

The Life of William Cowper

1731: Born

1737: Mother died. Began attending a boarding school

1749-56: In love with his cousin

1752: Entered first major period of paralyzing depression. ("Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror and rising up in despair.")

1763: Entered second period of major depression. He was as "a man when he arrives at the place of execution."

1763: First attempt at suicide. Conviction of sin.

1763: Committed to St. Alban's Insane Asylum.

1763: Conversion. ("saw so much benevolence, mercy, goodness, and sympathy with miserable men, in our Saviour's conduct, that I almost shed tears.")

1765: Moves in with Unwin family

1767: Cowper begins friendship with John Newton

1769: John Newton begins work on Olney Hymns

1773: The Fatal Dream ("*It is all over with you. You are lost.*")

1779: Olney Hymns published

1785: Publication of *The Task*

1786: Another period of insanity

1794: Final major bout of depression and insanity

1800: Death ("I feel unutterable despair.")

"Farewell, dear scenes, forever closed to me, Oh, for what sorrows must I now exchange ye!"

"Oh! with what a surprise of joy would he find himself immediately before the throne, and in the presence of his Lord! All his sorrows left below, and earth exchanged for heaven." – John Newton

Lessons from his life:

1. We should not expect an easy life (1 Peter 4:12)
2. Depression, doubt, pain and suffering can affect anyone.
3. God works through the most unlikely of people (1 Cor 1:26-31)
4. Being present is one of the most effective means of ministry

O For A Closer Walk With God (1772)

Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.

Return of Joy (1772)

When darkness long has veiled my mind,
And smiling day once more appears;
Then, my Redeemer, then I find
The folly of my doubts and fears.

Lines Written During a Period of Insanity (1773)

Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,
Scarce can endure delay of execution,
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damned below Judas; more abhorred than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master.
Twice-betrayed Jesus me, the last delinquent,
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me;
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot! encompassed with a thousand dangers,
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm called, if vanquished, to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong;
I, fed with judgment, in a fleshy tomb, am
Buried above ground.

God Moves In A Mysterious Way (1779)

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence,
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood (1779)

There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in His day;
And there have I, though vile as he,
Washed all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Are saved to sin no more.

Ever since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

When this poor, lispings, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave,
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save!