

JODY HEDLUND'S BOOK CLUB COLLECTION

He has been pleased in loving kindness to draw us to himself, and to be found by us when we sought him not.
~John Newton



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT NEWTON AND POLLY

WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF THE SLAVE TRADE IN THE 1700S?

Throughout history, slavery has always been a common practice dating back to ancient times. From the Roman to the Muslim Empires, slavery and the often brutal treatment of slaves was inherent in culture.

However, Europe in the 1700's took slavery to a new level of depravity by developing it into a lucrative and commercially aggressive business. Between 1450 and 1600, an estimated 367,000 slaves were exported from Africa. Between 1700 and 1800 the number of exported slaves was greater than 6 million.

Although many European nations participated in the business of buying and selling slaves, the British dominated the market sending hundreds of ships to the African coast each year to trade for slaves before sailing across the Atlantic to sell the slaves in the West Indies as well as in America.

By 1780 the trans-Atlantic slave trade hit its peak. However, in the late 1780's the abolitionist movement in Great Britain began to gain momentum so that by 1787 the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was founded in Britain by Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson.

The slave trade continued until the Slave Trade Act was passed by Parliament in 1807 which abolished slave trading. However, it did not outlaw slavery. Slavery itself was not abolished in the British Empire for twenty-six more years until 1833.

The U.S. also abolished the slave trade, which took effect in 1808, shortly after Great Britain's act. However, slavery in the U.S. would continue to be legal until 1863 when President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went into effect and then also in 1865 when the 13th Amendment banned it once and for all.

WHAT WAS NEWTON'S ROLE IN ABOLISHING THE SLAVE TRADE?

Newton became an ordained minister for the Church of England and took his first parish in 1764 (approximately fifteen years after he married Polly). After he became a pastor, his popularity grew as both a preacher and an author. His autobiography, *An Authentic Narrative*, became an international and national best-seller.

As a result of his popularity, he eventually became the spiritual mentor to a man named William Wilberforce. Newton's expertise on the slave trade as well as his hatred of it impacted Wilberforce who went on to help abolish the slave trade in England.

During Wilberforce's campaign against the slave trade, he went to Newton for help. Newton's popularity as well as his eyewitness accounts made him the perfect person to testify to a Select Committee in the House of Commons.

Newton also wrote a pamphlet, *Thoughts Upon The African Slave Trade*, which was very instrumental in the abolitionist cause. The pamphlet did a great deal to sway public opinion against the slave trade because it described in detail the sadistic treatment of slaves.

All in all, Newton played a crucial role in bringing about the eventual abolishment of the slave trade in England.

WHAT HAPPENED TO NEWTON AND POLLY AFTER THE END OF THE BOOK?

John Newton became a ship captain like his father and made a total of four voyages between 1750 and 1754 before a strange illness finally put an end to his seafaring career. During his illness he remained unemployed for ten months, a time fraught with anxiety especially because Polly became ill too. However, as was the case many times in Newton's life, God miraculously intervened. He opened a way for Newton to become appointed as Liverpool's Surveyor of the Tides.

He and Polly moved to Liverpool where Newton remained in his position for many years. During that time, Newton felt certain that God was calling him into full time ministry. He studied Greek and Latin during his spare time and applied to become ordained by the Church of England. For seven years he faced rejection in his quest to become a pastor. But in all that time, he never gave up. In 1764, he resigned from his Surveyor of the Tides

position and was appointed as curate of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Olney, a town sixty miles north of London.

During his years as a pastor at Olney, he became friends with a man by the name of William Cowper. The two collaborated together in writing hymns and eventually put together a hymnal called *Olney Hymns*. One of the songs that became a part of that hymnal was "Amazing Grace."

Newton was the pastor in Olney for sixteen years before he became the Rector of St. Mary Woolnoth in the heart of London's financial district. Because of Newton's fame, people came from all over to attend his church. He continued to write books, mentor, and founded The Eclectic Society for young clergymen in order to be a father figure to future leaders of the church.

Although Polly and Newton were never able to have any children of their own, they went on to adopt two orphaned nieces of deceased family members. In addition to infertility, they faced other challenges. But through it all, they continued to pray together until Polly died of cancer in 1790. Newton eventually published his correspondences to Polly in a book *Letters to a Wife* in which he hoped to thank God, honor Polly, and demonstrate the holiness of a God-centered marriage.

WHAT WAS THE "SECRET" OF NEWTON'S SUCCESS?

Newton's biographer, Jonathan Aitken, attributes Newton's success to two private strengths—his happy marriage to Polly and his close relationship with God.

Newton loved Polly deeply during their courtship years. But that love never waned throughout their marriage. He continued to love her ardently until the day she died.

Newton's passion for his Lord also continued to grow stronger throughout his life. Aitken says that the reason Newton had such a close and powerful relationship with God was because of his prayer life. He prayed at least **five hours a day**. He kept diaries of how often he prayed, what he prayed for (his lists were vast), and what his priorities in prayer were.

WHEN DID NEWTON WRITE THE HYMN AMAZING GRACE?

Newton wrote the song in 1773 in preparation for a New Year's Day sermon for his congregation at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Olney. Unlike other pastors of the time who used only the *King James Bible* and *Book of Common Prayers* for their church services, Newton strove to make his services something that his congregation (made up primarily of laborers and tradesmen) could understand. He often wrote hymns that tied in with his sermons in order to make the message more meaningful for uneducated people. The Church of England didn't support Newton's hymns. While hymn singing was

popular among the Dissenting churches (like the Methodists), the Church of England still used metrical Psalms (similar to chanting). Despite the opposition, Newton continued to develop his own hymns with the help of a friend and poet, William Cowper.

On New Year's Day of 1773, Newton preached on 1 Chronicles 17:16-17, the story of King David whose life paralleled his in many ways. They both had sinned greatly and both were recipients of God's grace anyway. Newton chose this particular sermon to be grateful to God for his past mercies, and the hymn became one more way for him to share his testimony.

Newton later said that he was a "striking example of the riches of thy mercy that can pardon scarlet and crimson sins and the power of thy grace that can soften the hardest hearts and subdue the most inveterate habits of wickedness."