then be magnified in an especial manner.

What but sovereign love in the whole contrivance and counsel of God about our redemption? What admirable love and grace in the whole management of that design? What unparalleled kindness in the accomplishment of it, by the sacrifice of the son of God? And how glorious will this love appear, when he shall come again to give us the full harvest of all his purchase? With what admiring thankfulness shall believers then contemplate the unsearchable riches of his grace? In all the parts and instances of his humiliation, from his conception to his crucifixion and burial; in all the evidences and discoveries made of it, from the first promise to its completion; yes, from before the foundation of the world, in the covenant of peace between the father and the son—until his second coming, to judge the world, and deliver up the kingdom to his father.

How shall we then admire and adore his powerful grace, which snatched us as firebrands out of everlasting burnings; that effectually shined into our minds by heavenly light; conquered the opposition of our stubborn wills; sanctified our carnal hearts, rescued us from the tyranny of Satan, and the dominion of lust; giving, cherishing, and preserving the holy seed of grace, and making it spring up to eternal life; defeating the malicious and subtle endeavors of the devil to destroy it; enabling us to endure tribulation, and persevere to the end; giving us victory over death; conducting us through the dark valley; raising our bodies, reviving and reuniting them to our souls, and rendering them glorious like his own body; and at length rewarding our imperfect services with eternal life.

Yes, though our best services were mixed with sin, our holiest duties spotted, our most courageous sufferings mixed with unbelief—yet rewarded with a blessedness that has no alloy of evil, but all the ingredients of a perfect felicity, and nothing to lessen and interrupt it—how shall we then admire the bounty of our gracious Lord, the freeness, tenderness, riches, and the exceeding greatness and glory, of his infinite goodness and grace to poor believers?

With what ecstasies of joy and gratitude may we imagine that our Lord will be then admired by all his redeemed ones?

Saying, this is he, who made our peace with God, and reversed the sentence of damnation, which we were under; who bought us with the price of his most precious blood, bore the wrath of his father, and submitted to a cursed death for us. He assumed our nature, that we might partake of his; became the son of man, that we might be made the children of God; for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich: he stooped to bear the greatest ignominy and reproach—to confer the greatest honors on us. He was for a time forsaken of his father—that we might not be eternally forsaken. He felt the stroke of his anger against sin, that we might not perish under it. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs—that we might rejoice. His agonies and bloody sweat were for our refreshment, and by his stripes we are healed. He bowed his head on the cross—that we might lift up ours in triumph. Because we had eaten of the forbidden fruit, he hung on the accursed tree. 'Twas for us that he suffered the frowns of Heaven, the enmity of Hell, the rage of devils, the hatred and persecution of the world. He was judged, that we might not come into condemnation. He was crucified, that we might be glorified. He is now come again finally and fully to effect it.

O the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the love of Christ, which passes knowledge—but calls for admiration, and everlasting gratitude! This is the blessed day, we longed and waited, and prayed for! This is our gracious, our glorious Lord:  
whose love melted our heart,  
whose promise was our support,  
whose Word was our rule,  
whose Spirit was our comforter,  
whose cross was our crown, and  
the hope of his appearance was our chief consolation!

Lord! What am I, what was I, that the ever blessed son of God should do and suffer, and purchase all this for me? I can remember when I was ignorant of God, a stranger to him, at enmity with him, under the power of darkness and the devil, serving divers lusts and pleasures, hastening to Hell, and liable to his wrath.

But he chose me out of the world, stamped his image upon me, pardoned my sins, and embraces me in the arms of his unchangeable love. O happy change!

And yet how little did I prize his grace, admire his love, and express my own, or promote his glory, and honor him in the eyes of others?

How did I dishonor my profession and holy calling, as his disciple, by aggravated declesions? But he recovered me by repentance, and healed my back-sliding's, and received me graciously, because he loved me freely. O admirable grace! To pardon, and save, and bring to glory such an unthankful wretch, as I have been! To make such a difference between me and others, whom I knew on earth! That the same power, which makes them miserable, now makes me blessed! That when they are banished from his presence into everlasting destruction, I am admitted to behold his glory, and shall dwell with him forever!

O, how much more do I now see and find, than ever I believed, of the love of Christ, and his promised salvation! How much more glorious is the person of my redeemer! How much more excellent is the heavenly state, than ever I thought or expected! I could not have imagined the thousandth thousandth part of that which I now see and feel! I cannot but admire, and spend an eternity in admiring, and praising the incomparable grace and glory of my blessed redeemer.

Such holy admiration will certainly produce the most thankful adorations of our Lord Jesus. O bless the Lord of love and glory! Who humbled himself so low, as our mediator; and has exalted us so high, as the blessed fruit of it! How can we ever adore and praise him enough, who condescended so far, and has done and suffered so much for us? See how the holy angels worship this king of glory! And have not every one of us more reason to do so? O let all the choir of Heaven celebrate his glorious love!

And let us his redeemed, his glorified ones say continually: Let the Lord be magnified; who has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests unto God his father.

O merciful Savior! O glorious change! O happy society! With whom we shall eternally adore our common Lord. We can some of us remember when we lived together on earth, how we wept and prayed, and fasted and mourned together, how we suffered, and complained, and sinned together. O the marvelous change our redeemer has now wrought for us, and in us! These bodies, these souls, this life, this place, this company, these enjoyments, are not like those in yonder world.

But alas, who can describe what believers shall then think and say to extol their Savior! How small a portion that we understand of that world? How little can I conceive, and how much less express? Blessed be God we know so much, as the matter of our joyful hopes; and forever blessed be God, who has promised and provided such a glory for us, as cannot now be fully known.

What inexpressible sweetness might believers taste by rejoicing in hope, did a more lively faith realize all this to their souls? We might listen as it were to the shouts and acclamations of the saints above, and say amen to their thanksgivings. We might behold them about the throne of God, and of the lamb, with palms of victory in their hands, a crown of glory on their heads, and songs of triumph in their mouths, saying: Hallelujah; worthy are you, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power, for you have created all things, and for your pleasure they are, and were created. Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. And again, blessing, honor, glory, and power be unto him who sits upon the throne, and to the lamb, forever and ever!

Whence is it, O my soul! If indeed, I believe and expect all this; that I can hear, and read, and think, and speak of these great things, with no more ardent affections, suitable preparations, importunate prayers, and vigorous desires? How should the believing thoughts of that day promote my heavenly-mindedness, self-denial, contempt of the world, patience and perseverance? Quicken my zeal, secure my steadfastness, and give life and spirit to my prayers for the hastening of it! How should my soul rise towards Heaven, by holy love and desire? Ascend and meet him, get as near him as I can, breathe after more of his presence, and beg him to possess my heart, to anticipate his second coming by clearer discoveries of his love, and fuller communications of his grace. Even so, come Lord Jesus!

Concerning the Examination of a Man's Heart and Life.

The reasonableness, advantages, and necessity of it. Some direction and advice concerning the time and manner. That we may know in what preparedness we are for eternity.

I am hastening every year, every day, to the end of this life. I must shortly appear before my glorious judge; and experience these terrors or comforts, this blessedness or misery, which I have now read of. Shall I not therefore inquire, which of the two belongs to me?

Is it not worth considering, where I must go, and how I shall fare, when I leave this body? What is likely to be my next habitation? To which of the two unchangeable states I shall be adjudged? Shall an inquiry of so much consequence be put off, to an indefinite hereafter? Do I not desire to know the worst, while a remedy may be found? Or am I content to die, through an unwillingness to discover that I am sick? The question to be resolved, is of infinite weight.

Shall I not spend a few hours to know what will become of me forever? An error is more than possible, it is easy to mistake; and the hazard of doing so is unspeakably great. How many thousands perish eternally, even under the light of the gospel, who never suspected their danger? How ordinary, how common a thing is it, for men to be thus deceived! How successful is the devil in this stratagem against the souls of men! Is it not then a most criminal stupidity, to be contentedly ignorant, and unresolved, whether I am reconciled to God or not; whether I am led by the flesh or the spirit; whether I am in the broad or narrow way, which lead to such contrary ends; that is, whether, if I die in this condition, I shall be saved, or perish?

Can such an inquiry be frivolous or indifferent? Is the subject of it so contemptible, or my concern in it so small, that it merits not to be attentively considered? Shall I never ask my soul, until I am leaving this world, (the most unfit time of all to begin so important an affair) what am I? To whom do I belong? Whose image do I bear? How have I lived, and what do I do? What do I love most? What do I most constantly desire, and choose, and seek? How does the pulse of my soul beat? Is it quickest towards God—or towards the world?

Where am I going? What will be the final upshot and issue of my present course? Is it Heaven or Hell I must be translated to by dying?

What security have I got for eternal life? What provisions have I made? What foundation have I laid?

How strangely infatuated are most men, who talk of an everlasting life as an article of their creed, and say they count upon it that they must dwell in happiness or misery forever; and seldom or never think themselves in good earnest, and for any time, with a settled composed exercise of thoughts, which of these two is like to be their lot. Or if they begin to search and try themselves, they come to no conclusion, or conclude too hastily; they pluck off the plaster as soon as it begins to hurt; they are either frighted with the horrid prospect of past crimes, or, having escaped the grosser pollutions of the world, judge too favorably of their own ease. They commonly do the work but by halves, and so go from the looking-glass, and forget what manner of persons they were.

Let me therefore, O my soul! Sequester myself from the world, to commune with my own heart, to reflect upon my past life, and look into my present state, to recollect and review the most considerable passages of my course and time hitherto.

O what a neglected and disused a practice is this, which challenges and requires our principal and most serious concerns about it! And how many begin it, and are discouraged, and leave off without reaching the end of such an inquiry!

How much wiser in this respect are the children of this world, in their generation, than the children of light? Who is so exact in his computations between God and his own soul, as tradesmen in their dealings with one another? Who is at the pains to write down his sins and his mercies? The grounds of his fear, and the encouragements of his hope? Or keeps a journal and diary of his spiritual state? Who does at set times, once a month, or once a quarter, or even once a year—take a just view of himself, his heart, and life, and state, as a Christian; that he may see what he has received and done, what he owes, and what he may expect; that he may know whether he thrive or decays; whether he increases or decreases; whether he goes backward or forward; whether he is spiritually richer or poorer this year than the last?

Is it not a symptom that you are declining, when you have no desire to examine your accounts? Is there not ground of jealousy and suspicion, that you are behind hand, because you are loath to inquire, whether you are or not? Are you unwilling to know the worst of your condition? Nevertheless, without such inquiries, and bringing the matter to a determination, at what uncertainties must we live? And how inconceivable an hazard do all hypocrites and unrenewed sinners run? And how reasonable, how necessary is it that we should know, and in order to it, prove ourselves? We must therefore bestow time and serious diligence about it, that we may examine matters to the bottom, and come to some result; so that we may form a right judgment concerning our own case.

He who would do it to good purpose, must endeavor to understand clearly the terms of the covenant on God's part, and on ours; and take care not to judge of himself by mistaken rules; by a false standard, that God will not justify; or by any such characters as will not conclude.

But most men are unwilling to bring themselves to a trial, or to let conscience deal plainly and faithfully with them. They are stupidly secure, and see not the necessity of this duty. Or they do not suspect themselves. They presume they need not be at that trouble: or are so taken up with the world, that they cannot find time for it.

Most men dare not bring their hearts and ways to a trial. There is commonly some secret lust indulged, which they are loath to let go. But most go on in sin, and perish eternally, because they think there is no danger of perishing. They never repent, and make their peace with God, because they imagine and presume it is done already.

Therefore let me beg of you, whoever you are, who read this, to put the case to yourself, seriously to admit the doubt, whether you are not mistaken. Make the supposition, that you have not hitherto sufficiently considered the state of your soul. You are confident that all is well; and thereupon are unwilling to examine farther: but for that very reason you ought to question, whether it is so or not? Do but ask yourselves seriously: What is the ground of your good opinion concerning yourself? For what reason can you thus conclude?

Did you ever seriously lay to heart the characters, and description, which the scriptures give, of those whom Christ will own at the last day; and of such whom he will reject and reprobate? With sincere application to your own case, have you therewith proved yourselves?

Have you come to a settled judgment, after a deliberate inquiry? And was the conclusion to your comfort and joy? If so, what influence has it since had upon your heart and life? Has it promoted purity, thankfulness, heavenly-mindedness, contempt of this world, and stronger desires after the image, love, and presence of God, and the glory of Christ?

Moreover, consider, is not this a good while ago? How have you behaved yourself ever since? Have you not reason to look back with shame? If you but slightly examined yourself formerly, then resolve to do it more effectually now: review the sins you have been since guilty of.

If you have not done anything considerable of this kind, you ought now to begin. It is seasonable to begin the year by such an exercise, and it will be found of great use, in all the following parts of it: especially when you come to examine yourself afresh, in order to partake the Lord's supper. For we ought frequently to renew the sad remembrance of our former sins; that from time to time we may renew our repentance, which is the work of our life, and not of one day. And he who comes to the sacrament, and will look no farther back than to the last communion, may possibly presume too much, that all was then as it should be, and not be humble enough.

If anyone therefore resolves in good earnest upon a holy life, and seriously designs to prepare for eternity, as it is necessary to make a general review of his life—so I desire to afford him the best counsel I can, in order to it.

It may be advisable, if you have not formerly begun this work, to employ one hour at least in a day, for several days following, in writing down the most considerable passages of your life you can remember, desiring God's assistance therein; and keeping your eye upon your end, in the whole; that is, thinking seriously that it is in order to eternity, that you now examine yourself. Choose a place of retirement, and the most convenient time, that you may not be interrupted, and when your heart is most serious.

Every man may divide his life into several parts, as from infancy until he left off going to school, or was bound apprentice, or settled in any way of education. From thence, until fixed in some employment; if a married person, until entered into that condition. And from thence to another remarkable period, or to the present time. It may better assist some persons memory, to consider the several places of their abode, and compute according to them. In each portion of time, recollect what sins you were most addicted to—in what instances, with what frequency, and with what other various aggravations, you committed them. What have been the effects and consequences of those sins, to yourselves, and others, in order to repentance, and godly sorrow. Which must not be judged of by tears, but grief, and inward hatred of sin. Remembering that no man is the better merely for being examined, if there follows nothing after it. It is in order to a judgment to be passed upon ourselves. It is to search out our own iniquity, our beloved sin, in order to the mortification of it. That Goliath must first be slain, if ever the other philistines are conquered. In some it is pride, in others worldliness, in some impurity, in others drunkenness, gluttony, etc. That you may discover it, observe:

What sin it is you are most unwilling to part with, and which you could even wish were not forbidden.

Which sin you have formerly been most apt to plead for, to extenuate or excuse, and hide.

The thoughts whereof do most frequently occur; especially when alone—first in the morning, and last at night; and are most distracting in prayer and worship.

Which an awakened conscience has most plainly told you of; under a sermon, or at a sacrament, or under some heavy affliction, or on a sick-bed, etc.

Which sin you can least bear to be reproved for.

Which sin the temperament of your body does most incline to.

Which sin your calling, employment, company, and conversation, administer the greatest temptations for.

That especially, which sin has the throne of the heart, and sets all the faculties a work to contrive fuel and opportunities for its gratification.

Observe likewise, what passion was most predominant in each period of time, or is yet so; and what ill effects it has produced. Consider farther what dangerous temptations you have met with: how you have fallen by them, or been enabled to resist. Consider withal the time, and the means, whereby God has at any time formerly awakened, convinced and humbled you; what purposes of amendment, and promises of reformation you have ever made; and how far you have, or have not performed them. Recollect likewise all the special mercies you have received from God in every state and period of your life, in order to thankfulness. The last section of these papers may give you some assistance therein, and consider what returns you have made to God, for all his kindness to you.

You may do well to consider yourself also, in the relations you have stood to others; as inferior, equal, or superior; in family, church, or state; in your calling, profession, employment, etc. and examine in what more notorious instances, you have been faulty in your relative duties. How you did ordinarily carry it in your place and station; for that is the best, the truest picture of a man, which is like him in his ordinary every days habit. Particularly reflect upon the sins you have committed in company with others. By whose example you have been drawn to sin; who may probably have been tempted by yours, and bewail it; and if the persons are living, admonish them to repent; and if you have injured and wronged any, acknowledge your fault, and to the utmost of your power, make speedy restitution, if any of your companions in sin are dead, and you fear died without repentance; humble yourself particularly before God for having contributed to their damnation. I know of some who have made such a catalogue of their sins, with the most observable aggravations of them; which they constantly preserved, and frequently reviewed, to keep them humble, penitent, watchful, and thankful; and on some occasions of secret humiliation, have spread them before the Lord (as Hezekiah did the writing of his enemy) covering themselves with shame and confusion of face, by considering what they have been, and thence admiring the riches of free grace in the forgiveness of such crimes, through the blood of Christ.

Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my thoughts, and my heart, for your loving kindness is before mine eyes, and I will walk in your truth. You have searched me, O Lord, and known me; you know my thoughts a far off; all my secret sins are in the light of your countenance; and you are acquainted with all my ways; set my sins in order before me, that I may repent and forsake them. Show me my infirmities and weaknesses, that I may watch against them.

Teach me to judge and condemn myself, that I may not be judged by the Lord, or condemned with the world.

How Christians Ought to Examine Their Decays in Grace and Piety.

The greatness of their sin, and of their loss under such a declension: God's displeasure, and departure from them, considered, to awaken endeavors of a recovery. In what manner the faith of adherence may be acted by one, who has no assurance.

It cannot but be of use to believers also, at stated times to examine themselves, concerning their languishing's and decays in grace; falling from their first love, to a spirit of indifference and lukewarmness; disorderly walking or unfruitfulness; whether gray hairs are not here and there upon them, and they know it not. For God may withdraw by degrees, so that his departure may not presently be perceived. And some kind of activity in duty may be continued upon false principles, and from common assistance, while a Christian, as to his spiritual state, may be under a dangerous consumption. It is not difficult for others to observe it sometimes, and would be visible enough to themselves, would they spare a few hours to examine the matter. The punishment of such backslidings, the loss of the quickening and comforting presence of the Holy Spirit, deserves likewise to be inquired into, in order to a speedy remedy, and should enforce the counsel.

I mean not barely the ebbing of affections in the duties of religion, or the lack of life, and quickening from sensible consolations, which new converts, (especially such as have been reclaimed from a course of notorious impiety) have more of at first than afterwards.

This doubting Christians should particularly take notice of, by the instance of the prodigal, who was extraordinarily feasted at his first return, but was doubtless contented afterwards with the ordinary provisions of his fathers house. Neither does God dispense the same measure to all alike, nor to any alike at all times. Some, who are called to greater services and sufferings, than others, or had greater conflicts before conversion, may have a greater share than the rest of their brethren.

Neither will the same degree of grace imparted to some persons, so discernibly move and comfort, as it will do some others of a different temper. It is not therefore so much to be the matter of our inquiry, (if at all it need to be so) whether we have more or less of sensible joy in the performance of duty. But whether we are not fallen and declined, as to the inward vital acts of grace, and in the outward fruits of holiness. Whether we have such clear convincing apprehensions of divine and spiritual truths, and the mysteries of the gospel, as formerly; whether our minds are not become more vain and heedless; whether our knowledge of God, and of the revelations of his will, are as powerful and efficacious upon our hearts and lives, as heretofore; whether there be not less frequency, less consistency, less inward satisfaction in holy serious thoughts, than formerly.

You were accustomed to pray and endeavor, that God might be first and last in your thoughts every day, and by frequent prayers in civil affairs, to maintain a daily converse with God; but now you mind not whether it be so or not; yes, you cannot but know, that it is not thus with you still. It was once your burden to be pestered with foolish, filthy, worldly, vain thoughts, especially on the Lord's day, or in the worship of God; you rejected and disowned them, you lamented and prayed against them; do so much as examine, whether it is thus still.

Consider all your affections, and their several objects; and see whether a criminal lukewarmness has not diffused itself into every one of them. Examine every grace; and see whether your faith, hope, love, holy desires, and delight in God are not miserably abated; as to the strength and vigor, the efficacy, and frequent exercise of every of them—so that your thoughts of God are few, cold, and lifeless, without desire, delight and love.

Consider the opportunities of public worship, and solemn occasions of approaching the divine presence: are they as much the desire of your souls, and the rejoicing of your hearts as once they were? Are you not more easily diverted from them, less satisfied and refreshed by them? Are not all gospel ordinances less powerful and quickening, and your profit and advantage thereby unspeakably less then formerly? Do you hunger and thirst, and pant as the deer after the water-brooks, to draw near to God, and come into his courts?

Do you make conscience of preparing before hand? Do you come with a real desire, and design, and expectation of profiting, and bettering your spirits? Do you join in every part of divine worship, with that attention, seriousness, and composure of mind, and taste the sweetness and benefit of such solemnities, as formerly? Are such services performed with that awe of God, with that humility, fervency, and intenseness of spirit, as once they were? Are you not more negligent and unconcerned before and after, whether you find anything of this or not? The your desires are weak, your hearts dull, your thoughts wandering, your spirits trifling, just so that the work is done, and the duty is over, (in how formal, customary, and careless a manner, however it is) you consider it not, you lay it not to heart, you reflect not upon it, you bewail it not, or at least are better contented and sooner quieted, and take less notice of the frame of your heart in such duties, than formerly?

Examine farther, how it is with you as to the great distinguishing duties of an upright Christian, (if performed as they ought to be.) I mean secret prayer and meditation: are you as strict and careful, constant and conscientious, frequent and abundant in these, as formerly? May not our closets and places of retirement witness against us? How seldom are we there? How quickly are we gone? How easily diverted? How soon tired? How do we trifle in that work, and shuffle it over, and take up with the shadow and image of prayer?

Our former humble and importunate prayers, joyful thanksgivings, and sweet contemplation of the mysteries of religion, compared with our present daily practice, will testify that we are declined and fallen.

Moreover consider the evil of sin, and how your heart stands affected to it. Is not your hatred of sin, and zeal against it, much decayed? Especially with respect to inward spiritual sins, such as the secret workings of unbelief, and distrust, pride, lust, envy, uncharitableness, etc. Do you bewail it, strive against it, and shun the occasions, and fear the temptations that may lead you into sin, as once you did? Have you not lost much of that tenderness, and holy jealousy over your heart and ways, which you formerly had? Do you not now make more bold with temptation? Are you not oftener conquered? And with less reluctance? And by smaller temptations?

Are you not more unserviceable? Root and fruit in a withering condition? God less honored, and others less profited, and edified by your example and life? Do you not adhere more to the world? Do you conform to it, and comply with it in many things, which formerly you dared not have done? And are every day waxing worse? Pause a while, and bethink yourself, what this will come to at last? When even the little good that remains, is ready to die.

May I not ask such Christians, or desire them to ask themselves: what is already the effect and consequence of this declension? Is not God's spirit removed, and the light of his countenance eclipsed?

Yes as to many of them, are they not under sad apprehensions of God's displeasure? Do they not feel the terrors of the Lord? Do they not walk heavily from day to day? Those who could once converse with God on all occasions as a friend, and a father—now think of God and are troubled: thick darkness does encompass them round about: they have lost the sense of his love, the comforts of his presence, and their song in the night, and see no relief.

This is a more hopeful case however, than theirs, who are under great backslidings and desertion, and hardly sensible of it. To awaken and assist both; consider I beseech you, whence you are fallen, and what you have lost, and what will be the outcome of this; if sickness, or some deadly affliction overtakes you; or if you should die in this condition.

And inquire seriously, and presently, into the cause of all this evil: for a few transient thoughts will not affect the heart and persuade to action. And do it presently, because by every delay your work will be the harder, your danger the greater, and your recovery the more difficult. Reflect upon the sinfulness, as well as the affliction of this case.

Know that you have displeased God, and run from him, neglected his presence, and grieved his spirit, and in what instances you have done so? What ordinances you have slighted; what duties you have omitted; what sins you have given way to—in order to repentance and deep humiliation.

Can you contentedly sit still, with this dismal state of things? While God has somewhat (yes a great deal indeed) against you, for having left your first love? Will you not endeavor to remove that, which has made such a separation between God and you, and brought you thus low? What communion with God, what communications of his grace, what influences of his Spirit, and evidences of his favor have you lost? And will you not acknowledge your iniquity, and abase yourselves in the dust, and return to the Lord, and do your first works? That he may heal your backslidings, and receive you graciously; that you may again take hold of his covenant, and be at peace with him.

But to be at peace with God, is not the whole of your concern, you need not only a pardon, but a physician to heal you; as does a malefactor, who is not only liable to the law, but desperately sick.

Your state is sinful, and dangerous, as well as troublesome. From performing duties in such a manner as you now do, you may quickly be tempted to let them altogether alone. God may be so far provoked to allow Satan to make attempts upon you of that kind: (and he is forward enough to make use of such an opportunity, to try all his snares and stratagems against you:) until he prevails with you to think hardly of God himself, unthankfully to overlook all his former kindnesses, to put the worst interpretation that can be upon all his providences; to distrust and quarrel with him, as if his faithfulness had failed, and his mercy were clean gone forever, and there were no hope left, for one in your case: and so run into desperation, and through the subtlety and violence of Satan's temptations, try the most foolish and unlawful means for ease and cure; either open licentiousness, or it may be self-murder!

Therefore speedy present repentance is necessary, to find out, and mortify every corruption, and that especially, which conscience tells us, you have most indulged; from whence your distress does principally arise: confessing your sin freely, fully, and without reserve, and waiting on God in the diligent use of all means, for the recovery of that which you have lost: and justifying God in his righteousness, truth, wisdom, holiness, and in all his rebukes. That you may regain a spirit of prayer, and taste the sweetness, virtue, and efficacy of every duty, and of every ordinance; and God may give you the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and the joy of the Lord may be your strength, for future service and suffering.

In the meantime, do not cast away your hope, but though you have (too justly) deprived yourself of the faith of assurance, yet endeavor to maintain and exercise the faith of adherence. Say unto God, that because there is forgiveness with him, therefore he is to be feared.

My sin is not too great to be forgiven. It is not the unpardonable sin: for I desire to repent, and am resolved to return. I will still cleave to the Lord, and wait upon him, and follow hard after him, and take no other course for deliverance and comfort.

Mine is not a single case: I am not the only soul that has been so distressed, and yet found relief by seeking unto God. It is therefore good for me to hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of God. I will draw near to God; I will lie at his foot; and continue in all ways of worship and duty, wherein I may hope to meet with the quickening, and comfort, of his Spirit: I will seek relief from no other; I will keep as near him as I can. Where else shall I go, he alone has the words of eternal life; he alone can create (what is the fruit of his own lips) peace, peace.

I will encourage myself in the consideration of his general grace, and the probabilities of his special love. I will recollect my former experiences, when I had some good hope, through grace, concerning my adoption. I will remember the years of the right hand of the most high. If God will give me so much grace as to continue waiting, I will hope still. And though I walk in darkness, and see little or no light, I will stay myself upon the Lord. And if by the want of sensible consolation he will make me more humble, and keep me in a greater submission to his will—I will bless his holy name; and derive more comfortable hope from thence, than from the most sweet and sensible considerations I ever had; and look upon humility, self-denial, dependence on God, resignation to him, and hatred of sin, as a better sign of his love, than the highest fervors of affection in his service can be.

Oh that I had formerly done as much for holiness, as I have for comfort! By the enjoyment of the one, I should have had more of the other: the exercise of grace would have revealed the truth of it.

Let me therefore accuse and condemn myself; but still trust, and love God, and wait upon him. Let me resolve never to choose a new Lord or master. Or take up with any portion beneath God himself; or any way of hope or salvation, but by Jesus Christ, my only Savior; neither let me forsake the way of faith and holiness, for all the hopes and happiness of this world, if put to my choice. But be always able to say, (blessed be God I now can) that I will return to my former husband, for then it was better with me than now. I had peace and refreshment in my former ways, I will return to them. Lord, forsake me not utterly! Keep not your anger forever: cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me: restore unto me the joy of your salvation, that my heart may be enlarged to praise your name, and to run the way of your commandments.

Confession of Sin, Humiliation, and Repentance must Follow upon Self-examination.

Advice concerning repentance of some particular backsliding. The great perplexity and distress of a penitent sinner represented, as a caution against returning to folly.

That we may turn unto the Lord, is the end of searching and trying our ways. Lord! I have been searching my heart, and considering my ways, but can find little or no good; neither can I discover all that is evil in both. But I find enough to make my own heart condemn me, and you, who are greater than my heart, and know all things, may much more condemn me. I am altogether unclean, polluted, and abominable before You!

If I go about to enumerate the sins of my thoughts, words, and actions, in all the periods of my life hitherto; if I consider my omissions of duty, and daily sins by actual commission; if I reflect upon my sins according to their respective object, as either against you, O God, and against my neighbor, and against my own soul or body; and compare my heart and life with your strict and holy law, and think in how many instances I have transgressed every of your righteous commandments: I find that my sins are more than the hairs on my head, they cannot be numbered.

Who can tell how oft he has offended? Many of my sins make little impression on my memory, (I observe them not, I remember them not). But this hinders not, but they may make deep impression on my conscience, which will one day be awake, and set them in order before me; and they are all written in your book of remembrance, in order to my final judgment. All my sins are before you: but you require my humble confession of them, in order to repentance; and as a part thereof, that I freely acknowledge their heinous aggravations to shame, and humble myself the more before you, whom I have offended and provoked.

How long did I serve divers lusts and pleasures, with the neglect and forgetfulness of God? How sad a prospect may I take of the far greatest part of my past life? Especially of my younger years, which have been trifled away in vanity and folly and sin? And since I have known the way of truth, how shamefully have I prevaricated with God? I am confounded to consider how often I have despised the commandment, and rebelled against the light; against the principles of education, and the checks of conscience, frequent warnings from God, and reproofs from others; contrary to my profession, and experience; contrary to the obligation of peculiar mercies, solemn promises, resolutions, and engagements, and a nearer relation to God than many others; which sins have more dishonored my Lord, discredited his gospel, gratified the devil, scandalized the gospel, and strengthened the hands of the ungodly, than the sins of others. And alas! How much of my precious time is thus gone, which if duly improved, would now afford me comfort to review.

How much guilt have I contracted every year, particularly in this last year? I now begin another, which will soon be gone as that which was concluded yesterday. And shall I only advance in age, to increase the number of my sins, and heighten my account against the day of reckoning? In temporal and civil affairs day unto day utters knowledge, and night unto night teaches wisdom. We are taught by experience many useful lessons which we should not else have learned; to reform many errors and mistakes, to correct many rash and foolish actions and speeches, etc. And shall I not learn wisdom by the experience of another year, in what concerns my greatest, my eternal interest? Shall not the reflection on my past sins prevent my commission of the like? Especially considering how my sins are aggravated by every mercy I have received; by every affliction I have undergone; every awakening sermon I have heard; every motion of God's Spirit, and every check of my own conscience that I have resisted; every offer of his grace; every warning of his providence; every invitation and call of his word; every purpose to repent, and every resolution I have made to forsake sin. The greater knowledge I have had of my danger, the longer time I have deliberated about it; the oftener I have confessed my sin, and been sorry for it; every reproof I have had from others, and every promise I have made myself—does aggravate and increase my guilt.

How many years has God given me to work out my salvation? But how little have I done towards it? Had I died this last year, how unprepared must I have made my appearance before his tribunal?

What opportunities of doing and receiving good have I let slip? Have I not made it more my business to seem religious, than really to be so? How much of the patience of God have I abused? Refusing his calls to repentance, resisting the strivings of his Spirit, smothering my convictions, and turning the grace of God into a license for sin?

Instead of returning gratitude for all his love, I have repeated my transgressions after forgiveness: and gone in a circle of repenting and sinning, even to this day. Lord, I am ashamed, and lay myself in the dust before you. To me belongs nothing but shame and confusion of face. If God should condemn and punish me as a rebel, and a traitor, and give me the portion of hypocrites—I cannot but own his justice; even in Hell I must do it, with my flaming tongue and breath!

O spare me for your mercies sake! Enter not into judgment with your servant, for in your sight shall no flesh living be justified—if you lay judgment to the line, and equity to the plummet. Give me repentance unto life, never to be repented of, never to be retracted again. Bring me to the blood of Jesus, which cleanses from all sin.

Behold the sighing's of a contrite spirit: for I acknowledge my transgressions unto you, against whom I have sinned. O Lord, forgive the iniquity of my sin. I am unworthy to lift up my hands and eyes towards Heaven, unworthy to be called your son, or your servant: I am vile in mine own eyes, because I have made myself vile in yours. For this I am troubled, and mourn, and my soul is grieved within me.

O heavenly physician of souls! From your pity alone I expect my cure. I am miserable and undone without your compassion; and expect no relief but from the treasure of your grace. I must perish, and sink under the burden of sin, if your merciful hand does not save me, and lift me up. I am entangled and ensnared by the devil and my lusts, and without your support can never hope to get free. O Lord forgive my sins, and heal my soul: deliver and save me for your mercies sake.

May I not yet hope in your mercy? You have mercifully born with me hitherto: you call me to repent; you command me to return, and promise to forgive those sins which are confessed and forsaken. O do not cast me out of your sight and presence: now I desire from the bottom of my heart to return to you! I abhor myself in dust and ashes, for my past iniquities.

But alas! Such is the hardness of my impenitent heart, that I am even ashamed of my humblest repentance; how much more may God despise and reject it? But have you not given your blessed son to die for sinners? And exalted him to this very end, to be a prince and a Savior, to give repentance, and remission of sins? And by the word of your grace, you beseech all, (even the greatest sinners) to accept of your mercy. You are more willing to pardon, than we can be to repent. It is your delight and glory, agreeable to your nature, and declared name, as a God gracious, and merciful, slow to anger; and of great kindness, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin! O pardon my iniquity for it is great; and receive a humble penitent, who implores your grace, according to the tenor of your new covenant, flying to the arms of your mercy, through the merits of Jesus Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him.

Lord, hear my prayer, and let not the mixture of my weaknesses and unworthiness turn it into sin; but graciously grant to look upon a returning prodigal; and cause me to hear the voice of joy and gladness, that my sorrowful heart may be comforted, and my life be directed to your praise. Lead me into the path of life, that I may no longer err from the way of your commandments. Teach me to do your will, O God, and write your law upon my heart, that I may never more return to folly. I am convinced of the evil of sin, of your right to govern me, of the equity and justice of your law, of the sweetness and rewards of keeping your precepts. O sanctify my heart, and make me sound in your statutes, that I may hate every false way, and be devoted to your fear, for the remainder of my life.

If there be any particular lust, or wickedness, which through the power of temptation, and the deceitfulness of sin you have fallen into; that has wasted conscience, and robbed you of your peace, and provoked God to write bitter things against you; then be sure to humble yourself without delay in an especial manner for that backsliding; confess it freely, with its aggravations. Consider whether it was not after some special manifestation of God's love, after some special warning, some strong conviction, under or soon after some great affliction from God, or some more than ordinary kindness of his providence, etc. and impress such thoughts, to humble yourself the lower, search into the grounds and causes of such apostasy, such as the abatement of your watchfulness, the neglect of serious closet devotion, making bold with temptation, too great compliance with vain company, venturing too far in lawful or indifferent things, too much confidence in your own wisdom, strength, and steadfastness, not fearing sufficiently the approaches and beginnings of sin, or avoiding the fuel, incentives, and occasions of it, etc. Palliate and disguise nothing, that may make your sin exceeding sinful, lest by some little art of the devil, you deceive yourself by an half-repentance; and the evil spirit, you think to be cast out, returns again with seven worse than himself, and so your latter end be worse than your beginning. For if the sin be not truly hated, but only covered over with penitential ashes, it will quickly flame out again, when it meets with combustible matter, and a strong blast of temptation.

But if you are grieved to the very heart, and abhor the sin, and resolve to leave it, you need not doubt of God's readiness to receive you to mercy. His spirit is yet striving with you, if you are willing to repent, and return to God. He sought you, and called you to return, when you were wandering as a lost sheep in the broad way; and can you think, he will not be found by you, if you seek him with your whole heart? Therefore renew your repentance, and beg more earnestly a spirit of humility, holy fear, and watchfulness. And every morning implore divine supports against that sin, and all temptations to it. (which, as much as possible, you must avoid,) constant and fervent prayer, after repentance, must be your refuge, and your remedy. If you let fall your hands, this Amalek will prevail again: as soon and as far as you fail in the constancy, and fervency of that duty, your sin will get strength, and successfully tempt you another time. But by this practice, God may turn evil to work for good, make you gain by your loss, stand the faster by your falls, and become stronger by the discovery of your weakness, and so be better established for the future.

But take heed that you do not pervert the grace of God, and encourage yourself to sin again by the supposition, that if you should fall, it is but to repent, and renew your resolutions, and all will be well. This is a subtle artifice of Satan, but such methinks, as should take with none, who have ever known by experience, what it is to repent. Who have felt the burden of sin to be heavier than a millstone; than the weight of a mountain. Who have tasted, however evil and bitter a thing it is, to depart from God. Who have loathed and abhorred themselves, with deep remorse, and sorrow, and anguish of spirit: wishing with all their hearts, that they had not sinned; and if it were in their power would give all the world to retrieve it; and would rather die than commit that folly again, they then repented of.

Let those who have not their own experience to confirm this, read over and consider the case of David, when he wrote the penitential psalms.

How many like him have roared and cried out under the sense of sin, of stings and furies in their conscience, of the poisoned arrows in their souls, and his terrors surrounding them wherever they went: from the sense of sins malignity, the apprehensions of God's anger, and the consequent fears of his wrath! Serious repentance after great transgressions is another thing than most imagine it. When their aggravated sins shall beset them behind, and before, ree placed in order before their eyes, and set in array against them. It is always a work of difficulty as well as importance, to crucify corrupt affections, to tear a beloved lust from the heart, with self-indignation to abhor and cast away what before you loved and delighted in. How did David's sin stare him in the face? It is continually with me, it is ever before me, says he. It haunted him like a specter, or like Belshazzar's handwriting on the wall, it still appeared before him in some horrid shape.

However sin may smile in its first address, and speak to us in flattering language, and promise pleasure, and profit, and great advantages and satisfaction; these are but fair appearances; this is but the outside of the cup, and the color of the liquor. It will prove gall and wormwood, and a mixture of deadly poison, if ever God sets it home upon the conscience, and awaken us to a true sense of it.

And the continuance of daily repentance for sin, which all Christians are called to, is no such easy matter either. Constant self-abasement and humiliation before God, from a sense of his majesty and holiness, and of our many sins, and pollution thereby: the imperfection of our best duties continually to be bewailed; inordinate affections to be still mortified; always resisting and opposing sin, in its root and branches; conflicting against the whole interest of the flesh, the world, and the devil; seeking after more holiness; to be derived unto us by the grace of Christ, to be wrought in us by his spirit, and maintained by his power; and making daily applications to the fountain of all grace, for spiritual strength, to continue our warfare against sin, in all instances of outward duty, and inward acting's of grace, even as long as we live; all this is included in it.

Due apprehensions concerning repentance, as so comprehensive and difficult a duty, would teach us to beware of sin.

The Necessity of Christian Resolution to Upright, Persevering Obedience.

How full and extensive our obedience ought to be, and yet humble; by what means we may be assisted to perform that which we resolve.

Having acknowledged my transgressions unto God, and begged forgiveness, and experimentally learned the evil of sin by the bitterness of repentance—I resolve for the future to watch against it more narrowly, and against everything that leads to it; endeavoring to please and honor my God and Savior by an upright, obedient heart and life.

And for the remission of my former contracted guilt, I trust to Jesus Christ, according to the revelation made in the gospel, of what he is, has done, and suffered, and continues to do in Heaven, for the salvation of repenting sinners, who desire to come unto God by him.

But how often, O my soul! Have I mocked God, and deceived myself, with formal and faint purposes of amendment? My good resolutions have been as the morning cloud, and the early dew, which quickly passed away. One fresh assault of temptation has swept away all my good purposes as a spider's web. I have falsified so many promises, and broke my word so often, that I dare not trust to anything I now resolve, or rely on any promise I should farther make.

Support me therefore, O Lord, by your powerful grace, that what was defective in my former fruitless resolutions, may be now rectified.

Let me be more humble in the sense of my weakness, more dependent on your grace, and more heartily seek it from time to time.

Strengthen me with strength in my soul, with might and power in my inward man, that I may so resolve and purpose, as to perform; that I may not be one day hot, and the next cold; zealous in the beginning, but faint and lukewarm in the progress; fervent and serious only in resolving, but weak and impotent in the execution.

Having changed my master, my end, and my hopes, by returning unto God from whom I had gone astray, I firmly resolve, through the assistance of his grace, to change my course of life; that old things being done away, all things may become new; that being made free from sin, by pardoning mercy, and become the servant of Christ, I may have my fruit unto holiness, that my end may be eternal life.

In the interim, whether I live or die, let it be unto the Lord, resolving both in life and death to be absolutely his. And to that purpose, O my soul! Let me seek for continual supplies of grace from Christ my head, to enable me to yield ready obedience, in the most difficult, hazardous, painful, and humbling duties. In vain do I resolve it, without the assistance of his mighty power, to strengthen my heart and hands, whenever I am called to such a trial of my sincerity.

Without it I shall never recover my liberty, or break asunder those bonds and cords with which I have formerly been held captive, as the servant of sin and Satan. Such is the weakness and treachery of my own heart, the influence of ill examples, and the subtlety and cunning of the tempter—that otherwise I shall quickly change my mind, and return to folly, as the dog to his vomit. The spirit is so weak, and the flesh so frail; the snares of the world are so many, the power of remaining corruption is so strong; and of myself I am so unsettled and wavering, fickle and unsteady, and prone to backsliding—that all my strongest purposes will not be sufficient, without daily strength from above. My senses are so deceitful; my passions are so ungovernable; the rule and law which I am to walk by is so strict, and spiritual, and extensive; criminal omissions may be so frequent, and so easily overlooked; so many different and difficult duties are to be performed; and by every change of my condition, or of God's providence, so many new dangers and new duties may arise—that I fear the outcome of my firmest resolutions. So strict a watch must always be kept; such humility and caution is everywhere to be practiced; such speedy repentance required after every fall; with thankfulness and contentment in every state, under all calamities, be they ever so many, or ever so pinching; and perseverance herein absolutely necessary, though never so many stratagems are used to discourage me from proceeding, or to entice me to go back, or turn aside to some other path; insomuch that if God had not promised me his continued presence, and that his grace shall be sufficient for me, and that I shall not be tempted above what I am able to bear—I would utterly despair of making good what I now resolve.

But besides these promises to encourage my resolved obedience, he has left upon record in his word many glorious examples of his assisting and rewarding the courage and resolution of his servants to continue faithful; as in the case of Joseph, Daniel, and his three friends, etc. If Christ stands by, and strengthens me, I know I shall be able to do all things. I shall not then be flattered, or frighted out of the way of my duty; no wind that can blow shall then turn me to another point; nothing shall then be able to prevail for my consent to a willful and deliberate forsaking of God; no argument, no temptation, though privacy, opportunity, impunity from men, with rewards of worldly gain and honor—could all concur to enforce a temptation. But, by that heavenly assistance, I shall be preserved humble, temperate, chaste, patient, thankful, self-denying, crucified to the world, and hold fast my integrity until I die—still perfecting holiness in the fear of God, growing in grace, and in the knowledge of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, waxing stronger from day today, be seldomer surprised, offend less, and repent more quickly, and watch more narrowly afterwards, until at last I receive the crown f glory!

Especially, let me watch against my constitution sins, such as I am most inclined to, and where a temptation does most easily enter; where the devil can take the fastest hold, and be least suspected; where he has formerly made a breach. I have known some humble watchful Christians, after being recovered from their backslidings, who abhorred every temptation to that sin, by which they had been defiled and wounded. They can hardly put up a prayer, but they mention it. They can hardly have their hearts affected in any ordinance, but they are inwardly ashamed of it. They can hardly hear of anyone guilty of the like, but they are ready to burst out into tears.

Fix therefore, I beseech you, most gracious God—my sincere resolutions of cleaving to you, with full purpose of heart; and show your strength in my weakness, by enabling me to do what I now resolve. To that end, teach me to watch over my heart, to keep it with all diligence, to be more conversant with my own thoughts, examining the motions that arise in my heart, whence they come, and where they go, and what they tend to—that I may suppress the beginnings of sin.

The unsearchable deceitfulness of the heart, the rovings, stragglings and wanderings of the thoughts, the ungovernable motions and stirrings of the passions and affections, with the corrupt inclinations that are ready to comply with temptation—make such a constant watchfulness necessary. Let me live no longer as a stranger to myself, but by self-reflection dwell more at home, reckoning my principal work to be within doors, to keep my own vineyard. Teach me:  
to watch over my senses,  
to guard the door of my lips,  
to govern my passions;  
to be wary in the choice of my company, and in the right use of it;  
to be circumspect in every step of my daily walk,  
to call myself frequently to a reckoning,  
to cast up my accounts by every day's review of my actions,  
to live always as in God's presence, and be awed everywhere by the thought of his holy eye ever upon me,  
to shun the occasions and appearances of evil, etc.

By the neglect of this, spiritual distempers will insensibly creep upon us. There is such a venom and malignity in sin:  
to wound and weaken the soul,  
to put us off the hinges,  
to disorder and unfit us for any spiritual service,  
to make our hearts vain and frothy, lazy and listless  
—that we shall easily let our opportunities slip, lose our seasons, and languish and pine away, notwithstanding all the means of thriving and growth. And hence it is that so many professors mourn and complain, lick the dust, and lie among the clods, are dead under the most awakening ministry, and barren under the most fruitful means. Hence it is they do little good, as well as taste little comfort; some duties are neglected, and others performed slightly; and in none of them do they meet with that sweetness and satisfaction, that refreshment, and advantage, fruit and benefit, as formerly. And all from the neglect of watchfulness, making bold with temptation, and not standing upon their guard in the use of their Christian armor.

And because no place, no condition, no employment is exempted from temptations, let me fortify myself every morning against all assaults for that day, by serious prayer, as holy David was accustomed to do. My voice (says he) shall you hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto you, and will look up, [Psalm 5:3](https://ref.ly/Ps 5.3;niv?t=biblia), [4](https://ref.ly/Psalm 5.4;niv?t=biblia). Let the law of God be my daily and delightful study, that I may be able presently to bring my words and actions to the touchstone; and know how to manage the sword of the spirit, on all occasions, against the fiery darts of the devil; that knowing the rule, I may not be doubtful, or at a loss, whenever I am tempted. I may not parley with sin, but immediately summon all my forces to resist, and reject the snare; being assured from God, that the continuance of this warfare shall end in a most glorious victory. He will shortly tread down Satan under my feet. Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, my Lord.

The Import and Obligation of Our Baptismal Covenant.

The renewal of it by a solemn dedication of ourselves to God the father, son, and Holy Spirit, exemplified and recommended.

All this, O my soul, which I have now resolved on, is no more than what I am obliged to, by my vow in baptism: to renounce the devil and his works, the flesh and the lusts thereof, the world, and conformity to it—that I may love and serve the Lord agreeable to the undoubted right which God has in me by creation, redemption, and his innumerable other benefits.

But the outward washing of baptism, and a visible profession of obedience, will not save me, without the answer of a good conscience towards God; [1 Peter 3:21](https://ref.ly/1 Pet 3.21;niv?t=biblia). May I not by the consideration of my baptismal covenant suppose God speaking to my conscience, to this effect:

Will you take me for your whole portion and felicity? Will you take my law for the constant rule of your obedience? Will you fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, to your life's end? Will you believe in Jesus Christ, and receive him as a prince and Savior? Will you adhere to the faith and obedience of the gospel, however hazardous and difficult the profession and practice of it may be? Will you receive the blessed Spirit as your teacher, sanctifier, and comforter? Will you cherish all his motions, to enlighten, purify, confirm, comfort, and assist you?

It is my hearty consent to these terms, and resolved compliance with them, which baptism obliges to; and this is the answer of a good conscience towards God.

I have often renewed this covenant on several occasions; but did I ever duly consider the tenor and obligation of it? How have I lied to the God of truth? How have I dealt deceitfully with him? How have I been false and fickle, treacherous and unfaithful to what I promised? O let me now again repeat it, and give up myself once more to be the Lord's, more sincerely, more firmly than ever I have hitherto done—that the bonds of God upon me may be strengthened, and my soul more thoroughly engaged to be the Lord's. O help me to do it with the greatest seriousness, as the most important affair of my whole life!

By your aid and grace alone shall I be sincere and cordial in this surrender, and dedication of myself. O breathe upon my soul, most Holy Spirit, that there may be no hypocrisy, or reservation, in this so weighty and solemn transaction between God and me!

O most blessed and glorious trinity! Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, your favor is my life, and your loving-kindness is better than life: Your will should have been my rule, your word my law, your glory my end, to please you my principal business, and to enjoy your love and presence my ultimate felicity. But I am one of your revolted creatures, who have lost your image, and rebelled against your law, slighted your authority, and rejected your grace, and deserve to be cast out of your sight, and banished from your presence forever.

Nevertheless, O most merciful God and Father, upon your gracious invitation and call, I now return to you as my rightful Lord: acknowledging you, as my almighty, wise, and bountiful creator, my absolute owner, my righteous governor, my end, my happiness and chief good. I now accept your offered mercy; I now submit to the scepter of your grace; and give up myself to you, as my king, and my God—to rule and sanctify me now, and be my everlasting portion!

I desire to be no longer my own, but yours, to whom I belong, and ought to be devoted. I yield myself to you, O my Lord! Accept and possess that which is your own. I lay myself at your feet, at all times, and in all conditions, to be at your disposal, and in everything to acquiesce in your good pleasure. Deliberately resolving, with sincere and free consent of my will, to walk before you in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life. Hereby I consecrate and devote myself to be your perpetual devoted servant Lord.

Though other lord's have had dominion over me, I will now make mention of your name, and of your righteousness only, by Jesus Christ.

O blessed Jesus, my all-sufficient Savior! Your dying love, infinite condescension, and matchless grace has at last overcome me, and constrained me to resolve to be wholly yours, who has redeemed and bought me with your most precious blood. I now acknowledge and own you as my Lord, and my Jesus, and my prophet, and my priest, and my king; and my sacrifice, and my surety, and and my ransom—to satisfy for my sins, and reconcile me unto God, to instruct me in his will, and teach me the mysteries of his kingdom, and the way to the Father. How often have you opened your arms, and called me, yes beseeched me to come unto you, and accept of life? But I refused to come.

I adore your merciful condescension, that yet you will receive me on such easy terms. O you Lord of life and glory, now accept of an unworthy helpless sinner, who flies to you as his only refuge and hope! I am convinced, that none but Christ can make my peace with God, and save me from wrath to come. I acknowledge your title to me, and my obedience, and to all I have, by dying for me. I desire to take your yoke upon me, for it is easy; and your burden, which is light. I desire to be entirely, and forever yours, in an everlasting covenant, never to be broken. I desire to take up the cross, and follow you, wherever you shall lead me; through the straight gate, and the narrow way. I will reserve no lust, refuse no labor, grudge at no suffering, stick at no difficulty—so that I may please, and honor you, and continue in your love. O shed abroad more of your love in my heart, to make all things easy for his sake, who has loved me, and washed me from my sins in his own blood!

O God the Holy Spirit, I acknowledge you as my great teacher and sanctifier, and give up myself to you, as the author of all saving knowledge and holiness. By you I have been convinced of my sin, against the law of God, and the gospel of Christ, and of my necessity of his merit, satisfaction, and righteousness, to justify my guilty soul, by procuring the forgiveness of sin, and my acceptance with God; and of the freeness of his love, the riches and all sufficiency of his grace, towards all who come unto God by him.

I adore you, O most blessed Spirit, as proceeding, and sent from the father and the son, to renew all the powers of my soul, and restore the divine image there; to enlighten my mind, to know and receive the truth as it is in Jesus, and purify my heart: and to sanctify all the members of my body, and make them instruments of righteousness unto holiness, which before were servants unto sin; and gradually to deliver me from the power, the defilement, and abode of sin; as from the guilt and punishment by the blood of Jesus.

As the witness of God to the truth of the holy Scriptures; and as the great paraclete, to comfort and establish the hearts of believers, sealing them up to the day of redemption, and giving them the pledge of their heavenly inheritance. O blessed Spirit, be my witness, that though I have violated the law of God, and defaced his image, and formerly undervalued the love of Christ, and the grace of the gospel—yet by your aid, I now accept what I have so long neglected: and thankfully devote myself henceforward to be the Lord's follower in a covenant relation.

But fearing and distrusting myself, I give up myself entirely to the conduct of your grace, depending upon it for my establishment and perseverance. O form my heart into an obediential frame! That in everything I may endeavor to answer the ends and obligations of this devoted state.

To this one God I have once again dedicated and resigned myself: to serve, and please, and honor you, in thought, word, and act, to the last moment of my life: in the performance of all duties, even those which I have been most averse from; in the mortification of every lust, and the forsaking of every sin, even those which I was once most addicted to; resolving deliberately to allow myself in nothing, great or little, secret or open, which I know or believe to be contrary to your holy will; making it my business to be fruitful in good works, to the praise of my Redeemer; waiting in the use of all his appointed means for higher measures of grace and holiness, to be more victorious over inward lusts, and outward temptations, still pressing towards the mark for the prize of my high and holy calling, even eternal life.

I call Heaven and earth, O Lord, to witness this day, that I own and avow this to be my mind, and the settled prevailing purpose of my soul. This I again ratify and confirm, without any exceptions. So help me, O my God. Glory be to God the father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Practical and Consolatory Reflections on the Preceding Self-dedication, or Covenant with God.

I have this day solemnly avouched the Lord to be my God, to walk in his ways; thereby to fortify my resolutions, that I and my house will serve the Lord. I intend, desire, and hope never willfully to violate the vow which I have now pledged in the presence of God; but to continue steadfast, immovable; always abounding in the work of the Lord, etc.

Should I undertake any new employment, or enter into any new condition, or change the place of my abode, where I might see more of God's dishonor, and meet with more and stronger temptations to sin, and be called to the performance of more difficult duties, greater watchfulness and self-denial, etc. I would hope hereby to engage the presence of God with me, and his blessing on all my affairs, (on which depends the success of all that I undertake,) and would hope the better to preserve my integrity, not only this year, but in all the remaining portion of my time, by the abiding sense of my covenant with God; thus seriously renewed.

This is the method I have been often advised to, for peace of conscience, under doubts and scruples concerning my spiritual state: to put the matter out of doubt, by again accepting the offered mercy and grace of the gospel; and heartily consenting to the new covenant: giving up myself to God in Christ, to be ruled and saved by him. Blessed be God, I have now done so. Lord, say Amen to your part of the covenant, that you are and will be my God; as I desire sincerely to do to my part, that I will be your servant.

But because articles are sooner consented to, than made good; (though I seriously intend never to disown this my solemn act and deed, but firmly to adhere to it as long as I live; that having sworn, I will endeavor to perform it, that this shall be my everlasting choice, never to be recanted or altered,) yet considering the sad instances of my former weakness, and the vigilance and subtle malice of my great adversary, I again implore the support of divine grace, to keep it forever in the purpose of my heart, that it may be as the laws of the Medes and Persians, never to be reversed.

I have given up myself to be yours; O put your fear into my heart, that I may never depart from you! Imprint your laws upon my heart, that my obedience may be uniform and universal, unwavering and perpetual; suitable to so honorable and near a relation to you! I am sensible I lack wisdom and strength to that purpose, but you have bid me to ask it of you, who gives liberally to all without desert, and upbraids not, with present unworthiness, or former faults.

O lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. Stand by and strengthen me in the hour of trial, lest I forget my vows, and deny you. O that my soul may never draw back, lest your have no pleasure in me. I can serve no better master. O let my ears be bored to the door of your house, as the token and assurance of my being your servant unto death. I know it is my duty, I am sensible it is my privilege and honor; I am convinced, that it is my interest and felicity; my soul, my life, my present and everlasting welfare, and all depends upon it—that you should be my God forever!

O conduct me by your Holy Spirit of grace, that I may walk and act, and direct my heart into your love, and the faithful keeping of your commandments. That when so many professors make shipwreck of faith, and a good conscience, and discredit the religion of my Lord, by their shameful falls—you may make me to stand, and improve the warning of their examples, to walk humbly; and while I stand, to take heed least I fall.

Having thus surrendered myself to God, what is there, O my soul, that is ever likely to prevail with me to go back, and revolt from him?

Is the gratification of a lust, the securing of an estate, compliance with a friend, the pleasing of a superior, living in ease and honor, and outward prosperity for a little while, the saving my body from suffering, or my life from violence, (or whatever else be the motive of my unfaithfulness to God, and apostasy from him). Is any, is all of these any way considerable, compared with the blessedness of having God to be my God? For thereby I have the forgiveness of all my sins, and the assurance of his favor; the certainty of present protection and provision; all creatures reconciled to me, and to be employed for my good, as the friend of God; all things to work together for my spiritual advantage; and by the evidence of my adoption, a well-grounded hope of eternal life.

God as my sun and shield, will give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from me. So unspeakably comprehensive are the privileges of so near a relation to God in Christ. O happy are the people who are in such a case! Blessed are the persons whose God is the Lord.

Do I resolve to abide by my choice, and to trust in Christ for persevering grace? And shall I not, ought I not to take comfort in it?

Shall I not give God the glory of his infinite goodness, by adhering to him, and rejoicing in him, notwithstanding all temptations to the contrary? Casting all my care upon him, and quieting myself in the all-sufficiency of my heavenly father: having a God in covenant, who will supply all my needs, and take care of me as his own redeemed child. Shall I not give him the glory of his truth and power, by trusting him in every condition—by confidence in his promise, dependence on his word, faithfulness to his interest, and constancy in his service to the end? Is it not a most encouraging thought, that God does never abandon any, who do not first forsake him? And after such strict engagements, as I have laid upon myself, shall I ever strike the fatal stroke with my own hand? Shall I be off and on, say and unsay, promise and retract? And after I have proceeded thus far, shall I forsake the fountain of living waters, and turn again to broken cisterns?

After I have examined myself, considered my ways, confessed my sins, and upon serious deliberation have come to a resolve, and in pursuance of it have devoted myself with such solemnity to be the Lord's—shall I ever after this, forsake him, and my own mercies, and lightly esteem the rock of my salvation?

Now I have learned in some measure what sin is, by the sorrows and anguish of an hearty repentance. Now I have discovered so much of the snares and devices of Satan, whereby I have formerly been betrayed. Now I am sensible of the dangerous and powerful influence and infection of bad company; the treachery of fleshly lusts; the bewitching temptations of the world; and have tasted a little, by my own experience, of the pleasantness of wisdom's paths, the peace and satisfaction of devotedness to God, by the present rewards of a calm conscience, the communications of divine grace, and the encouragement of an holy hope, etc. and am persuaded of the stability of his word, and the certainty of eternal life to all who continue in well-doing; shall I, after all this, ever break with God again? Shall I ever cancel this engagement? Shall I ever violate this my vow? Shall I ever falsify so many repeated promises and resolutions? Oh that his power may rest upon me, and his grace work in me both to will and to do! O that this God may be my God forever, and my guide unto death!

Let me never reassume this gift, and surrender of myself, or defraud God of his right and propriety. His I am, and him I will serve—living wholly to him; using all I have for him: being willing that he should do what he desires with his own, and consequently dispose of me, and of all that any way belongs to me, as shall seem good in his eyes.

I am yours, O Lord save me. Command my work, appoint my duty, direct my station, order my condition. Let me be your, though employed in the poorest service, and the most laborious self-denying work. I desire to be nothing but a doorkeeper in your house, a hewer of wood, or a drawer of water; then I must pinch the flesh, and swim against the tide, and renounce what before I valued—yet this God shall be my God forever.

By this means when I come to die, (if God should add more years to the little number I have past) I may be able to say with upright Hezekiah: remember Lord, how I have walked before you in my integrity. That in the face of death, and the grave, in the view of the eternal world, and the near prospect of eternity, I may be able to rejoice in hope, and say, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! You are my Savior, and I have waited for your salvation. I have sought you with my whole heart; I have chosen your favor rather than worldly grandeur and prosperity; I have prized your love, and endeavored to obey you, though with many imperfections, which I bewail. I have delighted more in your service and presence, than in the pleasures of sin and vanity; your testimonies have been the joy of my heart. I took no delight in the company of the ungodly, after I was devoted to you; O let me not have my portion with them in the eternal world! Fortify me now against the king of terrors, strengthen me in this my last conflict, enable me to triumph over death by the cross of Christ, (my victorious redeemer) and carry me through the dark valley, at the divorce of soul and body. Grant me an abundant entrance into your heavenly kingdom; let me be numbered among your chosen ones. May my body wait in hope, 'until the general resurrection, that I may then see your glory, and dwell with you forever!

I gave up myself to you, and do not repent my choice; acknowledge me now for yours, and do not lose that which is your own. Lord Jesus! You have paid my ransom, to deliver me from Satan, and from eternal wrath—oh do not now reject me, and cast me off. Is it not your office and covenant to save those who trust in you? Oh remember your word unto your servant, wherein you have caused me to hope, when I ventured my salvation on your promise, and trusted to your gracious word for eternal life.

Your love has already overcome the greatest impediments of my salvation. It is as easy now to receive me, as to love me. You have prepared glory for your redeemed ones; and have bid me believingly to follow you, and wait for your salvation. You have begotten me to a living hope, by the incorruptible seed of the word; let me not now be deprived of the inheritance. Can your love that pitied me in my blood, and fetched me from the gates of Hell—now allow me to fall into it? Oh crown your grace, and perfect your preparatory mercy, with everlasting mercy.

By voluntary consent and choice, you are my God! Your presence in Heaven, is my ultimate felicity. I have trusted to your gracious promise, to prepare me for it, and bring me to it. O fulfill your word unto your servant, wherein you have caused me to hope; and mercifully receive my departing soul, that seeks you, that loves you, that breathes after you, and desires nothing but to know you better, and love you more, and be more entirely conformed to your image, and live always in your blessed presence!

You have called me out of the world, placed your image upon me, enabled me to make it my business, though with many imperfections, to serve, and please, and honor you. Oh receive me to the fullness of your love and grace, and present me faultless before the presence of your glory, with exceeding joy! Amen, holy father, be it unto me according to your word; through the merits and intercession of my all-sufficient Savior, Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness, in whom all your promises are yes and amen.

Thanksgiving to God for His Innumerable Benefits and Mercies, Particularly in the Past Year, with Some Direction and Advice Concerning It.

How precious and delightful are the thoughts of your benefits! O

Lord, how great is the sum of them! Should I count them, they are more in number than the stars. Shall I not observe and consider them? Shall I not maintain a grateful sense of them, and publicly acknowledge them on all occasions? That I may bless the Lord at all times, and his praise be continually in my mouth.

More especially, I should conclude and begin the year, with solemn praises to my great benefactor and preserver. I ought to begin and close every day with it, thereby to make the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice in God. Every year, every day, every hour, every moment offers me an occasion to praise him: because he is every minute gracious: and has been so ever since he gave me my being.

Almost one half of my time has been spent in sleep, when I remember not God, nor myself. Yet he who never slumbers or sleeps, remembers me in mercy, and watches over me for good. Yes, though in the other half, by day, I have forgotten him in a worse sense, by casting off his fear, and not remembering that his holy eye is upon me—yet has he not forgotten to be gracious. Therefore I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving, and never forget his benefits. With the sacrifice of praise, he is better pleased than with an ox or bullock.

He has prolonged my life this last year, when so many others of his more useful servants, have been removed by death. He has given me farther time and space to repent, when multitudes have been surprised in their impenitence. Yes, it was he, who formed me in the womb, and brought me safely into the world, by whose providence I have hitherto been supplied! In him I live, and move, and continually exist; to his undeserved goodness I am indebted for all the good of any kind, which I ever enjoyed. To his bounty I am indebted for all that I now have; and must depend upon it, for whatever I can hereafter expect.

Through infancy and childhood he was pleased to preserve me; favoring me with many advantages in my birth and education; providing for me a competent livelihood; disposing the circumstances of my condition, relations, places of abode, etc. more advantageously than he has done for thousands: affording me many helps for the improvement of my mind, and the increase of knowledge: and preventing my necessities, and even my desires, with numberless blessings, which I never so much as asked for.

He has caused several of my relations to yield me comfort, when they might have been sore afflictions. He has raised up strangers to befriend me, and show me kindness. How many favors have I received from God, by the instrumentality of other men—to whom God gave the will, and the power, the opportunity, and the inclination?

How often has he delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling—by seasonable preservations? So that I yet walk before him in the land of the living. He has rescued me from the brink of many a precipice, which, through ignorance or inadvertency, I did not apprehend or fear. When I knew not which way to turn, he has made my path plain. Under sinking disappointments, he has been my support; and a present help in the time of trouble.

In great perplexities, his eye has been my guide, and his own arm has brought salvation: it may be by the ministry of his holy angels, obeying his order, and giving unusual intimations of very great, and otherwise unsuspected dangers: or sending relief and deliverance, by such small, unlikely, and unexpected means, as carried the name of God visibly engraved on them.

Innumerable calamities he saves me from, which others groan under—and as many blessings am I favored with, whereof they are destitute. He spreads my table, and fills my cup, and gives me all things richly to enjoy—when many excellent persons, of whom the world is not worthy, are fed with the bread of affliction, and the water of affliction.

Others have only necessities, or but few conveniences, in comparison with the plentiful provisions God has made for my cheerful obedience to him. And shall I not praise him for the precious things of Heaven, the blessings of the earth? And more especially for the goodwill of him who dwelt in the bush, to sanctify and sweeten all: whereby common mercies become the pledge and fore-runner of better things; as the fruit of his special kindness, the witness of his truth, and the seed of peace and joy, and righteousness, and praise; by reason of his blessing on all that I possess, which otherwise would prove a snare, and a temptation, and be intermixed with a curse.

And besides the ordinary and continued bounty of every day, in the midst of how many difficulties and dangers have I felt the dear obligations of his preserving mercy? Abroad and at home; in foreign countries, as well as my own; in the midst of enemies, and among friends; in all places, and at all times.

He has prolonged my health, or made my bed in sickness. He has often granted the desires of my heart whenever it was for his glory; and contradicted my wishes, and disappointed my endeavors, in other instances, when it was more to my disadvantage. From how many harms has he saved me, by such things as I deprecated, and would have hindered? How many evils has he turned for good? He has heard my cry in the day of adversity, and set my feet in a large place. He has chastened me for my profit—his rod and his staff have comforted me—he has spoken comfortably to me in the wilderness. Affliction has been a useful and necessary remedy; made an instrument of virtue, and so a token of his love. Therefore I will sing of the mercy of the Lord forever, and with the voice of thanksgiving will I make known his faithfulness.

He has all along conducted me by his wisdom, guided me by his providence, and has directed my path, and ordered all my goings. He has been a cloud to me by day, and a pillar of fire by night: he has helped me in my straits, and supplied my needs, and comforted me in all my sadnesses. His powerful and gracious presence has been my constant guard: and his sovereign never-failing goodness has compassed me about with mercy on every side. For which, O most merciful father, my soul, and all that is within me, desires to speak your praise!

The advantageous circumstances of many divine favors raise their value, and deserve to be particularly observed and acknowledged. How suitably, how seasonably, how wisely has he conferred his benefits! And with what tenderness and kindness! With what freedom and readiness! Of his own bounty and good will, without any necessity, or obligation on his part; without any desert, and sometimes without so much as a prayer on my part. And what is more, notwithstanding my ingratitude and forgetfulness of him, and great provocations, heightened by the abuse of so much mercy—he demands nothing after all, in requital of so much kindness, but my acceptance of his love, and grateful sense of his goodness, and the sweetest and most reasonable expressions of it, by thankful obedience.

More especially, would I bless the Lord, for enlightening my mind in the great mysteries of the gospel—disposing in wonderful wisdom the several means and methods, whereby he brought me to the knowledge of the truth—by parents, ministers, friends, acquaintances, books, afflictions, etc. beginning with me in childhood, awakening and cultivating the inbred notions of God, and natural religion, of good and evil, rewards and punishments, by the careful instructions of parents, or others concerned in my education: giving me the advantage of good examples, counsels, and encouragements, to know and do well; with more assistance, and less hindrances and diversions, than to most others.

Particularly, for the excellent privilege and inestimable blessing of his holy word and sacraments; the liberty of the Christian religion, in the purity of it, in most of those places, where God has been pleased to cast my lot. Causing me to lay down in green pastures, and leading me beside the still waters: instructing me in the revelation of his will and grace by Jesus Christ: acquainting me with the sublime principles and precepts and promises and hopes of the gospel, in order to eternal life!

I bless you, O Lord, and shall forever do so, that with any or all these advantages and helps, your Holy Spirit has taught me to know the truth as it is in Jesus, and heartily to believe and obey it. That by your grace I have been convinced of sin, and brought to repentance; showing me the necessity of a Savior, to make my peace with you, the all-sufficiency of his grace, the fullness of his merit, the freeness of his love, and his readiness to receive me to mercy, inviting and calling me to it, and enabling me to accept his gracious invitation, and obey his compassionate call; making me willing by a powerful and victorious grace, drawing me with cords of love, and so effectually persuading me to consent to your covenant, and comply with your message, on the gracious terms of the gospel.

Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, through his abundant mercy, has begotten me again to a living hope; having humbled my proud heart, and conquered the perverseness of my stubborn will, and brought my soul to an entire subjection to himself: who took pity on me when he saw me in my blood, spread his skirt over me, cast a mantle upon my nakedness, washed me from my sins, and put his own loveliness upon me, by sanctification: who opened my eyes, when I was leaping blindfold into the pit of destruction: who healed my soul, when I was sick unto death: who rescued and recovered me from the slavery of the devil, when I was led captive by him at his will.

Shall not a ransomed, redeemed slave, be thankful to his deliverer? Shall not a miserable undone sinner, who is received to mercy, be thankful for a pardon? Awake, O my soul! and utter a song of praise to him, who forgives all my iniquities, and heals all my diseases; who redeems my life from destruction, and crowns me with loving-kindness, and tender mercies!

Has he made me partaker of his own renewed image and likeness? Has he given me his son, his grace, his Spirit? Has he taken such a wretched creature into so near a relation to himself; and promised to be my God and guide, my portion and your inheritance, my friend and your physician, my sun and shield, and my exceeding great reward?

And shall not my soul speak aloud his praise? Has he been merciful to my unrighteousness, and blotted out my sins? Has he gathered me with his arm, and carried me in his bosom? Has he been my Savior and redeemer, adopted me into his family, and promised to make me blessed in his glory, with himself? The curse being removed, and the hand-writing against me canceled, the price paid, the breach made up, the mouth of justice stopped, and the condemning sentence of the law exchanged for a gracious pardon, through the sacrifice of my blessed Lord Jesus! And shall I not praise his incomprehensible love and grace?

I likewise thank you, most holy father, for saving me from guilt and ruin, when assaulted by powerful and dangerous temptations; that by preventing mercy, or restraining grace, you have kept me from many scandalous and presumptuous sins and crimes. I thank you, for making the sins of others a

 warning and a caution to me, an argument to humility, and a motive to watchfulness; for preserving my judgment from many errors and delusions, by which others are seduced; for enabling me to improve any opportunities of doing good, and making me in anything useful to others. Yes, I thank you for all your mercies to other Christians; for all the gifts and graces and usefulness of any of your servants, wherein, as a member of the same body, I desire to rejoice; for any support and comfort to me, or any of them, under honorable sufferings for your names sake.

I desire sincerely to praise you, for any support, relief and victory, with respect to the snares and buffetings of Satan, and the vilest of his temptations. When he has tempted me to apostasy, and infidelity in speculation and practice; to question the truth of the holy scriptures, and the life to come; to doubt of the foundations of the Christian faith, or to despair of your mercy, and give up the reins to sensual lusts; or to draw me from God, by the love of the world, and the praise of men, by evil company, intemperance, secret wickedness, etc.

I bless you with my whole soul, for calling me back from all of my wanderings, and by infinite goodness recovering me after great falls, enabling me to return when I had gone astray, and seek your forfeited favor, that you may heal my backslidings; giving me, in order to it, a deep sense of my own sin, and of your sovereign grace; leading me to a Savior, whose blood cleanses from all sin, when my guilty defiled soul so much needed its pardoning and cleansing virtue; awakening me to make holy vows, and calling upon me by your word, and Spirit, and providence, to perform them.

I bless you, who have guided my feet into the way of peace, when by the terrors of an accusing conscience, and the sense of unpardoned sin, and the apprehensions of your deserved wrath, I was ready to despair: that though you did most justly hide your face at any time, it was but for a little while; but did seasonably, and in mercy return—to wipe off my tears, restore the joy of your salvation, and chase away the clouds and darkness on my spirit, by the reviving presence of your own Spirit. You who are the author, will be the finisher of my faith; and therefore, though you have visited my iniquities with a fatherly rod, yet your loving-kindness you have not taken from me, or allowed your faithfulness to fail, or your covenant of peace to be removed; but have refreshed me with hidden manna, after great perplexities, saying unto my soul: "I am God, even your God!" making me to hear your voice, which was sweet, and to taste your love, which is better than wine; enabling me to say with your apostle Thomas, "my Lord, and my God!" and to have communion with you since.

For all these innumerable mercies I desire to praise you, which yet are but in order to greater, to everlasting kindness in Heaven. These are but the taste and pledge of what you will bestow hereafter. O how great is his goodness, that he has laid up for those that fear him? And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is even in you. I thank you, who have thus put it into my heart, to render you solemn praise, and once more to renew my covenant with you. I will magnify the Lord, and my spirit shall rejoice in God my Savior.

Return unto your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with me. While I live I will praise you, and sing praises unto my God, while I have a being. O come, and behold the works of the Lord—what be has done for my soul! The Lord lives. Blessed be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted. Let my heart be glad, and my glory rejoice, for the Lord is not ashamed to be called my God. Thanks be to God, who has caused me to triumph in Christ Jesus. Sing unto the Lord, O his saints, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness! I cried unto you, and you have healed, and saved me: I will give thanks to you forever. I will show forth your loving-kindness in the morning, and your faithfulness every night. For the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endures throughout all generations. O enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominions: bless the Lord, O my soul!

Let me add for a conclusion, that the particular deliverances, supports, and consolations, which at any time God has granted to me in cases of great need, or in answer to importunate prayer, ought never to be forgotten. Many experienced Christians have been accustomed to write down such remarkable appearances of God for them, with the particular circumstances that did recommend and enhance the mercy, (whether spiritual or temporal) as an encouragement to trust in God in future difficulties; and have afterwards found the comfort and advantage of being able to have recourse to such papers. This practice I recommend as what has been useful and consolatory to divers Christians, for many years afterwards; and to some others, of their more intimate friends, to whom they might without vanity be imparted.

What experiences might be recorded of signal returns to prayer, and seasonable manifestations of the truth, and goodness, and wisdom of God—if all the instances thereof were duly recollected and preserved!

And how sweet and pleasant would the work of prayer and praise then be! With what rejoicing and delight should we set about it, and live in it, if the constraining goodness and love of God, and a thankful sense of his unspeakable mercies—did bring us to him, and animate every word! What support, and comfort, and hopes of the special love of God, might we derive from the various passages of his compassion and kindness! And hereby we may be able more heartily to give him thanks for pardon, sanctification, and adoption, which we commonly mention with too much doubt and fear.

It may likewise be advisable to examine and record the workings of your own spirit, under such dispensations: What thoughts you then had of God? What acts of faith, love, thankfulness, you did then manifest? What evidences of God's favor, and what discovery of your own sincerity, you have had at such times? When, and how and by what means you were cured of your uncomfortable unbelief, and raised from your despondency? What promises you had recourse to for relief? What considerations were most helpful to you? What frame of spirit you kept up in prayer, before and after? What resolutions and engagements you made to God—to love, and trust, and praise, and serve him, and give up all to his all-wise disposal for the future? And what consequent obligation may be inferred from thence, to acquiesce in the will of God, and resign ourselves entirely to him, saying, this God is our God forever and ever, and he will be our guide unto death!