

What Young George Muller Got Wrong, and then Right, About Bible Intake

By Steve Burchett



I was a freshman in high school when the Lord saved me through hearing the gospel at a weekly Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting at my public high school. Once converted, I used a devotional provided by that ministry which amounted to reading a few verses a day and then a few paragraphs of teaching on that part of the Bible. I'm grateful I was pointed to the need to be in the Bible regularly, but looking back, it was an insufficient amount of time not only for a young believer, but any follower of Jesus.

George Muller had a similar experience with the Bible when just a new believer. He eventually became famous for caring for orphans in Bristol, England (over 10,000 in his lifetime), all while never making needs known to anyone but God. Yet initially he writes that his daily spiritual disciplines were out of order, especially regarding Bible intake. When Muller was 71 (he died in 1898 at the age of 93), he was addressing young believers when he said the following.

For the first four years of my Christian life I did not carefully read the Word of God. I used to read a tract, or an interesting book, but I knew nothing of the power of the Word. I read very little of it, and the result was, that, although a preacher then, yet I made no progress in the divine life. And why? Just for this reason — I neglected the Word of God. [*Valuable Selections from the Writings of George Muller*, Granted Press, 38-9].

In the fifth year of his life as a believer, Muller got serious about “attending regularly to reading through the Scriptures” — starting at the beginning of the Old Testament and the New Testament and reading alternatively until completing the whole Bible, and then starting over. His Bible reading led to the formulation of many critical doctrines that strengthened his confidence in God and shaped his ministry, but he was most concerned about partaking of what he called “food for my own soul” (32). At one point in his address to young converts, he urges the reading of Scripture “with reference to your own heart,” and then says, “Ask yourselves, how does this suit *me*, either for instruction, for correction, for exhortation, or for rebuke? How does this affect me? If you thus read, and get the blessing in your own soul, how soon it will flow out to others!” (41).

Sixteen years into his life as a Christian, Muller made a significant discovery about Bible intake that was immensely helpful the rest of his life.

I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit. Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer, after having dressed in the morning.

Now 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 meditate on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. (31-2).

Muller's discipline of beginning in the Bible ultimately enhanced his prayer life: “The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to supplication; so that though I did not, as it were, give myself to *prayer*, but to *mediation*, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer” (32).

George Muller was not a “super human” that woke up every day singing “Amazing Grace.” He *needed* grace, he needed the joy and power that comes from fellowship with God, he needed to hear God's promises, so he opened his Bible and was fed.

We are no different.

Some of us are somewhat grumpy in the morning, while others are (strangely) raring to go even without a cup of coffee! But we all need Jesus from the start. I'm not exactly sure what this might look like in your life. Most of us can carve out some time in the morning to read the Bible and allow that to prompt us to pray. But don't rush. Meditation is critical. Listen to Muller one last time.

If you merely read the Bible, and no more, it is just like water running in at one side and out at the other. In order to be really benefitted by it, we must meditate on it. We cannot all of us, of course, spend many hours, or even one or two hours each day in this manner. Our business demands our attention. Yet, however short the time you can afford, give it regularly to reading, prayer and meditation over the Word, and you will find it will well repay you. (41)

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