

GEORGE MUELLER OF BRISTOL
AND HIS WITNESS TO A PRAYER-HEARING GOD
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The originally "authorized memoir".

BY
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New Lessons In God's School Of Prayer

A teacher must also be a learner, and therefore only he who continues to learn is competent to continue to teach. Nothing but new lessons, daily mastered, can keep testimony fresh and vitalizing and enable us to give advance lessons. Instead of being always engaged in a sort of review, our teaching and testimony will thus be drawn each day from a new and higher level.

George Mueller's experiences of prevailing prayer went on constantly accumulating, and so qualified him to speak to others, not as on a matter of speculation, theory, or doctrinal belief, but of long, varied, and successful personal experiment. Patiently, carefully and frequently, he is to impress on others the conditions of effective supplication. From time to time he met those to whom his courageous, childlike trust in God was a mystery; and, occasionally unbelief's secret misgivings found a voice in the question, *what he would do if God did not send help!* what, if a meal-time actually came with no food, and no money to procure it; or if clothing were worn out, and nothing to replace it?

To all such questions there was always ready this one answer: that *such a failure on God's part is inconceivable*, and must therefore be put among the impossibilities. There are, however, conditions necessary on *man's part: the suppliant soul must come to God in in the right spirit and attitude*. For the sake of such readers as might need further guidance as to the proper and acceptable manner of approach to God, he was wont to make very plain the scripture teaching upon this point.

Five grand conditions of prevailing prayer were ever before his mind:

1. Entire dependence upon the merits and mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the only ground of any claim for blessing. (See John xiv.13,14; xv.16, etc.)
2. Separation from all known sin. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us, for it would be sanctioning sin. (Psalm Ixvi.18.)
3. 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. (Hebrews xi.6; vi.13-20.)

4. Asking in accordance with His will. Our motives must be godly: we must not seek any gift of God to consume it upon our own lusts. (1 John v.13; James iv.3.)

5. Importunity in supplication. There must be waiting on God and waiting for God, as the husbandman has long patience to wait for the harvest. (James v.7; Luke xviii.1-10.)

The importance of firmly fixing in mind principles such as these cannot be overstated.

The first lays the basis of all prayer, in our oneness with the great High Priest.

The second states a condition of prayer, found in abandonment of sin.

The third reminds us of the need honouring God by faith that He is, and is the Rewarder of the diligent seeker.

The fourth reveals the sympathy with God that helps us to ask what is for our good and His glory.

The last teaches us that, having laid hold of God in prayer, we are to keep hold until His arm is outstretched in blessing.

Where these conditions do not exist, for God to answer prayer would be both a dishonour to Himself and a damage to the suppliant. To encourage those who come to Him in their own name, or in a self-righteous, self-seeking, and disobedient spirit, would be to set a premium upon continuance in sin. To answer the requests of the unbelieving would be to disregard the double insult put upon a word of promise and His oath of confirmation, by consistent doubt of His truthfulness and distrust of His thoughtfulness. Indeed not one condition of prevailing prayer exists which is not such in the very nature of things. These are not arbitrary limitations affixed to prayer by a despotic will; they are necessary alike to God's character and man's good.

All the lessons learned in God's school of prayer made Mueller's feelings and convictions about this matter more profound and subduing. He saw the vital relation of prayer to holiness, and perpetually sought to impress it upon both his hearers and readers; and, remembering that for the purpose of persuasion the most effective figure of speech is repetition, he hesitated at no frequency of restatement by which such truths might find root in the minds and hearts of others.

There has never been a saint, from Abel's day to our own, who has not been taught the same essential lessons. All prayer which has ever brought down blessing has prevailed by the same law of success-- *the inward impulse of God's Holy Spirit*. If, therefore, that Spirit's teachings disregarded or disobeyed, or His inward movings be hindered, in just such measure will prayer become formal or be altogether abandoned. Sin, consciously indulged, or duty, knowingly neglected, makes supplication an offence to God.

Again, all prayer prevails only in the measure of our real, even if not conscious, unity with the Lord Jesus Christ as the ground of our approach, and in the degree of our dependence on Him as the medium of our access to God.

Yet again, all prayer prevails only as it is offered in faith; and the *answer* to such prayer can be recognized and received only *on the plane of faith*; that is, we must maintain the believing frame, expecting the blessing, and being ready to receive it in God's way and time and form, and not our own.

The faith that thus *expects* cannot be surprised at answers to prayer. When, in November, 1840, a sister gave ten pounds for the orphans, and at a time specially opportune, Mr. Mueller records his triumphant joy in God as exceeding and defying all expression. Yet he was *free from excitement and not in the least surprised*, because by grace he had been trustfully waiting on God for deliverance. Help had been so long delayed that in one of the houses there was no bread, and in none of them any milk or any money to buy either. It was only a few minutes before the milkman's cart was due, that this money came.

However faithful and trustful in prayer, it behooves us to be none the less careful and diligent in the use of all proper means. Here again Mr. Mueller's whole life is a lesson to other believers. For example, when travelling in other lands, or helping other brethren on their way, he besought the Lord's constant guardianship over the conveyances used, and even over the luggage so liable to go astray. But he himself looked carefully to the seaworthiness of the vessel he was to sail in, and to every other condition of safe and speedy transportation for himself and others. In one case where certain German brethren and sisters were departing for foreign shores, he noticed the manner in which the cabman stored away the small luggage in the fly; and observed that several carpetbags were hastily thrust into a hind boot. He also carefully counted the pieces of luggage and took note of the fact that there were seventeen in all. On arriving at the wharf, where there is generally much hurry and flurry, the dishonest cabman would have driven off with a large part of the property belonging to the party, but for this man of God who not only prayed but watched. He who trusted God implicitly, no less faithfully looked to the cabman's fidelity, who, after he pretended to have delivered all the luggage to the porters, was compelled to open that hind boot and, greatly to his own confusion, deliver up the five or six bags hidden away there. Mr. Mueller adds in his Narrative that "such a circumstance should teach one to make the very smallest affairs a subject of prayer, as, for instance, that all the luggage might be safely taken out of a fly." May we not add that such a circumstance teaches us that companion lesson, quite as important in its way, that we are to be watchful as well as prayerful, and see that a dishonest cabdriver does not run off with another's goods!

This praying saint, who watched man, most of all watched God. Even in the lesser details of his work, his eye was ever looking for God's unfailing supplies, and taking notice of the divine leadings and dealings; and, afterward, there always followed the fruit of the lips, giving thanks to His name. Here is another secret revealed: prayerfulness and thankfulness-- those two handmaidens of God-- always go together, each helping the

other. "Pray without ceasing: in everything give thanks." (1 Thess. v.17,18.) These two precepts stand side by side where they belong, and he who neglects one will find himself disobeying the other. This man who prayed so much and so well, offered the sacrifice of praise to God continually.

For example, on September 8, 1840, a specific entry was made in the Narrative, so simple, childlike, and in every way characteristic, that every word of it is precious.

"The Lord, to show His continued care over us, raises up new helpers. They that trust in the Lord shall never be confounded. Some who helped for a while may fall asleep in Jesus; others grow cold in the service of the Lord; others be as desirous as ever to help, but no longer able; or, having means, feel it to be His will to lay them out in another way. But in leaning upon God, the Living God alone, we are BEYOND DISAPPOINTMENT and BEYOND *being forsaken because of death, or want of means, or want of love, or because of the claims of other work*. How precious to have learned, in any measure, to be content to stand with God alone in the world, and to know that surely no good thing shall be withheld from us, whilst we walk uprightly!"

Among the gifts received during this long life of stewardship for God some deserve individual mention.

To an offering received in March, 1839, a peculiar history attaches. The circumstances attending its reception made upon him a deep impression. He had given a copy of the Annual Report to a believing brother who had been greatly stirred up to prayer by reading it; and knowing his own sister, who was also a disciple, to possess sundry costly ornaments and jewels, such as a heavy gold chain, a pair of gold bracelets, and a superb ring set with fine brilliants, this brother besought the Lord so to show her the uselessness of such trinkets that she should be led to lay them all upon His altar as an offering for the orphan work. This prayer was literally answered. Her sacrifice of jewels proved of service to the work at a time of such pressing need that Mr. Mueller's heart specially rejoiced in God. By the proceeds of the sale of these ornaments he was helped to meet the expenses of a whole week, and besides to *pay the salaries* due to the helpers. But, before disposing of the diamond ring, he wrote with it upon the winlow-pane of his own room that precious name and title of the Lord-- "JEHOVAH JIREH"-- and henceforth whenever, in deep poverty, he cast his eyes upon those two words, imperishably written with the point of a diamond upon that pane, he thankfully remembered that "THE LORD WILL PROVIDE."

How many of his fellow believers might find unfailing refreshment and inspiration in dwelling upon the divine promises! Ancient believers were bidden to write God's words on the palms of their hands, the doorposts of their houses, and on their gates, so that the employments of their hands, their goings out and comings in, their personal and home life, might be constant reminders of Jehovah's everlasting faithfulness. He who inscribed this chosen name of God upon the window-pane of his dwelling, found that every ray of sunlight that shone into his room lit up his Lord's promise.

He thus sums up the experiences of the year 1840:

1. Notwithstanding multiplied trials of faith, the orphans have lacked nothing.
2. Instead of being disappointed in his expectations or work, the reverse had been true, such trials being seen to be needful to demonstrate that the Lord was their Helper in times of need.
3. Such a way of living brings the Lord very near, as one who daily inspects the need that He may send the more timely aid.
4. Such constant, instant reliance upon divine help does not so absorb the mind in temporal things as to unfit for spiritual employments and enjoyments; but rather prompts to habitual communion with the Lord and His Word.
5. Other children of God may not be called to a similar work, but are called to a like faith, and may experience similar interposition if they live according to His will and seek His help.
6. The incurring of debt, being unscriptural, is a sin needing confession and abandonment if we desire unhindered fellowship with God, and experience of His interposition.

It was in this year 1840, also, that a further object was embraced in the work of the Scripture Knowledge Institution, namely, the circulation of Christian books and tracts. But, as the continuance and enlargement of these benevolent activities made the needs greater, so, in answer to prayer, the Hand of the great Provider bestowed larger supplies.

Divine interposition will never be doubted by one who, like George Mueller, gives himself to prayer, for the coincidences will prove too exact and frequent between demand and supply, times and seasons of asking and answering, to allow of doubt that God has helped.

The "ethics of language" embody many lessons. For example, the term "poetic retribution" describes a visitation of judgment where the penalty peculiarly befits the crime. As poetic lines harmonize, rhyme and rhythm showing the work of a designing hand, so there is often harmony between an offense and its retribution as when Adonibezek, who had afflicted a like injury upon three score and five captive kings, had his own thumbs and great toes cut off, or as when Haman was himself hung on the gallows that he built for Mordecai. We read in Psalm ix.16:

"The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth:
The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands."

The inspired thought is that the punishment of evil-doers is in such exact correspondence with the character of their evil doings as to show that it is the Lord executing vengeance--

the penalty shows a designing hand. He who watches the peculiar retributive judgments of God, how He causes those who set snares and pitfalls for others to fall into them themselves, will not doubt that behind such "poetic retribution" there is an intelligent Judge.

Somewhat so the poetic harmony between prayer and its answer silences all question as to a discriminating Hearer of the suppliant soul. A single case of such answered prayer might be accounted accidental; but, ever since men began to call upon the name of the Lord, there have been such repeated, striking, and marvelous correspondences between the requests of man and the replies of God, that the inference is perfectly safe, the induction has too broad a basis and too large a body of particulars to allow mistake. The coincidences are both too many and too exact to admit the doctrine of *chance*. We are compelled, not to say justified, to conclude that the only sufficient and reasonable explanation must be found in a God who hears and answers prayer.

Mr. Mueller was not the only party to these transactions, nor the only person thus convinced that God was in the whole matter of the work and its support. The *donors* as well as the *receiver* were conscious of divine leading.

Frequent were the instances also when those who gave most timely help conveyed to Mr. Mueller the knowledge of the experiences that accompanied or preceded their offerings; as, for example, when, without any intimation being given them from man that there was special need, the heart was impressed in prayer to God that there was an emergency requiring prompt assistance.

For example, in June, 1841, fifty pounds were received with these words:

"I am not concerned at my having been prevented for so many days from sending this money; I am confident it has not been needed."

"This last sentence is remarkable," says Mr. Mueller. "It is now nearly three years since our funds were for the first time exhausted, and only at this period, since then, could it have been said in truth, so far as I remember, that a donation of fifty pounds was *not* needed. From the beginning in July, 1838, till now, there never had been a period when we so abounded as when this donation nation came; for there were then, in the orphan fund and the other funds, between two and three hundred pounds! The words of one brother are so much the more remarkable as, on four former occasions, when he likewise gave considerable donations we were always in need, yea, great need, which he afterwards knew from the printed accounts."

Prevailing prayer is largely conditioned on constant obedience.

"Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things which are well pleasing in His sight."

(1 John iii. 22.)

There is no way of keeping in close touch with God unless a *new step* is taken in advance whenever *new light* is given. Here is another of the life-secrets of George Mueller. Without unduly counting the cost, he followed every leading of God.

In July, 1841, both Mr. Craik and Mr. Mueller were impressed that the existing mode of receiving free-will offerings from those among whom they laboured was inexpedient. These contributions were deposited in boxes, over which their names were placed with an explanation of the purpose to which such offerings were applied. But it was felt that this might have the appearance of unduly elevating them above others, as though they were assuming official importance, or excluding others from full and equal recognition as labourers in word and doctrine. They therefore decided to discontinue this mode of receiving such offerings.

Such an act of obedience may seem to some, overscrupulous, but it cost some inward struggles, for it threatened a possible and probable decrease in supplies for their own needs, and the question naturally arose how such lack should be supplied. Happily Mr. Mueller had long ago settled the question that *to follow a clear sense of duty is always safe*. He could say, in every such crisis,

"O God my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed, trusting in Thee."
(Psalm cxii.7.)

Once for all having made such a decision, such apparent risks did not for a moment disturb his peace. Somehow or other the Lord would provide, and all he had to do was to serve and trust Him and leave the rest to His Fatherhood.

In the autumn of 1841 it pleased God that, beyond any previous period, there should be a severe test of faith. For months the supplies had been comparatively abundant, but now, from day to day and from meal to meal, the eye of faith had to be turned to the Lord, and, notwithstanding continuance in prayer, *help seemed at times to fail*, so much so that it was a special sign of God's grace that, during this long trial of delay, the confidence of Mr. Mueller and his helpers did not altogether give way. But he and they were held up, and he unwaveringly rested on the fatherly pity of God.

On one occasion a poor woman gave two pence, adding, "It is but a trifle, but I must give it to you." Yet so opportune was the gift of these "two mites" that *one of these two pence* was just what was at that time needed to make up the sum required to buy bread for immediate use. At another time eight pence more being necessary to provide for the next meal, but *seven pence* were in hand; but on opening one of the boxes, *one penny* only was found deposited, and thus a single penny was traced to the Father's care.

It was in December of this same year, 1841, that, in order to show how solely dependence was placed on a heavenly Provider, it was determined to *delay for a while* both the holding of any public meeting and the printing of the Annual Report. Mr. Mueller was confident that, though no word should be either spoken or printed about the work and its needs, the means would still be supplied. As a matter of fact the report of 1841-2 was thus postponed for five months; and so, *in the midst of deep poverty and partly because of*

the very pressure of such need, another bold step was taken, which, like the cutting away of the ropes that held the life-boat, in that Mediterranean shipwreck, threw Mr. Mueller, and all that were with him in the work, more completely on the promise and the providence of God.

It might be inferred that, where such a decision was made, the Lord would make haste to reward at once such courageous confidence. And yet, so mysterious are His ways, that never, up to that time, had Mr. Mueller's faith been tried so sharply as between December 12, 1841, and April 12, 1842. During these four months, again, it was as though God were saying

"I will now see whether indeed you truly lean on Me and look to Me."

At any time during this trial, Mr. Mueller might have changed his course, holding the public meeting and publishing the report, for outside the few who were in his councils, *no one knew of the determination*, and in fact many children of God looking for the usual year's journal of "The Lord's Dealings," were surprised at the delay. But the conclusion conscientiously reached was, for the glory of the Lord, as steadfastly pursued, and again Jehovah Jireh revealed His faithfulness.

During this four months, on March 9, 1842, the need was so extreme that, had no help come, the work could not have gone on. But, *on that day*, from a brother living near Dublin, ten pounds came: and the hand of the Lord clearly appeared in this gift, for when the post had already come and no letter had come with it, there was a strong confidence suggested to Mr. Mueller's mind that deliverance was at hand; and so it proved, for presently the letter was brought to him, having been delivered at one of the other houses. During this same month, it was necessary once to *delay dinner for about a half-hour*, because of a lack of supplies. Such a postponement had scarcely ever been known before, and very rarely was it repeated in the entire after-history of the work, though thousands of mouths had to be daily fed.

In the spring of 1843 Mr. Mueller felt led to open a *fourth orphan house*, the third having been opened nearly six years before. This step was taken with his uniform conscientiousness, deliberation, and prayerfulness. He had seen many reasons for such enlargement of the work, but he had said nothing about the matter even to his beloved wife. Day by day he waited on God in prayer, preferring to take counsel only of Him, lest he might do something in haste, move in advance of clear leading, or be biassed unduly by human judgment.

Unexpected obstacles interfered with his securing the premises which had already been offered and found suitable; but he was in no way "discomforted." The burden of his prayer was, "Lord, if *Thou* hast no need of another orphan house, I have none"; and he rightly judged that the calm deliberation with which he had set about the whole matter, and the unbroken peace with which he met new hindrances, were proofs that he was following the guidance of God and not the motions of self-will.

As the public meeting and the publication of the Annual Report had been purposely postponed to show that no undue dependence was placed even on indirect appeals to man, much special prayer went up to God, that, *before July 15, 1844*, when the public meeting was to be held, He would so richly supply all need that it might clearly appear that, notwithstanding these lawful means of informing His servants concerning the work had for a time not been used, the prayer of faith had drawn down help from above. As the financial year had closed in May, it would be more than *two years* since the previous report had been made to the public.

George Mueller was jealous for the Lord God of hosts. He desired that "even the shadow of ground might be cut off for persons to say, 'They cannot get any more money; and therefore they now publish another report.'" Hence, while, during the whole progress of the work, he desired to stand with his Master, without heeding either the favourable or unfavourable judgments of men, he felt strongly that God would be much honoured and glorified as the prayer-hearing God if, before the public had been at all apprised of the situation, an ample supply might be given. In such case, instead of appearing to ask aid of men, he and his associates would be able to witness to the church and the world, God's faithfulness, and offer Him the praise of joyful and thankful hearts. As he had asked, so was it done unto him. Money and other supplies came in, and, on the day before the accounts were closed, such liberal gifts, that there was a *surplus of over twenty pounds* for the whole work.