



**CHURCHES TOGETHER
IN CENTRAL BROMLEY**

CTCB Lent Course 2021

My Favourite Hymn

Session 4: John Newton

“There is a style and manner suited to the composition of hymns, which may be more successfully, or at least more easily attained by a versifier, than by a poet. They should be Hymns, not Odes, if designed for public worship, and for the use of plain people”

John Newton in his preface to *Olney Hymns*

Course outline

Session 1	Tuesday 23 rd February	<i>Ancient</i>
Session 2	Tuesday 2 nd March	<i>Isaac Watts</i>
Session 3	Tuesday 9 th March	<i>Charles Wesley</i>
Session 4	Tuesday 16 th March	<i>John Newton</i>
Session 5	Tuesday 23 rd March	<i>Fanny J Crosby</i>
Session 6	Tuesday 30 th March	<i>Modern</i>

Starter activity (in small groups)

What have been some of the highlights so far of this course? How would you like to see your Christian life change as a result of the hymns and Bible passages we have considered in our sessions so far?

For further details about this course or other church events please contact:
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Bible passages for reflection and discussion

John Newton's own sermon notes for *Amazing Grace* include his Bible Study based on the following passages of Scripture.

1 Chronicles 17:16-17 *Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: 'Who am I, LORD God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, my God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You, LORD God, have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men.'*

Romans 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.*

Romans 13:11: *The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.*

Deuteronomy 15:15 *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.*

In Contrast William Williams based his *Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer* on the story of the Hebrews' flight from Egypt and journey to the Promised Land as recorded in the book of Numbers.

Numbers 27:15 *Moses said to the LORD, ¹⁶ 'May the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community ¹⁷ to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.'*

Both Newton and Williams were part of the movement that introduced hymns *inspired by the Bible* but were not restricted to simply using the words of the Bible.

Now consider the following questions in your small group:

1. John Newton organised his hymn book into three sections – *On select passages of scripture*, *On occasional subjects*, *On the spiritual life*. What difference does it make if a hymn is scripturally based? Or a response from faith?
2. Newton considered the passage from 1 Chr. 17:16-17 “*to lead us to a consideration of past mercies and future hopes*”. How successfully does *Amazing Grace* do this and how? Discuss which phrases you most identify with.
3. Newton’s own faith stressed a personal response to God’s Grace was appropriate. He chose Roman 12:1 –how does this challenge us today? What might it mean to us today?
4. Deuteronomy 15:15 was Newton’s own personal verse – why do you think it was important to him? Do we have key bible verses as well as favourite hymns that help guide us?
5. Read the verses of *Guide Me* carefully. What is its key message? Why might this hymn particularly appeal to the open-air congregations Williams preached to? NB *Cwm Rhondda* was not the original tune!
6. Both Newton and Williams drew heavily on the Old Testament as well as the New for their Christian faith. Do modern hymns? Why?

Time to share

Choose your favourite one of the five hymns we have considered this evening, and try and work out three different things you like about it. Then share them with the rest of your group.

Closing prayer (from Numbers 6:24-26)

The Lord bless you and keep you: the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you: the Lord lift his countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.

This week’s homework (optional!)

Inspired by the example and work of John Newton, let’s find a different reason every day this week to give thanks to God for his Amazing Grace.

Fact file: *John Newton (1725-1807)*

John Newton crammed a lot of living into his 82 years. His mother died when he was six years old, and he joined his father at sea when he was eleven. He served his apprenticeship as a sailor, and rose through the ranks until he became the captain of a slave ship. He abandoned the religious training that he had experienced as a child, and revelled in the dissolute life of a slave trader. He was noted for his profanity and his cruelty.

But one stormy night, when his ship was in danger of sinking and he was in danger of dying, Newton had a real change of heart. It might have been his religious training at his mother's knee surfacing after all those years — or it might have been his love for Mary Catlett, a Christian woman whom he later married — or it might have been his reading of the book, *Imitation of Christ*, by William Law — or it might have been all three. In any event, Newton had a real conversion experience.

For a while, Newton continued on his slave ship, but he began to treat both the slaves and his crew with a good deal more compassion. Finally, convinced that the slave trade was wrong, he left his ship and took a job onshore.

He then felt a call to the ministry, and was ordained at age forty and assigned to a church at Olney, England. He continued in ministry through the rest of his long life, even after failing eyesight made it impossible for him to read.

The hymnbook *Olney Hymns*, Newton's collection published in 1779, contains some of the most popular Christian songs of all time, *Amazing Grace* among them. By 1836, the book had gone through at least another 37 editions. The book contains over 300 hymns, some of which still appear in modern church worship. John Newton and his friend, William Cowper, one of the most respected and influential English poets of the 18th century, worked together on this project. Both men shared passion for showing others that they could befriend God personally, receiving forgiveness, freedom, and love.

The hymn *Amazing Grace* is in a sense Newton's own story. It was amazing grace that saved him, and it was amazing grace that was the focus of his preaching. But it is also the story of every Christian. It is amazing grace that saves us — nothing else — no works of our hands or gifts of our wealth. It was amazing that God would love and save John Newton, but it is amazing that God would love and save any of us.

Adapted from Richard Niell Donovan www.lectionary.org, © 2007

Five well-known hymns by John Newton and his circle

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!

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace hath 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.

John Newton, *Olney Hymns* (1779)

Last stanza unknown, published 1829 in the *Baptist Songster*

Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God!
He, whose Word cannot be broken, formed thee for his own abode.
On the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded, thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See! the streams of living waters, springing from eternal love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters, and all fear of want remove:
Who can faint while such a river ever flows their thirst t'assuage?
Grace, which like the Lord, the Giver, never fails from age to age.

Saviour, since of Zion's city I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in thy Name.
Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know.

John Newton, *Olney Hymns* (1779)

How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest.

Dear Name, the Rock on which I build,
My Shield and Hiding Place,
My never failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace!

Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

Till then I would Thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath,
And may the music of Thy Name
Refresh my soul in death!

John Newton, *Olney Hymns* (1779)

May the grace of Christ our Saviour
And the Father's boundless love
With the Holy Spirit's favour,
Rest upon us from above.

Thus may we abide in union
With each other and the Lord,
And possess, in sweet communion,
Joys which earth cannot afford.

John Newton, *Olney Hymns* (1779)

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim though this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through;
strong Deliverer,
be thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
bear me through the swelling current,
land me safe on Canaan's side;
songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1745), translated by Peter Williams (1771)

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