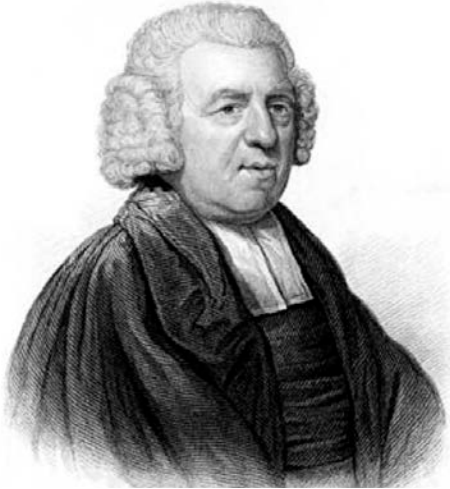


John Newton (1725-1807)



Early Life

- John Newton was born in Wapping, London, in 1725. He was the son of Elizabeth and John Newton Sr, who was a ship captain that worked primarily in the Caribbean.
- John's mother Elizabeth died of tuberculosis in 1732, just two weeks before young John's seventh birthday. John's father then sent him to boarding school for two years while he was working at sea, then moved to Essex County to live with his father's new wife.
- When he was 11 years old, John's father took him out to sea on a voyage with him, and he sailed a total of six voyages with his father before he retired in 1742.
- Following his retirement John's father was planning to have his son work on a sugarcane plantation in Jamaica, but he had other plans. At age 17 he signed up to join the merchant marine, and set sail to the Mediterranean Sea.

Life at Sea

- In 1743, while going to visit friends, Newton was captured and "pressed" into the naval service by the Royal Navy. He became a midshipman aboard HMS Harwich.
 - **Impressment is the act of taking men into a military or naval force by compulsion, with or without notice.**
 - At one point Newton tried to desert and was punished in front of the crew of 350. Stripped to the waist and tied to the grating, he received a flogging of eight dozen lashes!
- Later, while traveling to India, he transferred to Pegasus, a slave ship bound for West Africa. The ship carried goods to Africa and traded them for slaves to be shipped to the colonies in the Caribbean and North America.

Abandonment, Enslavement, and Eventual Rescue

- Just like on the HMS Harwich, Newton did not get along with the crew of Pegasus. They abandoned him in West Africa with a slave dealer who owned a lemon tree plantation on an island just off the coast.
 - John Newton was 'given' to the wife of the slave dealer, where he was abused and treated as poorly as many of her African slaves.
 - Newton later recounted this period as the time he was "once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in West Africa."
- John's father, John Newton Sr. grew increasingly worried about his son, and in 1748 he asked the captain of the Greyhound, a British trading vessel, to find his son, and successfully bargained for his return to England aboard the Greyhound.

Conversion to Evangelical Christianity

- During the 1748 voyage to England after his rescue, Newton had a spiritual conversion. The ship hit a severe storm off the coast of Ireland and almost sank. Newton awoke in the middle of the night and, as the ship filled with water, called out to God. The cargo shifted and stopped up the hole, and the ship drifted to safety. Newton marked this experience as the beginning of his conversion to evangelical Christianity.
- Following this incident Newton began to read the Bible and other religious literature. By the time he reached Britain on March 10, 1748, he considered himself a convert to Evangelical Christianity

- John Newton marked the day of this anniversary for the rest of his life. From that point on, he avoided profanity, gambling, and drinking.
- Newton gained sympathy for the slaves during his time in Africa.

Return to England and work in the slave trade

- Upon his return to England by way of Liverpool, Newton's father helped arrange for him to be a first mate aboard a slave ship named *Brownlow*, which sailed from Guinea to the Caribbean.
- While in West Africa, Newton became ill with a fever and professed his full belief in God, asking Him to take control of his destiny. He later said that this was the first time he felt totally at peace with God.
- After his return to England in 1750, Newton made three voyages as captain of the slave ships *Duke of Argyle* (1750) and *African* (1752–53 and 1753–54).
 - After suffering a severe stroke in 1754, he gave up sailing and actively participating in the slave trade, but continued investing his money in slaving operations.

Post-Slave Trade

- In 1750, at age 25, Newton married his childhood sweetheart, Mary Catlett, and adopted two of his orphaned nieces.
- In 1755 at age 30, Newton was appointed a tax collector at the Port of Liverpool and studied ancient languages and religious texts in his spare time.
- In 1757 he applied to be an ordained Anglican priest, but he would not be ordained until 1764. He worked for 16 years as a priest in the community of Olney, where he became well-known for his community work.
 - In 1767 William Cowper, the poet, moved to Olney. He collaborated with the priest on a volume of hymns; it was published as *Olney Hymns* in 1779, and contained the **famous hymn still sung today; “Amazing Grace!”**
- In 1779, he became a priest in London and was considered a very popular preacher.
 - John Newton even provided spiritual guidance to **William Wilberforce**, a British MP who played a very prominent role in the abolition of slavery. He's also a character in the show!
- In 1788, 34 years after he had retired from the slave trade, Newton broke a long silence on the subject with the publication of a forceful pamphlet *Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade*, in which he described his experience with the horrific conditions of the slave ships.
 - He apologized for "a confession, which ... comes too late ... It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders." He had copies sent to every MP, and the pamphlet sold so well that it needed to be re-printed multiple times!
- Newton became an ally and mentor to William Wilberforce, leader of the Parliamentary campaign to abolish the African slave trade. He lived to see the British passage of the Slave Trade Act 1807, which abolished the slave trade in England. He died shortly thereafter.

Famous Quotes

- “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.”
- “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”
- “We judge things by their present appearances, but the Lord sees them in their consequences.”