



New Creation Teaching Ministry

George Müller

A Biography

By

John Dunn

GEORGE MÜLLER

George Müller was born at Kroppenstaedt in Prussia in September 1805¹. His father was an excise collector but there is very little detail of him or of George's mother. There is certainly no evidence of any 'religious' background in his youth. What we do know is that the lad received very little personal attention from his busy father even though he was clearly the favourite among his sons. Their father was over-generous in his gifts of money to the boys, mistakenly believing it would teach them how to manage their financial affairs when they grew up. Far from doing them good (as their father hoped), it only encouraged them to spend recklessly, and then lie when called to give an account.

George became a master of deception, learning to skilfully falsify his entries in the account book which was supposed to be a record of how he spent the monetary gifts from his trusting father. On those occasions when he was found out, he learned to invent masterful ruses as explanations for the discrepancies. He figured that it was no fault to steal, but only to have his theft found out!²

George became an habitual thief and an expert cheat. "Before I was ten years old, I had repeatedly stolen government money which was entrusted to my father and forced him to make up the losses".³ This led to a trap being set for the young thief. Needless to say he was caught red-handed, but—as George recorded later—it made no difference to his conduct. "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".⁴

Incredibly, old Müller wanted George to become a clergyman and so, when he was only eleven, he was sent to a classical cathedral school at Halberstadt to be prepared for university and a life in the ministry. George's attention was hardly on his studies. "...reading novels and indulging in sinful practices were my favourite pastimes".⁵ It was while he was in one of his drunken stupors at age fourteen that his mother died. News of her passing seemed to have little affect on his indulgence and bad habits. At Easter 1820 this careless and spiritually indifferent youngster was confirmed according to the traditions of the Lutheran church of his day. Although the solemnity of the occasion left a mild impression on him in which he 'resolved to live a better life; but there was no real sense of sin or of repentance towards God'.⁶ "All soon came to nothing, and I grew still worse".⁷ His moral degeneracy continued with a constant round of broken promises to his father, of stealing, lies and alcoholism.

In 1821 his father moved to Schoenebeck and George decided to attempt a moral renovation when his father transferred him to Magdeburg cathedral school. But 'God was not at all in his thoughts'⁸ and so nothing came about by way of moral change. In an extraordinary act of misplaced trust, his father allowed George to collect—on his behalf—money owed to him by his many debtors. The temptation was too great and George resorted to fraud—spending large sums on himself whilst concealing the fact from his father. We do not know if his father even found out, but it was not long before George was arrested for another, unrelated crime. He had absconded from an expensive hotel where he had been staying without paying his bills. At sixteen he was now in jail as a thief, swindler and drunkard. Learning of his son's imprisonment, old Müller 'obtained his release by paying the inn debt and his maintenance at the jail, also furnishing enough money for the lad to return home'.⁹

¹ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p18

² *ibid.*, p18

³ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p10

⁴ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p6

⁵ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p10

⁶ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p20

⁷ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p8

⁸ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis, p21

⁹ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p9

George made a concerted effort to amend his ways and to study more diligently. But the reform was only outward and it was not long before he was forging ‘a whole chain of lies’¹ to once again deceive his father. Not surprisingly he was banned from living at home and so he announced to his father that he would pursue his studies at Halle university. In reality he headed for Nordhausen where he joined the gymnasium, living with its director.

During his two and half years at the gymnasium he worked harder than ever before, often rising at 4 am and working right through the day until 10 at night. He studied ‘the Latin classics, French history, German literature, as well as a little Hebrew, Greek and mathematics’.² However, by his own confession years later, in spite of this formal reformation ‘there lay secret sin and utter alienation from God’.³ He had no concern for God’s Word and had no hesitation in maligning or mocking His law. Although he was studying for the Christian ministry, in his three hundred reference books there was no Bible. The fact is, he was both ignorant of and indifferent to the Scriptures.

By the age of twenty, George Müller was truly a professional liar. ‘Professional’, because he spent time studying the part of an actor, precisely so that he could master the art of deception. On one occasion he played the part so well when pretending to be the victim of a violent robbery, that friends passed around the hat on his behalf to make up for his supposed losses.⁴

Having been accepted as a candidate for holy orders, George now had permission to preach in the Lutheran church. Of the twelve hundred students in the university, nine hundred, like him, were studying Divinity. But of these, it was thought, probably less than hundred ‘feared the Lord’⁵. George himself knew nothing of the God of salvation and was ignorant of the most basic elements of the Christian gospel of grace. He seldom attended a worship service and had never heard a genuine gospel sermon. He hadn’t the slightest idea what it meant to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, nor did he have any comprehension that a Christian is someone who lives by God’s help according to His word. As far as he was concerned, moral reformation was nothing more than a matter of expediency. He resolved to change his life-style for two reasons: “Unless I reformed, no parish would choose me as their pastor; and secondly, without a considerable knowledge of theology, I would never earn a good living”.⁶ The trouble was, his own attempts at such reformation made no difference in the long run. Each time he tried to change his ways, he soon found himself indulging in his old vices. “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”.⁷ As with many of his fellow Divinity students, the formal, outward profession of piety was but a cloak for ongoing immorality and infidelity.

THE TURNING POINT

George had a friend named Beta who, one Saturday night in November 1825, invited him to a Christian meeting in a believer’s house. For some strange reason he immediately felt impelled to go along. It proved to be the turning point in Müller’s life. The little group led—by a Mr Wagner—sang, prayed, read the Scriptures and listened to the reading of a printed sermon. Müller felt awkward and uncertain of himself but he never forgot Wagner’s welcoming remark to him: “Come as often as you please; house and heart are open to you”⁸. It was the first time Müller had seen people *kneeling* in prayer—the Prussian habit being to stand for public prayer. This first impression of seeing people kneel to pray stayed with him for the rest of his life. As he listened to this brother pray, Müller thought to himself: “I could not pray as well, although I have more education than this man”.⁹

¹ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis., p22

² Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p9

³ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p23

⁴ *ibid.*, p24

⁵ *ibid.*, p26

⁶ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p13

⁷ *ibid.*, p13

⁸ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p15

⁹ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p16

As he sat in the meeting, great joy and peace came over Müller, although there was no conviction of sin, no thought of guilt, no recognition of condemnation, no deep knowledge of God and no clear understanding of divine realities. Nevertheless, something happened to George Müller during the course of that simple gathering. He later wrote: “I have no doubt that on that evening, He began a work of grace in me”.¹ Before the next Saturday arrived, George had made his way several times to Wagner’s door to sit with the brethren to study the Scriptures.

Though there was no dramatic change in his life, there was, nevertheless, a new distaste for his former companions. He quit frequenting the tavern. Lying now seemed distasteful and his bad language suddenly stopped. At the time he had been working on the manuscript of a crude French novel which he was almost ready to head off to Paris to sell. In his ‘first courageous act of self-denial in surrender to the voice of the Spirit’ he burned it.²

‘Open sins now became less frequent and secret sins less ensnaring’.³ He began to regularly read the Scriptures, pray often, seek out Christian fellowship and to attend worship. Not surprisingly he was ridiculed and reproached by his former friends.

One day he discovered John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’. For the first time he glimpsed the way of salvation. For the first time he began to understand the love of God in Christ. For the first time faith—not feeling—was taking hold of him. ‘What all his father’s injunctions, chastisements, entreaties, with all the urgent dictates of his own conscience, motives of expediency, and repeated resolves of amendment, utterly failed to effect, the love of God both impelled and enabled him to do—renounce a life of sinful self-indulgence.’⁴

1826 was indeed a new year for the now born-again 21-year old. His reading of missionary journals kindled a flame in his heart and a yearning filled his heart to be a herald of the Gospel to the nations. This conviction deepened as he prayed and waited on the Lord. Slowly his knowledge of the world and its spiritual need grew and a recognition of the desperate plight of the heathen without Christ flamed his growing missionary spirit.

It was in the midst of this growing zeal and passion for mission that George fell in love with a young Christian girl in the fellowship he was attending. She swept him off his feet—so to speak—and he began to grow cold in his concern for the things of God. George had another Christian friend at that time, Hermann Ball. Although wealthy and cultured, Ball put aside promising prospects of position and prestige to move to Poland as a missionary to the Jews. “His example made a deep impression upon me. For the first time in my life, I was able to give myself up to the Lord fully and without reservation”.⁵ He began to see how far and how quickly he had drifted from the Lord during his infatuation with this young lady. His life had become joyless and prayerless. He determined to break off the relationship, renounce his love for her and retrieve the lost ground in his spiritual life. Peace and joy flooded back into his heart and he now set out with renewed zeal to be about the Lord’s business.

PASSION FOR MISSION

George was now at Halle university and sitting under the godly ministry of the famous Dr Tholuck.⁶ His influence on young Müller was significant. George’s circle of fellow believers enlarged greatly as did his missionary spirit. So convinced was he of his calling that he asked his father’s permission to join one of the German missionary institutions. His father was not only disappointed but furious with his son’s strange turn of mind. It had long been his hope that George would provide him with care in his old age as part of the lucrative ‘living’ his son would get as a German clergyman. In a fit of rage he threatened to disown George. This was deeply distressing to

¹ *ibid.*, p16

² Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis., p34

³ *ibid.*, p34

⁴ *ibid.*, p36

⁵ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p17

⁶ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p38

young Müller who then determined to take no more money from his father nor in any way to be dependent upon him in the future. He resolved from that day onwards to trust the Lord entirely for his financial needs. Shortly after, he was hired as a German tutor by the American theologian Charles Hodge¹ —the pay being far in excess of any he had ever received from his father or any other employer. “Thus did the Lord richly make up to me the little which I had relinquished for His sake”.²

But Müller was becoming impatient and wanted to get going immediately with some missionary work for the Lord. Impulsively he applied to the Berlin Missionary Society but was refused because he lacked his father’s consent.³ Other applications and offers for missionary work were met with similarly closed doors. In the months ahead he began to learn that God’s guidance would come through believing prayer in relation to a deeper understanding of His Word. Müller should have seen that any continuing roadblocks as to what he should do or where he should go were good grounds for waiting. But he was immature and lacked an understanding of many of the great fundamental truths of the Gospel. He had a lot to learn. At this stage he was so set on being a missionary in the East Indies⁴ that he was not ready to see and accept the unique life-work that God had purposed for him elsewhere.

It was at this time that Müller began to see the need to spend more time in prayer, bringing to the Lord all matters that were on his mind. From the outset God gave him ‘a very simple, childlike disposition toward Himself’.⁵ In time he was to become a supreme example to believers of what it means to be an intercessor.

HIS FIRST SERMONS

In 1826 he preached his first sermon. As a Lutheran theological student he was free to preach at any time, but had not done so because he was acutely aware of his own ignorance. On this first occasion he took someone else’s sermon, committed it to memory and reproduced it at the morning service. Unfortunately for him he was asked to preach again in the afternoon to the same congregation! Since he had no second sermon committed to memory he was forced to depend on the Lord as he attempted to expound Matthew 5. To his surprise, he was greatly assisted. “Immediately as I began to teach.... I felt the anointing of the Holy Spirit”.⁶ ‘Not only were his lips opened, but the Scriptures were opened too, his own soul expanded, and a peace and power, wholly unknown to his tame, mechanical repetitions of the morning, accompanied the simpler expositions of the afternoon, with this added advantage, that he talked on a level with the people and not over their heads, his colloquial, earnest speech riveting their attention’.⁷

Müller returned home determining: “This is the way I would always like to preach”.⁸ But would it work with educated, university trained congregations? “Because I did not yet understand the work of the Spirit, I did not realise the powerlessness of human eloquence”.⁹ Doubts put aside, he resolved to trust the Lord to give him the words to say and to always speak with simplicity directly to the hearts and minds of his congregations. One biography notes that from this point onwards Müller was ‘to rank throughout his life among the simplest and most scriptural of preachers’.¹⁰

THE HALLE ORPHANAGE

It was during his time of study at Halle university that Müller lodged for a short time at the famous orphanage houses built by A.H. Franke. This godly man had founded the work in Halle more than 100 years earlier, but it was still remembered that he had done so in entire dependence upon God.

¹ *ibid.*, p39

² Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p17

³ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p40

⁴ *ibid.*, p42

⁵ *ibid.*, p43

⁶ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p19

⁷ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p45

⁸ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p20

⁹ *ibid.*, p20

¹⁰ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p45

This principle was not lost on Müller as he looked around and saw the fruit of this man's labours. The buildings, the facilities, the orphan work—all were testimony of the fact that the Living God hears and answers prayer. In later years, Müller was to acknowledge that much of his own faith-work was indebted to the example set by Franke in the orphanages at Halle.

MOVE TO LONDON

Müller's growing passion for missionary service was heightened in 1827 when he heard that the Continental Society of Britain was looking for a minister for their work in Bucharest. With his father's consent he offered himself, but due to the war between the Turks and the Russians, the door closed firmly in his face and he never went. Instead he turned his attention to work among the Jews. His friend Hermann Ball had returned from Poland an ill man and Müller immediately thought he could take his place to continue the work there among the Jews. But that was not to be either. He then received a surprise invitation from the London Missionary Society asking him to come over and be a probationary student for six months in their mission to the Jews. He jumped at the opportunity, but was faced with a formidable obstacle. As a Prussian he was bound to serve three years in the army as soon as his university studies were complete. He could not even obtain a passport for England without this obligation having been fulfilled. His appeal for exemption was refused. Meantime he fell ill. Once recovered he presented himself for the physical examination by the army doctors. "The doctors examined me and declared that I was unfit for military service. The chief general himself signed the papers, and I got a complete dismissal for life from all military duty".¹

Released from his obligations in Prussia, he arrived in London in March 1829 and commenced his term with the LMS. He worked hard, often studying for 12 hours a day. It was during this time that—fearful of becoming dull and spiritually dead—he committed to memory much of the Hebrew Old Testament'.² Unfortunately he made little progress in his study of English—a fact which he later regretted greatly.

One day, a fellow student told Müller of an Exeter man—Mr Groves—who had resigned his well-paid job as a dentist and, with wife and family, was going to Persia as a missionary. What captured Müller's attention was the fact that Groves was heading off simply trusting the Lord for all his temporal needs. For some reason his act of entire reliance on the Lord left a deep impression on Müller. He could not dismiss it from his mind. This example proved to be another important milestone as the Lord preparing him for his own life's work.

JUSTIFICATION

In May 1829 when he was 24, Müller became ill again. "In my estimation I was beyond recovery".³ In deep anguish he thought over his short life. He was deeply troubled by his guilt before God and began to realise that he really did not know where he stood. Conviction of sin at the time of his conversion had been a shallow experience and now his guilt was coming to the surface with devastating force. For the first time he really turned to the cross. He began to see that only there could he know release from his sin and failure. He saw that it was at the cross that his sin had been atoned for. It alone was the mercy seat where God's forgiveness meets the penitent sinner. "I realised that I was washed and made completely clean in the blood of Jesus".⁴ As this light of faith dawned in a new way, he was flooded with joy and thankfulness. It was the joy of a justified sinner who has understood for the first time his 'no condemnation standing' before a just and holy God. He was so free in his spirit that, far from fearing his death-bed, he now welcomed the prospect of going to be with Christ!

Another important change took place while he was in hospital. He began to pray about every detail of his life, the doctors, the medicine, the day-to-day events that were occurring around him. He committed everything to the Lord in prayer no matter how trivial or seemingly unimportant. "Lord,

¹ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p25

² Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p54

³ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p25

⁴ *ibid.*, p25

you know that this medicine is no more than a little water. Now please, Lord, let it produce the effect which is for my good and for Your glory”.¹

Müller recuperated in Teignmouth where he began to study the Scriptures as never before. He put aside all commentaries and just read the Word of God day after day. It is hard to estimate the importance of this change in his perspective. Many new insights came to Müller during these important weeks. “God showed me that His Word alone is our standard of judgment in spiritual things. The Word can be explained only by the Holy Spirit who is the teacher of His people..... Now I learned that the Father chose us before the foundation of the world. He originated the wonderful plan of our redemption, and He also arranged the way it was to be brought about. The Son fulfilled the law and bore the punishment due to our sins, satisfying the justice of God. Finally, the Holy Spirit alone can teach us about our sinful state, show us the need of a Saviour, enable us to believe in Christ, explain the Scriptures to us, and help us preach the Word”.²

George returned to London noting that he was “much better in body, and as to my soul, the change was so great that it was like a second conversion”.³ No sooner was he back in the city than he started a prayer and Bible study with his fellow students from six until eight each morning. In addition, he often spent hours in personal prayer and praise, sometimes not going to bed until 2 am.⁴ It was then that he felt a growing reluctance to accept the strictures of the LMS in the way they called men to the mission-field. Their methods did not seem to him to be Scriptural. He saw that it was God who called Paul and Barnabas by giving them a passion for the work and a clear leading as to His purposes for them. The church at Antioch did not originate their call but only confirmed it. Accordingly, Müller decided to begin immediately the pursuit of his own sense of obligation to the Jews. He started work among them right on his doorstep in London, distributing tracts to any who would take them. He read and taught the Scriptures to some fifty Jewish lads who came week by week to the small classes which he initiated. As for the LMS, he put it to them that he would work for them only if they agreed to allow him to serve without a salary, and to go only when and where he believed the Lord might direct. His terms were unacceptable and so “in complete kindness and love”⁵ his ties with the Society were terminated.

PASTORATE

In 1830 Müller was invited to take the place of a minister at Ebenezer Chapel in Teignmouth. He reluctantly did so and began his pastoral work there in the small congregation of about eighteen. His greatest embarrassment was his poor command of English, and no doubt there were some who resented his appointment on that score alone. There were others who just didn’t like his blunt, down-to-earth sermons! “I decided to stay until I was formally rejected..... Some people left and never returned. Others came to the chapel who had not been in the habit of attending before I came..... Most importantly, God set His seal of approval on the work by converting sinners”.⁶ It was during this period that he met the Scottish Hebraist Henry Craik, a man with whom he was to develop a deep friendship and with whom his life’s work would be shared.

It is instructive to hear what Müller wrote at the time about his approach to preaching in Teignmouth. “Rather than presuming to know what is best for the hearers, I ask the Lord to graciously teach me the subject I should speak about, or the portion of His Word I should explain..... Frequently, however, I have no subject in my mind before I pray. In this case, I wait on my knees for an answer, trying to listen for the voice of the Spirit to direct me.....The Lord always helps me when I preach, provided I have earnestly sought Him in private. A preacher cannot know the hearts of the individuals in the congregation or what they need to hear. But the Lord knows; and if the preacher renounces his own wisdom, he will be assisted by the Lord. But if he is determined to choose a subject in his own wisdom, he should not be surprised when he sees little fruit resulting from his labours....My chief help is prayer.....no one should expect to see much good resulting from his labours if he does not spend time in prayer and meditation..... I then leave myself entirely

¹ *ibid.*, p26

² *ibid.*, p26

³ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p23

⁴ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p58

⁵ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p28

⁶ *ibid.*, p30

in the hands of the Lord, asking Him to bring to mind what I have learned in the prayer closet. He faithfully does this and often teaches me more while I am preaching....The *preparation* for the public ministry of the Word is even more excellent than preaching in church. To live in constant communion with the Lord, and to be habitually and frequently in meditation over the truth is its own reward”.¹

MARRIAGE

In October 1830 Müller married Mary Groves the sister of the dentist who had given up his job to go to Persia the year before. Mary was a godly young woman who had no hesitation in accepting George’s principles of living, knowing full well that this would most likely mean a life of hardship and difficulty. But she also relished the step of faith that her union with George would entail. From the outset their life together was one of common self-denial but there is no hint of their decision to live in voluntary poverty ever being regretted.

A year later, Mary gave birth to a still-born child. She too almost died. The experience left a deep impression on George. Not because of her near death, but because he realised that he had not rejoiced at the prospect of being a parent, but had rather, secretly resented the fact that he would have another mouth to feed and funds would have to be diverted from the Lord’s work! He castigated himself for such selfishness and for having such a low view of the sacredness of marriage and the God-given responsibilities of parenthood.² He never made that mistake again.

MONEY PRINCIPLES

1830 was also an important year for Müller in that he defined in his heart many principles of living which came to be foundational for the remainder of his days. He decided never to receive a salary as a minister of God but to trust the Lord implicitly for all his financial needs. He believed that being on a salary placed a wrong burden on others and led some—especially the poor—into a bondage in their obligation to support him. “A brother may gladly give something towards my support if the choice is up to him. But when he has other expenses, I do not know whether he pays his money grudgingly or cheerfully, and God loves a cheerful giver.... Fear of offending those who pay his salary has kept many ministers from preaching the uncompromising Word of God”.³ Müller therefore determined that any monies provided for him should be entirely voluntary. Moreover, since he did not want people to be handing him money publicly he instituted a gift box at the rear of the church. Giving would thus be in the sight of God alone. There would be no risk of ‘sinful pride or false humility’.⁴

Further, Müller determined not to *ask* anyone for money. In no way would he even hint at his needs to others. His requests for financial and material needs would be directed to the Lord alone. He noted in his journal that “to come to this conclusion before God required more grace than to give up my salary”.⁵

An example will illustrate Müller’s principle of not asking anyone for money. He records an occasion when he and his wife had only a few shillings in hand. “I had asked the brethren to please let me have the money in the [gift] box every week. But either they forgot to take it out weekly or were ashamed to bring such small sums. It was generally taken out every three to five weeks. I explained that I desired to look neither to man nor the box but to God. Therefore, I decided not to remind them of my request to have the money weekly, lest it hinder the testimony I wished to give of trusting in God alone. On January 28, we had little money again although I had seen a brother open the box and take out the money four days earlier. But I would not ask him to let me have it. When the coals for our fire were almost gone, I asked the Lord to incline the brother’s heart to bring the money to us. Shortly afterwards, it was given to us, and our temporal needs were supplied”.⁶

¹ *ibid.*, p31-33

² Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p75

³ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p36

⁴ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p70

⁵ *ibid.*, p71

⁶ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p40

Müller's journal records numerous occasions during which his faith was stretched to the limit. There were times when the Müllers had nothing—not one penny to their name—and yet never a day closed with them in want. He recorded story after story of money arriving just as they needed it, and in just the right amount. Driven more and more to prayer, the Müllers were discovering the great blessing of trusting the Lord alone for all their temporal needs.

Of course many criticised Müller for living in this way, saying that such an emphasis on asking the Lord daily for money must, of necessity, take his thoughts away from the important *spiritual* issues of life. He replied to his critics: “Trusting the Lord for the supply of my temporal needs keeps me from anxious thoughts like: ‘Will my salary last and will I have enough for the next month?’ In this freedom I am able to say: ‘My Lord is not limited. He knows my present situation, and He can supply all I need’. Rather than causing anxiety, living by faith in God alone keeps my heart in perfect peace”.¹

At the end of the first year of his ‘experiment of faith’ he testified that the Lord had “richly supplied all our temporal wants, though at the commencement we had no certain human prospect of a single shilling, so that.....we have not been in the smallest degree a loser in acting according to the dictates of conscience. The Lord dealt bountifully with me, and condescended to use me as an instrument in doing His work”.²

Another principle of life which formed in his mind was that he would never go into debt. He always paid in cash and if he could not afford something then he would go without. He would never borrow, and he would therefore owe no man anything.

He also came to regard money in hand as being for a designated purpose. It was not to be diverted to other so-called ‘emergencies’. He would not therefore save up money for a ‘rainy day’. He would not hoard funds for any unforeseen contingency. He reasoned that ‘with God no emergency is unforeseen and no want unprovided for’.³

These principles, intelligently and prudently adopted, became the trademark of Müller's life work from that point onwards. He put great emphasis on the matter of conscience, determining to keep *his* clear before God and man in everything regarding money and material wealth. In this regard, his life of faith was no less a life of conscience. He exercised faith and trust in God, but at the same time he exercised truth and faithfulness towards his fellow man.

MOVE TO BRISTOL

In 1832 Müller received a letter from his friend Henry Craik who had recently moved to Bristol to start a new Gospel work in that city.⁴ He invited Müller to join him. “Wrote to Brother Craik, in which I said I should come, if I clearly saw it to be the Lord's will”.⁵ After much prayer and consideration he accepted this as the Lord's leading. He and Craik together formed a pastoral team in two chapels in Bristol, heading up the work there of what was—in those days—the infant Brethren denomination.⁶ The same principles relating to money which he had adopted during his two and half years at Teignmouth were enshrined in this new work. From the outset, the Lord blessed the work. Crowds overflowed the churches and new converts flocked into the Kingdom. Müller wrote at the time: “The meetings for enquirers were so largely attended that, though they sometimes lasted for more than four hours, it was frequently the case that many..... had to be sent away for lack of time and strength on the part of the two workers”—he and Craik.⁷ For some eight years both these chapels in Bristol—Gideon and Bethesda—continued as the scene of spiritual revival and renewal under the powerful preaching of Müller and Craik.

¹ *ibid.*, p41

² Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p29

³ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p76

⁴ *ibid.*, p93

⁵ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p33

⁶ F. F. Bruce. Internet article on Muller

⁷ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p36

FEEDING THE ORPHANS

Within a year of being in Bristol, Müller had become concerned about the number of poor children wandering the city streets. He began gathering them together at eight in the mornings and giving them a piece of bread for breakfast. He would then spend an hour and a half teaching them to read and reading to them from the Scriptures.¹ ‘He found himself feeding thirty or forty such persons, and as the number increased the Lord’s provisions also increased. One kept pace with the other’.² However, the local residents so objected to the inconvenience caused by all these beggars hanging around their homes that the work had to be abandoned—temporarily!

THE SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTION

On February 21st 1834 Müller wrote: “I was led this morning to form a plan for the establishing, upon Scriptural principles, of an institution for the spread of the Gospel at home and abroad. I trust this matter is of God”.³ Thus, in March, he and Craik founded *The Scriptural Knowledge Institution For Home and Abroad*.

The purposes and principles were carefully set out:⁴

- (i) We consider every believer bound..... to help the cause of Christ.
- (ii) We never intended to ask unconverted persons of rank or wealth to countenance this Institution.... In the name of God we set up our banners.
- (iii) We do not mean to ask unbelievers for money.
- (iv) We reject altogether the help of unbelievers in managing..... the affairs of the Institution.
- (v) We intend never to enlarge the field of labour by contracting debts.....but in secret prayer.....we shall carry the wants of the Institution to the Lord, and act according to the means that God shall give us.
- (vi) We do not reckon the success of the Institution by the amount of money given..... but by the Lord’s blessing upon the work.
- (vii) We desire to go simply according to the Scriptures, without compromising the truth.

The three-fold purpose of the Institution was stated in these simple terms:

- (i) The establishment of day-schools, Sunday schools and adult schools.
- (ii) To circulate the Scriptures
- (iii) To aid missionary efforts world-wide.

Two days after founding the Institution Müller 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’.⁵

In connection with the stated aims of the Institution Müller would often visit Bristol folk, going from door to door. “I visited from house to house the people living on Orange Street, to find out whether any individuals wanted Bibles, whether they could read, and whether they wanted their children placed in our day schools or Sunday school. This gave me many opportunities to converse with them about their souls....I greatly delight in such work”.⁶

During the first seven months of the Institution, some 482 Bibles and 520 New Testaments were circulated while around £57⁷ was given to missionary work abroad. In fact Müller’s heart was never far from missionary concerns. In January 1835 he noted in his journal: “I have.... prayed very much to ascertain whether the Lord will have me to go as a missionary to the East Indies, and I

¹ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p104

² Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p37

³ *ibid.*, p37

⁴ *ibid.*, p38

⁵ *ibid.*, p39

⁶ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p64

⁷ It is difficult to estimate how much an English pound in the mid 1800s would be worth today, but for the purpose of this paper, a conservative estimate suggests one pound then to be about \$200-250 (Australian) today. £57 would therefore be around \$A13,000 in today’s money.

am most willing to go..... I have been greatly stirred up to pray about going to Calcutta as a missionary. May the Lord guide me in this matter”.¹

Meantime Müller’s concern for the orphans of Bristol had not been forgotten. On November 20th 1835 he wrote: “Today I have had it very much impressed on my heart no longer to merely *think* about the establishment of an orphan house, but actually to set about it. I have been very much in prayer regarding it.... to ascertain the Lord’s mind”.² His conviction grew that he should do something about their needs by finding a way of permanently housing them as well as caring for the material and spiritual necessities of these young waifs. He laid his concerns before the Lord seeking to discern if this was indeed God’s leading or just his own well-intentioned but misguided idea.³

THE ORPHAN HOUSE

Once convinced it was the Lord’s will he formally announced (in December 1835) his proposal to open an orphan house in Bristol. He had been reading Psalm 81:10 “Open your mouth wide, And I will fill it”⁴ and was immediately sure of the provision of his God to meet all the needs associated with such a venture of faith. “I was led to apply it [the text] to the orphan house, and asked the Lord for a building, one thousand pounds⁵, and suitable individuals to take care of the children”.⁶ This text became a key motto of the work for the remainder of Müller’s life as he trusted in the promise for continuing Divine aid.

Müller made no secret of the fact that his *primary* reason for wanting to start the orphan house was to demonstrate the faithfulness of God. “The primary object of the work is that God would be magnified because the orphans under my care will be provided with all they need through prayer and faith. Everyone will see that God is faithful and hears prayer”.⁷

Although Müller had made no pleas for help, the first gifts of money and furniture arrived within the week. The orphan house was to be a part of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution, but only those funds expressly earmarked for the work would be used for that purpose. The plan was to take in only those children between the ages of seven and twelve who had no parents and no means of support. It was not long before the first offers came from those who wanted to give their services to the work. A couple wrote to Müller: “We offer ourselves for the service of the intended orphan house, if you think we are qualified for it. Also we will give up all the furniture and household items which the Lord has given us, for its use. We do this without expecting any salary, believing that, if it is the will of the Lord to employ us, He will supply all our needs”.⁸ Here were two people after Müller’s own heart!

Every detail of the orphan work was meticulously brought before the Lord in prayer: the supply of buildings, the furnishings, the helpers, the provision of food and money and so on. But just as the work was ready to be launched, Müller suddenly realised they didn’t have a single applicant! They had everything but the orphans! At no stage had it occurred to anyone on the team to ask the Lord to provide the children; it had just been taken for granted that they would be there. “I have prayed about everything connected with the work—for money, for a house, for helpers, about the various articles of furniture etc, but I have never asked the Lord to send me orphans.”⁹ In deep humiliation they sought the Lord’s face and asked Him to send along those whom He wanted them to help.

The very next day the first application was made, and by April 1836 the first house was opened for the most destitute of the young girls in that city. Within a month there were twenty six children under their care with more wanting to apply. By November the second house was opened. At the

¹ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p41

² *ibid.*, p43

³ In the early 1800s there were less than 4000 children provided for in orphanages in all England. On the other hand the prisons contained more than twice that number of children under the age of eight.

⁴ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p74

⁵ About \$A230,000 in today's money.

⁶ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p74

⁷ *ibid.*, p73

⁸ *ibid.*, p75

⁹ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p47

end of that first year Müller recorded: “On December 31, we had this evening a prayer meeting to praise the Lord for His goodness during the past year, and to ask Him for a continuance of His favours”.¹ By April the following year there were sixty youngsters in the two houses. By the next October a third house was opened, this one for orphan boys.

Meantime, the work of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution prospered. There were four day schools with over one thousand students attending and more than four thousand copies of the Scriptures had been distributed.²

The demands of the work at the Institution, the orphan houses and the pastorate, drove Müller to prayer more than ever. He saw anew how indispensable it was for him to withdraw for private communion with the Lord. He determined never to allow himself to become too busy with the work to pray. He became equally convinced that he who does not first hide himself in the secret place to be alone with God is unfit to show himself in the public place to move among men.³ He used to say to those who had ‘too much to do’ that they should spend proper time with God. In his mind, ‘four hours of work after an hour of prayer would accomplish more than five hours without prayer’.⁴ Service to our Master—Müller reasoned—is more acceptable and our mission to man more profitable, when it is saturated with the moisture of God’s blessing—the dew of the Spirit’.⁵

KNOWING GOD’S WILL

Many used to ask Müller how he could know God’s will in any given situation. His reply is instructive:

- (i) I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord’s will, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what His will is.
- (ii) Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impressions. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions.
- (iii) I seek the will of the Spirit of God through or in connection with the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also.
- (iv) Next, I take into account providential circumstances. These plainly indicate God’s will in connection with His Word and Spirit.
- (v) I ask God in prayer to reveal His will to me aright.
- (vi) Thus through prayer to God, the study of the Word and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly. In trivial matters and in transactions involving most important issues, I have found this method always effective.⁶

At the close of his life Müller testified that in so far as he “sincerely and patiently sought to know the will of God by the teaching of the Holy Ghost through the instrumentality of the Word of God, but I have been always directed aright. But if honesty of heart and uprightness before God were lacking, or if I did not patiently wait upon God for instructions, or if I preferred the counsel of my fellow men to the declarations of the Word of the living God, I made great mistakes”.⁷

¹ *ibid.*, p48

² Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p128

³ *ibid.*, p130

⁴ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p49

⁵ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis., p130

⁶ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p50

⁷ *ibid.*, p50

THREE BOOKS

There were three books which deeply influenced the life of Müller at this stage when he was in his late twenties. The first was the testimony of A.H. Franke, the founder of the Halle orphanages. His account of the work in Germany greatly encouraged Müller to take bolder steps of faith and to launch into the work in Bristol with greater courage and enthusiasm. It was from Franke that he was encouraged all the more to trust the Lord solely for the finances needed for the work.

The second book was the biography of John Newton. Müller was very moved by Newton's account of his life in which the grace and mercy of God to such a wretched slave-trader was so clearly demonstrated. It led Müller to give similar testimony to the sovereign love of God in his own life. He commenced writing his own 'Narrative' in which he recorded the events that had led to his conversion and the subsequent leading of God for the work in Bristol. There is no doubt that Müller's decision to publish this account of God's dealings in his life has been a great blessing to thousands of readers over the past 150 years. Müller himself records the fact that there were conversions resulting from people reading his Narrative.

The third book was the journal of George Whitefield. This especially fired Müller's heart. He was moved by Whitefield's unusual prayerfulness as also his habit of reading the Scriptures on his knees. It led Müller to far greater earnestness in his preaching while at the same time drove him to an ever deeper prayer life. He now commenced the same habit as Whitefield's: that of reading the word of God on his knees. "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".¹

ILL HEALTH

From time to time Müller suffered from a 'weakness in his head'—as it was described in those days. This debilitating affliction (whatever it was) often laid him low. He was often absent from ministry at the chapels on Sundays and this fact alone grieved him deeply. "My affliction causes me to be very irritable" he wrote early in 1838.² He found it hard to concentrate, and sometimes even prayer was almost impossible.

But it was also at these times of physical trial that the Lord showed him new truths and new sights of His own character and purposes. On one such occasion, when he was laid aside for rest in Plymouth, he thought about the need to give the Lord the very best hours of his day. As a student in Halle he had once been in the habit of getting up at 4 am, but in recent years, this routine had been moderated so that he rarely rose before 6 am or more often, at 7. He now determined, ill health or not, to allow himself no more than seven hours sleep a night. Not only did this change provide him with prolonged hours alone with the Lord, but he also found himself not physically worse off but better! He experienced renewed life and spiritual vitality as a result. He wrote: "I want to encourage all believers to get into the habit of rising early to meet with God....If we sleep more than is necessary for the refreshment of the body, it is wasting the time the Lord has entrusted to us to be used for His glory, for our own benefit, and for the benefit of the saints and unbelievers around us".³

NEW TRIALS

In 1832 Müller's wife had given birth to a daughter, Lydia. Then in 1834 a son arrived, whom they named Elijah. Within the year he suddenly became very ill and died four days later. In 1838 Mary gave birth to another still-born babe, and for more than two weeks her own life hung in the balance.

But by 1838 a crisis over money for the orphanages had also come to a head. Funds were alarmingly low. More children were applying for acceptance and the way ahead seemed impossible. It drove Müller to fervent prayer. He was tempted to find a way out of the difficulty rather than wait on the Lord for deliverance. But he saw that to trust in expedients of his own would not only hinder

¹ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p138

² *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p90

³ *ibid.*, p117-118

the work, but also undermine their experience and growth in faith. He determined therefore to ‘rest solely on the promise of a faithful God’.¹

As he was meditating on Hebrews 13:8, ‘Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day and for ever’, suddenly, the present need of the Orphan Houses was brought to his mind: “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 pounds²“.³

On September 5th, 1838 he recorded: “Our hour of trial continues. The Lord mercifully has given enough to supply our daily necessities. But he gives *by the day* now, and almost *by the hour*, as we need it. Nothing came in yesterday. I sought the Lord again and again, both yesterday and today, and it seems that He is saying, ‘My hour is not yet come’“.⁴

The trial continued. Every day they met for prayer. Every day they sought the Lord to honour His promise not to forsake the fatherless, but to provide for their needs. Every day they saw a tiny trickle of money, just enough to get them through the next 24 hours. Although Müller was often forced to admit that their funds were exhausted, that situation never carried over into the following day. By nightfall there was always just enough money sufficient for the next morning. Hence, on September 17th, Müller wrote: “It is now more trying to our faith each day, but I am sure God will send help, if we wait. Several people gave us a few shillings which enabled us to pay the current expenses and to purchase provisions so that nothing in any way has been lacking”.⁵

November 10th: “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”.⁶

One biographer notes that during these early years Müller ‘literally fed the orphans out of God’s hand. The supply was almost like that of the manna in that it was to be gathered each day afresh. There was scarcely anything left over from one day to another. Often money had to be prayed in before breakfast could be eaten or the evening meal finished’.⁷

SHARING THE LOAD

Up until autumn 1838 only three or four had known of the financial needs of the ministry. But Müller came to see that the workers in the orphanages ought to be told and thus drawn into the circle of prayer. ‘Those who shared in the toils should also share in the prayers, and therefore in the knowledge of the needs which prayer was to supply. Else how could they fully be partakers of the faith, the work, and the reward?’⁸

By broadening the number of shoulders able to bear the burden, Müller’s decision brought great blessing into the work. The helpers in the orphanages now knew of the true situation and so were more careful in their work, more prayerful in their concern, and more diligent in their own lives. Müller held nothing back from them and so a considerable number of praying believers were added to the band of intercessors that ‘gave God no rest day or night’.⁹ Many of the helpers began giving as never before. ‘It was in thus giving that all these helpers found also new power, assurance and

¹ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p148

² About \$A4,600 in today's money.

³ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p53

⁴ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p94

⁵ *ibid.*, p100

⁶ *ibid.*, p104

⁷ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p56

⁸ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p154

⁹ *ibid.*, p155

blessing in praying; for, as one of them said, he felt that it would scarcely be “upright to pray, except he were to give what he had”¹.

In all this, nothing was ever revealed to outsiders. Neither the general public nor even any of the children ever knew of the day-to-day situation in regard to the financial state of the Institution or the Orphanages. Müller and his team were determined to prove the faithfulness of their God. Having said that, Müller did make public, at regular intervals, an account of God’s faithfulness in maintaining the work over the preceding months. But these contained no appeals for funds and no hints that might induce pity or sympathy. Müller hoped the reports would encourage readers to embark upon a new level of trust in the Living God in their own lives. Many an outsider assumed there must have been a band of very wealthy supporters who contributed generously and regularly to the work. That was never the case.

Müller received a letter from a German believer during this 1838 period of acute financial distress in the work. The letter acknowledged that Müller never solicited money, but asked that he tell the writer if they needed money right then, and if so, how much. Müller replied: “While I thank you for your love, and while I agree with you that there is a difference between *asking for money* and *answering when asked*, nevertheless, I do not feel at liberty to speak about the state of our funds. The primary object of this ministry is to lead those who are weak in faith to see that there is *reality* in dealing with God *alone*”² No sooner had the letter been dispatched than Müller was on his knees. “Lord, you know that, for Your sake, I did not tell this brother about our need. Now, Lord, show afresh that there is reality in speaking to You only about our need. Speak to this brother, so that he may help us”³ Within days, a hundred pounds⁴ arrived from the German brother, just when the work didn’t have one penny in hand!

In July 1845 Müller gave this testimony: “Though for about seven years, our funds have been so exhausted that it has been comparatively a rare case that there have been means in hand to meet the necessities of the orphans for three days together, yet I have been only once tried in spirit, that was on September 18, 1838, when for the first time the Lord seemed not to regard our prayer. But when He did send help at that time, and I saw that it was only for the trial of our faith, and not because He had forsaken the work, that we were brought so low, my soul was so strengthened and encouraged that I have not only not been allowed to distrust the Lord since that time, but I have not even been cast down when in the deepest poverty”⁵.

There were many in his day (and since) who have questioned Müller’s approach in funding the orphanages. What if the day came when no money turned up? What if there was actually an occasion when no food was available for the many hungry mouths? For Müller, failure on God’s part was inconceivable.⁶ But he recognised only too keenly the responsibility that lay on each one involved in the work. Clearly the supplicants must come to God in the right spirit and with the right attitude of heart. He therefore advocated five basic principles for prevailing prayer.⁷

- (i) Entire dependence upon the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only ground for any claim for blessing.
- (ii) Separation from all known sin. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us, for it would be sanctioning sin.
- (iii) Faith in God’s word of promise as confirmed by His oath. Not to believe Him is to make Him both a liar and a perjurer.

¹ *ibid.*, p158

² *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p122

³ *ibid.*, p123

⁴ About \$A23,000 in today’s money.

⁵ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis., p167

⁶ *ibid.*, p169

⁷ *ibid.*, p170

- (iv) Asking according to His will. Our motives must be godly: we must not seek any gift from God to consume it on our own lusts.
- (v) Importunity in supplication. There must be waiting on God and waiting for God, just as the husbandman has long patience to wait for the harvest.

Müller's principles confirmed that the teacher must also be a learner. Only he who continues to learn is competent to continue to teach. New lessons, daily mastered, keep our testimony fresh and vibrant. Instead of us always being engaged in review, our teaching and testimony will be daily drawn from a new and fresh experience of the truth of God's grace.

BURDENS OF MINISTRY

Thus far, George Müller and Henry Craik had shared the entire load of ministry at the two chapels in Bristol. This, together with their responsibilities at the Scriptural Knowledge Institution and the Orphanages was a huge task. Each year the numbers being converted grew and the congregations were flourishing. But Müller and Craik were both feeling the strain. In 1837 Müller wrote concerning one particular need that was on his heart: "Arrangements should be made so that I may be able to visit the brethren more because an unvisited church will sooner or later become an unhealthy church.....I have for a long time been too busy.....Brother Craik and I have realised the importance of more pastoral visiting".¹

He went on to list specific obstacles to their pastoral visiting aims:

- (i) Four hundred people to be pastored by just two men.
- (ii) More than 50 more being added to the church each year
- (iii) The considerable distance some lived from the church.
- (iv) The division of labour between two churches—doubling the work
- (v) Extensive daily correspondence taking up so much time
- (vi) Both pastors were often too exhausted to be visiting.
- (vii) Most of their time was taken up with the Orphan houses, schools etc.

Added to these was the fact that many Christians passing through Bristol expected to lodge with either Müller or Craik. It was not unusual for George and his wife to have several extra mouths to feed, and he felt the importance of giving these visitors something of his time and attention.

He began to pray that the Lord would send them more men who had a pastor's heart and pastoral gifts. In addition it was decided that, not only should the two churches be combined into one, but some of the week-night meetings be abolished. These measures would significantly reduce the work-load and free both men for the more pressing tasks of pastoral care.

A FOURTH ORPHAN HOUSE

In 1843 Müller had been thinking that a fourth orphan house ought to be secured. "I therefore gave myself to prayer. I prayed day after day, without saying anything to any human being. I prayed two and twenty days without mentioning it to my dear wife".² Müller wanted to be absolutely sure that this was from above, and not just his own ambition or self-will. There were unexpected obstacles, but far from being discouraged, he prayed: "Lord, if *You* have no need for another Orphan House, *I* have none".³ In fact, Müller apparently had a secret satisfaction when there were difficulties in the way of achieving this or that goal. "When sight ceases, it is time for faith to work. The greater the difficulties, the easier it is for faith. As long as human possibilities for success remain, faith does not accomplish things as easily as when all natural prospects fail".⁴

Müller had learned well the great principle that he could gauge the measure of his surrender to the will of God by the measure of any impatience he might feel when there were obstacles in the way! Whatever seemed to oppose his plans would either disturb and annoy him, or else he would quietly

¹ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p86

² Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p61

³ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p168

⁴ *ibid.*, p187

leave all such hindrances to the Lord to deal with as He pleased. Müller was fast learning to trust the Lord implicitly, and not to rely on his own wisdom or plans, no matter how reasonable or necessary they appeared to be. In this instance, the fourth orphan house was duly obtained and the work expanded.

THE NEW ORPHANAGE

In 1845 it became necessary to review the entire work in Bristol. The orphan houses were becoming over-crowded and local residents complained about the noise and the inconvenience of having so many children in their immediate neighbourhood. The buildings lacked adequate facilities and the grounds were now too small. These factors led Müller to consider *building* completely new orphanages outside the city. So far, the orphan houses in Bristol had been rented and the idea of owning their own facilities raised entirely new tensions. Müller would not budge from his fundamental principle of trusting the Lord implicitly for every penny. He would not canvas for money nor even hint at the scale of their financial needs for such an undertaking. He was convinced that the Lord could provide large sums of money as easily as small amounts. He would pray and wait.

“I began to see that the Lord would lead me to build, and that His intentions were not only to benefit the orphans..... but also the bearing of further testimony that He could and would supply large sums..... and that He would enlarge the work, so that if I once did build a house, it might be large enough to accommodate three hundred orphans”.¹

Over the months Müller became so sure that the proposal was God’s will that he began to think of the buildings as if they had already been constructed! In late 1845 he received a gift of £1000² for the new project—the largest single gift yet given for the work. Just three days later a London architect offered his services free of charge to design, draw the plans and manage the construction of the new buildings.

ASHLEY DOWNS

Müller wanted land that was not too far from the centre of Bristol but far enough out in the ‘country’ to give an entirely new environment for the orphans. However, the priority now was to seek the Lord to provide the funds for the purchase of a suitable property as well as the construction of the new facilities. As the team prayed, so the money began to arrive. Another £1000, £50, three and sixpence, a further £1000.

Müller was drawn to a property for sale at Ashley Downs. All efforts to contact the owner failed at first. Undaunted, Müller persisted in prayer firmly convinced that the Lord would open the door if this was the right course. When the land-owner was finally located he confided to Müller that he knew of his plan to use his land for a new orphanage and had had a disturbed night thinking about what he should charge for it. Müller reported: “He decided that if I wanted to buy it, he would let me have it for one hundred and twenty pounds per acre, instead of two hundred pounds³—the price which he had previously asked. How good the Lord is! The agreement was made this morning, and I purchased a field of nearly seven acres”.⁴

Müller resolved that no work on the buildings should begin until the full sum of money was in hand. He also believed that there ought to be at least ten other men—‘full of the Holy Ghost’—to be on a board of trustees to have oversight of the new property.

As they prayed, gifts large and small continued to flow in. On January 25th 1847 Müller recorded that he thought the time was near to start work. But more money was needed. “About an hour after I had prayed, the sum of two thousand pounds⁵ was given to me for the building fund. I cannot describe the joy I had in God when I received this donation. I have waited four hundred and forty-

¹ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p65

² About \$A230,000 in today's money.

³ About \$A30,00 and \$A46,000 respectively in today's money.

⁴ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p181

⁵ About \$A460,000 in today's money.

seven days upon God for the amount we needed”.¹ In July 1847 over £11,000² had come in and there was now enough to begin construction.³

The building was finally completed, and in June 1849—twenty years after the work began—the orphans were transferred from the rented premises in Bristol to the spacious new house on Ashley Downs. By May 1850 there were two hundred and seventy five children and thirty three helpers resident at *The New Orphan House*—as it was now called.

By 1850 the Scriptural Knowledge Institution had dispersed over £50,000 to various needs around the world, and its own operating costs were in excess of £6000⁴ per year. It was a vast, time-consuming ministry about which Müller wrote at the time: “My labour is abundant”.⁵

MÜLLER’S ENLARGED VISION

Meantime, Müller was thinking of ways to house a total of 1000 children. He began praying to discern if this desire was of God or just a fanciful dream. “Am I going beyond the measure of my faith in thinking about enlarging the work? Is this a delusion of Satan, an attempt to cast me down from my place of usefulness by making me go beyond my capabilities? Is it a snare to puff me up in pride by attempting to build a larger Orphan House?”⁶

The more he sought the mind of the Lord, the more he became convinced that an enlargement of the work was appropriate. He set the goal of asking the Lord for £35,000⁷ before any work would commence⁸. Funds soon began coming in almost daily for the expansion of the current work. However, as before, no start was to be made until the construction could be carried on without any risk of debt. In November 1857 the second house was opened to cater for 400 extra children. Elated, Müller wrote: “How precious this [day] was to me after praying every day for seven years”.⁹ As with the first house, the Lord provided not only the funds, but also the helpers.

In 1862 a third house opened its doors. Müller wrote at the time: “It was in November 1850 that my mind became exercised about enlarging the orphan work from 300 to 1000 orphans, and subsequently to 1150.... From November 1850 to this day, March 12, 1862, not one single day had been allowed to pass without this contemplated enlargement being brought before God in prayer, and generally more than once a day. Observe then..... how long it may be before a full answer to our prayers, even to thousands and tens of thousands of prayers, is granted..... I did without the least doubt and wavering look for more than eleven years for the full answer”.¹⁰

But the expansion did not stop there. Müller felt constrained to step out in faith to ask the Lord for the provision of yet more buildings to house the growing numbers of orphans needing accommodation. Thus in 1868 a fourth house was opened, followed in 1870 by a fifth.

The vast sums of money required for these huge undertakings as well as for the ongoing work of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution came entirely through prevailing prayer. Clearly Müller was a remarkable man of vision and faith. He and his band of helpers met for prayer daily, but more and more they were pressed to meet even more frequently. They were now to be found together before the Father’s throne at least three times a day.

Müller’s vision had been for an orphanage ultimately catering for 1000 youngsters, but in the 25 years since the ministry began at Ashley Downs the Lord provided enough money and workers for

¹ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p185

² About \$A2.5 million in today's money

³ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p68

⁴ About \$A11.5 million and \$A1.4 million respectively in today's money.

⁵ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p70

⁶ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p203

⁷ About \$A8 million in today's money.

⁸ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p71

⁹ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p227

¹⁰ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p75

the facilities to accommodate over 2000 children. Every penny had come through Müller praying and asking the Lord to provide. As one biographer has noted: “No man so poor as Mr Müller, if at the same time *sane*, would ever have *thought* of such a gigantic scheme, much less have undertaken to work it out, if his faith and hope were not fixed on God”.¹

GOD’S CONTINUING GRACE

The orphanages were never without difficulties of one sort or another. Children were often brought in who were sick or suffering from chronic ill-health. Some were so unruly that they had to be expelled. Müller took the view that the orphanage was neither a reformatory nor a hospital. However, generally there was remarkable good health among the children in spite of diseases such as consumption, cholera, scarlet fever, whooping cough, typhus and smallpox ravaging the towns and cities of England during various periods in the mid 1800s. Prayer was Müller’s one resort to preserving the orphans from these serious epidemics.

There were troubles with the heating boilers; drains sometimes became obstructed requiring urgent attention. During the great summer drought of 1864 all fifteen of their large cisterns were empty. Their nine deep wells were almost dry. Two thousand gallons of water were required daily and urgent prayer was made to the Lord for relief. In answer, a nearby farmer offered the water from one of his larger wells.

Violent winds struck the Bristol region in 1865. The orphanage suffered a damaged roof and broken windows. Since workmen could not be found to carry out immediate repairs, prayer went up for the Lord to withhold any rain. Remarkably the repairs were completed by the time the downpours began some days later.

EVANGELISM AMONG THE ORPHANS

Although Müller placed great emphasis on the housing of the orphans with a view to their physical well-being, he nevertheless had a heart-ache for their souls. Only Christians were permitted to work among the children, and the prime concern was for the salvation of their young charges. Prayer for the conversion of the boys and girls ranked high in the daily requests that ascended to the Lord of Hosts. Müller records in early 1860, “A great work of the Spirit of God began in January and February among the six-to-nine year old girls. It extended to the older girls and then to the boys. Within ten days nearly 200 of the orphans found peace through faith in our Lord Jesus”.² In one house alone, 350 children were led to faith in Christ. Over the years, thousands found the Lord in the orphanages at Bristol and Ashley Downs and in later years many became Christian workers, missionaries and pastors.

MARY’S DEATH AND MÜLLER’S REMARRIAGE

Mary—Müller’s wife—never enjoyed robust health. Though she tirelessly supported her husband and the work of the orphanages, her energies were beginning to wane and by 1859 she was suffering from debilitating rheumatism. Over the next year her health deteriorated rapidly and eventually she died peacefully one evening in February 1870. Müller wrote: “On October 7, 1830 (therefore 39 years and four months since) the Lord gave me my most valuable, lovely and holy wife. Her value to me and the blessing God made her to be to me is beyond description. This blessing was continued to me till this day, when, in the afternoon, about four o’clock, the Lord took her to himself”.³ The funeral was attended by more than a thousand mourners, and in his eulogy Müller said: “Every day I see more and more how great is her loss to the orphans. Yet, without an effort, my inmost soul habitually joys in the joy of the loved and departed one..... God alone has done it; we are satisfied with Him”.⁴

Müller nevertheless felt his own condition of loneliness so very deeply that in 1871 he remarried. He had known Susannah Sangar for 25 years and was convinced that she would share not only his toils but also the trials of the work to which God had called him. She proved to be no less a

¹ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis., p200

² *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p235

³ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p87

⁴ *ibid.*, p88

remarkable partner than Mary had been, especially as Müller now launched into a new phase of his life's work.

APPOINTMENT OF A SUCCESSOR

In November 1871 Müller appointed his son-in-law James Wright as his successor in the event of his own death. Müller wrote: "By the Lord's kindness I am able to work as heretofore..... yet, as I am sixty-six years of age, I cannot conceal from myself that it is of great importance for the work that I should obtain a measure of relief..... On this account, I have therefore not only appointed Mr Wright as my successor, in the event of my death, but have also associated him at present with me in the direction of the Institution".¹

MISSIONARY TOURS

By their mid 60s most men are thinking of retirement or at least of slowing down. Not Müller! Ever since his student days in Germany he had longed to be involved somehow with the missionary work of the church and to be instrumental in bringing the Gospel to the nations. His early attempts to join a missionary society had all failed. But that fire had been burning in his heart for more than 45 years. Although he had been able to make huge contributions to missions world-wide through the Scriptural Knowledge Institution, he felt it was time to do something more personal. He had the growing conviction that he should begin an itinerant preaching ministry that would take him to the ends of the earth.

He thought and prayed through the matter very carefully and arrived at the following seven reasons or motives for going:²

(1) *The world-wide need for the Gospel to be preached in its simplicity.*

Salvation based on the finished work of Christ; justification for all—the moment they believed—and acceptance in the Beloved.

(2) *The need for believers to know their saved state.*

Christians must know their standing in Christ. Many, including preachers, are destitute of real peace and joy in the Lord. They are unable to lead others.

(3) *The need for believers to be brought back to the Scriptures.*

They need to search the Word to find its hidden treasures. Everything ought to be tested by the touchstone of the Word of God. The Scriptures to be the basis for daily meditation and prayer.

(4) *The need to promote brotherly love among believers.*

Make much of the great essentials of the Word, and minimise the non-essentials in which they differ. To be united in the truths that matter and rise above sectarian barriers to fellowship.

(5) *The need to strengthen the faith of believers.*

Encourage them to a simple trust in the Lord and confidence in their great God—especially in the matter of believing prayer.

(6) *The need to promote separation from the world.*

To increase heavenly-mindedness in the children of God. Warn against fanatical extremes and extravagances.

(7) *The need to encourage believers to look for the second coming of Christ.*

There lay on his heart a double burden: that of evangelisation and, at the same time, the edification of believers. He knew that as believers were strengthened and encouraged in their faith, so they in turn would become ambassadors of the Gospel.

¹ *ibid.*, p88

² Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p246

In March 1875 he set off on the first of his seventeen ‘missionary tours’. It took him to Brighton, Lewes and Sunderland. At Spurgeon’s request he spoke at the famous Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Then on to Newcastle and other centres. He was away for ten weeks and spoke seventy times.¹

Meantime Moody and Sankey had been in England on one of their evangelistic campaigns. Müller knew that many had come to the Lord but would be without adequate follow-up teaching. He and his wife set off to trace the steps of the evangelists and spend time in each of the towns in turn, teaching and encouraging the new believers. He spent up to six weeks in some centres, visiting scores of cities in England, Ireland and Scotland. His audience in some places numbered 6000. They were away from Bristol for eleven months, Müller having averaged a sermon a day.²

When he was asked about the benefit and effects of these ‘preaching tours’ he replied: “The day of the Lord alone will reveal it. Here on earth, but little can be known, comparatively, of the fruit of our labours; yet, as far as I have been permitted to see, even here, there is good reason to believe that I have not been directed to one single place regarding which there was not manifest proof that the Lord sent me there”.³

The third tour was to Continental Europe and included engagements in France, Switzerland, Prussia and Holland. ‘At Stuttgart, Mr Müller held an interview with the Queen of Wurtemberg, who at the Palace asked him many questions about the Orphanage in Bristol. At Darmstadt by request he spoke in the drawing room of the Court Preacher, at which the mother of Prince Louise of Hesse, and other princes and princesses were present. While in Berlin the cousin of Prince Bismarck travelled 125 miles to hear him, whose ‘Narrative’ had been a blessing in his spiritual life”.⁴

In all Müller spoke more than 300 times in some 70 cities.⁵

The fourth tour was in 1877. The Müllers traversed the USA and Canada for 10 months. He frequently spoke to large congregations of Germans, as well as to coloured congregations in the Southern States. But much of his ministry was also to pastors, evangelists, Christian workers and theological students. He spoke 308 times and travelled 19,274 miles.⁶

Müller had his critics, and on his return to Bristol he remarked: “It is important that I state that my preaching tour in the United States was not set about for the purpose of collecting money for the Institution.... but only that by my experience and knowledge of Divine things, I might benefit Christians.... and that I might preach the Gospel to those who knew not the Lord....The donations handed me for the Institution would not meet one half of its average expenses for one single day”.⁷

After only two months at home in Bristol the pair were off again in 1878. This fifth tour took him back to Europe including preaching engagements in Spain and Italy. His visit to Rome profoundly depressed him as he saw the city wholly given over to papal idolatry. He was away 9 months and spoke some 286 times. Müller spoke English, German, French and a little Dutch, but required interpreters for Spanish and Italian meetings.⁸ (It might be noted that besides being proficient in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, he also spoke two other Oriental languages.⁹)

The sixth tour was again to North America. This was in 1879 when he preached in over forty cities, speaking 300 times in 270 days.¹⁰

¹ *ibid.*, p248

² *ibid.*, p249

³ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p93

⁴ *ibid.*, p94

⁵ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p249

⁶ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p96

⁷ *ibid.*, p96

⁸ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p251

⁹ *The Autobiography of George Muller*. Whitaker House. 1984. p7

¹⁰ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p252

Müller's seventh tour was also to North America. The year was 1880. One biographer records: 'Considering the weather that winter, for a man seventy-five years old his labours were prodigious. "That winter," Mrs Müller writes, "was the coldest that had been known in New York for thirty years, and the many long drives my beloved husband took at night..... when the weather was most severe, were very trying..... Constrained by the love of Christ, however, he persevered in a service that would have been considered, by most persons of his age, an arduous undertaking"'¹

Within twelve months he was back in Europe visiting not only Germany and Switzerland but Egypt, the Holy Land, Italy and Greece. Sightseeing was not on Müller's agenda, and every moment was spent in preaching and teaching. It was eight months before he and his wife were back in Bristol.

The ninth trip—from August 1882 to June 1883—took him to Russia, Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, Germany and Austria.

In late 1883 they set off on their tenth overseas tour to proclaim Christ to the world. They headed for the Orient and India in particular. Müller and his wife travelled more than 21,000 miles during which he preached over 200 times. He spoke to Missionaries, Christian workers, European residents, Eurasians, Hindus, Moslems, educated natives, boys and girls. At 79 he was still going strong!²

After some months preaching in England, Scotland and Wales, in November 1885 he and his wife embarked on their fourth visit to the United States. It was his eleventh major tour. He crossed the continent and headed over the Pacific for Australia where they landed in Sydney in early 1886. After seven months in Australia they sailed north to Java, thence to Japan and China. When they finally arrived home in June 1887 they had covered some 38,000 miles and had been away for 19 months.³

After only two months at home they set sail once again for Australia. It was late 1887 when the two landed in Adelaide for preaching engagements in South Australia. From there they went to Tasmania, New Zealand, Ceylon and India. It was while they were in India that news arrived of the death of his daughter Lydia. The remainder of the meetings were cancelled and they returned immediately to Bristol.⁴

Mr and Mrs Müller were absent again from July 1890 to May 1892 on other extensive missionary and preaching tours. These long and sometimes tiring journeys extended for seventeen years. He was now 87 and had preached in 42 countries and covered some 200,000 miles. It is estimated that he preached about 6000 times to some 3 million people during these latter years of his life.⁵

Müller's extensive journeys by ship and train, as well as hotel costs and daily living expenses over these seventeen years of travelling, meant an outlay of money far in excess of that previously required for the upkeep of the orphanages. Yet Müller relied entirely on prayer to his Heavenly Father for the supply of all his needs for these missionary tours. He made no appeal for human help, expecting rather that, since the Lord had led him into this new work, He would continue to provide all his needs just as He had done since the beginning. Nor was there any diminution of funds for the work in Bristol as a result of his travels and nothing of the ministry there suffered as a result of his long absences.

MÜLLER'S OTHER MINISTRIES

Müller's founding of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution in 1834 (of which the orphan work was but a part) was without any fanfare, but the work steadily expanded under the Lord's hand of blessing. 'Slowly but surely the little institution grew. Faith and its heavenly response went hand in hand, and being weighted and borne down by no anxiety as to debt, as many religious agencies are,

¹ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p97

² Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p255

³ *ibid.*, p255

⁴ *ibid.*, p256

⁵ *ibid.*, P257

the trustful founder was able to give himself wholly to prayer for the means and grace to carry the work on'.¹

Part of the work of the Scriptural Knowledge Institution was the distribution of Christian tracts, New Testaments and Bibles. These were made available to churches, missionaries and other Christian workers, but were also handed out to the public—free of charge—at all forms of public gatherings. Tracts were given away in large numbers at open-air services, local fairs, races and steeplechases, and among spectators at public executions or among passengers on board ships and trains. At the Paris Exposition in 1867 the workers distributed, in thirteen languages, 12,000 copies of the Word of God and although other Christian groups joined in this ministry it was largely due to Müller's promotion. By the late 1800s the circulation of Bibles from the Institute under Müller's constant drive and enthusiasm had reached nearly 4 million copies.²

To give some idea of the magnitude of this work of faith, consider the following: In 1874 there were 2100 orphans to daily feed and clothe; the Institution assisted 189 missionaries in various parts of the world; there were 100 schools with 9000 students to be supported; four million pages of tracts to be produced and tens of thousands of copies of the Bible to be prepared for distribution. In all, about £44,000³ was needed annually—all of which came from daily prayer to the Father.

In the last annual report that Müller gave (1896-97) he confirmed that God's rich blessing had indeed remained on the work of the Institution throughout those decades since its founding. During the 63 years since the beginning of the work, in the schools alone, they had been able to minister to over 121,000 students—with thousands of them receiving Christ. Some 280,000 Bibles had been distributed world-wide in many languages. Almost 1.5 million New Testaments had been printed as also over 21,000 copies of the Psalms and roughly 220,000 other portions of Scripture.⁴ The distribution of tracts had exceeded 111 million.⁵

Of this gigantic task Müller once wrote: "God, who has raised up this work through me; God, who has led me generally year after year to enlarge it; God, who has supported this work now for more than forty years, will still help and will not suffer me to be confounded, because I rely on Him. I commit the whole work to Him, and He will provide me with what I need, in future also, though I know not whence the means are to come".⁶

DEATH

At 93 years of age Müller was still preaching. He was in the pulpit on Sunday morning of March 6th 1898, his text being: 2 Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens". He preached again that evening; presided over the fellowship meeting on the Monday and again at the prayer meeting on Wednesday evening. On Thursday morning he was taken his usual cup of tea at 7am, but he had departed. He just slipped quietly off Home as the Lord opened the door and whispered, 'Come on in—good and faithful servant'.

His death caused a world-wide outpouring of both grief and thanksgiving. In a unique manner he had belonged to the whole church and the whole world. As one biographer has put it: "The whole race of man sustained a loss when he died".⁷

The funeral took place the following Monday. Tens of thousands lined the streets of Bristol as the cortège made its way through the streets. 'Men left their workshops and offices, women left their

¹ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p105

² Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p266

³ About \$A10 million in today's money.

⁴ Basil Miller. *George Muller—Man of Faith and Miracles*. Bethany House. p108

⁵ *ibid.*, p111

⁶ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p267

⁷ *ibid.*, p285

elegant homes or humble kitchens, all seeking to pay a last token of respect. Bristol had never before witnessed any such scene'.¹

By the time of Müller's death, the work in Bristol had received some 1.5 million pounds² in unsolicited gifts—all the result of God's faithfulness and the daily prayers of Müller and his team. Müller's own contribution during those years was £81,490 18s 6d.³ When his will was admitted to probate his entire estate amounted to a mere £169 9s 4d.⁴ He once said: "My aim never was, how much I could *obtain*, but rather how much I could *give*".⁵

The work started by George Müller in Bristol in 1834 survives to this day.⁶

¹ *ibid.*, p286

² About \$A350 million in today's money.

³ About \$A19 million in today's money.

⁴ About \$A39,000 in today's money.

⁵ Dr A. T. Pierson. *George Muller of Bristol*. Pickering & Inglis. p299

⁶ F. F. Bruce. 1998 Internet article.