

THE STORY BEHIND THE SONG, AMAZING GRACE

A Devotion Written by Gerald E. Cumby



***Note: The history upfront of this devotion concerning the life story of John Newton was taken from a book I happened to find in a bookstore near our home in Burleson, Texas. I copied the information and have misplaced the book as we have made a move to another location in the past three years. Books were given to the Salvation Army and other credible charitable entities. I shouldn't have given the book away...but, I did. Shame on me. Please forgive me for not writing the name of the author or publisher down.**

John Newton was born in London July 24, 1725, the son of a commander of a merchant ship which sailed the Mediterranean. When John was eleven, he went to sea with his father and made six voyages with him before the elder Newton retired. In 1744 John was impressed into service on a man-of-war, the H. M. S. Harwich. Finding conditions on board intolerable, he deserted but was soon recaptured and publicly flogged and demoted from midshipman to common seaman. Finally at his own request he was exchanged into service on a slave ship, which took him to the coast of Sierra Leone. He then became the servant of a slave trader and was brutally abused. Early in 1748 he was rescued by a sea captain who had known John's father. John Newton ultimately became captain of his own ship, one which supported the slave trade.

Although he had had some early religious instruction from his mother, who had died when he was a child, he had long since given

up any religious convictions. However, on a homeward voyage, while he was attempting to steer the ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he was to refer to later as his "great deliverance." He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship would surely sink, he exclaimed, "Lord, have mercy upon us." Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him.

In 1750 he married Mary Catlett, with whom he had been in love for many years. By 1755, after a serious illness, he had given up seafaring forever. During his days as a sailor, he began to educate himself, teaching himself Latin, among other subjects. Newton's self-education continued, and he learned Greek and Hebrew.

He decided to become a minister and was ordained. He preached in Olney, Buckinghamshire where his preaching drew large audiences of which required an addition to the auditorium in Olney. He began a series of weekly prayer meetings, for which the goal was to write a new hymn for each prayer meeting. 280 songs/hymns were written by Newton and they were published in 1779.

"Amazing Grace" was composed probably between 1760 and 1770 in Olney. Through the years other writers have composed additional verses to the hymn. However, these are the six stanzas that appeared, with minor spelling variations, in both the first edition in 1779 and the 1808 edition, the one nearest the date of Newton's death.

AMAZING GRACE

Amazing grace! (How sweet the sound) That sav'd 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 reliev'd; How precious did that grace appear, The hour I first believ'd!

*Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.
The Lord has promis'd good to me, His word my hope secures; He will my shield and portion be, As long as life endures.*

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mortal life shall cease; I shall possess, within the veil, A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, The sun forbear to shine; But God, who call'd me here below, Will be forever mine.

Newton continued to preach until the last year of life, although he was blind by that time. He died in London December 21, 1807. Infidel and libertine turned minister in the Church of England, he was secure in his faith that amazing grace would lead him home.

Incidentally, we do not know who wrote the following verse that is in most hymn books today. That being, *When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun; We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.*

One of the greatest gifts God can give to man is a discerning heart and a will to make choices in life.

Here are choices one can make that will be either life or death in the spiritual realm of decision making:

1. Heaven or Hell
2. Jesus or the World
3. Good or Evil
4. Love or Hate
5. Pro-Life or Pro-Choice (Support Life or Support Abortion)
6. The Bible as the Word of God or The Bible as a Fairy Tale
7. Marriage between one woman and one man or Living an adulterous or Gay Lifestyle
8. Hate sin or Love sin!
9. Fear God or Shake a Finger in the Face of God
10. Promote Life or Promote Death
11. Support Politicians who promote Christian morality or Support Politicians who support the opposition to any moral criteria.

Father God, how grateful we are for our forefathers and special messengers who loved God enough to pen wonderful words of life. We all, from our era, sung and still sing the words that were penned with the anointing God placed on these great authors. The hymns were messages within themselves.

Thank you for teachers, ministers, parents and all who took the time to teach, train, mentor, and pray for students, families, friends and even foes. Thank you for knowledge gained as we were taught;

and for the wisdom gained from the experiences we had as children, teenagers, adults, and now senior citizens.

May God give us health, wisdom, and common sense to know what to do, when to do it, and why we have been left here on planet earth. Let us be grateful, thankful, and appreciative of Godly teachers and mentors who are trying to build bridges from one generation to the next with a "spirit of excellence." May we do our part to help bridge that gap.

Thank you, Jesus, for giving us something to live for as we place our trust and faith in you. It is in the name of Jesus we pray.