



0. AMAZING GRACE - Story Preface

1. AFRICA, BEFORE SLAVERS

2. SLAVE-TRADE BEGINNINGS

3. THE TRIANGLE TRADE

4. THE MIDDLE PASSAGE MYTH

5. MIDDLE PASSAGE REALITY

6. JOHN NEWTON, SLAVE TRADER

7. OLAUDAH EQUIANO

8. HUMANS: PROPERTY and AUCTIONS

9. WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

10. VOICE of a MOVEMENT

11. MASSIVE EXPLOITATION

12. THE FAMOUS SPEECH

13. CONVINCING the PUBLIC

14. SLAVE TRADE ABOLISHED - FEBRUARY 23, 1807

15. MORE TRAGEDIES

**16. AMAZING GRACE**

Mike Haywood has produced a triptych (three-panel painting) about John Newton's fateful voyage aboard the *Greyhound*. This image depicts the middle painting, entitled "John Newton's Ship in the Violent Storm." Copyright, Mike Haywood, all rights reserved. Image provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with Haywood's amazing marine work. Click on the image for a much-better view.

John Newton's life was filled with many unexpected events. Losing his mother, when he was just six, Newton frequently looked to his father - a sea captain - to help him get through difficult predicaments. At age eleven, the young lad was already at work on his father's ship.

As a young man, he found himself working on a slave ship after he was traded from the vessel he'd been on. At one point, he worked on land, in Sierra Leone. Falling out of favor, he was forced to work as a slave. To use a phrase of the time, he was "growing black."

Becoming commander of a slave-trade ship himself, Newton experienced firsthand the evils of selling human beings as though they were animals. Later, when he wrote *An Authentic Narrative* (in 1760), he said:

*I know not that I have ever since met so daring a blasphemer.*

He was talking about himself.

In 1748, he was on board the *Greyhound*. Largely incorrigible, he derided people of faith and, according to his own journals, he did - and said - all kinds of things which shocked even the hardened crew. In January, the *Greyhound* was sailing home to Liverpool. They would cover 7,000 miles before they made landfall.

During the trip, Newton looked for books to read. He found only a few. One, by George Stanhope, was called *The Christian's Pattern*. A devotional, without theological dogma, it was simple in style and based on the work of Thomas à Kempis (a Renaissance monk). Newton began to study it.

On March 9th, the crew encountered a ferocious westerly gale. Sleeping below deck, Newton was awakened when he felt a jolt and water began to flood his cabin.

Furiously pumping and baling during the storm, the crew thought the ship would sink. Tethered to the deck, so as not to be washed overboard, they did what they could to keep it afloat. Later, in his Narrative, Newton describes the storm:

*The sea had torn away the upper timbers on one side, and made the ship a mere wreck in a few minutes...Taking all the circumstances, it was astonishing, and almost miraculous that any of us survived to relate the story.*

*We had recourse to the pumps; but the water increased against our efforts...We had but eleven or twelve people to sustain this service; and, notwithstanding all we could do, she was full, or very near it: and then, with a common cargo, she must have sunk of course; but we had a great quantity of bees wax and wood on board, which were specifically lighter than the water...*

Newton kept pumping as the waves crashed over his head.

Around noon, exhausted after pumping for about nine hours, he briefly rested. Thereafter summoned to steer the ship, he thought about the events of his life and how many times he'd been spared from some calamity. He tells us more in his *Narrative*:

*...the extraordinary turns in my life; the calls, warnings, and deliverances I had met with... about six in the evening [I heard] that the ship was freed from water, there rose a gleam of hope. I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour; I began to pray.*

Although the *Greyhound* survived the storm, the crew was far from land. Their next worry was starvation, since much of their food had been washed overboard.

Four weeks after the gale, the ship reached Lough Swilly, in northwest Ireland. They were safely home. Newton's *Narrative* describes how close they'd still come to disaster:

*When we came into this port our very last victuals were boiling in the pot: and before we had been there two hours, the wind, which seemed to have been providentially restrained till we were in a place of safety, began to blow with great violence, so that if we had continued at sea that night in our shattered, enfeebled condition, we must have gone to the bottom. About this time I began to know that there is a God that hears and answers prayer.*

In the summer of 1752, Newton commanded a ship called *The African*. It carried 250 slaves, according to "A List of the Guineamen Belonging to Liverpool in the Year 1752." It proved to be his last ship. After it docked, in 1754, Newton never went to sea again.

Years later, as a clergyman writing hymns with his friend William Cowper, Newton recalled the *Greyhound* events. He didn't need to compose music for his lyrics because, at the time, people did not sing the words - they chanted them. He did not name his song "Amazing Grace" - that came later - but hereafter are three of his original verses:

***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 Olney Parish Church, where the still-popular song was first introduced, has stained-glass windows which depict two contrasting scenes. The first is a ship going "through many dangers." The second is a ship brought safely home

It has now been two hundred years since Olaudah Equiano, Thomas Clarkson, Hannah More, William Wilberforce, John Newton and so many others fought to end the slave trade. Thinking about the anniversary, in November of 2006, Prime Minister Tony Blair issued a statement in the *New Nation*, a British Afro-Caribbean community magazine. We close this story with his words:

*It is hard to believe that what would now be a crime against humanity was legal at the time...I believe the bicentenary [of Parliament's repeal of the slave-trading law] offers us a chance not just to say how profoundly shameful the slave trade was, how we condemn its existence utterly and praise those who fought for its abolition, but also to express our deep sorrow that it could ever have happened...*

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/AMAZING-GRACE-Amazing-Grace>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/AMAZING-GRACE-Amazing-Grace>



## Questions 2 Ponder

### What Is the Story Behind the Song, “Amazing Grace?”

John Newton, a slave-trader-turned-abolitionist, encountered a vicious storm which wrecked his ship. He and his crew mates pumped the water out of their vessel for at least nine straight hours. No one believed they had survived.

Reflecting on his life, and how many times he had avoided death, Newton penned a poem which people still sing. It's called “Amazing Grace.”

Do you think that surviving a disaster, where death seems imminent, might cause a person to write about the experience? Why, or why not?

Would writing about a catastrophic event, which did not take your life, seem cathartic to you? In other words, would writing about what happened help you to better deal with your emotions? Explain your answer.

Why do you think 21st-century people still sing Newton's song?

## Media Stream

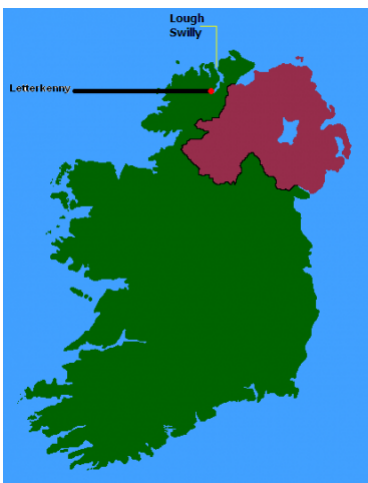


### Thomas a Kempis

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

PD

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Thomas-a-Kempis>

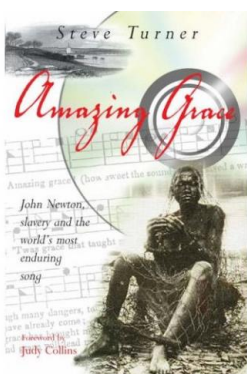


### Lough Swilly

Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

PD

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lough-Swilly>



### Amazing Grace by Steve Turner

Book-cover image online, courtesy Harper Collins and Google Books.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Grace-by-Steve-Turner>



### Through Many Dangers - Stained-Glass Window

Image online, courtesy Cowper & Newton Museum in the UK.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Through-Many-Dangers-Stained-Glass-Window>



### Window at Olney Church - Ship at Safe Harbor

Picture of window, Olney Church.

Image online, courtesy Cowper & Newton Museum in the UK.

PD

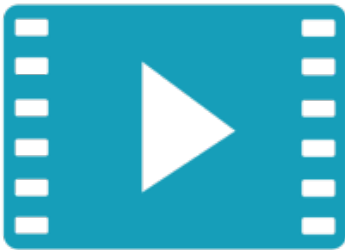
View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Window-at-Olney-Church-Ship-at-Safe-Harbor->



### AMAZING GRACE

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/AMAZING-GRACE>



### Amazing Grace - The Song and Its Context

Video clip online, courtesy YouTube.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Grace-The-Song-and-Its-Context->



### Amazing Grace - by Chris Tomlin

Video clip online, courtesy Bristol Bay Productions. Copyright, Bristol Bay Productions, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the film.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Amazing-Grace-by-Chris-Tomlin>