

the rack

Amazing Grace



Amazing Grace

When John Newton was a young man, he'd have never thought that he'd be the writer of one of the most popular hymns of all time. His lifestyle at the time was about as far from that of a Christian as a man of his time could get. But, after all, that's what the song is all about—the story of God's amazing grace.

Newton's father was a sea captain in the Mediterranean. His mother, a godly woman, died when he was only six years old. So at the age of 11, after only a few years of formal education, he left school and joined his father's crew. John Newton apparently succumbed early to the temptations of a sailor's life—drinking, gambling, and immoral

living. Things got so bad that he was eventually rejected by his father, fired by his employers, and thrown in jail.

Newton served on several ships, then ended up in the most degraded occupation of the time—the slave trade. First he worked on the islands and mainland of the West African coast, buying people who had been captured for slavery and selling them to visiting traders. Then he became a trader himself and captain of his own slaving vessel. Newton lived this degraded and degrading life for several years. In later life he once referred to himself as that “old Africa blasphemer.”

But on March 10, 1748, during a violent storm in which he almost lost his life, John Newton was converted. Newton continued as a slave ship captain for two more years, trying to justify his work by improving conditions as much as possible. Eventually, however, he realized that his occupation

was incompatible with Christ's call, and he became a crusader against slavery and the slave trade. Later in life Newton joined forces with William Wilberforce and other political leaders in the fight to abolish the slave trade. His testimony was influential in convincing Parliament of the inhumanity of slavery. And in 1807, the year Newton died, the British Parliament finally abolished slavery throughout its dominion.

Newton was about 34 when he began to study for the ministry. He was greatly influenced by the evangelist George Whitefield and the Wesleys but remained an Anglican rather than join those who broke from the established church. He pastored the church at Olney, England, for 15 years. While there, he collaborated with the famous English poet William Cowper on a hymnal. "Amazing Grace" was one of those Olney hymns.

*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 has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me 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'd first begun.*

Grace was the theme of Newton's life as a Christian. Grace is the giving nature of God; it is the love and forgiveness of God that we don't deserve.

John Newton never forgot what he was. And he never forgot the sea. Once, when he was pastor of St. Mary-Woolnoth, near London, he entered the pulpit in a sailor's

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JONAH

and the empty tomb

**WHAT A MESSAGE WE HAVE TO SHARE!
JESUS ROSE FROM THE GRAVE!**

Did you know that there's a resurrection story in the Old Testament?

It's true. In Matthew 12:38-41 Jesus tells some Pharisees that one of the stories they know so well gives us a clue about something much greater—God's plan for our redemption.

Read what He tells them, then fill in the chart to the right with all the similarities you can find between Jesus and Jonah.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Jonah 2:1-6

'From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. 2 He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry." 3 You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. 4 I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' 5 The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. 6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit.

Matthew 12:38-41

³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here."

Verse to Remember: "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day." Luke 24:46



Bible Study

1. Compare Jonah's mission with Jesus' mission (Jonah 1:1-2 and Matthew 4:17-19; John 10:10).

(Of course, you know how different Jonah was in his reaction to his mission. He ran. That's where the big fish comes in. But that's not Jesus' point.)

JONAH	JESUS

2. In Matthew 12:40, what does Jesus point out as the most obvious similarity between what happened to Jonah and what would happen to Him?

3. Now read Jonah 2:1-6. The text says this was the prayer Jonah prayed from inside the fish. What does that tell you about verse 6? How were Jonah's and Jesus' experiences similar?

4. God wanted a response to the miracles of Jonah and Jesus. What did He want to happen? (Matthew 12:41) How did the people of Nineveh respond to Jonah? How did the Pharisees respond to Jesus?

5. This brings up a thorny question. Why were the people looking for a sign in the first place? What was wrong with their request? (See Matthew 12:22-24.)

6. Jonah's experience was a sign pointing to what would happen to Jesus. But Jesus is greater than Jonah (Matthew 12:41b). Draw stick figures to contrast Jonah and Jesus.

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the Resurrection as a sign that Jesus is divine? (1 = not a sign; 10 = absolutely a sign)

8. How do people today respond to Jesus? How about you—how do you respond?

Amazing Grace

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uniform—Bible in one hand, hymnbook in the other. Late in life, when his memory had lost its sharpness and his health was failing, he cried out during a sermon, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.”

Two stanzas of “Amazing Grace” that are often omitted in today’s hymnbooks tell more of Newton’s story:

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

*And 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 inscription on his tombstone in the Olney churchyard summarizes his life: “John Newton, Clerk; once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.”



HE'S alive!

This was removed so
that all could see,
The event that changed
all history!

Crack the code to find the message (and write it below).

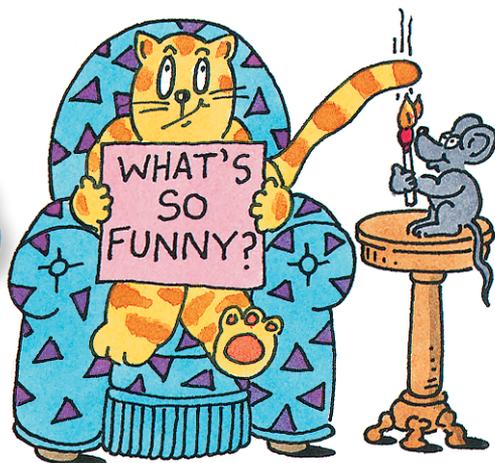
**Hsteone stiosne sntoonte shteornee—sHteone shtaosne
rsitsoenne! Jsetsounse stionse asltioveree!**

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Hint: see Matthew 28:6 and Luke 24:6.

Puzzle answer: Remove "stone" from each word. The correct message reads: "He is not here—He has risen! Jesus is alive!"

every day devos



God has some interesting ways to get people's attention . . . just look at Jonah's story! What has God done lately to get your attention?

"This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."

Luke 24:46

MONDAY

Read Matthew 12:38-41. How is Jonah's story like Jesus' story?

TUESDAY

Read Hebrews 2:1. Have you ever drifted away from what you knew to be true about God? How did God get your attention and call you back to Him?

WEDNESDAY

Read James 1:22. God wants us to not only pay attention to what we hear, but also act on it. How can you act on something you've heard about God this week?

THURSDAY

Read Hebrews 2:1. Make an acrostic with the word *attention*, writing a word or phrase for each letter to express what you've learned about this verse this week.

FRIDAY

Read Luke 24:46. How can you know that this verse is true?

SATURDAY

Where might you hear from God's Word in the next three days? Pray to God, asking Him to help you pay attention to what you hear.

