



Spirit of Grace

The Ministry of Dennis
& Benedicta Pollock

Herald

May, 2018

Spirit of Grace Ministries
P.O. Box 2068
McKinney, TX 75070
(530) 712-4253

Email: grace@spiritofgrace.org
Website: www.spiritofgrace.org

John Newton and Amazing Grace

I have spent the last several weeks with John Newton. Well, not exactly, since Newton has been dead for about 200 years, but I have immersed myself in biographies, videos, and his own autobiography, in preparing for a lengthy 4-part devo about the man and the hymn he wrote which is arguably the “national anthem” for Christians all over the world.

Most Christians know that Newton wrote *Amazing Grace* and that he was once a slave ship captain, but little more than that. This is a shame because his story is powerful and riveting, and is surely as great a testament to amazing grace as one can find in the annals of Christianity. When Newton wrote the hymn, he was thinking of himself when he referred to the grace of Christ saving a “wretch.” When you learn of the life he led, you could hardly help but agree: He was truly a wretch transformed by amazing grace.

Newton started his adult career as a sailor and eventually was forcibly impressed (drafted) into the British navy. He was an angry young man with an attitude and in those days the officers and captains on the ships where he served came to despise him. He had a volatile temper, he was lazy, and his quick wit was used sarcastically, which endeared him to no one.

Eventually Newton ended up out of the navy and working in Africa with a slave trader who bought slaves from the tribal chiefs (mostly prisoners from inter-tribal wars and criminals). These unfortunate men, along with some women were sold to passing slave ships who would take them to America or to the West Indies where they would be sold for plantation work. Newton soon lost favor with his new boss’s wife, who was an African herself, and while he was sick she treated him so badly he almost died from his illness and the fact that she barely fed him. His boss had been away, but shortly after he returned a fellow slave trader lied about Newton and said that he had been stealing from them.

At that point Newton was made a slave himself. He had come to stay with his boss as an apprentice, but now he was kept in chains much of the time, and when he was free from the chains he was forced to do field work alongside the African slaves. Without any police force and court system in the area where he lived, there was nothing he could do about it.



Eventually he was freed, and on his way back to England his ship encountered a storm so fierce that it seemed certain that all on board would soon perish. For the first time in years John Newton began to pray. At one time he was discussing with the captain the need for bailing and repairs to the ship, and stated, “If this doesn’t work, the Lord have mercy on us!” Newton shocked himself with this statement. He had mocked God, blasphemed God, and laughed at God in his previous years, but here he was now speaking reverently of God and declaring their need for God’s mercy. Amazingly the ship survived and came limping into a port in Ireland. John Newton, seeing God’s hand in preserving their lives, became a believer

in Jesus Christ.

It was a long and winding road before he would become England’s most famous minister and write the hymn *Amazing Grace*. Most people assume that he was a slave ship captain, came to Christ, and then repented and left the horrid business of slavery. In fact it was the reverse. Newton gave his life to Christ before he ever served as slave ship captain. In Britain in those days, the church had not yet awakened to the evils of slavery, and as a new believer Newton saw nothing wrong with transporting Africans in irons in the hot, stifling belly of the ship to far away lands where they would live out the rest of their days as slaves on foreign soil. Still, the brutality of his position bothered him, and he hoped to one day make his living in a more compassionate manner.

John Newton and Amazing Grace

God responded to that hope by allowing him to suffer a stroke just before he was to leave for his fourth voyage as a ship's captain. Newton was forced to take a land-based job and thus his days as slave ship captain were brought to a halt, not due to a guilty conscience but to the providential hand of God. If Newton could not see the evil of his occupation, God surely could, and stepped in to bring it to an end.

Newton began to earnestly study the Scriptures and would travel many miles to hear outstanding preachers. Eventually he was ordained and became a minister himself. His love for Jesus, love for people, ability to write, and passion for ministry made him both successful and well known throughout England. He developed the habit of writing hymns to illustrate particular sermons he wanted to preach. One day at the end of the year 1772, John wanted a hymn to accompany a sermon he was going to preach about David and his question to the Lord, "Who am I that you have brought me this far...?" Newton was planning to share a little of his own experience and describe how far God had brought him from his days serving as a slave in Africa.

He sat at his desk and wrote the words: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me..." He wrote several verses and it was taught to his church the day he preached his sermon about the grace of Jesus Christ. After that he preached more sermons, wrote more hymns, and didn't give the song too much thought. Somehow, after his death the world found that song and, to use today's terminology, it went viral. John 3:16 is the Bible's most famous verse, Psalm 23 is the most popular Psalm, and *Amazing Grace* is without a doubt the most sung, most loved, and most recorded hymn in the history of Christianity.

As he grew older Newton recognized the evils of slavery, and repented of those years he worked in that terrible business. In his latter years he, along with his friend William Wilberforce, became Britain's most forceful voices to oppose the slave trade, and eventually their opposition gathered momentum and forced the politicians to end slavery. Amazing grace had done its work very well. The arrogant, disagreeable, obnoxious young man despised by nearly every ship's captain under which he served, had been transformed into a warm, friendly, compassionate minister of the gospel who fought the evil of slavery and promoted the amazing grace of Jesus Christ.

To read or hear our 4-part devo series on Newton, which goes into much more detail, go to our website and click on the picture of the Bible by the fireplace. The articles are in alphabetical order—so look under N for Newton.

Benedicta Soon Headed For KENYA

Benedicta will be leaving for Kenya in mid-June, the Lord willing, to head up the administrative preparation for the meetings we will be doing there in July. Please pray for her safety, and for her effectiveness in this role. Pray that the Lord would pour out His Spirit richly upon us in this mission, and build His church in Kenya.

Mission: KENYA

Partner with Us: Become a "Friend of Grace!"



Our Friends of Grace help us to plan missions, pay for mailing costs, maintain and purchase equipment, mail out bulk pamphlets to prisoners in several different prisons, and more. In appreciation we send our friends a monthly CD with five audio devos plus DVD mission reports. Please pray about becoming a friend!