

JOHN NEWTON, who wrote many well-known hymns, had found that the grace of God (i.e. God's immense love towards us) changed his life.

Born in London, his mother died when he was seven. As a young teen he was press-ganged on board HMS Harwich. Eventually he became a slave trader, known for being coarse and immoral.

However, during a severe storm in the Atlantic, Newton found himself whispering a prayer for mercy. When the ordeal was over he began to read the Bible. It was some months later when he truly asked God to save him from sin, and help him follow Jesus. He not only left the slave trade and became a Church of England clergyman, but also bitterly regretted his involvement with slavery. He supported Wilberforce in the cause for its abolition. Whilst a vicar, he took to writing hymns, many of which are still sung, 'Amazing grace' being the most well known.

*Amazing grace: how sweet the sound
that saved 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 relieved;*

*How precious did that grace appear,
the hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.*

*When we've been there a thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we first begun!*

John Newton (1725 – 1807)

Though from very different backgrounds, the lives of Wilberforce and Newton were to cross. They both came to the moment when they saw how sinful they were compared with God who is pure and holy. They knew they could never make themselves good enough for God. But they came to see that Jesus had died to rescue them. As Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Wilberforce and Newton both thoughtfully realised that Jesus had died as their substitute, a sacrifice for sin, paying the penalty of their wrong. They asked Jesus, who not only died but rose again, to forgive them and become their Lord, Saviour and Friend.

This is what changed them. Their lives were different on earth, but Jesus has also promised "Whoever believes in me will not perish, but have everlasting life". They knew they were going to heaven, because the sin that would condemn them to hell had been forgiven. That's why Newton could write what he did in the last verse of his famous hymn.

You and I also need to receive Jesus into our lives as Lord and Saviour. Read the Bible, and let God introduce Himself to you. I encourage you to ask Jesus to forgive you, too. Let Him direct your life, and give you Himself as He promises.

For more information about what it means to be a Christian, write to:



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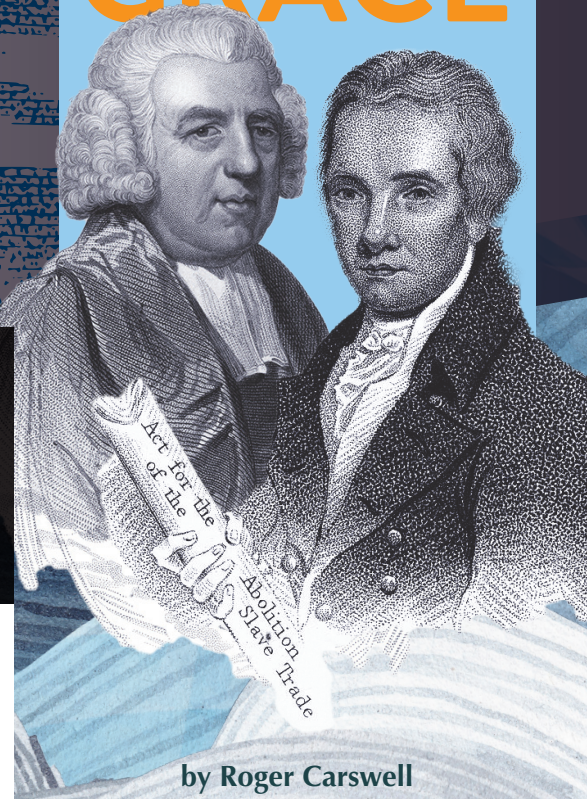
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AMAZING GRACE



by Roger Carswell

AMAZING GRACE

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE (1759–1833) is best remembered as the great nineteenth century social reformer. It was he who worked tirelessly to bring about the end of the slave trade, first in Britain, and then throughout the Empire.

Yorkshireman Wilberforce was elected to the House of Commons at the age of 21. He was first a member for Hull, and then for Yorkshire. He went to parliament as a self-seeking politician, but everything was to change. He knew the Christian message, because for some of his childhood his aunt and uncle in London had brought him up, and they were committed Christians. Believing in God, they had asked Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Saviour. They wanted to live their lives in the way God had taught in the Bible, but as he matured William Wilberforce had too many doubts to be a follower of Jesus.

As an MP he found himself quite unexpectedly on holiday with a group of people, which included a brilliant Cambridge scholar, **Isaac Milner**, who was a committed Christian. Together they read a Christian book and the

New Testament. Wilberforce said, “The deep guilt and deep ingratitude of my past life forced itself upon me in the strongest colours, and I condemned myself for having wasted my precious time, and opportunities and talents”. He longed to find peace with God.

He arranged to meet **John Newton**, the ex-slave trader who had dramatically changed when he became a Christian. Wilberforce began to find peace and calm as he came to the point where he asked Jesus Christ, who had died taking on Himself the sin of the world, to forgive him. He found that Jesus “produced in me something of a settled peace of conscience. I devoted myself for whatever might be the term of my future life, to the service of my God and Saviour”. Shortly after, he met the then **Prime Minister William Pitt** who had long been a close friend, to explain how he was now trusting in Jesus Christ. They remained good friends, though Pitt was not converted to Christ.

Wilberforce put behind him the win-at-all-costs politics, and set about mending broken relationships. The course of his life and eternity were altered forever. He had come to know God, and wanted to serve Him. John Newton persuaded Wilberforce that something had to be done to bring an end to the horrors of the slave trade, and he responded by writing in his diary, “God has set before me two great objects,

the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners (i.e. morality)”.

He was involved in establishing schools for the deaf and blind, lending libraries, trade schools and colleges. He worked to prevent food shortages, and was involved in over seventy charities. He himself lived very carefully so that he could give more money away. He helped in the founding of the **National Gallery**, the **RSPCA**, and funded scientific research, the distribution of Bibles and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He visited prisons and the sick, funding hospitals, and supporting ‘The Friends of Foreigners in Distress’, but gave up even before becoming a Christian when he won £600 from friends. He felt wretched for leaving others, worse off than himself, with gambling debts. Later, he was responsible for abolishing the National Lottery of his day.

Of course, he is most remembered for his work to bring about the abolition of the slave trade. To do this it meant he had to sacrifice the fame and power of possibly becoming Prime Minister. He had to work with people of any party or class who would support the cause. Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire three weeks after his death.

He is buried in Westminster Abbey next to his friend, William Pitt the Younger.

