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Notebook has been purchased. Thank you for understanding.)**

The hymn stories included in “Dramatic Hymn Stories” are:

John Newton – “Amazing Grace”

Fanny Crosby – “Blessed Assurance”

John Fawcett – “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

Isaac Watts - “Am I A Soldier of the Cross”

Edward Mote – The Solid Rock

Elizabeth Prentiss – “More Love to Thee”

George Duffield – “Stand Up for Jesus”

Elvina Hall – Jesus Paid It All”

Horatio Spafford – “It IS Well”

**These are written in chronological order and may be presented as an
entire program or as separate entities or in any combination.**

**Hymns are arranged directly from the hymnbook
making the music easy to perform.**

(Lights come up on the church setting as the Narrator enters.)

Narrator: Come with us on a journey back in time. *(picks up a hymnal)*
Explore with us through the pages of your hymn book. Look beyond the
words and melodies into the lives of those who gave us such rich treasures,
treasures we often take for granted. It is our prayer that the stories behind
the songs will encourage you to view these hymns in a deeper sense: to
understand, enjoy, appreciate, and apply to your lives the fullest meanings
of the Scriptural truths they seek to impart.

(looking towards the house setting) Our journey begins in the year
1736—

Am I a Soldier of the Cross?

(Lights up on the house setting.)

Soldier: *(knocks on the door)* Open up, in the name of the law!

Mr. Watts: *(opening the door)* What is it? What do you want?

Soldier: *(barging inside)* You are under arrest, Watts.

Mrs. Watts: *(She is seated in a chair and starts to get up. Her husband motions for her to remain seated.)* Under arrest? Why? He's done nothing wrong!

Soldier: *(putting Mr. Watts in chains)* He is a dissenter of the official church, is he not?

Mrs. Watts: My husband is a deacon—

Mr. Watts: I am a part of the Free Churches here in England, sir—

Soldier: *(scoffing)* Free churches! There are no free churches in England, sir, only Anglican. It is against the law to belong to any other, which I am certain you and your good wife are well aware of. Now, *(pushing Mr. Watts roughly towards the door)* come along!

Mr. Watts: But my wife is expecting a child, sir!

Soldier: *(sarcastically)* Well, now, isn't that a pity. Perhaps we'll bring word to your prison cell as to whether it is a girl or boy. Move! *(pushes him out the door, crosses stage, and exits, stage right)*

(Mrs. Watts buries her head in her hands and begins crying softly. Lights fade on the house setting, come up on the Narrator.)

Narrator: It was into this situation that Isaac Watts, the eldest of nine children, was born in 1674.

From early on, Isaac showed great interest and ability in writing poetry.

When he was of college age—

(Lights fade on the Narrator, come up on the garden setting)

Benefactor: Isaac, you have displayed tremendous literary aptitude. I realize your family is unable to send you to the University for further study. However, I have the means to do so. I have taken great interest in your abilities and believe that you have the makings of a fine minister.

Isaac: Thank you, sir. I do enjoy studying and would love nothing better than to attend the University in order to develop my talents for God's use.

Benefactor: Wonderful! The church is in need of fine young minds such as yours.

Isaac: *(hesitatingly, with respect)* There is only one hindrance, sir. I am certain you had in mind for me to become a minister of the Anglican church. Correct?

Benefactor: Well, of course, Isaac. There is no other "real" church of England.

Isaac: With all due respect, sir, you must be aware of my family's involvement with the dissenting congregations.

Benefactor: Yes, but surely you would not throw away the opportunity—

Isaac: I could not, in good conscience, sir, become a part of a system which has left the true teachings of the Word of God.

Benefactor: *(sternly, resolutely)* And I could not support a young man who would stoop to serve in lowly parishes among lawbreakers! *(both freeze momentarily, then exit as lights fade on scene, come up on the Narrator)*

Narrator: Isaac Watts did go on to prepare for the ministry *(pause)*—among the independent churches of England.

His intense study of the scriptures, as well as philosophy, led him to write several works on logic. Yet, he is best known for the hymns he left to posterity, among them: “*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*,” “*I Sing the Mighty Power of God*,” and “*Joy to the World*.”

But there is one song that best reflects the stalwart position of his courageous family as well as those of other fellow dissenters of the day, including John Bunyan. (*The introduction for “Am I a Soldier of the Cross” begins.*) It is a hymn which is an even greater testimonial to this outstanding man of God than the monument in West Minster Abbey which was constructed in his honor.

Choir: (*Entering from different parts of the auditorium, they converge on the church setting and face the audience as they sing.*)

“Am I a soldier of the cross?
A foll’wer of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own His cause
Or blush to speak His name?

(men only)
Must I be carried through the skies
On flow-ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize
And sailed through bloody seas.

(ladies only)
Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?

(each phrase is spoken by a different member of the choir while the rest hum the tune)

Sure I must fight if I would reign-
Increase my courage, Lord!
I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.

(all sing - strongly)

I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
Or to defend His cause;
Maintain the honor of His Word,
The glory of His cross."

(Lights fade as the choir exits.)

End Scene

The Story of John Newton and “Amazing Grace”

(Lights up on the house interior, home of the Newtons)

Captain Newton: Son, I’ve been thinking that, since you’re now eleven, perhaps it’s time you traveled with me on one of my journeys.

Young John: Go to sea! I should like that, sir.

Captain Newton: You seem eager enough. Did you not like the boarding school at Essex?

Young John: It was fine, sir, after my first master left. He was too strict. I almost lost my love for books. The teacher who replaced him was better. I especially enjoyed Latin, but I’m tired of reading Virgil and Tully.

The openness of the sea would be exciting. I could use some adventure.

Captain Newton: I must warn you, son. The life of a sea-faring man is hard.

Young John: I’m young and strong, sir. I’m sure I can stand with the best of them.

Captain Newton: That’s not what I meant, John. Your mother was a godly woman—

Young John: I know, Father. Mother would have wanted me to be around “better” company. But she’s been gone now these four years—and, well, as much as I loved her, I’m older now, and this is what I want!

Captain Newton: *(thinks a moment, sighs)* Your mother had hoped you’d become a minister in time.

Young John: I don’t think I’d be suited to that sort of life. I’m too restless.

Captain Newton: *(shaking his head in agreement)* Hmm. Impatient is the word, John. *(sternly)* Mind you, I will keep a sharp eye on you, for your

mother's sake as well as my own. As captain, I have a reputation to maintain. I expect you to honor and obey me, John.

Young John: *(respectfully)* Yes, sir.

Captain Newton: Very well, son. My ship leaves port next Friday. Report for duty at six a.m. sharp!

Young John: *(saluting)* Aye, aye, captain!

(lights down on scene)

Narrator: John Newton sailed with his father several times in the next few years. Proving himself to be the opposite of what his parents had hoped, he became reckless, wicked, profane.

(Several years later. Lights down on the narrator, up on the ship. Captain Newton is at the helm, speaking to one of his crew)

Captain Newton: Where is John? He was supposed to be back two weeks ago!

Sailor 1: I saw him only a half-hour ago, sir.

Captain Newton: Where was he?

Sailor 1: Asleep in his berth, sir.

Captain Newton: Drunk again, no doubt! *(thinks a moment)* When he sobers up, send him to me.

Sailor 1: Yes, sir. *(exits)*

(Lights down, slight pause, then lights up again on the same scene. John enters. He is now a teenager.)

Teen John: You wanted to see me, Father?

Captain Newton: Captain!

Teen John: Captain! Sir!

Captain Newton: (*sarcastically*) Where have you been? Off to Kent again, to see Mary, were you?

Teen John: I, ah—well. sir, I—

Captain Newton: The last time it was three weeks. And the time before that—

Teen John: It won't happen again, sir.

Captain Newton: I should think by now that George Catlett would throw you out the door upon your arrival. How do you ever expect to win the hand of his daughter? You have no means to speak of, for you're far too impulsive to spend your money wisely and save up for marriage. How was your meager fare used this time, John, on one of your drunken "frolics" as you call it?

(*John hangs his head guiltily and says nothing.*)

Captain Newton: Mary doesn't know what you're really like, does she? (*pause*) You don't deserve a girl like her.

Teen John: (*quietly, looking away from him*) I know.

Captain Newton: (*disgustedly*) I'm tired of your blasphemies, rebellion, and debauchery, John. I've excused it before, but this time— This time— (*John looks up slowly, fearfully*) Get out of my sight before I decide to disown you!

(*John exits. Lights fade on the scene and come up on the Narrator.*)

Narrator: 1744. Hostilities between England and France were mounting. John Newton was now a midshipman on a British Man-O-War. The boat was scheduled for a five year voyage. One day, while in charge of a group of sailors to make certain they did not desert ship, John decided to abandon

ship himself. He planned on trying to find his father and getting transferred to a different vessel, one that would not keep him away so long from his beloved Mary Catlett.

(Lights come up dimly on the night scene, a street in Plymouth, England. John is walking cautiously, looking furtively about him. He is suddenly spied by some sailors who begin to chase him down the center church aisle.)

Soldier 1: There he is!

Soldier 2: Get him!

(They catch up to John, then forcibly take him aboard the ship.)

Captain: *(furiously)* Can't be trusted, can you, Newton! I was foolish enough to excuse your behavior the last time, when you returned late from your leave. But now! You betrayed your trust! You deserted a Man-o-War, leaving the very men you were guarding to keep from doing the same! You'll not escape punishment this time, John Newton! I intend to make an example of you that none of the three hundred sixty-five men on board will ever forget; nor will you, if you live through it!

(to the two sailors who brought John on board) Put him in irons. Tomorrow he'll feel the sting of the lash, about eight dozen times from a cat-o'-nine tails!

Narrator: Miraculously, John Newton survived the ordeal. God had spared his life once again, as He had on several other occasions from shipwreck, drunken recklessness, a near fatal fall from a horse, and severe storms at sea. You see, God's amazing grace was yet to reach down in love and rescue this wretched sinner from hell's doom.

Newton served on several other ships before becoming captain of his own. *(pause)* It was a slave ship off the coast of Africa. *(Lights fade on the Narrator, back on the scene.)*

John: *(now near his mid-twenties; speaks to sailors off stage)* Chain them fast, boys! I can't afford to take a chance on any of them escaping or

plotting some treachery against me once we're out to sea. Besides, Mary's finally given me hope I she will wait for me. I need the money if I'm to show Mary's parents I have the means of taking care of her.

Midshipman: *(coming on deck as John is speaking, overhears him)*
Money in exchange for the souls of men, sir?

John: *(looking over at the Midshipman, a little perturbed)* This your first voyage on a slave ship?

Midshipman: Yes, sir.

John: Then you'd better get used to what you see and hear, or find another kind of "cargo" to deal in.

(pauses, then speaks thoughtfully, reflectively) It's strange, being here at Sierra Leone. Strange that I can help make slaves of others when I myself spent several wretched months as a slave myself.

Midshipman: You, sir?

John: *(sighs)* Yes. Ironically, at the Plantenes where we just purchased these men and women. Did you happen to notice the lime-trees while we were there?

Midshipman: Yes, sir.

John: I planted them during my captivity. *(shakes his head, stares blankly ahead of him as if thinking back)* Sometimes I wondered if I'd live through those days. I was cruelly treated, half-starved, sick— *(sighs, looks back at the Midshipman, then offstage, as if thinking of the slaves that were just loaded on board)*

You do this job long enough, and you'll have yourself convinced they have no souls. *(stares absently out towards the audience, as if thinking)* You'll get so hard you may even start to wonder if you have one yourself.

(pauses again, then sharply) Return to your duties, sailor! And not another word about the souls of men!

Midshipman: Yes, sir.

(Lights down on the scene, up on the ship. Sky darkens - simulate lightning, thunder, and waves with special effects.)

John: *(at the helm, shouting above the storm)* All hands on deck! All hands on deck! *(John freezes his action at the ship's wheel. Lights fade, come up on the Narrator.)*

Narrator: It was March 10, 1748. The storm was severe, so severe Captain Newton was worried that his ship with its precious “cargo” would be lost. Fearing for his own life, John Newton began to be concerned about the destiny of his own troubled soul by reading a book titled, “*The Imitation of Christ.*” Shortly thereafter he at last gave his heart to the Savior whom he had so long denied. In order to help soothe his own conscience, concerning his dealings with slavery, he began worship services for the captives.

(Lights fade on the Narrator, come up on the stage where the action is resumed - Sailor 3 comes to Captain John Newton)

Sailor 2: Captain Newton, the men are, uh, ready for you to begin the worship service, sir.

John: Thank you, sailor. I’ll be down in a minute. Perhaps you can get them singing awhile.

Sailor 2: *(a little uncomfortable with the idea)* Uh—yes, sir.

John: I know the men don’t particularly like it, but I believe it does help them treat the slaves with a little more respect.

Sailor 2: Yes, sir. *(starts to leave)*

John: *(thinking a moment, then calling to him)* And sailor—

Sailor 2: Yes, sir?

John: Speaking of the slaves on board, I want you to go around to each one and make certain they are all reasonably comfortable and in good health. I

thought a few of them looked rather sickly yesterday. I want them taken to the sick bay and treated for their illnesses, if necessary.

Sailor 2: Yes, sir. (*exits*)

John: (*praying aloud, looks up*) It's no good, is it Lord? I try to appease my conscience by making their voyage as easy as possible, but for what? So they can be auctioned off like cattle? So families can be torn apart? Babies snatched out of their mother's arms? Husbands and wives forever separated by man's greed?

No! No, it's wrong! No matter what I do, I can find no peace in my soul! For one man to own another is a slap in the face of their Creator! I can no longer condone such evil!

(*pauses*) I know now what I must do. This will be my last voyage, Lord, on such a ship. I will henceforth fight against the vice of slavery.

Please, Lord, as I give up the only life I've ever known, show me what my life's work will now be. (*Lights fade. John exits backstage to be "aged". Lights come up on Narrator*)

Narrator: And God did exactly that. His tombstone in his own parish churchyard in Olvey, England, written by himself shortly before his death, sums it up best.

John: (*from prerecorded tape over sound system*) "John Newton, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy."

Narrator: (*background music begins of "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,"*) He finally married Mary Catlett, on February 12, 1750, became a clerk at the Port of Liverpool for nine years, then answered the call of God to preach, (*pause*) which he did for the next forty-three years. During that time he penned over two hundred eighty hymns, among them, "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken.

But John Newton shall always be remembered most for his simple soul-stirring hymn based on I Chronicles 17: 16, 17, a hymn which reflects the story of his life, and words that he proclaimed in one of his last

messages at the age of eighty-two. (*Background music transitions begins into “Amazing Grace.” Lights down on the Narrator, up on the church*)

John: (“aged,” *enters the church, stands behind the pulpit*) “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior!”

(*He begins to sing falteringly as lights come up dimly on the ship in the background and the congregation in the foreground in front of the pulpit.*)

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me (*glances up at the ship*)
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

(*The stage congregation begins to “oo” in the background as John continues singing.*)

“T’was grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!”

(*Music is transposed up a key. The stage congregation sings triumphantly.*)

“When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
(*John joins them*)
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise,
Than when we’d first begun!”

(*Lights fade onstage as all exit*)

End Scene

Sacred Music Choir and Orchestra - Am I A Soldier Of The Cross? Terms of Service. Share: Am I a Soldier of The Cross. Artist: Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers. Album: The Colored Sacred Harp, 1993. A Soldier Of The Cross(Isaac Watts) - Hymn / Song Lyrics with Instrumental backing music. LYRICS: Am I a Soldier of the Cross Lyrics: Isaac Watts Scripture:Acts 14:22; 1 Corinthians 16:13 Meter: 8.6.8.6. Am I a soldier of the cross, A follow'r of the Lamb? And shall I fear to own His cause, Or blush to speak His name? Must I be carried to the skies On flow'ry beds of ease, While others fought