

# Life of John Newton, 2

by Ian Murray

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*John Newton's life and ministry offer valuable lessons on the importance of humility, humour, partnership, and the power of prayer and worship.*

**Duration:** 51:52

**Scripture:** Romans 3:25, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8

**Topics:** "Christian Biography", "Effective Preaching"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker discusses the life and ministry of John Newton, a preacher in the 18th century. Newton was known for his love for children and his ability to connect with them through storytelling and spiritual conversations. He was also dedicated to preaching the gospel in a parish that had been lacking in gospel preaching for many years. Despite his imperfections and struggles, Newton's ministry had a profound impact on the community, leading to a crowded church. The speaker also highlights Newton's struggle with preaching and his eventual realization that preaching from a warm heart was the most effective approach.

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## Transcript

As you would observe yesterday morning, I was not able to complete what I had hoped to say on John Newton, so I continue this morning. And I feel guilty in not having an orderly layout of my material, but I am consoled by one fact, and that is that John Newton had this particular failure. He was very much an extemporary creature, that is to say, although he meditated upon his subject, if he had any fault, and no doubt it was quite a serious fault, he did not lay out his material in an orderly manner.

Well, I shall be following in his steps in that regard. I have reflected on what he would have thought of such a gathering here this week, and there are two thoughts which immediately come to my mind. He would have been immensely delighted.

One of his greatest pleasures was to spend a great deal of time with young people as one reads through his life. This is recurring again and again. With children, he was an expert in making paper boats and Chinese junks.

He used to get little boys on his knees and bounce them up and down to a naval song, and then he would tell them a sea yarn, and then when children got older, he would spend much time with them, speaking to them on spiritual things, and particularly encouraging young men in the work of the Christian ministry, so

that there is no question at all that he would have been delighted to have been at such gatherings as we have been having this week. And then what would he have thought about our speaking about him? Well, there are some things that he would certainly have thought about it, and I will give you one quotation. He was fond himself of reading biographies, and one of the biographies of which he was fond was the life of Philip Henry, the Puritan pastor, the father of the famous Matthew Henry.

But he had this to say about Philip Henry's life. If the lives of the two Henrys and of other good men were written by inspired men, you would not be so much discouraged at reading them. Depend upon it.

They saw as much reason to be ashamed of themselves as we do. To us they appear in their best clothes, and we are told more of what the Lord wrought for them than of the effects of indwelling sin under which they groaned. So he is saying that the difference between biographies in church history and the biographies of scripture is that in the biographies of Christian men in history we tend to get the external side of their life and not the indwelling burden of sin about which they were so conscious.

And then he's writing to a ministerial friend. He says, if I should outlive you, and I should have a call to write the life of the Reverend Mr. Simmons of Bedford, that's the man, I should perhaps find more to say in your favour than you are aware of. And if you have the darker side known as well as the brighter, and if you would have the darker side known as well as the brighter, then you must write it yourself.

And one of the helpful things about John Euston's life is that we find from his letters and from his diary, which is quoted in various books which I shall mention later, we find that the man gives us a very realistic view of what he was himself. Listen to him at the age of 30. Too often, he says, my mind is little better than the wayside, a highway for carnal, evil thoughts of every kind.

And then he says of a Sunday that he had just spent, a dull, barren day this proved to me. Crowds of vain thoughts within me prevented my hearing with any profit. Then listen to him as an old man.

I find, he says, I find not one corruption of my vile heart is dead, though some seem now and then to sleep. And then this last reflection on himself, which he wrote in his old age. It's in the form of a comment on Paul's verse, by the grace of God I am what I am.

First he says, I am not what I ought to be. Ah, how imperfect and deficient. Second, I am not what I might be, considering my privileges and opportunities.

Three, I am not what I wish to be, God who knows my heart knows I wish to be like him. Fourth, I am not what I hope to be, ere long to drop this clay tabernacle, to be like him and to see him as he is. Fifth, I am not what I once was, a child of sin and slave of the devil.

Though not all these, not what I ought to be, not what I might be, not what I wish or hope to be, not what I once was, I think I can truly say with the apostle, by the grace of God I am what I am. So that he would have cautioned us, you see, from taking from his life certain things which might even prove a discouragement to ourselves. When he was advanced in life and quite a famous man, he said, when I am tempted to think I am somebody, I mix a little plantain sauce with my diet and then I know what I am.

That will not mean anything to you until I remind you that the name of the part of Africa where he settled when he was in that wretchedness for two years was called the plantains. A little plantain sauce was the memory of that time of his utter wretchedness and bondage. And when he remembered that, he says, he knew what the grace of God was to him.

Well, then we shall continue on our course with John Newton. And I had arrived at the point when I had said that he became curate of Olney in Buckinghamshire in the year 1764. And somebody asked me since how it was that a seafaring captain could, without going to any universities, rather suddenly become the clergyman of a parish church.

That, of course, is partly to do with the utter confusion of the church position in the 18th century. You noticed I said that Newton was curate of Olney. The vicar of Olney lived miles away and never even came near the parish.

Newton was never more than a curate. And through the system of patronage which operated by great men and patrons and so on, livings were bought and sold and pluralities were held. A man might be vicar or rector of several parishes at once.

The position was in general confusion. Nevertheless, the bishops certainly stumbled at the extraordinary idea of a seaman like Newton becoming a minister of the gospel. And particularly because he was branded as a Methodist.

The Methodists were the followers of Whitefield and Wesley, the men who preached the necessity of the rebirth. And that was sufficient stumbling block to the bishops of that time. But Newton had been studying.

He studied hard on board his ship when he was captain. He had his Latin books which he worked at. He studied the scriptures.

And as one looks at the earlier life of Newton, we are reminded of how God prepares us, each one, for the work which he has for us to do. It was not to be Newton's work to be a great instructor of others in doctrine and theology. If that was to have been his work, God would have prepared him in a different way.

But as we noted yesterday, his work was to be a counselor, a practical advisor, a letter writer. That was his great work. And to prepare for that work, he needed much time to meditate and to become a letter writer.

And on those years away at sea, he got his practice writing his letters to his wife. And if you can get hold of the works of John Newton, you'll see that many, many pages are taken up with his published letters to his wife. These were published after her death.

Not all were published, but many of them. And you see, from the earliest days then of his Christian experience, he was being led and prepared for the particular work in which he was to be of the greatest usefulness. So by the study of Scripture and by reading of other things, he was mentally, to a considerable extent, prepared for the ministry.

And some indeed said that he was above the average graduate of Oxford and Cambridge. When it was through the intervention of Lord Dartmouth that he was given the curacy of Olney. Let me just tell you one story which Newton told, which illustrates in a rather humorous way - I hope I can remember it - how in those days one could arrive at a position by not going through the normal processes to arrive at it.

This man was a carpenter, of which Newton speaks. And in the course of his work as a young man, he had certain employment in the inns of court in London, and in the temple. He had to lay floorboards and do various things.

And in the course of his carpentry work, he noticed these unusual books in the library on the work of law and so on. He began to study them. And so diligent was he in his studies, along with his carpentry, that before very long, Newton says, he became a barrister himself.

And then, believe it or not, he actually became a high court judge. Well, this was not viewed with favour by all members of the legal profession. And on one occasion, when this man had ascended to the judge's bench, he reproved a lawyer for the way in which he had presented his case.

I think he was the counsel for the defence. And the judge told him that he had not made his case plain. He said, you've not even made it smooth.

This lawyer, resenting the comment, rose and said he could not help that matter for he was not bred as a carpenter. And the judge, without losing any composure, replied at once, that is quite evident, he said, for had you been bred as a carpenter, you would have been a carpenter still. Well, that story illustrates that men did move about in rather strange ways in the 18th century, and also it gives you a little of John Newton's humour.

And lest I forget to tell you, that certainly was a characteristic of the man. As we've often been reminded, and have commented on even this week, a conversion does not change a man's temperament. John Newton's temperament was by temperament a rather cheerful extrovert, and as a Christian he remained so.

It was his vow to be a cheerful Christian, and God gave him much grace to do that. But besides being a cheerful Christian, he had this considerable extent of humour. He was once with a group of young people.

As an old man he was sitting in his chair, I think with his seaman's jacket on. He never wore the proper clerical dress. And in his old age he became rather stout and bald, and as they were talking he gave a tremendous sneeze.

And there was a fly on his head at the time, and the fly flew off. And John Newton said, if that fly keeps a diary, he'll say, today there was a tremendous earthquake. So there are many things like that in Newton, and you can see why young people enjoyed him, because he was full of this kind of thing.

So then he went to Olney in 1764. I'll come back to that. Olney is a little town in Buckinghamshire.

If you went there today, you would hardly find a soul walking on the main street. It's a very quiet backwater. But in those days it was a busy town.

It was on the main coach route. There were many public houses. It had quite a considerable population.

It was a lace-making town. There were over a thousand lace-makers in Olney. There was a great deal of poverty.

Lace-making was not a profitable industry in the 1760s. And John Newton found that he had come to a parish which socially, and above all spiritually, had great problems. There had evidently been little gospel preaching there for many long years.

He says how the children ran wild about the streets. One of the early funerals that he had to take, the children accompanied the coffin to the grave as though it was some kind of pantomime. He tells us of the bell ringers in the town that used to get drunk.

And one night when they were drunk ringing the bells, one of the bells fell down and killed one of these drunken bell ringers. There were many things like this which indicated the necessity of a gospel ministry in Olney. And Newton gave himself wholly to that work.

Before long the church was crowded. In a little while they had to build an extra gallery, or rather a gallery because there was not one there before. And the church ultimately could hold perhaps one and a half thousand people.

So he gave his early years at Olney solely, or almost entirely, to the work of the parish and the building up of the few believers which there were in Olney. And the work was of course far too much for him. And in 1767 God sent him a great friend and these two men worked together in Olney for twelve years.

And the friend was William Cooper, a written William Cowper, C-O-W-P-E-R, but pronounced in those days Cooper. And I must pause for a few moments to tell you who Cooper was. He was seven years younger than John Newton.

He was born in 1731, educated at Westminster School in London, entered the temple to prepare for a legal profession, and until about the age of thirty had idled away about ten or eleven years in legal studies without really accomplishing anything. Then in 1763 a relative of Cooper's offered him the clerkship of the House of Lords. This man had the office in his patronage and he offered it to Cowper, Cooper.

Well, Cooper by temperament was highly nervous and prone to melancholy. No doubt it was a hereditary thing that had run his family. His mother had died when he was only six years of age, like Newton.

He had an unhappy childhood and he was a very sensitive, introspective young man. And while he desperately needed a good job the fact was that this post of clerkship of the House of Lords necessitated some kind of brief public examination at the bar of the house. And the prospect of such a public trial completely unnerved him.

And by the end of 1763 Cowper had had a serious mental breakdown, indeed so serious that he had tried to kill himself, and by the end of the year 1763 he was completely insane. He was taken then to a mental asylum at St Albans under the care of a Dr Nathaniel Cotton. And it was there in the summer of the following year, 1764, that sitting beside a window, picking up a New Testament, he tells us that his eyes fell on those verses in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, whom God had set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.

The doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ as the ground of our peace broke in upon his soul, and he was filled with peace and with wonder. The hymn that we sang the other night was Cowper's hymn, of course. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins.

Sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. And that was his experience in the summer of 1764. He then had a problem what to do with his life, because he was utterly wearied of London, and he felt that he would rather die than sin, and that the country would be a far better place for him spiritually.

He had a brother in Cambridge, who was a Cambridge don, a clergyman, and also a don in St Bennett's College. So he decided that he would take up lodgings in Huntingdon, which is a small town, as you probably know, not many miles from Cambridge. So Cowper went to Huntingdon, went into lodgings, and within a few months he was finding himself excessively lonely.

He still had the joy of his salvation, but he was beginning to become anxious, because the truth was he knew no one in Huntingdon, and while Cambridge was not so far away, he could not be visiting his brother seven days in the week. And then one Sunday morning after service, he met a young man in the churchyard by the name of William Unwin. And this young man had spotted him and noticed he was obviously on his own, and next Sunday asked him to come home with him to dinner.

And this is what Cowper did. And he not only came for dinner, but he came to stay. Within a few days he'd packed up all his belongings and went to live with them.

And the family that he had come to live with, the Unwins, were an interesting family. The father was a clergyman who had a living in, I think it was Norfolk, but he did not reside there. The mother, her name was Mary Unwin, considerably younger than the father.

And then there were the two children. One was William, who Cowper had met in the churchyard. William was twenty years old.

And then there was a daughter, Susanna, eighteen. Well, Cowper lived with them for perhaps three years until 1767. And it was a, you might say, monastic life.

They had prayers in the morning and worship. They did their gardening. Cowper had a little money invested or which had come to him through the family.

He had no real need to work. It was a very peaceful and indeed a happy existence with walks in the afternoon and tea on the lawn. And so it seemed as though it would go on forever.

Until one Sunday morning the father of the family, Morley Unwin, arriving to take a service, was thrown from his horse. His skull was fractured and he died very soon afterwards. And at once the Unwins were, as it were, left adrift in their spiritual connections.

Mary Unwin in particular, the mother, was a very spiritually minded woman. And their first concern was to find a parish where they could be fed. Well, it was just at this time that Newton had heard of Unwin's death.

And although it was some miles away from Olney he had called to extend his sympathy. And there he was on the doorstep. They'd never set eyes on him before.

Short-statured with his cheerful face. They welcomed him in. And within a matter of days it was decided that the Unwins and Cowper would settle at Olney.

So to Olney they went in the August of 1767. And William Cowper became the assistant to John Newton. They organised prayer meetings together.

They visited the poor. They gave out food and clothes to those who were impoverished and there were many such. In the afternoons they went their walks together.

And then in 1769 they began writing hymns together. The Olney Hymns. Now the purpose of the Olney Hymns was perhaps primarily to convey instruction.

Newton was thinking of various ways to reach the young people particularly of Olney. Many of whom did not come to church at all. And he hit upon this expedient.

Lord Dartmouth had a house in Olney which he never lived in. And it was more or less empty most of the year. So Newton had permission to use one of the large rooms in this house.

It was called the Great House. And here he had a weekly prayer meeting. And a weekly meeting for young people.

Which was, they were incorporated in the prayer meeting I think one grew out of the other. And for these meetings they arranged that they would write a hymn. And Cowper wrote one of the first.

And the first meeting they had in the Great House they had Cowper's hymn When Jesus, where'er thy people meet There they behold thy mercy seat. One of his best known hymns. And so the development of the Olney Hymns was almost accidental.

It was certainly never intended to provide hymns for the Christian church of all ages as it has since tended to do. There were about 300 Olney Hymns written. We have been singing several of them this week.

Approach my soul the mercy seat John Newton's Come my soul my soul prepare Jesus loves to answer prayer another of Newton's Glorious things of thee are spoken. And then Cowper's perhaps are even more beautiful some of them certainly in their poetic rendering God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform is one of Cowper's. And so is the other Cowper's testimony Heart my soul it is the Lord His thy saviour hear his word Jesus speaks and speaks to thee Say poor sinner loves thou me.

Well these and many many others they wrote together for this little meeting in the Great House. It was not until many years later that the hymns were published in 1779 and when they were published it was first agreed that a thousand copies would be printed. Then the figure was increased to two thousand but those hymns have been printed by the million of course since that date and upon that fact John Newton would have been altogether astonished.

If you want to know my favourite of all those hymns it would be Newton's How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear. Well this was the origin of the only hymns. Their work went on together Cowper and Newton's until the year 1773.

On the morning of January the 2nd at the beginning of the year Newton was woken early and hastened over to the house of his friend Cowper who had had another seemingly complete nervous breakdown. If you go to Albany today you can see these two houses the vicarage where Newton lived and then behind the vicarage is a garden there was an orchard and the other side of the orchard is the house called Orchard Side and in Orchard Side Cowper lived with the Unwins and they just had a path through from one back garden to the other and the two houses you might say were almost joined. Mary Unwin, the widow was a very close friend of John Newton's Mary.

These two Marys would sit sewing together in the evening while the men would talk or read a book. John Newton liked to read or rather Cowper liked to read books like Captain Cook's Narrative for Anson's Voyages Round the World and as he did so Newton would begin to talk about Africa and so on and then Newton liked to learn more about the classics and so Cowper who was a classical scholar of great ability he would perhaps be reading Homer or something like that and expounding it to Newton Newton would be puffing at his pipe and this had gone on this had gone on happily for some while and then Cowper had this further breakdown and I don't intend to stop to talk very much on that in the next issue of the Banner of Truth magazine in September if you see that magazine I have an extensive article there on Cowper's

nervous breakdown and his affliction.

The fact of the matter was in a few words that Cowper had this constitutional tendency and it reasserted itself even in him as a Christian and until the end of his life he had great struggles with despair, with despair sometimes the heavens were utterly black he felt that God had cast him off forever at other times hope was stirred within his heart but it is a sad story and the truth is that Cowper never recovered the extent of spiritual joy that he had in those seven years after his conversion the latter part of his life was spiritually a great struggle but he became a man of great usefulness everybody knows or ought to know of William Cowper the poet John Gilpin was a citizen and then he goes on about John Gilpin's ride you remember how the horse ran away and so on well that was one of

his better known poems but he wrote many poems The Tusk and I can't give them to you they're not much read these days but we must remember that in the 18th century there was a great fashion for poetry and Cowper was raised up as a Christian poet and people by the thousand read his poems and in these poems he inculcated Christian truth spoke on the Sabbath, on the law of God he condemned faithless ministers and these poems had tremendous influence upon the state of England and they resulted really from his nervous breakdown because when he recovered he found he needed some relaxation and his relaxation was partly carpentry and partly gardening but then partly poetry because of his spiritual depression he could not write any more hymns he didn't feel that he was able to he didn't have

enough assurance himself but he wrote these wider poems and certainly under the hand of God they had a great influence now I must say a few words about that romance which you were so interested in yesterday with his wife Mary where are my notes on this? they married as I told you in the year 1750 and they were given 40 years of happiness together on the 25th anniversary of their wedding John Newton wrote this is the 25th anniversary that great hinge our marriage upon which all the leading events of my life were to turn we are still preserved to each other forward with health, peace and with abundance of earthly blessings oh for more thankful hearts then he says my love was grown pretty tall when I married you and it has been growing ever since it was once an acorn but it has now spread

branches and a deep root like an old oak and then later on he writes to her when she was absent no time in your absence passes so pleasantly as when I am thinking of you writing to you or hearing from you I mean this with proper limitation dear as you are to my heart you were not, you could not be crucified for me nor do I live and move and have my being in you but in Jesus may he be our supreme Lord our chief beloved and may his grace teach us to love each other in him and then we shall not exceed and that is connected with the verse that we sung in that earlier hymn when one there is above all others well deserves the name of friend his is love beyond the brothers costly, free and knows no end as I've read Newton there is only one point at which he had a real disagreement with his wife

and I must give it to you because it illustrates a very important side of John Newton's character he was a man of truly Catholic spirit that is to say when he saw the image of the Lord Jesus and where he believed that men loved the gospel then he made his business to stand with them and to hold such fellowship with them as he could now after he had been in Albany a little while the Baptist brethren began to grow in numbers and they even had the temerity to hold a meeting on the same night as they met in the great house for their prayer meeting and Mrs Newton was very upset at this no doubt feeling that her husband's position was in some ways reflected upon and we read therefore in one of her personal letters when she was away from home she wrote to John Newton he had evidently been

telling her what he had been doing and he had been at one of the Baptist meetings and having fellowship with these brethren and she wrote back I do not care about your going to hear the Baptist though I am very glad you did not dine with them now this is what he writes back he says I hope you will not be angry with me for daily praying to the Lord to deliver you from a spirit with respect to the Baptist which I am sure is not pleasing to him and which I am persuaded hurts you it likewise has often grieved me and then he says we must try to bear with each other upon this point till the Lord gives us to be of one mind about it and when he does I think the change will be in you laughter this is quite a nice squabble that goes on for a few pages and obviously there was more to it but in

reality it was a very under the hand of God it was a matter of great seriousness because Newton developed friendships in the Midlands and the men who became his close friends amongst the Baptists were men who were to be used to the establishing of the Gospel in that great continent in the Far East John Ryland Jr of Northampton Baptist pastor there the son of the quaint old John Ryland William Carey who was baptized by Ryland and others these were the men who were much younger than Newton but who gained so much from him and had Newton followed his wife's counsel these men would have been deprived of one of the great influences upon their early life let me just give you a quote which is typical of Newton's pastoral counseling.

He's writing to one of these Baptist ministers, John Ryland and John Ryland was the opposite to Newton in his temperament he was always prone to see the dark side of something and to worry excessively about things and Newton was the opposite quite easy going and sometimes almost too cheerful well, Newton writes to him the ship was safe when Christ was in her though he was really asleep at present I can tell you good news, though you know it he is wide awake and his eyes are in every place you and I if we could be pounded together might perhaps make two tolerable ones you are too anxious and I am too easy in some respects indeed I cannot be too easy when I have a right thought that all is safe in his hands but if your anxiety makes you pray and my composure makes me careless you have certainly the best of it what Mr.

Martin was bringing to us the other evening on the necessity of making friendship with unconverted people is very much illustrated in Newton. When he got to Albany he found that amongst the neighbouring clergy there was perhaps no one who was really preaching the gospel and while he did not in any sense open his pulpit or his spiritual ministry to friendships with these men, he did seek to befriend them as individuals he felt they were in utter ignorance there was a nearby clergyman not long after he had gone to Albany who was drunk one night and in his drunken stupor he had set fire to curtains and burnt himself to death and evangelicals were shocked and horrified that a clergyman should die in such a condition but Newton felt nothing but profound compassion he said that he had been in such a condition often and yet God had not taken him away in his sins and he went out of his way to befriend them.

One man who he befriended was a clergyman by the name of Thomas Scott now Scott was quite a scholar and loved an argument and he knew that Newton was an evangelical Methodist and time hung heavily on his hands so he entered into a correspondence with Newton and you must read that correspondence for yourself it was printed later in a book in which Scott gave his testimony to how he was converted from being a rationalist he became an evangelical Christian let me just mention this Scott was very prejudiced against Newton until one evening he had a report from one of his parishioners about one of his members who was very ill and Scott perhaps had seen this person once or twice but that night he heard that John Newton had come all the way from Olney to visit this person Newton knew that nobody would be dealing with them about their souls now Scott was moved by that fact that this man sincerely

was seeking people's spiritual good that helped him to listen to Newton well Scott was then converted but what happened after his conversion? well he also began to preach the gospel and one of the young men who came often to hear him preach was William Carey William Carey was born in Paulus Puri in the Midlands was a non-conformist was a Baptist as you know but not having much teaching he came to hear Scott and many years later in India Carey said how much he owed to the ministry of this man it all began because Newton befriended him it's an illustration, a very striking one I think of what we were considering the other evening well Newton remained at Olney until the year 1780 and then he moved to London his last years at Olney were rather difficult and sad partly because of Cooper's illness partly because there was a spiritual decline in the church which he couldn't rightly account for the services were not so well attended there seemed to be less spirit of prayer I think that is something which has been true in the ministry of many famous ministers people become accustomed to a gift of God they know the man so well that they cease perhaps to regard him as they ought as a messenger of God and it may well be too that Newton had a weakness in regard to his strong points, you know our strong points can very easily be our weakest points in this way John Newton's gift was a great gentleness and tenderness he felt so deeply his own wretchedness as a sinner that he was very very tender in dealing with others but his gentleness sometimes seems to have been well almost a softness there was the old woman who said to him when she was very ill she said oh she said you often spoke to me of Christ but you never warned me of my danger plainly enough and that does seem to represent a certain weakness in Newton and then as I mentioned at the outset he had this habit of extemporary preaching there is just one point the only one I know in which a minister should not follow John Newton and it was this he had a struggle to know how to preach.

The first time he preached in Yorkshire going back now many years he preached without any notes at all and he got to his first point in the sermon, a few minutes on the first point second point and his mind was a complete blank and he sat down in great confusion. The second time he preached he had a complete manuscript and he followed each line and he said he dare not lift his eyes from the line because he would never find it again then he was depressed for days and he came to the conclusion that the only way he could preach would be out of a warm heart. So he threw away all his notes and he meditated on his subject and while that is good for occasional preaching and for itinerant preaching perhaps, when one is preaching for twelve, sixteen years to the same people you can easily see what happens when a minister does that.

He goes over and over the same ground and I think that probably happened in Newton's case. Well he was called to London and about he said writing to a friend, to make a connection with one Mary Woolnoth, which I hope will be for life. And Mary Woolnoth of course was the name of the parish church, St. Mary Woolnoth in the city of London.

His coming to London at that time was under the hand of God, the means of strengthening and bringing forward the whole evangelical witness. One of the men that came to hear John Newton preach was William Wilberforce, great parliamentary leader as he was to become. Wilberforce was converted, if I remember rightly, by the reading of Philip Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul.

But it wasn't until he talked with Newton and others that he was given that boldness and resolution which came to mark his life. As a leader in Parliament he gave himself to every cause which furthered the Kingdom of God. He went up himself to Liverpool.

He looked into the slave trade. He infuriated the merchants. You may have read how on one occasion as Wilberforce was standing by the dock and the water beside him in Liverpool, it was an attempt to push him over into the sea.

Wilberforce became a great Christian leader. And he did what Cooper had done in another way. He spoke to the higher society, not by poetry but by a book.

He wrote a book titled *Evading Mere Practical View of Christianity*. Was that it? Something like that? A very famous book. And one of the people whose conversion was connected with that book was none other than Thomas Chalmers who was converted in Scotland about the year 1810.

Became the leader of the evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. So Wilberforce was one of the men who was so influenced by John Newton. Now our time is really gone and there are certainly one or two things which I had wanted to give to you.

I certainly must give you his last words before his death. I have told you that he lived to be a very old man. 83 years of age.

His wife died about 13 years before him. As he was awaiting his death he said, I am like a person going a journey in a stagecoach who expects its arrival every hour and is frequently looking out of the window for it. And then with his old touch of humour he said, when somebody asked him how he was, I am packed and sealed and waiting for the post.

William Jay visited him near the close. He was hardly able to speak. He however said to William Jay, my memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things.

That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great saviour. And when he was turned 80 his friends were really concerned about his preaching because with memory almost gone he would stand in the pulpit desperately short sighted. He couldn't have even seen notes if he wanted to then.

And he had a servant who stood behind him who would try to prompt him where he got completely, as it were astray in his drift. And one of his best younger friends, Richard Cecil, pleaded with him to lay aside this particular aspect of his ministry. There was no need for him to continue to preach at Newton in indignation.

He said, what? He said, what? Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak? Shall he stop while he can speak? There's one point upon which I find Newton especially helpful and upon this point I will close. It's on the connection between faith and our feelings, our enjoyment, our conscious pleasure in communion with Christ, the joy of the Christian life. Now, as a young Christian John Newton had that overflowing joy.

But as he went on he learned that God had other things to teach him. This is what he says in one place. Through divine grace I have been led to live above and beyond my frames that is my emotional states to live upon the everlasting righteousness of my dear redeemer.

To which my best obedience can add no value and from which all my infirmities can take nothing away. So these things that is his inward problems, though they take from my pleasure have no considerable effect upon my peace. And that's an important distinction.

Our peace and our pleasure are not the same. Then he says in another letter, he said when I was writing from this desk yesterday I had a beautiful prospect of the Isle of White. I am looking today through the same window and I can see nothing.

But I do not suppose the Isle of White is sunk because I cannot see it. I consider that this is a thick rainy morning and I expect when the weather clears up the island will be visible again. Thus it is he says with respect to many great truths which you and I have seen with the eye of our minds there may be returns of dark and misty hours when we can hardly perceive them.

But these should not put us on questioning whether we ever saw them at all. Faith he says, faith and obedience are like the road we travel. The frames and feelings of our spirits are like the weather.

Though the weather may often change the road, faith and obedience is always same. And they who travel upon it will renew their strength as they go on and at length surely arrive at the end of their journey and possess the promised land. Well if you read this little paperback of Newton's letters, letters of John Newton, you will find a great deal of that practical wisdom.

Just a word on the books on Newton. Best biography is by Josiah Bull, written a hundred years ago, Josiah Bull. There is a modern biography by Bernard Martin which gives you a little more facts, but spiritually it's not nearly so helpful as Josiah Bull.

Then there are those books on Newton which are semi-fictitious. You may have read some of them. These are the historically more valuable ones.

His works were printed in six volumes. And then there was a one volume edition. And the one volume edition is more valuable in one respect.

Its print is much smaller of course, but it has the authentic narrative in, which the six volume edition doesn't have. And I think that if you search second-hand bookshops for John Newton's works you should find them without very great difficulty because so many editions were printed. We'll stop at that point.

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