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In this image of a portrait by Vincent Galloway, after a work by John Russell, we see the young William Wilberforce (1759-1833).

In 1784, while traveling in Europe with his former teacher, Wilberforce saw a book - *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* - in his friend's luggage. William was intrigued.

Reading William Law's words, the young politician began to reassess his own life. Instead of focusing on himself, he started thinking how he could help others.

Wilberforce wasn't the only person whose life was dramatically impacted by Law's book. Dr. Samuel Johnson - one of Britain's most distinguished literary critics - was also impressed with Law's thinking. In his famous biography of Johnson, James Boswell quotes his subject:

*I then became a sort of lax talker against religion, for I did not much think against it; and this lasted till I went to Oxford, where it would not be suffered. When at Oxford, I took up Law's *Serious Call to a Holy Life*, expecting to find it a dull book (as such books generally are), and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry.* (Samuel Johnson, quoted in James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, pages 50-51.)

Seriously doubting his own unbelief, Wilberforce moved closer to becoming a Christian. He pondered whether his newfound faith, and his existing career, were mutually exclusive. He asked himself:

*Can one serve God and one's nation in parliament?*

Now twenty-five years old, William sought the advice of a former slave-ship captain who, himself, had gone through a spiritual conversion: John Newton. Meeting in secret, since evangelical Christians were looked down on, Newton assured Wilberforce he was on the right path:

*God has raised you up for the good of the church and the good of the nation, maintain your friendship with Pitt, continue in Parliament, who knows that but for such a time as this God has brought you into public life and has a purpose for you.*

Soon thereafter, William Wilberforce became the parliamentary voice of a movement which changed the world.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/VOICE-of-a-MOVEMENT-Amazing-Grace>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/VOICE-of-a-MOVEMENT-Amazing-Grace>

## Questions 2 Ponder

### How Can a Young Man of 25 Become the Voice of a Movement?

Stumbling upon a book in his mentor's luggage, William Wilberforce began to read words which caused him to think about how he was living his life.

At the conclusion of his study, Wilberforce realized there was more to his life than thinking about himself. What could he accomplish if he put others first?

Seeking the advice of John Newton, a slave-trader-turned-abolitionist, Wilberforce wondered whether he could remain a Member of Parliament given his new views of life. Newton encouraged him to stay involved in government, advising that he could do some good there.

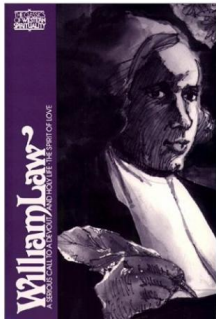
Twenty-five years old, this young Member of Parliament became the voice of a movement when he undertook what seemed an impossible cause. Wilberforce wanted Parliament to abolish the slave-trade.

Although he was a very young member of government, Wilberforce believed he could take-on "the establishment." Do you think a young person could undertake such a huge challenge in the 21st century? Why, or why not?

Can you think of a young person who has taken-on today's establishment? If so, who is it and what has that person done to change the system?

What are other issues for which young people could champion change? Could you become a champion for change, even if you did not lead the charge? Explain your answer.

## Media Stream



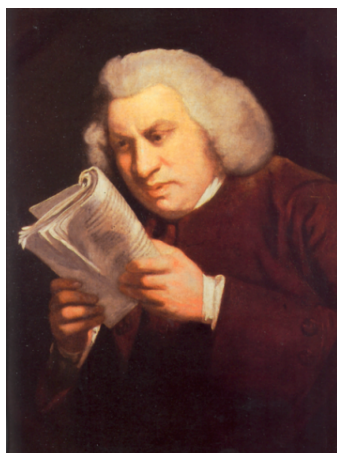
### A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life - by William Law

Image of book cover, online courtesy Library of Congress.

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/A-Serious-Call-to-a-Devout-and-Holy-Life-by-William-Law>



### Dr. Samuel Johnson

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### James Boswell

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### John Newton, 1725-1807

Image, public domain.

Information on Newton: BBC web site, *The Business of Enslavement*.

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### VOICE of a MOVEMENT

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