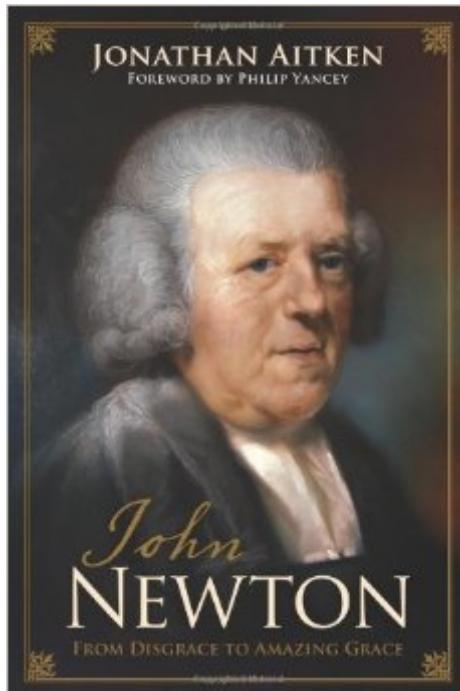


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John Newton: From Disgrace To Amazing Grace



Synopsis

Most Christians know John Newton as the slave ship captain who famously converted to Christ on the high seas and then penned one of the greatest hymns of the faith: "Amazing Grace." Less well-known is Newton's significance in his own day as an evangelical icon, great preacher and theologian, and important influence on abolitionist William Wilberforce. In this fascinating biography, Jonathan Aitken explores many facets of Newton's eventful life story, helping readers better understand his remarkable conversion and passionate fight to end the slave trade. The first modern account to draw on Newton's unpublished diaries and correspondence, this colorful and historically significant portrait provides fresh insights into the life and legacy of one of the most important Christians of the 18th century. Now available in paperback.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

While not everyone knows the name of John Newton, everyone knows his song and at least a bit of his story. Immortalized in the words of "Amazing Grace," the most-recorded song in history, everyone knows that John Newton was wretched and miserable until saved by a grace that forever transformed his life. Two centuries ago, fewer people knew his song, but far more knew his story. That story is told again and told afresh in Jonathan Aitken's new biography *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace*. John Newton lived a life that could only have been more dramatic if it were the product of fiction. Forced into naval service when he was young, Newton endeared himself to no one, living a life of utter disregard for authority. While attempting to desert he was captured

and dropped to the lowest ranks of seamen. He eventually found a way to be released from the military and wormed his way onto a slave ship with which he sailed down the long coast of Africa. Being deserted for a time on that dark continent, he was made the slave of a slave-trader and suffered terrible abuse at the hands of his captor. After a time he was rescued and became the captain of his own slave ship. But then, during a long passage across the Atlantic Ocean, he began to read a Bible and underwent the remarkable transformation chronicled in the song he wrote years later. Newton worked in secular employment for a time but soon felt the call to ministry and was ordained an Anglican priest, a position he retained until his death in 1807. In the intervening years he became widely-known through his biography and through his efforts to abolish the slave trade. He served as mentor to William Wilberforce who fought a long but ultimately successful campaign to ban the British slave trade.

Mr. Aitken's book takes us through John Newton's amazing life, and I found myself very pleased to read the story of Newton's role in the abolition of the slave trade through his influence on his friend Wilberforce (who served in Parliament devoting his life to abolition) as well as his own testimonies to the British authorities. Further, his Christian devotion to William Cowper helped that troubled man get through many dark periods -- even suicide attempts -- and he, Cowper, became one of the leading lights of 18th century English literature. Also, his devotion to and love for his wife, Polly, is also heavily accented in this work. It was a 43 year love affair, despite the fact that many found her to be unattractive and somewhat deficient between the ears. Also, they never had children. Nonetheless from the day he first set eyes upon her until the day of her death, she was his one and only. Rev. Newton also demonstrated singular devotion to hymnody in worship services which was suspect in high Church of England circles at that time. He showed a sympathy for and interest in some of the religious enthusiasts of the day that rankled some of his Church of England contemporaries, but his charitable attitudes seemed to win over those who needed to be won over, and the cause of Christ was served mightily by the man until he was in his eighties (he was exceedingly long-lived for a person in that century). The author is thorough in his treatment of the above themes, but the work is a little too coolly detached for my taste which is why I have given it a four rather than a five. It's filled with facts, yet the texture of the man doesn't really come across.

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