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Directions how to conduct yourself in your Christian course
(A letter by Jonathan Edwards, addressed to a young lady in the year 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 your church, inclines me to do anything in my power, to contribute to the spiritual joy and prosperity of God's people there.

1. I would advise you to keep up as great an effort and earnestness in religion, as if you knew yourself to be in a state of nature, and were seeking conversion. We advise people 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 lack of this, many people, 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;' whereas, if they had done as the apostle did, (Philippians 3:12-14) their path would have been 'as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day.'

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 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 corruption remaining, that they still need to have that work of God wrought upon them, further to enlighten and enliven them, that shall be bringing them more and more 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 who, in other respect, 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 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 godly; 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.' And be often confessing your old sins to God, and let that text be often in your mind, (Ezekiel 16:63.) 'that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more, because of your shame, when I am pacified toward you for all that you have done, says the Lord God.'

5. Remember, that you have more cause, on some accounts, a thousand times, to lamest and humble 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; 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 Â—come to Christ as Mary Magdalene 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 perfume out of h er pure broken alabaster jar! "There was a woman who was a notorious sinner in that city. When she learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's home, she took an alabaster jar of perfume and knelt at His feet behind Him. She was cryin g and began to wash His feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. Then she kissed His feet over and over again, a nointing them constantly with the perfume." (Luke 7:37-38)

8. Remember that pride is the worst viper that is in the heart, the greatest disturber of the souls peace, and of swee t 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 deceitful of all lusts, and often creeps insensibl y into the midst of religion, even, sometimes, under the disguise of humility itself. "To fear the Lord is to hate evil. I hate arrogant pride, evil conduct, and perverse speech." (Proverbs 8:13)

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 t hose that most engage and fix your heart, in a full and firm disposition to deny yourself for God, and to spend and be sp ent for him.

10. If at any time you fall into doubts about the state of your soul, in dark and dull frames of mindÂ—it is proper to r eview your past experience; but do not consume too much time and strength in this way. Rather apply yourself, with all y our might, to an earnest pursuit after renewed experience, new light, and new lively acts of faith and love. One new disc overy of the glory of Christ's face will do more toward scattering clouds of darkness in one minute, than examining old ex perience, 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 ha ve fear cast out any other way, than by the reviving and prevailing of love to God in the heart. By this, fear will be effectu ally 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. Remember that you are speaking to your equalsÂ—let your warnings be intermixed with expressions of your sense of your own unworthiness, a nd of the sovereign grace that makes you differ.

13. If you would set up pious meetings of young women by yourselves, to be attended once in a while, besides the other meetings that you attend, I would 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 othersÂ—set apart a day for secret prayer and fasting by yourself alone; and let the day be spent, not only in petitions fo r the mercies you desire, but in searching your heart, and in looking over your past life, and confessing your sins before GodÂ—not as it accustomed to be done in public prayer, but by a very particular rehearsal before God of the sins of you r 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 true religion on your account. How holy shoul d the children of God, the redeemed and the beloved of the Son of God, behave themselves! Therefore, 'walk as childre n of the light, and of the day,' and 'adorn the doctrine of God your Savior.' And especially, abound in what are called the Christian virtuesÂ—which make you like the Lamb of God. Be meek and humble of heart, and full of pure, heavenly, and humble love to all. Abound in deeds of love to others, and self-denial for others. Let there be in you a disposition to acco unt others better than yourself.

16. In all your daily living, walk with God, and follow Christ, as a little, poor, helpless child, taking hold of Christ's ha nd, 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 h e has now begun, until the world shall be full of his glory.