

### **Activity 8. John Newton and “Amazing Grace”**

**Sources** (accessed January 27, 2010): [www.flash.net/~gaylon/jnewton.htm](http://www.flash.net/~gaylon/jnewton.htm);  
<http://www.gospelcom.net/chi/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glmps028.shtml>

**Background:** John Newton was a sailor on the Greyhound, a vessel involved in the Atlantic Slave trade. He had been a sailor from the age of eleven. In March 1748, the Greyhound was caught in a north Atlantic storm off of the coast of Sierra Leone. The storm ripped its sails and splintered and tore away one side of the ship. The sailors had little hope of survival but they continued to pump out water in an effort to trying to keep the boat afloat. March 21, 1748 was the eleventh day of the storm. Newton, who was too exhausted to pump water, was tied to the helm where he tried to hold the ship to its course. He remained there from one o'clock in the afternoon until midnight. While waiting for death, John Newton underwent a religious awakening and believed he had experienced God's grace. Although Newton continued as a slave-trader, his life had been transformed. He eventually abandoned the sea and became a Protestant minister. As part of his duties, he composed hymns, including one that described his experience as a slave trader and his eventual redemption. It was called “Amazing Grace.” John Newton also became an activist in the campaigns to end the slave trade and abolish slavery.

**Instructions:** The lyrics to “Amazing Grace” are available online at [http://www.constitution.org/col/amazing\\_grace.htm](http://www.constitution.org/col/amazing_grace.htm) (Accessed January 27, 2010). Read the lyrics and answer questions 1 – 4.

#### **Questions**

1. What different types of work did John Newton do during his lifetime?
2. What caused him to change the way he lived?
3. What evidence is provided in the song that his conversion was sincere?
4. What do we learn about the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the story of John Newton and “Amazing Grace”?