



## Beginnings

Michael Faraday was born into a world that gave him almost no reason to expect greatness.

He entered that world in 1791 in Newington Butts, a poor community south of London. His father, James Faraday, was a blacksmith whose failing health made it difficult to provide consistently for his wife and four children. The family moved frequently and lived in rented rooms. Food was sometimes desperately scarce. Faraday later recalled receiving a single loaf of bread that had to sustain him for an entire week.

*There was little money in the Faraday home, but there was faith.*

His family belonged to a small Christian fellowship known as the Sandemanians. Their faith was plain, disciplined, communal, and deeply grounded in Scripture. It was not an ornament added to life when circumstances were favorable. It was the foundation upon which the family stood when circumstances were anything but favorable.

Michael received only the rudiments of formal education. He learned basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, but poverty made continued schooling impossible. At approximately 13, he went to work as an errand boy for a bookseller and bookbinder. At 14, he began a seven-year apprenticeship under George Riebau.

It would have appeared to be a humble occupation with a narrow future. Yet the bookbinding shop became Faraday's university.

As he bound books for other people, he read them. He studied chemistry, electricity, philosophy, and the natural world. He copied illustrations, took notes, conducted simple experiments, and attempted to understand ideas for which he had neither a teacher nor the mathematical education enjoyed by gentlemen of science.

Faraday did not have wealth, position, or credentials. What he possessed was curiosity disciplined by perseverance.

## The Door Opens

In 1812, a customer helped Faraday obtain tickets to hear Sir Humphry Davy lecture at London's Royal Institution. Davy was one of the most celebrated chemists in England, a scientific star in an age when science was still largely controlled by men of education, status, and social standing.

Faraday listened intently. He filled pages with detailed notes and illustrations, then carefully organized and bound them into an impressive volume. He sent the book to Davy along with a request for an opportunity to work in science.

Davy was impressed, although he initially had no position to offer him. When an opening later arose, Davy remembered the young bookbinder and hired him as a laboratory assistant.

Faraday had entered the Royal Institution, but hardly as an equal. He washed bottles, cleaned equipment, prepared specimens, and performed whatever duties were assigned to him. During a lengthy European journey, he accompanied Davy and Davy's wife, Jane. Because of his working-class origins, Lady Davy reportedly treated Faraday more as a servant than as a scientific colleague.

It must have been humiliating. Faraday had the mind of a great scientist but was repeatedly reminded of his social position.

*Yet he did not allow humiliation to make him bitter.*

That may be one of the most remarkable features of his life. Faraday experienced poverty, condescension, exclusion, and eventually the jealousy of a man he had once admired. He could have become resentful. He could have allowed injury to shape his character.

**He did not.**

## Making the Invisible Visible

Faraday possessed an unusual ability to imagine forces that no one could see.

In 1821, he performed an ingenious experiment involving a magnet, a wire carrying electrical current, and a small bath of mercury. When current passed through the wire, the wire moved

continuously around the magnet. Faraday had demonstrated electromagnetic rotation, the principle underlying the electric motor.

A decade later, he made an even more consequential discovery. Faraday demonstrated that electricity could produce magnetism, but he wanted to know whether magnetism could also produce electricity.

In 1831, through a series of meticulously designed experiments, he showed that a changing magnetic field could induce an electrical current in a nearby conductor. This was electromagnetic induction. The discovery became the foundation of the electric generator and, ultimately, much of the electrified world in which we now live.

Every large-scale electrical generator operating today owes something to the mind of a man who once possessed scarcely enough bread to survive the week.

Faraday also discovered benzene, liquefied several gases, developed the laws of electrolysis, investigated the relationship between magnetism and light, and gave science its enduring concept of the electromagnetic field. Although his formal mathematical abilities were limited, his visual understanding of physical forces was extraordinary. James Clerk Maxwell later translated Faraday's insights into the mathematical equations that became foundational to modern physics.

Albert Einstein reportedly kept portraits of three scientific giants on the wall of his study: Isaac Newton, James Clerk Maxwell, and Michael Faraday.

The boy who left school with almost no formal education had taken his place among the greatest scientific minds in history.

## **When a Mentor Becomes a Rival**

Faraday's success eventually strained his relationship with Humphry Davy.

The details and motives remain matters of historical interpretation, but Davy appears to have become threatened by the growing reputation of his former assistant. When Faraday was nominated for membership in the Royal Society, Davy attempted to prevent his election. Faraday was nevertheless elected in 1824, with Davy reportedly casting the only opposing vote.

Faraday could have retaliated. He could have publicly diminished Davy or rewritten their history to present himself as the mistreated hero.

Instead, he continued to acknowledge the man who had opened the laboratory door for him. When Faraday was later asked about Davy's greatest discovery, he is said to have answered, "Michael Faraday."

There is humor in that response, but there is also grace. Faraday could recognize both Davy's failure and Davy's contribution. He did not need to deny the wound, but neither did he allow the wound to become his identity.

### **That is character.**

Faraday did not merely discover invisible forces in nature. He demonstrated the quiet force of humility.

## **A Personal Reflection**

Faraday's example reaches uncomfortably close to my own life. I am certainly no Michael Faraday of psychology. I am simply a psychologist who, over many years, has attained a certain professional standing and has tried to contribute ideas that might help people heal.

Like many professionals, I have known the pain of having ideas challenged, dismissed, or embraced without acknowledgment while I experienced personal rejection. At times, I believed that my judgment, integrity, or professional reputation had been called into question. Those experiences created genuine wounds. I took them personally because they mattered personally. The work mattered to me, the relationships mattered to me, and my name mattered to me.

Looking back, I wish I had been more mindful of Michael Faraday. That does not mean pretending the injuries were insignificant or that humility requires us to tolerate mistreatment silently. It means learning that another person's rejection does not determine our identity, and that even a deep professional wound does not have to harden into bitterness.

Faraday encourages me to carry those experiences differently. I can acknowledge what happened, learn from it, establish appropriate boundaries, and still refuse to let resentment have the final word. His life reminds me that character is revealed not only by the work we accomplish, but also by what we become when our work is questioned, appropriated, or dismissed.

I wish I had handled some of those moments better. Perhaps that recognition is itself part of healing. We cannot change how we responded yesterday, but we can decide what kind of person we will be when the next wound comes.

## **Science Did Not Drive Him Away From God**

Faraday's scientific achievements did not weaken his Christian faith. His discoveries deepened his sense that creation possessed coherence, order, and meaning.

He did not use God as an explanation for what he could not understand. He investigated nature rigorously, questioned assumptions, repeated experiments, and refused to confuse conjecture

with demonstrated fact. His notebooks reveal a disciplined mind continually testing what he thought he knew.

Yet Faraday did not imagine that scientific investigation had eliminated the need for faith. He believed that studying nature and receiving the truth of Scripture were different but compatible ways of encountering reality. The laws of nature were not rivals to God. They were expressions of an ordered creation.

This distinction is important. Faith did not make Faraday careless with evidence, and science did not make him ashamed of faith.

Faraday became a deacon and later an elder in his church. He preached sermons, participated in the life of his congregation, and remained devoted to his wife, Sarah. They had no children, but by all accounts theirs was a loving and enduring marriage.

He carried his faith quietly. It was not self-promotion, intellectual decoration, or a tool for winning arguments. It was the organizing center of his life.

## Plain Mr. Faraday

The honors eventually came, but Faraday remained remarkably indifferent to status.

He declined a knighthood, reportedly preferring to remain “plain Mr. Faraday.” He twice declined the presidency of the Royal Society. He also declined the opportunity to be buried among Britain’s most celebrated figures in Westminster Abbey.

Faraday died in 1867 at the home provided to him near Hampton Court. He was buried simply in Highgate Cemetery in the section reserved for religious dissenters. Westminster Abbey later honored him with a memorial stone near the grave of Isaac Newton, but the simple burial was consistent with the man himself.

In his later years, Faraday experienced increasing difficulties with memory and concentration. Some have wondered whether years of exposure to hazardous chemicals contributed to his decline, although that cannot be established with certainty.

*His scientific powers diminished, but his faith did not.*

A beloved account describes someone asking the dying Faraday about his “speculations” concerning life after death. Faraday reportedly answered:

***“Speculations? I have none. I am resting on certainties.”***

The account continues with his confidence that his Redeemer lived and that he, too, would live.

Because the precise wording comes to us through later retellings, we should be appropriately cautious about treating it as a perfectly documented deathbed transcript. Nevertheless, the sentiment is entirely consistent with the life Faraday lived. When his mind could no longer conduct great experiments, he remained anchored to what he believed was ultimately true.

## What Faraday Still Teaches Us

Modern psychology has often treated faith as something outside its proper field of vision. At times, religious conviction is regarded merely as a cultural variable, a coping mechanism, or even a defense against uncertainty.

Faraday's life offers another possibility.

Authentic faith does not require us to fear the brain, the body, scientific evidence, or the natural world. Science can help us understand mechanisms. Neuroscience can illuminate how trauma affects the brain and nervous system. Psychology can help us understand emotion, attachment, memory, identity, and behavior.

Faith addresses questions that mechanisms alone cannot answer: Who am I? Why does my life matter? What is the meaning of suffering? Is restoration possible? Where do hope, moral responsibility, love, sacrifice, and transcendence belong in our understanding of the human person?

This is part of the vision behind NeuroFaith®. We do not have to choose between the nervous system and the soul, between sound clinical science and spiritual meaning, or between careful evidence and enduring hope. Human beings live biologically, psychologically, relationally, and spiritually. A model of healing that ignores any of these dimensions risks seeing only part of the person.

I would like to think that Faraday would recognize something familiar in this integration. He spent his life revealing connections between forces that others had regarded as separate. Electricity and magnetism were not isolated phenomena. Motion could generate electricity. Magnetism could influence light. The visible world was joined by relationships that had been present all along, waiting to be discovered.

*Perhaps the human person is no less wondrous.*

Michael Faraday began life with little education, little food, and no social standing. He became one of the greatest experimental scientists who ever lived. Yet his deepest legacy may not rest solely in motors, generators, fields, or formulas.

It may be found in the kind of man he remained.

**Michael Faraday: *The Man Who Found God in the Wonder of Creation***  
**-Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.**

He was brilliant without becoming arrogant. He was injured without becoming bitter. He was honored without becoming consumed by status. He investigated the natural world without abandoning its Creator.

At the end of his life, Faraday was no longer searching for another scientific discovery. He was resting.

*Not upon his reputation.*

*Not upon his honors.*

*Not even upon the magnificent body of knowledge he had given the world.*

**He was resting upon certainty.**