

The Personal Letters of Martin Luther

This is one of the finest letters written by Martin Luther. It expresses his faith, emotional ties between a son and his parents, and spiritual counsel. We do not know the exact date of the birth year of Luther's father, Hans, but we do know that Martin Luther is age 47 and his father is likely in his 70's and suffering from the English fever or severe sweating. Death was often a result of dehydration. Hans Luther died on May 29, 1530.



Portrait of Hans and Margarethe Luther by Lucas Cranach

February 15, 1530 (To Hans Luther, my father, living in Mansfeld)

“Dear Father: James, my brother, has written me that you are seriously ill. (likely the flu or the sweating sickness) As the weather is now bad, and there is danger everywhere, and because of the season, I am worried about you. For even though God has thus far given to and preserved for you a strong, tough body, yet your age gives me anxious thoughts at this time – although regardless of this worry, none of us is, or should be, sure of his life at any time. Therefore because of these circumstances I would have liked to come to you personally, but my good friends advised me against it, and have talked me out of it. I myself have to agree, for I did not dare to venture into danger at the risk of tempting God, since you know how lords and peasants feel toward me. It would be a great joy for me if it were possible for you and mother to be brought here to us; this my Katie, too, desires with tears, and we all join her in this. I hope we would be able to take care of you in the best way.

In the meantime 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, and enlighten and preserve you with His Spirit, so that you may perceive with joy and thanksgiving the blessed teaching concerning His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to which you have been called and have come out of the former terrible darkness and error. I hope that His grace, which has given you such knowledge (of your redemption) and begun His work in you, will persevere and complete His work up to the arrival of the future life and the joyous return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

God has also sealed this teaching and faith in you and has confirmed them with marks; (Galatians 6:17) that is, because of me, you, together with all of us, have suffered such slander, disgrace, scorn, mockery, contempt, hatred, hostility, and even danger. These are but the true marks with which we have to become identical to our Lord Christ, as St. Paul says in Romans 8:17, so that we may also become identified with His future glory.

Therefore let your heart now be bold and confident in your illness, for we have there, in the life beyond, a true and faithful helper at God's side, Jesus Christ, who for us has strangled death, together with sin, and now sits in heaven for us; together with all the angels He is looking down on us, and awaiting us, so that when we are to depart, we dare not worry or fear that we might sink or fall to the ground. His power over death and sin is too great for them to harm us. He is so wholeheartedly faithful and righteous that He cannot forsake us, nor would He wish to do so; He wishes only that we desire His help without doubting His promise, for He has said, promised, and pledged His help. He will not and cannot lie to us, nor trick us; there is no doubt about this. ***‘Ask,’ He says, ‘and it will be given to you; seek and you will find, knock, and it will be opened to you.’*** (Matthew 7:7) And elsewhere, ***‘All who call on the name of the Lord will be***

saved.’ (Acts 2:21) The whole Psalter is full of such comforting promises, especially Psalm 91, which is particularly good to be read by all who are sick.”

I wished to talk this over with you in writing, because I am anxious about your illness for we know not the hour, so that I might participate in your faith, temptation (struggle), consolation, and gratitude to God for His holy Word, which in these days He has given to us so richly, powerfully, and graciously. Should it be His divine will, however, for you to wait still longer for that better life, and to continue to suffer with us in this troubled and sorrowful vale of tears, and to see and hear sadness, or, together with all Christians, to assist others in enduring and overcoming this sadness, then he will also give you the grace to accept all this willingly and obediently. This cursed life (sinful life) is nothing but a real vale of tears, in which the longer a man lives, the more sin, wickedness, torment, and sadness he sees and feels. Nor is there respite or cessation of all of this until we are buried; then of course this sadness has to stop and let us sleep contentedly in Christ’s peace, until He comes again to wake us with joy. Amen.

Herewith I commend you to Him who loves you more than you love yourself. He has proved His love by taking your sins upon Himself and by paying for them with His blood, and he has let you know this through the gospel, and has given it to you freely to believe this by His Spirit. Consequently, He has prepared and sealed everything in the most certain way, so that you are not permitted to worry about or be concerned for anything except keeping your heart strong and reliant on His Word and faith. If you do this then let Him care for the rest. He will see to it that everything turns out well.

Indeed, He has already accomplished this in the best way, better than we can understand. May He, our dear Lord and Savior, be with you and at your side, so that God may grant it to happen either here (Wittenberg) or there (Mansfeld), and we may 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. For the departure from this life is a smaller thing than if I moved from you in Mansfeld to here, or if you moved from me in Wittenberg to Mansfeld. (sic) This is certainly true; it is only a matter of an hour’s sleep, and all will be different.

I hope that in these matters your pastor and preacher will abundantly demonstrate their faithful service to you, so that you will not need my words. Yet I could not refrain from excusing my physical absence, which God knows causes me heartfelt sorrow. My Katie, Hanschen (Johannes), Lenchen (Magdalen), Aunt Lena (relative of Katie and former nun), and all my household send you greetings and pray for you faithfully. Greet my dear mother and all my relatives. God’s grace and strength be and abide with you forever. Amen.

Your loving son,
Martin Luther

For He
shall give His
angels
O charge
over you, to
keep you
in all
your ways.
Psalm 91:11