

George Mueller

George Mueller was born September 1805 in Kroppenstaedt in Prussia. His name is legendary amongst those who have lived 'by faith' and practised that in their ministries.

As a child, George had money and gifts showered upon him by his father. He became a master at deception, falsifying the account books in how he spent his fathers money. When he was caught he would invent ingenious excuses and became an habitual thief and cheat. '*Before I was 10 years old I had repeatedly stolen government money which was entrusted to my father and forced him to make up the losses*'. (1) This led to a trap being set and he was caught red handed. '*Though I was punished on this and other occasions, yet I do not remember that anytime...it made any other impression upon me than to make me think how I might do the thing the next time more cleverly*'. (2) George continued to skilfully collect money from his fathers debtors and used this to commit fraud, spending large sums of this money.

His father wanted him to become a clergy man and sent him at age 11 to a classical Cathedral school at Halberstadt to be prepared for university and ministry. But George '*indulged in sinful practices which were my favourite pastimes*'. (3) At age 14 his mother died while George was in a drunken stupor.

The next year he was 'confirmed' as a Christian in the Lutheran church. But stealing, lies and alcoholism still dominated his life. At age 16 he was finally arrested for leaving a hotel without paying his bills. He went to jail as a thief, swindler and drunkard. His father obtained his release by paying the debt and the fine, but banned him from living at home. George then travelled to Nordhausen and went to Halle University. Although he was still studying for the Christian ministry, in his 300 reference books there was no Bible.

By age 20 he took up acting so he could master the art of deception further. Soon after, he was accepted as a candidate for Holy Orders in the Lutheran church and given permission to preach, yet he had rarely been to church or a Gospel service. He stated: '*Deep in my heart, I longed to renounce this wretched life, I did not enjoy it, and I had sense enough to see that one day it would ruin me completely. Still I felt no sorrow about offending God*'. (4)

In 1825 a Christian friend invited him to a house meeting. The group, led by a Mr. Wagner, sang, prayed, read the scriptures and listened to the reading of a printed sermon. George was impressed by their praying and a great joy and peace came over him as he listened, yet he experienced no conviction or repentance. But, as he was to say later: '*He began a work of grace in me*'. George burned a crude book he was about to publish and began to read the scriptures, pray and attend church services. He was ridiculed by former friends but soon discovered the truth of John 3:16 and claimed to be Born Again by the Spirit of God.

The next year at age 21 he read accounts of missionary endeavours which stirred him greatly. But then he fell in love with a young Christian girl in the fellowship meeting he was attending. His love for the Lord grew cold. Fortunately he realised what was happening to him and he broke the relationship off. Peace and joy flooded back into his life and he set himself to the Lord's work again.

George was now sitting under Dr. Tholuck's teaching at Halle University. He asked his father's permission to join a Missionary society. His father was enraged, instead expecting

him to become a clergyman and look after him in retirement. From that day on Muller resigned to trust the Lord for all his financial needs. Soon after he was hired by Charles Hodge to be a German tutor. The pay was good and George later wrote: '*thus did the Lord richly make up to me the little which I had relinquished for His sake*'. (5) Still determined to be on the mission field, George applied to the *Berlin Missionary Society* but was refused because he lacked his fathers consent. George then went to prayer with a childlike faith.

In 1826 he preached his first sermon. Because he did not know how to prepare a sermon, he borrowed one. To his surprise at the end of the service he was asked to preach again in the afternoon. George, not knowing what to do, prayed for help. He attempted to expound Matthew Chapter 5 without notes and claimed a great assistance from the Holy Spirit. He returned home vowing this would be the way he would always preach. Biographies testify that Muller was '*to rank throughout his life among the simplest and most scriptural of preachers*'. (6) It was at this time he lodged for a short time at the Orphanage houses built by A.H. Franke.

In 1827 he again applied for missionary service with the *Continental Society of Britain* but the war between the Turks and Russians closed the door yet again. The *London Missionary society (LMS)* then asked him to be a probationary student for six months in their mission to the Jews. But as a Prussian he was bound to serve three years in the army when his university studies were finished. He was yet again refused from missionary service on these grounds. George then fell ill and when he recovered he presented himself to the army doctors for a medical. They declared him unfit for Military duties. And so he went to London in 1829 and commenced with *LMS*. He studied hard including learning the Hebrew language and memorising much of the Old Testament. During this time he heard of someone who had gone to the mission field entirely 'by faith'.

The same year he became ill again and it was during this time he realised his conversion had been shallow. Through searching the Scriptures and much reading he received understanding of the doctrine of Justification by God for His sins. He began to pray over every detail of his life and committed everything to the Lord. He recuperated from illness in Teignmouth and he studied the Scriptures more deeply. He wrote: '*God showed me that His Word alone is our standard of judgement in spiritual things...*' (7)

Three books influenced George - The Testimony of A.H. Franke - '*Life of Faith*'; the second, a biography of John Newton; the third, the Journal of George Whitefield. Whitefield's works lead to a far greater earnestness in preaching and soul winning. '*George Whitefield's life drove home the truth that God alone could create in him a holy earnestness to win souls and qualify him for such divine work by imparting a compassion for the lost that should become an absorbing passion for their salvation.*' (8)

He returned to London with renewed energy and started a Bible study with his fellow students 6-8am each morning. He also prayed during the night, sometimes till 2am in the morning. (9)

Because he disagreed with the methods of *LMS* in sending people to the mission field, he started his own work to the Jews where he was. He put it to the *LMS* that he would

continue to work for them if he could work without a salary and go when and where the Lord might direct. His terms were unacceptable to *LMS* and on good terms his ties with them were terminated.

In 1830 Mueller was invited to replace a minister at Ebenezer Chapel in Teignmouth and reluctantly he began with a congregation of about eighteen people. Some did not like his accent or his down to earth sermons. But sinners were converted. His sermons were prepared without notes and after waiting on the lord. It was here he met the Scottish Hebraist Henry Craik who he would work with for much of his future life.

George continued never to receive a salary and asked no one for money. He believed in never borrowing or incurring debt. He instituted a gift box at the rear of the church rather than have people hand him money. In George's mind there would be no risk of '*sinful pride or false humility*'. (10)

In October, 1830 he married Mary Groves, the sister of a friend. One year later she gave birth to a still born child and almost died. George was convicted that he had not rejoiced about the prospect of being a parent but had secretly resented the fact. He was to never make the same mistake again.

Mueller's journals record many occasions when their needs were stretched to the limit and money came at the last hour. To his critics he replied: '*Rather than causing anxiety, living by faith in God alone keeps my heart in perfect peace.*' (11)

In 1832 he received a letter from Henry Craik who had moved to Bristol. Craik invited Mueller to come and help. After much prayer Mueller and Craik formed a pastoral team in two chapels in Bristol which was the infant brethren denomination of those days. The Lord blessed the work, crowds overflowed and people were converted. For eight years the two churches saw revival.

Within a year of being in Bristol Mueller saw the needs of poor children wandering the streets. He gathered them together at 8am each morning, gave them bread, read the scriptures and taught them to read. As the numbers grew local residents complained about the beggars hanging around the shops and homes and the work was temporarily abandoned.

In 1834 Mueller and Craik established an institute called '*The Scriptural knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad*'. The purpose was to establish day schools, Sunday schools and adult schools; to circulate the scriptures; and to aid Missionary efforts worldwide. Two days after establishing the institute Mueller wrote: '*Today we have only one shilling left - only one shilling between two preachers and their families. There were no patrons, no committees, and no membership*'. (12) During the first seven months of the institution some 482 Bibles and 520 New Testaments were circulated, as well as monies being given to Missions.

In December 1835 he announced his desire to establish an orphan house in Bristol. He asked the Lord for a building, one thousand pounds and people to run the orphanage. His primary reason for the orphanage was to show the faithfulness of God. The first gifts of furniture and money arrived within weeks, even though they were not asked for. Two couples offered their services and requested no salaries be given. But George suddenly realised he had not asked for the orphans to come! In humiliation he went before the lord again and the next day the first applicant arrived. In April 1836 the first house was opened with 26 children. By November a second house was opened and by April the next year a third house

with 60. The Institute also prospered with thousands of copies of Bibles and texts being distributed.

Mueller believed that '*four hours of work after an hour of prayer would accomplish more than five hours of work without prayer*'. (13) He taught that to know God's will one first got his heart in a state that it had no will of its own in regard to the matter. Secondly, he sought the will of the Spirit through the Word of God. He was adamant that the spirit and the word must be combined and that if one looked to the Spirit without the word they would lay themselves open to great delusions. Thirdly, Mueller took into account providential circumstances. Lastly, he asked the Lord to reveal his will in prayer and if he had a peace after two or three petitions, he would proceed accordingly. Mueller stated at the end of his life that he had made great mistakes only when he favoured the counsel of men over the Word.

Mueller suffered from time to time from a mysterious illness in his head and it caused him to miss services, to be at times irritable and unable to pray. But it was in these times that God showed him truths about his own character.

In 1832 his wife Mary gave birth to a daughter, Lydia, then in 1834 a son, Elijah, who died that year. In 1838 she gave birth to another still born and for some time her own life hung in the balance.

In 1838 there was a financial crisis at the orphanages. It drove Mueller to prayer with greater intensity. As he meditated on Hebrews 13:8 he rested in the fact that '*Jesus in his love and power has hitherto supplied me with what I have needed for the Orphans, and in the same unchangeable love and power He will provide with what I may need for the future. A flow of joy came into my soul...About one minute later a letter was brought to me, enclosing a bill for twenty pounds*'. (14) From then on that year the money came in like Manna from heaven, by the day and the hour as they needed it. '*Often money had to be prayed in before breakfast could be eaten or the evening meal finished*'. (15) On November 10th. he wrote: '*All seemed to be dark at the beginning of this day. But the lord has enabled us to meet all financial demands. One more week has ended, and we have been able to supply the needs of ninety seven people in the Orphan houses, without going into debt*'. (16)

Mueller advocated five principles in prayer: 1. Entire dependance on the mediation of The Lord Jesus Christ as the only ground for any blessing. 2. Separation from all known sin, or the Lord would not hear us. 3. Faith in God's word. 4. Ask according to His will with right motives. 5. Waiting on God with patience.

In 1845 the houses were overcrowded and neighbours were complaining of the noise. Mueller began to pray about building a new and larger Orphanage outside the city. That year he received a gift of 1,000 pounds, the largest single donation to that time. This was followed by another donation of the same amount. Mueller purchased seven acres and would not commence the work on the buildings till all the money was in. On January 25th, 1847 being slightly short of the goal, he went to prayer. One hour later 2,000 pounds arrived. Over 11,000 pounds had flowed in, enough to start construction. The building was completed in 1849 and by 1850 housed 275 children and 33 helpers. Mueller then began to think of housing 1,000 children. He asked the Lord for 35,000 pounds before any work could commence. Funds immediately began to come in and in 1857 a second house opened. In 1862 a third house opened and the numbers of

Orphans increased to 1,500. By 1870 a fourth and fifth house brought the number of children to 2,000. There was remarkable good health amongst the orphans despite the diseases of the day.

The spiritual conversion of the orphans was a high priority. In 1860 Mueller wrote of a revival amongst the children in which 200 orphans had trusted Christ for their salvation. Many became Christian workers and pastors in later life.

In 1870 Mueller's wife died. Mueller spoke glowingly of his wife and her work with the orphans. His loneliness caused him to re-marry in 1871 to Susanna Sanger, a friend of 25 years and one who shared his vision.

Mueller then began to travel and preach all over the world. He was motivated by the worldwide need for the Gospel to be preached, the need for assurance to believers, the need for teaching of scripture, the need to promote separation from the world, and the urgency of the second coming of Christ. He did 17 missionary tours after 1875. His visit to Rome depressed him as he saw the city given over to papal idolatries.

Mueller was proficient in many languages including Latin, Greek and Hebrew. At age 87 he had preached in 42 countries to over 3 million people. By the late 1800's his distribution of Bibles and tracts had totalled over 4 million copies. 44,000 pounds was needed annually to maintain the work.

At age 93 Mueller preached his last sermon on March 6th 1898. On the next Thursday morning at 7am, after his usual cup of tea, he slipped quietly home to his Lord. There was a worldwide outpouring of grief. Unwitnessed before by Bristol, tens of thousands of people lined the streets for the funeral.

His own personal estate amounted to a mere 169 pounds. But he once said '*My aim never was, how much I could obtain, but rather how much I could give.*' (17)

The work started by Mueller survives to this day. (18)

Terry Arnold

Source: '*George Mueller - A Biography*' by John Dunn, New Creation Teaching Ministry

(1) '*Autobiography of George Mueller*', Whitaker House, 1984, P.10 (2) '*George Mueller - Man of Faith and Miracles*', Basil Miller, Bethany House, P.6 (3) '*Autobiography of George Mueller*', Whitaker House, 1984, P.10 (4) Ibid P.13 (5) '*George Mueller - Man of Faith and Miracles*', Basil Miller, Bethany House, P.17 (6) '*George Mueller of Bristol*', Dr. A.T. Pierson; Pickering & Inglis, P.45 (7) Ibid P.26 (8) Ibid P.138 (9) Ibid P.58 (10) '*George Mueller of Bristol*', Dr. A.T. Pierson; Pickering & Inglis, P.70 (11) '*Autobiography of George Mueller*', Whitaker House, 1984, P.41 (12) '*George Mueller - Man of Faith and Miracles*', Basil Miller, Bethany House, P.39 (13) Ibid P.49 (14) Ibid P.53 (15) Ibid P.56 (16) '*Autobiography of George Mueller*', Whitaker House, 1984, P.104 (17) '*George Mueller of Bristol*', Dr. A.T. Pierson; Pickering & Inglis, P.299 (18) F.F. Bruce, 1998 Internet Article