

DEPTHS OF GRACE

The Life of John Newton

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Chapter 1 Grace Unknown



Show Illustration #1

“What is God, John?” asked his mother.

John thought for a moment, then sat up in his chair and began. “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice,

goodness and truth.”

His mother continued. “Are there more Gods than one?”

“That one’s easy, Mother. ‘There is but one only, the living and true God.’”

“Very good, John. You’ll have the Shorter Catechism memorized before you’re six.”

Each morning, John and his mother would review the Westminster Shorter Catechism, a series of 106 questions and answers used to teach John the basics of the Christian faith.

“What is the work of creation?” she continued.

“The work of creation is, God making all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good.”

Before they could go any further, they were interrupted by his mother’s coughs. She stood up and hurried to the other room before it got too loud. Usually they would make it past question 20 of the catechism before the coughing started. Today, it was at question nine.

Not that John didn’t mind the break. It gave him a chance to ask a question of his own. He waited until his mother came back and sat down.

“Mother, what day did God create the seas?”

“I believe it was on the third day, John. The Bible says He gathered the waters together to form them.”

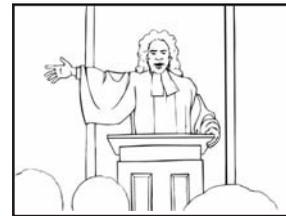
“Which one is Father on right now?”

“Well . . . he sails on most of them, so I’m never quite sure. But his letter last month said they were headed to the Mediterranean.”

John’s father was a captain of a merchant ship and was never home very much or for very long. It had been over a year since John and his mother had seen him.

“Will Father ever take me on a sailing voyage?”

His mother smiled. “Such questions, John.” She drew him close and hugged him. “Thank the Lord, He has placed your feet on dry ground. Be content to keep them there for now. Now where were we? Question ten . . .”



Show Illustration #2

Thoughts of the sea were never far from John’s head. It was a hard subject to avoid in a place like Wapping where they lived. Wapping was a village in England on the banks of the Thames River just outside London and was

always full of sea captains, sailors and dock workers.

It was also home to the Old Gravel Lane Chapel, the church where John’s mother took him every Sunday.

One Sunday instead of their regular pastor, Dr. Jennings, speaking, a visitor took the pulpit John sat up in his pew as he listened to Dr. Isaac Watts preach. He had heard about Dr. Watts before. Their church had often sung many of the hymns he had written, including well-known ones like *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* and *Joy to the World*. But John’s favorite was one Watts had written especially for children, called *I Sing the Mighty Power of God*.

As he walked home from church afterwards, he held his mother’s hand and sang out the words.

“I sing the mighty power of God,
that made the mountains rise,
That spread the flowing seas abroad,
and built the lofty skies . . .”

John’s song was cut short as his mother began to cough again. Her coughing had become worse in the last few weeks.

When she was finally able to speak, she said, “John, I’ve been wanting to tell you something. I . . . I’ll be going away for a while to my cousin’s house by the coast. The doctor thinks the clean sea air might help my health to improve.”

“Do you mean the Catletts, Mother?” John asked. “You’ve told me so much about them. I can’t wait to visit. When do we leave?”

Tears began in the corners of his mother’s eyes. “No, you don’t understand, John. I’m going there. You’ll be staying with the Marsden family from church.”
