

"Amazing Grace/My Chains Are Gone"

History

The original song, "*Amazing Grace*" was a New Year's song written for a January 1, 1773 New Year's message at a church in Olney, England. In John Newton's sermon he said, "*Look back at God's goodness, look around at God's promises, and look forward to future usefulness.*" He concluded the sermon with a poem he'd written for the occasion, "*Amazing Grace.*"



This song has many chapters starting with the poem John Newton wrote for New Year's Day, 1773 to the adaptation Chris Tomlin, an American contemporary Christian music singer, songwriter, and worship leader from Grand Saline, Texas, wrote in 2007.

Chapter 1 - Amazing Wickedness - That's a mild description of Newton's early adult life. The captain of a slave ship, Newton stood out, even in that crowd, for his brutality and his drunkenness. Newton's crew, hardened sailors all, considered him more an animal than a human being.

Chapter 2 - Amazing Stubbornness - This aptly describes Newton's resistance to God's grace. Again and again, Newton faced serious dangers at sea. Again and again, he fell prey to bouts of serious depression. Again and again, he cried out for God's help. But as soon as each time of trouble passed, Newton fell back into unbelief and wickedness.

Chapter 3 - Amazing Persistence - The Holy Spirit did not give up on John Newton, despite all the depravity, all the resistance, all the missed opportunities. On one of Newton's last voyages, an especially violent storm struck. Crew members lashed themselves to masts to avoid being washed overboard. When the winds finally died down, the sailors found themselves aboard a seriously damaged ship. It took weeks to limp back to port, the sailors pumping water out from below decks, day and night, the whole way. It was a race against starvation. Newton finally began to pray in earnest. A year or two after landing safely in Ireland, Newton married and began to study for the ministry. In 1799, he published the Olney Hymns. It included 281 hymns he himself had written, including "**Amazing Grace.**"

Chapter 4 - Amazing Grace - It's not just the title of a beloved hymn, it's a two-word summary of John Newton's life. It is a two-word summary of each of our life's, too. Our sins may differ from those of John Newton, but they are no less scandalous, no less shameful.

Chapter 5 - My Chains Are Gone - Chris Tomlin had a chance encounter with a friend who told him about a movie in the making called "**Amazing Grace.**" His friend mentioned the producers of the film were wondering if Tomlin would be willing to do something with the hymn of the same name. Tomlin's reply was, "**Anybody would be crazy to do that! It's only the greatest song ever written.**" Though hesitant to make additions to something so well known, Chris decided to give it a go after discovering the song had already had a previous addition, when the last verse was added anonymously in 1790. While pondering all he had learned about Newton's life and the movie about William Wilberforce's work to abolish slavery in Britain, these words just started flowing one night - "**my chains are gone, I've been set free, my God, my savior, has ransomed me**" Then Tomlin began thinking about the word "**ransom**" and how would one pay a ransom for a slave - "**and like a flood, his mercy reigns. Unending love, Amazing Grace.**" So, he wrote that little refrain, and started singing it out to the hymn, never thinking it was going to do anything!

Chapter 6 - Amazing Grace/My Chains Are Gone - Tomlin sent his adaptation of "**Amazing Grace**" to the movie producers saying, "**Hey, if you want to use this for the movie, that'd be great,**" never dreaming that churches would adopt this version. Tomlin counts it an incredible privilege to be among all people who love and sing (or "sign") this song.

Reference: Church bulletin, "A Song In My Heart," by Robert J. Morgan, and various internet searches.