

William Wilberforce (24 August 1759–29 July 1833) was always destined to be a leading public figure. A native of Kingston upon Hull, he began his political career in 1780 and became the Member of Parliament for Yorkshire (1784–1812). Rich, intelligent, talented and energetic, and a frequenter of drinking and gambling clubs in London, he was for many years the darling of the political classes.

Then something extraordinary happened. He met God. At the time of his conversion to evangelical Christianity, he was labelled by his peers as an 'enthusiast' or a 'methodist' (terms reserved for passionately religious people). Faced with this opposition, Wilberforce determined to leave the worldly pursuit of politics and join the clergy. Thankfully, he was persuaded to stay and to serve Jesus in politics by the ex-slave trader and writer of *Amazing Grace*, John Newton.

Of this radical new mission, Wilberforce stated 'God has laid before me two great objects; the suppression of the slave trade, and the reformation of manners.' With his friends such as Thomas Clarkson, Hannah More, Granville Sharp and Henry Thornton, he became an integral part of the 'Clapham sect', a group of Christian activists dedicated to the moral regeneration of society. Although

frail in health for most of his adult life, through decades of political campaigning and missionary activity, he succeeded in the dual objects of his mission. His philanthropic efforts succeeded in re-moralising British society, and in 1807 parliament finally passed a Bill to abolish the slave trade – the beginning of the end for the practice of slavery amongst western powers.

What most inspires me about Wilberforce is his example as a missionary to politics. Filled with the Holy Spirit and immersed in the Word of God, he had an intimate relationship with God, and like the Men of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12.32), he understood the times he was living in and knew what to do.

Dave Landrum
Senior Parliamentary Officer – Bible Society

Born: August 24 1759 in Kingston upon Hull, Yorkshire

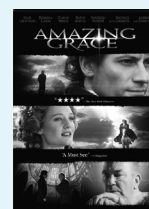
Died: July 29 1833 (aged 73) in London

Spouse: Barbara Spooner

Children: William, Barbara, Elizabeth, Robert, Samuel and Henry



Further Resources



Amazing Grace
DVD (2006)