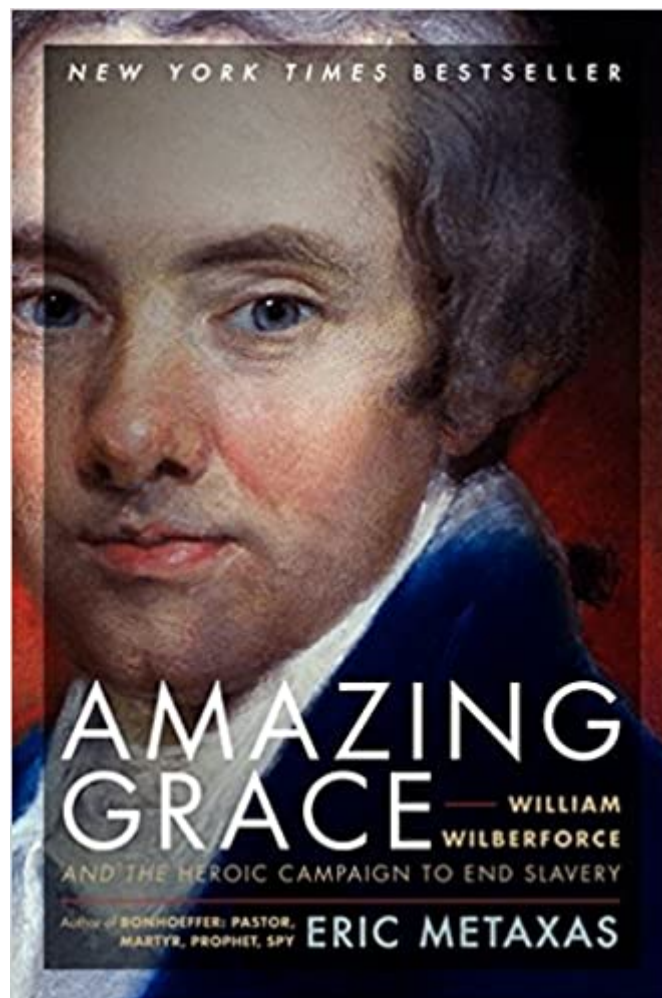


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# Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce And The Heroic Campaign To End Slavery



## Synopsis

Amazing Grace tells the story of the remarkable life of the British abolitionist William Wilberforce (1759-1833). This accessible biography chronicles Wilberforce's extraordinary role as a human rights activist, cultural reformer, and member of Parliament. At the center of this heroic life was a passionate twenty-year fight to abolish the British slave trade, a battle Wilberforce won in 1807, as well as efforts to abolish slavery itself in the British colonies, a victory achieved just three days before his death in 1833. Metaxas discovers in this unsung hero a man of whom it can truly be said: he changed the world. Before Wilberforce, few thought slavery was wrong. After Wilberforce, most societies in the world came to see it as a great moral wrong. To mark the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the British slave trade, HarperSanFrancisco and Bristol Bay Productions have joined together to commemorate the life of William Wilberforce with the feature-length film Amazing Grace and this companion biography, which provides a fuller account of the amazing life of this great man than can be captured on film. This account of Wilberforce's life will help many become acquainted with an exceptional man who was a hero to Abraham Lincoln and an inspiration to the anti-slavery movement in America.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

• (Chicago Sun-Times) • The little-known story of the lifelong struggle of a member of Parliament to abolish slavery in the British Empire. • (USA Today)

Amazing Grace is the biography of William Wilberforce, a British statesman and reformer from the

early part of the 19th century. It chronicles his extraordinary contributions to the world, primarily his 20-year fight to abolish the British slave trade, which he won in 1807. He was also instrumental in passing legislation to abolish slavery in the British colonies, a victory he won just three days before his death in 1833. He was a hero to Abraham Lincoln and an inspiration to the anti-slavery movement in America. America needs to become reacquainted with this moral hero. This biography of one of the foremost abolitionists of Britain's anti-slavery movement is the official tie-in book to the film *Amazing Grace* by Walden Media. The hardcover edition spent four weeks on the New York Times bestseller list.

Eric Metaxas does a fantastic job bringing William Wilberforce to life in a beautifully written biography. I was not familiar with him before and we chose it for our book club which focuses on the impact of religion on our lives. The author does an excellent job of capturing the era of the late 1700's to early 1800's. Highly recommend.

This book will change you. It will take you inside your soul and ask: 'What will remain when your life is spent'? I have read this twice, listened to it via Audible, given it to people I love. We are living in an age of 'crowd rule'. This vividly reminds us what one person totally committed to completing the mission the Lord God has given him can change the WORLD! William Wilberforce CHANGED THE WORLD!

The Wilberforce story is one of the most compelling in the History of Western Civilization. He had at least as great an impact on America, as did our founding fathers. Metaxis is one of the best Christian authors around these days, and he did an excellent job of researching and writing. Highly recommend this book to all.

An outstanding short biography of a terrific man almost lost to modern history. Wilberforce, as the driving force, & a few friends fought for two decades to end British slave trade. The book examined his fight in Parliament & his personal life, which was joyful & enthusiastic. A terrific read.

What an amazing and inspiring story! The often gruesome facts of the life in the late 1700's and early 1800's is unfolded in a captivating and compelling manner, showing the utter depravity of man at his worst in contrast to a man determined, with God's guidance, to make a difference. William Wilberforce not only worked in the parliament to change laws dealing with the slave trade through

Africa but worked on the plight of the orphans, widows and those in caught in sex traffic. This is not a light reading but a comprehensive true story of perseverance and dedication wrapped in the faith of a God who loves--and so should we.

Eric Metaxas is wonderfully engaging, as a speaker and author. *Amazing Grace* is a story worth reading for both historical and moral reasons. I thoroughly enjoyed Metaxas' humor throughout, reflective of his subject. The only difficulty I had was in keeping track of all of Wilberforce's associates. *Fierce Convictions* by Karen Swallow Prior is an excellent companion read on Wilberforce's fellow abolitionist, Hannah More.

William Wilberforce was indeed a 'force' for the abolition of slavery in England back in the late 1700s-early 1800s. A forceful speaker and brilliant orator, he was a member of Parliament for a time, bringing bills before the group to abolish the slave trade. England itself didn't have African slaves, but prospered economically in the slave trade, employing thousands upon thousands in their colonies and empirical holdings. Wilberforce came to Christianity late in life, and used his reason and logic for years to shield himself. But once converted his anti-slavery feelings were more intense and he fought all the stronger. He sought to alleviate suffering and oppression in other areas, too, trying to awaken the conscience of a society that reveled in brutal public hangings and turned a blind eye to the accepted practice of throwing widows in India onto the fire to be burned alive on their husbands' pyres. He fought the abolition battle for 30 long years, and lived only a short time after seeing it finally won. A gentle, intelligent, compassionate man, he changed the world forever. The book is a bit long, but a compelling read, and a story we all should know.

That the name of William Wilberforce has largely been lost to history seems somehow unfair. Wilberforce was the driving force behind the abolition of slavery within the British Empire. A Member of Parliament for forty-five years, the results of his efforts are still seen and understood in Western society to this day. Though his impact was felt not only at his time, but has extended through history, few people know his name. In *Amazing Grace*, Eric Metaxas' new biography of Wilberforce, which was timed to coincide with the release of a film by the same title (which was, in turn, timed to coincide with the two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade) he makes the valid comparison to a scientist who discovers the cure for an inoculation against a terrible disease. As the disease is eradicated and passes out of memory, so the scientist's name is likely to be forgotten. And this is what seems to have happened to Wilberforce. We live in a day where slavery is

unthinkable and we can hardly conceive of a time when the best and brightest of society defended it and thought little of pillaging the African continent for their own gain. Though those of us who remember Wilberforce know him primarily as the leader of the fight to abolish the slave trade, the truth is that he fought two great battles, the first against slavery and the second for the reformation of manners (which is to say a kind of social reform against rampant immorality and vice). While this biography focuses primarily on the first of these battles, the second does receive some attention as well. Life in Wilberforce's day was brutal, decadent, violent and vulgar. Societal evils were many and horrific: "epidemic alcoholism, child prostitution, child labor, frequent public executions for petty crimes, public dissections and burnings of executed criminals, and unspeakable public cruelty to animals." All of these were far more visible than slavery. Wilberforce knew that, if society was to be brought into line with the commandments of God, it would need to begin with the reformation of manners and he spent much of his life attempting to ban what was vulgar and unbiblical and to promote what was beautiful and Scriptural, knowing that success in the small things would eventually lead to success in greater things. Wilberforce has rightly been credited with giving the West its social conscience. Having read this biography, there are at least three great lessons I have drawn from the life of this great Christian. First, I have seen the value of persistence. Wilberforce fought for years and years before seeing any measurable success in his battle to outlaw the slave trade. Had he not persisted, it may have taken many more years and hundreds of thousands of lives for the trade to be abolished. Second, I have seen that there is hope even in the most evil of the many evils in our society. There was a time when very few could have imagined that slavery would ever be banned and yet, in one lifetime, attitudes were changed so that today slavery is almost unimaginable. As we think about the evils that plague contemporary society we can have hope that minds, hearts and attitudes can change. Third, I have seen the value of incremental change for Wilberforce was willing to accept incremental improvements. At one point he supported a bill, passed on a trial basis, that would regulate the number of slaves that were permitted to be transported on a single ship. Previously slaves had been laid in rows on benches, chained on their sides with the front of one pressed against the back of the next. Following the legislation, improvements were made. Though the bill implicitly and explicitly supported the continuance of slavery, Wilberforce saw it as a step in the right direction and was willing to support it. Another time he voted for a bill that required plantation owners to register all of their slaves. While this bill also supported slavery, Wilberforce saw that a registry of slaves would keep plantation owners from adding to their number of slaves by buying them from illegal slave smugglers. Incremental changes may lead to greater and more profound changes. Some who have read the book have made note of

the author's occasional use of sophomoric humor. Though there are several examples, perhaps the most blatant falls outside of the flow of the book's text in the Acknowledgments. "I wish first and foremost to thank my typist, yours truly, for quite literally transcribing my thoughts as I thought them, a feat hardly to be explained, and yet quite literally true." I suppose some find this kind of humor to be funny but in a serious biography it seems a little out of place. Other examples are less obvious and are perhaps more clever than obnoxious: "Wilberforce may have been crazy like a fox, but Fox himself was so often drunk as the proverbial skunk that Wilberforce wisely decided to forego badgering him about becoming involved. Even if Fox had initially assented to lend his name to the cause, it seems rather likely that he may have eventually weaseled out of any real commitment anyway, and it is always possible that, given his affection for dissolute living, he may even have become a mole for the opposition." If you missed the humor in that paragraph, read it again and you should catch it. Though the author's expression can seem a trifle obnoxious at times, this is true more in the early pages than in the majority of the text. The reader who presses on will be richly rewarded, not only with great content but even with some excellent prose, a brief example of which I will provide here. "And thus, history: three men, each named William, each twenty-seven years old, talking at the base of an ancient oak tree on a hill in May: one prime minister, one prime-minister-to-be, and one who would stand from that moment forward at the center of something so big and beyond any single man that a tree whose life had begun several centuries earlier, and would continue for nearly two more, was the humble creature chosen to bear mute witness to the conversation." Despite its few problems, and though this may not be among the greatest biographies ever written, it is certainly a good one and is a worthy addition to any library, personal, church or public. It wonderfully describes and analyzes the life of a great Christian man who can and should serve as an inspiration even today. I enjoyed it thoroughly and commend it to you.

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