**WEEK 6: Lessons from the British Awakenings**

**John Newton (1725-1807)**

* Born in London. His mother died before he was 7. His father was an irreligious sea captain. Newton was friends with George Whitefield, John Wesley, William Carey, & William Wilberforce.
* At age 11 he began his first of 5 voyages with his father. In 1743, at age 17, his father arranged for him to find work in Jamaica. However, he missed the boarding after meeting 14-year-old Mary (Polly) Catlett. He was forever smitten.
* In 1744, he was press-ganged into the navy and forced unto the HMS *Harwich*. In June, twice Newton was late to the ship after shore leave. The reason: Polly Catlett. In November, he was to leave for India. He deserted the ship to run away with Polly. He was arrested and flogged.
* Newton gained permission to join a merchant (slave) ship headed to the coast of Africa. There he met Amos Clowe who promised him riches in the slave trade. Newton was 19 yrs. old.
* They arrived in Sierre Leone and soon his dreams were shattered when he was himself enslaved (for nearly 18 months) under Clowe’s black mistress while he was away on business. Newton said of this time later:

"I have seen frequent cause since to admire the mercy of the Lord in banishing me to those

distant parts, and almost excluding me from human society, at a time when I was big with

mischief, and, like one infected with a pestilence, was capable of spreading a taint wherever I went.

But the Lord wisely place me where I could do little harm…I was too low to have any influence. I

was rather shunned and despised than imitated; there being few, even of the Negroes themselves,

during the first year of my residence, but thought themselves too good to speak to me.”

* Newton was re-employed by another more successful slave-trader who ran several slave ‘factories’ on the coast. At this time, Newton adopted the lifestyle of the African natives, dabbled in black magic and voodoo, and lived promiscuously.
* In February of 1747, the captain of the HMS *Greyhound* discovered Newton and they sailed back to England. The ship encountered a massive storm off the coast of Ireland. Newton woke up to water pouring into his cabin. A sailor washed overboard and drowned. Newton manned the ship’s pumps for 9 hours and then stood at the ship’s helm for 11 hours till he was exhausted.
* Newton cried out to God for mercy and afterward began reading the Bible. It was the beginning of his conversion. Two years later (1750) he said of his time during and after the storm, “If I had any spiritual light, it was but the first faint streaks of early dawn.”

“I was greatly deficient in many respects. I was in some degree affected with a sense of my

enormous sins, but I was little aware of the innate evils of my heart. I had no apprehension of…the

hidden life of a Christian, as it consists in communion with God by Jesus Christ; a continual

dependence on him…. I acknowledged the Lord’s mercy in pardoning what was past, but

depended chiefly upon my own resolution to do better for the time to come…. I cannot consider

myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards.”

* In 1748, after 5 years of absence and little word from her, Newton was reunited with Polly. They were married for 40 years. They had no children.
* In 1749, at age 24, his father got him employed on a slave ship. In the next 5 years he made 4 voyages, the last 3 as its captain.
* In 1754, at age 30, he was too ill to lead the ship, so for 10 years he worked in an office in Liverpool. For the first time, he was able to attend church regularly and grow in his faith.
* In 1764, at age 39, Newton became a pastor in Olney and published *An Authentic Narrative*. Most of the people in his church were nominal Christians. Over the next 16 years, the church grew in faith and numbers.
* During his pastorate at Olney, Newton published *The Olney Hymns* which consisted of nearly 350 hymns, including several written by his friend William Cowper. It included ‘Amazing Grace.’
* In 1779, at age 53, Newton was offered an honorary doctorate from the College of NJ (Princeton) which he turned down. He never received any formal training and only spent 2 years in grammar school (age 8-10). He was largely self-taught his whole life including learning Latin and French (learned at sea) then later Greek and Hebrew.
* Also in 1779, he published *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (30 years after he stepped foot off his slave ship) which was used by the abolition movement he helped give guidance to.
* That same year, he moved to the heart of London to pastor the church of St. Mary Woolnoth. He preached there for the next 27 years until his death at age 82. Polly died 17 years earlier in 1790.

**William Wilberforce (1759-1833)**

* Wilberforce spent 46 years (1787-1833) in Parliament fighting to abolish the slave trade and slavery itself. He never lost an election. His bills were defeated 11 times before finally passing in 1807. Slavery itself was abolished 3 years before he died.
* Although he was from the wealthy, upper-class, when he was converted, he gave one quarter of his earnings to help the poor.
* Early in his career, he felt he was useless as a politician and decided to meet with John Newton. Newton encouraged him to stay in public life for the good of the church and for the nation.
* The odds were against abolition. England was economically and politically dependent on the slave trade. Wilberforce’s fight lost him many friends. There were many threats to his life. But over 20 years he turned the tide. When the bill to abolish the trade was passed the entire Parliament stood and cheered for him as he sat, head bowed, tears streaming from his eyes.
* John Wesley wrote a letter to Wilberforce in 1791 when he was 87 years old and 6 days before his death. Wilberforce was 3 years into his fight. Wesley said, “Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of man and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you.”
* Wilberforce also battled family problems. His wife suffered chronic depression. 3 of his sons defected from his evangelical faith, becoming Roman Catholics after he died. His daughter died at age 32 of Tuberculosis. He suffered many health issues that should have prevented him from going on in his fight. He was dependent on opium to manage his pain. He had such spine problems, that his head drooped down to his chest unless he consciously held it up. He wore a brace under his clothes no one knew about.