

# **The Life and Ministry of George Mueller**

By Ed Reese

BORN: September 27, 1805  
Kroppenstaedt, Prussia (Germany)

DIED: March 10, 1898  
Bristol, England

LIFE SPAN: 92 years, 5 months, 11 days

George Mueller has proved to the world the truth of Philippians 4:19 and he will always be remembered as the man who got things from God. His testimony is an inspiration to Christians everywhere. Three weeks after his marriage, he and his wife decided to depend on God alone to supply their needs--never again to approach people about them. Now he felt led to relinquish his small salary as a preacher completely. Wishing that all support be spontaneous, he put a box in the chapel for his needs; determining never to run into debt, and to get his needs supplied only by requests to God Himself. This was October, 1830. When he died, in March 1898, 68 years later, he had obtained from God more than any one else who ever lived--seven and a half million dollars.

Mueller was the son of Herr and Frau Mueller. His father was a Prussian tax-collector. The family moved to Heimersleben, four miles away, in 1810. Soon two other sons were born. Strangely gullible, the father would entrust his small sons with considerable amounts of cash to teach them to acquire the habit of possessing money without spending it. This back-fired, for George, in particular, devised numerous methods of using the money for himself without being detected. Before he was ten years old, he repeatedly stole from the government funds in his father's keeping.

Herr Mueller wanted his son to be a clergyman and make a good living, in order to be able to support him when he became old. Schooling was obtained for George at Cathedral Classical School at Halberstadt, with very little supervision given him from about age ten to 16. His mother died when he was 14. George was playing cards, not even aware of her illness that night. He spent the next day at a tavern with some friends.

Lutheran church confirmation classes started at this time, and it was a custom for candidates on the eve of confirmation to make a formal confession of their sins to the clergyman in the vestry. Mueller used the opportunity to cheat clergyman of 11/12ths of the fee his father had given him for the cleric. Confirmed the Sunday after Easter, 1820, he was now a religious lost person. When George was 15, his father was transferred to Schoenebeck, Prussia. The son was left at home to supervise some repairs and to study for the ministry. George was up to his old tricks. He collected money which the villagers owed his father for taxes, then took a trip which he later called "...days of sin." He would stay in expensive hotels, sneaking out after a week without paying a bill. However, after a couple weeks of this, he was caught and put in jail for 24 days. The elder Mueller bailed his son out, and soon George entered school at Nordhausen, Prussia, where he stayed for two and one-half years. He studied from 4 a.m. until 10 p.m. The teacher said he had great promise, but drinking and debauchery continued to cancel these acclaims. This time (1820-1825) was also spent in contriving to provide himself with money for his bad habits.

In 1825, when 19 years old, he left school and entered Halle University as a student of Divinity. The University had 1,260 students, including some 900 divinity students preparing themselves for the Lutheran Church ministries. Here he decided he must reform if a parish was to ever choose him as pastor. He renewed an acquaintance in a tavern with a fellow student named Beta, who was a backslidden Christian. They were former school-fellows. In August, 1825, Mueller, Beta, and two other students, pawned some of their belongings to get enough money for a few days of travel. Switzerland was decided upon, and George forged the necessary letters from their parents with which to get passports. Mueller, like Judas, decided to carry the purse. His friends unwittingly paid part of his expenses as a result and 43 idle days of travel followed.

Back at the University, Beta was stricken with remorse and made full confession to his father. Beta began to attend a Saturday night Christian meeting in a home. Mueller, hearing about this, became sincerely interested, and pressed his friend into taking him to the meeting. Beta did, reluctantly, not believing George would like it--reading the Bible, praying, singing hymns, and listening to a sermon. As he sat in the Wagner residence, George saw something he had never seen

before--people on their knees praying. He felt awkward for being there and even apologized for his presence. The host pleasantly invited him to come as often as he pleased. As he walked home, he declared, "All we have seen on our journey to Switzerland, and all our former pleasures, are as nothing in comparison with this evening!" That Saturday night in mid-November, 1825, turned him around as Christ became his Savior. At age 20 the unstable pagan found the power to overcome his moral weaknesses and a new life began.

In January, 1826, as he began reading missionary literature, he felt inclined in this direction more and more. He wrote his father and brother to this end. However, the reply from father was a furious objection to these plans. As a result, George decided he would have to support himself at the University, rather than take funds from his father. Back at Halle he obtained a well-paying job of teaching German to American college professors and translating lectures for them. He preached his first sermon on August 27, 1826, at a village six miles from Halle. During this time he lived for two months in the Orphan House built by August Hermann Francke, Professor of Divinity at Halle. Here the seed of an idea was sown that was to come to fruition later in Bristol. In 1828, he completed his University courses.

Mueller now had a desire to become a missionary to the Jews, so he applied to a society in London which majored in this work, which led to an invitation to come for a six-month probationary period in London. He left home on February 10, 1829 and arrived in London on March 19. His English became fluent, although he never lost his German accent. The regulations and routine at seminary tempted him to give up his ideas. His study of Hebrew was unremitting, and soon resulted in delicate health. Advised by doctors and friends, he went to the country for a change of air and schedule which was to change his life as well. He traveled to Teignmouth in Devonshire and became acquainted with Henry Craik, who would become his loyal associate in the ensuing years. Here he attended the reopening of a small meeting-house called Bethesda Chapel, where he was touched deeply by one of the speakers. By the time he returned to London, he was a different man, having learned the value of meditation upon the Scriptures, beginning in August, 1829.

Now he began to gather some of his fellow-students from 6 to 8 a.m. each morning for prayer and Bible reading. Evenings he would pray with anyone he could find, often until after mid-night. During these days he felt he

did not want to be limited to ministry amongst the Jews alone, so he resigned from the London Society. Back in the Devonshire area he began to preach in chapels in Exmouth, Teignmouth and Shaldon. He was then called upon to pastor at the Ebenezer Chapel in Teignmouth, a congregation of 18 people where he began in 1830. During this year he became convinced of the necessity of believer's baptism, and was rebaptized. In January of 1830 he undertook a monthly preaching engagement just outside Exeter, lodging there with a Mrs. Hake, an invalid. Mary Groves, age 29, was keeping house for her. Mueller, with a mature outlook on life, was greatly attracted to Mary, though he was only 24 years of age. On October 7, 1830 they were joined in marriage at St. David's Church in Exeter.

Three weeks after their marriage, they decided to depend upon God alone to provide their needs as already indicated. They carried it to the extent that they would not give definite answers to inquiries as to whether or not they were in need of money at any particular moment. At the time of need, there would always seem to be funds available from some source, both in regards to their private income, and to the funds for his vast projects soon to be discussed. No matter how pressing was the need, George simply renewed his prayers, and either money or food always came in time to save the situation. On February 19, 1832, he records an instance of healing by faith. Suffering from a gastric ulcer, he believed God could heal him and four days later he was as well as ever. In the spring of 1832, he felt he must leave Teignmouth. Craik, his friend, had gone on to Bristol for a visit, and Mueller felt led to go there also. On April 22, he preached his first sermon in Bristol. A friend offered to rent Bethesda Chapel there for a year if the two men would stay and develop a work. Agreeing not to be bound by any stipulation, Craik and Mueller accepted the call. On May 25, 1832, the Muellers settled permanently in Bristol which became his home until he died. A long association with the chapel on Great George Street also began. In July of that year, Bristol was visited with a plague of cholera which took many lives, but none of those among whom he and Craik ministered. On September 17, 1832, his first child, Lydia, was born.

It was on February 25, 1834, that George Mueller founded a new Missionary Institution which he called "The Scriptural Knowledge Institution for Home and Abroad." It had four objectives:

1. To assist Sunday Schools, Day Schools and Adult Schools, and where

possible to start new ones.

2. To sell Bibles and Testaments to the poor at low prices, and if necessary, to give them free of cost.
3. To aid missionary effort. (This was to provide financial aid to free-lance missionaries.)
4. To circulate tracts in English and in various foreign languages.

The Orphan House became a fifth objective, and the most well known enterprise, yet it is right to point out that Mueller was greatly used in developing the other objectives as well.

On March 19, 1834, a son, Elijah, was born but he died the next year, June 25, 1835, from pneumonia, leaving the Muellers with only one child--Lydia. The summer of 1835 found Mueller himself in very poor health, slowing down his pace and giving him time to write "The Narrative of the Lord's Dealing with George Mueller."

For some time he had been thinking about starting an orphanage in Bristol. On December 9, 1835 he presented his burden at a public meeting. No collection was taken, but someone handed him ten shillings and a Christian woman offered herself for the work. After five days of prayer \$300 came in and it seemed they might now have enough money to rent a house, equip and furnish it. The other request was for Christian people to work with the children. His basic aim was to have a work--something to point to as visible proof that God hears and answers prayer. His heart went out to the many ragged children running wild in the streets, but that was a secondary reason for starting the orphanage.

He rented Number 6 Wilson Street, where he himself had been living, and on April 11, 1836, the doors of the orphanage opened with 26 children. These were girls between seven and twelve years old.

The second House was opened on November 28, 1836, to care for children from babyhood to seven years of age. In September, 1837, a third house was opened for boys over seven years of age.

Illness plagued Mueller from time to time, and in late 1837 he was very weak. This time his head provided the discomfort. He went to Germany in

the spring of 1838 as well as in February, 1840, when he saw his father for a last time. Presumably he still had not accepted Christ as George noted, "How it would have cheered the separation on both sides were my dear father a believer." He died shortly thereafter. The years 1828 to 1843 were surely years of trials for Craik and Mueller as they prayed in everything. All were properly clad and everyone sat down to regular meals in the Houses. Mueller never incurred a debt, and God supernaturally provided for everyone. A well known story indicates the kind of life that was lived.

One morning the plates and cups and bowls on the table were empty. There was no food in the larder, and no money to buy food. The children were standing waiting for their morning meal, when Mueller said, "Children, you know we must be in time for school." Lifting his hand he said, "Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat." There was a knock on the door. The baker stood there, and said, "Mr. Mueller, I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn't have bread for breakfast and the Lord wanted me to send you some. So I got up at 2 a.m. and baked some fresh bread, and have brought it." Mueller thanked the man. No sooner had this transpired when there was a second knock at the door. It was the milkman. He announced that his milk cart had broken down right in front of the Orphanage, and he would like to give the children his cans of fresh milk so he could empty his wagon and repair it. No wonder, years later, when Mueller was to travel the world as an evangelist, he would be heralded as "the man who gets things from God!"

By March, 1843, he felt the need for a second home for girls. On July, 1844, the fourth house on Wilson Street was opened--the total of his homeless waifs now being 130. A letter received on October 30, 1845, changed his entire ministry...he was now age 40. Basically, it was a letter from a local resident complaining that the noise of the children was a nuisance. They were vastly over-crowded and there was not enough space for land cultivation, washing clothes, etc. He gave the letter much thought, listing the pros and cons. If he were to leave, he would have to build a structure to hold at least 300 orphans at a cost of \$60,000. On his 36th day of prayer over the dilemma, the first \$6,000 came in for a building program. By June, 1848, he received all of the

\$60,000 which he needed. He had begun to build the previous year on July 5, 1847, at a place called Ashley Downs as the bulk of the money had been sent in. Building Number 1 was opened in June, 1849, and housed 300 children with staff sufficient to teach and care for them. It was a seven-acre site and finally cost about \$90,000 as legal expenses, furnishings, and land purchase brought the price up higher than anticipated. The old houses on Wilson Street emptied and everyone was now under one roof.

Mueller was becoming a well known Christian leader. He answered some 3,000 letters a year without a secretary. Besides his orphanages, the four other objectives of his Scriptural Knowledge Institution claimed his attention and he continued his pastoral work at Bethesda Chapel also.

In 1850, he felt the need for a second orphanage. Donations began to come in miraculously again and finally, on November 12, 1857, a second building housing 400 children at a cost of \$126,000 was built. Number 3 opened on March 12, 1862, housing 450 children, and costing over \$138,000. It was housed on 11 1/2 acres. Number 4 was opened November 5, 1868, and Number 5 on January 6, 1870. These last two cost over \$300,000 and housed 450 each.

From 1848 to 1874, money came in to improve and expand the work which went from 130 orphans to 2,050 during this time and up to 13 acres. Mueller describes these days, writing in 1874:

But God, our infinite rich Treasurer, remains with us. It is this which gives me peace. Moreover if it pleases Him, with a work requiring about \$264,000 a year...would I gladly pass through all these trials of faith with regard to means, if He only might be glorified, and His Church and the world benefited...I have placed myself in the position of having no means at all left; and 2,100 persons, not only daily at the table, but with everything else to be provided for, and all the funds gone; 189 missionaries to be assisted, and nothing whatever left; about one hundred schools with 9,000 scholars in them, to be entirely supported, and no means for them in hand; about four million tracts and tens of thousands of copies of the Holy Scriptures yearly now to be sent out, and all the money expended...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.

His own personal income varied around \$12,000 a year, of which he kept for himself \$1,800 giving the rest away.

His fellow worker, Henry Craik, died on January 22, 1866, followed by the death of his wife on February 6, 1870. She was 72 and had suffered from rheumatic fever. James Wright married Mueller's daughter, Lydia in 1871 and also replaced Craik as his associate. Mueller himself remarried on November 30, 1871, to a Susannah Grace Sangar, whom he had known for 25 years as a consistent Christian. He was 66 and she in her late forties, a perfect companion for him in his ministries still ahead.

Mueller decided to fulfill the many requests for his appearance around the world. Turning the work over to Wright, from 1875 to 1892, Mueller made 16 preaching trips to various sectors of the world. For the sake of historians and others interested in statistical data, they were as follows:

March 26 - July 6, 1875 England (Brighton, London, Sunderland, Newcastle). Preached 70 times, such places as Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle, etc.

August 14, 1875 - July 5, 1876 England, Scotland and Ireland. His five week stay in Liverpool had Sunday Crowds of 5,000.

August 16, 1876 - June 25, 1877 Switzerland, Germany and Holland. Preached 302 times in 68 places in three languages.

August 18, 1877 - July 8, 1878 Canada and the United States. Preached 299 times, conference with President Rutherford Hayes.

September 5, 1878 - July 18, 1879 Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy. Fellowship with Spurgeon in France, saw schools he supported in Spain.

August 27, 1879 - June 17, 1880 United States and Canada. Spoke again 299 times - in 42 places.

September 15, 1880 - May 31, 1881 Canada and the United States. Accepted many invitations he had to turn down the previous tour.



August 23, 1881 - May 30, 1882 Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Turkey, Greece. Many physical difficulties were encountered, traveling was primitive.

August 8, 1882 - June 1, 1883 Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, Russia, Poland. Suppressed in Russia, could only preach to 20 at one time.

September 26, 1883 - June 5, 1884 India. 78 years old, preached 206 times and traveled 21,000 miles.

August 18 - October 2, 1884 England and South Wales. Tour cut short because of illness of Mrs. Mueller.

May 16 - July 1, 1885 England Tour cut short because of illness of George Mueller.

September 1 - Oct. 3, 1885 England and Scotland, Primary ministry was in Liverpool, England, and Dundee, Scotland.

November 4, 1885 - June 13, 1887 Australia, China, Japan, Straits of Malacca. Ages 81 to 83 - traveled 37,280 miles around the world.

August 10, 1887 - March 11, 1890 Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, Ceylon, India. Intense heat of Calcutta almost killed him. Telegram that daughter Lydia had died January 10, 1890 in Bristol cut short the tour.

August 8, 1890 - May, 1892 Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy. At 86 preaching to large crowds.

George and his wife traveled 200,000 miles in 17 years of world-wide evangelism efforts, in 42 countries, preaching to 3 million people.

It was on January 13, 1894 that his second wife passed away after 23 years of marriage. He was now 89 years old, and was living out his days in Orphan House #3. He preached his last sermon on Isaiah's Vision, March 6, 1898 at Alma Road Chapel in Clifton. On March 10, 1898 the maid went to his room, and found him dead on the floor by the side of his bed. The funeral in Bristol on March 14th has never been surpassed there as tens of thousands lined the streets. The grief of the orphans was evident. He was buried by the side of his two wives.

Mueller was non-sectarian in his general outlook, and was one of the founders of the Brethren movement. His influence touched the lives of thousands--perhaps most notable, that of J. Hudson Taylor. His most moving reunion with an orphan was on October 19, 1878 when a 71 year old widow met him...she had been his first orphan over 57 years previously. 10,023 other orphans were to follow her there and have Daddy Mueller rear them. Mueller read the Bible through over 200 times, half of these times on his knees. He said he knew of some 50,000 specific answers to prayer...requests to God alone!

Over 3,000 of his orphans were won to Christ through his ministry by the Holy Spirit.

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