

Thomas More's Instructions and Prayers

A Godly Instruction [on How to Treat Those Who Wrong Us]

*written by Sir Thomas More, Knight,
within a while after he was prisoner in the
Tower of London, in the year of our Lord 1534*

Bear no malice nor evil will to no man living. For either the man is good or naught.¹ If he be good, and I hate him, then am I naught.

If he be naught, either he shall amend and die good and go to God, or abide² naught and die naught and go the devil. And then let me remember that if he shall be saved, he shall not fail (if I be saved too, as I trust to be) to love me very heartily, and I shall then in likewise love him.

And why should I now then hate one for this while³ which shall hereafter love me for evermore, and why should I be now, then, enemy to him with whom I shall in time coming be coupled in eternal friendship? And on the other side, if he shall continue naught and be damned, then is there so outrageous eternal sorrow towards⁴ him that I may well think myself a deadly cruel wretch if I would not now rather pity his pain than malign his person. If one would say that we may well with good conscience wish an evil man harm, lest he should do harm to such other folk as are innocent and good, I will not now dispute upon that point, for that root hath more branches to be well weighed and considered than I can now conveniently write (having none other pen than a coal). But verily thus will I say that I will give counsel to every good friend of mine, but if⁵ he be put in such a room⁶ as to punish an evil man lieth⁷ in his charge by reason of his office, else leave the desire of punishing unto God and unto such other folk as are so grounded in charity, and so fast cleave to God, that no secret shrewd⁸ cruel affection,⁹ under the cloak of a just and a virtuous zeal, can creep in and undermine them. But let us that are no better than men of a mean¹⁰ sort ever pray for such merciful amendment in other folk as our own conscience showeth us that we have need in ourselves.

¹ wicked

² remain

³ period of time

⁴ facing

⁵ *but if*: unless

⁶ office, position

⁷ who lieth

⁸ malicious, wicked

⁹ inclination

¹⁰ mediocre, common, poor

A Godly Instruction [on Whether to Save One's Life]

*written in Latin¹¹ by Sir Thomas More, Knight,
while he was prisoner in the Tower of London,
in the year of our Lord 1534*

5

Whosoever so saveth his life that he displeaseth God thereby shall soon after, to his no little grief, full sore¹² mislike the same. For if thou so savest thy life, thou shalt on the morrow so deadly hate thy life that at the heart full heavy¹³ shalt thou be that the day before thou didst not lose thy life. For that certainly die thou must, shalt thou full surely¹⁴ remember; but how, or how soon, that wottest thou¹⁵ not at all. And just cause hast thou to fear lest upon the such delay of that death may haply¹⁶ ensue the everlasting torments in hell, where “men shall sore long to die, and death shall flee from them,”¹⁷ whereas by the enduring of that death which thou so much abhorrest, there should have undoubtedly followed the everlasting joys of heaven.

10

What folly is it for thee, then, to avoid this temporal death as thereby to fall in peril to purchase thyself eternal death? And yet therewith not to escape thy temporal death, but perhaps for a while only to delay thy death.

15

For put case thou mightest for that while eschew¹⁸ the danger of death. Art thou sure, therefore, either to continue thy life forever, or at another time to die and feel no pain? Nay, rather it may fortune¹⁹ to fare with thee as it fared with the rich man that assuredly reckoned himself to live full many a year—to whom Christ said, “This night, thou fool, shall they bereave thee of thy life.”²⁰ And again, this art thou well assured of: that both die once thou shalt and also (for that²¹ so shortly man's life here passeth away) that long here live thou canst not.

20

Finally hereof,²² as I suppose, doubttest thou never a deal:²³ that when the time shall come in which thou shalt lie sick on thy deathbed, and therewith begin to feel the painful pangs of death so dreadfully²⁴ drawing on, then wilt thou heartily wish, for the saving of thy soul, thou hadst died a most sharp and cruel death many a day before. Then cause hast thou none, pardie,²⁵ so sore²⁶ to fear that thing to fall which, as thou knowest thyself right well, thou wouldst within a while after have wished to have fallen unto thee before. Whosoever suffer any trouble or adversity, according to the will of God, must wholly commit their souls into the hands of God, their trusty and faithful Creator. “Be not discouraged, my well-beloved brethren,” saith Saint Peter, “by reason of the extreme persecution that is amongst you (which is sent you for a proof²⁷ of your patience), as though some strange thing were befallen unto you; but inasmuch as ye be partakers²⁸ of Christ's pains and Passion, full heartily rejoyce, that thou mayest likewise rejoyce at the revelation of his glory.”²⁹

25

Well may good men be ashamed to have less courage to do good than evil men have to do evil. For a man may hear thieves not let³⁰ to say that he hath a faint stomach³¹ that will stick³² for half an hour's hanging

¹¹ The translation that follows appeared in the 1557 *Workes*.

¹² *full sore*: very greatly

¹³ sorry

¹⁴ *full surely*: with complete certainty

¹⁵ *wottest thou*: you know

¹⁶ perhaps

¹⁷ Rv 9:6

¹⁸ escape; avoid

¹⁹ happen

²⁰ Lk 12:20

²¹ *for that*: because

²² of this

²³ a bit

²⁴ fearfully

²⁵ “by God” (from the French); certainly

²⁶ greatly

²⁷ testing

²⁸ sharers

²⁹ 1 Pt 4:12–13

³⁰ hesitate

³¹ spirit, courage

³² hesitate

to live seven years in pleasure. And what a shame were it then for a Christian man to be content rather to lose the life and bliss everlasting than suffer a short death somewhat before his time—which he is so well assured that needs suffer he shall, and that within a while after and, but if³³ he repent him in time, straight upon his temporal death fall into eternal death, and the same so horrible and painful that it far exceedeth all other kinds of death.

If it were possible for a man, with his corporeal eyes, to behold one of those grisly fiends which in so great a number daily look and long for us in hell forever to torment us: the fear of him alone would make him not to regard a rush,³⁴ all the terrible threats that any man could imagine. And how much less would he regard them, then, if he might possibly see heaven open and Jesus Christ there standing, as did the blessed Saint Stephen.³⁵

“Your adversary the devil,” saith Saint Peter, “like a roaring lion runneth about, seeking whom he may devour.”³⁶ But hark what Saint Bernard saith:³⁷ “I humbly thank that mighty Lion of the tribe of Judah; well roar may this lion, but bite me he cannot. Threateneth he us never so much, let us not be such beastly cowards that for his only³⁸ rude roaring, we fall down flat to the ground.

“For a very beast is he, and hath no reason indeed, which³⁹ is either so feeble-spirited that for fear alone giveth over, or so discomfited upon a vain imagination of the pains that he may hap to suffer, that at the bare blast of the trumpet, before the battle begin, he is quite and clean overthrown, without any stroke at all.

“ ‘Ye have not resisted as yet to the shedding of your blood,’⁴⁰ saith that valiant Captain, which knew right well that the roaring of this lion was nothing to be passed on.⁴¹ And another saith, ‘Stand stiff against the devil, and he will flee from you.’ ”⁴²

Stand stiff, I say, with a “strong and steadfast faith,”⁴³ for Isaiah giveth us warning⁴⁴ before that “they that, having no hope of God’s help, fly for succor to man’s help, shall both themselves and their helpers with them come to utter confusion.”⁴⁵

So came King Saul to naught,⁴⁶ who, because he was not by and by⁴⁷ of God heard at his pleasure, murmured, grudging⁴⁸ and distrusted God and so fell in conclusion to seek counsel of a witch—whereas for the punishment of all witches, he himself had given generally⁴⁹ so precise⁵⁰ commandment before.⁵¹

My firm hope is that he which⁵² so dearly bought⁵³ me will not, without mine own damnable fault, lose me to his most malicious enemy.⁵⁴

³³ *but if*: unless

³⁴ *regard a rush*: attach a straw’s worth of importance to

³⁵ Acts 7:55–56

³⁶ 1 Pt 5:8

³⁷ These next paragraphs are from Saint Bernard’s thirteenth sermon on Psalm 90(91).

³⁸ *for his only*: just because of his

³⁹ who

⁴⁰ Heb 12:4

⁴¹ *passed on*: paid any attention to

⁴² Jas 4:7

⁴³ 1 Pt 5:9

⁴⁴ Is 31:1, 3

⁴⁵ *confusion*: ruin, destruction

⁴⁶ wickedness

⁴⁷ *by and by*: immediately

⁴⁸ grumbled, complained

⁴⁹ all inclusive, without exception

⁵⁰ strict

⁵¹ 1 Chr 10:13–14

⁵² who

⁵³ *so dearly bought*: at such great cost ransomed or redeemed. See 1 Cor 6:20.

⁵⁴ This concluding sentence follows the Latin prayer in *Workes*, p. 1407.

A Godly Meditation
written by Sir Thomas More,
Knight, while he was prisoner in the
Tower of London in the year of our Lord 1534

5
Give me thy grace, good Lord,
To set the world at nought;⁵⁵

To set my mind fast⁵⁶ upon thee,
10 And not to hang upon the blast of men's mouths;

To be content to be solitary,
Not to long for worldly company;

15 Little and⁵⁷ little utterly to cast off the world,
And rid my mind of all the business thereof;

Not to long to hear of any worldly things,
But that the hearing of worldly fantasies may be to me displeasing;
20

Gladly to be thinking of God;
Piteously to call for his help;

To lean unto the comfort of God;
25 Busily to labor to love him;

To know mine own vility⁵⁸ and wretchedness;
To humble and meeken myself under the mighty hand of God;

30 To bewail my sins passed;
For the purging of them, patiently to suffer adversity;

Gladly to bear my purgatory here;
To be joyful of tribulations;

35 To walk the narrow way that leadeth to life;
To bear the cross with Christ;

To have the last thing⁵⁹ in remembrance;
40 To have ever afore mine eye my death that is ever at hand;

To make death no stranger to me;

⁵⁵ *set at nought*: regard as nothing

⁵⁶ firmly; steadfastly

⁵⁷ by

⁵⁸ lowness of condition; moral baseness

⁵⁹ *last thing*: last judgment

To foresee and consider the everlasting fire of hell;

 To pray for pardon before the judge come;
 To have continually in mind the Passion that Christ suffered for me;
 5

 For his benefits incessantly to give him thanks;
 To buy⁶⁰ the time again that I before have lost;

 To abstain from vain confabulations;⁶¹
 10 To eschew⁶² light foolish mirth and gladness;

 Recreations not necessary, to cut off;
 Of worldly substance, friends, liberty, life, and all—
 to set the loss at right nought⁶³ for the winning of Christ;
 15

 To think my most⁶⁴ enemies my best friends,
 For the brethren of Joseph⁶⁵ could never have done him so much good with their love and
 favor as they did him with their malice and hatred.

 20 These minds⁶⁶ are more to be desired of every man than all the treasure of all the princes
 and kings, Christian and heathen, were it gathered and laid together all upon one heap.

⁶⁰ redeem

⁶¹ familiar conversations; chats

⁶² avoid

⁶³ *set ... nought*: regard the loss as nothing at all

⁶⁴ greatest, worst

⁶⁵ Gn 37, 41.

⁶⁶ states of thought and feeling; intentions; dispositions

A Devout Prayer

made by Sir Thomas More, Knight, after he was condemned to die,
and before he was put to death; who was condemned the Thursday the first day
of July in the year of our Lord God 1535, and in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of
5 King Henry the Eighth, and was beheaded at the Tower Hill at London the Tuesday following

*Paternoster, Ave Maria, Credo.*⁶⁷

10 O Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—three equal and coeternal persons, and
one almighty God—have mercy on me, vile, abject, abominable, sinful wretch, meekly acknowledging before
thine high majesty my long-continued sinful life, even from my very childhood⁶⁸ hitherto.

In my childhood in this point and that point, etc.

After my childhood in this point and that point, etc., and so forth by every age.

15 Now, good gracious Lord, as thou givest me thy grace to acknowledge them, so give me thy grace,
not in only word but in heart also, with very sorrowful contrition to repent them, and utterly to forsake them.
And forgive me those sins also in which by mine own default,⁶⁹ through evil affections⁷⁰ and evil custom,⁷¹
my reason is with sensuality so blinded that I cannot discern them for sin. And illumine, good Lord, mine
heart, and give me thy grace to know them and to acknowledge them, and forgive me my sins negligently
forgotten, and bring them to my mind with grace to be purely confessed of them.

20 Glorious God, give me from henceforth the grace, with little respect unto the world, so to set and fix
firmly mine heart upon thee that I may say with thy blessed apostle Saint Paul, *Mundus mihi crucifixus est, et ego
mundo. Mihi vivere Christus est et mori lucrum. Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo.*⁷²

Give me the grace to amend my life and to have an eye to mine end without grudge of death,⁷³ which
to them that die in thee, good Lord, is the gate of a wealthy⁷⁴ life.

25 Almighty God, *Doce me facere voluntatem tuam. Fac me currere in odore unguentorum tuorum. Apprehende
manum meam dexteram, et deduc me in via recta propter inimicos meos. Trahe me post te. In chamo et freno maxillas meas
constringe, cum non approximo ad te.*⁷⁵

30 O glorious God, all sinful fear, all sinful sorrow and pensiveness, all sinful hope, all sinful mirth and
gladness take from me. And on the other side, concerning such fear, such sorrow, such heaviness,⁷⁶ such
comfort, consolation, and gladness as shall be profitable for my soul, *Fac mecum secundum magnam bonitatem tuam
Domine.*⁷⁷

Good Lord, give me the grace in all my fear and agony to have recourse to that great fear and
wonderful agony that thou my sweet Savior hadst at the Mount of Olivet before thy most bitter Passion, and
in the meditation thereof to conceive ghostly⁷⁸ comfort and consolation profitable for my soul.

⁶⁷ This rubric indicates one should pray the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Creed.

⁶⁸ childhood

⁶⁹ misdeed

⁷⁰ dispositions

⁷¹ habit

⁷² “The world is crucified to me, and I to the world. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. I wish to be dissolved and be with Christ.” See Gal 6:14 and Phil 1:21, 23.

⁷³ complaint; being discontent

⁷⁴ possessing well-being

⁷⁵ “Teach me to do your will. Make me run to the scent of thy ointments. Take my right hand, and lead me in the right path because of my enemies. Draw me after you. With a bit and bridle bind fast my jaws when I come not near unto thee.” See Ps 142(143):10, Sg 1:3, Ps 72(73):24, Ps 26(27):11, Ps 31(32):9.

⁷⁶ grief

⁷⁷ “Deal with me according to thy great goodness, O Lord.” See Ps 118(119):124.

⁷⁸ spiritual

Almighty God, take from me all vainglorious minds,⁷⁹ all appetites of mine own praise, all envy, covetise,⁸⁰ gluttony, sloth and lechery, all wrathful affections, all appetite of revenging, all desire or delight of other folks' harm, all pleasure in provoking any person to wrath and anger, all delight of exprobration⁸¹ or insultation⁸² against any person in their affliction and calamity.

5 And give me, good Lord, a humble, lowly, quiet, peaceable, patient, charitable, kind, tender, and pitiful mind, with all my works, and all my words, and all my thoughts to have a taste of thy holy blessed Spirit.

10 Give me, good Lord, a full faith, a firm hope, and a fervent charity, a love to thee, good Lord, incomparable⁸³ above the love to myself, and that I love nothing to thy displeasure, but everything in an order to⁸⁴ thee.

Give me, good Lord, a longing to be with thee, not for the avoiding of the calamities of this wretched world, nor so much for the avoiding of the pains of purgatory, nor of the pains of hell neither, nor so much for the attaining of the joys of heaven, in respect of mine own commodity,⁸⁵ as even for a very⁸⁶ love to Thee.

15 And bear me, good Lord, thy love and favor, which thing my love to thee-ward⁸⁷ (were it never so great) could not but of thy great goodness deserve.

And pardon me, good Lord, that I am so bold to ask so high petitions, being so vile a sinful wretch and so unworthy to attain the lowest. But yet, good Lord, such they be as I am bounden to wish and should be nearer the effectual desire of them if my manifold sins were not the let.⁸⁸ From which, O glorious Trinity, 20 vouchsafe⁸⁹ of thy goodness to wash me with that blessed blood that issued out of thy tender body, O sweet Savior Christ, in the diverse torments of thy most bitter Passion.

Take from me, good Lord, this lukewarm fashion, or rather key-cold⁹⁰ manner of meditation, and this dullness in praying unto thee. And give me warmth, delight, and quickness in thinking upon thee, and give me thy grace to long for thine holy sacraments, and specially to rejoice in the presence of thy very 25 blessed body, sweet Savior Christ, in the holy sacrament of the altar, and duly to thank thee for thy gracious visitation therewith, and at that high memorial, with tender compassion to remember and consider thy most bitter Passion.

Make us all, good Lord, virtually⁹¹ participant of that holy sacrament this day, and every day make us all lively members, sweet Savior Christ, of thine holy mystical body, thy Catholic Church.

30

*Dignare Domine die isto sine peccato nos custodire.*⁹²

*Miserere nostri Domine, miserere nostri.*⁹³

*Fiat misericordia tua Domine super nos, quemadmodum speravimus in te.*⁹⁴

⁷⁹ dispositions; intentions

⁸⁰ covetousness

⁸¹ reproaching

⁸² insult; scornful triumph or boasting

⁸³ incomparably

⁸⁴ *in ... to*: ordered to

⁸⁵ benefit

⁸⁶ true

⁸⁷ *to thee-ward*: toward thee

⁸⁸ hindrance

⁸⁹ grant

⁹⁰ cold as a key; without heat or fervor

⁹¹ with spiritual effect

⁹² "Deign, O Lord, on that day to preserve us without sin." This and the following psalms comprise the last stanza of the *Te Deum*, a hymn of thanksgiving.

⁹³ "Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us." See Ps 122(123):3.

⁹⁴ "Let your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we have hoped in you." See Ps 32(33):22.

*In te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum.*⁹⁵

*Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei genetrix, ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.*⁹⁶

*Pro Amicis*⁹⁷

5 Almighty God, have mercy on N.⁹⁸ and N., etc., with special meditation and consideration of every friend, as godly affection and occasion requireth.

*Pro Inimicis*⁹⁹

10 Almighty God, have mercy on N. and N., etc., and on all that bear me evil will, and would me harm; and their faults and mine together, by such easy tender merciful means as thine infinite wisdom best can devise, vouchsafe to amend and redress, and make us saved souls in heaven together, where we may ever live and love together with thee and thy blessed saints. O glorious Trinity, for the bitter Passion of our sweet Savior Christ, Amen.

15 Lord, give me patience in tribulation, and grace in everything to conform my will to thine, that I may truly say: *Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo, et in terra.*¹⁰⁰

The things, good Lord, that I pray for, give me the grace to labor for. Amen.

⁹⁵ “In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded.” See Ps 30(31):2.

⁹⁶ “Pray for us, holy mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ” (from the prayer *Salve regina*).

⁹⁷ “For Friends”

⁹⁸ The liturgical abbreviation for the Latin *nomen* (“name”).

⁹⁹ “For Enemies”

¹⁰⁰ “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10).