

George Mueller

Legacies of Light, Part 12

Psalm 84:11

In her book *Mystery on the Desert*, Maria Reich described for her readers the hills and valleys created by the Indians in Peru, centuries ago.

Looping hills that would run and circle around and then suddenly stop; short mounds that seems to randomly appear . . . without any kind of sense or pattern.

For centuries, all of these twisting and turning hills and mounds and depressions were thought to be mystical patterns for some sort of worship system . . . some even thought it was ancient remnants of an irrigations system for farming.

All the way up to 1939 they remained a mystery. But in 1939, the mystery was solved when Paul Kosok, a professor of anthropology discovered that these hills were not irrigations systems after all – they were works of art created by the landscape.

He discovered it when he got into an airplane and flew overhead and discovered that that one of the patterns was clearly the outline of a bird.

Among other findings, these random hills and valleys were actually landscape drawings of birds and other animals.ⁱ

Once he flew high overhead – he gained the perspective he needed to see it clearly.

Imagine, creating art that you can't really understand on planet earth – artistic forms of beauty you can only fully appreciate and understand from a higher perspective.

Isn't that a wonderful analogy of the Christian life?

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes a rather bold statement in **chapter 8**. In fact, it's so bold and so dramatic, that many Christians have memorized it.

Let me show you two verses – first, Romans 8:28.

Paul writes in **Romans 8:28** – say it with me – ***For we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God – to those who are called according to His purpose.***

The Apostle Paul is basically saying that all those seemingly random patterns of your life – that seem somewhat mysterious and at times meandering – they stop and start – they go up and then quickly go down . . . all of that demands a higher-than-earth perspective.

Paul effectively says – let's get a higher view on life.

And he speaks with confidence, doesn't he? ***For we know that all things work together . . .***

Paul isn't guessing at this – **Romans 8:28** begins with words of reassurance - **for we know!**

By the way, you need to keep in mind that Paul did not say, "For we know that all things *are* good," because they aren't . . . some of those valleys are deep and some of those hills are treacherous.

He said, "This is what we can be confident about – **we can know that all works together for good.**"

That all things work together – that verb is *sunergeo* (συνεργεω) which gives us our English transliterated word, synergism.

Webster defined synergism, as the combined action of two or more things which have a greater total effect than the sum of their individual effects.ⁱⁱ

That's exactly what Paul has in mind.

Any one event in your life may not seem to work out. Paul is saying that *every* event synergistically produces something far better than a *single* event.

And he tells us that – **all things work together for . . . what? . . . for good!**"

Paul did not say, "All things were good." He said, "All things work together for good."

You mean even evil and sin and false accusations and injustice and failure and broken relationships and cruelty and betrayal and pain and suffering and hatred and jealousy and abandonment and murder – you mean even that?

Yes. Because every one of those single events I just mentioned took place over the last few hours in the life of Jesus Christ – and all of those single events worked together to produce something good.

Paul concludes, For those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

Those phrases are simply two descriptions of Christians.

You love God and you've been called by God to a purpose which He will ultimately fulfill in your life – not only *now* but eventually in your glorification and perfection in Christ Jesus.

Every random hill – every twisting valley – every sudden stop; every sharp turn; every climb up and every step down is the artistry of God at work.

Now, there's a lesser known Old Testament verse that could be called the twin verse of Romans 8:28.

It's found in **Psalm 84:11. For the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord bestows favor and honor – now watch this – no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12. O Lord of hosts, blessed in the one who trusts in You.**

Again, this is a reference to every believer – and with incredible confidence, the Sons of Korah, compose this statement – **No good thing will He withhold from His children.**

So if you don't have something – it's because God didn't consider it good for you. And if you have it – it's because God considered it good – for His ultimate purposes in your life!

This concept . . . these texts of scripture . . . will become the foundation for one of the most amazing testimonies of faith in modern history.

In fact, one particular man will literally stake his life and ministry on such a bold confidence – that God would never withhold what was ultimately good for His beloved – that every event worked synergistically together for ultimate good.

Before we get to this man's life long perspective and fruitful ministry, you need to know, he was an unlikely candidate for God's service.

His name was George Mueller. He was German born – technically speaking – he was born in the Kingdom of Prussia in 1805. His native language was German.

It seems that both his parents were unbelievers. In fact, his father was a tax collector for the government – made plenty of money and seemed to live for it. George and his brother routinely stole money from their father in order to support their own lives of gambling, drinking and immorality.

His father decided to make a Lutheran minister out of him – not because of spiritual obligations, but because Lutheran ministers were supported by the state and it was a comfortable life.

That didn't work out so well and it all fell apart when his mother died. George was 14 at the time and unaware that she had even died because – he

writes later – “I was playing cards until two in the morning and then on the next day, being Sunday, my companions and I got drunk and wandered the streets.”ⁱⁱⁱ

By the age of 16, George Mueller was in prison, charged with stealing. His father bailed him out, beat him and then took him to settle down and start over in another town nearby. He straightened up a bit, learned his undergraduate subjects and a few years later began seminary studies.

Yes, seminary. You’re thinking, but he’s still unconverted. I know.

George would later write that of the 900 divinity students at his seminary, only 9 of them were Christians. They would all go on to make their living off government funds, renting pews in the church and performing liturgical services, weddings and funerals.

While in seminary, Mueller was invited to an evangelical prayer meeting with a handful of humble believers. He was struck by their simple singing of hymns; the sermon that was read – and it was read because it was illegal for someone to preach and expound on scripture without an ordained minister present.

And, of course, then again, most of the ordained clergymen were unbelievers. But what struck him the most was how the meeting had begun – with everyone in the room getting on their knees and praying. He wrote, “I had *never* either seen any one on his knees, praying, nor had I at any time prayed on my knees.”

That evening on his bed, he would later write, God’s began a work of grace in me . . . that evening was the turning point in my life.”^{iv}

He was 20 years of age when he would give his life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Four years later he came to England as a missionary to the Jews – a ministry inhibited by his lack of English – and a ministry that he soon would leave due to doctrinal differences.

A year later, he would be baptized by immersion, convinced that scripture allowed for this mode

alone; and he would become the pastor of the church where he meet and marry his future wife, Mary Groves.

Following his marriage he quickly gave up a formal pastoral salary, determined to only receive from people what they would joyfully give for his allowance; and he also stopped their practice of renting out pews.

He argued that these steps of faith were necessary since the church was guilty of committing the same sin as James the Apostle warned in chapter 2 – of giving the best seats to the rich and asking the poor to stand by the wall.

While pastoring there, Mary gave birth to their stillborn child.

A year later – in 1832 – at the age of 27, he moved to pastor a small church in Bristol, England – a church he would pastor for the some 50 years. While there, they had a daughter born to them and they named her Lydia. They would later have another child – a son who would live for only 3 months. Then another son would be still born a few years later.

In the meantime, George and his wife decided to take as many orphans off the streets as they could feed. They renovated their home so that they could house 30 girls. That must have been some renovation!

It wasn’t long before the neighbors complained about the noise – I can imagine – and, get this, the neighbors complained of the regular disruption of public utilities. Evidently, when those girls were getting ready, there wasn’t any water in the neighborhood.

It was the beginning of a ministry that George Mueller and his wife would eventually see God use in a tremendously fruitful manner.

Within 10 years, and without any appeal for funds, a house was built to accommodate up to 300 children.

There are two things that I discovered in my research that you may not have known as well.

1. First, Mueller’s orphanages, which eventually included 5 buildings caring for 2,050 orphans at any single moment – were only a part of his vision.

He founded the Scripture Knowledge Institute and a five-fold commitment:

- first, to assist the education of children and adults by providing biblical curriculum;
- second, to distribute Bibles;
- third, to distribute biblical materials, tracts and literature;
- fourth, to support missionaries and
- fifth, to board, clothe and scripturally educate destitute children who have lost both parents by death.

Keep in mind the destitute condition for children in 19th century England – a supposedly civilized culture.

When George Mueller began his orphanage in 1832, there were nearly 10,000 children in prison under the age of 8.^v

So the first surprising element of his ministry was not only that he pastored a church for more than 50 years, but that his orphanage was only one part of his vision.

2. The second surprising element of his orphanage ministry was his primary objective.

He was adamant that God would *not withhold from him any good thing*. And he wanted a way to encourage other believers that God was trustworthy and that He would not withhold from them any good thing either.

And wouldn’t it be a good thing to provide the needs for these 5 branches of his ministry vision?

So, George Mueller wrote, and I quote, “The [primary] reason for establishing the Orphan House was, that God may be glorified, should He be pleased to furnish me with the finances, [showing]

that it is not a vain thing to trust in Him; and that thus the faith of His children may be strengthened.”

Because of this mission and perspective, George set a standard that he would never directly appeal for funds, but simply report how God provided. In fact, he called it, his Report – and he published it annually – it included personal testimonies and the stories of God’s wonderful provision though the faithful support of so many friends.

As an older man in his 70’s he wrote, “We do not doubt that the Lord used these [reports] again and again as instruments in leading people to help us with their financial means.”

In other words, he simply told the story of God’s faithfulness – and God brought in such a response that George and his family never took a formal salary.

But there were times, especially in the early years, when the finances didn’t come in until just in time.

It is true that on one occasion he sat at breakfast with 300 orphans, their plates in front of them and nothing on the table.

Their cups in front of their plates, empty as well. And he stood and gave thanks for their breakfast. And as he sat down, a knock on the front gate allowed a baker to enter who had been up all night, he said to Mueller, unable to sleep, baking bread for everyone.

And just then came another knock – a village milkman who’s cart had broken down right in front of the orphanage arrived to say that the milk would spoil by the time he fixed his wagon – would you be in any immediate need of free milk? It was enough for 300 children and more.

George Mueller would write as an older man, “It simply needed to be seen – that if I, a poor man, simply by prayer and faith, could establish and carry out an Orphan-House; it could be instrumental in strengthening the faith of Christians and serve as a testimony to the unconverted, of the reality of the things of God.

Imagine this life mission – to have the opportunity to become the visual aid to the world of God’s faithfulness.

George Mueller just wanted an opportunity to demonstrate that God was real – and faithful. That God would, as he would write, quoting one of his favorite texts, “*That God would not withhold anything He considered good, for those who walked with Him.*”

By the end of his ministry – and it would continue under the leadership of his son in law, long after his death – but at the end of Mueller’s life, the Institute would have:

- distributed 244,000 biblical resources;
- 285,000 entire Bibles;
- 1.4 million New Testaments,
- supported numerous missionaries – including Hudson Taylor and housed and
- cared for and educated just over 10,000 orphans.

And what can’t be fully calculated is the effect of his ministry on others. One author said that his ministry so inspired others, that at least one hundred thousand orphans were cared for in England alone.

To study the life of George Mueller is to study the life of someone who simply took God at His word.

His simple reading of the Bible – some 200 times throughout his ministry – and his simple prayer life – continues to be so commendable.

I discovered this tradition: when each child became old enough to live on his own, George would personally pray with him and put a Bible in his right hand and a coin in his left. He would explain to the young person that if he held onto what was in their right hand, God would make sure there was just enough in their left hand as well.

That’s how he lived.

When he gave his life to Christ – you remember – he was struck by believers getting on their knees to pray.

And that became his practice as well.

And when George Mueller was 92 years old, he led a prayer meeting at his church on Wednesday evening; he had asked that the next morning his hosts bring him a cup of tea: but when knocked on the door the following morning at 7:00 am, there was no answer. They entered and found him beside his bed, having died while praying on his knees.

That’s how he lived – and that’s how he died.

And he remains a living testimony to us all that God really won’t withhold any good thing – and good things might be steep hills and deep valleys and sudden stops . . .

God is creating divine art – and with a higher perspective – now and certainly later, we’ll see that God was indeed providing everything necessary for those who know Him and follow Him.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/8/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i Timothy George, “Big Picture Faith,” *Christianity Today*, September 23, 2000

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Kosok

ii *New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus*, (Lexicon Publications, Danbury, 1995), p. 1003

iii Christian Biography Resources (wholesomewords.com)

iv John Piper, 2004 Bethlehem Conference for Pastors; *George Mueller's Strategy for Showing God* (February 3, 2004)

v Ibid