

The background is a soft, impressionistic painting of a beach at sunset. The sky is a mix of warm yellows, oranges, and light blues, with several birds in flight. In the foreground, a dark grand piano sits on the sand, its reflection visible in the shallow water. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

How Sweet the Sound

Lyrical Reflections based on
“Amazing Grace”

SARAH HART

Introduction

This booklet celebrates the 250th anniversary of the song “Amazing Grace.” Journey with musician and songwriter Sarah Hart who shares her exuberant love of life and faith, and her personal inspiration found in this beloved hymn. Sing along and delve into the hymn’s message—stanza by stanza—with short reflections, plus discussion questions to tap into your own experiences related to the song, with ample space for journaling. Background information about the song will also enhance your knowledge.



Consider using this booklet as a mini-retreat for music lovers. It could be covered in a couple hours or spread across seven days, taking one verse a day. Or use it for your own private devotion time. Let your heart be filled with hope and joy through the beautiful words and melody of “Amazing Grace.”



Sarah Hart is a Grammy-nominated singer and songwriter. Sarah has recorded 11 albums, plus written countless songs and hymns for congregational use. For more than 20 years, her musical journey has included giving concerts and retreats, composing for stage and screen, and being a keynote speaker. She has performed in churches nationwide and internationally. In 2013 she was invited to perform in St. Peter’s Square for Pope Francis with a crowd of 150,000 people. Learn more at SarahHart.com.

History of the Hymn

“Amazing Grace” is a Christian hymn penned by the English poet and Anglican clergyman John Newton to accompany a sermon he preached on New Year’s Day, 1773. Over the last 250 years, it has become an immensely popular hymn, particularly in the United States, where it is used for both religious and secular purposes. The text for the hymn is drawn from 1 Chronicles 17:16-17, in which King David responds to the prophet Nathan’s words that God intends to continue David’s royal line for eternity. The text reads:

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, “Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And even this was a small thing in your sight, O God; you have also spoken of your servant’s house into the distant future. You regard me as someone of high rank, O LORD God!”

Newton wrote the words of “Amazing Grace” from his own personal experience. He was once a man far from faith who was brought near to God by a harrowing event in his life. In 1748 while Newton served as a sea captain of a ship in the Atlantic slave trade, a violent storm off the coast of Ireland struck his vessel so severely that he called out to God for mercy. This moment marked Newton’s turn toward God, what he called “the hour I first believed.” Eventually leaving sailing behind, Newton then began studying Christian theology and was ordained in the Church of England in 1764. He served as a minister in Olney, England, where he began writing hymns.

“Amazing Grace” was published in *Olney Hymns* in 1779, but was rarely sung in England. It was in the United States where the song would become widely known during the early 1800s. While the hymn was associated with more than 20 melodies over the years, in 1835 American composer William Walker set it to the tune known as “New Britain,” and the melody stuck. Today “Amazing Grace” remains one of the most recognizable songs in the English-speaking world.

*Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.*



A - maz - ing grace! How sweet the



sound That saved a wretch like me!



I once was lost, but now am



found; Was blind but now I see.

Listen for God

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

John 1:16

What is it about the song “Amazing Grace” that makes it so beloved? Why do the words and melody resonate with us on such a deep level? What is it that our hearts “hear” in this song?

I’m reminded of my daily walk. It’s time that I take each day because I need to listen—not just *hear* but actually *listen*. The sound of God is all around me in my walk: in the wind that rushes through the new buds on the tulip poplars, in the conversation being held by two neighbors, in the squawk of the heron who found her place in the little pond near my house. The sound of God is constant, as constant as creation. It is a sweet sound, but I must stop myself long enough to listen.

In this world that is overflowing with chaos and noise, the sweet sound of grace tends to be quelled. But grace is at every moment in the air all around us, full of possibility, waiting for us to stop and hear. We ourselves must make the choice to stop, and to listen.

Even when we are distracted in our lives, because of Christ we are found by this sweet but mighty roar of love. Eyes are no longer blind to what God is doing, for grace opens our hearts to hear and receive. We are no longer lost to the shadows but found standing in the light. In Christ, the Word, we hear the sound of redemption: the saving voice of God singing in our own lives, every day.

How sweet the sound.

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*



'Twas grace that taught my heart to



fear, And grace my fears re - lieved;



How pre - cious did that grace ap -



pear The hour I first be - lieved!

The Moment of Belief

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all ...

Titus 2:11

All Christians have an “hour” when we “first believed.” Some of us may have to do a little memory work to find it; others can recall it without hesitation. Wherever we are, let’s just pause and recapture when we’ve had a powerful moment of belief in God that overwhelmed us.

I have a very distinct memory of singing in the children’s choir at the midnight service one Christmas Eve. I was about seven years old, and it was way past my bedtime. I was exhausted, edgy and very afraid that Santa Claus wouldn’t come because I was going to be up half of the night. All the children in the choir were ushered to the front of the church, and all of the lights were turned out. I remember standing in complete darkness, as our pastor lit a single candle in the back and called out, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light!” Candles were lit one by one by one until everyone in the church was holding a flickering light. I will never forget that moment. My fears, anxiety and weariness gave way to a single heart-swell of joy and wonder. It was the first time in my little heart that I truly felt what it meant to believe.

For adults, belief may become more difficult the older we get. And yet if we allow our hearts to be open with childlike wonder, grace will pour in and replace every fear and every darkened corner with the light of Christ. We will be reminded in a very real way of our own first-love of God, the God who first loved us.



How Sweet the Sound

In the past 250 years, the sweet sounds of “Amazing Grace” have become a deeply treasured and universally known melody of personal faith and shared worship. This devotional booklet by popular musician Sarah Hart can be experienced at any time of the year, for groups or personal use. It helps readers (and singers!) explore the lyrical text and take the tune to heart with reflections on each of the hymn’s verses, along with questions, journaling pages and historical background. Perfect as a gift for choir members, musicians and all music lovers in your parish.



For more resources related to “Amazing Grace” visit CreativeCommunications.com/AmazingGrace

Lyrics of “Amazing Grace” as they appear in this text are in the public domain.

Musical notation herein is set to the tune New Britain, also in the public domain.

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