

# GLIMPSES INTO LUTHER'S DAILY LIFE FROM HIS LETTERS

CH 543 - Light on Luther from his letters  
(based on letters from Luther's Works: American Edition)  
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for Professor A. Schuetze  
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## Prologue: Morning

Luther, at Coburg, is wakened early in the morning by a "diet", a "council", of noisy jackdaws (crows), busily carrying on their business. He saw them as "magnanimous kings, dukes, and other noblemen of the kingdom, who seriously care for their belongings and offspring, and who with untiring voice proclaim their decisions and dogmas through the air" (49:293).<sup>1</sup> As Luther sits here at the Coburg, he busies himself also with prayer, no longer the daily prayers of a monk seeking righteousness through works, but the prayers of a man who entrusts all things to his heavenly Father and knows that He will answer those prayers and promote His Church and Gospel so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. Near the end of the Diet at Augsburg Luther writes that he prays "studiously and ardently" (49:365) for Elector John that all will turn out well, but even before the Diet he trusts that the Lord will answer the prayers of His people, since the Turks had been turned back against the Florentine army, so that the Emperor could come for the Diet. "From this you people can see how much good our prayers do, if we are persistent. ... Word and prayer will fight against [the Turks]" (49:286).

## I. LUTHER: MAN OF PRAYER

### A. Prayer is part of daily life

Luther prays much, and seriously. He also requests the prayers of others on his behalf; very many of his letters close including the words: "Pray for me [or, us]."<sup>2</sup> "Pray for me, because I always pray for you, that God may strengthen your heart" (48:219). He asks for prayers in many different situations: for his health (48:219), when Elector John's foot has gangrene (50:48), when Katie is ill (50:72), when Jonas is recuperating from a stone (56:155), when he feels unproductive (50:79). Many times Luther promises a *Pater noster* for the Duke in troubled times, even into the battlefield.<sup>3</sup> The illness of Luther's father moves the whole family to prayer: "My Katie, Hänschen, Lenchen, Aunt Lena, and all my household send you greetings and pray for you faithfully" (49:271). From the Wartburg, when Philip is carrying on the work in Wittenberg, Luther writes: "I pray for you as for no one else, if my prayer can accomplish something – which I do not doubt" (48:216).

### B. Prayer is intercession

Prayer is powerful and useful not only as intercession, but also in thanksgiving to God, as well as against falsehood and laziness. Luther from the Wartburg writes: "until now I have been sleepy and lazy, both in praying and resisting [Satan]" (48:308), which shows how strongly he considers prayer as a powerful tool against Satan. The Lord hears and answers the prayers of His people: "Let us only pray, for the power of prayer is certainly felt" (49:352); "Here I am sufficiently well off, for it seems that that demon which till now has beaten me with fists, has given up (as if broken by your prayers and those of the brethren)" (49:329). Luther invokes imprecations against the devil in whatever ways he manifests himself. He urges Caspar Müller: "For goodness sake, pray the *Pater noster* at least once against the papacy" (50:127). Even events

of daily life, war, sickness, “natural” occurrences, elicit prayer, because everything is in God’s control. “About the Turk [threatening war] we hear monstrous things. I am praying against him” (50:243). When heat, drought, and forest fires afflict in Thuringia, he urges Katie: “Pray, and have [the children] pray against that horrible Satan who most violently attacks us not only in soul and body but also in property and honor” (50:220, 222). Luther urges prayers also against Karlstadt’s false teaching, but for his conversion to the truth (48:73).

### **C. Prayer is thanksgiving**

After recovery from an illness, he writes to Katie: “Therefore thank God and have the dear little ones, together with Aunt Lena, thank the real Father, for you certainly would have lost this father. ... God has accomplished a miracle in me, and he continues to do it through the intercession of godly people” (50:168). He praises God for restoring Melancthon’s health: “Master Philip truly had been dead, and really, like Lazarus, has risen from death. God, the dear father, listens to our prayers” (50:208-209).

Prayer was an essential part of Luther’s daily life. He could not imagine Christianity without it. The Christian prays; the Church prays. To some pastors of the city of Lübeck, Luther writes:

Among the most important things you must constantly impress upon yourselves as well as upon the people, however, are the prayers and litanies, both private and public, for purity and fruitfulness of the Word, for common peace, [good] government, and for all other matters, [about which] you can read in the litany. (49:263)

These daily prayers are useful in the Church not only through their intercession to God, but also through their didactic character, demonstrating to the people what the Word of God teaches us about prayer and what to pray for.

## **II. LUTHER’S WORK AND STUDY: PREACHER, PROFESSOR, PASTOR**

### **A. Luther as preacher and professor**

Luther saw his work as preaching and proclaiming the Gospel. This he based on his call to be Doctor of the Bible and preacher to the people of Wittenberg. “I am called by the whole congregation at Wittenberg... and since I must confess that I am a humble servant of the congregation to which God has sent me, I had no way of refusing [this call] without rejecting Christian love, trust, and obedience” (48:395).

By God and by the people he was called to preach and teach the Gospel. The work was not his, but the Lord’s. He acknowledges this very clearly toward the end of his life when certain people want to publish a complete collection of his works.

Regarding [the plan] to collect my writings in volumes, I am quite cool and not at all eager about it because ... I would rather see them all devoured. For I acknowledge none of them really a book of mine, except perhaps the one On the Bound Will and the Catechism. Nevertheless I have entrusted the matter to Doctor Caspar Cruciger to see if anything ought to be done. I have an idea that in this case you people will put forth much effort; yet I do pray that our [Lord] Christ does not let you work in vain. (50:172)

While at the Wartburg, Luther missed preaching and teaching very much. He requested several times to know “who fills my pulpit” (48:221, 232). Even on the return trip from the Diet of Worms, he preached at Hersfeld because they compelled him, even though he did not want to put the monastery in danger, and he preached at Eisenach. The Emperor had forbidden Luther to preach on his safe-conduct back to Wittenberg, but Luther defends his actions because, as he says:

I had not consented that the Word of God should be bound... Perhaps you may hear at Worms, therefore, that I broke the safe-conduct by this, but it was not broken. The condition that the Word of God should be bound was not within my power [to uphold], nor did I agree to it; and even if I had agreed to it, it would not have been binding since it would have been against God's will. (48:226)

Luther always felt compelled to put God's Word above everything else, even if it meant suffering death for the sake of the Gospel: “We are to be those who suffer, ... as the sheep for the slaughter, and not avenge or defend ourselves, but give way to God's wrath; Romans 12 [:19]” (49:248). His work, his call from God, is to proclaim the Gospel of salvation through faith in Christ alone. Luther later returned to Wittenberg, where he preached and taught regularly. This was his daily work also.

### **B. Luther as translator and writer**

Luther spent much of his days translating, writing, and lecturing. At his Patmos, his protective exile at the Wartburg, Luther spent many days reading Scripture, translating, and writing for the Church. And though he speaks of being drunk with leisure, his works show no sign of it:

I am sitting here all day, drunk with leisure. I am reading the Bible in Greek and Hebrew. I shall write a German tract on the freedom of auricular confession. I shall also continue working on the Psalms and the Postil as soon as I have received the necessary things from Wittenberg – among which I also expect the unfinished Magnificat. (48:225)

Here he also works on a commentary on Psalm 67 (48:229) and the translation of the Bible into German (48:359, 363). The translation of the Bible is one of the things that compels him to return to Wittenberg (48:372). Although at the Wartburg he is somewhat free from daily routines of his duties at the University and feels “very idle”, he also wisely makes use of the time to read, write, and translate: “I am both very idle and very busy here; I am studying Hebrew and Greek, and am writing without interruption” (48:255).

At the Wartburg Luther was still a monk (48:303), who devoted his entire life to the service of God in prayer and study. Even after renouncing his monastic vows, his entire life continued in devoted service to God in prayer and study, both while alone at the monastery (49:58), and when his family lives there after his marriage to Catherine von Bora (49:115). His work as translator and preacher was a lifelong service to God and the Church. “I myself am now getting ready to translate the prophets into German, and at the same time I shall lecture on Isaiah, so that I may not be idle” (49:165). Translation is very hard work, as Luther acknowledges later on (50:72), but there was desperate need for it and the work brought much fruit to the Gospel.

Luther's intended to put the Word of God and its pure teachings into the hands of the people, which also included the composition of vernacular hymns for the Church, inviting many friends to help with this project:

[Our] plan is to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people [in the] vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, *so that the Word of God may be among the people* also in the form of music. Therefore we are searching everywhere for poets. (49:68). [emphasis added]

### C. Luther as businessman

The world of business was not Luther's realm, but his writing sometimes forced him into it. Wanting things to be done well, he complained about the poor quality of certain printers. From the Wartburg he complains about the poor workmanship of the printer Grünenberg:

I wish I had sent nothing in German! It is printed so poorly, so carelessly and confusedly, to say nothing of the bad type faces and paper... I shall send nothing more until I have seen that these sordid money-grubbers, in printing books, care less for their profits than for the benefit of the reader. ... I have changed my mind and am sending the rest of the Postil. ... But I do not want it to be printed on folio paper with Lotther's type faces (48:292, 296).

Luther had to deal with printers later in life also. From the Coburg he writes to Katie:

How disgusted I am that our printers delay so miserably the work on the manuscript! I sent this manuscript [to the publishing house] so that it should soon be finished [being printed], and [instead the printers] store it away for the winter. If I had wanted to store it in this way, I certainly would have known how to keep it here with me. I have written to you to take the sermon away from Schirlenz (if he has not begun [to work on it]), and to give it to George Rhau (49:403).

Even later, he calls the Leipziger Wolrab, who had printed many tracts against Luther, a scoundrel, because now he had "decided to reprint our German Bible and take the bread out of the mouths of our printers" (50:186). In many respects Luther did not enjoy the world of business. Much of this work he left to Katie.

### D. Luther's pastoral heart

Through all his dealings and all his life, Luther possessed a pastoral heart. Many people came to him for help, and he obliged as much as he could, even giving "secret refuge" to Karlstadt and his family when they had no where else to turn (49:122).

He wrote to Spalatin, advisor to the Elector, about some people to whom he had to give a loan (48:130), concerning taxes and a certain widow who had willed her house to the church and now wanted to change it (48:142), concerning lodging for a prospective Hebrew professor (48:162), and Melancthon's need and deserving of "a more respectable salary" (48:166). He interceded with the Elector for fair punishment for those who erred (49:9), for finding a place for Cruciger's wedding (50:135), for finding jobs for those in need (50:142), and for taking care

of pastors who were expelled (50:98) or who couldn't get along where they were (50:123). For old pastors (who were trained in the papacy) or those who are otherwise incapacitated and for the people of those parishes Luther holds out kind and gentle pastoral advice:

If they are not opposed to the gospel ... [let them] either read the gospel with the Postil to the people, or arrange to have them read. Thus a true ministry of the gospel would be given to the people, whom the pastors ought to nourish. For it would not be good to put these men out [of their offices] without any recompense, if they are not against the gospel. (49:138-139)

Throughout his life he retained a heartfelt concern for his people. It caused him to return from the Wartburg (48:248), and to write to his aged parents when they were near death (49:269, 50:18-21). His pastoral heart points them to the Gospel, to saving faith in Christ, and the blessed hope of heaven. To his father: "(May God grant it to happen whether here or there) [that] we may joyfully see each other again. For our faith is certain, and we don't doubt that we shall shortly see each other again in the presence of Christ" (49:271). To his mother: "Dear Mother, you also know the true center and foundation of your salvation from whom you are to seek comfort in this and all troubles, namely, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone... [Jesus says:] I live, and you will live also, and no one will take your joy from you" (50:19,21). Seven times in that letter he repeats to his mother Jesus' words: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

### III. LUTHER'S STRUGGLES

Besides his hard work, Luther had many other struggles in his life, struggles of conscience and of heart. He was bothered at times with loneliness, with spiritual afflictions that he called *Anfechtungen*, and with his health, which troubled so much of his daily life.

#### A. Loneliness

Four times especially Luther had to deal with loneliness and separation from his friends and loved ones: at the Wartburg, at the Coburg, and twice because of the plague in Wittenberg. The Wartburg exile was especially lonely because he had been banned by the Emperor and was made an outlaw; he didn't know what more would come of his life—he felt "half alive" (48:232). Even after he returns to Wittenberg he writes: "I daily expect death and the punishment due to a heretic" (49:93). During his stay at the Wartburg, his Patmos, he is frustrated because he wants to stand up in public for the Word of God (48:221). He misses his friends: "I am alone and you are not helping me" (48:308). He writes to Melancthon: "Be sure to write everything that happens and how everything is" (48:217). He sends greetings to many people through Melancthon and insists: "You must as a matter of necessity take care of these greetings" (48:236). This shows Luther's concern and longing for his friends and colleagues while he is away.

In the "wilderness" of the Wartburg he contents himself with bird-watching "in the land of the birds that sing sweetly in the branches and praise God with all their power night and day" (48:236), with hunting (48:295), with reading and writing. Yet even the hunting trip he turns into an allegory, in which he sees the pope and Satan hunting and attacking souls that have been saved, like these innocent little creatures, hares and partridges (48:295).

Luther also suffers loneliness when the University students and professors move out of Wittenberg twice because of the plague. The town must have been very quiet during these times. In 1527 Jonas and his family move to Nordhausen to escape the plague, causing Luther to write: "I wish that we could live together again, and could publish our work on Ecclesiastes before we die. Remember me in your prayers" (49:176). To John Brenz he confides: "Pomer

sends greetings; he is my only companion, since all others have gone because of fear of the plague" (49:179). When the plague subsides, Luther eagerly awaits Jonas' return: "The Lord keep you, and shortly bring you and yours back to us. Amen" (49:184). Luther's loneliness in Wittenberg returns once more in 1535 with a recurrence of the plague: "In all these matters I need you people here. But I am forced to carry these burdens alone and answer by myself because of that plague (that is, the devil), which rejoices that it is able to keep us apart for such a long time" (50:111).

Luther's deepest loneliness, however, seems to come at the Coburg in 1530, for several reasons: he is now married and has a family; everyone has to wait for the Emperor to arrive for the Diet of Augsburg to begin; his friends do not communicate enough with him; and they are presenting the first real public confession of the Lutheran Church. Castle Coburg is pleasant and comfortable, but Luther was not a loner: "This place is certainly extremely pleasant and most suited for studying, except that your absence makes it a sad place" (49:288-289). Several times he writes to Melancthon, asking what is going on: "In my last letter, my Philip, I wrote that we were annoyed because you people had let the messenger return to us empty-handed... for you must know that we here in the wilderness, as in a dry land, are longing for letters from you people from which we may learn of all your affairs" (49:316-317); "we shall compete with you in the matter of silence" (49:320); "we in the meantime were thirsty and hungry for more than three weeks, thanks to your silence" (49:336); and to Catherine he says: "We have not yet received anything from Augsburg, but are waiting all hours [of the day] for a message or letter" (49:399-400).

## **B. Health**

Health was also a constant battle for the Reformer. As early as April 1521, on the way to Worms, Luther writes: "I am coming, my Spalatin, although Satan has done everything to hinder me with more than one disease. All the way from Eisenach to here I have been sick; I am still sick in a way which previously has been unknown to me" (48:198). In the Wartburg his bout of digestive problems afflicted him from mid-May until the end of July and progresses from painful (48:217) to "bad" (48:219) to "more than ever" (48:255), until he gets some medicine which helps the situation (48:269, 270, 276). This made his daily work very difficult. Finally in October he declares relief: "I need no further medication, and I am again completely healthy as before. Thanks be to God!" (48:316). But as in all his daily life Luther sees here too the workings of God: here he gives thanks for relief; earlier he thanks God for this "relic of the holy cross" (48:307). Luther's health continued to give him problems at various times in his life: digestive problems (50:87, 291); gallstone and kidney stones (49:147, 50:167, 170); fainting spells and headaches (49:169, 50:54, 290); colds and coughs (50:108, 125, 128). During later years his health gradually failed, yet he kept teaching: "I am more dead than alive... the stone and much else weigh me down" (50:242). He kept Katie informed of his health, even thanking her for trying a remedy (50:168). He tries to ease her mind by letting her know when he is doing well (49:400, 418); sleeping well (50:48); "chipper and healthy", "eat[ing] like a Bohemian and drink[ing] like a German" (50:208, 218, 306).

## **C. Anfechtungen**

Luther's greatest struggles indeed were within his own soul, the assaults and attacks of Satan, his *Anfechtungen* (afflictions, trials, temptations). Luther had struggled with these much more in his early life, seeking to please God by his works of righteousness, which drove him almost to despair in the monastery. Satan continued to afflict him, as he afflicts all Christians,

with doubts and worries and troubling thoughts. These *Anfechtungen*, too, were part of Luther's daily life. His letters present this mostly from the time at the Wartburg. One of the most explicit passages depicts one of his deepest afflictions:

Your high opinion of me shames and tortures me, since – unfortunately – I sit here like a fool and hardened in leisure, pray little, do not sigh for the church of God, yet burn in a big fire of my untamed body. In short I should be ardent in spirit, but I am ardent in the flesh, in lust, laziness, leisure, and sleepiness. I do not know whether God has turned away from me since you all do not pray for me. ... Already eight days have passed in which I have written nothing, in which I have not prayed or studied; this is partly because of temptations of the flesh, partly because I am tortured by other burdens. (48:257)

Luther's problems were not helped at this time by his poor health, but there seems to be something more behind this. Not long after this he writes: "In this seclusion I am drowning in sins" (48:263). Part of these afflictions may also be caused by the loneliness, the lack of people to talk with who will share these burdens. He says:

In this leisurely solitude I am exposed to a thousand devils. It is so much easier to fight the devil incarnate – that is, people – than the spirits of iniquity in heavenly places. Often I fall, but the right hand of the Most High raises me again. Therefore I yearn again and again for companionship. (48:319)

Luther felt his sins and temptations very acutely (48:357). Troubling thoughts come again when the Jonas family must leave because of the plague (49:186) and when he is alone at Coburg (49:295). Another time he writes: "I am now so worn down by certain vexations of Satan that I am unable to write more" (50:174). Again he writes about his "personal wars with Satan" (50:183), asking for prayers of intercession: "I write nothing about myself except to ask you to pray in my behalf that the Lord may free me from the blows and the thorns of the angel of Satan, and that according to His will He may grant me a good hour when I am to be delivered from this misery" (50:184). Luther's spiritual troubles afflicted him many times, but they were deepest when he was removed from friends who could preach the gospel to him. Yes, he knew the Gospel and believed it with all his heart; he was willing to die for it. Yet he who treasured the saving Word of God and Holy Absolution had no one to preach to him and no one to absolve him. Perhaps we learn more from this about the blessed means of grace than about Luther's personal struggles. Like David's harp, the Gospel in Word and Sacraments drives away the messenger of Satan, soothes our conscience, and gives us the Spirit's peace. Sometimes it is hardest for the preacher to apply the Gospel to himself.

#### **IV. LUTHER'S HOME LIFE: MARRIAGE, FAMILY, & CHILDREN**

##### **A. Luther on marriage**

Luther's views on marriage are intriguing. As a monk, marriage was not open to him at all. When the liberated monks begin taking wives (while Luther is at the Wartburg), he expresses almost a delightful surprise, certainly excluding himself: "Good Lord! Will our people at Wittenberg give wives even to the monks? They will not push a wife on me!" (48:290). In the meantime Luther very joyfully congratulates those who are getting married: Bernhardt (48:231), Karlstadt (48:363), and later Spalatin (49:164). Luther writes very positively concerning

marriage: "I consider marriage to be a paradise, even if it has to endure greatest poverty" (48:321). Innumerable times he sends greetings to man and wife and children when he writes letters.

The idea of getting Luther a wife seemed to be a running joke for a while (48:303). Now having decided to marry Catherine von Bora, he reverses the joke and considers this one more way to spite the devil and to declare his stand on God's Word: "If I can manage it, before I die I will still marry my Katie to spite the devil... I still hope to live for a little while... I also did not want to reject this unique [opportunity to obey] my father's wish for progeny" (49:111, 117). It may seem odd to us that Luther at first speaks of no passionate love for his spouse, yet he very plainly says: "I cherish her" (49:117). His love and appreciation for Catherine, her help and love and companionship, grew over the years. Though he loves to joke with her and needle about her worries (50:305), her frugality (hiding the pewter dish, 49:150), her "negligence" (50:174), yet he esteems her very highly. Not completely in jest, but also with deepest love and respect he addresses her in the letters as "my rib" (49:154), "Lord Catherine, doctor and preacher... Sir Katie" (49:236), "the empress" (49:267), "Gracious Lady" (50:208), "wise woman and doctor" (49:209), "Your Grace" (50:208, 210, 218), "holy lady" (50:305); signing himself "Your obedient servant" (49:238), "Your loving Martin Luther" (50:223, 292, 304), or "Your Holiness' willing servant" (50:306).

Luther respects Katie so much that he entrusts much of the household management to her able care. Katie is to deal with the printer who does not print Luther's writings soon enough (49:403). "She drives the wagon, takes care of the fields, buys and puts cattle out to pasture, brews, etc." (50:108-109). Katie brews the beer (50:81); prepares food for the graduation banquet (50:94); runs not only the Wittenberg household, but also the Zölsdorf estate with its barn and fish-pond (50:208 n.12, 50:286), including selling what she needs to in order to come home (50:225). She also is in charge of renting horses (50:167), selling linen (50:113), and making sure the servant doesn't "neglect the mulberries by oversleeping" (50:212). When writing to her about renovating the house, he simply makes suggestions as to how she could have it constructed, leaving it to her charge (50:216-217). He even invites her opinion on which candidate is to be sent to a certain parish:

As a wise woman and doctor, you, with master George Major and Master Ambrose, might also give counsel as to which of the three candidates I suggested to Pomer might be convinced [to go]. It is not a bad parish. Yet you people are wise and will find a better solution [than I suggested]. (50:209)

Luther also encourages her to read and study the Bible and the Catechism (50:109, 113, 302). He considers the wife so much a part of the husband, that he often refers to wives as the husband's "Rib" (49:147, 202). He felt that close bond also with his Katie (49:154).

## **B. Luther and children**

In his letters we see Luther as a tender and loving father of his children. At their birth he rejoices: "My dear Katie, by God's grace, gave to me a Hansen Luther" [punning in the letter on sun and son] (49:152); "God in his great goodness has blessed me with a healthy and vigorous son, John, a little Luther" (49:154); "Katie was delivered of a little daughter [Elizabeth]. Glory and praise be to the Father in heaven" (49:181); "she gave birth to a healthy baby daughter [Magdalen] without difficulties. The Lord has blessed us so richly that she had an

uncomplicated delivery; to him be glory forever" (49:218, 220). He also took care that the children be baptized as soon as possible to have the assurance of their salvation:

I am therefore asking Your Honor [Nicholas von Amsdorf] for God's sake to assume a Christian office, to be the spiritual father of the said little heathen, and to help her to the holy [Christian faith] through the heavenly, precious sacrament of baptism. Thus you would be the catechist of my daughter [Magdalen]. (49:219)

I ask Your Honor [John Löser] again to humble yourself in God's honor, and to appear in assistance of my young son [Paul], whom God has given to me this night by my dear Katie, so that he may come out of the old Adam's nature to the rebirth in Christ through the holy sacrament of baptism, and may become a member of sacred Christendom. ... I would like very much to have him baptized around the Vesper hour so that he remain a heathen no longer, and I might become the more assured [of his salvation]. (50:74)

Luther's love for his children is seen in how often he mentions them in his letters<sup>4</sup>, even concerning himself with little things: "My little John thanks you, excellent Nicholas, for the rattle. He is very proud of it, and delighted with it" (49:203); "My daughter Margaret thanks you for your gift [of money, James Propst]" (50:246); at Coburg: "I have also [received] the picture of Lenchen. At first I did not recognize the little strumpet [an affectionate term], so dark she appeared to me to be" (49:312)<sup>5</sup>; "I have for Hansen Luther a big fine piece of sugar [candy] which Cyriac has brought from Nürnberg from the pretty garden" (49:419); he also mentions sending a "silver apple" for the children to divide up (50:210), but another time he can find no gift:

Kiss young Hans for me; keep after Hänschen, Lenchen, and Aunt Lena to pray for the dear Sovereign and for me. I am unable to find anything to buy for the children in this town even though there is now a fair here. If I am unable to bring anything special along, please have something ready for me. (50:50)

Luther's tender heart shows itself in one of the most difficult trials in anyone's life, the loss of a child. Luther lost daughters Elizabeth and Magdalen.

My baby daughter, little Elizabeth, has passed away. It is amazing what a sick, almost woman-like heart she has left to me, so much has grief for her overcome me. Never before would I have believed that a father's heart could have such tender feelings for his child. Do pray to the Lord for me. (49:203)

My dearest daughter Magdalen has been reborn in Christ's eternal kingdom. I and my wife should only joyfully give thanks for such a felicitous departure and blessed end by which Magdalen has escaped the power of the flesh, the world, the Turk, and the devil; yet the force of [our] natural love is so great that we are unable to do this without crying and grieving in [our] hearts, or even without experiencing death ourselves. (50:238)

He also comforts others who have suffered such a loss:

Your dear son, John Zink, whom you sent here to study with us, was overtaken by a severe illness and, although nothing was spared in the way of care, attention, and medicine, the disease became too powerful and took your son away, carrying him off to heaven, to our Lord Jesus Christ. We were all very fond of the boy; he was especially dear to me... Accordingly we all are deeply grieved by his death. We would have been very happy to have him saved, and to keep him with us, had this been at all possible. But he was even dearer to God, who desired to have him. (50:51)

As a Christian father and pastor, Luther also had and shared the comfort of eternal life as we see from this letter and also what he says concerning the death of his Elizabeth: "The Lord has taken my little Elizabeth, that she may not see any evil" (49:213). Though Luther knows that Magdalen departed this life "to the true Father in heaven" (50:235), he himself cannot yet overcome his grief enough to thank God for this, so he asks his dear friend, Justus Jonas, to do so:

You, therefore, please give thanks to God in our stead! For indeed God did a great work of grace to us when he glorified our flesh in this way. Magdalen had (as you know) a mild and lovely disposition and was loved by all. Praised be the Lord Jesus Christ who has called, elected, and made her glorious. God grant me, and all my [loved] ones, and all our friends such a death – or rather, such a life. This alone I ask of God, the Father of all comfort and mercies. (50:238)

Luther loved other people's children as well, congratulating their parents and greeting them often in his letters: "I congratulate you [Wenceslas Link] on the birth of your daughter Margaret, who has been given to you as a gift of God. I have looked forward to this with great eagerness so that you, too, might experience 'the natural affection of parents for their children'" (49:166); "Greet your Else with her cluster of grapes" (to Agricola, 49:213); "Please give one gulden to the newborn, another to the mother in childbirth confinement so that she can have wine and have enough milk [for nursing]; for were I present, I would of course be godfather" (48:222); "Visit my family, and also the Pomeranian Rome and his little Quirites" (50:156); "My Katie greets you [Spalatin] reverently; she is sorry that she brought along nothing in the line of a present for your daughters, but she is now having some little books bound, which she has decided to send as a memento" (50:170).

Some of Luther's most touching words concern his son John (Hans, Hänschen). Of course in his most famous letter to Hans he describes a beautiful garden where there are many "children who like to pray, study, and be good" (49:323). In this letter he also mentions Hans' little friends, Lippus Melanchthon and Jost Jonas. As Hans grows up, Luther speaks of him as "set on really growing up" (50:129). Luther encourages his son in his studies:

Thus far, my dearest son, your studies and the letters you have written to me have been a pleasure for me. If you continue this way then not only will you please me, your father who loves you, but you also will very much benefit yourself... God, who has commanded children to be obedient to their parents, has also promised his blessing to obedient children. See to it that you have only this blessing before your eyes, and that you do not let yourself be diverted from

it by any evil example... Your mother cordially greets you; so do Aunt Lena and your sisters and brothers, all of whom are looking forward to a successful progress and conclusion of your studies. (50:152)

Luther signs this letter "Your Father according to the flesh and spirit" (50:152). Later John is entrusted to the tutelage of Marcus Crodel and Johann Walther in Torgau: "so that you may add him to the boys who are to be drilled in grammar and music. Also, keep an eye on his conduct and correct it... If I see success with this son, then soon, if I live, you will also have my other two sons" [Martin and Paul] (50:231-232). Luther had also sent along his nephew, Florian von Bora, who apparently stole a knife from young Paul Luther on the trip. Luther immediately writes Crodel to punish him on three consecutive days for bullying Paul, for lying, and for actually stealing the knife (50:234). Just a few days later Luther has to send a carriage to bring John home because Magdalen is ill and near death. When John returns to school, he is still grieving, apparently having misunderstood something his mother had said, and at Christmas has a hard time. His kindly father offers encouragement:

I and your Mother, along with the whole house, are fine. You see to it that you overcome those tears like a man, so that you do not cause your Mother additional pain and worry... She wishes you to put aside this mourning so that you may study in a happy and peaceful frame of mind (50:240).

A few years later John takes brothers Martin and Paul to visit relatives in Mansfeld (50:291, 312). Father Luther also makes sure that the children are watched over even after his death: "My lord Katie greets you [James Propst], and so does your godchild, my daughter little Margaret, for whom you will please provide a decent suitor after my death" (50:184).

Luther shows his love for all children by thanking Elector John for having such a wonderful kingdom where the Word of God is taught to children so freely:

Surely Your Electoral Grace's territory has more excellent pastors and preachers than any other territory in the whole world, and their faithful, pure teaching helps to preserve peace. As a consequence, the young people, both boys and girls, grow up so well instructed in the Catechism and the Scriptures that I am deeply moved when I see that young boys and girls can pray, believe, and speak more of God and Christ than they ever could in the monasteries, foundations, and schools of bygone days, or even of our day. Truly, Your Electoral Grace's territory is a beautiful paradise for such young people; there is no other place like it in all the world. (49:307)

### **C. Luther and his family**

Luther's marriage and family probably also influenced his relationship with his parents and siblings. An early letter of Luther shows that even though relations had become strained between them because of Martin's decision to join the monastery, Luther still loved and respected his father, wanting him to be present at his first mass, and his father obliged (48:4). In later life Luther asks his father to forgive his actions from when he "was still clothed in hot youth" and to see how God made great use of his son, Martin, to free many other children for their parents:

But behold how much good God (whose mercies are without number and whose wisdom is without end) has made to come out of all these errors and sins! ... Thus I hope that he has taken from you one son in order that he may begin to help the sons of many others through me (48:333, 336).

Luther's letter to his very ill father exudes deep love and respect:

It would be great joy for me, however, if it were possible for you and mother to be brought here to us ... I pray from the bottom of my heart that the Father, who has made you my father and given you to me, will strengthen you according to his immeasurable kindness (49:268-269).

Luther's love for his father shows itself most profoundly when he receives word that his father has died:

My very dear father, Hans Luther the Elder, departed from this life on Exaudi Sunday at one o'clock. This death has certainly thrown me into sadness, thinking not only [of the bonds of nature] but also of the very kind love [my father had for me]; for through him my Creator has given me all that I am and have. ... the pity of heart and the memory of the most loving dealing[s] with him have shaken me in the innermost parts of my being, so that seldom if ever have I despised death as much as I do now. (49:319)

Luther's deepest concern was that his parents were in heaven: "[My father], strong in faith in Christ, had gently fallen asleep" (49:319) ... "For our faith is certain, and we don't doubt that we shall shortly see each other again in the presence of Christ" (49:271). To his mother: "[Jesus says:] I live, and you will live also, and no one will take your joy from you" (50:21).

#### **D. The Luther home**

Luther's home was the former Augustinian monastery. Even in those days as a monk, he sometimes had to concern himself with upkeep and daily affairs at the monastery. He writes to Elector Frederick for help in having a room (probably a kitchen) built at the cloister (48:120, 125). In the same letter he reminds Frederick of the white cowl that he had been promised, apparently for writing the Galatians commentary, and suggests that perhaps he should have a black one now for the Psalter (48:121).

The "black cloister" became the Luther family home after his marriage to Catherine, well furnished home for its time. Luther was concerned about his family and household having the things they needed. He sends for "some tools for boring and turning" so that he and his servant Wolfgang can operate a lathe that they have (49:158). He thanks Link for the tools as well as a quadrant and clock that he had sent (49:166). In another letter he mentions a clock again, perhaps the same one: "Perhaps worn out from the trip, or unaccustomed to its new home, it is sometimes quiet; but it seems, as time goes on, that it resumes its movement. My thanks to you. I, a poor man, have nothing to give in return" (49:220). Also at Luther's request (49:158), Link sends some seeds for spring gardening, prompting a later reply: "The melons, or pumpkins, are growing and want to take up an immense amount of space; so do the gourds and watermelons. Don't think you sent the seeds in vain!" (49:167).

Shortly after his marriage, Luther gets a new mattress for him and his bride (49:142). Another item in the Luther house, a “little pewter dish”, created some fun between husband and wife. Luther wanted to send it to Agricola, but apparently Katie had hidden it (49:151). Link also sent them a small washbasin, and a two-arm candelabrum (50:16). In remodeling their home, Luther sends suggestions to Katie as to how they could construct some windows in the new roof.

The Luther home, although quite large, was often filled with many boarders and dinner guests. Many University students not only ate at Luther's home, but some also boarded there. They could not even accommodate them all: “For several reasons I would have liked to have Kegel as a boarder; but since the students are returning from Jena my table is filled, and I cannot simply oust the old companions” (50:126). To his friend, Nicholas Hausmann, he writes: “I am thinking about calling you away from there and making you a member of my household, so that finally you can enjoy peace and quietness” (50:149). Doctor Jerome Weller had been staying with the Luther's (50:149). They even housed Karlstadt and family for some time (49:122). In another case Luther writes: “Two excellent and learned brethren [have come to us] from lower Germany. Of course, we, who are poor enough ourselves, are flooded with poor people who come from all over. Yet we decided to feed them both, according to our ability” (50:182).

Writing to Katie, Luther often adds greetings to the extended household: “With this I commend you to God, together with our young ones and all the members of our household” (50:81); “Greetings to our children, the boarders, and all” (50:223); “With this I commend you and the whole house to God; give my greetings to all the table companions” (50:292). Of course, while here we naturally think of Luther's famous Table Talk, those friends also enjoyed eating, good conversation, and singing together. Of that one fine student, already mentioned, who died from a severe illness, Dr. Luther informs the parents of the closeness he shared with their son: “We were all very fond of the boy; he was especially dear to me – so that I made use of him many an evening for singing in my house” (50:51).

### **E. Luther and food**

Around that table they shared some very fine food. Food is mentioned not so seldom in Luther's letters. In their garden they grew melons, pumpkins, gourds, and watermelons (49:167). At the Coburg they were eating bunches of ripe grapes (49:402). Venison is highly prized, for they have it at Aurogallus' wedding (49:5). Elector John Frederick also presented some venison to the Luther's (50:122). Other gifts of food include oranges (50:16), hare and birds (50:110), wine (50:130), fish (50:175), and a trout (50:312). He writes to Michael Stifel that he will soon visit his cherry orchards “with many cherry-loving boys” (50:27). Catherine is to make sure that their servant does not “neglect the mulberries by oversleeping... Also, he should tap the wine at the right time” (50:212).

Katie is chief cook for the graduation banquet and sends money for Jonas to bring “poultry or fowl... sparrows... rabbit or similar meaty delicacies” (50:94-95). Luther asks Melancthon to inform them how many will be coming (50:86). While away from home Luther misses Katie's beer: “what good wine and beer I have at home, and also [what] a pretty lady or (should I say) lord. You would do well to ship the whole cellar full of my wine and a bottle of your beer to me here, as soon as you are able” (50:81); “Please see to it that you have a good glass of beer waiting for us” (50:221). He also mentions “good beer from Torgau and good wine from the Rhine” (50:287) and the beer from Naumberg “which tastes to me almost like the beer from Mansfeld which you praised to me” (50:291, 304). We can just imagine Luther eating like a Bohemian and drinking like a German as he said (50:208, 218).

### **F. Luther as friend, helper, good citizen**

Luther treasured his friends and friendship. He pokes fun at Melanchthon's fascination with astrology (50:86). He jokes about his servant being so forgetful that he might forget to oversleep (50:212). He enjoys good company for dinner at home and away. In Altenburg at dinner they had a game in verses, trying to outdo each other in clever poetry (50:156). He looks forward to friendly sweet revenge on Spalatin for sending an "unsealed letter" (49:413), because Spalatin had reprimanded him earlier for not signing a letter. He sends a dog to Wenceslas Link "so you no longer need shake your finger at me" (49:21). Luther cherished his friends and loved sharing good fun with them.

Luther was generous and helpful to others as much as possible. Katie is to give John Rischman ten gulden on his departure from Wittenberg (50:49). He asks Spalatin to intercede with the Elector to be fair in punishing a poor fisherman who "made a mistake and on only one occasion fished too close to the waters of my Most Gracious Lord" (49:9). He writes Spalatin again to help in various cases (50:98, 99, 142). He also writes to the Elector about the disrepair of the city wall and the danger it now poses (50:25).

### **Epilogue: Evening**

All of these glimpses give us a picture of Luther as a kind and caring man, devoted to the Word of God, not simply an ivory-tower scholar, but also a tender individual who loved his family and friends, who strove to be a good pastor, professor, and citizen. It shows us that in all his dealings and in all his daily life he prized the Word of God above all else.

A final glimpse depicts Luther's evenings, a model and lesson for all Christians. From the Wartburg Luther wrote to Melanchthon: "All of you, do not be downcast but sing the Lord's hymn which is appointed for the night [Psalm 42]. I will sing too; and so let us be anxious only for the Word" (48:233). At Spalatin's request, Luther wrote about how a priest should study and his reply depicts how Luther felt about evening, reminiscent of his instructions for evening prayer:

In the evening take something from holy Scripture in your heart to bed with you, so that, like a clean animal chewing its cud, you may gently fall asleep. But it shouldn't be much, rather something short, well thought through and understood, which you, in the morning when you arise, can readily recall as a left-over from the previous evening. Likewise in all study of holy Scripture, you must despair completely of your own intellect and work, but with fear and humility pray the Lord to give understanding. Therefore, when you approach the Bible, first raise your eyes and heart to Christ and with a quick sigh implore his grace. Frequently do this while you read, namely, that you say and think: Grant, Lord, that I may understand this correctly, and what is more, also put it into practice.<sup>6</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> References to *Luther's Works: American Edition* are notated by volume and page number in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> Just a few examples are: 48:26, 42, 194, 256, 364; 49:20, 142, 221, 237, 286; 50:17, 108, 246, 287.

<sup>3</sup> 50:69, 71, 84, 100, 119, 186, 205, 255, also once for the King of Denmark 50:250, once for Count Albrecht of Mansfeld 50:283

<sup>4</sup> Besides the references cited here, Luther also speaks of his children in these places: (49:169, 49:173, 50:210).

<sup>5</sup> Luther goes on here to give Katie advice on weaning Lenchen.

<sup>6</sup> *Luther's Sämmtliche Werke*, St. Louis Edition, XV col. 2446, translation by A. Schuetze.