

# Moments for YOU

Volume 51, Number 3

Theme: Amazing Grace



*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.*

## AMAZING GRACE

Visit the memorial service following any tragedy, and you will most likely hear the song, “Amazing Grace.” Its memorable words and soul-stirring tune (especially when performed on bagpipes) have captivated millions, and seem especially suited to times of collective sorrow.

“Amazing Grace” is also one of the most-recorded songs in history, with hundreds of artists from nearly every style of music having contributed their rendition of this classic hymn. Through the years it has been popular in both Christian and secular circles, and has even been at the top of the music charts.

But I have to wonder how many of the people who have sung (and even recorded) this song have never gotten past the poetry and the notes. How many have uttered the words “amazing grace ... that saved a wretch like me” and yet are strangers to grace and offended by God’s declaration of their wretchedness?

The man who knew this song most personally—it was the story of his life—was John Newton. This year marks the 200th anniversary of his death, and though he is remembered for many things, above them all shines the bright testimony of his faith handed down to us in “Amazing Grace.”

He was a man whom God rescued from many things, but though he believed “there never was or could be such a sinner as myself,” you and I alike are just as guilty as he was, and just as desperately in need of God’s amazing grace.

After his conversion, John Newton

continued a life of grace. He was a devoted husband who eventually became an effective preacher, a caring pastor, as well as a down-to-earth teacher. Whenever conflict arose, he sought ways to focus on truth without losing sight of the effect his words and manner would have on those he was trying to convince. Despite their differences on some doctrinal issues, John Wesley once wrote to him, “You appear to be designed by divine providence for a healer of breaches, a reconciler of honest but prejudiced men, and a uniter (happy work!) of the children of God.”

What would John Newton think of his song being used in times of tragedy, and being found on the lips of those who do not yet take it to heart? From his letters we get the impression that he would be thankful for such a testimony to God’s grace being proclaimed in times of trouble: “Perhaps dark times are the brightest, for they are usually seasons when the Lord’s people are stirred up, and when many who would not hear Him in prosperity are glad to seek Him.”

In this issue, using the story of John Newton and the teaching of the Bible, our desire is to search out what grace is, who it is for, and how it is received. We trust that you will be blessed by this study, and will learn to trust, rest, and glory in God’s “Amazing Grace!” —T. Don Johnson

*Not long before his death, John Newton told a friend: “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things—that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.”*

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## A SERVANT OF SLAVES

*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.*

John Newton, the author of this famous hymn, is an amazing testament to God's saving grace. Born in England in 1725, he was raised by a godly mother until she died just before he turned seven. Because his father was a sailor who spent most of his time on long voyages at sea, John's next few years were unhappily spent at boarding school and in the custody of his step-mother.

On his eleventh birthday, John Newton's father introduced him to the sailor's life, and they made several voyages together during his early teenage years. John was treated well, but he was surrounded by poor role models. Later, John would write in his autobiography: "I am persuaded that my father loved me, though he seemed not willing that I should know it." One of the ways the elder Newton cared for his son was in using his connections to secure job opportunities for him. These, however, were repeatedly squandered as distractions and a penchant for mischief led John to one disappointing end after another.

During his rebellious teenage years, John Newton became a self-described "slave to every customary vice," whose actions were "exceedingly vile." It wasn't long until he adopted a philosophy that denied the existence of God. This brought some rest to his troubled conscience, because if God didn't exist, then there would be no judgment for his sins either. He took much pleasure in converting as many people as possible to his godless theology by ridiculing and blaspheming their faith.

But even though he tried to forget about God, God did not forget about John Newton, and preserved his life on many occasions. Once he was only minutes late for a boat which overturned, drowning all of the passengers. Another time he was thrown from a horse and landed just short of being impaled on sharpened stakes. Some of these dramatic brushes with death caused John to consider the possibility that God was watching over him, and he even made several failed attempts at reforming his life.


A series of circumstances, including forced military service, desertion, capture, demotion, and transfer to the crew of a slave ship, eventually left John nearly dead from malaria and brutally mistreated by slave traders in Africa. Eventually, John was found by a ship captain who, at his father's request, was looking for John to bring him home. God, the heavenly father, was also seeking John Newton, and was about to get his attention.

During the long trip back to England, he was awakened one night by a violent storm which was ripping the ship apart. He briefly went below deck, and the man who took his place was washed overboard. John cried out, "the Lord have mercy on us!" Over the next couple of days, as the sailors attempted to save the battered ship, John began to seriously consider his life in light of the Bible. He recalls: "I concluded at first that my sins were too great to be forgiven."

In time, however, as John Newton learned more of the amazing grace of God, he "began to understand the security of the covenant of grace, and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God through faith in an unchangeable Saviour."

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believed!*

This same “amazing grace” of God that saved John Newton is available to sinners today. Like him, you might think that your sins are too great and too many to be forgiven. Or, you may not yet understand that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Either way, God’s Word teaches us that we are slaves of sin (John 8:34), and that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Like John Newton discovered, trying to live a better life is powerless; self-reform is hopeless. You and I need a Saviour.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16) is the One we need. He lived a perfect life and then died as a guiltless sacrifice for sin (1 Peter 1:18-21). His gift of forgiveness and everlasting life is offered to all who will repent of their sins and put their trust in Him. Salvation is offered through God’s grace, and accepted by faith: “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). Will you turn to God and take advantage of His amazing grace today? 

*A friend called on John Newton in the later years of his life. Together they read 1 Corinthians 15:10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am.” Newton then commented, “Though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say that I am not what I once was—a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle and acknowledge, ‘By the grace of God, I am what I am.’”*

## DO YOU KNOW GRACE?

Many non-Christians know the hymn “Amazing Grace” but may not know what grace means. One day when evangelist D.L. Moody was studying the meaning of God’s grace, he dashed into the street and shouted to the first man he saw, “Do you know grace?” Mystified, the man replied, “Grace who?” No doubt Moody then explained grace—that God has compassion on sin-sick people and freely offers them forgiveness and new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

I heard of a man who had lived a troubled life and died without understanding the message of God’s grace. A minister had talked to him and encouraged him to come to church, but his response was, “I’m too undeserving.” He didn’t know that God’s grace is for the *undeserving*.

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he bluntly described their pre-Christian lives as being “dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1). Then he used two hope-filled words: *but God* (v. 4). They introduce God’s mercy and grace that provide forgiveness and new life through Christ. Salvation is through faith, not works, so no one can boast (vv. 8,9).

Let’s help others to understand that God’s salvation is for sinners only—and that includes all of us. That’s what makes God’s grace so amazing!

*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.*

The first step to receiving eternal life is to admit that we don’t deserve it.

—By Joanie Yoder. From “Our Daily Bread,” published by RBC Ministries. Used by permission.

## FAITH'S REVIEW AND EXPECTATION

There is a famous hymn that was originally titled: "Faith's Review and Expectation." Do you know what it is? The original author would probably be surprised to find that not only has his hymn lost its title, but at least two of its original stanzas are also gone. Plus, it has gained four lines which did not come from his pen. He would most likely approve of the tune we sing the words to, but seeing that it was not applied until many years after his death, it never graced his ears.

Nonetheless, in its current form, "Amazing Grace" is one of the best-known and best-loved songs in the English language. Because the original hymn is prefaced with "1 Chronicles 17:16-17," it is likely that its author, John Newton, composed it to accompany a New Year's Day sermon he preached from that exact passage at the dawn of 1773.

Those verses read: "And David the king came and sat before the LORD, and said, Who am I, O LORD God, and what is mine house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And yet this was a small thing in Thine eyes, O God; for Thou hast also spoken of Thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O LORD God."

Comparing the words of the hymn with his sermon notes, it seems that the message on Mr. Newton's heart that day is one which remains relevant for us more than 200 years later.

### WHO AM I?

Those who claim Jesus Christ as Saviour will be the first to admit our unworthiness of God's blessing. In the same way, David was declaring that God's favor to him was undeserved.

### THOU HAST BROUGHT ME HITHERTO

Because of his colorful history, John Newton could easily identify with David in tracing the remarkable ways in which he had been rescued, pardoned, and protected by God.


### YOU HAVE SPOKEN ABOUT THE FUTURE

To the believer, God's past blessings are "a small thing" compared with the promises He gives to His children. In light of this, Mr. Newton encouraged his hearers to continue in love, gratitude, and obedience toward Christ, trust and confidence in God, and patience through the trials of life. He closed his sermon with the following warning: "We are spared thus far—but some, I fear, are strangers to the promises. You are entered upon a New Year. It may be your last. You are at present barren trees in the vineyard. O fear lest the sentence should go forth—'Cut it down.'"

It is probable that "Amazing Grace" was sung for the first time at the end of this message. As the words reverberated through the church, the following stanzas were included:

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

*The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But GOD, who called me here below,  
Will be for ever mine.*

These words stand as a challenge for us today. If by faith you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Saviour, God's Word secures your hope: "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). If not, it secures your doom: "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). 

## GRACE OR WORKS?

*“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).*

A preacher who had long-departed from the truth of the gospel, told the following story to summarize “the faith” he taught.

“It seems that a frog one day fell into a pail of milk, and though he tried every conceivable way to jump out, he always failed. The sides were too high, and because he was floating in the milk he could not get enough leverage for the needed leap. So he did the only thing he could do. He paddled and paddled and paddled some more. And voila! His paddling had churned a pad of butter from which he was able to launch himself to freedom.”

The preacher’s conclusion was “Just keep paddling, keep on working, keep on doing your best, and you will make it.” You may smile at this exaggerated simplification, but this actually describes the false “good news” being preached by many churches and by every non-Christian religion in the world.

It is amazingly sad that “Amazing Grace” is one of the favorite hymns worldwide and yet most of these same people reason that if you just do your best you will somehow make it to Heaven. The truth is that mankind is lost in sin and deeply hostile to the truth of justification by faith alone through God’s grace. Sadly, most people are much more comfortable with the false notion that: “We get our salvation the old-fashioned way. We earn it!”

*“And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace” (Romans 11:6).*

## MIND-BOGGLING GRACE

Amazing grace! We sing about it, but what is grace? We can begin by saying that it is God’s favor toward us. But it is more than that. It is His *undeserved* favor. Now let us go a step further. It is His *undeserved* favor to those who deserve the very opposite!

The words *grace* and *gift* are close relatives. Grace is a gift and for that reason it can neither be earned nor deserved. The minute you introduce any idea of debt or merit, you have eliminated grace. The gift of God’s grace is of such enormous proportions that any thought of ever repaying it is completely ruled out. It is unspeakable and incomprehensible.

Now the true gospel is salvation by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8,9). Grace means you don’t deserve it. Faith means you must receive it by a definite act of your will. No one understands the gospel unless he understands grace.

The grace of God is wonderful. It can take a repentant prostitute, forgive and cleanse her, make her a new woman, and destine her to be a companion of Jesus in eternal glory. It can take a dying thief, save him in the closing moments of his life, and escort him to paradise that very day. Grace populates heaven with converted murderers, sex offenders, alcoholics, thieves, and liars. No sinner is beyond its saving power.

Grace has lifted millions out of a horrible pit and from the miry clay; set their feet on a rock, establishing their way; put a song in their heart, to glorify their God; and eventually taken them to the many mansions in the Father’s house (Psalm 40:1-3).

Hymn writer Haldor Lillenas was right on key when he wrote that the wonderful grace of Jesus is “broader

than the scope of our transgressions, greater far than all our sin and shame.”

Every true believer is often compelled to say: “I don’t know why the Lord ever showed grace to me. I certainly am not worthy of such favor. The price He paid for me was definitely too high.”

Grace transcends reason and logic, but it doesn’t violate them. Reason would never have the shepherd die for the sheep, the judge die for the condemned, or—most incredible—the Creator die for the creature. Logic would insist that the sinner die for his sins, that the penalty of the broken law be carried out. Grace does the unthinkable.

Someone has described the marvel of grace this way: “Grace is not looking for good people whom it may approve, for it is not grace but justice to approve goodness; but it is looking for condemned, guilty, speechless, and helpless people whom it may save, sanctify, and glorify.”

#### **GRACE IS BETTER THAN MERCY**

When a condemned criminal receives a reduced sentence, we say that the judge has shown him mercy. Imprisonment rather than death is an act of mercy. Grace is better than that. It acquits the guilty sinner, imputes righteousness to him, and silences the law’s condemning voice.

#### **GRACE IS BETTER THAN JUSTICE**

Grace and justice are completely opposite. A man is asking for justice when he says, “I am a good person and I want what I deserve.” Hell is what he deserves. Don’t ever ask God for justice! Grace says, “I am guilty, but I believe Christ died to pay the penalty for my sins, and I receive Him as Lord and Saviour. I don’t deserve eternal life but I receive it as a free gift from God.”

#### **GRACE IS A BETTER PRINCIPLE THAN LAW**

The law tells a person what he must do in order to attain a righteous standing. Grace gives him a righteous standing before God, and then tells him to walk worthy of it. The law says, “Do and you will live.” Grace says, “Live and you will do.” Law says, “Try and obey.” The language of grace is, “Trust and obey.”

Law tells you what to do, but does not give you the power to do it, and curses you if you don’t. Grace teaches you what to do, and gives you the power to do it, and rewards you when you do. So law carries the threat of punishment while grace carries the promise of reward.

Law condemns the best, since even the best cannot keep the Ten Commandments. Grace justifies the worst. Law reveals sin. Grace takes away sin. Law encourages boasting. Grace excludes boasting.

Under law, the work is never finished. Grace tells of the One who finished the work. The law demands, “You shall love.” Grace announces, “God so loved.” The law lays heavy burdens on people. The burdens of grace are light. Law is a system of bondage, grace of liberty.

There is no mercy in the law. It is cold, hard, and inflexible. Grace tells of a God who is rich in mercy.

—From “Now That is Amazing Grace” by William MacDonald. Published by Gospel Folio Press, used by permission.

*An atheist said, “If there is a God, may he prove himself by striking me dead right now.” Nothing happened. “You see, there is no God.” Another responded, “You’ve only proved that He is a God who possesses amazing grace.”*

## "AMAZING GRACE" SCRIPTURE PUZZLE

Here are John Newton's original words for "Amazing Grace." Using the Scripture references listed below, select the one that best matches each line of the hymn. See how many more verses you can find using your Bible.

*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.*

*The Lord has promised 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 called me here below,  
Will be forever mine.*

1 John 2:25 • Hebrews 12:28 • 1 Peter 5:10 • John 9:25 • Psalm 4:8 •  
1 Peter 1:18,19 • Psalm 116:2 • 1 Corinthians 15:53,54 • Acts 2:20 •  
Psalm 89:15 • John 5:25 • 1 Peter 1:24 • John 10:3 • Psalm 23:6 •  
Titus 1:2 • Matthew 17:7 • Luke 15:24 • Hebrews 6:19 • 2 Peter 3:10 •  
Philippians 3:12 • Romans 7:24 • Psalm 28:7 • Romans 14:17 • Psalm 34:17