

George Muller (1805-1893): Part 1

Historical Theology

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INTRODUCTION:

“In 1871, an article in The Times stated that since 1836, 23,000 children had been educated in the schools. Also it said that thousands had been educated in other places that they paid for. The article also said that since he started, 64,000 Bibles, 85,000 Testaments, and 29,000,000 religious books had been made, and given away. They also had to pay the support of 150 missionaries.”

“In 1875, at the age of 70, he began a 17-year period of missionary travel. He preached in the United States, India, Australia, Japan, China, and nearly forty other countries. He traveled over 200,000 miles, and that was before the airplane was invented.”

1. Matthew 7:7
2. John 14:13-14
3. Matthew 6:25-26

I. EARLY LIFE

B) George was born in Kroppenstadt, Prussia to a decently well-off, middle class, but non-religious family. His father had a good, government job collecting taxes from local businesses.

1. By George's own account his father was fairly generous to his children giving them rather large quantities of money relative to their ages and encouraging them to spend it on indulgences.

2. This seemed to cause young George to have greedy and entitled tendencies. Eventually young George would take to stealing directly from the collected tax money.

3. Once when George was caught he was severely disciplined, but he claimed all this taught him was the importance of being more clever the next time.

4. As another example of George's bad nature the story goes that when George was 14 his mother lay dying while George was carousing with

some friends. The following day, a Sunday, found George in a tavern drinking, playing cards, etc. seemingly unaffected by his mother's death.

- C) When George was 11 his father determined that George should pursue employment as a Lutheran minister, and so George was enrolled in the cathedral classical school at Halberstadt.
- D) In his current unrepentant state George completed his confirmation, and began partaking in communion.
- E) The following year George's father changed districts for his tax collecting and moved his family to a new city. However George was left behind for the summer to finish his father's work in Kroppenstadt and oversee some house renovations. While he was there he helped himself to the tax revenue. Then in November George left Kroppenstadt for Magdeburg and a new school. Along the way he treated himself to luxurious accommodations. He quickly ran out of money, and on several occasions snuck off without paying. Eventually he was caught and jailed, and his father came to pay his fines and expenses to get George released.

- F) The following October (1822) George enrolled in a different school. He resolved to "do better." Which he did, outwardly, to the point that the faculty praised him as a model student, but, inwardly, he was a self-indulgent disaster and often engaged in many of the same sorts of trouble-making which had become his habit.
- G) In 1825 George entered Halle University. Being accepted at Halle also gained him the opportunity to preach in Lutheran churches. George merely saw this as a form of employment, but he wondered whether any church would take him and decided he should reform his behavior and reputation some. This would lead to THE pivotal moment in George's life.

II. CONVERSION/MINISTRY TRAINING

- A) In his pursuit of personal reform George befriended a fellow student, whom he believed to be a strong Christian, named Beta. Each secretly hoped to follow the example of the other, and each of them misjudged the character of the other.

- B) In mid-November, 1825 Beta told George he was going to a "cottage meeting that evening and invited George to join him.
- C) Upon asking what would happen at the meeting George was informed they would pray, read the Bible, sing some hymns and someone would read a printed sermon. (It was illegal for lay people to preach their own words in Germany at the time.) George witnessed, and felt, such joy as he had never known while at the meeting that when he got home he knelt to continue praying. He knew this was what he had been looking for in all his pursuits of pleasure. George described this as the night of his conversion.
- D) George began to eagerly read the Bible and frequently attend church services. He did these things to the extent that other Halle University students began to make fun of him, but he did not care.
- E) By January, 1826 George considered becoming a missionary, but at present his missionary endeavors consisted only of writing letters. George pursued his

father so aggressively that his father told George to give up this foolishness or he would quit paying George's tuition. George concluded that to be free to be obedient to God he would have to give up his father's support. This left George with a problem, his tuition bill would soon be due. Very soon however God prompted a professor to suggest George as a paid German-language tutor for some American university professors who needed help learning German.

- F) In November 1827 his mentor, Dr. Tholuck, discovered George was interested in being a missionary to Jews. Dr. Tholuck had a connection to a missionary society in London who did just that. He suggested George's name to them. About a year later they agreed to take George on, but they said he had to travel to London. George was stuck because he had not performed his mandatory military service, so he couldn't get a passport. A few months later he suffered a significant stomach ailment which later led to failing the military physical, being exempted from service and soon receiving his passport and traveling to London.

G) While in London George learned of a missionary who had declined to receive a salary saying only that God would provide for his needs. This left an indelible impression on the 24 year old George.

H) A short time later his stomach trouble resurfaced causing George to go stay with a minister to recuperate. During this time George became impressed that the only text truly necessary for him was the Bible. Later in life he would regularly read through the Bible 4 times per year.

I) About this time George became impatient with waiting on the London missionary society and resorted to casting lots trying to discern what he should do next. When this led him to 3 successive poor choices he resolved to never cast lots again, but rather to read the Bible and pray and then wait however long it took for God to reveal what George should do next. This would become another hall mark of George's life.

J) Being anxious to begin missionary work, but not receiving an appointment from the missionary society George began trying to reach the lost people around him. Late in 1829 George asked the

society to give him an appointment telling them he would gladly work without a salary. He received a response early in 1830 telling him he no longer had a relationship with the society.

K) While waiting for the society's response George came across three passages from the Bible that further shaped his views of dependence on God:

1. Matthew 7:7

2. John 14:13-14

3. Matthew 6:25-26

L) A short time later George found out he was not going to be a missionary soon and began looking for how God would supply him and George began preaching as he was doing this he preached at Ebenezer chapel where the congregation eventually asked him to stay on a full time basis. This would finally launch George into full time ministry.

III. PLYMOUTH BRETHERN

IV. SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTION

V. ORPHANAGES

VI. MISSIONARY JOURNEYS