

## What Happened to the Amazing Grace?

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It all started when our kids gave us tickets to the Broadway musical, *Amazing Grace* – the story of John Newton. I became filled with questions about his life and his salvation; and how he came to write one of the most famous songs in Christianity; and his changing from being a slave ship captain to being a proponent for abolishing the slave trade in England.

So, of course, I bought his autobiography. I didn't in any way think I would read something to help my life by reading about his life. I didn't expect to learn that the things that troubled him in his spiritual life were the same things I had struggled with for so long. I didn't think his writing from the 1700s would be relevant to my life, but it was.

He wrote: "I was hardly aware of the innate evils of my heart. The hidden life of a Christian – communion with God by Jesus Christ and dependence on Him for hourly supplies of wisdom, strength, and comfort – was a mystery of which I had no understanding. I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but I depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the future." (Out of the Depths, John Newton, revised by Dennis R. Hillman)

Oh, how that resonated with me! For so long I either did not grasp or totally ignored the teaching in Galatians 3 – "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

For so long I tried to live the Christian life by my efforts; my willpower; my strength. Looking back, I can't imagine how I believed that was possible. But I truly did. And I truly failed. Why did I so sincerely believe and know to the depths of my soul that I could not by any means accomplish my salvation by my works; but I thought I could, by my own efforts, live a life blessed by God? God's amazing grace was my only hope of salvation, but where did it go in my daily living?

Can a branch of a tree live independently of the tree? The answer is so obviously no. Jesus clearly tells us how to live: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:4, 5)

God is faithful and kept loving me throughout my many failings. He knew what was in my heart – that my desire really was to know Him and love Him and He kept trying to teach me. His

patience is incomprehensible. I finally realized that I needed a God who was much bigger than the one I thought I knew. When I had nowhere else to turn, I turned to God with my whole heart and told Him, "I can't do this. You'll have to do it." And He did. And He does.

There are still times throughout my day that I forget to stay in communion with God and in dependence on Him. God is continually faithful to remind me to abide in Him and uses many different ways. Sometimes I'll glance out the window and see a bird and remember that God takes care of them and He'll take care of me. Sometimes it's a thought that will come into my mind of God's unfailing love. Sometimes, I'll trip going up or down the stairs and I'll remember to be thankful for God's protection. There really are too many ways to name but our God is very creative and persistent in helping us to stay close to Him.

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." (John 15:11)