

JODY HEDLUND'S BOOK CLUB COLLECTION

He has been pleased in loving kindness to draw us to himself, and to be found by us when we sought him not.
~John Newton



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *NEWTON AND POLLY*

1. If not for Polly Catlett, the world might not have the classic hymn, "Amazing Grace." John freely admits in his autobiography that "hardly anything less than this intense and compelling passion [for Polly] would have been sufficient to awaken me from the dull melancholy habit I had formed [while slave trading in Africa]." Had you ever heard of Polly Catlett before reading this novel? Did you realize how instrumental she was in bringing John out of his life of sin?
2. John also says in his autobiography that "almost at the first sight of this girl, I felt an affection for her that never abated or lost its influence a single moment in my heart. In degree, it equaled all that the writers of romance have imagined; in duration it was unalterable." Do you believe *love at first sight* is possible? What are some of the pros or cons to falling in love quickly?
3. John overstayed his visits with the Catletts on multiple occasions and overestimated his abilities to find and retain work without much effort. How did you feel about John making some of the same mistakes? Why do we often do the same thing? We've all heard of sayings, "History has a way of repeating itself" or "Children grow up to make the same mistakes as their parents." How can we stop the cycle of making the same mistakes over again?
4. At times Polly wondered why her father had to be different from so many of the other customs officers who turned a blind eye to the smuggling going on around them. If so many people thought smuggling was okay, then why was her father taking a stand against it? We face the same controversy in our modern culture. How can we take a stand for what's right, even if we're in the minority?

5. What did you think of the practice of impressing men to become sailors on the King's ships? Do you think John was justified in being angry that he'd been forced to serve in the navy? How could he have handled his situation better?

6. When he realized that he would be bound to the navy for a term of five years during a voyage to the East Indies, John said, "I think nothing I either felt or feared distressed me so much as being thus forcibly torn away from the object of my affection under a great improbability of seeing her again." When the English shore disappeared from sight he said, "I was tempted to throw myself into the sea." It was at this point that John utterly abandoned God for a life of atheism. What drives people to abandon belief in God? Discuss how people of faith and those who don't believe can have positive dialogue about their choices.

7. John's relationship with his father was always very strained. Yet his father never stopped loving him or trying to help him. Describe some of the ways Captain Newton tried to help John. How did John treat him in return? Have you experienced or known of a "prodigal" son or daughter who seemed ungrateful and contemptuous toward his or her family?

8. When John was finally found by Captain Swanwick in Africa, how did the captain persuade John to leave? What did John think would endear him to Polly and the Catletts? While financial prosperity might be one way to find favor with others, what do you think George Catlett was really looking for in a spouse for his daughter?

10. It became very clear to John that God had saved him for a purpose. John didn't understand what that purpose was for many years. In fact, it's safe to say, that John died not knowing what a legacy of faith he left through his famous hymn, "Amazing Grace." God asks us to trust him even when we don't understand our situations. When we're in difficult situations, why is it often so difficult to trust God's higher purposes?