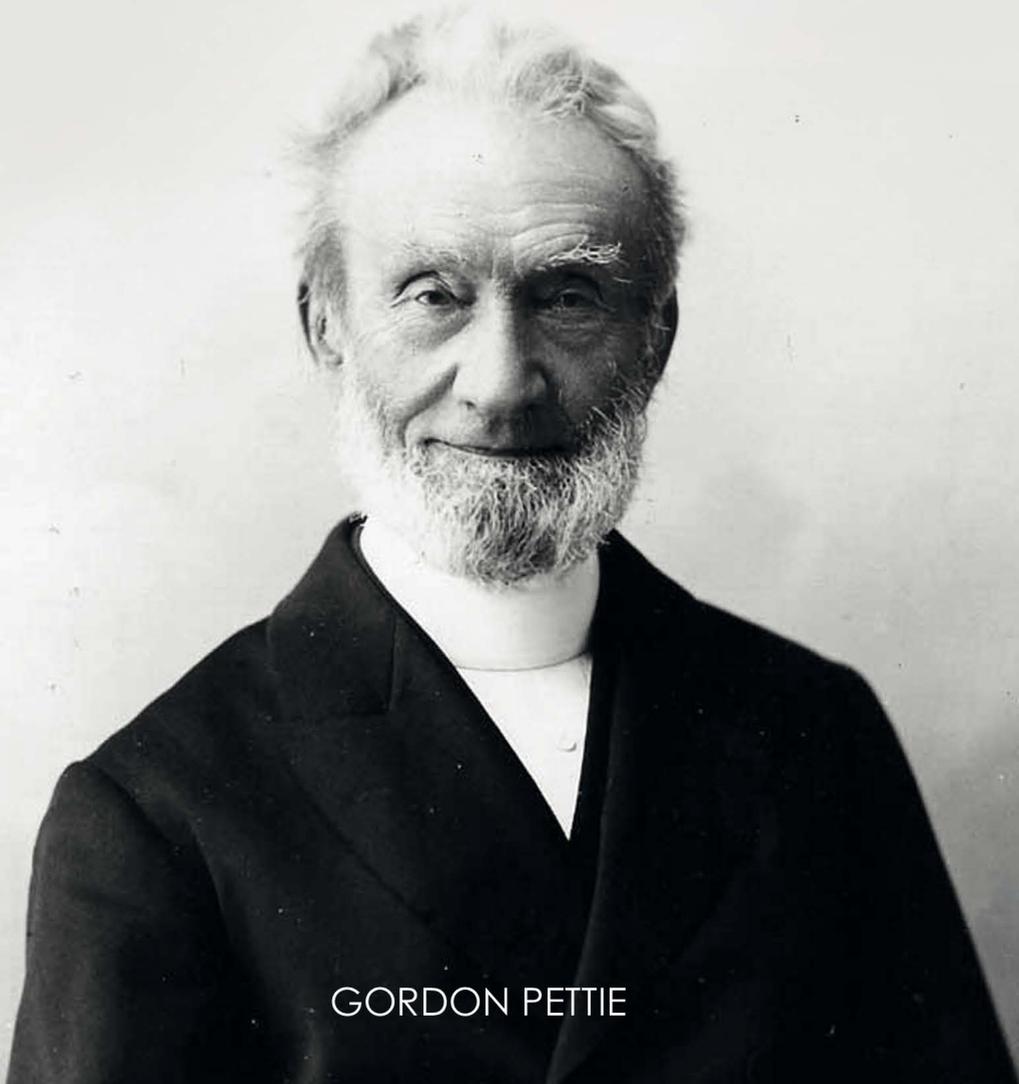


GEORGE MÜLLER

A MAN THAT PROVED GOD



GORDON PETTIE

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George Müller brought prayer and care together to prove God and transform lives.

On Monday 14th March 1898, a funeral took place in Bristol, quite unlike any that Bristol had ever seen. The streets of the city were lined with thousands of people. Bristol came to a standstill. All of the factories and shops closed. Flags flew at half-mast.

Who commanded such a funeral? His name was George Müller, a German immigrant who had pastored a Church in Bristol for 50 years.

Christians know little about him today, but the work that he started in Bristol continues to this day -

reaching more than he ever reached in his lifetime. Those who knew him as a boy could never have imagined what he would achieve.

He was born in Prussia in September 1805. At the age of 11, his father sent him to the Cathedral Classical School at Halberstadt. He wanted his son to become a clergyman. He considered a clergyman was a comfortable living and would enable the young Müller to look after him in his old age!

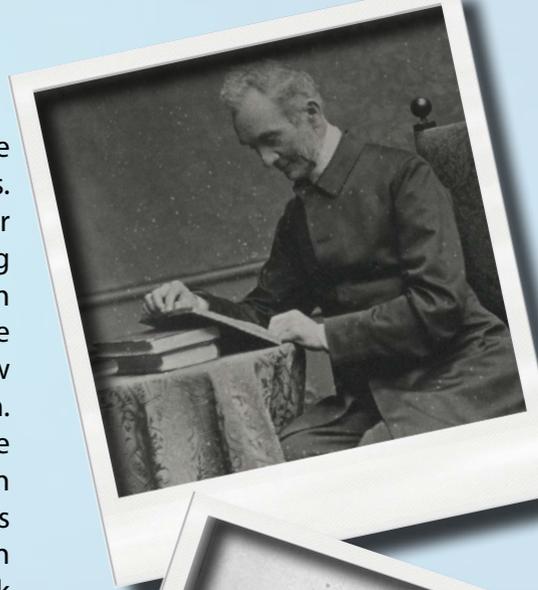
Müller had no interest in the Church. He much preferred drinking gambling and spending money. Three days before his confirmation and first communion in the Church he committed what he called gross immorality. Christmas 1821 saw him in prison for living in hotels and not paying the bills. When his father discovered where he was, he paid his debt, took him home and gave him a severe beating.

As he moved from teen to twenties he determined to change his ways. In 1825, he enrolled into Halle University. One day whilst drinking in a tavern one of his friends, Beta, told him that he had begun visiting a Christian's house on Saturday's for a prayer meeting. Would he like to

come? Not knowing what to expect he agreed to join Beta for one of the meetings. Such an impression was made on Müller by the meeting that he started returning to the house to read the Scriptures with the owner. His life didn't suddenly change but it changed sufficiently for his fellow students to begin to laugh and mock him. In typical youthful eagerness he wrote to his father to tell him of the change in his life. He urged his father to follow his example and couldn't understand it when his father sent him an angry letter back in reply! His relationship with his father deteriorated further when Müller told him that he wanted to become a missionary. His father was angry that he had spent all his money educating him so that he could be looked after in his old age, and told him he would receive no more money from him.

This created a problem for Müller as he had two years remaining of his university studies. However some American professors came to Halle University to study. They needed help with translating lectures and writings into German. One of Müller's professors made a suggestion that Müller could assist. They paid Müller handsomely for his help.

There now began for Müller a search to discover what God wanted him to do with his life. When a mentor mentioned



working for the London Missionary Society for Promoting Christianity to the Jews, he felt a calling. In June 1828 the Society invited him to London on six months' probation. Within a few months of arriving in London, Müller fell very ill. It was suggested to Müller his health might improve if he spent some time enjoying country air. A few days later the 23-year old Müller travelled to South Devon.

It was there that he befriended a young Scotsman called Henry Craik with whom enjoyed a unique friendship for the next 36 years. Craik had been a private tutor in the home of Anthony Groves who had greatly influenced Craik. Anthony Groves had been a successful dentist but had given it all up to serve as a missionary in Persia, trusting in God alone for all his needs.

Müller was hearing teaching he had never heard before. He returned to London with renewed vigour and health but towards the end of the year his health again deteriorated. Müller began to wonder if he was in the right place and doing the right work. He discussed it with the Society in London and they graciously released him.

With no income and no employment, he decided to return to the Exmouth area. Opportunities opened up for him to preach. Through staying in a

home recommended to him, he met a lady called Miss Groves, none other than the sister of Anthony Groves, the dentist who had gone as a missionary to Persia. Eight months later, George Müller wrote a letter to her asking her to become his wife. When Müller next visited the area, she accepted his proposal. On the 7th October 1830 they were married. Years later Müller described their wedding day: *We walked to Church, had no wedding breakfast, but in the afternoon had a meeting of Christian friends and commemorated the Lord's death. And then I drove off in the stage coach with my beloved bride to Teignmouth and the next day we went to work for the Lord.* He was invited to preach daily in the Chapel in Teignmouth. At the end of twelve weeks the Chapel members unanimously invited him to become their pastor.

There were so many ways that Teignmouth was a training ground for Müller. Initially the Church paid him a salary of fifty-five pounds a year. Müller could see that the money was coming from the Church renting out pews. He was troubled by this practice. At the end of October 1830, three weeks after he had married Mary Groves, he told the Church he would not longer take a salary from them. It was decided to place a box in the Chapel for anonymous donations for those who wanted to support

the Müller's. They started married life by selling or giving away everything they had. They resolved to follow the path of trusting in God alone for their needs, regardless of the cost. One year after the Müller's stopped receiving a salary, he recorded in his diary:

November 27th was the Lord's day. Our bread was hardly enough for the day. I brought our needs before the Lord several times ... While I was praying, there was a knock at the door. A poor sister came in and brought us some of her dinner and five shillings. Later, she also brought us a large loaf of bread.

Ten months after marriage, Mrs Müller struggled through seventeen hours of the most severe labour to deliver a still born baby. At the time of the birth, her life was in great danger and remained so for several weeks. She never fully regained full health and strength.

The following April Müller's friend, Henry Craik, preached to large crowds at Gideon Chapel in Bristol and wrote to Müller inviting him to come and help. Müller was already sensing his time in Teignmouth was drawing to an end. He travelled to Bristol to assist Craik and meet the people. Immediately he sensed it was right for him to move to Bristol. Leaving Teignmouth after two and a quarter years, was a struggle. But Müller knew obedience was always the way to blessing.



Besides the congregation at Gideon Chapel, Bristol, a new congregation was also formed at the Bethesda Chapel in Great George Street. The opening service at Bethesda Chapel was on July 5th 1832 and Muller preached. Quickly the Chapels attracted much interest, though the Scottish accent of Craik and the German accent of Müller caused some to wonder what they were preaching about!

A month after the work started, Mrs Müller went into labour for the second time. For a time her life was in great danger. Müller spent the night in prayer and on the 17th September 1832 their daughter Lydia was born. She was their only child who survived infancy.

The following year, Müller and Craik formed a new Institution with the goals of assisting day schools and Sunday schools, which gave instruction on Scriptural principles; to distribute Holy Scriptures; and to assist missionaries whose ministry was carried out according to Scripture. Within a year they had opened two boys' schools and three girls' schools providing schooling to 439 children.

Two weeks after the launch, Mrs Müller gave birth to the Muller's first

living son. Thankfully this birth was not marked by the difficulties the two previous labours had caused. They called the child Elijah, which means *My God is Jehovah*. Sadly within two years Elijah died of pneumonia.

Müller continued to experience ill-health. At times he felt so weak that he had to refrain from all public speaking and he even wondered if he should leave Bristol. The family went and stayed on the Isle of Wight for a period of time.

Once back in Bristol the Lord gave Müller a fresh vision and direction. He particularly felt burdened for the orphans who were on every street corner because of the deadly cholera epidemic sweeping through the United Kingdom. On the 21st November, he wrote: *Today I have had it very much impressed on my heart, no longer merely to think about the establishment of an Orphan House, but actually to set about it ...* . He saw the challenge not just as a way of showing compassion to the children but of demonstrating to the world the reality of God.

He called a public meeting where he announced he was opening an Orphanage where there would be no charge for admission and no restriction on grounds of class or

creed. He asked the Lord for a suitable building, a thousand pound, and qualified individuals to care for the children.

Two days after the public meeting he received his first donation for the orphan home – one shilling. A couple of days later someone offered some furniture – a large wardrobe.

He was told about a large terrace house, No. 6 Wilson Street, which was available at a low rent. After viewing it he decided to rent it for a year and use it as a home for 30 girls aged from seven to twelve years of age. The first girls arrived on the 11th April 1836. The enormity of the task Müller had taken on immediately hit him. Thirty hungry children plus their staff, needed feeding three times a day, seven days a week. Thirty children meant thirty pairs of shoes, meant clothes and replacements for when their clothes were washed or worn out. He clung to the words of Matthew 5: *Do not worry saying, "what shall we eat, or what shall we wear?" But seek first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added to you.*

As soon as that Home opened, he realised he needed another home for children under seven years of age. In the October of 1836 he managed to rent No. 1 Wilson Street. He was

determined to open a third Home for boys aged seven and over. Müller was offered another house in Wilson Street to rent, No. 3, and that opened as an Orphan House for boys on October 21st 1837.

With the new Boy's Orphanage opened, Müller knew he had no alternative but to take some time away from Bristol for rest. Disorderly nerves were diagnosed, then an inactive liver. He was not able to preach at Bethesda Chapel from November 6th 1837 until the 8th May 1838.

Whilst Müller is renowned for the way that money arrived when he prayed, there were many times when he struggled. He recounts in his diary for September 25th 1838: *In four days the rent for the orphan houses will be due and we have nothing for it. Also the housekeeping money in the three houses is gone again. May the Lord have compassion on us and continue to help us!* Four days later the rents had to be paid and despite intensive prayer, they had no money to pay it. Müller says what he learnt from this experience was: *I am now fully convinced that the rent should be put aside daily or weekly as God prospers us, in order that the work, may be a testimony.*

At the beginning of 1840 Müller went and visited his father in Germany. The

old animosity between them was gone. There was a clear affection. Whilst his father was weak, he joined Müller in prayers and reading the Bible. It was to be the last time he saw his father who died the month after Müller's visit.

Until now Müller and Craik had pastored between them two Chapels – Bethesda Chapel and Gideon Chapel. The decision was taken to concentrate all their efforts on Bethesda Chapel. Bethesda was now a thriving Church of five hundred members. It continued to

grow and records for 1870 show over a thousand members.

Müller was very careful about who he received money from. At the beginning of January 1840, even though Müller did not have enough money to meet expenses, when he received an envelope with money for the orphans, and knew the individual who donated it was deeply in debt he returned the envelope with all the money inside. It was a principle of Müller that no one had a right to give while in debt.

A couple of months later Müller



received a letter from a brother who had on several occasions donated to the institute. *I have received a little money. Do you have any present need for the institution under your care? I know you do not ask, except of Him whose work you are doing; but to answer when asked, seems the right thing to do.* At the time of the letter arriving Müller had considerably needs. Nevertheless he answered: *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.* After sending off the reply, Müller recorded in his diary: *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. On the 26th March, the brother gave 100 pounds.*

Müller was adamant that the way he saw the Lord provide for his needs, could be the experience of every Christian. There were those who suggested to him that he had a special gift of faith for finances in line with 1 Corinthians 12.9. Müller was adamant that he did not have the gift of faith and he was thankful that he did not have it. Müller wanted to emphasise that if believers cast all their burdens upon the Lord, and trusted in Him for everything, expecting answers to their petitions

when asked according to His will and in the name of the Lord Jesus, then they could experience exactly the same as he had.

Müller's influence began to grow around the country. Charles Spurgeon held Müller in such esteem that he made a number of visits to the Orphanages in Bristol and invited Müller to preach at the Tabernacle. He called Müller that 'heavenly-minded man.' They often spent days together, stimulating each other's faith by discussing the unfailing promises of God.

As the number of houses that Müller rented as Orphan Homes grew so did the concern of the neighbours in Wilson Street where they were all situated. Things came to a head at the end of October 1845. Müller received a letter from one of the Wilson Street residents, drawing Müller's attention to the problems the Orphan Houses were causing. Müller spent many hours seeking God's will. He outlined the pros and cons.

Reasons for moving from Wilson Street.

1. Neighbours don't enjoy the noise of the children.
2. The number of residents in each house causing drainage problems.
3. There are no playgrounds on

Wilson Street for the children to play in.

4. There are no gardens at any of the Wilson Street houses.

5. In times of sickness, everyone is too close together. None of the houses has a spare single room to isolate a sick child.

Reasons for remaining on Wilson Street.

1. God has plainly given the Wilson Street location and made houses available.

2. More houses on Wilson Street could be rented and one used as an infirmary.

3. If rented houses are done away with, the only alternative would be to build. To do so would involve a considerable sum of money.

As Müller prayed he sensed the Lord's leading towards building a purpose build Orphanage, able to accommodate 300 children.

Müller and his colleagues met every morning to pray. On the 36th day of prayer, he received the largest donation he had ever received, a thousand pound. Then his sister-in-law returned from a visit to London to tell him of a gentleman who was interested in the work Müller was doing. The gentleman had told the sister he was an architect and a Christian, and he offered to design an Orphanage and supervise the building of it for free.

Müller started searching for land. When he heard of land for sale at Ashley Down, he tried to find the owner but kept missing him. In the end he decided to leave it with the Lord. The next day they met. The owner told Müller that the night before the Lord had told him in a dream to sell the land to Müller for 120 pound an acre – instead of the 200 an acre he was trying to sell it for. Müller agreed to purchase nearly seven acres. The building work finally began in July 1847.

June 18th to 23rd 1849 was an exciting week for the children. After 13 years in rented houses in Wilson Street, the children moved from the four houses to the new Orphan House. No sooner was the Orphan House fully operating with 300 orphans and 35 staff, than Müller was thinking of building another Orphan House, large enough to accommodate 700 children. No one in the whole of Britain was doing anything as radical as Müller in the care of orphaned children.

Müller decided to do what he had done for the first property and set out the pros and cons.

Reasons not to build another Orphan House.

1. Would it go beyond my spiritual capabilities?

2. Would it be going beyond my

physical and mental strength?

3. Is it 'tempting God' to think of building another Orphan House?
4. How will I get the money for building this large Orphan House?
5. Suppose I succeed in getting this large Orphan House built, how will I be able provide for 700 more orphans?
6. Would building another Orphan House cause me to be lifted up in pride?

Müller then sought to think through the reasons for another Orphan House.

1. Many applications for admission for orphans continue to come in.
2. The moral state of the Poor Houses and prisons greatly influences me to go forward
3. I am encouraged by the help which the Lord has given in this blessed service
4. My experience and capabilities have grown with the work.
5. My greatest desire is to show forth the glory of God.
6. I am peaceful and happy in the prospect of enlarging the work.

Müller came to the conclusion that it was the will of God that a further Home be built.

The children Müller was caring for had all suffered the trauma of losing their parents and the majority of

children had lived on the streets begging to survive. Putting them together in one building was not easy for them or the staff. Somehow Müller and his team held it all together and cared for the children and loved them to adulthood. One of the orphan boys, George Collett, in later life, wrote of his experiences on arriving at a Müller Home .

A matron came and took my sisters and told me another lady was coming for me soon. We went up a long drive to the Boys Wing. I had to have a bath and all my clothes were taken away. I was now fitted with different clothes – three sets of them – and was told I would be No. 23 from now on ... Boys crowded round me like a swarm of bees and fired questions at me with bewildering rapidity.

I tried to put on a brave face and didn't cry, but I could hardly understand a word they said ... next a barber came along and my hair was cut to what the boys called a 'Bicky'(short for biscuit). It was cropped short.

I lay in bed that night in a cavernous dormitory with about 50 other boys. Later when it was nearly dark, one of the staff came round and found me still awake. A kindly word and a pat on the head, and I soon fell asleep. I was not in prison. I was in Müller's Homes, Bristol.

By 1855 Müller was searching for more land. As he searched, he realised that if he built two houses, one either side of the existing Orphan House he could build on the land the institute already owned. With the need desperate - children literally living on the streets waiting for a bed, thousands living in the prisons as they had nowhere else to go to - Müller did not want to delay a single day. He had sufficient funds to start work straightaway and by November 1857, the long-prayed-for day arrived. The new Home for two hundred infant girls and 200 girls from eight years opened. Within three months Müller started towards building the third house.

Caring for this number of orphans was a costly business. There were those who said there was no way he would be able to provide for so many children and such a large staff force. But he did and proved he served a God who answered prayer. One such answer was follows:

"The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat," the housemother informed George Müller. George asked her to take the 300 children into the dining room and have them sit at the tables. He thanked God for the food and waited. George knew God would provide food for the children. Within minutes, a baker

knocked on the door. "Mr. Müller," he said, "last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in." Soon, there was another knock at the door. It was the milkman. His cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The milk would spoil by the time the wheel was fixed. He asked George if he could use some free milk. George smiled as the milkman brought in ten large cans of milk. It was just enough for the 300 thirsty children.

Most girls stayed at the orphanage until they were 17 and then generally went into domestic work or trained for a career, such as a nurse. Boys tended to be apprenticed at 14 or 15. As every orphan left the orphanage, they were provided with three suits of clothes at the expense of the Institute. Then each had a final one-to-one meeting with Müller in his prayer room. Müller would put half a crown in their left hand and a Bible in their right hand. They would kneel down together. Müller would put his hand on the orphan's head and commit them to God's keeping.

On the 2nd March 1862, the third - and largest of the Ashley Down Orphanage Homes - opened. Still not content he was doing enough for the orphans, in October 1864, Müller set

about buying land to build a fourth home.

Amidst all the responsibilities of a busy Church and reaching out to the poor and the needy, Müller never lost the wider vision of the Institution. During 1857-1858, 24 schools were supported or assisted, nearly 4,000 Bibles and portions of Scripture were distributed, 1 million tracts and books given away, and over £3,500 was distributed to help 82 missionaries.

One such person he reached out to was Hudson Taylor, who went on to found the China Inland Mission, now known as the Overseas Missionary Fellowship. Müller took it upon himself to financially support Hudson Taylor and other missionaries who worked alongside him.

In August 1865 Hudson Taylor visited Müller and the Orphanages at Ashley Down. He brought with him to meet Müller new recruits for his mission. He recorded in his diary: *Had an hour with Mr Müller. He spoke most preciously on the call and spirit of the missionary; on the consecutive reading of the Scriptures; on prayer and faith in God.* For the next 20 years, Müller never failed to pray and give practical support to the China Inland Mission.

On Guy Fawkes day 1868, Orphan Home No. 4 opened and on January 6th 1870, No. 5 – the last – Orphan Home was opened. Two thousand children, plus all the staff to care for them, had to be fed and watered, and clothed every day. The enormous buildings had to be maintained. Furniture had to be repaired and renewed. All by prayer.

As the fifth home was opened, it was clear Mrs Müller's health was failing. She grew thinner and tired easily, though that did not stop her working every day at the Orphanages. George Müller's wife was taken home to be with her Lord on Sunday February 6th 1870.

A few days later Müller shared with his Church family: *With every year our happiness increased more and more. I never saw my beloved wife at any time, when I met her unexpectedly anywhere in Bristol, without being delighted to do so. Day by day as we met in our dressing room at the Orphan House to wash our hands before dinner and tea, I was delighted to meet her and she equally pleased to see me.*

As the years progressed, Müller felt even more the loneliness of no helpmate that he could share with.

So it was at the age of 66, George Müller married Susannah Sangster, who he had known for more than twenty-five years. This marriage was to be for 23 years. Now a different phase in Müller's life began. He handed over the day to day responsibilities of the Orphanages to his assistant James Wright, and at the age of 70 Mr and Mrs Müller began travelling the world sharing the principles that he had learnt in Bristol.

August 1877 saw them off to the United States of America. Their crossing of the Atlantic was aboard the 4,000 ton ship, the Sardinian. The ship ran into thick fog off the coast of Newfoundland and the Captain decided to slow the ship down.

"Captain Dutton, I have to tell you that I have to be in Quebec by Saturday afternoon," Müller told the captain.

"It is impossible," replied the Captain. "Very well," said Müller. "I will ask God to make a way. I have never broken an engagement in fifty-two years."

Müller knelt and prayed. When he had finished the Captain started to pray. Müller stopped him, partly because of the Captain's unbelief, but mainly because he believed his prayer had already been answered.

"Captain," Müller continued, "I have known my Lord for fifty-two years, and there has never been a single day that I have failed to get an audience with the King. Open the door and you will find the fog gone."

Sure enough, the fog had lifted. The story is known, not because Müller told it, but because Captain Dutton frequently retold it. Shortly after his encounter with Müller, he became a Christian.

It was during this trip that the Müllers were invited to the White House and had an audience with President Hayes and his wife. On and on they went with their travels to Canada, India, Australia, China, and back to Europe. It is estimated Müller preached on average at least once a day and spoke to millions.

On Wednesday 9th March 1898, he led a prayer meeting at his Church in Bristol in the evening, before retiring to his room. The next morning a cup of tea was taken to his room at seven in the morning. There was no answer to the knock on the door. When the door was opened, Müller was found dead on the floor beside his bed. On his desk were unfinished notes for a sermon he would never preach. He

was aged 92 years.

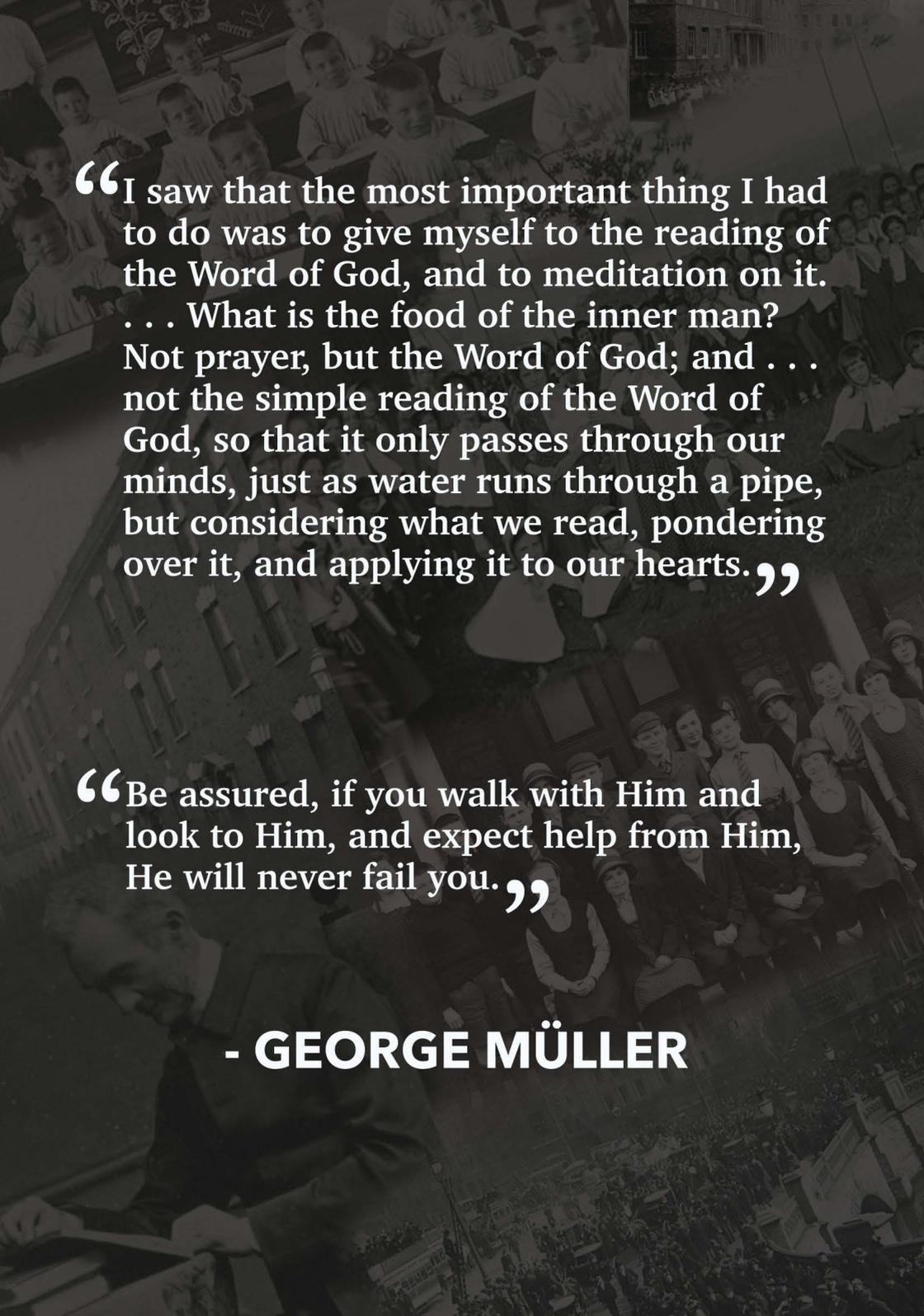
The Bristol Times said of his life: He was raised up for the purpose of showing that the age of miracles is not passed, and rebuilding the sceptical tendencies of the time.

The Daily Telegraph wrote: He (Müller) had robbed the cruel streets of thousands of victims, the jails of thousands of felons, the workhouses of thousands of helpless waifs.

On one occasion someone asked Müller what was the secret of his walk with God. He replied: "There was a day when I died, utterly died". As he spoke he bent lower and lower until he almost touched the floor. "Died to George Müller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame of even my brethren and friends; since then I have studied to show myself approved only unto God."

I wonder how many Christians today could say they have learnt how to die to self and live only to be approved by God. **What a challenge to all of us today!**





“I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, and to meditation on it. . . . What is the food of the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and . . . not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts.”

“Be assured, if you walk with Him and look to Him, and expect help from Him, He will never fail you.”

- GEORGE MÜLLER