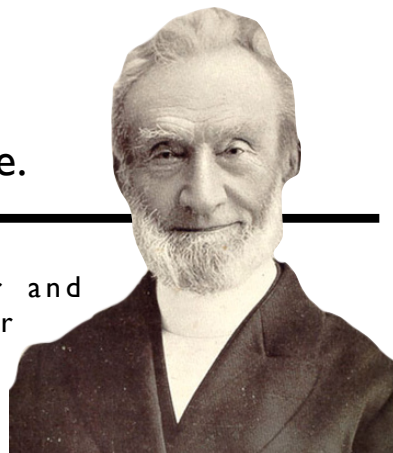


How

George Mueller

Determined The Will of God For His Life.



GEORGE MUELLER

George Mueller (also spelled Müller) was born less than a decade before **Charles Dickens** in 1805; so he was certainly aware of all the horrors of society that the famed novelist describes in his works: *workhouses, prisons, filth and disease, lack of concern for the poor and homeless* - all the things about which Ebenezer Scrooge in his unredeemed state could care less. But Mueller did care, deeply; and in 1834 he decided to do something about it. He and his best friend, Henry Craik, founded the Scriptural Knowledge Institution (SKI) in Bristol, England, with one of their prime objectives being to establish Orphan Homes for the many homeless children in Great Britain.

But Mueller and Craik had no money, nor did they intend to ask anyone for it: they believed that God would provide everything they needed - without patronage, without requests for contributions and without debts. All they had to do was pray, and God would provide.



ASHLEY DOWN ORPHAN HOUSES, BRISTOL, ENGL.

For sixty-four years, that was how George Mueller operated. In that course of time, he built The Orphanage campus at Ashley Down, where

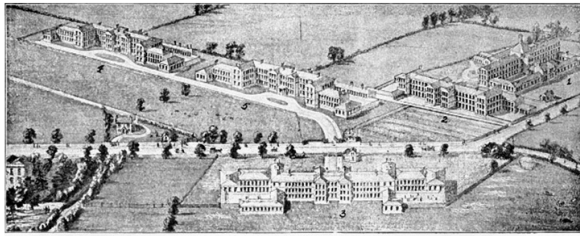
he cared for and educated over 18,000 children; educated over 100,000 more in other schools at the Orphanage's expense; distributed hundreds of thousands of Bibles and tens of millions of religious tracts; supported about 150 missionaries; travelled over 200,000 miles as a missionary himself; and shared the Gospel with over three million people around the world.

And in all that time, he never asked for one penny from anyone, his children never missed a meal, and he never had a debt. That is the remarkable record of George Mueller.

Here are some of the ways he prayed.

First, he never shared a need with anyone but God. **Second**, when he had a need, he opened his Bible, searched for a promise that fit that need, and then meditated on that Scripture. Mueller believed in the power of thinking through Scripture as much as he believed in the power of prayer. **Third**, he pleaded for that promise before God. And he didn't just pray for money: he prayed for individuals as well.

Sometimes Mueller prayed for someone for as long as fifty years. He didn't stop praying for anyone or anything until he got his request. That's how convinced he was that God would answer his prayers. Through his prayers, Mueller obtained the modern-day equivalent of 150 million dollars for his charities; he led tens if not hundreds of thousands to the Lord; and he lived to be



THE FIRST NEW GEORGIA ORPHAN ASYLUM, BRISTOL.

ninety-three years old. That was the power of his faith and life.

Once, when there was no food to give the children and it was almost lunch time, one of Mueller's assistants came to him, worried. Mueller said, *"It's not twelve o'clock yet."* Just then, a truck pulled up to the orphanage loaded with food from an unsolicited donor. Often, Mueller had no idea where their next meal was coming from: he just trusted God's promises. Another time, when Mueller was onboard a ship that was lost in fog, he comforted the anxious captain by saying, *"My eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life."* They came out of the fog, and that captain later gave his life to Christ.

For George Mueller, prayer wasn't just a "quiet time" with God in the morning, although that was important: it was a way of life. He said, *"I live in the spirit of prayer. I pray as I walk about, when I lie down and when I rise up. And the answers are always coming. Thousands and tens of thousands of times have my prayers been answered. When once I am persuaded that a thing is right and for the glory of God, I go on praying for it until the answer comes. George Mueller never gives up!"*

Part of Mueller's success was due to his attitude. Someone once asked him the secret of his service, and he said, *"There was a day when I died, utterly died: died to George Mueller, his opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren and friends."*

And since then, I have studied only to show myself 'approved unto God.'" Being dead to self, the world, approval, and blame, freed Mueller of the cares of life that hold so many of us back, freed him to be alive only to Christ, freed him to serve.

The promise George Mueller clung to most throughout his life, and I'm guessing the one he prayed most often, was *"Open wide your mouth and I will fill it"* (Psalm 81:10b). He had no "Plan B" for his life. If his prayers had failed, his orphanages would have failed. Mueller was totally dependent on God. That was how he wanted it. He wanted people to see that God was faithful and could be trusted. He once said, *"I have joyfully dedicated my whole life to the object of exemplifying how much may be accomplished by prayer and faith."* His life certainly exemplified that.



How George Mueller Described His Prayer Time

1. *"I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nine-tenths of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what His will is."*
2. *"Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impressions. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions."*

3. *"I seek the will of the Spirit of God through or in connection with the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also."*
4. *"Next I take into account providential circumstances. These plainly indicate God's will in connection with His Word and Spirit."*
5. *"I ask God in prayer to reveal His will to me aright."*
6. *"Thus through prayer to God, the study of the Word and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge, and if my mind is thus at peace, and continues so after two or three more petitions, I proceed accordingly. In trivial matters and transactions involving most important issues, I have found this method always effective."*



Mary Muller

It took a remarkable woman to be the wife of George Muller. He almost did not marry her because of his fear that marriage would slow him down in his ministry. When he found himself in love with her, he was surprised because she was eight years older than he, and because she had a very large nose and wasn't pretty like an earlier girlfriend George. But what Mary Groves did have was a sincere faith, a willingness to give up everything for the work they wanted to do, and a maturity and smart mind that became a huge comfort and support to George.

In the book *George Muller The Guardian of Bristol's Orphans*, a story is told which illustrates just what an incredible woman Mary was. When they were first wed, Mary and George loaded up her things on a stagecoach to their new home. George was surprised at how many things Mary had, four trunks full of household items. After Mary had taken a week to get everything settled and arranged beautifully into George's small home, he came

QUOTES BY GEORGE MULLER

"The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith, and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety."

"I hope in God, I pray on, and look yet for the answer. They are not converted yet, but they will be"

"To learn strong faith is to endure great trials. I have learned my faith by standing firm amid severe testings."



The Orphanage Today

home one evening disheartened by all the worldly possessions they had. He told her that every unnecessary thing had to go, all the silver, china, and tapestries. She was shocked and probably a little hurt because she had worked so hard to make their home lovely. But the next evening when George came home, all of the extra things were gone, and in their place there was a stack of pound notes, (money) which she told him to use as he thought best. *"And may God help us both,"* she said.

Her love for George and her faith in her heavenly Father allowed her to do what he requested. Mary sincerely surrendered to this and jumped in wholeheartedly with George's way of life.

Mary and George went through many trials together, including the death of their young son, the death of Mary's father, serious bouts of illness for George, and a very simple life bordering on poverty. They always took everything to God in prayer, and Mary worked tirelessly by George's side

to serve hundreds of unloved orphans, giving them a place to live, bread to eat, and a God to love.



George Muller dared to trust God for "...great and mighty things" (Jeremiah 33:3). He dared to take God at His word and ventured to establish the Orphan Houses to prove that *"...with God nothing shall be impossible"* (Luke 1:37). Over his lifetime, George Muller cared for countless of orphans - all without asking anyone for a penny but only by going to God.

How did George Muller cultivate this faith?

His faith was no different from my faith and your faith, as he once proclaimed. But his faith was stretched by the trials he went through which caused him to trust God for the "impossible." George Muller learned to depend on the Lord from his youth. He knew also the importance of spending quality time with the Lord first thing in the morning. George Muller *"delighted in God"* and He gave Muller the desires of his heart (Psalm 37:4). Over his lifetime, George Muller read the whole Bible over one hundred times which developed his faith for the Bible says that *"...faith*



cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).



*"Two little lines
I heard one day, Traveling
along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my
heart, And from my mind
would not depart;
Only one life, 'twill soon be
past, Only what's done for
Christ will last."*



*"Our God and Father is the same faithful God
as ever He was; as willing as ever to prove
Himself to be the living God, in our day as
formerly, to all who put their trust in Him."*

George Muller

REPENT YE!

by Gipsy Smith



Gipsy Smith was born in 1860, and grew up in a gypsy wagon, without ever seeing the inside of a school house or church building.

He was converted at the age of sixteen, taught himself to read, began to preach seven months later at the age of seventeen, and became one of the greatest evangelists of the present century.

He died in the work in 1947, at the age of 87.

"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching . . . saying, Repent ye."

(Mark 1:14,15)

The Bible, especially the New Testament, is the handbook of repentance. It commands it,

it urges it, enforces it, repeats it, drives it in everywhere. Over sixty times repentance is enforced. The great doctrine of repentance occupies a very prominent place in the teaching of Jesus Christ and His apostles. All the epistles were written to show men how to do it, because there is no such thing as vital communion, fellowship with God, with out it. And I want to speak plainly about Bible repentance, and I pray God to help me, for I have not anything pleasant to say. It is far easier to congratulate than it is to expostulate.

My business is not to speak smooth things, but to say some things that you may resist, fight, get angry with; and you may get angry with me for saying them, but they are here, and it is my business to say, *"Thus saith the Lord."* There is no intelligent conversion with out an intelligent understanding of these words. May the Holy Spirit breathe light upon these truths, and help us to see them! For it is my business to make you see what God means when He says, **"Repent ye."**

I am afraid that in our zeal to get people into the kingdom or the Church we have lowered the standard. These words meant far more when they were uttered than they do today with most people. I am afraid that with the familiar way with which we use them and the constant contact with them and with the daily handling of them, we have somehow allowed their edge to

be worn off. They do not mean as much to us. The depth, the breadth, the height, the length of these mighty utterances do not search us and illuminate and startle, and thrill and overwhelm as they used to. But they do mean as much.

If we have not eyes to see and ears to hear, if by long contamination with evil, and soothing the conscience with opiates from hell, if crying, "*Peace*" where there is no peace has brought a stupor upon us, that is our responsibility, not God's or His Word's. God means as much by these words today when He says, "*Repent ye,*" as He did when they were first uttered.

I am afraid we have brought them down, we have lowered them, we have pulled them from their heights down to the low levels of our own poor experiences. But that is not the way to climb with measured step the hills of light, and walk in unbroken fellowship with God. I am afraid that in our zeal to get people into what we call the Church we have been more anxious about heads than hearts.

In order to capture, we have compromised and lost. We have been more concerned about filling our Church registers than we have about the kingdom. We have not sufficiently emphasized the greatness of coming to Christ, and we have said, "*It is only a step.*" **Who told you so? Only a step to Jesus? It is not true.** It is not gospel. Only a step to Jesus? Then it is a very big step. We have made it a very little thing, and we have multitudes of people joining the Churches. It is child's play. It used not to be.

When I came to Christ I came under the old Act. It was a conflict, it was a warfare, it was a pilgrimage, it was a struggle, it was cutting off the right arm and plucking out the right eye, it was being maimed if necessary. It meant sacrifice. There was a

day in our calendar called Good Friday; there was a place called Calvary. It meant coming out, being forsaken, abused, slandered, rejected, despised, hated, persecuted, a fool for Christ's sake, sneered at, laughed at, misrepresented, suffering the cross.

What does it mean now? A picnic. It is a "*social,*" it is an entertainment, it is a guild, an ordinance; and with multitudes of people who call themselves Christians it means nothing more. We have made it too easy, but Jesus never made it so: He never deluded anybody. He never cried "*Peace*" where there was no peace. He knew the danger of saying "*Peace*" when the soul was in anarchy and the will in rebellion, and the whole man against God. He could not cry "*Peace.*"

No, He never made it easy. We have said to anybody and everybody, "*Only believe.*" The New Testament does not say so. The devil believes, and believes more than you do; in his heart he knows more about it. He believes; and if he says he does not, he is a liar, he is shamming. He believes far more than any of us, but he is not a saint. Jesus has never made it easy.

There was one man who came and asked, "*Are there few that be saved?*" and He said, "*Strive, struggle, agonize to enter in at the strait gate.*" He never made it easy. Here is another man who came and said, "*Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.*" But Jesus knew he had not counted the cost, and said, "*Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.*"

Here is another who came and said, "*Lord, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*" Jesus diagnosed the case instantly, and put His finger on the weak spot of his life and said, "*If thou wilt be perfect, sell all thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow Me.*" He did not make it easy.

Here is another man who came and said, *"Lord, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him."* Jesus said to him, *"Ye must be born again."* And to the multitude of people who listened to Him He said, *"If any man will be My disciple, let him take up his cross and deny himself."*

He never made it easy; and the man who makes it easy to be a Christian preaches a mongrel gospel. Jesus said, *"Repent."* John preached repentance. He came to preach it. It had the first place in his sermons. It was first and last with John, *"Repent, repent."* You say it is too startling, sensational, vulgar; but remember, it was God's vulgarity *"Repent."* No man who preaches as John did will be popular.

They put John in prison for preaching repentance, and so that the doctrine should not be silent, as soon as John was shut up Jesus began where John left off, and His first public sermon to the world was on repentance. He knew where to begin. *"Repent ye,"* said Jesus. That is His first utterance, and if you care to go to His last before He left His disciples and was received up yonder in the clouds, He gave them the commission to go and preach repentance.

So that in the first and the last utterances of the Son of God you have repentance enforced.

And when He was back again on the throne, when angels and archangels had received Him with the shouts of triumph and welcome which He deserved, when He had been exalted as a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance, as though He knew that some of us would shrink from driving it in, as though He knew that some of us would be afraid to push it home, He said to Saul, *"Saul, you go to the Gentiles and make them----make them----do works meet for repentance."*

Jesus never made it easy. Let any man who ever tried honestly but one day in his life to serve God with all his powers, let him tell me if it was an easy thing to do. It is not easy. It is a struggle, it is a fight. Jesus Christ on Calvary is not a substitute for the life He means you to live, but the means by which you get the power to live the life.

No, there is no salvation without repentance. This is the first step. First things first. And the man who misses repentance will miss everything. If your repentance is shallow your religious life will be shallow. If your coming to Christ does not mean everything you will not get everything. If your surrender is not complete you cannot receive. If your hands are filled you cannot take hold. It is only those who come empty-handed that can cling. It is only those who turn from darkness to light that understand God. It is only those who leave the devil who can receive God. No, we must repent.

"Then," you say, "what is repentance?" Listen, it is not conviction. It is possible to be convicted without repentance. Why, it is hardly possible to meet and talk with anybody in these days but at some moment of their life's history they have been convicted of their need of Christ. It is hardly possible to meet with anybody who does not know what he ought to do and what he ought to be. You cannot meet and talk with any man that has not light about these things; but light is not life.

What brings you to a mission service? Deep down in your conscience, the soul of you, the man of you, back of everything, hid away that nobody else can see, there is a real cry in your soul for God. That is conviction. That is God-given; that is Holy Ghost-brought, that is the result of the light that flashes over the cliff-tops of eternity, that is the soul's awakening. It is one thing to be awake, it is another thing to get up. You have often heard

your minister preach. Maybe you have been hearing him for years. Perhaps you sit in the gallery or away back in one of the pews, or near to him, and every time he preaches and you hear him, you go home and say, *"My pastor is right; I ought to be a Christian, I know I ought,"* and you feel beneath the powerful pleadings of your own pastor, beneath the pleadings of the evangelist, you know God's claims, you admit them, you feel them. They are right, they are reasonable, and you ought to surrender. That is conviction. But it is one thing to be convicted and another thing to repent. Conviction is not repentance.

What is repentance? It is not sorrow. Sorrow for sin is one element of repentance, but you can be sorry without repentance. There is a kind of sentimental sorrow, a sorrow at the thought of coming retribution and exposure, which is mean, selfish, devilish, and is not healthy and life-giving. There is a sorrow that weeps at funerals and sentimental plays, and weeps beneath the ordinary preaching and the special preaching. There are multitudes of people who think they are not far from the kingdom because their tears come easily; they whisper all sorts of sweet messages to themselves because they can weep. They tell themselves they are not hard, and therefore there must be hope for them, and all the while they are holding on to forbidden things and walking in forbidden paths, and keeping company with those who are destroying them and leading them far from God.

It is no good to cover God's altar with tears while your heart is in rebellion. It is no good to hold out one hand apparently to the Cross with the other holding on to a black hand behind you. You cannot hold Dagon in one hand and the Ark of the Covenant in the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

It is no good to sing on Sunday with your face toward the Cross and on Monday with your feet toward the beer shop.

I sat in a home a few days ago playing with a boy of ten. His face was bright as the sun. He looked as happy as any child in the home, calling me *"Uncle."* Presently his mother had missed something, and she came in and said, *"Jack, have you taken so-and-so?"* His head dropped. *"Jack, have you taken so-and-so?"* No answer. *"Jack" --- and she came and put her hand on his shoulder --- "did you take --- "* *"Yes, mother;"* and he began to cry. Oh, he was sorry; he did look sorry; he sobbed as though his heart would break. What for? He was just as guilty five minutes before, and he knew he was. What made him sorry? Sorry that he had sinned against his mother? No. Sorry that he had sinned against God? No. Well, what was his sorrow? He was sorry because he was found out. And there are multitudes of professing Christians whose religious sorrow is no deeper. That is the sorrow that worketh death. There is a godly sorrow, sorrow because I have sinned against God. *"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. ..For thou desirest truth in the hidden parts, honesty where no eye but Thine can see, transparency where no light but thine can penetrate."* There is a sorrow that means death. There is a sorrow for sin that worketh life. Which is yours?

What is repentance? Listen. It is not promising to be better. There are plenty of people who have been promising to be better ever since they can remember, from boyhood or girlhood. When God has laid His hand upon them, as He does in a thousand ways, they are ready to promise, and do promise. Where are you, you who have been making promises till your hair is grey and broken every one of them, and angels beholding your

shattered promises have shuddered to the tips of their wings. You are further from God than ever you were in your life, with all your promises. Your psalm-singing and your hymn-singing, and your church-going, and your offerings, and all the rest of your religious paraphernalia, are so much mockery because you have not walked the straight and blessed path of obedience and trust.

It is not enough to promise. It means more than that. If it is not conviction, if it is not sorrow, if it is not the desire to be better and the promise to be better, what is it? What is repentance? Is it crying? No. Is it excitement? No. Is it emotion? Is it kneeling down and groaning? No. Is it going and hearing preachers? No.

What is it? Listen. Jesus Christ tells you in that beautiful picture in the fifteenth of Luke. It is a wonderful chapter. There are three cases in that chapter ---- the silver, the sheep, and the son. The sheep was lost out of the fold, the silver was lost in the house. The sheep was lost without any intention of being lost, but it was lost.

The silver was lost in the house through somebody's carelessness, and it may be there is somebody lost in your house, in your pew in the church, through somebody's carelessness. God help you to find out who that somebody is!

The son was lost, and it was his own fault. He was a prodigal before he left home. He was a rebel before he got a penny of his fortune. He was as bad in heart and in mind before he received a cent of the money as when he had spent it all. He was guilty the moment he said to himself, *"I will demand the portion of goods that falleth to me."*

When the sheep went astray a man went after it. When the silver was lost a woman went after it. When the son went astray

nobody went after him. How is that? Remember who told the story. Nobody went for him. How is that? Because he was a man, because he was a moral agent, because he was accountable to God for his own act. Why did not the father gather his servants with the elder brother, why did he not gather his neighbours together, and say, *"Look here, I have lost my boy, let us go and find him and bring him back in spite of himself"*? Why did he not? Because if they had brought him back again he would have been a prodigal still, he would have been a rebel inside the house as well as out of it, for no man comes till he returns; and heaven and the Bible, Christ and Calvary, the Holy Ghost and eternity stand absolutely defeated before the citadel of the human will. Do not forget it. Listen. The prodigal went astray, took every step from the homestead of his own deliberate choice, step by step away up into the far country, and he had to come to himself, he had to come back every inch of the way, and he did not send a letter home to his father and say, *"If you will sent the old chariot I will come home,"* and he did not ask anybody to give him a lift.

He had to walk back every inch his own self, step by step, with bleeding feet and aching head, and broken heart. He had to do it. "But," you say, "the father ran to meet him, did he not?" Yes he did, and He will run to meet you when He sees you coming, but you must come. Coming is repentance. It is the response of the will.

Repentance is the response of the enlightened, redeemed man to the call of God, the "I will" of the soul. It is putting your hand on your heart and getting hold of what has been your curse, the thing that has chained you. It is getting hold of the thing that has made hell of earth for you, the sin of your heart ---- for I have discovered that there may be a dozen sins in a man's life, but there are not a dozen that predominate;

there is one overmastering, predominating, all-prevailing sin that enslaves and damns, and if that sin goes everything goes. It is putting your hand to your heart and plucking that out root and branch and saying to God, *"There it is, and I will die before I will sin again."* Have you repented in that fashion?

Don't talk about Church membership, don't insult God by talking about the Communion until you have done this: this is the first thing and the others will not be expected until you have done this. *"Repent ye,"* make a full surrender to God.

Brother, listen to me once more. Repentance, when it is done, is such a beautiful thing that Jesus Himself said, *"There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."* Have you repented along that line? There are some of you who do not understand how it is you have no peace and no joy in your profession. I know, just as well as if I lived with you, I know if you have no joy and no peace in your professed faith it is because you have never turned to God wholly. Some of you say, "I want peace." Never mind peace; do as you are told, and peace will come. There are some people more concerned about nice feelings, happy feelings, ecstasies and joys, and all the rest of it, than they are about putting God in His place. You put God in His place, and you will have peace; you honour God, and you will have peace.

A dear fellow came to me when I was in South Africa, and he said, *"Sir, I want to get relief from a guilty conscience,"* and he had an awful story to tell, a story that made me shudder. He unfolded a page in his history that I dare not tell you. Then he said, *"Sir, I want God's pardon."* I said, *"My brother, how do you expect to get it?"* He said, *"By an honest attempt to undo the past."* *"Then,"* I said, *"turn your face that way and wait for peace."* *"But,"* he said, *"that will mean*

prison, and it may mean a lifetime in prison." I said, *"Turn your face that way. It is no good to talk about peace while there is wrong to be righted, while there are stripes that need to be washed; it is no use to talk about peace till you get right with God."* *"The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace."*

Righteousness, that means rightness, wholeness, harmony ---- and then the music. There will be no music till the instrument is put in tune. You know where you have to yield; you know the point of controversy between you and God; you know the thing that has hindered you, you know the thing that robbed you, you know the thing that has darkened your sky, you know the thing that has come in between you and God, you know the thing about which you have persisted in having your own way and not God's. When you yield on that thing, you will repent.

Will you do it now? *"But,"* you say, *"I am a church member."* Never mind. You say there is some one near that knows you. Never mind. You say people expect better things of you. Never mind. Be honest. Put God in His right place. Turn from sin to God, from darkness to light ---- and you can do the turning. The Spirit enlightens, the Spirit breathes tenderness, the Spirit coaxes, woos, tries to win. God the Holy Ghost is doing His work in your heart, but, brother, you must submit. When you submit wholly, that is repentance. God help you to do it!

---- Reprinted from *As Jesus Passed By*, by Gipsy Smith.

"Repentance is the response of the enlightened, redeemed man to the call of God, the 'I will' of the soul."



The Christian's Greatest Enemy

by A. W. Tozer

Article excerpted from *Rut, Rot or Revival*

East of the Jordan in the territory of Moab, Moses began to expound this law, saying: The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites; go to all the neighboring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore He would give to your fathers - to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob - and to their descendants after them"(Deuteronomy 1:5-8).

In the Old Testament, the enemy that threatened Israel the most was the dictatorship of the customary. Israel became accustomed to walking around in circles and was blissfully content to stay by the safety of the mountain for a while. To put it another way, it was the psychology of the usual. God finally broke into the rut they were in and said, "You have been here long enough. It is time for you to move on."

To put Israel's experience into perspective for our benefit today, we must see that the mountain represents a spiritual experience for a spiritual state of affairs. Israel's problem was that they had given up hope of ever getting the land God had promised them. They had become satisfied with going in circles and camping in nice, comfortable places. They had come under the spell of the psychology of the routine. It kept them where they were and prevented them from getting the riches God had promised them.

If their enemy, the Edomites, would have come after them, the Israelites would have fought down to the last man and probably would have beaten the Edomites - Israel would have made progress. Instead they were

twiddling their thumbs, waiting for the customary to keep on being the customary.

What is the worst enemy the church faces today? This is where a lot of unreality and unconscious hypocrisy enters. Many are ready to say, "The liberals are our worst enemy." But the simple fact is that the average evangelical church does not have too much trouble with liberalism. Nobody gets up in our churches and claims that the first five books of Moses are just myths. Nobody says that the story of creation is simply religious mythology. Nobody denies that Christ walked on the water or that He rose from the grave. Nobody gets up in our churches and claims that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God or that He isn't coming back again. Nobody denies the validity of the Scriptures. We just cannot hide behind liberalism and say that it is our worst enemy. We believe that evangelical Christians are trying to hold on to the truth given to us, the faith of our fathers, so the liberals are not our worst enemy.

Neither do we have a problem with the government. People in our country can do just about whatever they please and the government pays no attention. We can hold prayer meetings all night if we want, and the government would never bother us or question us. There is no secret police breathing down our backs watching our every move. We live in a free land, and we ought to thank God every day for that privilege.

Dictatorship of the Routine

The treacherous enemy facing the church of Jesus Christ today is the dictatorship of the routine, when the routine becomes "lord" in the life of the church. Programs are organized and the prevailing conditions are accepted as normal. Anyone can predict next Sunday's service and what will happen. This seems to be the most deadly threat in the church today. When we come to the place where everything can be predicted and nobody expects anything unusual from God, we are in a rut. The routine dictates, and we can tell not only what will happen next Sunday, but what will occur next month and, if things do not improve, what will take place next year. Then we have reached the place where what has been determines what is, and what is determines what will be.

That would be perfectly all right and proper for a cemetery. Nobody expects a cemetery to do anything but conform. The greatest conformists in the world today are those who sleep out in the community cemetery. They do not bother anyone. They just lie there, and it is perfectly all right for them to do so. You can predict what everyone will do in the cemetery from the deceased right down to the people who attend a funeral there. Everyone and everything in a cemetery has accepted the routine. Nobody expects anything out of those buried in the cemetery. But the church is not a cemetery and we should expect much from it, because what has been should not be lord to tell us what is, and what is should not be ruler to tell us what will be. God's people are supposed to grow.

As long as there is growth, there is an air of unpredictability. Certainly we cannot predict exactly, but in many churches you just about can. Everybody knows just what will happen, and this has become our deadliest enemy. We blame the devil, the "last days" and anything else we can think of, but the greatest enemy is not outside of us. It is within - it is an attitude of

accepting things as they are. We believe that what was must always determine what will be, and as a result we are not growing in expectation.

The Progressive Stages

As soon as someone begins talking like this, the Lord's people respond by getting busy. What I'm talking about, however, is internal. It is a matter of the soul and mind that ultimately determines our conduct. Let me show you the progressive stages.

I began with what I call the rote (mechanical or habitual repetition of something). This is repetition without feeling. If someday someone would read the Scripture and believe it and would believe what is sung in the great Christian hymns, there would be a blessed spiritual revolution underway in a short time. But too many are caught up in the rote, repeating without feeling, without meaning, without wonder and without any happy surprises or expectations. In our services God cannot get in because we have it all fixed up for Him. We say, "Lord, we are going to have it this way. Now kindly bless our plans." We repeat without feeling, we repeat without meaning, we sing without wonder, and we listen without surprise. That is my description of the rote.

The treacherous enemy facing the church of Jesus Christ today is the dictatorship of the routine, when the routine becomes "lord" in the life of the church.

We go one step further and come to what I will call the rut, which is bondage to the rote. When we are unable to see and sense bondage to the rote, we are in rut. For example, a man may be sick and not even know it. The doctors may have confided in the man's wife instead, "We don't want to frighten your husband, but he could drop any minute. He is critically ill, so just expect it any moment." The man himself does

not know he is seriously ill. He goes about his business as if nothing is wrong. He may play golf or tennis, maybe even go on a hunting trip. He is sick, and yet he does not know how sick he really is. This may in fact hasten his end. Not knowing is risky business and full of danger. Spiritually speaking, the rut is bondage to the rote, and the greatest danger lies in our inability to sense or feel this bondage.

There is a third word, and I do not particularly like to use it, but the history of the church is filled with it. The word is rot. The church is afflicted by drive rot. This is best explained when the psychology of non-expectation takes over and spiritual rigidity sets in, which is an inability to visualize anything better, a lack of desire for improvement.

There are many who respond by arguing, "I know lots of evangelical churches that would like to grow, and they do their best to get the crowds in. They want to grow and have contest to make their Sunday school larger." That is true, but they are trying to get people to come and share their rut. They want people to help them celebrate the rote and finally join in the rot. Because the Holy Spirit is not given the chance to work in our services, nobody is repenting, nobody is seeking God, nobody is spending a day in quiet waiting on God with open Bible seeking to mend his or her ways. Nobody is doing it - we just want more people. But more people for what? More people to come and repeat our dead services without feeling, without meaning, without wonder, without surprise? More people to join us in the bondage to the rote? For the most part, spiritual rigidity that cannot bend is too weak notice how weak it is.

What Is the Church?

For clarification, what is the church? When I say that a church gets into the rote and then onto the rut and finally to the rot, what am I talking about?

For one thing, the church is not the building. A church is an assembly of individuals. There is a lot of meaningless dialogue these days about the church. It is meaningless because those engaged in the dialogue forget that a church has no separate existence. The church is not an entity in itself, but rather is composed of individual persons. It is the same error made about the state. Politicians sometimes talk about the state as though it were an entity in itself. Social workers talk about society, but society is people. So is the church. The church is made up of real people, and when they come together we have the church. Whatever the people are who make up the church, that is the kind of church it is - no worse and no better, no wiser, no holier, no more ardent and no more worshipful. To improve or change the church you must begin with individuals.

When people in the church only point to others for improvement and not to themselves, it is sure evidence that the church has come to dry rot. It is proof of three sins: the sin of self-righteousness, the sin of judgment and the sin of complacency.

When our Lord said, "*One of you will betray Me,*" thank God those disciples had enough spirituality that nobody said, "*Lord, is it he?*" Every one of those disciples said, "*Lord, is it I?*" If they would not have so responded there could not have been a Pentecost. But because they were humble enough to point the finger in their own direction the Holy Spirit fell upon them.

Self-righteousness is terrible among God's people. If we feel that we are what we ought to be, then we will remain what we are. We will not look for any change or improvement in our lives. This will quite naturally lead us to judge everyone by what we are. This is the judgment of which we must be careful. To judge others by ourselves is to create havoc in the local assembly.

Self-righteousness also leads to complacency. Complacency is a great sin and covers just about everything I have said about the rote and the rut. Some have the attitude, "Lord, I'm satisfied with my spiritual condition. I hope one of these days You'll come, I will be taken up to meet You in the air and I will rule over five cities." These people cannot rule over their own houses and families, but they expect to rule over five cities. They pray spottily and sparsely, rarely attending prayer meeting, but they read their Bibles and expect to go zooming off into the blue yonder and join the Lord in the triumph of the victorious saints.

Is Simply Self-Deception

I wonder if we are not fooling ourselves. I wonder if a lot of it is simply self-deception. I hear the voice of Jesus saying to us, "You have stayed long enough where you are. Break camp and advance into the hill country." This would be a new spiritual experience that God has for us. Everything Jesus Christ did for us we can have in this age. Victorious living, joyous living, holy living, fruitful living, wondrous, ravishing knowledge of the Triune God - all of this is ours. Power we never knew before, undreamed of answers to prayer - this is ours. "See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of [it]." The Lord gave it to you in a covenant. Go take it - it's yours. It was given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all their seed after. Jesus prayed, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message" (John 17: 20). That embraces all those who belong to the church of Jesus Christ.

If we call Him Lord, how dare we sit any longer in the rut! The Lord has called us to move on. But when people are in a rut, not even the angel Gabriel can help them if they will not come out of it. This is not an accusation but a suggestion. If you are not in a rut, don't get mad - somebody else is. But if you are in a rut you ought to get out of it.

The difference between a wooden leg and a good leg is that if you prick a wooden leg the person would never notice. The difference between a church that has dry rot and a church that is alive is that if you prick the live church it will respond. If you prick the other kind, it is already dead. The tree that stands alive has lush, green leaves. Take a knife, scar the bark deeply and the tree will bleed. It is alive. The old dead tree just stands there, a watchtower for old sentinel crows. Take your knife and dig in as far as you want to, and nothing will happen because the tree is dead.

So it is with my message. If you'll get neither mad nor glad nor sad under my preaching, I know nothing can be done. But there are some who are alive, and I believe it is the majority.



**"Declare ye among the nations, and
publish, and set up a standard;
publish, and conceal not"**
(Jeremiah 50:2)

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