

Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound

John Newton, 1725-1807, cento

Amazing Grace C. M.
American traditional melody
Arr. by Edwin O. Excell, 1851-1921

Musical notation for the first system of the hymn. The treble clef is in the key of D major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The melody is written on a staff with notes and rests. Chord symbols G, D7, Em, C, G, D7, G are placed above the staff. The word "AMAZING" is written in large, bold, red-outlined letters across the staff.

1. A - mazing grace! How sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!
2. 'Tis grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears re - lieved!
Through man - ners, toils, and snares I have al - ready come.
The Lord has pur - chased me, my soul, My life, my heart, and home.

Musical notation for the second system of the hymn. The bass clef is in the key of D major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The bass line is written on a staff with notes and rests. Chord symbols G, C, F#m, G, D7, C, G are placed above the staff. The word "GRACE" is written in large, bold, red-outlined letters across the staff.

I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.
How pre - cious did that grace ap - pear, The first I ever be - lieved!
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.
He will my shield and por - tion be As long as life en - dures. A - men.

The Man & Facts Behind Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace has proven to be the most popular song of all time.

Its simple style and sweet sound, has found its way into almost every situation possible. It has been included in a U.S. President's acceptance speech and in many a preacher's sermon. It can be heard played on a simple mouth harmonica in the rural outback but also on a stately harp in a royal opera. In the first happy moments of a wedding and the final reflective minutes of a funeral, "*Amazing Grace*" is always suitable. Sometimes it is used as a tiny tune on a mobile phone, and sometimes in the powerful production of an Olympic ceremony. It has been used often on the guitar for "American blues" and also in the sustained notes of the Scotsman's bagpipes.

Amazing Grace is hummed, sung, and recognized on every continent of the world! It transcends race, religion and recording categories. It has a place among all nations, regardless of colour, creed or culture. Whether presented in churches, performed in concerts or played in clubs, this song can touch the heart of those who listen to its tune, and learn its truth, for this hymn of hymns, can transform the soul of those who hear its message and heed its meaning.

"*Amazing Grace*" is highly acceptable for use in movie studios and is still a hit on the music stage and movie scene. The long and exhaustive index of films that have included its reassuring presence, is a testimony to its remarkable popularity in the entertainment world. Almost every major artist, whether secular or spiritual, on stage or in the studio, have on some occasion rehearsed or recorded "*Amazing Grace*." There are well over 2,000 different recorded releases currently available.

Let us turn the clock back to the 1700's and examine the history of the man who wrote this well-known song and greatly-loved hymn.

John Newton, the only child of John Newton Senior and Elizabeth Newton, was born on July 24, 1725 in London, England. Thirteen days before his seventh birthday, his devout Christian mother died of tuberculosis. His father, a commander in the Mediterranean Sea Trade, remarried the following year. At the age of 11, the young boy was taken by his father on his first sea voyage. Over the next seven years he made several more trips.

1. MAN OF THE SEA

At the age of 18, John – a confused adolescent, was press-ganged to board the HMS "Harwick", a man-of-war ship. Unable to hold up under rigid discipline and unwilling to handle the daily routine, the defiant sailor deserted ship. He was sought and found, stripped and flogged. Filled with bitter rage and full of black despair, the demoted midshipman was eventually discharged from the British Royal Navy and dispatched to a slave trading ship.

After he had enjoyed six months of freedom on the open sea, the twenty year old then endured a long year of captivity in West Africa. There, his dream of work and wealth turned

into a nightmare of sickness and starvation, as he served a cold-hearted English master and then decadently suffered at the cruel hands of his own African mistress. Soon after his release, the man of the sea became a master of slaves.

2. MERCY IN THE STORM

At the age of 22, John – a wretched sinner, was converted from a daring God blasphemer, to a devout believer in Christ. His “great deliverance” took place on March 21, 1748 while sailing back to England from Africa. He and the crew of the “Greyhound” – a cargo ship, were caught in a violent storm. Battered by monstrous winds as they were beaten down by mountainous waves, the tired sailors, like their torn sails, were helpless as they battled against the raging seas, desperately trying to save their badly leaking, and rapidly sinking ship.

For the young seaman however, the day of salvation had come; the hour of decision had arrived; the moment of truth was at hand. In the midst of the chaos and confusion, frenzy and the fear, the sailor, John Newton called on the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, crying out in genuine repentance for the Redeemer’s tender mercies. AND, GOD SAVED HIM!

3. MAJOR SURRENDER

At the age of 29, John, then a growing disciple, turned his back on the sea and “*the business, at which now, his heart shuddered.*” Over the next four years, he searched the Scriptures daily and studied Bible truths diligently. On December 16, 1758, he surrendered his life to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the age of 40, after some religious opposition, John was eventually ordained a curate. He was appointed to the parish church of Olney, near Cambridge in a working class village, in the county of Buckinghamshire.

4. THE AMAZING SONG

At the age of 45, John, now a preacher, was enjoying a harmonious life at home as he exercised a holy leadership in the church. Conservative he was, but conventional and rigid he was not! Being a man of innovation and initiative, he searched for different means to reach his community as he also sought dynamic methods to teach his congregation. In the midweek service for example, he introduced to his evangelical parish, new hymns and spiritual songs. Some, he wrote himself and others he co-wrote with his friend William Cowper.

Amazing Grace was one of those fresh compositions inspired by God from his dedicated heart, and disciplined mind in late December of 1772. Originally entitled “*Faith’s Review and Expectation,*” the prayerfully chosen lyrics were carefully written for a New Year’s Day service. After reading the Bible passage of 1 Chronicles 17:16-17 and reviewing his own life in the light of David’s response, John Newton reflected on how far he had come since his seafaring days and sinful lifestyle of self-indulgence.

The now Servant-Shepherd of Olney, like the King of Israel, was overwhelmed at God’s amazing goodness and His awesome greatness. It was exactly at this point, that his best-known work, was actually born. Here is how it appeared in Olney Hymns, 1779 (but in today’s text).

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 hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis’d good to me, His Word my hope secures;

He will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, and mortal life shall cease;

I shall possess, within the veil, a life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine;

But God, who call’d me here below, will be for ever mine.

In 1853, this hymn, found its soul mate in “New Britain” and was born again as “*Amazing Grace.*” The spiritual message was now married to an early, simple, melody from America’s deep south. In 1900, American composer and publisher, Edwin Othello Excell (1851 – 1921) added the finishing touches with his musical arrangement. He also removed the final verse from the original poem and replaced it with the following stanza from “*Jerusalem, My Happy Home.*”

When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun;

We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.

5. MINISTRY OF SIGNIFICANCE

At the age of 57, John Newton – an accomplished author, found himself at a crossroad. The Newton’s were forced to make a decision to leave the “Olney community” where they had served for nearly sixteen years. The veteran, childless, couple moved their home from the small village of Olney to the huge city of London. On December 19, 1779 John preached his first sermon at the Woolnoth Church.

God blessed Newton’s ministry and enlarged his coast from England’s banking district even to Australia’s Botany Bay. As leader of “the Eclectic Society” (a practical group of evangelical clergy and Christian laymen) John approached Rev. Richard Johnson on September 23, 1786 to consider the chaplaincy on the first fleet to “the Land Down-Under,” AUSTRALIA. Brother Johnson accepted, and the rest is in Australian history.

The earlier work of Newton’s excellent writings, “Authentic Narrative” – a personal testimony, continued to challenge more hearts for God and change many lives for good. His published and necessarily controversial “*Thoughts on the African Slave Trade,*” equipped and empowered his friend, William Wilberforce M.P., to abolish slavery. After 20 years of faithful campaigning, Wilberforce finally succeeded, and in 1807, the passing of an act of parliament for action in UK and in all British colonies, brought this awful slavery trade to an end.

6. WORK COMPLETED

On December 21, 1807, John Newton exited earth and entered eternity. At the age of 82, his flesh and heart failed and his mortal life ceased, but his soul and spirit found everlasting rest and eternal reward in the paradise of heaven with Christ.

As you read the history of this repentant believing sinner, who became a rejoicing overcomer, may you also consider your life and legacy. May you be challenged to prepare for your future and destiny. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

Doomed without God's grace and damned without His mercy, Jesus Christ is the only hope, and the only help we need to obtain a present and eternal salvation.

Newton's life, as sinful as it was, demonstrates that the grace of God is greater than our sins. As Newton sought God's mercy and was saved by God's grace, so can we.

The Lord Jesus says: **"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."** John 14:6 **"By grace are ye saved through faith."** Ephesians 2:8

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