

John Newton

1725-1807

John Newton was in the second generation of leaders of the English evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. The first generation of leaders included George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, Daniel Rowlands, and William Romaine and others. By this time, there were fewer restrictions on religion than in Matthew Henry's day, a generation before. Anglicans, Methodists, and Independents could all tell others what they believed without too much government interference, even though mobs still frequently harassed outdoor preachers. Matthew Henry's *Commentary* had been finished by others and was in print, modeling direct, simple, and applicable teaching which centered on Christ. Before this revival period in the early 1700's, England had been returning to paganism with increasing drunkenness, immorality, and cruelty. But within fifty years, the national life was transformed.¹ That transformation came as the Lord honored warm-hearted Calvinism like Matthew Henry's. The blending of doctrine with strong applications to the everyday life appealed to the common man.

I want to introduce you to John Newton who was in the center of this national transformation from immorality and cruelty. He was kind and accessible to others. He could apply biblical principles to the everyday life of any village resident; his teaching was simple, practical, and warm. I was first drawn to his music especially the way it warmed my heart, later seeing the usefulness of his practical advice.

A PUBLIC DISPLAY OF GOD'S GRACE

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me,
because He counted me faithful, putting me into the

ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on him for everlasting life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (I Timothy 1:12-17).

This was a descriptive life verse for John Newton. He frankly admitted his blasphemy, his insolence, and his rebellion against God. It made him all the more frank in exalting the mercy of God in searching him out and saving him. He looked at his life as a public display of God's mercy and grace in saving, sustaining, and strengthening him through many trials and weaknesses. Have you been on public display? We all are to our family and friends. But John Newton has remained a celebrity of sorts since 1764 when his autobiography was first published.

The prayers of his Christian mother were answered years after her death. She died when John was seven, but only after she prayed he would become a pastor and taught him the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession and children's hymns by Isaac Watts.² His father was a merchant sea captain and by eleven John was sailing with him. What a different childhood from Matthew Henry's! He stayed at sea until he was thirty. He was forced into the Royal Navy, deserted, flogged, and then put to work for a slave trader--which actually meant being a slave himself, spending eighteen months in deprivation and near starvation. After his escape, he became a ship captain, sailing the triangle from Africa to Antigua to Charleston back to Africa carting slaves to market. He lived the sailor lifestyle so well chronicled in the novels of Patrick O'Brian. The one restraining influence on him was his desire to please and eventually

marry Mary Caitlin, a Christian girl from Kent.

His sinful lifestyle pressed upon him like a heavy backpack, causing him to fear a deserved hell, and bringing to mind his mother's instructions that salvation came only through faith in Christ. God saved John. Now he was a lone Christian on the sea but consciously not alone. He spent six years without any Christian mentor or encouraging preaching. Yet, he held on to his struggling faith. He came back to England, married Mary, continued to sail, but eventually left the sea and became a tide surveyor, a clerical position. Then he came into contact with George Whitefield and William Grimshaw and other leaders of the Revival and was strengthened in his faith through their preaching. He never forgot the depths into which he had fallen and so he later wrote, "Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me!" and titled his autobiography, *Out of the Depths*.

He was soon to become a public figure. While a clerk in Liverpool, he published his autobiography and some other books as he waited for a position in the state approved Anglican Church. (He was not a dissenter like Matthew Henry or William Jay.) By 1764, at the age of thirty-nine, he began a sixteen year pastorate in Olney.³ He worked with William Cowper to write simple instructive songs for the people of his village. He wrote letters and counseled those who knocked at his door. He remained accessible even though he became famous after his *Autobiography* was published. His *Letters* added to both his accessibility and his celebrity. He continued to publish his letters and researched church history as well. Therefore, by his fifties, he had even more of a public platform to use in exalting God's grace and mercy.

GLORY IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND MERCY

Eventually he was appointed to a pastorate in the heart of London where he served from age fifty-four to eighty-three. This pulpit increased his influence but he remained simple and accessible. He reached out to the wealthy and poor alike. He mentored young pastors. He influenced William Wilburforce to end the slavery trade. He published more letters; he continued to preach into his eighties. Suffering the ups and downs of life, God strengthened him in the loss of a niece he had raised, his loneliness after Mary's death, blindness, and even the mental collapse of his other niece whom he had raised.⁴ He talked about the grace which enabled him to endure and keep on trusting in God's promises and providence and everlasting love. He gloried in God's providence and mercy.

This glorying in the Bible's themes is very attractive. Do you have trials and suffer from the ups and downs of life? John Newton can inspire you and your children, just as he did to me and mine, to hang on to the goodness of a gracious and merciful Christ Jesus. Teen boys need to read his autobiography, thinking about what he went through when their age and marveling at God's great deliverance of him.

APPLYING DOCTRINE TO EVERYDAY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

Why his lasting influence? His hymns, of course, are still sung--even by country music artists who know little of his theology. His autobiography has inspired many to marvel at God's sovereignty in salvation. But, his influence on other young pastors, his life story, and his letters still resonant with us today.

William Jay, one of the young pastors he mentored, says,
I always admired, not only Mr. Newton's theology,
which moulded doctrine, and experience, and

practice so finely into each other, but also his composition.....His volume on ecclesiastical history is above all praise,...But he is most known for his admirable "Letters." ⁵

Newton's theology was thoroughly Calvinistic, but he was never cold like so many suspect Calvinists to be. This warmness attracted me; then I paid attention to his practical advice as I read his letters. Like Matthew Henry, he applied the Five Points of Calvinism and other foundational biblical principles to the everyday life of his hearers, and warmed their hearts in the process. I had started to learn this with Matthew Henry's *Commentary*, and now with Newton's letters, I saw it worked out in life's details. As I read, I realized I wanted to be able to help people like he did, especially my friends and my children and grandchildren. I wanted to mentor others too. John Newton might ask us whether we know the great themes of the Bible and can state them in easy principles. Can we help our children to apply them to their lives today? Even though he was a contemporary of John Adams and George Washington, we could learn directly from him through his letters and songs.

He blended doctrine with experiential application. Laying a doctrinal foundation, he, like Matthew Henry, joined that to everyday life. He taught principles--general Bible truths. An example of this is the songs he wrote with Cowper to help remember the principles found in his sermons. Notice how he blended the doctrine of Christ with a warm personal application to himself in "What Think You of Christ?" written for a sermon on Matthew 22:42 ("While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, 'What do you think of the Christ: whose Son is He?'")

What think ye of Christ?
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest until you think rightly of Him.
As Jesus appears in your view, as He is beloved or not
So God is disposed to you and mercy or wrath is your lot.

Some take him a teacher to be, a man or an angel at most
But these have not feelings like me,
Nor know themselves wretched and lost.
So guilty, so helpless am I, I dare not confide in His blood
Nor on His protection rely unless I am sure He is God.
Some call Him a savior in word, but mix their own works
with His
And hope He His help will afford when they have done all that they can.
If doings prove rather too light (a little they admit, they may fail;)
They purpose to make up full weight
By casting Christ's name on the scale....

If asked, what of Jesus I think? Tho' still my best
thoughts are but poor;
I'd say He's my meat and my drink,
My life and my strength and my store.
My shepherd, my husband, my friend,
My savior from sin and from thrall,
My hope from beginning to end, my portion, my Lord, and my all....⁶

Notice how he teaches the doctrinal principle of the deity of Christ and then connects belief in that foundational truth to love for the Savior and acknowledgement of one's own sinfulness and need of saving. He did not ignore emotions, either. Instead, he taught people to look at their feelings and spiritual experiences to acknowledge their own need of a Savior, love for Him, and need of His righteousness. These songs exemplify his ability to make the complex simple and practical, and warm too, with devotional feelings toward a loving God.

Why not make up simple songs for your own children or grandchildren? Or teach them the songs of William Cowper, Isaac Watts, and John Newton? Newton wrote both words and music. Could you do that, remaining true to Bible truths? Keep them simple. Warm hearts by pointing them to their Savior and God's love and care over them.
Go to www.ChristianClassicsOnLine.com or to *The Letters of John Newton* published by The Banner of Truth Trust for examples of his letters.

A WARM, KIND CALVINIST

Newton kindly reached out personally to others regardless of their church connections. He exemplified the principle of "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; charity in all." When William Jay set London buzzing about his preaching, Newton looked him up in London, gave him good advice, and invited him to his "open breakfast." These were informal times for mentoring-- where the scripture was read, Newton made a few remarks on the scripture passage and prayed before questions and answers were encouraged. Jay often returned over the years to this welcoming, inter-denominational gathering. (Jay was a Non-Conformist while Newton was in the Anglican Church; both were Calvinists.) He helped independents and Baptists and would even preach in independent pulpits and stay in their homes at a time when many still would not associate with those dissenting .⁷ Jay loved his "lively wit" and the easy and free but edifying conversations. He remained in touch with him until Newton's death--observing and learning. John Newton served as his role model in relationships and in preaching style. Jay had one of Newton's letters read to him every Sabbath evening, "and what refreshment and profit have I derived from them!"⁸ Newton set examples of kindness to notorious sinners and to young children and to overzealous Calvinists and evangelists alike. Jay also relates how understanding he was with William Cowper's depression bouts--distinguishing between physical causes and spiritual depression. John loved Mary dearly, modeling a loving Christian marriage before these young men. Newton's ability to deal one-on-one with all people, including young pastors, marked his ministry and his *Letters* still speak that way today.

You can practice this kind of warm Calvinism with your family and friends. It's okay to acknowledge our weakness, to give a

hand, to strengthen and come alongside the person fighting an addiction or depression or anger or divorce or rebellious kids. Or to gently mentor another Christian. Why not follow Newton's example and be hospitable? He, with Mary's help, used hospitality to be accessible to others. We can too. Yet, his hospitality was about remaining accessible to others who might differ on lesser issues, not allowing those differences to break their fellowship. That fellowship was based on historic Reformed doctrine. He evidently, as far as we can tell from this distance, not using Christian fellowship and warm feelings as a unifying tool instead of sound biblical principles expressed in the historic confessions.

EXPERIENTIAL TEACHING

John Newton did not hesitate to gently confront others with controversial biblical principles, appealing to their reason and experience. What did Jay mean that Newton's preaching moulded doctrine, experience, and practice? As you read Newton's *Letters*, you see that experience meant just that--their emotions, thoughts, failures. He called on his readers to use their own experience to help confirm the meaning of a passage or doctrine. In this letter explaining the doctrines of election and eternal security, Newton calls on a friend to examine his own feelings and emotions in seeking to understand the two doctrines.

Again, You will do well to consult experience as you go along. For though this is not to be depended upon in the first instance, but must itself be subjected to the rule of the written word, yet it is a good subordinate help. Consider which sense is most agreeable to what passes within you and around you, and which best answers to the dealings of God with yourself, and to what you can observe of his dealings with others.⁹

John was not advocating ignoring the Word of God; he was not putting emotions up above scripture or elevating experience to an equal level with biblical principles. Newton's friend was seeking to understand election. So Newton goes on to show him how to

consult his own experience:

Let us judge then, as I lately proposed, from experience. Admitting, what I am sure you will admit, the total depravity of human nature, how can we account for the conversion of a soul to God, unless we likewise admit an election of grace? The work must begin somewhere....Let me appeal to yourself. I think you know yourself too well to say, that you either sought or loved the Lord first: perhaps you are conscious, that for a season, and so far as in you lay, you even resisted his call; and must have perished, if he had not made you willing in the day of his power, and saved you in defiance of yourself.¹⁰

This advice came only after laying a foundation on biblical interpretation

and some general statements on election. He was moulding doctrine with experience here, like taking two handfuls of clay and blending them together. He goes on to the practical application:

They who believe there is any power in man by nature, whereby he can turn to God, may contend for a conditional election, upon the foresight of faith and obedience: but while others dispute, let you and me admire, for we know that the Lord foresaw us (as we were) in a state of utterly incapable either of believing or obeying, unless he was pleased to work in us to will and to do according to his own good pleasure.¹¹

He calls on his friend to admire God's work in his own life because of God's electing love. This was the forming of doctrine, experience, and practical application into one principle and is the mark of John Newton's ministry. The principle would be: *We should marvel and exalt the electing love of God who out of mere mercy has saved us!* That was a major theme of Newton's life and ministry. Perhaps this ability is the secret to his influence upon subsequent generations (even more than his fame as a former slave trader).

Do you want to influence another? Then John Newton would advise you to apply biblical principles in a way that exalts the graciousness and love (and even wrath) of God. Joel Beeke outlines how to do this in "The Lasting Power of Reformed

Experiential Preaching." Explain the doctrinal principle. Draw out the true experience of believers from the biblical text. Explain the necessity of grace and of spiritual fruit showing up in the life. Then, relate it all to the eternal relationship believers have with God.¹²

For example, a Christian wife might express resentment toward her husband when it seems she has to do all the work around the house while he relaxes watching his sports. (Especially if she also works full-time too.) Try to get her to think in biblical principles. One overriding principle here is that God has ordained marriage between a man and a woman for their mutual comfort and enjoyment, for the nurturing of children, and as a "place" where each can grow in Christian virtues and grace. Then tell her the home is basically her responsibility and duty; she is not to be idle. God does not tell the husband to be the "keeper" at home (Titus 2). Remind her that anger needs to be settled before the sun goes down, in other words, quickly. If she feels her husband is sinning against her, she needs to tell him about it. Also, part of her duty as a wife is to communicate her needs to her husband. She should ask him for help, telling him how she feels and listening to him. She should pray for grace to do this without demanding or pointing fingers. Perhaps he'll jump up and say, "I'll help you from now on!" But, in case he does not, she will need more grace, for patience, endurance, repentance, and prayer as they work out this conflict under the umbrella of a submit/love relationship. Exercising patience, thinking of the other person, living unselfishly, and cherishing her husband with a reverent manner does not mean she has to respond in a slavish manner. "Working out" does not mean clamming up and holding on to bitter feelings or selfishness or being used. Remind her about the fruit of the Spirit; she should expect to see a growing gentleness and patience in herself and, hopefully, in her husband. Fruit varies in quantity and quality, but it is there in

the life of believers. There is nothing wrong with love, joy, peace, self-control (Galatians 5). Then, follow Newton's example by showing the priority of her relationship with Christ and the importance of fleeing to Him, anticipating His involvement with her and with her husband. Re-emphasize that God is gracious, kind, and longsuffering with us. Urge her to rejoice in God while they keep on working things out between them. What is the chief end of life? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

The need for this is age-less and the principles remain the same. Keep it simple. Do not reduce it to a "to do" list! Relate great biblical principles to what they are going through. This is what experiential teaching is all about. John Newton taught this way, relying on the Holy Spirit to prick the conscience and warm the heart. Notice the balm is the grace of God and the righteousness of Christ. You can do this with anyone whose ear you have.

John's wife, Mary, died first, so he needed this grace himself. He had many troubles in those latter years, but he continued to look at himself as a display of God's grace. In 1807, he died at eighty-two. John Newton's life dressed up his preaching and teaching. Ours can adorn what we say as well. We can become more humble, more patient, gentler, while growing strong in our doctrinal understanding. We can have increased spiritual experiences like repentance while looking at our own lives as a display of God's undeserved love. John Newton, like Matthew Henry, was blessed by this tie blending doctrine with warm devotion that binds hearts and minds together in Christian love. We can be blessed too!

QUOTES FROM JOHN NEWTON

- "When I have thought myself most secure, I have been suddenly alarmed with danger; and when I have almost despaired of life, a sudden deliverance has been vouchsafed me."¹
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- "For about the space of six years, the Lord was pleased to lead me in a secret way. I had learned something of the evil of my heart; I had read the Bible over and over with several good books, and had a general view of gospel truths; but my conceptions were in many respects, confused, not having in all this time met with one acquaintance who could answer my inquiries....I found a captain of a ship from London, whose conversation was greatly helpful to me.... I was all ear; he not only increased my understanding, but his teaching *warmed my heart*."²
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- "During the time I was engaged in the slave trade, I never had the least scruple as to its lawfulness. I was upon the whole satisfied with it as the appointment providence had marked out for me. It was, indeed, accounted a genteel employment..."³
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- We must not, therefore, make the experience of others, in all respects, a rule to ourselves, nor our own a rule to others. These are common mistakes, and productive of many more. My case has been extraordinary; I have hardly met a single one resembling it."⁴
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- "I was weary of cold contemplative truths which can neither warm nor amend the heart, but rather tend to aggrandize self."⁵
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- "I commit my soul to my gracious God and Saviour, who mercifully spared and preserved me, when I was an apostate, a blasphemer, and an infidel, and delivered me from that state of misery on the coast of Africa into which my obstinate wickedness had plunged me; and Who has been pleased to admit me, though most unworthy, to preach His glorious gospel. I rely with humble confidence upon the atonement, and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, God and Man, which I have often proposed to others as the only foundation whereupon a sinner can build his hope...."⁶
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EXAMPLES FROM WRITINGS

Can't you hear the villagers at Olney singing this as an easy reminder of a sermon on the atonement? Couldn't your children sing it too?

"I saw One hanging on a tree, In agony and blood;
He fixed His loving eyes on me, As near His cross I stood.

O, can it be, upon a tree The Savior died for me?
My soul is thrilled, my heart is filled, To think He died for me!

Sure, never till my latest breath, Can I forget that look;
It seemed to charge me with His death, Though not a word He spoke.

O, can it be, upon a tree The Savior died for me?
My soul is thrilled, my heart is filled, To think He died for me!

My conscience felt and owned the guilt, and plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt And helped to nail Him there.

O, can it be, upon a tree The Savior died for me?
My soul is thrilled, my heart is filled, To think He died for me!

A second look He gave, which said, "I freely all forgive:
This blood is for your ransom paid, I die that you may live."

O, can it be, upon a tree The Savior died for me?
My soul is thrilled, my heart is filled, To think He died for me!" ⁷

2. Do you think your children need a definition of grace? Grace is God's unmerited, unearned favor.

Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound (1779)

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.⁸

Sin in the Minister

by John Newton

June 13, 1772.

My Dear Sir,

You say that your experience agrees with mine. It must be so, because our hearts are alike. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, destitute of good, and prone to evil. This is the character of mankind universally, and those who are made partaker's of grace are renewed but in part; the evil nature still cleaves to them, and the root of sin, though mortified, is far from being dead.-While the cause remains, it will have effects; and while we are burdened with the body of this death, we must groan under it. But we need not be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow, since we have in Jesus a Saviour, a Righteousness, an Advocate, a Shepherd. "He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust." If sin abounds in us, grace abounds much more in Him; nor would He suffer sin to remain in His people, if He did not know how to overrule it, and make it an occasion of endearing His love and grace so much the more to their souls. The Lord forbid that we should plead His goodness as an encouragement to sloth and indifference. Humiliation, godly sorrow, and self-abasement become us; but, at the same time, we may rejoice in the Lord. Though sin remains, it shall not have dominion over us; though it wars in us, it shall not prevail against us. We have a mercy-seat sprinkled with blood, we have an Advocate with the Father, we are called to this warfare, and we fight under the eye of the Captain of our salvation, who is always near to renew our strength, to heal our wounds, and to cover our heads in the heat of battle. As ministers, we preach to those who have like passions and infirmities with ourselves, and by our own feelings, fears, and changes, we learn to speak a word in season to them that are weary, to warn those who stand, and to stretch out a hand of compassion towards them that are fallen; and to commend it to others from our own experience, as a faithful saying. Besides, if the Lord is pleased to give us some liberty, acceptance, and success in preaching the Gospel, we should be in great danger of running mad with spiritual pride, if the Lord did not permit us to feel the depravity and vileness of our hearts, and thereby keep us from forgetting what we are in ourselves.

With regard to your young people, you must expect to meet with some disappointment. Perhaps, not every one of whom you have conceived hopes will stand, and some who do belong to the Lord are permitted to make sad mistakes for their future humiliation. It is our part to watch, warn, and admonish, and we ought, likewise, to be concerned for those slips and miscarriages which we cannot prevent. A minister, if faithful, and of a right spirit, can have no greater joy than to see his people walking honourably and steadily in the truth; and hardly anything will give him more sensible grief, than to see any of them taken in Satan's wiles. Yet still the Gospel brings relief here. He is wiser than we are, and knows how to make those things subservient to promote his work, which we ought to guard against as evils and hindrances. We are to use the means-He is to rule the whole. If the faults of some are made warnings to others, and prove, in the end, occasions of illustrating the riches of divine grace, this should reconcile us to what we cannot help, though such considerations should not slacken our

diligence in sounding an alarm, and reminding our hearers of their continual danger.

I am, &c.

Doubts-- Christian Growth

by John Newton⁹

June 20, 1776.

Madam,

It would be both unkind and ungrateful in me to avail myself of any plea of business, for delaying the acknowledgment I owe you for your acceptable favour from-- which, though dated the 6th instant, I did not receive till the 10th.

Could I have known in time that you were at Mr.--'s I should have endeavoured to have called upon you while there; and very glad should I have been to have seen you with us. But they who fear the Lord may be sure, that whatever is not practicable is not necessary. He could have overruled every difficulty in your way, had He seen it expedient; but He is pleased to show you that you depend not upon them, but upon Himself; and that, notwithstanding your connections may exclude you from some advantages in point of outward means, He who has begun a good work in you, is able to carry it on, in defiance of all seeming hindrances, and make all things (even those which have the most unfavourable appearances) work together for your good.

A sure effect of His grace is a desire and longing for Gospel ordinances; and when they are afforded, they cannot be neglected without loss. But the Lord sees many souls who are dear to Him, and whom He is training up in a growing meekness for His kingdom, who are, by His providence, so situated, that it is not in their power to attend upon Gospel preaching; and, perhaps, they have seldom either Christian minister or Christian friend to assist or comfort them. Such a situation is a state of trial; but Jesus is all-sufficient, and He is always near. They cannot be debarred from His word of grace, which is everywhere at hand, nor from His throne of grace; for they who feel their need of Him, and whose hearts are drawn towards Him, are always at the foot of it. Every room in the house, yea, every spot they stand on, fields, lanes, and hedge-rows, all is holy ground to them; for the Lord is there. The chief difference between us and the disciples, when our Saviour was upon earth, is in this: they then walked by sight, and we are called to walk by faith. They could see Him with their bodily eyes, we cannot; but He said, before He left them, "It is expedient for you that I go

away." How could this be, unless that spiritual communion, which He promised to maintain with His people after his ascension, were preferable to that intercourse He allowed them whilst He was visibly with them? But we are sure it is preferable, and they who had tried both were well satisfied He had made good His promise; so that though they had known Him after the flesh, they were content not to know Him so any more.

Yes, Madam, though we cannot see Him, he sees us; He is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. In a natural state, we have very dark, and indeed, dishonourable thoughts of God; we conceive of Him as at a distance. But when the heart is awakened, we begin to make Jacob's reflection, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." And when we receive faith, we begin to know that this ever-present God is in Christ; that the government of heaven and earth, the dispensations of the kingdom of nature, providence, and grace, are in the hands of Jesus: that it is He with whom we have to do, who once suffered agony and death for our redemption, and whose compassion and tenderness are the same, now He reigns over all blessed for ever, as when He conversed amongst men in the days of His humiliation. Thus God is made known to us by the Gospel, in the endearing views of a Saviour, a Shepherd, a Husband, a Friend; and a way of access is opened for us through the vail, that is, the human nature of our Redeemer, to enter, with humble confidence, into the holiest of all, and to repose all our cares and concerns upon the strength of that everlasting arm which upholds Heaven and earth, and upon that infinite love which submitted to the shame, pain, and death of the cross, to redeem sinners from wrath and misery.

Though there is a height, a breadth, a length, and a depth, in this mystery of redeeming love, exceeding the comprehension of all finite minds; yet the great and leading principles which are necessary for the support and comfort of our souls may be summed up in a very few words. Such a summary we are favoured with in Titus 2:11-14, where the whole of salvation, all that is needful to be known, experienced, practiced, and hoped for, is comprised within the compass of four verses. If many books, much study, and great discernment, were necessary, in order to be happy, what must the poor and simple do? Yet for them especially is the Gospel designed; and few but such as these attain the knowledge and comfort of it. The Bible is a sealed book till the heart be awakened; and then he that runs may read. The propositions are few. I am a sinner, therefore, I need a Saviour, one who is able and willing to save to the uttermost; such a one is Jesus; He is all that I want- wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But will He receive me? Can I answer a previous question? Am I willing to receive Him? If so, and if His word may be taken, if He meant what He said, and promised no more than He can perform, I may be sure of a welcome: He knew, long before, the doubts, fears, and suspicions, which would arise in my mind when I should come to know what I am, what I have done, and what I have deserved; and, therefore, He declared, before He left the earth, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." I have

no money or price in my hand, no worthiness to recommend me and I need none, for He saveth freely for His own name's sake. I have only to be thankful for what He has already shown me, and to wait upon Him for more. It is my part to commit myself to Him as the physician of sin-sick souls, not to prescribe to Him how He shall treat me. To begin, carry on, and perfect the cure, is His part.

The doubts and fears you speak of are, in a greater or lesser degree, the common experience of all the Lord's people, at least for a time: whilst any unbelief remains in the heart, and Satan is permitted to tempt, we shall feel these things. In themselves they are groundless and evil; yet the Lord permits and overrules them for good. They tend to make us know more of the plague of our own hearts, and feel more sensibly the need of a Saviour, and make His rest (when we attain it) doubly sweet and sure. And they likewise qualify us for pitying and comforting others. Fear not; only believe, wait, and pray. Expect not all at once. A Christian is not of hasty growth, like a mushroom, but rather like the oak, the progress of which is hardly perceptible, but, in time, becomes a great deep-rooted tree. If my writings have been useful to you, may the Lord have the praise. To administer any comfort to His children is the greatest honour and pleasure I can receive in this life. I cannot promise to be a very punctual correspondent, having many engagements; but I hope to do all in my power to show myself, Madam,

Yours, &c.

Faithfulness to Light Received--Resisting Sin

by John Newton

October 3, 1778.

Dear Madam,

You would have me tell you what are the best means to be used by a young person to prevent the world, with all its opening and ensnaring scenes, from drawing the heart aside from God. It is an important question: but I apprehend your own heart will tell you, that you are already possessed of all the information concerning it which you can well expect from me. I could only attempt to answer it from the Bible which lies open to you likewise. If your heart is like mine, it must confess that when it turns aside from God, it is seldom through ignorance of the proper means or motives which should have kept us near Him, but rather from an evil principle within, which prevails against our better judgment, and renders us unfaithful to light already received.

I could offer you rules, cautions, and advice in abundance; for I find it comparatively easy to preach to others. But if you should further ask me, how you shall effectually reduce them to practice, I feel that I am so deficient, and so much at a loss in this matter myself, that I know not well what to say to you. Yet something must be said.

In the first place, then, I would observe, that though it be our bounden duty, and the highest privilege we can propose to ourselves, to have our hearts kept close to the Lord; yet we must not expect it absolutely or perfectly, much less all at once; we shall keep close to Him, in proportion as we are solidly convinced of the infinite disparity between Him and the things which would presume to stand in competition with Him, and the folly, as well as ingratitude of departing from Him. But these points are only to be learned by experience, and by smarting under a series of painful disappointments in our expectations from creatures. Our judgments may be quickly satisfied that His favour is better than life, while yet it is in the power of a mere trifle to turn us aside. The Lord permits us to feel our weakness that we may be sensible of it; for though we are ready in words to confess that we are weak, we do not properly know it, till that secret, though unallowed, dependence we have upon some strength in ourselves, is brought to the trial and fails us. To be humble, and like a little child, afraid of taking a step alone, and so conscious of snares and dangers around us as to cry to Him continually to hold us up that we may be safe, is the sure, the infallible, the only secret of walking closely with Him.

But how shall we attain this humble frame of spirit? It must be, as I said, from a real and sensible conviction of our weakness and vileness, which we cannot learn (at least I have not been able to learn it) merely from books or preachers. The providence of God concurs with His Holy Spirit, in His merciful design of making us acquainted with ourselves. It is, indeed, a great mercy to be preserved from such declensions as might fall under the notice of our fellow-creatures; but when they can observe nothing of consequence to object to us, things may be far from right with us in the sight of Him who judges not only actions, but the thoughts and first motions of the heart. And indeed could we for a season so cleave to God as to find little or nothing in ourselves to be ashamed of, we are such poor creatures, that we should presently grow vain and self-sufficient, and expose ourselves to the greatest danger of falling.

There are, however, means to be observed on our part; and though you know them, I will repeat the principal, because you desire me. The first is prayer: and here, above all things, we should pray for humility. It may be called both the guard of all other graces, and the soil in which they grow. The second is attention to the Scripture. Your question is directly answered in Psalm 69:9. The precepts are our rule and delight, the promises our strength and encouragement; the good recorded of the saints is proposed for our encouragement; their miscarriages are as landmarks set up to warn us of the rocks and shoals which lie in the way of our passage. The study of

the whole scheme of Gospel-salvation, respecting the person, life, doctrine, death, and glory of our Redeemer, is appointed to mould our souls to a spiritual and divine taste; and so far as this prevails and grows in us, the trifles that would draw us from the Lord will lose their influence, and appear divested of the glare with which they strike the senses, mere vanity and nothing.

The third grand means is, consideration of recollection, a careful regard to those temptations and snares to which, from our tempers, situations, or connexions, we are more immediately exposed, and by which we have been formerly hindered. It may be well in the morning, ere we leave our chambers, to forecast, as far as we are able, the probable circumstances of the day before us. Yet the observance of this, as well as of every rule that can be offered, may dwindle into a mere form. However, I trust the Lord, who has given you a desire to live to Him, will be your Guard and Teacher. There is none that teacheth like Him.

I am, &c.

Dear Madam,

What a poor, uncertain, dying world is this! What a wilderness in itself! How dark, how desolate, without the light of the Gospel and the knowledge of Jesus! It does not appear so to us in a state of nature, because we are then in a state of enchantment, the magical lantern blinding us with a splendid delusion.

Thus in the desert's dreary waste,
By magic power produced in haste,
As old romances say,
Castles and groves, and music sweet,
The senses of the traveler cheat,
And stop him in his way.
But while he gazes with surprise,
The charm dissolves, the vision dies;
'Twas but enchanted ground
Thus, if the Lord our spirit touch,
The world, which promised us so much,
A wilderness is found.

It is a great mercy to be undeceived in time; and though our gay dreams are at an end, and we awake to everything that is disgustful and dismaying, yet we see a highway through the wilderness; a powerful guard, an infallible Guide at hand to conduct us through; and we can discern, beyond the limits of the wilderness, a better land, where we shall be at rest and at

home. What will the difficulties we meet by the way then signify? The remembrance of them will only remain to heighten our sense of the love, care, and power of our Saviour and Leader. O how shall we then admire, adore, and praise Him, when He shall condescend to unfold to us the beauty, propriety, and harmony of the whole train of His dispensations towards us, and give us a clear retrospect of all the way, and all the turns of our pilgrimage !

In the mean while, the best method of adorning our profession, and of enjoying peace in our souls, is simply to trust Him, and absolutely to commit ourselves and our all to His management. By casting our burdens upon Him, our spirits become light and cheerful; we are freed from a thousand anxieties and inquietudes, which are wearisome to our minds, and which, with respect to events, are needless for us, yea useless.

But though it may be easy to speak of this trust, and it appears to our judgment perfectly right and reasonable, the actual attainment is a great thing; and especially so, to trust the Lord, not by fits and starts, surrendering one day and retracting the next, but to abide by our surrender, and go habitually trusting through all the changes we meet, knowing that His love, purpose, and promise are unchangeable. Some little faintings, perhaps, none are freed from; but I believe a power of trusting the Lord in good measure at all times, and living quietly under the shadow of His wing, is what the promise warrants us to expect, if we seek it by diligent prayer; if not all at once, yet by a gradual increase. May it be your experience and mine!

I am, &c.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Learn some hymns by Isaac Watts. Sing them. Use them in your personal and family devotions. Teach them to someone else, especially children.
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- Do the same thing with hymns by William Cowper. Look for some of the Olney hymns written with John Newton.
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- Do the same thing with hymns by John Newton.
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- Read John Newton's autobiography. Give it to someone else, as an evangelistic attempt or to introduce them to John.
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- Tell John Newton's story to others. Use elements from his life to influence others--especially to preteens and teens about his sin in his teens and young adulthood and his conversion; to young marrieds of his romance with his wife and "her restraining influence" upon him.
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- Make a list of ways Newton appealed to experiences, feelings or emotions to confirm biblical truth, especially the Doctrines of Grace. Practice looking at your own experiences in this way first. Does it confirm the doctrine to you? Try appealing to others in the same way.
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- Look for warm-hearted Calvinistic teachers and preachers whose teaching makes doctrine of practical use and stirs your heart to love God and desire authentic Christian experience. For instance, they could equip you to focus on the sovereignty and grace of God amidst your current emotional, physical, or spiritual experiences.
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- John Newton was hospitable, not thinking of himself more highly than he ought, and so was an example and mentor to others. Could you do that too?
- Taking the time to carefully respond to someone by directing them to spiritual principles through letters, email, or in person should not be regarded as unimportant even if it is one person at a time.

