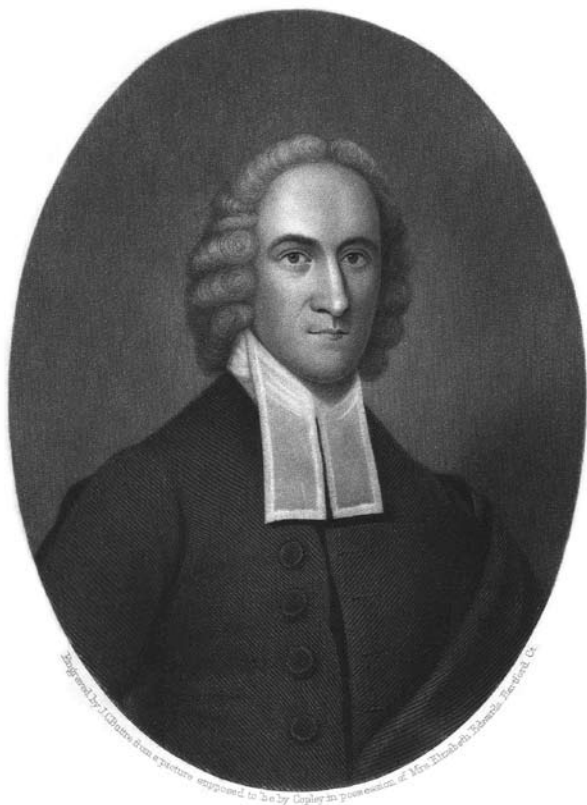


Jonathan Edwards



(The frontispiece to Charles W. Elliott, *The New England History* [New York: Charles Scribner, 1857], vol. II)

“A Sweet Flame”:

Piety in the Letters
of Jonathan Edwards

by

Michael A. G. Haykin

with a foreword by
George S. Claghorn



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PROFILES IN REFORMED SPIRITUALITY

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of Jonathan Edwards*

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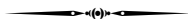
Alison,
“my dear companion”

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Abbreviations



Letters and Personal Writings

Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, vol. 16 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1998).

Marsden

George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003).

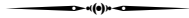
“Memoirs”

Sereno E. Dwight, “Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards, A. M.” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, revised and corr. Edward Hickman (1834 ed.; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), vol. 1.

Murray

Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards—A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987).

Profiles in Reformed Spirituality



Charles Dickens' famous line in *A Tale of Two Cities*—"it was the best of times, it was the worst of times"—seems well suited to western Evangelicalism since the 1960s. On the one hand, these decades have seen much for which to praise God and to rejoice. In His goodness and grace, for instance, Reformed truth is no longer a house under siege. Growing numbers identify themselves theologically with what we hold to be biblical truth, namely, Reformed theology and piety. And yet, as an increasing number of Reformed authors have noted, there are many sectors of the surrounding western Evangelicalism that are characterized by great shallowness and a trivialization of the weighty things of God. So much of Evangelical worship seems barren. And when it comes to spirituality, there is little evidence of the riches of our heritage as Reformed Evangelicals.

As it was at the time of the Reformation, when the watchword was *ad fontes*—"back to the sources"—so it is now: the way forward is backward. We need to go back to the spiritual heritage of Reformed Evangelicalism to find the pathway forward. We cannot live in the past; to attempt to do so would be antiquarianism. But our Reformed forebearers in the faith

can teach us much about Christianity, its doctrines, its passions, and its fruit.

And they can serve as our role models. As R. C. Sproul has noted of such giants as Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards: “These men all were conquered, overwhelmed, and spiritually intoxicated by their vision of the holiness of God. Their minds and imaginations were captured by the majesty of God the Father. Each of them possessed a profound affection for the sweetness and excellence of Christ. There was in each of them a singular and unswerving loyalty to Christ that spoke of a citizenship in heaven that was always more precious to them than the applause of men.”¹

To be sure, we would not dream of placing these men and their writings alongside the Word of God. John Jewel (1522-1571), the Anglican apologist, once stated: “What say we of the fathers, Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, Cyprian?... They were learned men, and learned fathers; the instruments of the mercy of God, and vessels full of grace. We despise them not, we read them, we reverence them, and give thanks unto God for them. Yet...we may not make them the foundation and warrant of our conscience: we may not put our trust in them. Our trust is in the name of the Lord.”²

Seeking then both to honor the past and yet not idolize it, we are issuing these books in the series

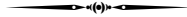
1. “An Invaluable Heritage,” *Tabletalk*, 23, no. 10 (October 1999): 5-6.

2. Cited in Barrington R. White, “Why Bother with History?” *Baptist History and Heritage*, 4, no. 2 (July 1969): 85.

Profiles in Reformed Spirituality. The design is to introduce the spirituality and piety of the Reformed tradition by presenting descriptions of the lives of notable Christians with select passages from their works. This combination of biographical sketches and collected portions from primary sources gives a taste of the subjects' contributions to our spiritual heritage and some direction as to how the reader can find further edification through their works. It is the hope of the publishers that this series will provide riches for those areas where we are poor and light of day where we are stumbling in the deepening twilight.

—Joel R. Beeke
Michael A. G. Haykin

Foreword



A rare privilege awaits you. In these pages, you are about to meet one of the great Christians of all time: Jonathan Edwards!

Your guide is reliable. Dr. Haykin has gathered some of the choicest letters of Edwards. In them, you will discover the insights of this noble leader on “Piety,” up close and personal. Piety? That is the way we tap the resources God provides, to live for His glory and help others find them, too.

Before going on to the high ridges of thought, your escort will sketch the chief events of Edwards’ life. Then, in the letters, you will find Edwards’ views on piety, in his own words.

Treasures for all ages are here. Edwards tells how he found heaven within, God’s mighty presence, enabling him to meet every challenge and be more than conqueror. Best of all, he had the radiant hope of being at home with the Lord in the life beyond.

Bringing the eternal into practical situations is no mean feat. Edwards, however, accomplishes just that. We see his role as a child, husband, parent, pastor, mentor, and educator—with pungent thoughts on conversion, prayer, the Bible, revival, evangelism, and other vital topics. Each fruit of the Spirit is to be

found here, expressed in Edwards’ own words, demonstrated in his life.

The selections were chosen wisely. We are all indebted to Dr. Haykin for his outstanding service in making these classics available in such an attractive format.

Now, to savor them!

George S. Claghorn
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

Acknowledgements



This small selection of Jonathan Edwards' letters is deeply indebted to the definitive collection made by George Claghorn in what is now Volume 16 of the Yale University Press edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Letters and Personal Writings* (1998). Prior to Claghorn's edition—over thirty-five years in the making¹—there were a few selections of Edwards' works that contained some of his letters,² but nothing substantial. With Claghorn's superb edition, the student of Edwards can now see something of the range of Edwards' correspondence, from influential Boston ministers like Benjamin Colman to the leading evange-

1. See George S. Claghorn, "Transcribing a Difficult Hand: Collecting and Editing Edwards' Letters over Thirty-Five Years" in D.G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas and Stephen J. Nichols, eds., *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 217-227.

2. See, for example, Vergilius Ferm, *Puritan Sage: Collected Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), 617-620, 637-640; Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections* (rev. ed.; New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), 382-415; John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1995), 298-325. See also Bernard Bangley, ed. and modernized, *Awakening: The Essential Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (Brewster, Massachusetts: Paraclete Press, 2004), 154-164.

list of Edwards’ era, namely George Whitefield, from important colonial figures like Sir William Pepperrell to notable Scottish preachers such as John Erskine.³ Edwards also wrote, though, to lesser-known individuals whose names do not normally appear in historical studies of Edwards and his era, from young believers like Deborah Hatheway⁴ to Boston booksellers.⁵ This volume, then, fills a lacuna by giving those interested in the life and work of Edwards a book-length selection of his correspondence. However, this selection does have a focus: Edwardsean piety. An attempt has been made to provide a number of vistas by which this area of Edwards’ life—so central to all of his theological and intellectual pursuits—can be viewed, and, it is hoped, be a challenge to Christian faith and practice in our day.

In a review of George Marsden’s biography of Edwards—*Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (2003)—Ted Rivera has noted that while Edwards’ thinking about various issues of theology, such as original sin, are accessible, “it is almost impossible to peer into his inmost private thoughts” in his latter years. As proof, he cites the fact that while there are three thousand of Martin Luther’s letters extant, Claghorn’s herculean efforts came up with only 236 of Edwards’ letters.⁶ This is quite remarkable and indeed lamentable, but

3. Claghorn, “Transcribing a Difficult Hand,” 224.

4. See below, pages 41-47.

5. See Jonathan Edwards, Letters to Jacob Wendell, August 8, 1737 and August 23, 1737 (*Letters and Personal Writings*, 70-71).

6. “*Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, by George M. Marsden,” *Faith & Mission*, 23, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 121.

in the letters that survive we do get rich glimpses of the passions that stirred Edwards' soul to the depths: books and biblical reflection, revival and the salvation of sinners, prayer and the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth, his family and the spiritual health of his wife and children—and above all, Christ and His glory. Hopefully, there is enough here in this small volume that will spur the reader on to delight in the God whom Edwards loved—and still does love.

I am deeply grateful to Steve and Lois Krogh for their hospitality in Jenison, Michigan, while I was finishing the initial draft of this book, and for their friendship. I also want to thank Jay T. Collier of Reformation Heritage Books, who has overseen this project and guided it into print, and for the team that works under his direction: Sharla Kattenberg (copy editing), Linda den Hollander (typesetting), and Amy Zevenbergen (cover design). Thanks are due Hélène Grondines for the painting of Edwards that adorns the front cover. Additionally I am indebted in various ways to Pastor Ron Baines (for photographs taken), to Pastors Scott Bowman and Steve Raemisch (for encouraging words and deeds), and Janice van Eck (for scanning most of the illustrations). I also want to thank George Claghorn for writing the foreword.

In the editing of these letters, most of them drawn from Sereno E. Dwight's biography of his great-grandfather, capitalization, punctuation and spelling have been uniformly modernized, and Edwards' long Latinate paragraphs broken down into smaller, manageable units. Various notes have been added to provide the reader with the historical background to these letters and to give some information about those

to whom they were addressed. Often these notes point out further articles and books where the reader can find out more about the context and original recipients of the letters. For indispensable help in transcribing these letters I wish to thank Christina Case.

As a note of interest, the emblem used to end most of the selections is taken from a stone frieze on the Edwards Church of Northampton, Massachusetts.

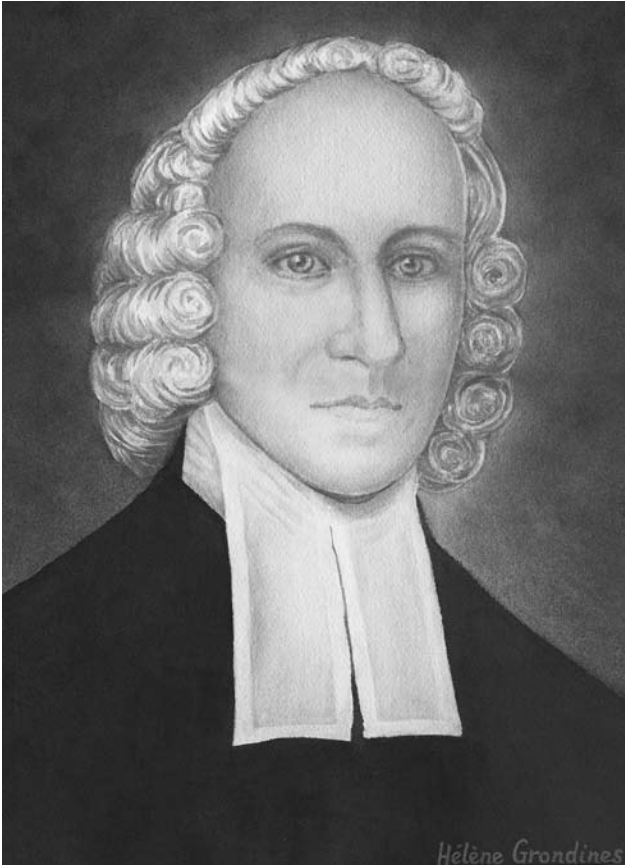
When Edwards was recommending the first major work by his friend and confidant Joseph Bellamy to his Scottish correspondent John Erskine, namely Bellamy's *True Religion Delineated* (1750), the New England divine told Erskine: "I am fully satisfied that his aim in this publication is not his own fame and reputation in the world; but the glory of God, and the advancement of the kingdom of his Redeemer."⁷ What a noble goal to aspire to for any Christian author—or editor!

Dundas, Ontario
March 17, 2007

7. Letter to John Erskine, July 5, 1750 ("Memoirs," cxviii). See below, page 118.

President Edwards was one of the greatest, best, and most useful men of this age.... And there is reason to hope, that though dead, he will yet speak for ages to come, to the great advantage of the church of Christ, and the immortal welfare of many souls—and that his publications will produce a yet greater harvest of happiness to man and glory to God in the day of the Lord.

—Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803)



Jonathan Edwards

(A portrait by Hélène Grondines, 2006)

The Piety of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) has been rightly described as “the greatest Christian theologian of the eighteenth century.”¹ At the beginning of his life, the Reformed faith was increasingly a house under siege in the transatlantic world as the Enlightenment, with its stress on the omniscience of human reason, was apparently relegating to the dustbin of history every worldview that asserted the priority of revelation. The Edwardsean corpus, composed of various occasional pieces and robust systematic treatises like *A careful and strict Enquiry into The modern prevailing Notions of...Freedom of Will* (1754), was key to the overall Christian rebuttal of the *mentalité* of the Enlightenment and the restoration of Calvinism to a place of spiritual vigor and influence.

In the realm of spiritual theology and Evangelical piety, Edwards’ writings—especially those on revival—also exercised a remarkable influence. Edwards was deeply indebted to the passionate interest that seventeenth-century Puritanism had in the

1. Miklós Vetö, “Book Reviews: *America’s Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*. By Robert W. Jenson,” *Church History*, 58 (1989): 522.

work of the Holy Spirit.² Along with being an heir to this profound pneumatological interest, Edwards found himself called upon to respond to both trenchant criticism of the Great Awakening (1740-1742), in which he played a central role, and clear fanaticism on the part of certain supporters of the revival. The result was some of the richest literature in the history of the church on the nature of genuine Christian piety.³

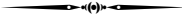
Early Years

What is remarkable, though, about this theological achievement is that Edwards lived most of his life on the edge of the transatlantic British Empire, far from the centers of literary power and influence in that world. Born on October 5, 1703, at East Windsor, Connecticut, his father, Timothy Edwards (d. 1758), was the pastor of the town's Congregational Church.⁴ His mother, Esther, was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), the enormously influential pastor of the Congregationalist Church in Northampton, Massachusetts, due north of East Windsor.

2. For example, for a clear link between the piety of Edwards' *Life of David Brainerd* (1748) and that of the New England Puritan Thomas Shepard (1605-1649), see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spirit of the Old Writers: The Great Awakening and the Persistence of Puritan Piety" in Francis J. Bremer, ed., *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 288-289.

3. See Michael A.G. Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival* (Darlington, Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 2005).

4. Especially helpful for understanding Edwards' life are Murray and Marsden. See now also Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).


To Deborah Hatheway¹

Northampton, June 3, 1741

My dear young friend,

As you desired me to send you, in writing, some directions how to conduct yourself in your Christian course, I would now answer your request. The sweet remembrance of the great things I have lately seen at Suffield inclines me to do anything in my power to contribute to the spiritual joy and prosperity of God's people there.

1. From "Memoirs," liii-liv. Deborah Hatheway (1722-1753) was living in Suffield, Massachusetts, when she received this letter. She had been converted in a revival that had come to the town in the spring of 1741, possibly as a result of a visit by Edwards in April of that year. Hatheway turned to Edwards for advice about how to live the Christian life since her church was without a pastor. This letter was often reprinted in the nineteenth century and became something of a minor classic of spiritual advice. By 1875 at least 328,000 copies of this letter had been printed.

In the original version, the letter has nineteen pieces of advice, most of which center upon growth in humility and holiness, and the cultivation of a deep sense of gratitude to God for forgiveness and salvation. Of the two that have been left out, one is quite similar to #12 below. The other urged Deborah not to "talk of things of religion and matters of experience with an air of lightness and laughter" (*Letters and Personal Writings*, 95).

For a modern edition of this letter, see *Jonathan Edwards' Resolutions and Advice to Young Converts*, ed. Stephen J. Nichols (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2001).

1. I would advise you to keep up as great a strife and earnestness in religion as if you knew yourself to be in a state of nature and were seeking conversion. We advise persons under conviction to be earnest and violent for the kingdom of heaven; but when they have attained to conversion, they ought not to be the less watchful, laborious, and earnest in the whole work of religion, but the more so; for they are under infinitely greater obligations. For want of this, many persons, in a few months after their conversion, have begun to lose their sweet and lively sense of spiritual things, and to grow cold and dark, and have “pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”² Whereas, if they had done as the apostle did (Philippians 3:12-14), their path would have been “as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.”³

2. Do not leave off seeking, striving, and praying for the very same things that we exhort unconverted persons to strive for, and a degree of which you have had already in conversion. Pray that your eyes may be opened, that you may receive sight, that you may know yourself, and be brought to God’s footstool; and that you may see the glory of God and Christ, and may be raised from the dead, and have the love of Christ shed abroad in your heart. Those who have most of these things, have need still to pray for them; for there is so much blindness and hardness, pride and death remaining that they still need to have that work of God wrought upon them, further to enlighten and enliven them, that shall be bringing

2. 1 Timothy 6:10.

3. Proverbs 4:18.

them out of darkness into God's marvelous light, and be a kind of new conversion and resurrection from the dead. There are very few requests that are proper for an impenitent man, that are not also, in some sense, proper for the godly.

3. When you hear a sermon, hear for yourself. Though what is spoken may be more especially directed to the unconverted, or to those that, in other respects, are in different circumstances from yourself, yet, let the chief intent of your mind be to consider, "In what respect is this applicable to me? And what improvement ought I to make of this, for my own soul's good?"

4. Though God has forgiven and forgotten your past sins, yet do not forget them yourself: often remember, what a wretched bond-slave you were in the land of Egypt. Often bring to mind your particular acts of sin before conversion, as the blessed apostle Paul is often mentioning his old blaspheming, persecuting spirit, and his injuriousness to the renewed, humbling his heart, and acknowledging that he was "the least of the apostles," and not worthy "to be called an apostle," and the "least of all saints," and the "chief of sinners."⁴ And be often confessing your old sins to God, and let that text be often in your mind, "That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God" (Ezekiel 16:63).

5. Remember, that you have more cause, on some accounts a thousand times, to lament and humble

4. 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 1:15.

yourself for sins that have been committed since conversion than before, because of the infinitely greater obligations that are upon you to live to God, and to look upon the faithfulness of Christ, in unchangeably continuing his loving-kindness, notwithstanding all your great unworthiness since your conversion.

6. Be always greatly abased for your remaining sin and never think that you lie low enough for it. But yet be not discouraged or disheartened by it, for, though we are exceeding sinful, yet “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,”⁵ the preciousness of whose blood, the merit of whose righteousness, and the greatness of whose love and faithfulness, infinitely overtop the highest mountains of our sins.

7. When you engage in the duty of prayer, or come to the Lord’s supper, or attend any other duty of divine worship, come to Christ as Mary Magdalen (Luke 7:37-38)⁶ did come, and cast yourself at his feet, and kiss them, and pour forth upon him the sweet perfumed ointment of divine love, out of a pure and broken heart, as she poured the precious ointment out of her pure broken alabaster box.

8. Remember that pride is the worst viper that is in the heart, the greatest disturber of the soul’s peace and of sweet communion with Christ. It was the first sin committed and lies lowest in the foundation of Satan’s whole building, and is with the greatest difficulty rooted out, and is the most hidden, secret, and

5. 1 John 2:2.

6. Edwards here is following a common exegetical tradition that regarded Mary Magdalene as the woman in Luke 7.

deceitful of all lusts, and often creeps insensibly into the midst of religion, even, sometimes, under the disguise of humility itself.

9. That you may pass a correct judgment concerning yourself, always look upon those as the best discoveries, and the best comforts, that have most of these two effects: those that make you least and lowest, and most like a child; and those that most engage and fix your heart, in a full and firm disposition to deny yourself for God, and to spend and be spent for him.

10. If at any time you fall into doubts about the state of your soul, in dark and dull frames of mind, it is proper to review your past experience. But do not consume too much time and strength in this way; rather apply yourself, with all your might, to an earnest pursuit after renewed experience, new light, and new lively acts of faith and love. One new discovery of the glory of Christ's face will do more toward scattering clouds of darkness in one minute, than examining old experience, by the best marks that can be given, through a whole year.

11. When the exercise of grace is low, and corruption prevails, and by that means fear prevails, do not desire to have fear cast out any other way than by the reviving and prevailing of love in the heart. By this, fear will be effectually expelled, as darkness in a room vanishes away when the pleasant beams of the sun are let into it.

12. When you counsel and warn others, do it earnestly and affectionately and thoroughly. And when you are speaking to your equals, let your warnings be intermixed with expressions of your sense of your

own unworthiness and of the sovereign grace that makes you differ.

13. If you would set up religious meetings of young women by yourselves, to be attended once in a while, besides the other meetings that you attend, I should think it would be very proper and profitable.

14. Under special difficulties, or when in great need of or great longings after any particular mercy for yourself or others, set apart a day for secret prayer and fasting by yourself alone; and let the day be spent, not only in petitions for the mercies you desire, but in searching your heart, and in looking over your past life, and confessing your sins before God, not as is wont to be done in public prayer, but by a very particular rehearsal before God of the sins of your past life, from your childhood hitherto, before and after conversion, with the circumstances and aggravations attending them, and spreading all the abominations of your heart very particularly, and fully as possible, before him.

15. Do not let the adversaries of the cross have occasion to reproach religion on your account. How holily should the children of God, the redeemed and the beloved of the Son of God, behave themselves. Therefore, “walk as children of the light” and of the day and “adorn the doctrine of God your Savior.”⁷ And especially abound in what are called the Christian virtues and make you like the Lamb of God: be meek and lowly of heart, and full of pure, heavenly, and humble love to all; abound in deeds of love to others, and self-denial for others; and let there be

7. See Ephesians 5:8; Titus 2:10.

in you a disposition to account others better than yourself.

16. In all your course, walk with God and follow Christ, as a little, poor, helpless child, taking hold of Christ's hand, keeping your eye on the marks of the wounds in his hands and side, whence came the blood that cleanses you from sin, and hiding your nakedness under the skirt of the white shining robes of his righteousness.

17. Pray much for the ministers and the church of God, especially, that he would carry on his glorious work which he has now begun, till the world shall be full of his glory.

