

## Letter to a Suffering Friend by John Newton

September 28, 1774.

My dearest sir,

I see the necessity of having, if possible, my principles at my fingers' ends, that I may apply them as occasions arise every hour.

Certainly, if my ability was equal to my inclination, I would remove your tumor with a word or a touch; I would exempt you instantly and constantly from every inconvenience and pain.

But you are in the hands of One who could do all this and more, and who loves you infinitely better than I can do, and yet he is pleased to permit you to suffer. What is the plain inference? Certainly, that at the present juncture, he, to whom all concatenations and consequences of events are present in one view, sees it better for you to have this tumor than to be without it.

For I have no more idea of a tumor rising, or any other incidental trial befalling you, without a cause, without a need-be, without a designed advantage to result from it, than I have of a mountain or pyramid rising up of its own accord in the middle of Salisbury Plain. The promise is express, and literally true, that all things, universally and without exception, shall work together for good to those who love God.

But they work together; the smallest as well as the greatest events have their place and use—like several stones in the arch of a bridge, where no one would singly be useful, but every one in its place is necessary to the structure and support of the arch; or, rather, like the movement of a watch, where though there is an evident subordination of parts, and some pieces have a greater comparative importance than others—yet the smallest pieces have their place and use, and are so far equally important, that the whole design of the machine would be obstructed for lack of them.

Some dispensations and turns of Divine Providence may be compared to the main-spring or capital wheels, which have a more visible, sensible, and determining influence upon the whole tenor of our lives. But the more ordinary occurrences of every day are at least pins and pivots, adjusted, timed, and suited with equal accuracy, by the hand of the same great Artist who planned and executes the whole. We are sometimes surprised to see how much more depends and turns upon these minor events, than we were aware of. Then we admire his skill, and say he has done all things well. Indeed, with respect to his works of providence, as well as of creation, he well deserves the title of *Maximus in minimis*.

Such thoughts as these, when I am enabled to realize them, in some measure reconcile me to whatever he allots for myself or my friends, and convinces me of the propriety of that verse, which speaks the language of love, as well as authority, "Be still—and know that I am God!"

I sympathize with you in your trial, and pray and trust that your Shepherd will be your Physician; will superintend and bless the use of means; will give you in his good time health and cure, and at all times reveal unto you abundance of peace.

His promises and power are necessary for our preservation, in the smoother scenes he has allotted for us, and they are likewise sufficient for the roughest. We are always equally in danger in ourselves, and always equally safe under the shadow of his wings. No storms, assaults, sieges, or pestilences, can hurt us, until we have filled up his appointed measure of service. And when our work is done, and he has ripened us for glory, it is no great matter by what means he is pleased to call us home to himself.

I have only room to present our joint and sincerest respects. The Lord bless you all.

This article is adapted from a letter found within [\*The Works of the Rev. John Newton ... to which are Prefixed Memoirs of His Life, &c. Volume 1\*](#)