

God's Grace Saved

— A Wretch like Me!

— by John Newton [born 1725]

Now that I look back at the things that I did, I'm horribly ashamed of what I did, but telling this story might help someone who is living in those kind of sins. (Yes, I loved my sins in those days, but it was those very sins that almost destroyed me.)

When I was 25 years old, I was captain of a slave ship. That is, back about 1750 I was captain of a ship that sailed from England to Africa, captured some black Africans, took them to the American continent, and sold them like cattle. But this was not my only sin. Though my mother read me many Bible stories from the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus from the New Testament, I became an atheist when I was a teenager. Once on board ship, I met a young sailor who was also from a good Christian home. I took him and expounded to him the doctrines of atheism and persuaded him to become an atheist. Years later, after God saved me from my sins, I met this young man on another ship and with tears in my eyes, begged him to turn to God. He was a more hardened atheist than I had ever been. I had done a good job of converting him to atheism!

But that is not all of my sins. With great shame of face I say: when we had the slaves in our ship, we sailors used to go down into the holds and rape the black African women. Probably some of the black people who today go to church and sing *Amazing Grace* are my descendants! That is truly amazing grace! And all of the time that I was living such a debauched lifestyle, I had a sweetheart in England that I was madly in love with. She came from a good Christian home and knew nothing of my lifestyle. Eventually we married and had a long happy marriage.

Do you want more? Once when I was in Africa, I got involved in an incident and ended up as a slave or prisoner of a black African queen (a slave of slaves)!

However, the day came during a horrible storm in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean that God came to me and changed my heart. He gave me a repentant heart and I committed myself to follow his way all of the days of my life. My mother's prayers were answered. However, she never got to see that day, because she died when I was only seven years old!

In the following pages, I tell my story, how I ended up becoming a captain of a slave ship, and how I went from the slavery trade to becoming the pastor or rector of one of London's most fashionable churches.

As I have already mentioned, my mother died when I was only seven years old. My step mother never told me any Bible stories or prayed with me or even acted like she cared much for me. I was placed in a boarding school for two years and that is all the education that I ever had. However, I learned to read well, loved to read, and read a lot. I became a self-educated person.

My dad was captain of a merchant ship, and when I was eleven years old, he took me with him on a commercial trip. We traveled the ports of Europe for four years. It was at this time in my life that I began to see life in the raw. Life for sailors and merchantmen was terrible, the living conditions were terrible, the food was terrible, and the pay was extremely low, besides very many sailors lost their lives in storms, shipwrecks, in mutinous fights, and in beatings. Being with my father, I was spared the worst of these things.

In those days, before I became an atheist, I fought spiritual battles with myself. My spirit wanted to follow my mother's teachings and God, but my body wanted to plunge lustfully into all of the pleasures that life had to offer. Twice I narrowly missed death, and each time I spent several days considering why I had been spared and what would have happened to me if I had been killed. Eventually I forgot those incidents and laughed them off as if it were nothing but luck that saved me. (However, later, in my atheist days, I couldn't deny that at the time, those things had shaken me a lot. I couldn't deny that my conscience had been calling me back to my mother's God.)

A few times in my teen years I tried to mend my ways and live a godly life. I spent many hours reading the Bible, praying, and even fasted some. Once I became a vegetarian for three months. I was really scared that I would speak some bad word. It was several years later before I understood what my problem was: I was trying to save myself rather than asking God to save me. It just doesn't work that way!

Finally, I decided that I loved my sins and there was nothing I could do about it. I abandoned all pretense at religion and almost forgot everything I had ever learned from my mother. But even after that, I had several reminders of the truth which shook my spirit somewhat. But I

turned to the atheistic teaching in a book called Rhapsody. It had a vow that I took. I vowed to “....no longer resist the passion growing in me for natural things.....by resisting the primitive state.”

My dad did try to reform me, but after four years, he decided that it might be best if I were on my own for a while. He got me apprenticed on another merchant ship. I was to go to Jamaica and work as a slave overseer.

I had to wait a few days for the ship to leave for Jamaica, and decided to go visit the Catlett family who had taken care of my mother when she was on her death bed. They gladly welcomed me into their home, and no sooner had I arrived than I met their daughter, Mary Catlett, and it was love at first sight. I was madly in love with her and never loved anyone else in my life. I was 17 years old, and she was 14.

I had intended to stay only three days with the Catletts so that I could make the ship before it left. But the Catletts made me so welcome and my love for Mary was so great, that I ended up staying three weeks. I missed the ship.

In those days England was at war, and missing the ship was equivalent to desertion. Desertion in wartime could mean a hanging or a beating that often ended in death. I decided to go see my dad, and see if he could help me out. On the way to my dad's house, I rehearsed in my mind what I would tell him. I certainly wasn't going to tell him that I missed the ship because I was in love with Mary!

I was only two hours walk from my dad's place when some government officers saw me, stopped me, asked me to see my identification papers, and wanted to know why I wasn't on board ship during wartime. I did not have any excuse and was thrown into jail awaiting to be taken on board ship and whipped. The government quit hanging men because there was such a shortage of sailors; however the beatings were so bad, we sometimes considered that a hanging would have been more merciful. Many sailors died from those beatings. Captain Carteret assembled his men in full dress uniform for the beating. He read my crime, my sentence, and the law that authorized my beating.

There was a doctor standing by when I was beaten with leather straps on my bare back. I was beaten to semi-consciousness before the captain ordered the beating to stop, my lacerated body released, wrapped in a blanket and taken below. The doctor treated my wounds with vinegar, spirits, salt water, or hot tar. For some days, I alternated

between consciousness and coma as fever racked my body. Also, I was demoted to a common seaman and my former officer friends were forbidden to speak to me. It was many days before the doctor pronounced me able to go back to work.

In all of my suffering, all I could think about was Mary and her pretty face. How miserable I was—and unable to do anything about my situation. Only my burning desire to see her again someday kept me from giving up.

In those days, conditions on board ship were worse than being in jail. Prisoners were fed better and had better living quarters. My dad learned that I had failed to board the ship to Jamaica, and he hurriedly made arrangements for me to be transferred from a naval ship to a merchant ship. My situation on the merchant vessel was only slightly better. I rapidly forgot my mother's teachings and descended into the sins that most all sailors fall prey to: profanities, drunkenness, whore-mongering, as well as atheism.

The ship I was on once visited Venice, which in those days was Europe's premier port. While we were at Venice, I had a dream that was a warning. Today I'm sure that it was from God.

In the dream I saw myself standing guard at the harbor at Venice, when a stranger approached me and gave me a ring. He said, “As long as you keep this ring, you will be happy and successful. If you let this ring get away from you one time, you may expect only sorrow and misery.”

Of course I was pleased with the gift, but soon another stranger approached me in my dream. He told me that what the first stranger told me was ridiculous. At first, I recoiled at his words, but he pressured me to turn from such foolishness. “If you want to show how strong you are and trust in yourself rather than such foolishness,” he said, “you will throw the ring into the water right now.” I threw the ring in the water.

Then in my dream, I looked at some mountains in the distance and noticed that they burst into fire. The Alps became a terrible inferno. This second stranger reminded me that I had already abandoned all of God's promises, then disappeared.

Then I was convinced that I had done the wrong thing and became distressed. Just then the first stranger reappeared, noticed my distress, and asked me why I was distressed. When I told him that I had thrown the ring into the water, he retrieved the ring from the water. I reached out my hand to take the ring, but he withheld it saying, “If you were

entrusted with this ring again, you would soon bring yourself into the same distress. You are not able to keep it, but I will preserve it for you. Whenever it is needful, I will produce it for you.” Then I woke up.

For the next few days, this dream troubled me continually. I hardly ate or slept or did my job assignments. Finally, the effect of this dream wore off and I almost forgot it. I ended back in my old foolish, wasteful, and whore-mongering lifestyle.

When I was 18 years old, I was once again in England, and I once again went to see Mary. However, having been demoted, I had nothing to offer her, and marriage seemed impossible. I didn't even mention it to her.

A few weeks later, I was again forced into the navy. England was at war, and government officers were allowed by law to go on merchant ships and “force” or “impress” sailors for the navy. Conditions in the navy were worse than ever, the food was uneatable. Most of the bread had maggots in it. Poor food caused many diseases among the sailors.

Once again my dad intervened. I was given a promotion, and I took advantage of my position. I can describe my attitude in those days as haughty and vain, and I did everything I could to let the men under me know what authority I had.

In those days, my closest friend preached the doctrines of atheism to me so thoroughly that, if I had any doubts, he wiped them all away. Not long after, a wave swept him overboard and he died without God. But that didn't bother me. I became an “apostle” for the cause of atheism.

It was then that I met a young sailor who came from a good Christian background and seemed to be a Christian. He was named Job and he was willing to listen to my preaching as I taught the doctrines of atheism. He was so thoroughly convinced, that he became more atheistic than I had been. We used sit together and mock the Bible and true religion.

Within a year (19 years old) I was back in England and once again headed straight for Mary's house. I only had one day there and the meeting was quite disappointing. But nothing could diminish my love for Mary. I started writing her letters and continued to write her for many years.

A few weeks later, I was assigned to a ship that would be gone for five years. The thought of five years separation from Mary was unbearable. However, the ship was forced back to port by a storm, and I went to see her once again. Again I was a deserter, and again I was

whipped and lay in bed many days recovering from that whipping. (I was not demoted this time.) I saw no hope. I was miserable, and it seemed my misery knew no end. The ship left and I gave up all hopes of seeing Mary for many years. As I looked at the sea, I thought for a while of throwing myself into the sea. Some weeks later, I considered killing the captain and then myself. I did not.

A few months later (I was 20 years old), I was transferred from a naval ship to a merchant ship that was heading for West Africa—a slave ship. On the navy ship, some of the men remembered the days when I had tried to reform myself—and they frequently ridiculed me for it. Now, on the merchant ship, no one knew about those days. I stood among them a man's man, as bad as the worst of them. My ambition was to turn as many of them as possible to atheism.

Surprise: the captain of the ship knew my dad, and consequently he was lenient and kind to me. However, it wasn't long before he heard me using all kinds of profanities and vulgarities, and he turned against me. I later made up a poem about him, saying all kinds of bad things about him, and had the whole crew singing it. Years later I would have done anything to erase this part of my life. The captain and his assistant both detested me.

It was only a few weeks later that we were loading black Africans into the hold of the ship. I, with my own hands, pressed the black men into the hold. (Forty years later I used my “expertise” in this field to testify before a government committee that was considering abolishing the slave trade.) The men were all put into shackles, and their conditions were so bad, that many died. It was not unusual to wake up in the morning and find a live one shackled to a dead one. Diseases were rampant in those holds. The women were not put in shackles. They were allowed the freedom of the deck, but their lot was worse. Almost all of the men took advantage of the women, and when we reached America, most of them were pregnant. The men used and abused them as much as they wanted. There were no restraints on them, and I was as bad as the worst of them. Actually the conditions were very bad for the sailors as well. An estimated one out of every five of the sailors died of diseases, shipwrecks, or mutinies.

THE PITS

I did not make it to America. I was again exchanged to another ship, but this ship was not taking black Africans to America; rather, it sailed upstream in the rivers of Africa, captured black people, brought them to the mouth of the river, and sold them to other ships that would then take them to America. This turned out to be the worst time in my life. First my boss, whose name was Clow, was living in a fine house he built on an island, surrounded by slaves and black wives. One of his wives was named Pea-eye. She seems to have been some kind of queen, and she ruled that house cruelly. She even seemed to influence Clow. When Clow was ready to go upstream, I was sick with a fever, and was left in Pea-eye's care. She hated me and she made my life miserable. Sometimes she fed me table scraps. Sometimes she let the slaves throw stones or limes at me. Sometimes she let me starve. Besides all this, my fever was so high, that I became delirious. It was at those delirious times that scenes flashed before my mind: my mother and the Bible stories and hymns that she taught me; my dad, a tough, stern, unbending man; the cruel officers on the ship; the men who captured me for desertion; the pain of the whip on my back; and Mary. What would Mary think of me if she saw me lying on a board for a bed and using a log for a pillow and receiving table scraps for food at the hands of the cruel Pea-eye—all this in the most filthy conditions?

One day I was so weak that I was unable to hold my plate, and my food spilled on the ground. Pea-eye just laughed at me; she did not feed me anymore food that day. I was so hungry, that I snuck out at night and pulled up roots to eat, and I ate them raw—and I would have been punished for stealing had I been caught. During the rainy season, it sometimes rained 20 to 40 hours at a time without stopping.

On Clow's next trip up river, I was well enough to go with him, but someone told him that I had been stealing from him—about the only crime that I was innocent of. After that, every time he left the ship, he locked me on deck. I fished for food and ate it half raw and half burnt.

All of my suffering caused my will to be broken. Only the memory of Mary kept my resolution from breaking. But what hope was there of ever seeing her again, or her waiting for me? I was at the low point of my life, and almost in total misery.

Also at this time in my life, I allowed myself to be influenced by the religious superstitions of the native Africans. For a while I worshiped the moon! I would not sleep at night as long as the moon was out.

I loved to read, but the only book that I had with me was a geometry book. In my spare time, I mastered the principles of geometry—drawing geometric patterns on a sandy beach.

I wrote my father and explained my situation, but I was so ashamed of my situation that I told him I would not return unless he requested it. I also wrote to Mary—with little hope that she would ever receive my letter.

Now, who can understand this next statement, but it is true: One day Clow prophesied to me, and in three years his prophesy came true! It so happened that one day, with nothing better to do, I planted some lime trees on the shore. Clow came by, saw what I was doing, and said, “Who knows, by the time these trees grow up and bear fruit, you may go to England, obtain the command of a ship, and come back to eat the fruits of your labor. We see strange things happen sometimes.” Within three years, I had been back to England, gotten the command of my own ship, came back to this exact spot, and ate some of the fruits of the lime trees that I had planted! His prophesy was fulfilled to the letter!

My stay with Clow lasted about a year at which time I got his permission to join another trader. Who can understand the rise and fall of fortunes? With Clow, I was a slave of slaves. In my new position, I was made manager or overseer or steward of thousands of pounds of British sterling and manager of a factory (the factory was in Africa)! I was well-clothed and well-fed. Business flourished and my employer was well satisfied. I was living so well, that I had little desire to go back to England. Slavery one day, riches the next! It seems that an unseen hand was controlling my life.

One day, someone offended me and I planned a duel. Before the duel, a ship came by, and my offender got on the ship and I never saw him again. That ship would ordinarily not have stopped there. Why it stopped, no one knows. Was my heavenly Father watching over me in those days?

Some of my letters did reach my dad, and he asked one of the shipping company owners to ask all of his captains who were going to the west African coast to inquire about me and to bring me back to England. Was it another coincidence that one of the ships landed within a mile of my factory, and within hours of when I was to embark on a trip inland? However, when the captain offered me transport back to England, I had such a good position that I didn't want to go back. The

captain, to persuade me, told me that a rich relative had died and had left me a huge fortune. That didn't persuade me either, but the thought of seeing Mary did. I went back.

This ship was on a trading expedition, and it was about a year before we were back in England. I continued my horrible profanities and vulgarities so much that the captain—who himself was not free from such things—rebuked me.

Once I picked up a devotional book in the captain's quarters. Again, reading it, my conscience pricked me. I put the book down and thought nothing more about my eternal future.

THE STORM

One night, while still hundreds of miles out in the ocean, I was washed out of my bunk by ocean water. Getting up quickly and climbing out of the cabin, I heard sailors crying that the ship was breaking up. 80-mile-per-hour gusts of wind were whipping the ship to shreds, and 30-foot waves were filling it up with water. Still I was hardened. I remarked to one man, “In a few weeks, this storm will make a good conversation piece over a glass of wine.” But with tears in his eyes, he responded, “No, it's too late for that now!”

Though I had made fun of eternal things many times, for some reason, that man's remark got into me, and I started considering: What if my mother's teachings were correct? What would become of me if we were all lost, as it appeared we would be? Before I knew it, a prayer slipped out of my lips: “Lord, have mercy on us.” I immediately caught myself. What right did I have to pray and to expect God to hear? But something had already happened to me. I couldn't lightly make any more remarks like I had done a few moments earlier when I remarked about the conversation piece over a glass of wine. Something had happened to me, and my conscience was smitten. For ten days I wallowed in misery over my horrible spiritual state—in bitter resentment and utter despair! On the tenth day, I saw clearly that it was atheism that had ruined my life. Suddenly, all of the times that I had ridiculed the message of Jesus came before me. None of my evil was able to erase my mother's teachings. I considered that if the Holy Bible were true, there could hardly be a greater sinner than me. I was a debauched, profane, miserable wretch. I was sure there was no forgiveness for a wretch like me.

However, sayings and teachings from the Bible came into my mind and they were like lights lighting up my soul. I was reminded that God promised to forgive our sins. I pondered this thought: God promised to forgive our sins. One of the sayings from the Bible that came to me was: “I will mock...when your destruction comes as a whirlwind...then they will call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me, but not find me. For they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear of the Lord...They will eat the fruit of their own way” (Proverbs 1:26-31). I certainly had thrown off God's council, and it certainly seemed that God had laughed at my calamity. And another saying: “If after they have escaped the pollutions of this world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them, and overcome by them, their end will be worse with them than their beginning” (Hebrews 6:4-6 and 2nd Peter 2:20). Certainly as a child, I had escaped through the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and certainly I had allowed myself to again be entangled in them, and overcome by them. I was convinced that my end would be worse than my beginning. It had been many years, but my mother's teachings came clearly into my mind, and many of the ministers, teachings, and books that I had read—all flooded my mind. But I was miserable. I knew that all would be lost forever in a watery grave.

After the tenth day, the ship was free of water, and was limping slowly back to land. I considered the teaching that “his death was for our sins, for those who in their distress would put their trust in him.” But I wanted proof or evidence. I decided to start by re-reading the Bible, the New Testament portion of the Bible, and examining carefully its teachings. I considered that if I professed faith in Jesus Christ at that time, I would be making a mockery of God, but I could study his word.

One verse convinced me: “If you who are evil people, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him?” I decided this would be a good place to begin. I would ask for good things and see what I got. If I got good things, that should be proof enough.

Most of the food had been lost in the storm, and what little was left had to be rationed out. Most of the sails were torn, and when we got a good wind, we made little progress.

Finally, we woke up one morning and saw mountains in the distance. With much rejoicing and jubilee, we ate up our last loaf of bread and drank our last bottle of brandy—only to discover that as soon

as the sun arose, it melted away those clouds that looked like mountains! Now we had practically no food left. The captain blamed me for the state of affairs, and proclaimed that if I were thrown overboard (like Jonah), they would be spared! However, he did not try to throw me overboard.

During those next few weeks, I started forming my first few prayers.

Four weeks after the storm we finally limped into Ireland—all of us ragged and starved skinny. Within hours, the man who said to me, “It’s too late now,” was sitting in a tavern telling of the storm over a glass of wine; while I, who had been the most hardened atheist of all, sat reading the New Testament and a book of sermons!

The next Sunday, I went to church, received communion, committed myself to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and live in God’s service forever. I renounced the sins that I had loved so much, and claimed God’s forgiveness. It was at that time that I accepted the doctrine that God had been manifest in the flesh, and had paid the price for my pardon. The first thing that changed was that I gave up using profanities and vulgar language. I was about 23 years old.

The very next day, I almost shot myself accidentally. The bullet knocked off a corner of my hat! Was this a warning? Was it a reminder?

I wrote my dad, and hastened to go see him, but before I got to his home, he had boarded a ship for his next trip. Two years later he was dead. I never got to see my dad again, but I did receive a couple of letters from him before he passed away. However, he did one thing for me before the passed away. He visited Mary’s family, and gave his consent to our marriage, should it ever come about.

As soon as I got back to my home base, I was offered the position of captain of a merchant ship by a shipping owner who was a friend of my dad’s. Being young, I did not consider myself ready to take on such responsibility. The position was offered to the captain of the ship that we had just crossed the Atlantic in, and I was made first mate (second in command).

However, there was one thing that I had to do before embarking on my next journey: see Mary. I did see her, but I was terribly bashful and didn’t know how to speak to her. We did not get married or even engaged. We only agreed to keep writing. (I had always been big on writing letters and had written many in the past few years.) One of my problems on that trip was that I did not have any money, and I didn’t want her dad to know that I didn’t. When I left, I walked to the town

where I was to board ship. I did not let her dad know that I was walking.

Before I left England, I got a letter from Mary telling me that she was not engaged, and she was willing to wait for me. I treasured that letter above everything I had.

That trip was also a slave-trading enterprise. In Africa, I was in charge of a smaller boat that went inland to purchase the Negroes from Clow. This assignment took several weeks, and we had to face heavy rains during the rainy season. In the jungles we faced billions of mosquitoes and burning fevers, and dangers from natives. I came down with a fever on that trip. I buried about a half dozen members of that crew.

However, the important thing in this journey was that I became slack in my Bible reading and praying, and gradually I drifted back into my old sins—almost as bad as before. I have no excuse for this, but I can say, most men that have been saved from a life of major sins, have struggled with those sins for many years and fallen back into them several times before becoming strong, established Christians. I made many attempts to reform myself, but mostly that was what I was doing: trying to reform myself instead of letting God save me. When I was almost delirious with fever, I crawled to a deserted area of the jungle, got down on my knees, and recommitted myself to God. The fever diminished rapidly after that.

Though my sins were many, I saw slave captains do things that I would never do: I once knew a captain who could not sleep because a little black baby was crying. He went down into the hold, snatched the baby from its mother’s arms, and threw it overboard. I never fell that low. I knew another captain who took a grown Negro man and threw him overboard—only so he could collect from an insurance company. I never fell that low either.

Once I was scheduled to go to shore to get a load of supplies. For reasons that he could not explain, the captain ordered me not to go, but he sent someone else in my place. The boat overturned and the man who substituted for me was drowned. I was humbled at how God was taking care of me—even in days that I was not serving him.

From Clow we purchased 218 black Africans, and took them to Charleston, South Carolina, to sell them. 62 of the slaves died on that journey and were buried at sea (fed to the sharks).

In South Carolina I again went to an isolated place alone, got on my knees, and sought God's forgiveness and blessings. It seems that I was not turning away from my faith, but I was very slow in learning to live a victorious Christian life.

About 18 months after we left England, we were back again, and this time I had a much better visit with Mary. I was no longer broke with nothing to offer her as I was on my last trip when I left her home walking. Also, I was wiser from having learned my own weaknesses and frailties during the last 18 months. Mary hung to every word that I said. As soon as I was able to get Mary alone, with much trembling I proposed marriage and she, with a practical, common sense attitude, accepted. I was speechless. I had always dreamed of this moment, but when it came, I didn't know what to say. We just sat there in awkward silence, not knowing what to do next! We were married the next February. I was 25 years old. We spent several months together before my next assignment: commanding another slave ship.

There I was: a committed Christian, a child of God—going to capture human beings, make slaves of them, and using the most barbaric methods to do it! Who can understand God's mercy on us human beings? Who can understand his patient endurance with us while we learn his ways?

During the next four years, I made three trips as captain of a slaving ship before my heavenly Father saw fit to put me into another profession. It was on the first of these three trips that Clow's prophecy was fulfilled. I returned to Clow's island as a captain of my own ship, and I ate limes from the trees that I had planted about three years earlier—thus the prophecy was fulfilled to the letter!

As a Christian man, I did not touch the Negro women, nor did I allow my sailors to touch them. I put them in irons whenever I heard that they had misused one of the women. Other sea captains ridiculed me for reading my Bible, praying, and writing letters to my wife. I wrote to Mary:

They think that I do not have the right notion of life; I know they don't.

They said I am melancholy; I say they are mad.

They say I am a slave to one woman (I am not); they are slaves to 100 women.

They wonder at my lifestyle; I pity theirs.

They have no idea of the happiness that I know.

Now I look back at that statement and wonder: how could I be so deceived at the “happiness” that I knew—while selling husbands and wives an ocean apart!

On the second of these last three journeys, I started having church services and scripture readings for my men. Also, on this journey, I heard rumors of a mutiny and plans to assassinate me. I had to put several men in irons, but some of the conspirators died of disease.

On my last slaving journey, I took on board the young man named Job. [For those of my readers who have forgotten who Job is: In earlier pages of this story I told about meeting Job just after I had become an atheist, and, though he came from a good Christian home, I converted him to a more confirmed atheist than I was.] Now, I pleaded with him concerning the truth, but that made him furious against me. He plotted against me and tried to incite the sailors against me. Finally, I couldn't take it any more, and I got him transferred to another ship. A few weeks later I heard that he died in a rage of despair. He was pronouncing his own fatal doom when he died. I did not forget that I was the one who turned him to atheism and blamed myself for his miserable end.

While I was on my last trip, through my reading and studying, I came to understand that my heavenly Father did not only want to bless me, he also wanted to use me to bless others, to share his truth with others, so that they too might come to know his forgiveness. It was also on this trip that I really came to understand these words: Jesus' death was the price paid for our sins, and when we come to the full realization of this in our spirits, we will sing for joy at the thought of our sins being forgiven and erased from the record.

One more thing that my heavenly Father did for me on this last trip: While I was attending a gathering of ship captains, I met a captain who was a strong, established Christian. Captain Alexander Clunie and I got together every day and studied God's word together. Please understand, up to this time, I had not had a chance to attend church except for a very few times in my life. Captain Clunie helped me a lot. He also warned me that many in the Christian ministry have rejected the teaching that Jesus is God's only Son, born of a virgin. Up to that time, I thought that all Christian ministers were true men of God. I had a chance to apply Captain Clunie's warning before I left that island. I attended a church one Sunday, and the only thing about the minister that impressed me as being religious, was the priestly robe that he wore! I had certainly learned my lesson.

Finally, Captain Clunie recommended a minister to visit whenever I returned to London: Brother Samuel Brewer. I did look up Brother Brewer the first chance I had after I returned to London.

When I returned to England, my boss commended me because I had not lost a single man—black or white on the passage to America. All of the other captains also commended me. My boss prepared a new, bigger, faster boat for my next trip, and it was ready to sail in three months—but God had different plans.

Just a few days before we were to embark, I was sitting in my boss' house one day when suddenly I fainted. The doctors were not sure what the cause was, but their opinion was that I would have recurrences. Because of this fainting spell, I resigned my position just two days before the ship was to leave. I never had any more fainting spells. My heavenly Father used the fainting spell to get me out of the slave trade.

After leaving the shipping business, I rested with Mary for a few months before I went back to work. During those months, I made several trips to see Captain Clunie's pastor friend in London. I met several strong Christians during that time who strengthened me in my Christian walk.

Several months later, my former boss with the shipping company (who had been a friend of my dad's, and was helping me as a favor to my dad), got me a very important position in government. The position was that of an officer who inspected incoming ships for contraband (and there was a lot of it). The job title was Tide Surveyor. As surveyor, I had over 50 employees under me.

That I should get this position was nothing short of a miracle. It happened that my dad's friend heard that the surveyor had resigned, so he sent in an application in my name. However, the surveyor did not resign. If he had, there would have been many applications for his position—applications from very rich and powerful people. Rather, the next day, the surveyor died, and my application was the only one on file. Again my heavenly Father was watching out for me! I was 30 years old, and I stayed in that position for nine years—till I was 39 years old.

Another time my heavenly Father watched over me when I was facing death. One day, I was scheduled to inspect a certain boat at a certain time. I was several minutes late, and the boat exploded, killing everyone aboard. Had I been on time, I too would have been killed. Little did I understand, when I was being delayed, the true purpose of my delay!

A few lines from a letter that I wrote to my wife about this time when she was fighting doubts as well as sickness in her body:

Keep on trusting, my dear.

I trust you are in the right way.

Wait patiently on the Lord.

Do not lose the confidence you have in his mercy.

If you cling to that confidence, you will find great reward.

The one who lives in us is greater than the one who lives in the world.

Expect changes; the Christian life is warfare.

Though Captain Jesus has conquered and secured victory for us, we may be sorely pinched and sometimes wounded while on the battlefield.

There is a healing balm, and he will always be near to apply it.

In those days, there was much controversy in England concerning what true Christianity is. On one side of the controversy was the Church of England with much elaborate ritual, decor, and correct protocol. On the other side, were several independent groups who followed a simple or primitive form of Jesus' message. They dissented from the Church of England, and therefore they were known as dissenters. These were the days when John Wesley was preaching to huge crowds, both in England and in America. This was the origins of the Methodist church. In our culture, the Methodists were considered fanatics, and were shunned by the more traditional denominations. However, among the Methodists and other dissenters, I found many who were set free from their sins when they heard the message. Many of them had a background and a life-changing experience similar to mine. I found little of that in the more traditional churches. I was very pleased when Mary started making friends with the Methodist people. She also listened to Mr. Brewer (the pastor in London that Captain Clunie had recommended), and said, "Listening to that man, has done me more good than all of the medicines I have taken."

Once, George Whitefield, one of the leaders of the Methodists came to my hometown and preached to crowds of 4000. My landlady went and she invited Mr. Whitefield to dine in our home. So it was that I met with one of the greatest preachers of my day. We remained close friends for many years. We had many conversations, and I learned much from this man.

Towards the end of my nine years as tide surveyor, I felt in my spirit that my heavenly Father wanted me to be in a full-time Christian service. I applied with the church of England and was turned down because I did not have a college education. I also applied with some dissenting groups, but it seemed that there was no opening when I applied, and Mary did not encourage me to go with those groups. It was about that time that I was offered a small parish in a very small town with the Church of England. Though I did not agree with all that the Church of England taught, they did not bother me in the small community where I was appointed, and I accepted the pastorate of that parish.

I stayed with that parish for about 15 years. God blessed. I preached the whole truth, and the people loved it. The attendance at the church increased, and we recognized God's blessings with us. There was also a dissenting church in that town, but the pastor of that church and I got along well. We shared many visits and words of encouragement and fellowship.

While in that small community, I wrote several articles, poems, and hymns, and became fairly well known through my writings. After 15 years (when I was in my mid-fifties), I was offered the pastorate of one of London's most prestigious churches.

While I was in London, many of England's leading politicians started working for abolition of slavery and the slave trade. I was considered an expert on the slave trade, and became advisor to several of those politicians—testifying before legislative committees.

The later years of my life are fairly well known, and several books have been written about them. I am not going to cover those years in this short testimony. One of the hymns that I wrote is *Amazing Grace* (How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me). It became extremely popular. It is astonishing that the Negroes in America are singing it in their churches—Negroes whose parents and grandparents were put in irons and taken across the Atlantic Ocean to sell them into slavery by the man who wrote:

Amazing Grace!

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm 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.

Thru many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come.

'Tis grace that 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 first begun.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

England's Parliament did not abolish slavery and the slave trade until 1833—after John Newton's death. They abolished it without having to fight a Civil War as the Americans did.

This story is an autobiographical adaptation.

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Acknowledgements and Bibliography

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In 1750, John Newton was captain of a ship that sailed from England to Africa, captured some black Africans, took them to the American continent, and sold them like cattle. Also, he had become an atheist when he was a teenager. Once on board ship, he met a young sailor who was also from a good Christian home, took him, and expounded the doctrines of atheism to him and persuaded him to become an atheist. Years later, after God saved John from his sins, he met this young man on another ship and with tears in his eyes, begged him to turn to God. But he had done too good a job of converting him to atheism! The man would not turn back to the God of his parents.

But that was not all of John's sins. When the sailors had the slaves on ship, they used to go down into the holds and rape the women. Probably some of the black people who today go to church and sing Amazing Grace are John Newton's descendants! That is truly amazing grace! And all of the time that he was living such a debauched lifestyle, he had a sweetheart in England with whom he was madly in love with. She came from a good Christian home and knew nothing of his lifestyle. Eventually they married and had a long, happy marriage.

Do you want more? Once when in Africa, John got involved in an incident where he ended up as a slave or prisoner of a black African queen (a slave of slaves)!