

AMAZING GRACE

Romans 1:1-7

Pastor Bonita Wood/Bob Hussong

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Amazing Grace – is one of the most popular hymns today.

It is even known by people who don't attend church, because you will often hear it played or sung at funerals.

Amazing Grace was written by John Newton in 1779. It was one of the many hymns he would end up writing.

John Newton left school at the age of eleven to become a rough and rowdy seaman. He eventually engaged in the despicable practices of capturing natives from West Africa to be sold as slaves in markets around the world.

One day while at sea, Newton was in a fierce storm that put the fear of God into him. He began to read "*The imitation of Christ*" by Thomas `a Kempis. God used this book to lead him to a genuine conversion and a dramatic change in his way of life.

Newton entered the ministry and was greatly influenced by John and Charles Wesley. At the age of 39 Newton became an ordained minister in the Anglican Church.

Until the time of his death at the age of 82, John Newton never ceased to marvel at the grace of God that transformed him so completely. John had called himself a "wretch" who was lost and blind. Shortly before his death, he is quoted as proclaiming with a loud voice during a message, "*My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior.*" What amazing grace.

So what really is grace and what does it mean to me...to you.

Webster's dictionary defines grace as : unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification; approval; favor; mercy.

The Apostle Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, begins and ends most of his letters by saying something along the lines of "*Grace and peace to you*" or "*God's grace and peace be yours.*"

Paul, like John Newton, had a profound experience that led him to a conversion and a dramatic change in his life as well.

Long before Paul was able to call himself a servant of Jesus Christ, he had gained a reputation as a great enemy of Christians.

Paul, who was then called Saul, persecuted the followers of Jesus without mercy. He had Christians beaten and whipped, sent to prison and condemned to death. He had even approved the stoning of Stephen, which you can read about in Acts chapter 8.

Then one chapter later in Acts 9 we find Saul on the road to Damascus, in pursuit of Christians. It was on this road that Saul was blinded by the light of Jesus Christ and heard the Lord speak to him.

Saul, who would thereafter be referred to as Paul, didn't call himself a "wretch," but he did refer to this encounter as the start of his new life in Christ.

Paul acknowledged Jesus as Lord, confessed his own sin, surrendered his life to Christ, and resolved to obey him.

Paul had discovered not just religion, but a relationship with the Risen Lord.

After Paul's conversion which we read about in Acts, the very next book of the Bible is written by Paul to the Church in Rome and it starts like this...

Please turn with me to Romans 1:1-7

Paul spoke so often of the **grace** of God because for Paul "**grace**" meant God's undeserved favor, his kindness shown clearly in his free gift of salvation given in Christ. Receiving it brought peace, the peace that Christ established between believers and God through his death on the cross. In a world of noise, confusion, and relentless pressure, people long for peace.

Paul and John Newton both knew that true conversion comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and leads to a new life in relationship with him, a life filled with God's unending love and *amazing grace*.

Today you will have the great pleasure of meeting two modern-day "wretches" who have been redeemed by the God of *amazing grace*.

First I want to introduce to you our Praise Team Leader Bob Hussong.

(Bob comes up on stage and sits on one of the stools)

Bonita: Bob tell us a little bit about yourself.

(Bob does an intro of himself.)

Bonita: Bob tell us your faith story and how you came to have a personal relationship with the God of amazing grace.

(Bob gives his testimony)

Although I was raised in the church, during my late teen years I really did not want anything to do with church – or its people. I was in a relationship with a girl, and doing my own thing when I felt God pulling at me. So, into my early twenties, I began to occasionally go to the church where my Dad was attending. During this time God's pull became stronger, his voice became louder and his hands became more visible to me. Realizing that I was tired of trying to do things "my way", I got more involved in how church could be used to "straighten up my life", so on November 11th, 1998 I began writing thoughts and ideas onto paper.

These words would eventually take shape in a dialog between God and I where I was writing my frustrations down and He was answering my concerns.

So on the night of the 11th, I asked God to reshape me, fill me with more of Him than I could handle so that He would spill out into all areas of my life. I asked Him that if my girlfriend was not the person I should marry, that He would have to make this relationship dissolve and place His woman of choice into my life. And He did all of those things. I followed through with that prayer at the next church service by going to the altar. I apologized and repented, then poured everything I had out Him to make room for His Spirit to fill me.

He moved people into my life that challenged me yet remained patient with me, like Melissa Anderson who would become my wife, and Linda Morrison, who became my Spiritual mother. With the help of these two women I learned what it meant to fully stand upon God. Within a few years, I began to teach the College and Career class at my local church. The early discipleship involved during those early formative year's was monumental in setting the stage for where I stand today. God's revelation through study and teaching was so dynamic. Discipleship continued through very close friends within the church, as did accountability. The struggles and temptations that found myself falling on were challenged through these friendships as victories which God had already overcome for me... if only I would recognize and reach out to grab a hold of God's promises for my life.

Bonita: Where do you see God's grace showing up in your life currently or how do you see his grace guiding you?

(Bob shares his answer)

Most recently, God has challenged me as we continue to speak to each other. He has questioned me to define and refine the call into ministry which He has called me to. Specifically, why I have told others that I have been called into music ministry. He very clearly revealed to me, that by stating a call to a specific area in ministry, that I was limiting what God could do and that I should no longer say “music ministry”, but just say that I am called into ministry. This change in wording has, to be honest, scared me but I very much look forward to seeing where God would lead my family and me. I am being as obedient as I know how, yet fully understand that obedience grows with faith, and I am claiming God’s blessings for myself and my family today, just as I have been claiming those victories which helped me grow in faith in the early years of my Christian faith.

Thank you so much for sharing your faith story and God’s amazing grace with us this morning Bob. Please join me in thanking Bob.

Now I would like to introduce you to Gladstone Joseph who is a pastor in Chennai, India. Gladstone is friends with our former pastor, Jeff Conrad. Gladstone came into visit with some old friends and to share how God’s amazing grace is showing up in his work in India.

Bonita: Gladstone could you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to become a minister.

Gladstone introduces himself and shares how he came to be in the ministry.

Bonita: Gladstone could you share with us how your church goes out into the surrounding villages and shares the grace of God in word and song?

Gladstone shares about the children dancing to the CD’s and his being able to preach to the people.

Bonita: Gladstone Joseph was sharing with me earlier this week how his late wife was able to go all over the world speaking on behalf of the Indian women and their plight. Because of her faith and her faithfulness to God and to the women of India, she was able to witness the grace of God in the lives of many, many women and so her faith lives on. Because of the faith of Gladstone and his continued ministry in the slums, he too has witnessed the grace of God as the lives of many of his brothers and sisters in India are being transformed through their belief in the one true Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Now Gladstone is offering us a chance to help him as he spreads the Good News that Jesus Christ is Lord, Redeemer and Savior. You are being invited to partner with him in his ministry by bringing a love offering which will be collected next Sunday to help Gladstone Joseph spread the unending love and amazing grace of Jesus Christ throughout the slums of Channai, India.

Next Sunday, June 13th we will be collecting a special offering to go to Gladstone Joseph and the Methodist Church of Tamil. Although you may never see the faces of the lives you are helping to change until we all arrive in heaven, you will nevertheless be instrumental in their salvation. So please make plans to help share the Good News through your gifts next Sunday.

Please join me in thanking Gladstone Joseph for joining us and sharing God's amazing grace in his life and the life of his ministry.

Romans 12:9 states that God's grace is sufficient for us. The New Living Translation says it this way, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.

Jesus assures us that his grace is what enables us to have a relationship with him and it is what empowers us to do his ministry.

Join me as we sing once again the first verse of Amazing Grace.

As we come to the Lord's table today I invite you to ponder the magnitude of God's amazing grace.

How has it shown up in your life?

And then as you do that I want you to think about the sound of that grace or as John Newton wrote:

Amazing Grace – How sweet the sound.

I want to suggest to you today that the sweet sound of that grace maybe wasn't quite the sound you were thinking it was, maybe it is not what we would immediately think of as being a sweet sound.

When my daughter, Bethany, was a young girl she took piano lessons.

She would play the scales over and over again. And as she was learning, many, many, many times she would mess up. I would tell you that it was not such a sweet sound. But when she actually played a song all the way through at her recital, what a sweet sound that indeed was. It made all the other painful moments worth it.

I think that the sound of the amazing grace offered freely to us, that Jesus paid for on the cross actually might have sounded more like this (hit spike with hammer).

Not exactly the sweet sound you may have imagined.

But the sound of that love, that forgiveness of our sins, that mercy, that grace that was freely offered to each of us was indeed sweet. I believe that Jesus would have even said it made the painful moments worth it.

Amazing Grace – How sweet the sound.

(offer the Lord's Supper)