



For some reason, one of America's favorite hymns, and certainly one of mine, *Amazing Grace* never made it into the 1940 Hymnal. I am certain Bishop Jerry could give you the reason, but I cannot. The hymn was written in 1779 by Anglican minister John Newton, a fairly prolific writer of hymns and poems. In 1835, American composer William Walker set it to the tune known as "New Britain" in a shape-note format, which is the version most frequently sung today.

Newton was a very interesting and complex man who reduced things to their simplest most understandable form.

Newton grew up without any particular religious conviction, but his life's path was formed by a variety of twists and coincidences that were often put into motion by others' reactions to what they took as his recalcitrant insubordination. He was pressed into service in the Royal Navy. After his naval service, he stuck with the sea and became involved in the lucrative Atlantic slave trade. In 1748, a violent storm battered his vessel off the coast of County Donegal, Ireland, so severely he called out to God for mercy. This moment marked his spiritual conversion but he continued slave trading until 1754 or 1755, when he ended his seafaring altogether. He began studying Christian theology.

Ordained in the Church of England in 1764, Newton became curate of Olney, Buckinghamshire, where he began to write hymns with poet William Cowper. "Amazing Grace" was written to illustrate a sermon on New Year's Day of 1773. It is unknown if there was any music accompanying the verses; it may have been chanted by the congregation. It debuted in print in 1779 in Newton and Cowper's *Olney Hymns* but settled into relative obscurity in England. In the United States, "Amazing Grace" became a popular song used by Baptist and Methodist preachers as part of their evangelizing, especially in the South, during the Second Great Awakening of the early 19th century. It has been associated with more than 20 melodies. In 1835, American composer William Walker set it to the tune known as "New Britain" in a shape-note format. This is the version most frequently sung today.

With the message that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed and that the soul can be delivered from despair through the mercy of God, "Amazing Grace" is one of the most recognizable songs in the English-speaking world. Author Gilbert Chase writes that it is "without a doubt the most famous of all the folk hymns." Jonathan Aitken, a Newton biographer, estimates that the song is performed about 10 million times annually.

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.

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

Thro' 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've first begun.

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. This is the universal truth, the Grace that saves us, the Grace of God, purchased for us by our Lord and Savior is truly amazing! Compared to perfection, we are indeed wretches, the best of us, and it goes downhill from there. Without God, in His Triune Person, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, we are indeed lost. When we are lost, it is because we cannot see our state of being, we truly are lost. When we gain the vision provided by the Holy Ghost, we can begin to get our bearings and un-lose ourselves. In reality, there are none so blind as those who will not 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! It is God's Grace, the knowledge of which comes through the Holy Ghost that allows us to learn our true state. That same knowledge gives us comfort that we have been saved and thus have nothing to fear. As soon as we gain that knowledge, our fear and terror subside and from thence forward we are secure in our freedom from death.

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come 'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far And grace will lead me home. We make our way through life's pitfalls and traps, our success is due to God's grace. If we do not give up and continue to follow His Lead, we will make it to our eternal home. We currently exist in the Shadowlands, we are meant to live in the real world, God's Country.

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've first begun. When we get home from these miserable Shadowlands, we will be home forever. We have eternal life and we need to

live our lives here like we really believe that. We need to act as if this were just a very small and insignificant part of our space on the line of time; which it is!

There are a couple of John Newton quotes you might consider keeping in mind as you go about your life:

I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.

Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.

—*John Newton*