

## CFBC Hymns Class 21

### John Newton (1725-1807)

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,  
restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach  
the gospel which he had long laboured to destroy

John Newton's Epitaph (composed by Newton himself)

***"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."***

"Whitefield was flamboyant, Wesley was masterful, Newton was unobtrusive. Yet Newton was indubitably one of the three greatest eighteenth-century evangelical leaders. As a warm-hearted pastoral counsellor, in groups and by letter, he had no peer; as a producer of plain hymns for plain people he was one of the greatest; and the wisdom of his preaching, for all its old-fashioned fulsomeness, is stellar and searching."

J I Packer

"John Newton spoke with a tender heart and had a theological backbone of steel. His might in the truth was matched by his meekness. His theological acumen was matched by his manifest contrition. His heights of intellect were matched by his depths of humility. He could never get over the wonder of his own rescue by sheer, triumphant grace. Glad-hearted, grateful lowliness and brokenness as a saved "wretch" were the root of Newton's winsome, humble, compelling tenderness."

John Piper

"John Newton must surely be one of the most conspicuous of God's trophies of grace (indeed, of amazing grace) throughout church history. He attributed his transformation to the grace of God alone. It was his only hope of God's acceptance. As he wrote in Cardiphonia, his collection of letters, about 'a precious and honourable woman', her hope rested 'not on what she had done for the Lord, but upon what he had done for her'. John Newton could certainly have said the same thing about himself."

John Stott

## **A Short History of John Newton's Life**

John Piper

John Newton was born July 24, 1725 in London to a godly mother and an irreligious, sea-faring father. His mother died when he was six. Left mainly to himself, Newton became a debauched sailor — a miserable outcast on the coast of West Africa for two years; a slave-trading sea-captain until an epileptic seizure ended his career; a well-paid “surveyor of tides” in Liverpool; a loved pastor of two congregations in Olney and London for 43 years; a devoted husband to Mary for 40 years until she died in 1790; a personal friend to William Wilberforce, Charles Simeon, Henry Martyn, William Carey, John Wesley, George Whitefield; and, finally, the author of the most famous hymn in the English language, Amazing Grace. He died on December 21, 1807 at the age of 82.

### **Newton's Youth and Childhood**

Newton's mother was a devout Congregationalist and taught her only child, John, the Westminster Catechism and the hymns of Isaac Watts. But she died in 1732 when John was six, and his father's second wife had no spiritual interest. Newton wrote in his Narrative that he was in school only two of all his growing-up years, from ages eight to ten, at a boarding school in Stratford. So he was mainly self-taught, and that remained true all his life. He never had any formal theological education.

At the age of eleven he began to sail with his father and made five voyages to the Mediterranean until he was 18. He wrote about their relationship: “I am persuaded he loved me, but he seemed not willing that I should know it. I was with him in a state of fear and bondage. His sternness . . . broke and overawed my spirit”.

## **A Durable Romance**

When he was 17 he met Mary Catlett and fell in love with her. She was 13. For the next seven years of traveling and misery he dreamed about her. “None of the scenes of misery and wickedness I afterwards experienced ever banished her a single hour together from my waking thoughts for the seven following years”. They did eventually marry when he was 24 and were married for 40 years till she died in 1790. His love for her was extraordinary before and after the marriage. Three years after she died he published a collection of letters he had written to her on three voyages to Africa after they were married.

## **Moral Ruin and Misery**

He was pressed into naval service against his will when he was 18 and sailed away bitterly on the Harwich as a midshipman. His friend and biographer, Richard Cecil, says, “The companions he met with here completed the ruin of his principles”. Of himself he wrote, “I was capable of anything; I had not the least fear of God before my eyes, nor (so far as I remember) the least sensibility of conscience. . . . My love to [Mary] was now the only restraint I had left”. On one of his visits home he deserted the ship and was caught, “confined two days in the guard-house; . . . kept a while in irons . . . publicly stripped and whipt, degraded from his office”.

When he was twenty years old he was put off his ship on some small islands just southeast of Sierra Leone, West Africa, and for about a year and a half he lived as a virtual slave in almost destitute circumstances. The wife of his master despised him and treated him cruelly. He wrote that even the African slaves would try to smuggle him food from their own slim rations. Later in life he marveled at the seemingly accidental way a ship put anchor on his island after seeing some smoke, and just happened to be the ship with a captain who knew Newton’s father and managed to free him from his bondage. That was February, 1747. He was not quite 21, and God was about to close in.

## **The Precious Storm at Sea**

The ship had business on the seas for over a year. Then on March 21, 1748, on his way home to England in the North Atlantic, God acted to rescue the “African blasphemer.” On this day 57 years later, in 1805, when Newton was 80 years old, he wrote in his diary, “March 21, 1805. Not well able to write. But I endeavor to observe the return of this day with Humiliation, Prayer and Praise” (D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 13). He had marked the day as sacred and precious for over half a century.

He awoke in the night to a violent storm as his room began to fill with water. As he ran for the deck, the captain stopped him and had him fetch a knife. The man who went up in his place was immediately washed overboard (Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, p. 25). He was assigned to the pumps and heard himself say, "If this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us". It was the first time he had expressed the need for mercy in many years.

He worked the pumps from three in the morning until noon, slept for an hour, and then took the helm and steered the ship till midnight. At the wheel he had time to think back over his life and his spiritual condition. At about six o'clock the next evening it seemed as though there might be hope. "I thought I saw the hand of God displayed in our favour. I began to pray: I could not utter the prayer of faith; I could not draw near to a reconciled God, and call him Father . . . the comfortless principles of infidelity were deeply riveted; . . . The great question now was, how to obtain faith".

He found a Bible and got help from Luke 11:13, which promises the Holy Spirit to those who ask. He reasoned, "If this book be true, the promise in this passage must be true likewise. I have need of that very Spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. He has engaged here to give that Spirit to those who ask: I must therefore pray for it; and, if it be of God, he will make good on his own word".

He spent all the rest of the voyage in deep seriousness as he read and prayed over the Scriptures. On April 8 they anchored in Ireland, and the next day the storm at sea was so violent they would have surely been sunk. Newton described what God had done in those two weeks:

Thus far I was answered, that before we arrived in Ireland, I had a satisfactory evidence in my own mind of the truth of the Gospel, as considered in itself, and of its exact suitableness to answer all my needs. . . . I stood in need of an Almighty Savior; and such a one I found described in the New Testament. Thus far the Lord had wrought a marvelous thing: I was no longer an infidel: I heartily renounced my former profaneness, and had taken up some right notions; was seriously disposed, and sincerely touched with a sense of the undeserved mercy I had received, in being brought safe through so many dangers. I was sorry for my past misspent life, and purposed an immediate reformation. I was quite freed from the habit of swearing, which seemed to have been as deeply rooted in me as a second nature. Thus, to all appearance, I was a new man.

It was a remarkable change but, from his later mature standpoint, Newton did not view it as full conversion.

I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of . . . the hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ: a continual dependence on him. . . . I acknowledged the Lord's mercy in pardoning what was past, but depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come. . . . I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards". For six years after this time, he said he had no "Christian friend or faithful minister to advise me". He became the captain of a slave-trading ship and went to sea again until December, 1749. In his mature years he came to feel intense remorse for his participation in the slave trade and joined William Wilberforce in opposing it. Thirty years after leaving the sea he wrote an essay, *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*, which closed with a reference to "a commerce so iniquitous, so cruel, so oppressive, so destructive, as the African Slave Trade!" (John Newton, "Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade")

On February 1, 1750 he married Mary. That June his father drowned while swimming in the Hudson Bay. He went on three long voyages after the marriage and left Mary alone for 10 to 13 months each time. Then in November, 1754 he had an epileptic seizure and never sailed again.

## **Self-Taught**

In the years between his seafaring and his pastorate at Olney he was a Surveyor of Tides in Liverpool and a very active ministerial lay person. He interacted with evangelicals from both the Anglican and Independent wings of the Awakening. He was especially taken by George Whitefield and "was even tagged with the epithet 'Little Whitefield' for his constant attendance upon the evangelist" (D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "I Am a Sort of Middle-Man": The Politically Correct Evangelicalism of John Newton," in *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States*, ed. by George Rawlyk and Mark Noll (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 32). He devoted himself to a rigorous program of self-study and applied himself to Greek and Hebrew and Syriac. He said, "I was in some hopes that perhaps, sooner or later, [Christ] might call me into his service. I believe it was a distant hope of this that determined me to study the original Scriptures" (Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, p. 50. Later in his ministry, Newton counseled a younger minister, "The original Scriptures well deserve your pains, and will richly repay them" (*The Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Vol.1., p. 143).

Concerning the early years of studying the languages he says, “You must not think that I have attained, were ever aimed at, a critical skill in any of these: . . . In the Hebrew, I can read the Historical Books and Psalms with tolerable ease; but, in the Prophetical and difficult parts, I am frequently obliged to have recourse to lexicons, etc. However, I know so much as to be able, with such helps as are at hand, to judge for myself the meaning of any passage I have occasion to consult” [Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, pp. 49-50]).

Along with these he was reading “the best writers in divinity” in Latin and English and French (which he taught himself while at sea), but gave himself mainly to the Scriptures. The upshot theologically of this study, together with his personal experience of grace, is summed up by Bruce Hindmarsh: “By the early 1760’s Newton’s theological formation was complete, and there would be few significant realignments of his essential beliefs. He was a five-point Calvinist” (D. Bruce Hindmarsh, “I Am a Sort of Middle-Man,” p. 42). But the spirit of his Calvinism was sweet and tender, which is one of the great concerns of this message.

## **Two Pastorates, No Children, and Heaven**

In 1764 he accepted the call to the pastorate of the Church of England parish in Olney and served there for almost 16 years. Then he accepted the call at age 54 to St. Mary’s Woolnoth in London where he began his 27-year ministry on December 8, 1779. The last time he was in the pulpit of St. Mary’s was in October, 1806 when he was 81 years old. His eyes and ears were failing and his good friend Richard Cecil suggested he cease preaching when he turned eighty, to which Newton responded, “What! Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?” (Richard Cecil, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Newton*, p. 88)

John and Mary had no children of their own, but adopted two nieces. When Mary died 17 years before John, Newton lived with the family of one of these nieces and was cared for by her as well as by any daughter. He died December 21, 1807 at the age of 82. A month before he died he expressed his settled faith:

It is a great thing to die; and, when flesh and heart fail, to have God for the strength of our heart, and our portion forever. I know whom I have believed, and he is able to keep that which I have committed against that great day. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me that day.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/john-newton-the-tough-roots-of-his-habitual-tenderness>

## My Profile (Newton Tells His Own Story)

I was born in London the 24th of July, 1725...My parents, though not wealthy, were respectable. My father was many years master of a ship in the Mediterranean trade. In the year 1748 he went Governor of York Fort in Hudson's Bay, where he died in the year 1750.

My mother was a dissenter, a pious woman, and a member of the late Dr. Jennings's church. She was of a weak, consumptive habit, loved retirement, and, as I was her only child, she made it the chief business and pleasure of her life to instruct me, and bring me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I have been told, that, from my birth, she had, in her mind, devoted me to the ministry; and that, had she lived till I was of a proper age, I was to have been sent to St Andrew's in Scotland to be educated. But the Lord had appointed otherwise. My mother died before I was seven years of age.

I was rather of a sedentary turn, not active and playful, as boys commonly are, but seemed as willing to learn as my mother was to teach me. I had some capacity, and a retentive memory. When I was four years old, I could read, (hard names excepted,) as well as I can now: and could likewise repeat the answers to the questions in the Assembly's *Shorter Catechism*, with the proofs; and all Dr. Watt's smaller *Catechisms*, and his *Children's Hymns*.

When my father returned from sea, after my mother's death, he married again. My new mother was the daughter of a substantial grazier at Aveley in Essex. She seemed willing to adopt and bring me up; but, after two or three years, she had a son of her own, who engrossed the old man's notice. My father was a very sensible, and a moral man, as the world rates morality; but neither he, nor my step-mother, was under the impressions of religion: I was, therefore, much left to myself, to mingle with idle and wicked boys; and soon learnt their ways.

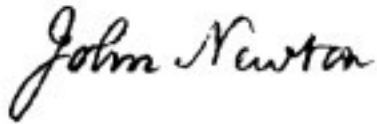
I was never at school but about two years; from my eighth to my tenth year. It was a boarding-school at Stratford, in Essex. Though my father left me much to run about the streets, yet, when under his eye, he kept me at a great distance. I am persuaded he loved me, but he seemed not willing that I should know it. I was with him in a state of fear and bondage. His sternness, together with the severity of my schoolmaster, broke and overawed my spirit, and almost made me a dolt; so that part of the two years I was at school, instead of making a progress, I nearly forgot all that my good mother had taught me.

The day I was eleven years old, I went on board my father's ship in Longreach. I made five voyages with him to the Mediterranean. In the course of the last voyage, he left me some months at Alicante in Spain, with a merchant, a

particular friend of his. With him I might have done well, if I had behaved well: but, by this time, my sinful propensities had gathered strength by habit: I was very wicked, and therefore very foolish; and, being my own enemy, I seemed determined that nobody should be my friend.

My father left the sea in the year 1742. I made one voyage afterwards to Venice, before the mast; and, soon after my return, was impressed on board the Harwich. - Then began my awfully mad career, as recorded in the Narrative; to which, and to the Letters to a Wife, I must refer you for any further dates and incidents.

I am truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Newton". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Dec. 19, 1795

### **John Newton's own sermon notes for Amazing Grace**

New Year's Morning  
1 January 1773  
1 Chronicles 17:16,17

*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.*

“The Lord bestows many blessings upon his people, but unless he likewise gives them a thankful heart, they lose much of the comfort they might have in them. And this is not only a blessing in itself but an earnest of more. When David was peacefully settled in the kingdom, he purposed to express his gratitude by building a place for the Ark. This honour the Lord had appointed for his son Solomon, but he graciously accepted David's intention, for he not only notices the poor services of his people, but even their desires to serve him, when they spring from a principle of simple love, though opportunity should be wanting. He sent him a message by Nathan assuring him that his son should build the house and that he himself would build David's house and establish his kingdom. This filled his heart with praise. My text is part of his acknowledgement. Omitting David's personal concerns, I would accommodate them to our own use as a proper subject for our meditations on the entrance of a new year. They lead us to a consideration of past mercies and future hopes and intimate the frame of mind which becomes us when we contemplate what the Lord has done for us.



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## **Oh, it was mercy indeed to save a wretch like me!**

John Newton wrote these words in his journal on 21 March 1796 (at the age of 70), 48 years after his conversion.

He had never forgotten that "great turning day" in 1748 when, as an obstreperous, rebellious young man, he was surprised to hear himself crying out during a violent storm at sea, "The Lord have mercy on us!"

For it was on that day he discovered, "How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed." Every year that followed, he kept 21 March apart as a day of remembrance, for thanksgiving, fasting and prayer.

The words of *Amazing Grace* were etched on Newton's heart daily. But we assume that he first wrote this hymn for his New Year's Morning sermon of 1 January 1773, for it fits his sermon notes so closely and the text he chose to write above it in the *Olney Hymns*, 1 Chronicles 17:16,17, is identical to the sermon's text.

## **The Original Text of Amazing Grace (1773)**

I Chronicles 17:16-17: "Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O God; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come, and have regarded me according to the rank of a man of high degree, O Lord God."

Perhaps few would guess the hymn this passage inspired...But perhaps the most obvious parallel comes from the phrase "that You have brought me this far" and the third verse of the song that we know today as "Amazing Grace."

Newton's original first four verses are quite familiar:

1. Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, hut now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

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

3. Through many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

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

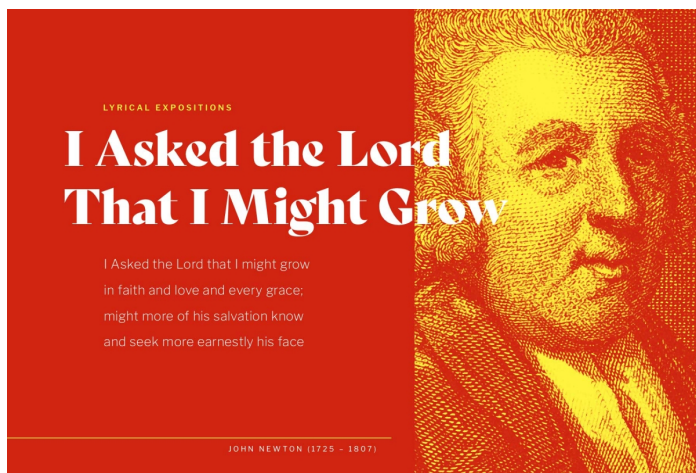
Less familiar, though, are the two verses Newton used to conclude the song:

5. 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.

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

The verse we sing today as the last verse, “When we’ve been there ten thousand years,” was a later addition by another writer. There’s nothing wrong with that verse, but it’s also interesting to see how Newton originally intended for his own song to conclude. Ultimately, he comes to the same conclusion, when he says that “God, who called me here below / will be forever mine,” but along the way, he uses more unusual allusions (“within the veil”) and metaphors (“dissolve like snow”).

<https://danielmount.com/archives/forgotten-verses-amazing-grace/>



John Newton is one of the most well-known Christian figures of the past 500 years. Born in London in 1725 and died in London in 1807, Newton, as a young man, lived a vulgar and sinful life and worked on slave ships for several years prior to turning in faith to Jesus in 1748. Upon his rebirth, he immediately left the slave trade and would go on to spend nearly 40 years as an abolitionist, befriending and influencing such anti-slavery voices as William Wilberforce, among others. Newton also pastored for about 30 years and became close friends with, and caregiver of, William Cowper (author of “There is a Fountain Filled with Blood”) over the final years of Cowper’s life due to Cowper’s severe mental health issues. Newton was also a prolific hymn writer, famously authoring “Amazing Grace,” which is probably the most well-known hymn in the English-speaking world today.

One of the songs that Newton wrote which has gained considerable attention among protestant and evangelical Christians over the past 15 years or so is one entitled “I Asked the Lord that I Might Grow”.

### **I asked the Lord that I might grow (1779)**

1 I asked the Lord that I might grow  
in faith and love and ev'ry grace;  
might more of his salvation know,  
and seek more earnestly his face.

2 'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,  
and he, I trust, has answered pray'r,  
but it has been in such a way  
as almost drove me to despair.

3 I hoped that in some favored hour  
at once he'd answer my request,  
and by his love's constraining pow'r  
subdue my sins and give me rest.

4 Instead of this he made me feel  
the hidden evils of my heart,  
and let the angry pow'rs of hell  
assault my soul in ev'ry part.

5 Yea more, with his own hand he seemed  
intent to aggravate my woe,  
crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
humbled my heart, and laid me low.

6 "Lord, why is this?" I, trembling, cried;  
"Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?"  
"Tis in this way," the Lord replied,  
"I answer prayer for grace and faith.

7 "These inward trials I employ  
from self and pride to set thee free,  
and break thy schemes of earthly joy  
that thou may'st find thy all in me."

Source: Trinity Psalter Hymnal #519

### **John Newton prayed for spiritual growth...**

What is going on this song? The answer is clear: if we take this song at face value, it is Newton's personal testimony regarding his progression in the Christian life. Starting out as young believer, we presume, in keeping with the heart of God himself (Mt. 6:9-10), Newton asks not for wealth, health, success, or comfort, but for growth in Jesus—greater degrees of maturity, more love for people, more strength against sin, and a deeper personal relationship with the Lord himself. Many of us can relate to that. In the early days of my conversion, I was so focused and had no desires or thoughts about anything else but growing in the Lord and in holiness and purity, and in telling everyone I could about Jesus, the Friend of sinners.

### **...and God answered his prayer.**

And Newton goes on to testify that God did, in fact, answer his prayer. But rather than making Newton the 'super Christian' he was asking to be, God grew him in a way that he never could have imagined, and that, by the sounds of it, drove him to the point of despairing of life...

In Newton's understanding, God did two things in answer to Newton's prayers for growth. First, he showed him the depths of the darkness and grossness of sin and wickedness that were still so alive and well within his own heart (4th stanza). Second, he disrupted Newton's life ambitions, undermining those desires that we all have for success and influence (5th stanza). In fact, if Newton's short biography is any indication—he became a pastor nearly 20 years after his conversion—he may have, for years and years and years, struggled with his own sin and the ugliness of his own heart, all the while never getting to the place in life in which he really wanted to be, which was his career of choice—that is, the ministry.

Admittedly, I don't know Newton's life well enough to do anything more than speculate here, but Solomon's words definitely come to mind about 'hope deferred making the heart sick' (Pr. 13:12). And how many of us do not know the feeling of having the greatest desire of our heart—marriage, children, a particular career choice, freedom from an illness, or any infinite number of things—go unmet for years, or even decades. To our minds, to have that desire satisfied is the pinnacle of meaningful existence for us; without it, life can literally feel hopeless, and many Christians simply cannot bear the weight of the feelings of loss and disappointment.

God answered John Newton's prayer in two ways. First, he showed him the depths of the darkness and grossness of sin and wickedness that were still so alive and well within his own heart. Second, he disrupted his life ambitions, undermining those desires that we all have for success and influence. These two stanzas of "I Asked the Lord"—stanzas 4 and 5—sound so much like Psalm 38, a psalm in which David is buried under the crushing weight of external problems (Ps. 38:11-12) and the knowledge of the sin of his own heart (Ps. 38:3-5). The result, as we can see in this psalm, is that David sees no way out and no immediate solution to his troubles. He can only hope against hope that God will hear him and be merciful (Ps. 38:15, 21-22) in the midst of the overwhelming darkness (Ps. 38:2, 8, 10, 17).

But something very much like this is exactly how God has "answered" John Newton's prayer for Christian growth and a deeper walk with the Lord, and that is the truly surprising thing.

Instead of growth, and strength, and greater measures of personal character and holiness, God plunges Newton into all the grossness of his own sin, and on top of it, disrupts and frustrates evidently all his outward attempts to satisfy those deep desires for the things in life that we all want.

Why would God do this? And why would someone...write a song about it?

Well, to answer the first question, in perfect keeping with his perfect character, God—who himself is a Teacher (Job 33:23-30), and a Redeemer (Ps. 107), and a Refiner (1 Pet. 1:6-7), and a Perfecter (Heb. 2:10-14), and a Sanctifier (Rom. 8:28-30), and, ultimately, a Father (Dt. 8:2-5, Heb. 12:5-11)—was growing John Newton in the same way he grew Joseph, and Job, and Jeremiah, and Jesus, and Paul, and is growing us today.

And to what end? To the end that Newton would prize Christ, and not this life; that he would love the Creator, not the creation.

To answer the second question, in his knowledge of God and his theological maturity, and in the pastoral tenderness borne out of his own experience, John Newton simply wanted God's people to be encouraged by what God is necessarily, unfailingly, unambiguously doing in their lives when they struggle with sin and suffer in trials.

### **What Should We Know?**

So, you are a Christian. You are trusting in Jesus alone for forgiveness of sins and for righteousness before God. So what are you experiencing today? Is life crushing you? Is your sin besetting and entangling you? What should you know in the midst of all that?

You should know that Jesus holds us in the safety of his hands, and no one—not even you—can snatch you away from him. God has given his own Son instead of us, and Jesus has joyfully laid down his life for his sheep, and all that is left is the refining, character-shaping, patient love of a Father toward you, his now-adopted son or daughter.

And it isn't arbitrary. There is a goal, namely this: that your affection for this world is weakened, and your affection for Jesus and his Kingdom is strengthened.

If have asked the Lord to grow you, to strengthen you spiritually, to help you defeat a particular sin, to make you a kinder, more patient, more faithful follower of the Lord Jesus, and all you seem to be seeing so far are external difficulties, frustrated plans, unmet desires, and greater measures of sin than you even realized were in you, be encouraged. Know that God is at work answering your prayers. He will certainly sustain you and restore you, either in this life or the next.

So press on, and fix your eyes on Jesus, our brother and great high priest who has authored and finished our faith, and remember the words of God to John Newton:

“Tis in this way,” the Lord replied, “I answer prayer for grace and faith. These inward trials I employ from self and pride to set thee free, and break thy schemes of earthly joy that thou may’st find thy all in me.”

<https://firmfoundationpv.org/lyrical-expositions-i-asked-the-lord-that-i-might-grow-by-john-newton/>