

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Fifteen

The Recovery of Living by Faith Part Five on the Life of George Müller

Introduction

As we consider the Lord's servants, we seek to focus on the Lord's way and work within these vessels of honor that became useful to the Master. Witness Lee points out, "Our study of biographies and histories is not for seeking out the outward manifestations of historical figures in order to reproduce them; rather, it is for seeking out the way God took in them and the work He did in them." We will bear this in mind as we approach the subject of the recovery of living by faith.

Living by faith is a precious looking to the Lord for one's material needs. This involves trusting in God with singleness of heart and vision, since no one can serve two masters. The Lord Jesus bore this testimony of living in full dependence upon the Father during the years of His earthly ministry as the God-man. Then many of the apostles followed in the same manner. They trusted in God for their necessities as they travelled from city to city proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.

But, as we know, the "anxieties of the age and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mark 3:19) can bring in temptations and degradation. We see in church history that money became a source of much compromise of the truth and leavening of the gospel. Thus, there was a need for some among the Lord's people to return to a full dependence upon God for their living and serving. George Müller was such a person, and his example of trusting in the Lord for all his needs has been a blessing to many.

Witness Lee comments, "The recovery of living by faith before God centered on George Müller, who testified that man could see God's answer to prayer in the practical matter of finances. Therefore, man should not trust in his money but in God. This practice existed in the days just after Pentecost, but later it disappeared. Luther did not recover

this matter, and although it was partially recovered with the Moravian Brethren, it was not recovered in a clear way. The recovery of the way of living by faith did not become crystal clear until George Müller.

He and Darby lived at approximately the same time, and both of these brothers lived under this principle.

They lived by faith before God, freed from religious organization and human methods. The expenses related to the work and the financial

support of all the serving ones were a big temptation. But they relied on God, and God looked upon their faith and answered their prayers of faith by specially caring for them. They had many testimonies of this kind of care."

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Witness Lee

First Experience in His Youth

Young George first encountered a conflict between trusting the Lord or trusting money when he felt led by the Lord to prepare to become a missionary. Being young, he had to seek his father's permission in order to affiliate himself with a missionary institution in Germany. His father was greatly opposed to this plan. It was at this time George resolved to follow the Lord's leading at any cost. He realized that the only way he could be free of his dependence upon man was to be entirely dependent upon God. From that time on he decided to no longer take any money from his father. This was a big step for a young man who had lived a life of always being financially bailed out of trouble by his

father. As he looked to the Lord to supply what he needed during his last two years at the university, George came to know that his heavenly Father was a faithful provider.

The Testimony of A. H. Francke

During this period, George took advantage of two months of free housing that was made available to poor divinity students. The lodging happened to be in a large house, a former orphanage, built by A. H. Francke, who had been a godly professor of divinity at Halle



A. H. Francke

approximately a hundred years earlier. Francke had been concerned about the many street children who were growing up around him in ignorance and crime. In 1695 he instituted a one-room “ragged school.” He eventually established the first orphanage in Germany and there hundreds of children were fed, clothed and educated. In addition, many more attended day schools administered by Francke. Francke and his workers trusted God for all the needs associated with this work. They found the Lord’s supply was always sufficient.

The young George Müller was impressed by hearing this testimony and also by reading Francke’s biography. Francke’s establishing an orphanage in entire dependence upon God became both an inspiration and a pattern for Müller. Müller often mentioned how indebted he was for the example of simple trust in prayer exhibited by A.H. Francke.

The Testimony of Anthony Groves

Another strong testimony that had a molding effect upon young George was that of Anthony Norris Groves. At the time when George was considering the mission field, he heard of Anthony Groves, described by some as the “father of faith missions.” Groves was a dentist who had responded to the Lord’s calling, resigned from his practice and, with his wife and children, offered himself as the

first Protestant missionary in Bagdad. He was not supported by any missionary society but trusted in the Lord to meet all his temporal needs.

This living act of trust in God had a deep impact upon George. To Müller, he was a present-day example of one who brought all

things before the Lord, and his testimony was another life lesson in faith to George Müller. It is interesting to note that years after hearing of Anthony Norris Groves, George came to know him well, and eventually married Mary Groves, Anthony’s sister.



Anthony Groves

Refusing a Salary

When George began his serving life in the ministry, he moved to the small town of Teignmouth, England. He made it clear to the congregation that he did not want to be paid a salary since he was not a hireling of man, but a servant of God. He looked to the Lord for the provision of his temporal needs, though he did remind the saints that it was a responsibility and privilege to fellowship with the Lord’s servants. Like Paul, he did not seek their gift, but the fruit that would increase to their account in the day of the Lord (Phil. 4:17).

To not accept a salary was a decision made according to his conscience and guided by his understanding of the Word of God. This was another instance in which he was willing to subject all customs and practices to the test of the Word. At that time, pastor salaries were related to fixed pew rents. Müller felt that pew rents created some class distinction among the rich and poor members (James 2:1-6), since only the more wealthy could afford to rent pews. He also felt fixed salaries for ministers of the gospel could become a cause of compromise, because some ministers would be intimidated to speak the truth freely to those who were paying their salaries.

Consequently, George would only accept

voluntary designated offerings. George determined not to ask help from man, even in bearing the costs of his travel in the Lord's service. He did not state his needs or appeal to any for aid. He felt that doing so would be trusting in the arm of the flesh instead of the Lord Himself.

Finding a Like-minded Wife

Proverbs 18:22 tells us that whoever finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from Jehovah. This was indeed the case for our brother George Müller. His marriage to Mary Groves was surely a match in the Lord. Along with their mutual love for one another and consecration to the Lord, they both had a mind and heart to serve and live by faith in God's provision. From the beginning of their married life, they followed the Lord's command in Luke 12:33 and sold their possessions and gave alms. They would not store up any money, even against a time of future need or crisis. Their treasure was in the heavens, where no thief could come or moth could corrupt. Following this step of voluntary poverty, they looked to the Lord for all the necessities for their living and serving. Years later, George testified, "Not once, or five times, or five hundred times, but thousands of times in these threescore years, have we had in hand not enough for one more meal, either in food or in funds; but not once has God failed us; not once have we or the orphans gone hungry or lacked any good thing."

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The Orphanages

The orphan work in Bristol, England, that George Müller began was gradually built up until eventually over 2,000 orphans were housed, fed, clothed, and educated year by year. George Müller personally supervised this work for over sixty years.

The book, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller* has been a great blessing to the Lord's children and

has encouraged many to trust and depend on the Lord for everything. This accounting record of sorts contains meticulous records regarding all aspects of the orphan work. Throughout the Narrative, you find remarks by George such as, "Every shilling of this money, and all the articles of clothing and furniture, which have been mentioned in the foregoing pages, have been given to me, without one single individual having been asked by me for anything."

Among the basic principles by which George Müller and his workers ran the orphanage: They would not seek any patronage of the world and would not accept monetary help from unbelievers; they would not go into any debt for any cause in their work for the Lord; they would not measure their success by any financial means; they would not compromise the truth that would impair the Lord's testimony; they would not look to any persons, regardless of their financial strength, but only to the rich and bountiful Lord.

Resolutely abiding in faith and prayer upon these principles, George Müller and his helpers passed through many periods of trial. They endured frequent and protracted times of financial straits. The money in hand for personal needs and for the needs of the orphans was often reduced to a single pound and sometimes to nothing. But the supply was always forthcoming, though often at the last moment. In such times they did not appeal for aid to any, but unto the living God alone. Their resort was to the One who is the Father to the orphans (Psalm 68:5), and this Father never allowed his children to be hungry. Time and time again, His faithfulness was manifested. Müller would not trust himself or neglect the word of God and prayer, even after

many positive experiences of knowing the Lord's answer to their prayers.



May the South Wind Blow

George Müller's practice was to bring every matter, small or large, to the Lord. One year in late November a boiler in one of the orphan houses developed a leak. It would be impossible to pass through the winter without heat in this home, so it was imperative that the boiler be repaired. However, this was an expensive and complex task. Adding to the dilemma was the fact that repairing the boiler would involve shutting off the heat for the repair period and there was no place to take the children during this time. Müller and his companions offered two specific prayers concerning this situation: one, that the Lord would be pleased to change the cold north wind into a warm south wind during this time; and two, that He would give the workmen a mind to work as in the days of Nehemiah.

On the day the repair work was started, the south wind blew exactly as they had prayed. The weather was so mild that no fire was needed. The brickwork was removed, the leak found and the boiler makers diligently set to work repairing the leak. The supervisor of the repairmen offered that the men would work late into the evening and come again early in the morning to continue. But the workmen were of a different mind: "We would rather, sir work all night." By morning the repair was completed and within about 30 hours there was fire in the boiler. During all the time of the repair the south wind blew mildly, and none of the children suffered from the cold.

Secret Transactions

Incidents of the Lord's meeting their needs were often not made known until much later in time. One such occurrence took place when a brother visited Müller's home. After spending the night, they enjoyed a simple breakfast together. At that time there was no appearance of any need. When he left, the guest offered Mr. Müller a donation, having no idea of the present state of affairs. Two years later an entry in the annual report told how the money that the guest offered provided what they needed to purchase the next meal.

At times like these (and there were many), George Müller thanked and praised the Lord. Regarding this particular incident he said, "I cannot describe the joy I had in God when I received this donation. It must be known from experience in order to be felt. The joy which answers to prayer give cannot be described; and the impetus which they afford to the spiritual life is exceedingly great. The experience of this happiness I desire for all my Christian readers."

Measles

Sickness at times came among the orphans. In the autumn of 1866 measles began to spread in three of the orphan houses. The saints prayed that there might not be too many children ill at one time with the disease, so that there would be adequate space in the sick rooms. They further prayed that the children who were taken ill might recover and not die. The Lord graciously listened to their supplications. Although 262 children became sick with measles, not one died, and there were no long-term consequences of the disease. How the saints were grateful for the Lord's mercy and blessing as a precious answer to their prayers.



Conversions

The workers also labored in prayer for the spiritual welfare of all the orphans under their care. These petitions were also abundantly answered and hundreds of the children came to know the Lord. At various times there would be periods when the Spirit was particularly working among the orphans and many were brought to salvation. This work was not a mere passing enthusiasm, but a deep and powerful work of the Holy Spirit and a most precious answer to prayer. As this work of the Spirit spread among the various houses and age groups, it brought great encouragement to the workers.

Support

Prayers were made not only for the needs among them, but for the work going on abroad. George Müller had a great burden to help support those serving the Lord on the mission field. At the end of 1863 Müller recorded, "It was my earnest desire, to do . . . all I could, in sending help to needy labourers in the gospel." According to his calculations, the need came to 476 pounds, but 280 pounds was all he had, so he wrote a check for that amount. Then, as was his habit, he prayed that day for various matters at hand, including his desire to support these missionaries. He asked the Lord that He would give more funds for them. When he went home that night he found a gift of 100 pounds designated for missions and 100 pounds left at his disposal. Recognizing the Lord's hand, he took the whole 200 pounds for missions, and thus had 480 pounds in hand to meet the need of 476 pounds he had desired for this purpose. Thus came another answer to prayer and an entrance into a spiritual enjoyment through this answer. This provision also gladdened the hearts of many devoted servants of Christ in China and elsewhere.

Conclusion

Thank the Lord for His work in His servant George Müller. The Lord worked Himself into Müller and this work was expressed in an excellent manner. The principles by which the Lord operates remain the same, but the manifestation of the Lord's work greatly varies from person to person as we have seen in previous sessions. The same God is working, but His working is shown in different ways through different people. George Müller did not intend for us to follow him in the same work, but we can follow the inner principles of life by which he lived.

One person who received much help from George Müller was Hudson Taylor. Müller's living by faith contributed much to Hudson Taylor's learning of the Lord's ways. Taylor, like Müller, would not depend on mission boards and human methods to support his gospel work in China. He said, "I do not do anything by asking for donations; I rely only

on God's mercy." Taylor touched the matter of the living by faith primarily as it was recovered through the testimony of George Müller.

May we also today be such learners – ones who come to the Lord in trusting prayer for all of our needs, and who find that "They who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true."

Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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