



John Newton was born in London on the 24th of July, 1725. His father commanded a merchant ship which sailed throughout the Mediterranean. At the age of eleven, John joined his father on the ship. Together they made six voyages.

Impressed (forced) into naval service on the H. M. S. *Harwich*, a man-of-war, John deserted when he found onboard conditions intolerable. He was soon found, flogged (publicly) and demoted.

Although now a common seaman, his superiors granted his request to be transferred to a slave ship where he ended up along the coast of Sierra Leone. Servant to a slave trader, he was physically abused but later rescued (in 1748) by another sea captain who knew John's father.

Thereafter, Newton became captain of his own slave-trading ship.

Despite the early religious influence of his mother, who had died when John was young, Newton no longer had any religious beliefs. Then, on a home-bound voyage, his ship was caught in a violent storm.

He recorded in his journal that when everything seemed lost, because the ship was about to sink, he cried out: "Lord, have mercy upon us." The ship did not sink.

Later, reflecting on his "great deliverance," he began to think that God had saved him from the storm. And as long as he lived, he commemorated May 10th (1748) as the day when he subjected his own will to that of a higher power.

For a time, following his conversion, he still worked in the slave-trade industry. In 1755, he gave up life on the sea forever.

While he'd been a sailor, he was able to use the time aboard ship to study. Educating himself, he learned Latin (amongst other subjects) and read many books.

Working in Liverpool, between 1755 and 1760, Newton met George Whitefield, an Anglican deacon and evangelistic preacher. He also met John Wesley, founder of Methodism.

Newton continued his self-studies, learning Hebrew and Greek, and eventually applied for ordination in the Church of England. After the Bishop of Lincoln agreed to his ordination, he took a ministerial position at Olney, in Buckinghamshire.

Newton was an effective preacher. His services were so crowded that his church needed expanding. He began to preach not only at his own church but elsewhere in Britain.

In 1767, William Cowper (a poet) settled at Olney. Cowper helped Newton at the church and together they started weekly prayer meetings for which they wrote hymns. Their goal was to write a new hymn for each weekly service. Their efforts produced several editions of Olney Hymns. Their first, which was published in 1779, contained 280 works by Newton and 68 by Cowper.

The most famous of Newton's contributions is still "Amazing Grace" (likely written, in Olney, sometime between 1760 and 1770), but others of his songs are still used in modern church services. They include "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken").

Newton wrote a great deal, and not just hymns. He penned many letters and kept extensive personal journals. In fact, historians give credit to Newton's writings as a source for what is known today about the eighteenth-century slave trade.

Newton went to London, in 1780, to serve as vicar of St Mary's, Woolnoth. Once again, he drew large crowds. During Newton's time in London, William Wilberforce, then a young Member of Parliament, sought the old man's advice.

Although he preached until the year he died, Newton had become blind. At the age of 82, he died in London on the 21st of December, 1807. He had lived long enough to see Parliament abolish the slave trade.

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Information on Newton: BBC web site, [The Business of Enslavement](#).

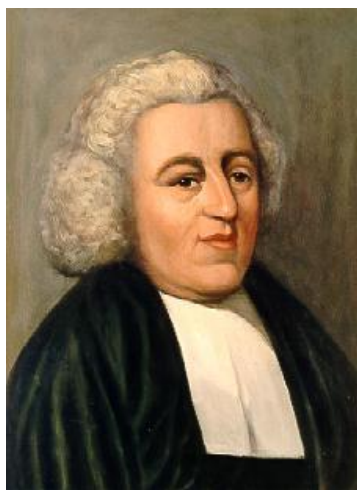
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