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“WHEN THE WIND BLOWS COLD”: THE SPIRITUALITY OF
SUFFERING AND DEPRESSION IN THE LIFE AND
MINISTRY OF CHARLES SPURGEON

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“WHEN THE WIND BLOWS COLD”: THE SPIRITUALITY OF
SUFFERING AND DEPRESSION IN THE LIFE AND
MINISTRY OF CHARLES SPURGEON

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I dedicate this dissertation to Anita without whom . . .

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>MTP</i>	<i>Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit</i>
<i>NPSP</i>	<i>New Park Street Pulpit</i>
<i>Lectures</i>	<i>Lectures to My Students</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>The Sword and the Trowel</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>The Treasury of David</i>

PREFACE

The material composed in this dissertation is, in large measure, the result of my life's journey thus far. My father introduced me to the writings of Charles Haddon Spurgeon when I was fifteen. Spurgeon's copy of *Twelve Sermons on Prayer* lay perched on one of my father's bookshelves. Spurgeon captivated me from that moment and has held me in his grasp since that time. My father is largely responsible for the initial love and the continued affection of Spurgeon. On the eve of his death, my father was reading from the "Prince of Preachers." I am also grateful to a mother who shares my fascination with Spurgeon and his love of Jesus in all things, as well as my siblings, Terri Tolliver and Rod Albert, who paved the path of Jesus before me.

This dissertation would not be possible without the support of the elders and congregation of Calvary Baptist Church of Lenexa, Kansas. For nearly a dozen years, these saints have loved, been extremely patient, and journeyed with me on this Christian pilgrimage. There are fewer titles in life that give me greater pleasure than to be called their pastor.

During this process, Dr. Jason Allen, President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, asked me to begin the arduous, yet extraordinarily rewarding, work of combing each volume of Charles Spurgeon's personal library housed at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. Each week for the last two years, I have examined hundreds of the nearly six thousand volumes of Spurgeon's personal collection. Through his books, I have learned much from the "Prince of Preachers" whom I affectionately call the "Prince of Pain." Without Dr. Allen's leadership, cooperation, and friendship, this would not be possible. In a similar vein, I have found a kindred spirit in Dr. Christian George, the curator of the Spurgeon Center

and assistant professor of historical theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. George's vision, expertise, and support have been incalculable to me. Never has a man been more appropriately named than Christian.

My dissertation committee is composed of men for whom I have the utmost respect. Tom Nettles has inspired me with his writings on Baptists in general and Spurgeon in particular. Michael Haykin, who lives all that he writes and has set the model that good scholarship, is ultimately about pursuing God. I have been a student under Don Whitney more than any other instructor in my life beginning with the days at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to today at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. It seems only fitting that I end my formal study of spirituality where I first tasted the subject, under his watch care.

Many friends and family members served as readers, conversationalists, and encouragers in this project. Being a pastor and a doctoral student is a lonely task, and when one studies depression one tends to become depressed. These dear ones were always a source of strength in the journey.

A special gratitude must go to our children, Emma and Noah. Being a father is a degree that one cannot bestow, yet one of the highest privileges in the world. During the period, which their father was both pastor and student, they have always been patient, understanding, and a treasure in their father's eyes. They have always made it a joy to be called their dad.

Anita Albert is one of my heroes. She is the most faithful human being that I know. Our God has brought her through many trials and has given her to me. For every hour I researched, she sacrificed. For every outing I refused, she went instead. For every late night conversation about Spurgeon, she was there. As a pastor's wife, she has shared me with hundreds of others, and in the process made me look good. As a doctoral student's wife, she has carried the burden. The Father gave me the best of friends, the best of a life, when he gave me Anita. This project would not be complete without her

steadfast support and devotion. Finally, life would not be worth living without my sweet Jesus, whom I love, but greater still he loves me. He is my only hope, and gets the glory for all the good done in me.

Brian Albert

Lenexa, Kansas

December 2015

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“If you wear the livery of Christ, you will find him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls . . . He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill.”¹ These words appeared in the closing paragraph from the final Sunday sermon that Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.² While

¹C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 37:324. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *MTP*. The first six volumes of this series are entitled *The New Park Street Pulpit*. Hereafter, this work will be referred to *NPSP*. There are discrepancies as to the date of this message. Lewis Drummond cited Sunday morning, May 17, 1891, as the delivery date. Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 743. J. C. Carlile placed the sermon a few weeks later on Sunday, June 7, 1891. Carlile was aware of this disparity. “Some confusion has arisen over the date of Spurgeon’s last sermon in the Tabernacle. It was not on May 17 [1891]. Later he was permitted to speak on the morning of June 7.” Carlile provided his reason for the rejection of May 17. “On May 17 Mr. Spurgeon could not preach. He began the service and read part of the chapter, then he turned to Mr. Stott and said, ‘Finish the reading.’ It was a dramatic moment. The vast congregation felt the thrill of something momentous. Spurgeon seemed to stagger. Two of the deacons assisted him up the stairs to his room. In a moment or two one of them returned and announced that Mr. Spurgeon had an attack of giddiness and would be unable to continue the service.” J. C. Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1933), 259-60. The notation of the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* confirms Carlile’s date as the Sunday Spurgeon preached the sermon. In recent years an audio version was discovered of Thomas Spurgeon reading this sermon thirteen years after it was preached. Sermon Audio, “The Voice of C. H. Spurgeon’s Son, Thomas Spurgeon,” last modified June 12, 2012, accessed January 2014, <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=61212024192>. Many believe that Thomas’ voice was similar to his father’s. W. Y. Fullerton’s biography of Thomas compared the father and the son. “When the New Zealand son [Thomas] came [to Metropolitan Tabernacle], many of the congregation began again to detect the authentic Spurgeon note.” W. Y. Fullerton, *Thomas Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 152. Iain Murray also attested to Thomas and Charles’ similar tone noting, “Spurgeon’s son was in the family tradition in so far as his preaching . . . and to the pleasure of many, he had his father’s voice.” Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 211. There would be some difficulty in asserting with any confidence that Charles and Thomas sounded identical since Charles had an Essex dialect and Thomas was raised in London.

²Biographer W. Y. Fullerton noted with interest, “Like John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Jeremy Taylor, George Whitefield and William Tyndale, Spurgeon was fifty-seven when he died, but he was not young, for he began early and he had laboured long, and departed full of days and of grace.” W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1920), 330.

Spurgeon reaped a voluminous harvest of spiritual fruit in his thirty-seven year pastorate at the Tabernacle, such bounty did not come without a price. The cost was immense, varied and regular depression. When Spurgeon commented that the “wind blows cold,” he spoke from personal experience. Yet through all his despondencies, Spurgeon was unwavering in his commitment of Christ’s loyalty to his disheartened children. In Spurgeon’s first recorded sermon as pastor of New Park Street Chapel, the London minister declared,

Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound, in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.³

This statement exemplified Spurgeon’s spirituality during suffering and depression. The believer in pain, though despondent, can always depend on Christ as the faithful support and strength. The reader may observe that at the commencement and conclusion of his pulpit ministry, Spurgeon resonated the same truth, which is Christ takes care of the suffering believer. Upon this point, the London pastor never faltered.

Spurgeon imagined himself as a piece in a long mosaic throughout church history with the saints who had faithfully suffered for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Regarding his tried ancestry Spurgeon remarked, “I had far rather be descended from one who suffered for the faith than to bear the blood of all of the emperors in my veins.”⁴ Prior to taking the pastorate at Waterbeach and while preaching in the villages around Cambridge, he recounted the following incident:

One night, having preached the word in a country village, I was walking home, all

³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:1.

⁴Clive Anderson, *C.H. Spurgeon: In the Footsteps of the ‘Prince of Preachers’* (Surrey, England: DayOne Publications, 2002), 8.

by myself, along a lonely footpath. I do not know what it was that ailed me, but I was prepared to be alarmed; when, of a surety, I saw something standing in the hedge, ghastly, giant-like, and with outstretched arms. Surely, I thought, for once I have come across the supernatural; here is some restless spirit performing its midnight march beneath the moon, or some demon of the pit wandering abroad. I deliberated with myself for a moment, and having no faith in ghosts, I plucked up courage, and determined to solve the mystery. The monster stood on the other side of a ditch, right in the hedge. I jumped the ditch and found myself grasping an old tree, which some waggish body had taken pains to cover with whitewash, with a view to frighten simpletons. That old tree has served me a good turn full often, for I have learned from it to leap at difficulties and find them vanish or turn to triumphs.⁵

At an early age, Spurgeon was acutely aware that suffering was inevitable in his life and he learned to use trials for spiritual triumphs. This would be abundantly helpful in the relationship he believed existed between theology and spirituality. “The men who think that we may alter this [truth] and alter that, and still maintain the spirit of religion, have some truth on their side . . . yet every error tends to weaken our spirituality.”⁶ This connection between theology and spirituality may account for much of Spurgeon’s response and development in times of suffering and depression.

In recent decades, several writers have drawn attention to the vital link between theology and spirituality.⁷ Evan Howard stated, “theology nourishes and sustains

⁵Anderson, *C.H. Spurgeon*, 32.

⁶*NPSP*, 4:171. Peter Morden posited that Spurgeon’s understanding of spirituality would be strictly bound to the inner dimension of the Christian life, and therefore Spurgeon chose terms like “piety” or “devotion” to speak of spirituality. But as the citation indicates Spurgeon did use spirituality interchangeably with an understanding of theology. Peter J. Morden, *Communion with Christ and his people: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 2-3. Terms like “piety” and “devotion” are perhaps the closest definition of spirituality from Spurgeon. He equated Christian spirituality with experiencing and conducting one’s life in accordance to one’s theology. One might define Spurgeon’s spirituality as: total devotion to the Christian God by embracing truths about him, experiencing communion with him, and conducting one’s life in accordance to his word. James Douglas believed that the “main characteristic of Mr. Spurgeon’s influence lay in his spirituality.” James Douglas, *The Prince of Preachers: A Sketch, a Portraiture, and a Tribute* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1893), 145. Mark Hopkins believed that one of the reasons for a resurgence of interest in Spurgeon is not so much his Calvinistic theology as his spirituality. Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2004), 165-66. The regular effort by Hopkins to mutually exclude Spurgeon’s Calvinistic theology with his spirituality is a weakness in Hopkins’ work.

⁷Richard Burridge suggested that spirituality inspires theology. He reasoned that Christian belief “arose not out of debate, but out of spiritual experience, worship and prayer.” Richard Burridge, “Jesus and the Origins of Christian Spirituality,” in *The Story of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon Mursell (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 29. In an effort to interrelate these two entities together some modern

spirituality . . . [and] functions as a critic of spirituality.”⁸ Alister McGrath noted, “properly understood, theology embraces, informs, and sustains spirituality.”⁹ Donald Bloesch asserted, “Spirituality is inseparable from theology.”¹⁰ Joel Beeke’s warning is appropriate. “The problem with most spirituality today is that it is not closely moored in Scripture and too often degenerates into unbiblical mysticism.”¹¹ In a similar vein J. I. Packer exhorted, “if our theology does not quicken the conscience and soften the heart, it actually hardens both; if it does not encourage the commitment of faith, it reinforces the detachment of unbelief; if it fails to promote humility, it inevitably feeds pride.”¹² Philip Sheldrake who observed, “Spirituality is one of those subjects whose meaning everyone claims to know until they have to define it,” proposed a framework that spirituality is understood as being concerned with the conjunction of theology, prayer and practical

scholars choose to employ the term “spiritual theology.” John Coe, “Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality,” in *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 35. One of the first scholars to use the term “spiritual theology” was Richard Lovelace, who defined spiritual theology as “a discipline combining the history and theology of Christian experience.” Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 11. Michael Haykin’s *The God Who Draws Near* is an effort to illustrate the relationship between theology and spirituality in each facet of the Christian’s experience. Michael A. G. Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2007). On the relationship between theology and spirituality in a postmodern age see D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 555-69.

⁸Evan Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 62. Howard provided extensive comparisons and contrasts in the relationship between theology and spirituality.

⁹Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 27. McGrath delivered extensive data on the relationship between theology and spirituality. He stated that Christian spirituality was based on “a set of beliefs, values, and a way of life (1-5).”

¹⁰Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New: Recovering Authentic Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 13.

¹¹Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), vii.

¹²J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 15

Christianity.¹³ One's theological beliefs, whether consciously or not, shape the way in which one lives. This correlation between theology and spirituality informs the thesis of this dissertation.

Thesis

The purpose of this dissertation is to answer the following question: in what ways did depression shape Charles Spurgeon's spirituality? This dissertation will also seek to address several related inquiries including the following: what personal and physical factors contributed to his despondency? How did Spurgeon's theology inform his understanding of depression? What were ways that Spurgeon sought to cure depression? This dissertation will argue that suffering in depression was a vital and prominent factor in Spurgeon's spirituality.

In sum, this project will seek to convince the reader that Charles Spurgeon believed that, for the Christian, depression could be designed for spiritual measures. He firmly embraced that suffering, which included depression, was predicted by the divine revelation of Scripture, rooted and illustrated by Jesus Christ, sustained and nourished by faith in the living Christ, and maintained through the conscientious practice of spiritual devotion.

While Charles Spurgeon remains a giant in church history, other aspects of his life and ministry have largely eclipsed his bouts with depression.¹⁴ William Williams, whom Spurgeon once said, "I believe God sent you to 'Upton' for my sake," penned his *Personal Reminiscences of C. H. Spurgeon*.¹⁵ Williams described Spurgeon as a

¹³Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History* (London: SPCK, 1991), 32, 52.

¹⁴Arnold Dallimore claimed that from 1892 to 1894 a new biography of Spurgeon was published every month, but few addressed his depression. Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), ix.

¹⁵The Spurgeon comment elicited Williams to believe that he had been brought to London by divine providence to write this work honoring Spurgeon. William Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), v.

“bubbling fountain of humour,” so much so that Williams “laughed more in his company than during all the rest of my life. . . . Charles Spurgeon had himself the most fascinating gift of laughter I ever knew in any man, and he had also the greatest ability for making all who heard him laugh with him.”¹⁶ Williams concluded, “Did not much of his power for usefulness lie in his bright and sunny disposition?”¹⁷ What is curious is that Williams immediately shifted his focus and declared that Spurgeon “was as familiar with the glades of grief and the dark narrow gorges of depression as any man, or he could never with such consummate art have ministered comfort to the suffering, sorrowing sons of men.”¹⁸ Throughout his biography, Williams provided ample examples and quotations from Spurgeon of the importance in learning to suffer well, yet Williams never cited theological reasons and cures for Spurgeon’s depression.

While Arnold Dallimore’s biography of Spurgeon delivered scant space to any element of Spurgeon’s suffering, he nevertheless concurred with Williams that Spurgeon’s depression had a positive effect on his listeners. “In his audiences each Sunday sat hundreds of persons who had come from a week of trial and who needed kindness and encouragement, and here was the man who could give it. His voice was often broken with his feeling for the sorrowing.”¹⁹ Like the Williams biography, Dallimore does not connect Spurgeon’s depression to his spirituality.

One of the most comprehensive works on Spurgeon among his contemporaries was G. Holden Pike’s *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*. Pike’s collection spanned over one thousand pages of meticulous data covering Spurgeon’s life and ministry. While Pike devoted three chapters on Spurgeon’s suffering, he did not address

¹⁶Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 17-18.

¹⁷Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 18.

¹⁸Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 19.

¹⁹Dallimore, *Spurgeon*, 186.

in detail the relationship of Spurgeon's depression to his spirituality.²⁰ Instead of providing theological reasons, Thomas Armitage associated Spurgeon's depressed moods with his personality. "At times there flowed over his spirit an inborn spring of pensiveness, which at times touched him with melancholy. Acute in sensibility and strong in passion, he rose above and sank below par alternatively, while his self-control was seldom undisturbed."²¹ W. Y. Fullerton, a popular early-twentieth century biographer of Spurgeon and student at the Pastor's College, mentioned Spurgeon's depression and suffering minimally and provided details only of his final illness.²² In a similar vein, George Needham, a contemporary of Spurgeon, wrote a six hundred page biography on the London pastor, devoting a mere chapter about Spurgeon's trials in ministry. Needham attributed Spurgeon's suffering primarily to overwork and health issues, but he never analyzed theological reasons and their connection with Spurgeon's spirituality.²³

Lewis Drummond's lofty but occasional discrepant labor, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, is a thorough biography spanning nearly nine hundred pages.²⁴ Drummond

²⁰G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 6 vols. (London: Cassell and Company, 1896). Pike described Spurgeon's suffering in the form of illness.

²¹Thomas Armitage, "Mr. Spurgeon, as a Man," in *Charles Spurgeon: His Faith and Works*, ed. H. L. Wayland (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1892), 127. Armitage does not provide examples of Spurgeon's "pensiveness" and "acute sensibilities."

²²Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*.

²³George Needham, *The Life and Labors of Charles H. Spurgeon: The Faithful Preacher, the Devoted Pastor, the Noble Philanthropist, the Beloved College President, and the Voluminous Writer, Author, Etc., Etc.* (Cambridge: University Press, 1882), 91-111.

²⁴Drummond's work consistently needs to be fact checked with other sources regarding, dating inconsistencies, "historical inaccuracies," and reproducing without documenting sections of Timothy Albert McCoy's thesis, "The Evangelistic Ministry of C. H. Spurgeon: Implications for a Contemporary Model for Pastoral Evangelism" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989). Peter Morden and Christian George provide further evidence of discrepancies in Drummond's work. Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 3; Christian T. George, "Jesus Christ: 'The Prince of Pilgrims': A Critical Analysis of Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Spurgeon" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2011), 20-21.

does approach Spurgeon's melancholy purely as a result of the Downgrade Controversy, overwork, and broken health. What is remarkably scant is any information regarding Spurgeon's own views of suffering with depression and the relationship that such suffering had on his spirituality.²⁵ Patricia Kruppa's *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress* is a valuable resource in connecting Spurgeon's suffering with the trials of the Victorian era, yet there is little theological analysis in her work.²⁶ As one can observe from the previous works, when Spurgeon's depression is discussed little, if any, theological links are made to Spurgeon's spirituality. Some works are outrageous in an effort to minimize the spiritual side of suffering. One such book is *Dancing with Bi-polar Bears: Living with Joy Despite Illness*. The author, James McCreynolds, claimed that Spurgeon "died of manic depression, and had long struggled with bipolar depression."²⁷ Perhaps the most erroneous claim by McCreynolds is "history shows he did not enjoy his joy in the Lord because of his illness."²⁸ McCreynolds does not provide citations supporting this claim, which runs contrary to what Spurgeon's writings attest.

Some works do attempt to link the relationship between Spurgeon's suffering and his spirituality. Spurgeon's student and biographer, J. C. Carlile, saw in Spurgeon beneficial elements in the way he bore constant pain. Carlile's short, but popular biography labeled Spurgeon's sufferings as "difficulties" but never gave details as to

²⁵Drummond, *Spurgeon*. Drummond wrote an excellent analysis of Spurgeon's spirituality being influenced by the Puritans. However, he mentioned nothing about such spirituality's development within Spurgeon's suffering and depression. Lewis Drummond, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001), 115-38.

²⁶Patricia Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982).

²⁷James McCreynolds, *Bi-polar Bears: Living with Joy Despite Illness* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2003), 50. There are many problems with McCreynolds' work on Spurgeon regarding accuracy. McCreynolds stated that Spurgeon served in his pastorate for forty years, was fifty-eight years old when he died and was pastor of just one church.

²⁸McCreynolds, *Bi-polar Bears*, 50.

what were these difficulties, leaving the reader to surmise in the context his sufferings were the result of the Downgrade Controversy.²⁹ Carlile observed that the greater part of Spurgeon's career "was lived in fellowship with physical pain."³⁰ He reported that Spurgeon understood his long term suffering as a means to bring "comfort and strength to others." Carlile documented that in his later years the London pastor would sit uncomfortably in a chair in his private room, talk was difficult as breath came only through pain, and, even in sitting, he leaned hard on his walking stick. "The enemy has me today," he once said, "in both knees. I am afraid I cannot walk to the platform."³¹ In a telling statement that exemplified his understanding of suffering and depression, Spurgeon recounted to Carlile, "God gives to some a talent for suffering."³² Carlile testified when men would witness Spurgeon suffer they would feel "ashamed that they had ever spoken of their paltry little aches and pains. They had seen a great soul in physical agony."³³ Richard Day devoted a chapter on Spurgeon's despair. In one section, Day revealed the heart of Spurgeon's relationship of suffering and depression to his spirituality. He noted, "[God] would be glorified, than Spurgeon's fathomless misgivings and the circumstances that provoked them [trials]. His song was thrilling to human ears because he came near to the throne out of great tribulation."³⁴

While past authors have largely ignored Spurgeon's spirituality of suffering, a renewed focus on this aspect of Spurgeon has emerged in recent decades. Kim-Hong

²⁹Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon*.

³⁰Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon*, 130.

³¹Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon*, 130.

³²Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon*, 130.

³³Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon*, 130.

³⁴Richard Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim: The Life Story of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Heir of the Puritans* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1943), 176. Throughout his chapter "Giant Despair," Day provided several contributing factors for Spurgeon's depression.

Hazra in “Suffering and Character Formation in the Life and Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon 1834-1892,” provides a succinct examination of Spurgeon’s physical maladies and their relationship to his theology. Hazra explains this theology of suffering was heavily influenced by Puritan doctrine.³⁵

A worthy book that provides a thorough introduction to Spurgeon’s theology and perhaps the most treated material on Spurgeon the man is Mark Hopkins’s, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*. While this work contains only two chapters on Spurgeon’s theology, the material is a full exposition of Spurgeon’s beliefs that serves as a framework to his spirituality.³⁶ Hopkins severely challenged the consistency of fellow Spurgeon scholar Patricia Kruppa, and claimed her account of Spurgeon the man as “unimpressive,” her analysis of Spurgeon the theologian was “thoroughly inadequate,” her thesis was “self-contradictory,” as a historian, according to Hopkins she was “weak,” finally his summary of her work, “she can’t have it both ways.” Yet Hopkins claimed Kruppa’s material as the “most scholarly work.”³⁷ Hopkins profoundly understood Spurgeon the man and gives ample attention to his suffering within his theological framework. There are, however, some conclusions that appear to be faulty and are not consistent with the Spurgeon corpus. Hopkins stated that Spurgeon “declined to predict a verdict of guilty on those who had not heard the Gospel.”³⁸ Hopkins created an unnecessary contrast between Spurgeon the preacher (and mystic) and theologian when he surmised that Spurgeon’s greatest achievement was his preaching not his theology.³⁹

³⁵Kim-Hong Hazra, “Suffering and Character Formation in the Life and Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon 1834-1892” (PhD diss., Regent College, 1986).

³⁶Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2004), 125-66.

³⁷Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, 11.

³⁸Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, 115. One of many sermons that would refute Hopkins’ reasoning here would be Spurgeon, *MTP*, 3:444.

³⁹Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, 115.

While Hopkins provided an extraordinary survey of Spurgeon's central theological pulse, he understated Spurgeon's Calvinistic leanings, calling them "of a lower variety than in his earliest preaching" and believed that his Calvinistic theology "was rarely taken seriously other than by people who were predisposed to be sympathetic to it."⁴⁰ Hopkins not only minimized the influence of Spurgeon's theology but also regularly contrasted it to his spirituality, which seems to undermine an understanding of biblical spirituality, and therefore, Spurgeon's.⁴¹

Iain Murray's *The Forgotten Spurgeon* focused on theological nuances of the Downgrade Controversy. Murray highlighted the impact of this controversy and the effects it had on Spurgeon's life, ministry and spirituality. Murray noted, "as a personality, preacher, author, Baptist, mystic and philanthropist, Spurgeon has been described and discussed, but meanwhile the great controversies in which he engaged so earnestly and *the theology to which held so tenaciously have, by and large, been allowed to fall into oblivion* [emphasis added]."⁴² Murray attempted to establish a relationship between this theological controversy, Spurgeon's spirituality and the suffering that emerged. Murray summarized, "Spurgeon reminds us that piety and devotion to Christ is not a preferable alternative to controversy, but rather it should, when circumstances demand it, lead to the second."⁴³

In an article entitled, "Charles Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity," John Piper highlighted seven foundational elements to Spurgeon's effectiveness as a preacher. The final point was that Spurgeon was a "maligned and suffering preacher."⁴⁴ Piper

⁴⁰Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, 140, 162.

⁴¹Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation*, 165-66.

⁴²Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 10.

⁴³Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 205.

⁴⁴John Piper, "Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity," *Founder's Journal*, 23 (Winter 1996): 20.

detailed how Spurgeon suffered as a preacher, and linked these trials to his spirituality. He suffered from the “frustration and disappointment of lukewarm church members, from extreme calamities that befall someone once in a lifetime, through personal family pain, from unbelievable physical suffering, from public ridicule and slander, and finally recurring battles with depression.”⁴⁵ Piper concluded with six ways that Spurgeon preached through adversity.

In terms of quantity, no author has tackled Spurgeon’s depression as extensively as Elizabeth Ruth Skoglund in her foundational piece *Bright Days, Dark Nights* taken from a Spurgeon sermon of the same name.⁴⁶ Throughout this work, Skoglund demonstrated that Spurgeon’s spirituality is not incompatible with his depression. “From his own personal experience he was acutely aware of the impact of the body on the mind—such as physical fatigue, gout, and rheumatoid-type illnesses as well as how the mind connects with the spiritual state of the individual.”⁴⁷ Skoglund believed this aided Spurgeon in comforting and relating to those who were suffering. In *Bright Days, Dark Nights*, the central theme is that Spurgeon would approach all of life including depression from biblical principle first. Spurgeon affirmed that much suffering both for Christian and unbelievers are due to human sinfulness. However, he recognized that “many emotional disturbances like depression or fear might have no relationship to sin in the person’s life. Indeed, they might reflect more accurately God’s refining influence or the oppression so often connected with the struggle to do God’s work.”⁴⁸ Skoglund’s

⁴⁵Piper, “Charles Spurgeon,” 5.

⁴⁶Elizabeth Skoglund has devoted much of her writing to the examination of suffering in the life of the saints. Her books *Coping* (Glendale, CA: Regel Books, 1979), *More Than Coping* (Minneapolis: World Wide Books, 1987), *Wounded Heroes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), *Found Faithful* (Chicago: Discovery House, 2003) all include much of the same information, but they attest to her commitment to this subject. Each of these works includes a chapter on Spurgeon’s suffering with depression.

⁴⁷Elizabeth Skoglund, *Bright Days, Dark Nights* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 32.

⁴⁸Skoglund, *Bright Days, Dark Nights*, 32.

work, *Found Faithful*, corresponds with *Bright Days, Dark Nights* by demonstrating that Spurgeon had a thorough grasp of the inner-workings of depression on God's servants. Skoglund noted, "Spurgeon was far ahead of his time in perceiving this important relationship between emotions and body."⁴⁹ This relationship D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones treated in his work, *Spiritual Depression*. Lloyd Jones believed that Spurgeon's depression was directly related to his physical ailments. "That great man [Spurgeon] was subject to spiritual depression, and the main explanation in his case was undoubtedly the fact that he suffered from a gouty condition which finally killed him."⁵⁰ Skoglund noted "the black clouds of depression never permanently left Spurgeon's life until he went to be with his Savior."⁵¹ Skoglund surveys of Spurgeon's life and ministry particularly through his sermons convinced her to conclude, "In spite of, and very likely because of, the depression in Spurgeon's life, he became a spiritual giant for God."⁵²

One of the most critical works in the modern era is Peter Morden's *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon*.⁵³ The writer of this dissertation concurs with Morden's conclusion that through a detailed analysis of the different aspects of Spurgeon's spirituality readers should have a "more complete picture of this multifaceted man and uncover the forces that shaped and drove him."⁵⁴

⁴⁹Skoglund, *Found Faithful*, 143.

⁵⁰D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 18.

⁵¹Skoglund, *Found Faithful*, 150.

⁵²Skoglund, *Found Faithful*, 150.

⁵³Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*.

⁵⁴Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 7. One of the recurring themes of Morden's work is to dispel the narrow caricatures of Spurgeon. Some of these caricatures include Spurgeon being exclusively a product of Puritanism, the Romantics, or the Enlightenment. Morden goes to great length to prove that Spurgeon was a complex Christian and thus a combination of these various movements.

While Morden devoted one chapter to Spurgeon's suffering, he bridged the relationship of Spurgeon's suffering and spirituality together in ways unprecedented by previous works. Morden proposed that to understand Spurgeon's spirituality, one must embrace "communion with Christ and his people" as the grid that holds all elements of Spurgeon's piety together.⁵⁵

Tom Nettles concurred with Morden's supposition while he emphasized the Scriptures as the ground of Spurgeon's communion with Christ:

Spurgeon lived with all his might, while he did live, in the felt presence of the living Lord Jesus Christ, gaining each day and in each message fresh floods of spiritual nourishment as the Spirit witnessed to Christ's completed work, while, at the same time, none of his views of experience or his statements about Christ were other than that which is communicated in revealed truth, the written word of God.⁵⁶

Nettles's work, much like Skoglund and Morden before him, presented the relationship between theology and spirituality as crucial for understanding Spurgeon. This is especially true for suffering to which Nettles devoted a chapter. "In sharing his pain, Spurgeon became a great source of comfort and counsel to others. His own vulnerability to this condition and the criticism he received for it, made him acutely sensitive to the experience of others and allowed him to find scriptural and theological examples to explain this very common, but nonetheless distressing, human condition."⁵⁷ Nettles concurred with Skoglund by noting that Spurgeon "had a keen insight into its origins mentally and physically, and gave profound theological interpretations of it. He did not analyze depression as having unexceptionally its roots in sin."⁵⁸ The link between Spurgeon's theology and spirituality is paramount for any understanding into his suffering.

⁵⁵Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 15.

⁵⁶Tom Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 12.

⁵⁷Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth*, 606.

⁵⁸Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth*, 606.

Zack Eswine has written much about Spurgeon particularly his depression. In his worthy book, *Kindled Fire*, Eswine devoted a chapter on the unique depression that affected Spurgeon as a pastor.⁵⁹ More recently, Eswine's *Spurgeon's Sorrows* mixed Spurgeon's struggles with depression to modern believers facing similar pitfalls.⁶⁰ Many of the primary sources quoted by Eswine correspond to this present dissertation. Aside from some minor citation discrepancies and a lack of addressing the paradoxical nature of Spurgeon's depression, which is present when researched extensively, Eswine's work is valuable for those who desire a beginning knowledge of the Spurgeon corpus. The book is easily readable but credible to Spurgeon's plight and our own.

Methodology and Outline of Argument

The primary method for this dissertation is a survey of Spurgeon's depression and suffering by way of his sermons, published writings, letters, lectures, autobiography, and other personal books. Secondary sources such as biographies, historical works, and theological treatises will be used to confirm, clarify, and provide a historical context to Spurgeon's works. The purpose of this method is to analyze Spurgeon's spirituality through an investigation of his suffering and depression. Although Spurgeon never wrote a formal systematic theology, his voluminous writings in general and sermons in particular make his theology and spirituality easily accessible.

Spurgeon is universally recognized as one of the most preeminent preachers in British history. David Bebbington noted that Spurgeon was a "personality of national standing" in Victorian Britain due to his preaching.⁶¹ His contemporaries also noted this

⁵⁹Zack Eswine, *Kindled Fire: How the Methods of C. H. Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2006).

⁶⁰Zack Eswine, *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those who Suffer from Depression* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2014).

⁶¹David Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 57.

feature.⁶² In Spurgeon's day and in the years that followed, his Sunday sermon was published weekly and cost one penny.⁶³ Lewis Drummond documented, "by the end of the publication of Spurgeon's sermons in 1917, one hundred million copies of his weekly sermons had been sold."⁶⁴ There were occasions when Spurgeon logged fourteen speaking events in the span of five days.⁶⁵ One contemporary of Spurgeon declared, "The sermons of this man are read in every tongue in which Christian truth is presented."⁶⁶ W.Y. Fullerton posited, "it may be questioned whether the influence of his printed sermons was not greater [than his preaching]."⁶⁷ If Iain Murray's assertion is correct that "Spurgeon's writings are so voluminous, extensive enough to fill the twenty-seven volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*," then there is much material from which to draw.⁶⁸ Because Spurgeon articulated his theology throughout all his

⁶²Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863–1945) dubbed Spurgeon as "the greatest preacher of his age. It was an age of great preachers, but he was the greatest in a great age. He was a great orator. I never heard anything like it." Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon*, 72. One eyewitness noted, "Never since the days of George Whitefield has any minister ever lived and acquired so great a reputation as this Baptist preacher." George Claude Lorimer, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: The Puritan Preacher in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: James H. Earle Publisher, 1892), 74-75.

⁶³Spurgeon's printed sermon number three thousand was published in 1906 and cost one penny. This sermon in pamphlet form is part of the Spurgeon collection at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. The pamphlet is simply labeled "Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: No. 3000; or Come and Welcome. Published August 9th, 1906." The pamphlet was published in London by Passmore and Alabaster. There are nearly a dozen advertisements in this special pamphlet ranging from "Freeman's Original Chlorodyne" to "Eno's Fruit Salt."

⁶⁴Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 322.

⁶⁵This schedule has a connection to Spurgeon's health deteriorating and the relationship with depression. Lewis Drummond documents that one particular week Charles preached over a dozen sermons in six days at places that were a considerable distance from each other. Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 279.

⁶⁶H. G. Weston, "Mr. Spurgeon the Preacher," in *Charles H. Spurgeon: His Faith and Works*, ed. H. L. Wayland (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1892), 72.

⁶⁷Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 206.

⁶⁸Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 4. Eric Hayden also claimed this was more than is found in the famed 1875-89 ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Eric W. Hayden, "Did You Know?" *Christian History* 29 (1991), 1-2. In his *Christian History* article, Eric Hayden notes the total number of volumes in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Christian George pointed out in his dissertation that the ninth edition contains twenty-four volumes with the additional index volume, not

writings, but primarily by his sermons, contemporary readers can observe Spurgeon's depression and the relationship to spirituality with clarity.

After this introductory chapter and its survey of Spurgeon's depression within the context of his spirituality, I support and develop the thesis through six subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 will place Spurgeon within the historical context of the nineteenth century, and especially within significant movements and events that established the context for his ministry in general and his suffering with depression in particular.

Chapter 3 will feature various aspects of Spurgeon's personality that influenced his depression and further document that he was in fact a depressed man. This section will also highlight certain dangers based on Spurgeon's proclivity toward despondency.

Chapter 4 will highlight specific causes in Spurgeon's depression. Factors will focus on physical, mental, circumstantial, ministerial, and other elements that contributed to his depression. A section on Spurgeon's theological tension within this depression will also be discussed.

Chapter 5 will discuss Spurgeon's theology as it relates to his suffering and depression. For Spurgeon, a Trinitarian and Calvinistic doctrine was paramount in dealing with depression. These teachings framed his understanding of man and human conduct both in life of the believer and unbeliever. The chapter will also demonstrate Spurgeon's understanding of church history within the context of a suffering faith.

Chapter 6 will examine the cures for Spurgeon's depression. Spurgeon had no aversion to medicine and doctors in assisting his physical maladies and depression. Diet, rest, exercise, the weather, and the sea were all factors that aided in temporary recovery

twenty-seven volumes as indicated in Hayden's research and John Piper's article "Preaching through Adversity." Christian T. George, "Jesus Christ: 'The Prince of Pilgrims': A Critical Analysis of Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Spurgeon" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2011), 2.

of Spurgeon when depressed.

As the conclusion, chapter 7 will explore the range of spiritual disciplines that Spurgeon practiced himself and which he encouraged other Christians to maintain a vital experience of communion with God during times of depression. Spurgeon believed that means such as thankfulness, meditation of Scripture, prayer, service and mission were essential practices for maintaining genuine Christian piety. This section will summarize answers given to the research question and related questions.

Epictetus, the Greek Stoic philosopher, once wrote, “It is difficulties that show what men are.”⁶⁹ This declaration could be written about Charles Spurgeon for it was in his difficulties that he best reveals his beliefs, his values, his person, and his God. If one understands Spurgeon’s spirituality of suffering and depression, then one understands Charles Spurgeon.

⁶⁹Epictetus, *Discourses* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1906), 66.

CHAPTER 2
THE FACT OF SPURGEON'S DEPRESSION

Introduction

The bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce (1805–1873), delivered a scathing rebuke of Charles Spurgeon before the House of Lords on June 28, 1868. The crux of the speech was aimed at Spurgeon's opinion that Ireland should be emancipated from the state church. Wilberforce charged the London pastor with inconsistency and hypocrisy. Spurgeon responded in a letter to *The Times* on July 4, 1868, which contained the following, "Every man who speaks freely what he believes and follows truth with a confident unreserve will be open to the charge of inconsistency."¹

Because of vulnerabilities in his struggle with depression, Charles Spurgeon may receive a charge akin to Wilberforce among researchers though in a more mild and benevolent way. Spurgeon believed that depression could be sinful or helpful in the development of godliness. He affirmed that one's personality, poor health, mental instability, circumstances, or spiritual state could cause depression or despondency could arrive with no evident cause at all. He declared that Christians should thank a good God who in His sovereignty permits depression on them, yet they can loathe their depressive mood to the extent that they may despair of any hope of recovery. He believed that individuals should be rebuked for being insensitive to those who are depressed, yet if a person is depressed frequently he should be willing to accept rebuke. The Christian should seek to comfort the depressed, yet people prone to melancholy are some of the

¹C. H. Spurgeon, "On the Voluntary Principle: Answer to the Bishop of Oxford," *The London Times*, July 4, 1868.

most frustrating individuals to interact with since they often do not seem willing to alleviate their despondent mood. Believers should utilize humor as an antidote against depression, yet making light of despair is akin to “rubbing salt in the wound.” These are but a few “inconsistencies” readers will discover when they begin seriously to analyze Spurgeon’s case, and will be addressed throughout this work. With such voluminous material in print from Spurgeon including these admonitions mentioned above, we can be sympathetic to him for any apparent “inconsistencies.”²

Depression: “The worst ill in the world”

Spurgeon was convinced that depression was the darkest pitfall into which a person could plunge. “The worst cloud of all is deep depression of spirit accompanied with the loss of the light of God’s countenance. Sickness, poverty, slander, none of these things are comparable to depression. . . . Do you know what exceeding heaviness means? I pray that you may have but very little of it.”³ A few years before this statement, Spurgeon revealed, “the worst ill in the world is not poverty; the worst of ills is a depressed spirit; at least, I scarcely know anything that can be worse than this.”⁴ In an effort to bring hope to his weary readers, Spurgeon admitted, “Of all things in the world to be dreaded despair is the chief. Let a man be abandoned to despair, and he is ready for all sorts of sins. When fear unnerves him action is dangerous; but when despair has loosed his joints and paralyzed his conscience, the vultures hover round him waiting for their prey.”⁵ “The worst cloud of all . . . the worst ills . . . chief” are Spurgeon’s

²Eric Hayden pointed out that prior to his death, Spurgeon published a staggering eighteen million words. Eric Hayden, *Highlights in the Life of C. H. Spurgeon* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1990), 75.

³C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit/New Park Street Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 59:427.

⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 55:401.

⁵C. H. Spurgeon, *Words of Cheer for Daily Life* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1895), 117.

descriptions for depression. The aim of this chapter is to establish the fact that Spurgeon did indeed struggle with depression, and demonstrate that, in many respects, depression was a central player in his spirituality. This should be seen first in light of the times Spurgeon lived.

Depression in Spurgeon's Time

Medical practitioners today confront the dilemmas of “depression,” but their Victorian predecessors employed a picturesque vocabulary to address the same ailment. They spoke of “shattered nerves” or “broken health” and often misdiagnosed the malady, just as it is misunderstood today. The historian will have an arduous task discovering the severity of depression plaguing individuals in the nineteenth-century. In contemporary times, “psychiatrists label dysthymia the chronic, but milder, forms of depression that rarely require hospitalization,” but their Victorian forebears frequently made “no clear distinction between the lesser and greater, chronic and acute varieties.”⁶ They and their patients occasionally used phrases like “nervous exhaustion” and “nervous collapse” to indicate a condition of “dullness, inertia, pessimism, and deep unhappiness that nonetheless permitted the victim to function and at other times describing complete paralysis of the will.”⁷ Manifestations of depression could be thoroughly appropriate responses to tragic events in life, or so utterly “out of proportion to their causes as to demand medical attention.”⁸ “It is not natural to burst into tears because a fly settles on

⁶Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

⁷Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 5. Oppenheim quotes from Sir James Crichton-Browne (1840–1938), who was an expert of nervous breakdowns. His medical career stretched from the early 1860s until 1922. He was involved in many developments that shaped the British psychiatric profession in the late Victorian and Edwardian decades, and was a pioneer in depression cases of the era. There is no record that Crichton-Browne or his colleagues ever treated Spurgeon for depression though Spurgeon would have been a candidate for treatment using the Crichton-Browne diagnosis.

⁸Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 5.

the forehead, as I have known a melancholic man to do,” wrote one Victorian doctor.⁹

Hysteria and hypochondriasis were two disorders that appeared “prominently in Victorian medical vernacular and were frequently confused with depression.”¹⁰ These disorders were assumed to have a physiological foundation, but since each featured changes in mood and behavior, medical commentators acknowledged their psychological aspects as well. “Victorian interpretations hovered between the physical and the mental; doctors were never sure whether to treat these illnesses with medicines aimed at restoring the body or with moral exhortations designed to rally the mind and return the will to its proper function.”¹¹

Although in theory depression was not a form of mental illness, but rather a disorder of the nervous system, most British doctors during the nineteenth century acknowledged extreme difficulty in separating them. Daniel Noble (1810–1885), a Manchester doctor, wrote in 1853, “practically it is always difficult to draw the boundary line between what are commonly considered purely nervous maladies, and diseases of the mind, on account of the connection subsisting amongst all the nervous centres and the correlated physical states.”¹² That connection in the brain whose function as coordinator of the nervous system and organ of the mind “made any precise discrimination between mental and nervous illness impossible for Victorians to establish.”¹³

Both doctors and patients knew that nervous breakdown did not necessarily undermine the ability to think coherently. Michael Faraday’s (1791–1867) Victorian

⁹Henry Maudsley, “Suicide in Simple Melancholy,” *Medical Magazine* 1 (1892–93): 46. Maudsley (1835–1918) was one of the leading psychiatrists of Victorian England.

¹⁰Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 5.

¹¹Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 5.

¹²Daniel Noble, *Elements of Psychological Medicine: An Introduction to the Practical Study of Insanity* (London: Churchill, 1853), xii.

¹³Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 5.

biographer, Henry Bence Jones (1813–1873), insisted that during the renowned physicist’s breakdown in the early 1840s, he wrote letters that were “free from the slightest sign of mental disease.”¹⁴ Severely depressed patients frequently revealed unwarranted fears of financial ruin or the expectation of professional disgrace.¹⁵ In the early 1860s John Tulloch (1823–1886), principal of the University of St. Andrews, experienced a nervous breakdown aggravated by the recollection of an erroneous Latin quotation embedded in a speech he had delivered to his fellow Scottish theologians. “The glee with which a particular Scottish newspaper seized on the inadequacies of Tulloch’s classical training should have hardly sufficed to keep a widely respected religious scholar in numbing despair for nearly a year.”¹⁶ In different Victorian hands, depression clearly meant different things. Strictly used, depression referred “only to the structure and activities of the nerves, but the popular meaning dealt with personality traits and conveyed the idea of edginess, agitation, and irritability.”¹⁷

The historian who investigates depression in nineteenth century England can expect to encounter a formidable array of pitfalls. “The inexactitude of diagnostic labels, the laxity with which the terminology of nervousness was applied to widely disparate physical and mental states, the imposition of social concerns on medical decisions—all obscure the subject and complicate the task.”¹⁸ Depression is a highly individual form of

¹⁴Henry Bence Jones, *The Life and Letters of Faraday* (London: Longmans, Green, 1870), 2:126.

¹⁵Richard Day recorded Spurgeon having such an episode regarding financial loss. Richard Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim: The Life Story of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Heir of the Puritans* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1943), 175.

¹⁶Margaret Oliphant, *A Memoir of the Life of John Tulloch* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1889), 164-68.

¹⁷Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 9. Spurgeon spoke of depression most often in this popular way.

¹⁸Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 9.

illness that follows no predictable pattern, as many Victorian medical men realized. “When shall we learn,” asked Alfred Schofield (1846–1929), a doctor who wrote numerous books about nervous patients, “that each case must be separately and intelligently studied on its own merits, for no two are alike?”¹⁹ Stuart Sutherland (1927–1998), professor of experimental psychology at the University of Sussex, depicted his own overwhelming depression with extraordinary intensity, “the reasons for breaking down are as multi-various as the goals that different people pursue, in the individual case one can never be sure of the factors that bring about recovery.”²⁰ Simply stated most Victorian physicians admitted that they could not know specifically “what combination of physiological and emotional causes subjected individuals to depression in the nineteenth century. They simply maintained that depression was the characteristic ailment of their day.”²¹ There was a claim in 1838 that “nervous complaints prevail at the present day to an extent unknown at any former period, or any other nation . . . atrocious and frightful symptoms were scarce known to our ancestors and never rose to such fatal heights, nor afflicted such numbers in any other known nation.”²²

For most Victorians, nervous breakdown and intense depression at its most severe signified “the complete destruction of the personality. Victorian doctors believed in such a situation the will was somehow deprived of the means to exert its controlling power, and the conscious sense of one’s own identity vanished.”²³ Depression could ensue “as a sequence of some severe illness, of some grave anxiety, or of some physical

¹⁹Alfred T. Schofield, *Nerves in Disorder: A Plea for Rational Treatment* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903), 156.

²⁰Stuart Sutherland, *Breakdown: A Personal Crisis and a Medical Dilemma* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987), 146-62.

²¹Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 9.

²²Edwin Lee, *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders* (London: Churchill, 1838), 15.

²³Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 87.

or moral shock”.²⁴

When physicians sought to cure patients incapacitated by nervous breakdown, the treatments they designed reflected their awareness that mind and body needed to be healed together. Although there existed no single prescription for the care of depression, virtually all of the therapeutic methods employed during the Victorian and Edwardian decades sought to address both somatic and psychological distress, restoring the depleted supplies that precipitated the collapse and calming whatever form of mental strain exacerbated it. Physical intervention and moral guidance were linked in a seemingly infinite variety of combinations, as doctors worked to return each patient to the medical ideal of healthy adulthood, with the will firmly in control of all mental processes.²⁵

This is the historical context in which Spurgeon lived and battled his own depression, and how he most assuredly would have been diagnosed and treated. He understood that despondency was multifaceted in terms of causes and cures, body and mind, sinful and sanctified. We shall now seek to provide evidence that Spurgeon did struggle with depression and he was aware of that struggle.

General Factors Involved in Spurgeon’s Depression

With the vast amount of material to glean, one may surmise that Spurgeon was a depressed soul. In a brief letter to his congregation in 1886, Spurgeon provided an update on his frail health, “I find myself too readily depressed with small matters, and I have a sense of unfitness for my future work.”²⁶ In another correspondence to his church, Spurgeon admitted that he was depressed. “The furnace still glows around me. Since I last preached to you, I have been brought very low and my flesh has been tortured with pain, and my spirit has been prostrate with depression.”²⁷ The reality of his depression will be unpacked in further detail later, but these statements establish the fact that

²⁴H. Charlton Bastian, “Nervous,” in *A Dictionary of Medicine*, ed. Richard Quain (London: Longmans, Green, 1882), 1025.

²⁵Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 110.

²⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:158.

²⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography: His Diary, Letters and Records*, (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 3:243.

Spurgeon was aware of his own struggles with despondency. While numerous factors can be analyzed as legitimate in Spurgeon's despondency, we might categorize the extent of his depression as: regular, public, varied, and greater than most individuals.

Regular Depression

Spurgeon fought depression most of his life. "[I know] by most painful experience what deep depression of spirit means, being visited therewith at seasons by no means few or far between," he admitted to a group of young pastors.²⁸ We can trace his regular depression through specific events, sermon material and personal correspondence.

Spurgeon's arrival in London to preach at New Park Street Chapel was not pleasant. All alone Spurgeon recalled, "that Saturday evening in a London boarding-house was about the most depressing agency which could have been brought to bear upon my spirit." He described a scene of "pitiless" misery, and that he had "no friend in all that city full of human beings, but felt myself to be among strangers and foreigners, and hoped to be helped through the scrape into which I had been brought . . . I felt all alone, and yet not alone."²⁹

Throughout Spurgeon's life, a cholera epidemic invaded England.³⁰ He had arrived in London when the disease ravaged through the streets. He was summoned to members of his congregation's sickbed or graveside almost daily. He later described his own soul during those days, "I felt my burden was heavier than I could bear and I was ready to sink under it."³¹

²⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:171. Hereafter *Lectures*.

²⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:318.

³⁰Cholera aroused terror in England in 1831, 1848-49, 1853-54, and 1866. Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 200.

³¹C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1892), 4:235. Hereafter, *TD*.

Two years later on October 19, 1856, Spurgeon experienced what he called “the greatest ordeal of [his] life.”³² His congregation had rented the Music Hall in Surrey Gardens while the new church building was being planned. The hall could seat an estimated twelve thousand people. Spurgeon had started to preach when a group of antagonists disrupted the service with shouts of “Fire! The galleries are giving way, the place is falling!” Seven people were trampled to death in the ensuing melee. Reports vary as to Spurgeon’s initial reaction, but once he grasped the total situation, he plunged into a dark depression that he never completely escaped. He spent two weeks away from his pulpit after the tragedy. When he returned he candidly spoke to his congregation:

I almost regret this morning that I have ventured to occupy this pulpit, because I feel utterly unable to preach to you for your profit. I had thought that the quiet and repose of the last fortnight had removed the effects of that terrible catastrophe; but on coming back to the same spot again, and more especially, standing here to address you. I feel somewhat of those same painful emotions, which well nigh prostrated me before. You will therefore excuse me this morning if I make no allusion to that solemn event, or scarcely any. I could not preach to you upon a subject that should be in the least allied to it. I should be obliged to be silent if I should bring to my remembrance that terrific scene in the midst of which it was my solemn lot to stand . . . The text I have selected is one that has comforted me, and in a great measure, enabled me to come here today, the single reflection upon it had such a power of comfort on my depressed spirit. It is this, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”³³

Biographer Richard Day provided more details concerning Spurgeon’s response.

“Spurgeon’s grief over this almost unseated his reason. He was immediately hidden from the public; spent hours in tears by day, and dreams of terror by night. A depression complex deepened upon him from which he never fully recovered.”³⁴ William Williams recounted a conversation he had with Spurgeon years after the Surrey Garden tragedy:

³²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:201.

³³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:378.

³⁴Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim*, 96.

“What are you going to preach from tomorrow?” he once asked me. “The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just;” I answered. He gave a deep sigh; his countenance changed even before I had finished the verse, brief as it was; and he said, in tones of deep solemnity, “Ah, me!” “What is the matter, sir?” I asked. “Don’t you know,” he replied, “that is the text I had on that terrible night of the accident at the Surrey Music Hall?” I did not know it, but I learned, from the mere mention of it, how permanent was the effect upon his mind of that awful night’s disaster. I never alluded either to this text or to the Surrey Gardens calamity after that. I cannot but think, from what I then saw, that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night.³⁵

Even the congregation recorded the matter in their meeting minutes. “This lamentable circumstance produced very serious effects on the nervous system of our Pastor. He was entirely prostrated for some days, and compelled to relinquish his preaching engagements.”³⁶

Twenty-five years after the Surrey Garden disaster, Spurgeon had a brief relapse concerning the event. He was invited to preach at the session of the Baptist Union at Portsmouth and Southampton. Many people struggled to enter the building after the hall had reached maximum capacity. As Spurgeon attempted to ascend to the platform the crowd pressed and a mild disorder ensued. “He seemed entirely unmanned, and stood in the passage leaning his head on his hand” an eyewitness recalled. “The circumstance so vividly recalled the terrible scene at the Surrey Music Hall, that he felt quite unable to preach.” The eyewitness candidly noted, “But he did preach, and preach well, though he could not entirely recover from the agitation of his nervous system.”³⁷

An analysis of Spurgeon’s sermons will also provide evidence concerning the regularity of his depression. Sermon titles and phrases connected with depression abound in the Spurgeon corpus from beginning until the end of his tenure at the Metropolitan

³⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:220. William Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), 46.

³⁶Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:213.

³⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:220.

Tabernacle.³⁸ If one compiled all the terms related to suffering and/or depression, then Spurgeon mentioned the subject albeit briefly an average of fourteen times per sermon. In terms of actual sermons dedicated to the issue of suffering and depression as the central focus, the data suggests for every hundred sermons preached, eight had the main theme of depression and/or suffering.³⁹ In a twelve-month period, Spurgeon preached nine sermons on the primary theme of suffering and/or depression.⁴⁰ He preached on the main point of suffering and/or depression four times in a four-month stretch.⁴¹

A final proof for the regularity of Spurgeon's depression is found in his personal letters. Hannah Wyncoll has compiled approximately sixty known letters Charles Spurgeon wrote while ill, suffering and depressed that covers nearly twenty years of his life.⁴² He wrote to James in 1878 thanking him for his steadfast support in carrying on the ministry during his illness. "I bless the Lord for enabling you to be the means of bearing me over a great crisis, which I now begin to think of somewhat more calmly. I can hardly look at it steadily without depression, and I do not feel that I have any need to

³⁸The most common terms are "ache" (15,172 occurrences), "sorrow" (7,637 occurrences), "pain" (5,363 occurrences), "trial" (4,790 occurrences), "suffering" (4,571 occurrences), "afflict" (3,996 occurrences), "grief" (3,138 occurrences), "distress" (1,937 occurrences), "misery" (1,595 occurrences), "agony" (1,214 occurrences), "anguish" (1,042 occurrences), "depress" (1,026 occurrences) "torment" (962 occurrences), "hardship" (114 occurrences), "discomfort" (94 occurrences). Clearly suffering was a part of Spurgeon's vocabulary. See Appendix A for a list of sermons that either by title or content demonstrates the regularity of the subject of depression in Spurgeon's preaching.

³⁹Approximately five hundred sermons from the *MTP* have as the major theme suffering and/or depression. See the appendix for a list of sermons.

⁴⁰This would be the years 1881–1882. 1881 was a tough year for Spurgeon. The kernel of the Downgrade Controversy began to be planted as Spurgeon suggested his growing dissatisfaction with denominational developments in a speech before the annual Baptist Union meeting at Portsmouth. He was sick most of the year and conceded that he had frequently felt in "deep-waters of mental depression." C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865–1902), 17:92. Hereafter *ST*.

⁴¹These sermons come from volume 6 of *MTP* and occur in January 1859 (2), March 1859 (1), and April 1859 (1).

⁴²Hannah Wyncoll, ed., *The Suffering Letters of C.H. Spurgeon* (London: Wakeman Trust, 2007).

do so as yet; but I am all the more grateful to you for leaping into the breach.”⁴³ He penned a letter to his congregation dated September 19, 1880, “I cannot express it [love for his congregation], or indeed express anything, for the mind suffers with the body.”⁴⁴ He wrote from Mentone in 1884 to his church, “Every limb of my body is tormented with pain; there is about as much pain in each limb as any one of them can conveniently bear. In addition to this, the whole system, mind and body, is in a state of fidgets, malaise, and depression.”⁴⁵ While on holiday, Spurgeon confessed, “Weather unsettled; progress fair, but not rapid. I find myself too readily depressed with small matters, and I have a sense of unfitness for my future work.”⁴⁶

Public Depression

Because Spurgeon’s depression was regular, inevitably the public was aware of his struggles. In God’s mystery, Spurgeon’s despondency was used to minister to others. He received a letter from a man who had been informed about Spurgeon’s depression. The knowledge that Spurgeon struggled with depression helped the gentleman with his own struggles:

My dear brother, I was sorry to hear that you were again in pain, and depressed in spirit, but, as I remembered how God had blessed you in so many ways, I thought to myself, perhaps Mr. Spurgeon would not have kept to preaching the doctrines of grace, and would not have been so able to comfort God’s poor people, if he did not get these smart touches sometimes. So . . . I congratulate you upon these trials; and I accepted the congratulation.⁴⁷

The members of Spurgeon’s church communicated openly concerning his

⁴³Iain Murray ed., *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 48.

⁴⁴Wyncoll, *The Suffering Letters*, 40.

⁴⁵Spurgeon, *ST*, 20:iii.

⁴⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:158. The letter appears at the conclusion of the sermon.

⁴⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 45:11.

condition. A letter to Spurgeon on behalf of the entire church read,

Very dear and highly esteemed Pastor:

Meeting around the communion table of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we are all of us, this night, sad and sorrowful because of your illness; and one impulse fills every heart, we are unanimous in the desire to offer you some expression of our heartfelt sympathy.

We had hoped that, after a few days' rest, you would have been relieved of the bodily pain, the physical weakness, and the mental depression with which it has pleased our Heavenly Father to visit you. The Lord has done it. We accept the affliction, as you do, from the hand of God. But we cannot help comparing you to a warrior wounded in action, or to a physician prostrated with exertions to prescribe for patients that importune him on every side. For the work of Christ, you have been nigh unto death, not regarding your life, to supply a lack of service, toward us.

We cannot forget that this visitation came upon you immediately after a season of heavy labour, remarkable energy, and (as we cannot doubt) of heavenly joy in the service of Christ, of this church, and of other churches. It seems to us meet, therefore, that we should attribute the cause of it to a natural infirmity of the flesh, and not in any wise to the severity of the Lord's chastening. . . .

With the affection we bear you, we can truly say that we should account it a happiness to bear your sufferings amongst us; some of us would gladly take them all, if we could thereby relieve you of the heavy cross that bows you down. As we sit before the Lord, we think of you, as the people said to David, 'Thou art worth ten thousand of us.' Kindly accept, then, our united expression of love in Christ Jesus, tendered to you in a solemn hour. It may be superfluous to you, but it is refreshing to us to get an opportunity of communicating with you in your sick chamber.

May the Lord look tenderly upon you in your affliction! May He graciously remember your work and labour of love, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister! May He be very attentive to our prayers and intercessions on your behalf, that you may be restored to us, not in weakness and decrepitude, but in the fullness of vigour, with your youth renewed like the eagle's, — and that right early!

(Signed, on behalf of the church, by fifteen deacons and elders.)⁴⁸

As a public figure whose life, including depression, was transparent for all to witness, Spurgeon was not always received favorably with his candor, yet he received criticism as a work of sanctification:

A sick and suffering brother rebuked me the other day for being cast down. He said to me, "We ought never to show the white feather; but I think you do sometimes." I asked him what he meant, and he replied, "You sometimes seem to grow

⁴⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:230-1.

desponding and low. Now I am near to die, but I have no clouds and no fears.” I rejoiced to see him so joyous and I answered, “That is right, my brother, blame me as much as you please for my unbelief, I richly deserve it.” “Why,” he said, “you are the father of many of us. Did you not bring me and my friend over yonder to Christ? If you get low in spirit after so much blessing, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.” I could say no other than, “I am ashamed of myself, and I desire to be more confident in the future.”⁴⁹

A criticism that he did not receive involved his opponents with the Downgrade Controversy (1887–1888) who used his depression to suggest that the reason for his combativeness had more to do with mental irritation than doctrine.⁵⁰

Varied Depression

The gales of depression might blow on the soul in a multiple of scenarios. First, depression may descend on a man *before* a blessing of the Lord comes on him. Within months after his arrival in London, Spurgeon’s gifts were apparent as testified in the fruit of his preaching ministry. “My success appalled me; and the thought of the career which it seemed to open up, so far from elating me, cast me into the lowest depth, out of which I uttered my miserere and found no room for a Gloria in excelsis.”⁵¹ Depression seemed ill timed when he was experiencing spiritual fruit, and, in fact, would reap greater fruit for the kingdom in the years that followed. Though a peculiar thought, Spurgeon was undaunted, “This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy.”⁵²

Secondly, depression might *follow* a blessing of God.⁵³ After Elijah

⁴⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 32:382.

⁵⁰Patricia Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher’s Progress* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 434.

⁵¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:392.

⁵²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:393.

⁵³“When at last a long-cherished desire is fulfilled, when God has been glorified greatly by our means, and a great triumph achieved, then we are apt to faint.” Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:176.

experienced his jubilant victory at Mount Carmel, he quickly fell into the doldrums. Spurgeon could relate to Elijah's plight. "I find that such an ecstatic state as that is frequently followed by deep depression. . . . Our great 'ups' are not far off equally great 'downs'; we climb the mountains, and then we slip down the cliffs; we descend into the Valley of Humiliation soon after we have been on the tops of the hills of communion."⁵⁴

Finally, Spurgeon declared that depression could come without any warning. "Whilst I shall be endeavoring to encourage those who are distressed and down-hearted, I shall be preaching, I trust, to myself, for I need something which shall cheer my heart, *why I cannot tell, wherefore I do not know*, but I have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me; my soul is cast down within me [emphasis added]."⁵⁵ When he addressed the young men at the Pastor's College, Spurgeon reiterated this mystery. "This evil [depression] will also come upon us, we know not why, and then it is all the more difficult to drive it away."⁵⁶

When the depressed individual cannot point to a specific reason for despondency, Spurgeon surmised this could be frustrating. "There is a certain condition, in which the heart seems to go down, down, down, down, down," Spurgeon remarked. "I know not how to describe it, but everybody who has ever had that painful experience knows what it is. You can hardly tell why you are so depressed; if you could give a reason for your despondency, you might more easily get over it."⁵⁷ This unknown reason for depression was a regular theme for Spurgeon. "Depressions come upon you, you scarcely know why. They come without apparent cause, and they depart almost as unexpectedly." He appealed to one of his greatest influences to support his proposition.

⁵⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 44:2; *MTP*, 27:77; *Lectures*, 1:176-77.

⁵⁵Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 3:390.

⁵⁶Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:177.

⁵⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 49:7.

“As John Bunyan says of the Slough of Despond, that at certain seasons it poureth forth its mire most horribly, so I have found it with regard to despondency and feebleness of faith. At certain times these tyrants make havoc in our souls.”⁵⁸ Spurgeon mentioned this feeling when preparing for a sermon, “I was feeling very heavy, I scarcely knew why.”⁵⁹

Great Depression

In most instances, Spurgeon described each successive depression as more dire and deeper than his previous melancholic moods. “Perhaps *never before have I been brought so low in spirit* [emphasis added], and assured, never more graciously restored.”⁶⁰ In 1861, Spurgeon spoke almost honorably of his depression as greater than anyone else could experience. “I, of all men, perhaps, am the subject of the deepest depression of spirits at times.”⁶¹ A few years later, Spurgeon highlighted a week in ministry. “I am much tossed up and down, and although my joy is greater than the most of men, my depression of spirit is such as few can have an idea of.” He continued, “This week has been in some respects the crowning week of my life, but it closed with a horror of great darkness of which I will say no more than this, I bless God that at my worst, underneath me I found the everlasting arms.”⁶² Nearly two years after this statement, Spurgeon declared, “I do not suppose there is any person in this assembly who ever has stronger fits of depression of spirits than I have myself personally.”⁶³ His perspective would not alter, as he got older. “I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here

⁵⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:566.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:559.

⁶⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:229.

⁶¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:352.

⁶²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:188.

⁶³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:640.

present, and I know also about as much of depression of spirit at times as anyone.”⁶⁴

When he was fifty-one years of age, Spurgeon remarked, “I know what it is to be depressed; I do not suppose there is any person in this place who knows what it is to be cast down so low as I sometimes am.”⁶⁵ Spurgeon’s depression by his own standard was greater and deeper than most. If one analyzes his statements further, one can witness how extensively Spurgeon thought of his depression. Many readers may be tempted to conclude that at times Spurgeon was prone to overstate his case while he minimized the plight of others. His inconsistency seems to surface on this point as he castigated others who practiced self-pity in depression when they refused to perform any good to others claiming they were under great trials.⁶⁶

The extent of his depression was so great that he questioned many benefits he received in Christ, namely his salvation, pastoral call, and life itself. Believers often evaluate their fruitfulness and conclude, for better or worse, that they cannot have experienced salvation in Jesus. For Spurgeon, his doubts were linked with depression. “I have seasons of despondency and depression of spirit, which I trust none of you are called to suffer, and at such times I have doubted my interest in Christ, my calling, my election, my perseverance, my Savior’s blood, and my Father’s love.”⁶⁷ His depression was so pronounced, he later admitted he nearly quit pastoral ministry:

I remember years ago, when I laboured to feel the responsibility of men’s souls upon me, I became very depressed in spirit, and the temptation arose out of it to give up the work in despair . . . in my own case I saw that I could harp on one chord of my nature till I destroyed my power to do good, for I became so unhappy that the

⁶⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:31.

⁶⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:183.

⁶⁶This will be addressed in chap. 7.

⁶⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:125. Apparently, Spurgeon mentioned this on more than one occasion and was sharply rebuked for the statement and how it would influence those who also doubted their faith. Spurgeon spent a considerable amount of time in his message providing his rationale for expressing himself in this way.

elasticity of my spirit departed from me. . . . We are not the keepers of other men's souls in a boundless sense, there is a limit to our responsibility and it is foolish to allow an excessive sensitiveness to burden us into semi-lunacy.⁶⁸

There were moments when death was favored over his depressive moods. "Death would be welcomed as a relief by those whose depressed spirits make their existence a living death."⁶⁹ He even believed martyrdom was to be preferred over bouts with depression. "I think it would have been less painful to have been burned alive at the stake than to have passed through those horrors and depressions of spirit."⁷⁰ When he encountered depression, Spurgeon recognized that his own spiritual energy changed. "I know this, brethren, having many cares resting upon myself, that when I can feel calmly restful and quiet before God, I am a match for anybody; but when once the spirits sink, and depression comes in, then the grasshopper becomes a burden, and a trifle frets the soul."⁷¹

Conclusion

Spurgeon lived at a time when causes for depression were as varied as the treatments for it. His despondent plight was authentic and extensive. Instead of total despair, however, Spurgeon recognized that depression was a "gift" sent by a good God for his glory and the benefit of the sufferer if only the recipient embraced these sufferings. His depression functioned as a ministry to others in a similar predicament. As Day observed,

There was one aspect of Spurgeon's life, glossed over by most of his biographers . . . he was frequently in the grip of terrific depression moods. This offers no difficulty whatever to any Christian who does sometimes himself walk the floor of hell, on and on, until he finds a Hand that brings him out. The sweetness of his release giveth him such radiant new love for his Redeemer, that he doth then find in his head the tongue of the taught, enabling him to sustain with words any other that

⁶⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:101.

⁶⁹Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:131.

⁷⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 53:137-38.

⁷¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:651.

may be weary.⁷²

Elizabeth Skoglund has rightly concluded that with Spurgeon there is no harshness in dealing with fears, depression or doubt. “He could be tough and exacting regarding sin, but he was gentle with human frailty. He did not believe that fear or depression could be eradicated . . . and always he believed that the experience could be a source of comfort for others. Above all, he believed in God’s power and God’s timing.”⁷³

In a sermon entitled, “Sweet Stimulants for the Fainting Soul,” Spurgeon addressed these various contributing factors:

We have wondered that we were low in spirits, whereas it would have been a thousand wonders if we had not been depressed. We have marveled that we have been cast down, whereas the physician would tell us that this was but one of many symptoms which proved that we were not right as to our bodily health. Not infrequently has some crushing calamity been the cause of depression of spirit. Trial has succeeded trial, all your hopes have been blasted, your very means of sustenance have been suddenly snatched from you; while all your needs have remained, the supplies have been withdrawn from you. At other times, it has been bereavement that has brought you down very low. The axe has been at work in the forest of your domestic joys. Tree after tree has fallen; those from whom you plucked the ripest fruits of sweet society and kindred fellowship have been cut down by the ruthless woodsman; you have seen them taken away from you for ever so far as this world is concerned. Or else it may be that you have been slandered, your good has been evil spoken of, your holiest motives have been misinterpreted, your divinest aspirations have been misrepresented, and you have gone about as with a sword in your bone while the malicious have taunted you, saying, “Where is now thy God?” The cases of depression of spirit are so various that it must be indeed a rare panacea, a marvelous remedy, which would suit them all.⁷⁴

In dealing with emotions like depression and fear, Spurgeon could envision any combination of factors to be the cause or cure. The body, the mind, and the spirit could each contribute to depression.⁷⁵ These factors are now the subject we address.

⁷²Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim*, 173.

⁷³Elizabeth Skoglund, *Bright Days; Dark Nights* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 122.

⁷⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:458.

⁷⁵Skoglund, *Bright Days; Dark Nights*, 91.

CHAPTER 3
SPURGEON'S PERSONALITY IN DEPRESSION

Introduction

When a young American boy was asked, “Who is the Prime Minister of England?” he replied, “Charles H. Spurgeon.”¹ To reverse the question and ask, “Who was Charles Spurgeon?” will invoke a variety of responses. W. Charles Johnson spoke for many, “we still await an adequate record and assessment of [Spurgeon] the man.”² William Robertson Nicoll put it more starkly, “most of his old students who have written about him have failed entirely to do justice to the deeper and finer element in his mind and culture.”³ Others shared James Douglas’s assessment of Charles Spurgeon, “He was great as a man; great as a theologian; great as a preacher; great in private with God; great in public with his fellow men.”⁴

In an effort effectively to grasp Spurgeon’s struggles with depression, we must attempt to understand Spurgeon the man. He believed that while circumstances could trigger “black moods,” in many cases dejection was merely the result of one’s natural disposition. Some individuals gravitate to depression more than others due to their

¹C. H. Spurgeon, *Mr. Spurgeon’s Jubilee: Report of the Proceedings at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on Wednesday and Thursday Evenings, June 18th and 19th 1884* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, n.d.), 34.

²W. Charles Johnson, *Encounter in London: The Story of the London Baptist Association, 1865-1965* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1965), 19.

³T. H. Darlow, *William Robertson Nicoll: Life and Letters* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), 403.

⁴James Douglas, *The Prince of Preachers: A Sketch; A Portraiture; And a Tribute* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1893), v.

personality. This chapter provides an overview into the relevant aspects of Spurgeon's personality, and to demonstrate how those characteristics may have been triggered depression. The chapter also provides data on how Spurgeon viewed the influence of personality on those prone to depression. In a sermon, he linked the relationship between personality and depression. "One of the things we most want is, to have our equilibrium always kept up." He explained, "Sometimes we are elated. If I ever find myself elated I know what is coming. I know that I shall be depressed in a very few hours. If the balance goes too much up, it is sure to come down again. The happiest state of mind is to be always on the equilibrium."⁵

Spurgeon the Man

Attempting to explain Spurgeon the man in a simple way is nearly impossible.⁶ While the data that follows is by no means exhaustive, a broad survey of Spurgeon's personality is helpful in understanding his depression and how he reacted to it.

Christian Man

Fundamentally Charles Spurgeon was a Christian. He personally embraced the truths of historic Christianity, and sought to know and love Jesus Christ. To understand Spurgeon the man was to be soon introduced to Jesus, the God-man. Spurgeon considered himself in good company to be descended from a family whose reputation was that they feared the Lord and came from Nonconformist stock.⁷ The Spurgeons were not recognized for any distinguishable achievements, but were known to their neighbors

⁵C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP/NPSP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 4:184.

⁶J. D. Everett's account of Spurgeon as a friend and fellow student is valuable in understanding Spurgeon's personal traits. C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: His Diary, Letters and Records* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 1:53-55.

⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *ST* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-1902), 20:471.

as pious persons of excellent Christian character.⁸ When he described his parental influence, Spurgeon emphasized the Christ-centered impression in the home. “Perhaps the first song we learned to sing was concerning the children’s best Friend. The first book that we began to read contained His sweet name, and many were the times when we were pressed by godly ones to think of Jesus, and to give our young hearts to Him.”⁹

Spurgeon’s devotion to Christ is reflected in his first sermon at New Park Street Chapel, and Jesus is identified as the saint’s great comfort in the last sermon of his pastoral ministry in London.¹⁰ Indeed, Jesus Christ was “the keynote of all his preaching.”¹¹ One of the first sermons he preached was on Sunday evening in 1851 at a cottage in Tevershem, near Cambridge. Spurgeon selected as his text, 1 Peter 2:7, “Unto you therefore who believe, he is precious.”¹² Believing that he could “tell a few poor cottagers of the sweetness and love of Jesus,” Spurgeon proceeded to preach a sermon on Jesus Christ.¹³ Later, he recounted, “This was the theme of the first sermon I ever preached, I hope it is my theme now, and ever shall be living, dying and glorified.”¹⁴

⁸Russell Conwell, *Life of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the World’s Greatest Preacher* (New York: Edgewood Publishing Co., 1892), 24.

⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:66.

¹⁰I am referring to “The Immutability of God,” sermon number 1, and “The Statue of David for Sharing of the Spoil,” sermon number 2208. When one analyzes the Spurgeon pulpit, one can observe the Christo-centric emphasis. Approximately 42,966 times the name “Jesus” is used in Spurgeon’s sermons. This is also true of the title “Christ” where Spurgeon employs the title approximately 103,320 times in his sermons. Forty-two occasions the name “Jesus” is mentioned in Spurgeon’s sermon titles; 101 times the title “Christ” is used in sermon titles.

¹¹Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1967), 77.

¹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 52:553. “This is the passage from which I first essayed to speak in public when I was but a boy of sixteen years of age; and I am sure it contains the marrow of what I have always taught in the pulpit from that day until now.”

¹³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:201.

¹⁴Christian George cited this incident in his dissertation. George’s thesis is how Spurgeon’s Christology is the focal point of everything he believes, preaches, and practices. Christian T. George, “Jesus Christ: ‘The Prince of Pilgrims’: A Critical Analysis of Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical

Spurgeon's chief reason for withdrawal from The Baptist Union in 1887 was that a newly drafted doctrinal statement did not include any specific articles about Christ's relationship to the Godhead, virgin birth, or substitutionary atonement.¹⁵ He believed that an individual's relationship with Jesus was the "nearest, dearest, closest, most intense and most enduring relationship that can be imagined."¹⁶ In *Smooth Stones from Ancient Brooks* Spurgeon included the following extract:

Christ is a most precious commodity, he is better than rubies or the most costly pearls . . . Christ is to be sought and bought with any pains, at any price; we cannot buy this gold too dear. He is a jewel more worth than a thousand worlds, as all know who love him. Get him, and get all; miss him, and miss all.¹⁷

While these accounts represent only a fraction of evidence that could be submitted regarding Spurgeon's devotion to Jesus Christ, they do serve to frame the character of Charles Spurgeon. Indeed, his "personal knowledge of [Jesus] . . . was at the heart of [his] understanding of conversion and at the heart of his spirituality."¹⁸

"Manly" Man

One of the Victorian terms that aptly described the Spurgeon persona was the phrase "manly man." Historian David Newsome noted, "'manliness' and 'manly' are words which appear so frequently in the writings of the Victorians, one might reasonably

Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Spurgeon" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2011), 45-46.

¹⁵Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans*, 139; C. H. Spurgeon, *The Down Grade Controversy* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001). Lewis Drummond provided a detailed timeline on the Downgrade Controversy. Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 661-716.

¹⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 20:42.

¹⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks* (London: Dean and Son, 1864), 30, as quoted in Peter J. Morden, *Communion with Christ and his people: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 46.

¹⁸Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 59.

conclude that manliness was one of the cardinal Victorian virtues.”¹⁹ Spurgeon employed the term “manly man” with a decisive Christian connotation.²⁰ He once remarked to his students, “We must be men ourselves if we ever wish to move men . . . a Christian is no milksop; nay, of all men the Christian is, or should be the most manly.”²¹ “A man of God,” said Spurgeon said through his literary character John Ploughman, “is a manly man,” and there “never was a more splendid specimen of manhood than the Savior.”²² Manliness in religion was a mark of “nobility of soul, such nobility of soul as grace alone can give.”²³ Spurgeon feared a manly Christianity would be replaced by a “namby-pamby sentimentalism, which adores a deity destitute of every masculine virtue.”²⁴ He made this particular argument as he referred to his opponents in various controversies as effeminate. In his celebrated sermon, “Baptismal Regeneration,” he had pointedly criticized the Puseyite preoccupation with “toy-rags, wax candles, and millinery.”²⁵ “How much of the extravagance of female dress,” he wondered, “could be traced to the man-millinery of Anglican priests? . . . when men, and even ministers, take to resplendent trappings, who can wonder that the weaker sex exercises a larger liberty? For shame ye

¹⁹Newsome traced the changes in the meanings of the words “manly” and “manliness” from mid to late nineteenth century. Originally the word “manly” was used to describe someone who was open, transparently honest; later the word described living life to its greatest potential, living for the higher good; finally the word came to have robust, masculine connotations. For Kingsley, Hughes, and Spurgeon, the opposite of “manly” was effeminacy. David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1961), 195.

²⁰Mark Hopkins cited “manliness” as one of the distinctive features of Spurgeon’s preaching. Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 2004), 152.

²¹Patricia Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher’s Progress, Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher’s Progress* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 384.

²²Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 384.

²³Spurgeon, *ST*, 1:390.

²⁴Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:274.

²⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:503.

so-called priests, put away your baby garments and quit yourselves like men.”²⁶ The way to heaven, he announced in 1866, is not to be found “through ceremonies, millinery, wax, gilt, artificial flowers, music, a kind of celestial squeaking through the throat, instead of speaking plainly.”²⁷ Spurgeon employed unmanly expressions to those modernists who held to a deviant theology. Their teachings were compared to “soufflés, whipped cream, velvet, jelly, slobbering kisses, ladies' games, dolls, dress-making, and lawn tennis.”²⁸ Those doctrines he identified with, however, were described as men of character, “stiff, hard, substantial, and manly.”²⁹ Spurgeon’s idea of manliness within his personality is best demonstrated in three traits: his work, his boldness, and his toughness.³⁰

According to one biographer, Spurgeon had the same characteristics as his ancestors: “love of flowers, industry and simple habits.”³¹ He was raised around Essex folk who believed in hard work, and he exemplified the capacity for arduous labor in extraordinary ways.³² Most retail shops in Victorian England stayed open with the same

²⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *The Bible and Newspapers* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1878), 34.

²⁷Oliver Creyton, *Spurgeon Anecdotes and Stories* (London: Houlston, 1866), 152.

²⁸Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 384.

²⁹Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 384.

³⁰For a brief understanding of Victorian manliness, see David Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning: Four Studies on a Victorian Ideal* (London: John Murray, 1961); Donald E. Hall, “Muscular Christianity: Reading and Writing the Male Social Body,” in *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, ed. Donald E. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Sean Gill, “How Muscular was Victorian Christianity? Thomas Hughes and the Cult of Christian Manliness Reconsidered,” in *Gender and Christian Religion: Studies in Church History*, vol. 3, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1998); Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: the Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

³¹J. C. Carlilie, *Charles H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1933), 31.

³²Spurgeon’s father played on his origins. During a fund raising tea party at Rea’s Repository, where over two thousand people were in attendance, John Spurgeon commenced his talk about his son by saying, “We are Essex men” to point to the stamina and hard work of Spurgeon’s London ministry. Spurgeon’s father was not supportive of the move to London at the outset. Spurgeon, *MTP*, 5:618. The

employees on duty between fourteen to sixteen hours a day. When Spurgeon remarked that he worked sixteen hours a day this is another connection with lower to middle class hard working citizens.³³ He was the epitome of a Victorian self-made, hard-working man who earned a gentleman's salary at the height of his fame.³⁴ A remarkable fact about Spurgeon was that despite chronic illness and natural weakness he produced enormous stamina and energy. As the Bishop of Ripon said of him, "he had what athletes would call 'staying power'."³⁵ There seems to be evidence that by the time Spurgeon was eighteen he had preached approximately 412 times.³⁶ While the Metropolitan Tabernacle was being constructed, he claimed, "almost every week I have the pleasure of preaching twelve times, and often in my sleep do I think of what I shall say next time."³⁷ During his lifetime, approximately fifty-six million sermons were sold.³⁸ The church would open as the largest place of worship in England without debt. In 1856, Spurgeon founded the

report of the "Evening Meeting" is at the conclusion.

³³George Needham, *The Life and Labors of Charles H. Spurgeon: The Faithful Preacher, the Devoted Pastor, the Noble Philanthropist, the Beloved College President, and the Voluminous Writer, Author, Etc., Etc.* (Cambridge: University Press, 1882), 28.

³⁴Spurgeon's annual income at the height of his fame was between twenty thousand and thirty thousand pounds, but his estate at death was a mere two thousand pounds. This salary would have been in the category of wealthy aristocrats and could have provided him a London house, a country estate, and servants. The 250 wealthiest aristocrats had incomes of more than thirty thousand pounds a year. Aristocratic income came primarily from hereditary landowning that they collected rent/payment/cash. Most aristocrats were given titles (duke, knight, earl, etc.) The head of these titled families had seats on the House of Lords. Earls owning land made at least twenty thousand pounds a year. Wealthy merchants, bankers, and manufacturers made ten thousand pounds a year. Some clergy in Spurgeon's time were fortunate to have made one thousand to two thousand pounds a year. Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 21, 32-34.

³⁵Bishop of Ripon, "Mr. Spurgeon," in *Littell's Living Age*, ed. Eliakim Littell and Robert Littell (Boston: Littell Co., 1892), 193:312.

³⁶A facsimile sermon outline appears to demonstrate this fact. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:267.

³⁷Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 3:215. The fact that Spurgeon is "restless" even during sleep suggests his mind never stopped working. He wrote on another occasion, "it was no uncommon experience for me to preach twelve or thirteen times a week." Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:81.

³⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:81.

Pastors' College to train ministers. A decade later, Spurgeon initiated the Colportage Association, which employed salesmen to increase the circulation of Bibles and other Christian literature. In 1865, Spurgeon created *The Sword and the Trowel* a monthly magazine that he edited and largely wrote himself for the rest of his ministry. Two years later, he established an orphanage. The core of Spurgeon's typical week included four services at the Tabernacle, revision at least one sermon for publication and delivered a lecture at the Pastors' College. He wrote and edited many other books as well. By the time of his death there were over one hundred and fifty volumes with Spurgeon's name on the title page. In addition, he spoke at numerous other churches and voluntary organizations.³⁹

Spurgeon was raised with the belief that hard work was integral to Christianity. All Christians should be industrious, for religion never was destined to make one idle. Jesus was a great worker, and his disciples must not be afraid of hard work. Spurgeon had little use for ministers who did not labor intensely. He often linked laziness with affluence, which was a deadly combination when one was to care for souls. Among these "smaller men" in Spurgeon's day were "loafers and ne'er-do-wells . . . whose religion consisted in little more than ritual and formality and who therefore were not motivated to do anything about changing the world."⁴⁰ According to Kruppa, the purveyors of the brand of Christianity he most despised were for the most part "stilted gentlemen" who peddled their "superior" religion among the sections of the community more accustomed to the drawing room than the workshop. His sharpest arrows were reserved for those "born with silver spoons in their mouths" who, "like spoons . . . will scarce stir their own tea unless somebody lends them a hand . . . our great folks [who] are some of them quite

³⁹For more details on a "Typical Week's Work," see Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:63-92.

⁴⁰Note his use of terms like "the little man in the gown surplice" and "the prim little man" to describe priests. Spurgeon, *MTP*, 21:474. See also Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 198.

as lazy as have nothing to do but to part their hair in the middle.”⁴¹ He firmly charged that the working class “will never be brought even to consider the truth of Christianity by teachers who are starched and fine. Soft speaking for soft heads, and good, plain speech for the hard-handed many.”⁴²

Work was a remedy and, on many occasions, the enemy of Spurgeon in his effort to curb depression. Examining his own labor coupled with a short amount of time with which to accomplish the work, Spurgeon remarked, “When I consider how many claims there are upon a Christian, and how much a loving heart desires to do, and then think how short is the space of time into which we must need crowd all, I am depressed in spirit, but sternly resolute to condense much work into small space.”⁴³ Part of Spurgeon’s depression occurred in his thoughts of not accomplishing all the work God gave him to do:

I do not know any subject that so much depresses me, humbles me, and lays me in the dust, as the thought of my omissions. It is not what I have done, about which I think so much as of what I have not done. “You have been very useful,” says one. “Yes, but might I not have been ten times more useful?” “You have been very diligent,” says another. “Yes, but might I not somehow have been more diligent? Might I not have done my work in a better spirit? If I had been better, would not my work have been better? If I had borrowed more of my Master’s strength, which I might have had, might I not have accomplished much more?” Do you ever feel satisfied with yourself? If so, I would advise you to fling that satisfaction out of the window, as Jehu said of the painted Jezebel, “Throw her down.” A sense of satisfaction with yourself will be the death of your progress, and it will prevent your sanctification.⁴⁴

Spurgeon admitted that he was prone to depression whenever he was not able to perform his work as well as he would have liked. “Occasional fits of depression there may be, but these are not because we do not love the work, but because we cannot do it so well as we

⁴¹Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 198; C. H. Spurgeon, *John Ploughman’s Pictures* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1884), 17, 23.

⁴²Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 198.

⁴³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 19:367.

⁴⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 44:27.

would desire. We are tired in the work, but not tired of it.”⁴⁵ In a scenario that seems to run counter to the previous situation, Spurgeon remarked that he grew weary from work, which made him susceptible to despondent moods. “I can say that, too; yet, when I get home tonight, it is very likely that I shall feel very, very, very weary, and possibly, on a sudden, a spirit of depression will come over me. It often does when one is very weary; and then I fall back on this fact, I did my best to extol my Master.”⁴⁶

From politics to religion, Spurgeon had an opinion on virtually every discussion. He described himself as having “my own ideas, and I always state them boldly.”⁴⁷ His mother once called him “strong willed” with “high spirits and daring temper.”⁴⁸ While his mother would surely know her son, he often spoke of his timidity in youth (the Thomas Roads incident aside). He traced his boldness for the gospel beginning at his baptism. “Baptism also loosed my tongue, and from that day it has never been quiet. I lost a thousand fears in that River Lark.”⁴⁹

In his *John Ploughman’s Pictures*, Spurgeon promoted the virtue of independent thought and obedience to conscience without regard to popular opinion. “He is not a free man who is afraid to think for himself, for if his thoughts are in bonds the man is not free. A man of God is a manly man. A true man does what he thinks to be right, whether the pigs grunt or the dogs howl!”⁵⁰ Whatever price Spurgeon paid for his resoluteness, he clearly saw standing steadfastly for the truth and doing so alone if necessary as a criterion by which both a man’s godliness and his manliness could be

⁴⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:36.

⁴⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 41:189.

⁴⁷Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:50.

⁴⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:69; Needham, *The Life and Labors of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 28.

⁴⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:152.

⁵⁰Spurgeon, *John Ploughman’s Pictures*, 26.

measured. “Men who are well taught, confirmed, experienced, and trained by the Spirit of God, are men of faith and firm convictions, men of decision and courage not men that retract, or shuffle, or evade; but witnesses who are faithful and true, imparting confidence to the feebler sort by their calm defiance of the foe.”⁵¹ As he put it bluntly, “a man should speak out as God tells him, and care for nobody.”⁵² This boldness, which would make him a national celebrity would also present him with heartache and result in his many doldrums.

Many of Spurgeon’s heroes suffered for the kingdom of Christ. Due to this, he embraced a virtuous idea of suffering to the extent that he had difficulty believing one could follow Jesus without a measure of hardship. He was proud of an ancestry that sought escape from Catholic persecutions in England. He never forgot his forebear Job Spurgeon, who had spent fifteen months in the Chelmsford jail for attending a Nonconformist service in defiance of the law. “I would far rather be descended from one who suffered for the faith,” he wrote, “than to have the blood of all the emperors in my veins.”⁵³ Spurgeon was from childhood fascinated by stories of religious persecution and martyrdom. In his final years he believed he was a “martyr for truth,” and was strengthened by the fact that he bore “the same name as that persecuted Spurgeon of two hundred years ago.”⁵⁴ The record of his family was a source of personal inspiration for him. Understanding Spurgeon’s affinity for suffering due to the gospel’s sake is important in understanding his own struggle with depression.

⁵¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:642.

⁵²Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 383.

⁵³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:8.

⁵⁴Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:8.

Complex Man

Spurgeon was a man with many complexities. One of his pastoral contemporaries, Joseph Parker, commented in 1890, “When people ask me what I think of Spurgeon, I always ask which Spurgeon?”⁵⁵ When W. Y. Fullerton described Spurgeon, he called his friend, “many-sided.”⁵⁶ An eyewitness reported that as a boy, Spurgeon was “somewhat shy and reticent, if not indeed somewhat morose.”⁵⁷ Yet a fellow student would describe him as “a clever, pleasant little fellow . . . small and delicate, with pale but plump face, dark brown eyes and hair, and a bright lively manner, with a never-failing flow of conversation.”⁵⁸ By his own account, Spurgeon loved books, but hated to write and prepare sermons.⁵⁹ He had an amazing memory and superb intellect, even outwitting his instructor, who was his uncle, on a math problem.⁶⁰ But it was his emotions, not his intellect, which seemed to be the dominant connection with people.⁶¹

Spurgeon appreciated art and music, and while he never became a professional

⁵⁵Editorial, *The British Weekly*, April 25, 1890.

⁵⁶W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1920), 346.

⁵⁷Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon*, 33.

⁵⁸The student was J. D. Everett (1831—1904), later professor at Queen's College, Belfast, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. His remarks are quoted in J. H. Barnes and C. E. Brown, *Spurgeon: The People's Preacher* (London: Epworth Press, 1892), 14.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:22. “Writing is the work of a slave!” said Spurgeon. Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim*, 185. He addressed his contempt for sermon preparation in a message entitled “Prayer-The Forerunner of Mercy,” saying, “God is my witness, I scarcely ever prepare for my pulpit with pleasure: study for the pulpit is to me the most irksome work in the world. I have never come into this house that I know of with a smile upon mine heart.” Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 3:255.

⁶⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:51. As to Spurgeon's intellect, Dr. Richard Glover provided personal testimony. “His intellectual qualities were of the supremest kind. I have met many great men, but never one so swift in perception, so rapid in seizing on the prime element in every cause, so prompt in discussion.” Fullerton, *Spurgeon*, 270.

⁶¹Spurgeon admitted he was overly sensitive, an emotional man for whom feelings were always very important. Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:604-5.

in either commodity, he incorporated both throughout his sermons.⁶² He thoroughly enjoyed nature and animals. At an early age he fantasized about the grandeur of being a foxhunter.⁶³ He kept dogs and bees, but was hesitant with horses and cows on the roads.⁶⁴ He loved humor and jokes.⁶⁵ While bold with people on the subject of the gospel, he feared crowds and was hesitant to cross the street alone.⁶⁶

Spurgeon's unique acquaintances were people in high places of British society, which included Lord Shaftesbury and the Archbishop of Canterbury, yet he always claimed to be a preacher "for the masses". He loved the country, particularly Stambourne, but lived in London.⁶⁷ He had moments when he regretted living in the age in which he existed. "I am more and more astounded at this nineteenth century; I have heard it praised up for its enlightenment and progress till I am sick to death of the nineteenth century, and am right glad that it is nearing its close, and I hope the twentieth century will be

⁶²See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:25 for his art talent, and Spurgeon told a humorous tale about the singing and composition ability of his grandfather, only to divulge his own experience with singing. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:27-28.

⁶³This was probably an unrealistic dream due to the fact that foxhunting was for the higher class in Victorian culture. Autumn was devoted to country sports. Foxhunting began on the first Monday of November and ended when the ground became dangerous for horses. The hunt maintained a pack of hounds, generally through subscriptions paid by its members, although some men kept their own packs. The dogs do the hunting by chasing and killing the fox; riders merely follow on horseback to watch. Hunting required weekday leisure in winter and enough money to keep good horses. Mitchell, *Victorian England*, 220.

⁶⁴Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 34. Part of his fear with horses was due to his awkward physical frame. His ideal horse would be "safe, old, and blind." Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:14, 28. Kruppa cited perhaps a cow charged him when he was young, and another incident where a young girl rescued him when a horse that he was riding "got away."

⁶⁵There are approximately twenty books on jokes and humor in the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

⁶⁶Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 34. This may be related to his fear of horses coupled with his fear of crowds.

⁶⁷"The joys of country life far surpass those of town." C. H. Spurgeon, *The Salt-Cellars: A Collection of Proverbs and Quaint Sayings* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:91.

something better.”⁶⁸ Yet he was very much a Victorian man.

Physically, Spurgeon was prone to falls and illness. He was not athletic, and his father expressed concern over his health, yet he had amazing stamina, particularly when he was weak.⁶⁹ He was sharp and witty, yet many believed he was overly sensitive to criticism, particularly in the press.⁷⁰ Mark Hopkins spoke for many when he stated that Spurgeon “was capable of great tenderness, but in some circumstances could display considerable severity.”⁷¹ “This was the combative, controversialist Spurgeon whose anger at an open foe would occasionally spill over into sustained fire at erstwhile allies that suspiciously were a few yards closer to the enemy’s camp.”⁷² While Spurgeon could remain steadfast even while risking friends and reputation, he could be very caring and tender toward others, particularly those suffering. One example of this complexity involved his brother James:

My brother, as a child, suffered from weak ankles, and in consequence frequently fell down, and so got into trouble at home. At last, hoping to cure him of what father thought was only carelessness, he was threatened that he should be whipped every time he came back showing any signs of having fallen down. When I reminded my father of this regulation, he said quite triumphantly, “Yes, it was so, and he was completely cured from that time.” “Ah!” I answered, “so you thought, yet it was not so, for he had many a tumble afterwards; but I always managed to wash his knees, and to brush his clothes, so as to remove all traces of his falls.”⁷³

Concealing this truth from his father in order to protect and aid his injury prone brother

⁶⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 19:281.

⁶⁹Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 185; Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 27.

⁷⁰He preserved a scrapbook of newspaper clippings that eventually spanned over fifty volumes. The first volume, which contained largely unfavorable criticisms, he entitled, “Facts, Fiction, and Facetiae.”

⁷¹Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, 131.

⁷²Kruppa provided significant data as to the toll that Spurgeon’s suffering took on his “friendships.” She noted the tension with Lord Shaftesbury, Joseph Parker, William Booth and D. L. Moody during the time of the Downgrade Controversy. She linked his “inflexible crabbiness” to his debilitating health. Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 360-63, 445-67.

⁷³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:41.

sheds light on the gentle side of Spurgeon who empathized with the suffering. In many ways, he was a paradoxical figure. Particularly during his bouts with depression, the reader will sympathize with him, be inspired by him, or be perplexed because of his reactions.

Depression May Be Influenced by Personality

Spurgeon did not underestimate depression's power on the personality. A "person's temper often depends a great deal upon the state of his health," he once quipped.⁷⁴ Believing that God had created each individual with their own characteristics, Spurgeon concluded that people prone to depression might be responding to their natural proclivities. He used images from botany and the calendar to describe a personality bent toward despondency:

Brethren, many of the excellent of the earth are constitutionally sorrowful. Certain of our friends are always happy, not so much as the result of grace as the effect of nature. Some can bear a very much larger amount of pain than others without being depressed in spirit: this is a great boon. Many plants flourish best in the sunshine, but others love the shade. I have seen a fern, which grows best in drip and gloom. God has made each one for its place. Some of the most beautiful flowers in the garden of the Lord grow under the shade of the tree of life. Bid all those who are timorous and sad to lift up their hearts and rejoice in God. But oh, do not condemn them while you encourage them! Cheer them, but do not censure them. The Lord knows that there may, in each case, be something about the body, something about the mind, or something about the condition, which makes it far less evil in these persons to be desponding than it might be in our cases.⁷⁵

The last line in this sermon is curious. Spurgeon affirmed that since God created the melancholy person and knows them, then it is "far less evil in these persons to be desponding than it might be in our cases [those who are not prone to despondency]." God designed each individual with a different personality, and one should not think ill of the depressed just as one would not think of a naturally elated person as being spiritually superior. Spurgeon was resolute with this logic by suggesting that depressed individuals

⁷⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:15.

⁷⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 35:198-99; *MTP*, 37:321.

may “flourish” in the “shades of life” in a way others would not “flourish.”

There are some flowers that must be grown in the shade. I believe God made and adapted them to flourish most in umbrageous spots. Some ferns never thrive so well as in some little corner of the brook where the damp continually washes them. Perhaps you are one of those flowers or ferns, planted in a soil that suits your growth. The gloom that hovers over you may help the peace of your heart.⁷⁶

Spurgeon also employed the month of December to illustrate the natural disposition of some depressed people. “There is always a party in the church that are naturally desponding. They cannot help it. They were born in December, and they will never have a birthday in June. They are of that kind of spirit that flourish best in the midst of a thaw and in wet times. They always look at the dark side of matters.”⁷⁷ He remarked in another sermon that there are “even among the excellent of the earth who seldom have a bright day in the whole year. December seems to rule the whole twelve months.”⁷⁸

Dangers with a Personality Prone to Depression

While Spurgeon affirmed that people are depressed often as a result of their natural characteristics, he did highlight the dangers. Chief among these perils was a distortion of reality. Preaching to a people overcome with fear, Spurgeon reasoned, “Despondent people can find fear where no fear is. Certain classes of persons are greatly gifted with the mournful faculty of inventing troubles. If the Lord has not sent them any trial, they make one for themselves.”⁷⁹ Another example of how a depressed person can twist reality is to mistake one’s “black mood” for a trial sent by the Holy Spirit. This “dark side of much that is called Christian experience is not the work of the Holy Spirit at all. In many, it is occasioned by a natural crabbedness of disposition. . . . The troubled

⁷⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 49:515.

⁷⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *Able to the Uttermost: Twenty Gospel Sermons by C. H. Spurgeon Selected from His hitherto Unpublished Manuscripts* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1892), 81.

⁷⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 55:401.

⁷⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 16:268.

man experiences a good deal, not because he is a Christian, but because he is a man, a sickly man, a man inclined to melancholy.”⁸⁰ Spurgeon spotted this problem in connection with the work of conversion:

In many persons their difficulties in coming to Christ were caused very largely by their melancholy temperament. We are not all alike cheerful by natural constitution. Why, here is one man who is bright-eyed by nature, and when he is down, he is higher up than others are when they are up. He is always bright and hopeful. Yonder is another brother who seems inevitably to take a dark view of matters. He is an unhappily constituted person; a person with whom it is not easy to live except in a very large hotel, in which the dinner table is many yards long. You know and avoid the style of man. If there is a melancholy disposition, it tends to darken the work of the Spirit in the heart; and whereas the work of the Spirit makes the man sorrowful, his own melancholy disposition, perhaps caused by mental disease, darkens that sorrow into black despair.⁸¹

While Spurgeon was sensitive to depressed individuals by virtue of their personality, he factored another potential danger. He suggested that while these nervous individuals reacted due to “a peculiarity of their constitution,” more often their state “leads them into much sin, and should cause them much repentance before the face of the living God.”⁸²

Another danger that Spurgeon noted was the despondent soul will often overreach in their fits and out of habit lapse into one melancholy state after another. “We happen, every now and then, to meet with some of the best of God’s people who get into the Slough of Despond. . . . There are believers who take periodically to despondency, as birds do to molting, and when the fit is on them you cannot cheer or comfort them.”⁸³ Once an unhappy person gets into this state, “they write bitter things against themselves, and call themselves all the ugly names in the dictionary, until they make us smile to hear them, because we know how mistaken they are.”⁸⁴ The melancholy person becomes

⁸⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:221-22.

⁸¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:248.

⁸²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 9:341.

⁸³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:380.

⁸⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:380.

easily agitated about anything and the distortion of reality continues. “When people are in the dark they are afraid of anything, everything! Nothing! Once get a person into a low and nervous state, and the fall of a leaf suggests an avalanche, the least shadow of a cloud foretells the total extinction of the orb of day, while a drop of rain is the commencement of the final conflagration!”⁸⁵

Conclusion

Preaching a sermon in immense physical pain and less than two years before his death, Spurgeon still held to the belief that some were downcast due to their personality. “Some persons are constitutionally sad. They cried as soon as they were born; they cried when they cut their teeth; and they have cried ever since. . . . Their spirits are very low down, there should be persons who have bad livers, feeble digestions, or irritated brains; but there are such.”⁸⁶ His recognition that depression and the human personality are linked helped him minister to others, as well as understanding himself.

He was not willing to lay depression solely at the feet of one’s constitution. He recognized and lived through other factors that contribute to one’s despondency. Perhaps the most prominent in his life and the lives of others were physical factors.

⁸⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 30:475.

⁸⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:297.

CHAPTER 4
CAUSES FOR SPURGEON'S DEPRESSION

Introduction

Charles Spurgeon was travelling one night on a third-class railway carriage with a large number of people on board. Apparently on this exhausting trip there was little, if any, light. Spurgeon and others became nervous due to this lengthy, shrouded venture. Then one of the passengers lit a candle, and the traveler's, including Spurgeon's, mood changed. He used that experience to illustrate what often occurs in the believer's soul. "There is a kind of mental darkness, in which you are disturbed, perplexed, worried, troubled, not, perhaps, about anything tangible; you could not write down your troubles, it may be that you really have not any, but you feel troubled and dismayed." When this situation occurred, Spurgeon admitted, "one imagines a thousand evil things. Even good things themselves seem to be evil, and what should be to your encouragement becomes often a source, of discouragement."¹

The train experience was not isolated. For most of his life, Spurgeon's nerves were frail, his body was weak, and he journeyed through a series mental darkness. He frequently felt "troubled and dismayed." Although Spurgeon confessed he may not know the precise cause of his troubles, Doctor Darrell Amundsen, professor of Classics at Western Washington University and co-editor of *Caring and Curing*, categorized Spurgeon's depression into three components: physical, emotional and spiritual.² While

¹C. H. Spurgeon, *NPSP/MTP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 51:350.

²Darrell Amundsen, "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," *Christian History* Issue 29 (1991), 20-25.

this will be an appropriate grid to analyze the causes of Spurgeon's depression, each are interrelated to the degree that it is difficult to address one without the others. Spurgeon recognized this relationship between a person's personality, physical and mental state:

A person's temper often depends a great deal upon the state of his health. If a man is perfectly well, sound in mind and body, he can put up with a good deal; but there are times when the head aches, or when the tooth aches, or when the heart aches, or when there is an overpowering sense of nervousness upon you, and then you know what a very little thing will put you out. "Oh, take that child away!" you cry, petulantly, "I cannot bear its noise." That ring at the bell has startled you, that cry of the costermonger in the street has quite irritated you, and now you are in a very fit state of mind to act the part of a tyrant. One who was discussing a certain trial said, "I wonder what the jurymen are having for breakfast this morning, for their food will have a good deal to do with the verdict they will give."³

This chapter will survey the major causes of Spurgeon's depression. Though not exhaustive, the major components will be limited to: physical, mental, circumstantial, pastoral and theological. The chapter will also address Spurgeon's suggestion that depression may have no specific cause at all. Understanding these causes should allow the reader to better appreciate how Spurgeon addressed the cures.

Spurgeon's Physical Constitution

Of all the physical conditions that caused and exasperated Spurgeon's depression, his fragile health was documented more than any other single factor.⁴ From an early age, friends and family observed that Spurgeon had a delicate frame. J. D. Everett, a school mate of Spurgeon's noted that he was "a clever, pleasant little fellow . . . rather small and delicate, with pale but plump face, dark brown eyes and hair, a bright lively manner, with a never-failing flow of conversation." Everett further described Spurgeon as "deficient in muscle, did not care for cricket or other athletic games, and was timid of meeting cattle on the roads."⁵ Another boyhood friend described Spurgeon as

³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:6.

⁴Iain Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 47-57.

⁵J. D. Everett was professor at Queen's College, Belfast, and a Fellow of the Royal Society.

“short, plump, and carelessly dressed, with protruding teeth and eyes that did not quite match.”⁶ One eyewitness listening to him preach for the first time remarked:

He was stout, with a face somewhat pale, and innocent of beard or mustaches, but often played over by a genial smile which won your confidence at once, with fearless, kindly eyes that told of the bold spirit and warm heart within, with black hair lightly tossed off the open brow, with gestures rather more frequent and rhetorical than those with which the great preacher now indulges, the hand being often uplifted, and with that rich, round, full voice which has never failed to charm with its music those who have had the privilege of listening to it.⁷

Spurgeon was of a broader build than his brother James, had a larger head and took to learning more readily than his brother. Besides the two boys, there were six sisters who were said to resemble the mental abilities of the eldest Spurgeon male.⁸ Spurgeon’s lack of athleticism was apparently a concern for his father.⁹ His height “at maturity was five feet, six inches, but his head and chest were larger than average (one phrenologist described his head as ‘massive’), but he was abnormally short from knee to loin, which made it difficult for him to run.”¹⁰ His coordination was poor and he was clumsy, as the number of falls he suffered during his life indicates. His only form of physical exercise was an occasional game of bowls, which he liked because it had been a

His remarks are quoted in J. H. Barnes and C.E. Brown, *Spurgeon: The People’s Preacher* (London: Epworth Press, 1892), 14.

⁶Patricia Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher’s Progress* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 107.

⁷George Needham, *The Life and Labors of Charles H. Spurgeon: The Faithful Preacher, The Devoted Pastor, The Noble Philanthropist, The Beloved College President, and The Voluminous Writer, Author, Etc., Etc.* (Cambridge: University Press, 1882), 4.

⁸Needham, *The Life and Labors of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 28.

⁹Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 33.

¹⁰Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 33; W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1920), 185; J. C. Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1933), 27. His lack of coordination may have been genetic. Spurgeon provided an account of his brother James often falling down regularly due to “weak ankles.” C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography: His Diary, Letters and Records* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 1:42.

favorite of the Puritans.¹¹

Spurgeon's Physical Maladies

Spurgeon was well aware of his physical frailty, calling his body “my poor creaking machine. . . . creeping like a snail.”¹² He used humorous metaphors to illustrate his weak condition. “I have been nearly wiped out, but the blaster’s touch is putting in the main lines, and the colours and tones will follow. I never was a ‘plaque’ for exhibition, but with a rivet or two the plate will be good enough for a few more feedings of the multitude.”¹³ He once opined, “No dealer would buy me except for cats’ meat, and I’m not worth so much for that as I was, for I am many pounds lighter.”¹⁴ At age forty-five he wished he could be young again and not lose the “elasticity of spirit, the dash, the courage, the hopefulness of days gone by” that, he believed, eclipsed him.¹⁵

There are variant opinions as to the duration of Spurgeon’s physical maladies. Peter Morden noted, “From 1879 until his death in 1892 he found himself frequently incapacitated. Spurgeon’s later London ministry was heavily marked by debilitating physical suffering.”¹⁶ J. W. Harrald, Spurgeon’s assistant, provided an earlier date when Spurgeon’s physical deterioration began to be noticed. Harrald estimated that from the age of thirty-five Spurgeon was out of his pulpit for one-third of the time either in pain, sickness, or convalescing.¹⁷ Indeed, Spurgeon himself wrote in the preface of the first

¹¹Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 33.

¹²Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 49, 54.

¹³Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 53.

¹⁴Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 56.

¹⁵C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 131.

¹⁶Peter J. Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 259.

¹⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:194.

installment of *The Treasury of David* concerning a “protracted illness that kept me away from preaching.”¹⁸ This would have been in the years 1865 through 1869 when Spurgeon was in his early to middle thirties. Patricia Kruppa believed that Spurgeon’s health deficiencies were much longer. “From the beginning of his ministry until his death there was not a year in which he enjoyed consistent good health.”¹⁹ Mark Hopkins concurred with Kruppa on this point when he claimed that Spurgeon’s kidney disease began in his early twenties.²⁰ All agree that Spurgeon’s physical maladies were a leading cause in his depression.

When Spurgeon wrote to his brother James, most often would be news concerning his health. The common refrain would be “I am not well.”²¹ In a letter posted to his brother on October 18, 1890, Spurgeon penned, “Think the most hopeful things of me. I am quite uninjured as to brain, and that is the main thing. The knee must have time, but I begin to walk, go-cart fashion, with a chair. Cough is better, but voice weak. I have been nearly wiped out. . . . I will come home when I can move.”²² While in convalescence from Mentone, he notified James on December 8, 1890:

It may seem childish, but I am full of pleasure this morning because I have dressed myself for the first time. My hand is not yet handy, but you see I can write handsomely. . . . Today is perfect. Every moment seems to do me good. I feel very feeble, and, after a drive, need to lie down; but the mischief has passed over, I trust. . . . I have to be penurious with my pen, for the hand soon aches. . . . Not many people in Mentone. All the better for my quiet.²³

¹⁸Spurgeon, *TD* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1892), 1:v.

¹⁹Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 107, 386.

²⁰Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Publishing, 2004), 130.

²¹Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 47. This is a letter written to James from Paris dated 1871. When one reads this letter, one is struck with the fortitude of Spurgeon for in the midst of illness he provided James with a list of no less than a dozen tasks to perform.

²²Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 53.

²³Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 54.

Eight years earlier, Spurgeon was recuperating again in Mentone when he wrote to James on December 2, 1882, “I am well, and I feel better than I remember to have been for years.”²⁴ This letter indicates a recurring problem in his physical frame that led him to caution James to be overly sensitive with his own condition. “Now do not come to see me tomorrow, but rest as much as you can. You must not knock up, or two cripples will be worse than one. Better, but broken-backed, and broken-kneed.”²⁵

Kidney Problems

Charles Spurgeon died on January 31, 1892, from Bright’s disease.²⁶ While many scholars believed Spurgeon’s kidney troubles emerged later in life, Patricia Kruppa stated that he began “to suffer from kidney trouble in his early twenties, which, complicated by rheumatic gout, led finally to chronic Bright's disease.”²⁷ Many medical professionals of the day affirmed that “gout and rheumatism and other painful and spasmodic affections” were the result of kidney problems.²⁸ Hannah Wycoll made the point, that his “condition was diagnosed as Bright’s Disease, or chronic nephritis, a disease of the kidneys, causing severe pain and swelling due to accumulation of fluid which can distend the whole body, and severely restrict breathing.”²⁹ While Tom Nettles

²⁴Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 50.

²⁵Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 56.

²⁶Bright’s disease led to the fatality of 140 British patients in 1881 and 149 in 1882. The disease was ranked as the twenty-third most common cause of death in 1882. Henry Hayter, *Victorian Yearbook* (London: George Robertson, 1883), 283.

²⁷Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 107, 386. Kruppa does not provide any evidence to this claim, but given Spurgeon’s symptoms this is feasible.

²⁸Charles Seale, *The Blood in its Relation to Life, Health, and Disease* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1861), 187. This particular work is part of Spurgeon’s personal library. The author sent this to Spurgeon with the following inscription, “The Rev Mr. Spurgeon, with the compliments of the author.” The fact that many doctors personally sent their work to Spurgeon implied they knew his health problems.

²⁹Hannah Wyncoll, ed., *The Suffering Letters of C.H. Spurgeon* (London: Wakeman Trust, 2007), 10.

rightly pointed out the hereditary aspect of Spurgeon's gout, he recognized the root cause of Spurgeon's maladies was probably Bright's disease. "The history of gout in his family makes it possible that at times his bodily complaint arose from that source, but probably the severity of it is explained in terms of the severe aggravation of joint pain by the peculiar symptoms of Bright's disease."³⁰

Victorian physicians associated chronic kidney disease with gout either as the cause or effect of the illness. In the nineteenth century, Bright's disease (named after Richard Bright who discovered the symptoms) was considered terminal and possibly genetic. The patient would complain of fatigue and puffiness especially in the ankles. In the early stages, urination would be frequent, copious and contain albumen leaking from the kidneys. As the patient became weaker, the amount of urine diminished, and dropsy became general. In the final stages, lungs were impacted, cramps would set in the lower extremities, convulsions ensued and the patient would die comatose.³¹

These descriptions parallel many of the accounts concerning the final days of Spurgeon. His kidney problems were so severe and known for years that many feared "this should end his life's work."³² In July 1891, Spurgeon experienced, "long periods of delirium" that extended over a month and was put on "a liquid diet, being reduced to oatmeal."³³ The waste of albumen from the kidneys "suddenly increased, and the prostration of strength was very great."³⁴ When he did recover consciousness, the illness

³⁰Tom Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 599-600.

³¹Charles Robert Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine: A Guide to the Mode of Recognition and the Rational Treatment of Diseases and Emergencies Incidental to Daily Life* (London: E. Gould & Son, 1893), 380-81.

³²Henry Davenport Northrop, *Life and Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon* (n.p: Memorial Publishing Company, 1892), 177.

³³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:359; Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 744.

³⁴Northrop, *Life and Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon*, 178. There are some apparent

had brought a faraway tone to his voice that was “hushed.”³⁵ A Boston minister, Doctor George Lorimer (1838–1904), who visited Spurgeon ten months before his death, found him prematurely old. “His shoulders were bent, he leaned heavily on a chair when he preached, he walked with painful slowness . . . he evidenced many marks of extreme old age.”³⁶ In his final illness of January 1892, he was given milk, but “could not keep it down.”³⁷

Doctors Joseph Kidd (1824–1918), R. M. Miller (n.d.), and Russell Reynolds (1828–1896) all treated Spurgeon in his final days with Bright’s disease. Doctor Kidd, who had treated patients with the illness prior to Spurgeon and was sent by Prime Minister Gladstone (1809–1898), provided the simple but solemn diagnosis, “this case is a very difficult and dangerous one.”³⁸ In his final hours, Spurgeon could not walk, talk ably or eat comfortably and looked much older than the fifty-seven young years he lived.

discrepancies in the account of Spurgeon’s illness of July 1891. Drummond reported that “first public mention of his kidney disease” took place with this event, yet Northrop noted that it “was known for a long time he [Spurgeon] had been a sufferer of kidney disease and gout.” Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 744; Northrop, *Life and Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon*, 177. Northrop pointed out about Spurgeon’s delirium, that “he had never been unconscious” and never been so delirious that “he did not know those around him.” Northrop, *Life and Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon*, 182. In his final illness of January 1892 however, he did not recognize Susannah in his final hours, and could not speak. Northrop, *Life and Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon*, 190.

³⁵C. H. Spurgeon, *ST* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-1902), 27:iii.

³⁶George Claude Lorimer, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: The Puritan Preacher in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: James H. Earle Publisher, 1892), 18-19.

³⁷Northrop, *Life and Works of Rev. Charles H. Spurgeon*, 190.

³⁸Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 745. Joseph Kidd (1824–1918) was one of the leading homoeopathic physicians of the nineteenth century. He was personal physician to two Prime Ministers of England, Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) and William Gladstone (1809–1898). His treatment of Spurgeon would have been thorough, as he had treated many with Bright’s disease. He probably made the official diagnosis of Bright’s disease in Spurgeon and would have limited Spurgeon’s medication. His style clashed with Dr. Andrew Clark (1826–1894) who was given the opportunity to treat Spurgeon as well, but declined because he did not wish to consult with Dr. Joseph Kidd. George Simmons, “Medical News,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 71 (Dec 1918), 1928; Alfred Pope, “The Reverend C.H. Spurgeon and Sir A. Clark, Bart,” *Homoeopathic Review*, 35 (September 1, 1891) 618-19. Spurgeon had Dr. Kidd’s book, *On the Adaptation of External Nature to the Physical Condition of Man* (London: William Pickering, 1836) in his personal library.

The kidney disease that probably plagued him all of his life rather than parts of it pained him no more around midnight of January 31, 1892.

In a medical report published in 1893, the average hospital stay for a person suffering with Bright's disease was thirty-eight days, gout was thirty-three days, influenza was nineteen days, and rheumatism was thirty-seven days.³⁹ There is no knowledge that Spurgeon had an extended hospital stay, and with the exception of the last year of his life no serious, on-going, professional, medical attention was recorded. Given what we know of each of these illnesses and the time required for convalescence, the endurance of such pain by Spurgeon was astonishing. If Spurgeon had survived another decade, the cure for Bright's disease would have been likely.⁴⁰ This kidney disease not only was responsible for his death, but is more than likely responsible for most of the physical maladies that he also had to contend. What follows are other illnesses, which more than likely resulted from his kidney problems.

Gout and Falls

Spurgeon once said to a friend, "I have inherited most of my father's excellences and the gout with them." "What is gout like?" was the inquiry. "If you put your hand into a vice," replied Charles, "and let a man press as hard as he can, that is rheumatism; and if he can be got to press a little harder, that is gout."⁴¹ So serious was

³⁹Victoria Government Statist, *Victorian Yearbook*, Vol. 21 (Cornell University Press, 1895), 391.

⁴⁰By 1902 surgeries on the kidney with sufferers of Bright's disease were quite successful. Many who underwent surgery noticed healing within seven months. George Edebohls, "Renal Decapsulation for Chronic Bright's Disease," in *The Medical Record*, ed. Frederick Shrady (New York: William Wood and Company, 1903), 481-91.

⁴¹Jesse Page, *Spurgeon: His Life and Ministry* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., 1903), 148. Lewis Drummond contradicted the fact that Spurgeon's father had gout since he had escaped "the family foe" which Drummond takes to mean gout. Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 577. Spurgeon's grandfather had gout. "Charles, I have nothing to leave you but rheumatic gout; and I have left you a good deal of that." Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 80.

Spurgeon's gout that he gave the attacks the name, "evil."⁴²

A leading physician of Spurgeon's day provided the following descriptions of gout that is helpful in understanding Spurgeon's condition. Gout attacks are usually preceded by "dyspepsia, *low spirits and irritability of temper* [emphasis mine], and by a cold, numb feeling in the lower extremities, or by a pricking sensation, as of pins and needles, with cramps and swelling of the veins of the legs."⁴³ The pain could be accompanied by "shivering, feverish heat and restlessness. The joints would be so tender that the patient could not even bear the weight of bedclothes, or at least the movement in the room."⁴⁴ With patients suffering from chronic gout, the person is "never completely free of pain, and acute seizures accompany this pain is the most severe. The patient may pass albumen in the urine, and the kidneys become diseased."⁴⁵

The fact that Spurgeon kept an amazing schedule of ministry is almost unbelievable in its own right. But when one considers that he accomplished this with gout spread throughout his muscles, and then it becomes nearly unfathomable. His gout was so extreme that it would often render him to near invalid status. He described a gout attack in December 1888. "I could not yet stand through a discourse, much less walk a mile; but I can walk further than I could a week ago, and I am conscious of renewed vigor. I thank God that the swelling of the feet is also decreasing, and so I may look for complete restoration, and then for a speedy return to my happy work."⁴⁶

Spurgeon experienced hand problems from his gout.⁴⁷ "It may seem childish,"

⁴²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:242.

⁴³Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 113.

⁴⁴Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 114.

⁴⁵Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 114.

⁴⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:696. The letter appears at the conclusion of the sermon.

⁴⁷What may be a desire to know more about his hand problems as it related to gout, Spurgeon had in his own personal library Sir Charles Bell's, *The Hand: Its Mechanism and Vital Endowments as*

he wrote in October 1891, “but I am full of pleasure this morning because I have dressed myself for the first time. My hand is not yet handy, but you see I can write handsomely . . . I feel very feeble, and, after a drive, need to lie down; but the mischief has passed over, I trust . . . I have to be penurious with my pen, for the hand soon aches.”⁴⁸

Throughout 1889 and 1890, Spurgeon incurred a series of seizures and various falls that may have been related to these seizures.⁴⁹ The “seizures” were probably not of an epileptic kind, but were related to gout.⁵⁰ These incidents were repeatedly described as “broke down” or “utterly broken down.”⁵¹ Spurgeon wrote to his church in January of 1889,

My injuries are far greater than I supposed. It will take some time before foot, mouth, head, and nerves can be right again. What a mercy that I was not smashed quite up! The angels did their work well, for another stone would have brought me to mine end. Through what a stupor I have passed! Yet in a day or two I shall be none the worse. I am overcome with gratitude. May I be spared to keep my own footing to the end, and let the down-graders know how terrible is a fall from the high places of the Lord’s truth!⁵²

His effort to turn his pain into a poignant lesson about the theological strife he was embroiled should not be lost. Apparently the seizures were not lost either:

After enduring much intense pain, I am now recovering, and, like a little child, am learning to stand, and to totter from chair to chair. The trial is hot, but it does not last long; and there is herein much cause for gratitude. My last two attacks have been of this character. It may be the will of God that I should have many more of

Evincing Design (London: William Pickering, 1834). In advanced cases, “gout stones are formed on the knuckles.” Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 118.

⁴⁸Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 55.

⁴⁹Spurgeon mentioned at least two episodes. See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:242. While this letter is undated it seems to fall within the timeframe being discussed.

⁵⁰Physicians would diagnose chronic gout patients as having “acute seizures.” Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 116. The connection with Spurgeon’s falls seems to concur with this theory.

⁵¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:213. The term “utterly broken down” was used for his condition in the summer of 1890.

⁵²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 35:36. The letter appears at the conclusion of the sermon dated January 12, 1889.

these singular seizures and, if so, I hope you will have patience with me.⁵³

In later years, the full effects of gout were manifest in Spurgeon's body as he had difficulty sitting and breathing. "The enemy has me today," he once said as he prepared to speak to one hundred and twenty men, "in both knees. I am afraid I cannot walk to the platform." He began the arduous stroll by straightening himself up, tightening his lips, he stood with the aid of his cane on one side and a helping arm on the other. He straightened himself more, reached the platform and sat down. "Then the enemy gave him another twinge; his face was drawn for a moment but when he looked up with a new light in his eye, he said, 'God gives some talent for suffering'." Reflecting on conversations that he had with other men present, Carlile noted, "that afternoon many men felt ashamed they had ever spoken for their paltry little aches and pains. They had seen a great soul in physical agony."⁵⁴

Knee and Arm Problems

As previously mentioned, Spurgeon had knee problems throughout his life that contributed to his lack of coordination. This may have been a genetic condition, or this could have been associated with gout. As early as forty-five years old, he was complaining about his knees. "I feel daily improving in health and strength; only my knees remain feeble."⁵⁵ On the last Sunday of 1888 Spurgeon was in Mentone and had a serious accident when his stick slipped at the top of a flight of marble stairs. In the ensuing fall Spurgeon rolled over at least twice and was badly bruised and shaken, losing two of his teeth.⁵⁶ Sometime in 1890, Spurgeon collapsed, suffered minor head trauma,

⁵³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:242.

⁵⁴Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon*, 131.

⁵⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 25:192.

⁵⁶G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Cassell and Company, 1896), 6:308-309.

and did damage to his already feeble knees. He lamented to his brother James, “The knee must have time, but I begin to walk, go-cart fashion, with a chair. Cough is better, but voice weak. . . . I will come home when I can move.”⁵⁷ In another letter to his brother, he expressed his concern for James sustained health while he reported on his “broken back” and “broken knees.” “Now do not come to see me tomorrow, but rest as much as you can. You must not knock up, or two cripples will be worse than one. Better, but broken-backed, and broken-kneed.”⁵⁸ On another occasion he became “disabled in both arms.”⁵⁹ This condition also was a result of his gout.

Neuralgic Pain

Spurgeon incurred sharp pain in his nerves that on occasion was associated with his gout. Apparently Spurgeon had chronic nerve and muscle pain that would be pronounced with a change in weather. Writing to his congregation in 1887, he remarked, “I have suffered much from neuralgic pain, for the weather was wet and windy.”⁶⁰ The flu would also aggravate his nerves. “I am very weak, but I hope the nerve poison is gone. This influenza is a vile business . . . I am not allowed to write much, and my head soon takes fire, and feels vast and flaming, like a prairie.”⁶¹

This nerve problem led to joint and muscle pain in his lower back.⁶² When he was forty-nine, Spurgeon bemoaned, “I am altogether stranded. I am not able to leave my

⁵⁷Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 53.

⁵⁸Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 56. This letter is undated and no more details of his back which we can assume was related to his falls.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, *ST*, 17:147.

⁶⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:696.

⁶¹Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 132. This letter was dated June 2, 1891 in the midst of another breakdown.

⁶²C. H. Spurgeon, *Eccentric Preachers* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1888), 31.

bed, or to find much rest upon it. The pains of rheumatism, lumbago, and sciatica, mingled together, are exceedingly sharp. If I happen to turn a little to the right hand or to the left, I am soon aware that I am dwelling in a body capable of the most acute suffering.”⁶³ Spurgeon’s age at the time of this statement would lead the reader to conclude that his nerve damage and the effects that came with it was not due to the falls in the final years of his life, but was occurring much earlier.

Lumbago was severe pain “involving the muscles of the loins, causing stiffness and inability to move or sit without discomfort.”⁶⁴ Victorian doctors believed that lumbago could be caused from over-exertion and a debilitated condition of health. Sciatica was a shooting pain (often described like darts) extending from the back of the hip joint to the knees, and at times, to the ankle. The patient “is obliged to walk with care, or in some cases, unable to move.”⁶⁵ The causes of sciatica were: rheumatism, gout, neuralgia, over-exertion, pressure on the nerves.⁶⁶

Spurgeon dealt with life long kidney disease that was associated with gout, which resulted in joint and muscle pain in his hands, arms, lower back, knees, legs and feet. He had incurred nerve damage in his lower back. In addition to these consistent maladies, in the middle of November of 1869, Spurgeon was suddenly laid aside by an attack of the smallpox, which he called “that dreadful disease” and possibly struggled with diabetes.⁶⁷

⁶³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:251. This evidently was recorded on January 10, 1884.

⁶⁴Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 533.

⁶⁵Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 534

⁶⁶Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 534.

⁶⁷I am thankful Nicholas Brennecke for alerting me to the possibility that Spurgeon may have been diabetic which would have amplified his gout and Bright’s disease though I disagree with Brennecke’s title of his thesis. Nicholas Brennecke, “Gout Killed Him: A Study of Spurgeon’s Health” (masters thesis, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, 2015), 4, 19.

Weather

Understanding Spurgeon's physical plight helps us grasp his sensitivities with the weather. The climate in England, particularly in winter, produced terrible pain as the change in temperature affected his muscles and nerves. "I have suffered much from neuralgic pain," Spurgeon once wrote to his congregation, "for the weather was wet and windy."⁶⁸ As early as 1871, he complained about the ill effects of weather on his health. "I am obliged again to take up the note of mourning, for I have been all the week suffering and the most of it confined to my bed. The severe weather has drawn me back, and caused a repetition of all my pains."⁶⁹

Spurgeon wrote while vacationing in Naples "the fall in the temperature seemed to affect me, and I had a very disturbed and uncomfortable night."⁷⁰ In a sermon he preached on Christmas Eve in 1876, Spurgeon, instead of being in a festive mood, admitted, "I was very heavy yesterday in spirit, for this dreary weather tends greatly to depress the mind."⁷¹ This admission once again links the relationship between Spurgeon's physical affliction and mental state. He does not mention his merely physical condition but that "dreary weather tends greatly to depress the mind." Even a change of weather in the summer would alter Spurgeon physically and mentally. In July of 1888, he noted, "this unseasonable weather fills our bones with rheumatism, and our spirits with depression."⁷² When the weather did turn favorable, so did his physical condition and moods. "The change in the temperature has worked wonders."⁷³ Spurgeon was convinced that warm weather would hasten his recovery from his many illnesses. "Living

⁶⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:696. The letter is attached to the end of the sermon.

⁶⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:212.

⁷⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:198.

⁷¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:716.

⁷²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:431.

⁷³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:213.

in an unbroken series of summer days, where no cold mists are dreamed of, it is no great marvel that rheumatic pains fly away, and depression of spirit departs.”⁷⁴

Others would link the change of weather with his change of moods. “Cold, wet days . . . acted on the Pastor’s sensitive frame. . . . Dull and dreary days depressed him. . . . he reveled in the sunshine, and enjoyed basking in its warm beams; and his pity for those who had to endure the severities of fog, frost, and snow, was very sincere.”⁷⁵

Spurgeon’s Physical Maladies and Depression

Spurgeon knew by personal experience that physical maladies had a direct connection with his depression. “Most of us are in some way or other unsound physically. . . . Certain bodily maladies, especially those connected with the digestive organs, the liver, and the spleen, are the fruitful fountains of despondency.”⁷⁶ At age twenty-seven he had already understood that illness could be the cause for his depression. “When we are depressed in spirit, perhaps some bodily illness has brought me low.”⁷⁷ Later in his life, he put it more bluntly, “Make no mistake: depression is frequently the fruit of indigestion.”⁷⁸

When counseling others, Spurgeon provided the same exhortations that he noted for himself. “Why, my dear friend, when the pain increases and the brain becomes weary, you are very likely to suffer depression.”⁷⁹ He saw a relationship between physical ailments and mental anxiety:

⁷⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:36.

⁷⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:362-63.

⁷⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:172.

⁷⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:571.

⁷⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 27:75.

⁷⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 20:311.

In many instances, the mental distress, which attends the work of the Spirit, is produced by sickness of body: it is not repentance, but indigestion or some other evil agency depressing the spirits. A sluggish liver will produce most of those fearsome forebodings, which we are so ready to regard as spiritual emotions. There is such a blending of the physical with the mental, that it is hard to name our feelings. . . . The troubled man experiences a good deal, not because he is a Christian, but because he is a man, a sickly man, a man inclined to melancholy.⁸⁰

Because he affirmed that physical and mental weakness shared a relationship with depression, he provided the following advice:

If any of you here present are depressed, and in mental trouble, I would invite you to look to your health, and not to blame yourselves till first you have seen whether your sadness arises from sickness or from sin, from a feeble body or a rebellious mind. Do not think it unspiritual to remember that you have a body, for you certainly have one, and therefore ought not to ignore its existence. If your heavenly Father thinks of your physical frame, he therein gives you a hint to do the same. . . . With us it is often the case that “the spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak”; it is no small thing to get the flesh put into order; the physician is often as needful as the minister.⁸¹

Believing that one’s physical condition should not be overlooked, Spurgeon emphasized the necessity of doctors as much as ministers in some situations. During times of depression, he thought it would be wise to begin with one’s physical condition since that is the entry point where mental despondency grows, “Sin makes frequent incursions into the region of mind and spirit, but *it generally begins with the body* [emphasis added].”⁸²

Spurgeon understood that physical weakness makes us vulnerable to Satan:

I find that when I am in good physical health, I am not often tempted of Satan to despondency or doubt; but whenever I get depressed in spirit, or the liver is out of order, or the head aches, then comes the hissing serpent, “God has forsaken you, you are no child of God, you are unfaithful to your Master, yea have no part in the blood of sprinkling,” and such-like things. You old rascal! If you say as much as that to me in my days of health, when my blood is leaping in my veins, I shall be more than a match for you; but to meet me just then, when you understand that I am weak, ay! This is like you, Satan.⁸³

Evidently when Spurgeon was weak physically these thoughts from the enemy were

⁸⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:221-22.

⁸¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:374-75.

⁸²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 51:214.

⁸³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:54.

regular:

I will tell you this morsel of my own faults: sometimes I have said, "I suffer so much. I become so ill. I shall be so long away from the Tabernacle. The congregation will be greatly injured. Perhaps I shall never be able to preach again." I have struggled to this pulpit when I could hardly stand, and when the service was over, and I have been weary, the wicked whisper has come, "Yes, I shall soon be useless. I shall have to keep my bed, or be wheeled about in a chair, and be a burden instead of a help." This has seemed a dreadful prospect.⁸⁴

While Spurgeon believed that physical weakness was often the entry point to mental anxiety, conversely he also recognized that one's mental state could have adverse effects on one's physical frame. "In some forms of sickness the soul is apt to be grievously depressed and cast out of its proper condition. . . . the body operates upon the condition of the mind, and that our being in a dry and thirsty land where no water is may be occasioned by a feverishness, or a feebleness of the flesh."⁸⁵ Using the Psalms to frame his reasoning, Spurgeon believed that mental depression had a profound influence on our physical makeup. "Mental depression tells upon the bodily frame . . . and is in itself the most painful of all diseases. Soul sickness tells upon the entire frame; it weakens the body, and then bodily weakness reacts upon the mind. . . . Deeper still the malady penetrates, till the bones, the more solid parts of the system, are affected."⁸⁶ While physical ailments were a consistent component of Spurgeon's depression, it was mental depression that was "the most painful of all diseases."

Spurgeon and Mental Anguish

An artist once decided to paint a portrait of Spurgeon but after four sittings he quit the task and confessed, "I can't paint you. Your face is different every day. You are never the same."⁸⁷ This artist observed features about Spurgeon, which was effervescing

⁸⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 32:47.

⁸⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:438-39.

⁸⁶Spurgeon, *TD*, 2:308.

⁸⁷Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust,

from his inner being. He was a man under great emotional strain, and this was manifest in a variety of external ways to those around him. Painfully aware of his condition, Spurgeon recognized that a greater culprit in his suffering and depression was not his physical frame, but his mental state. “The essence of our mischief is the brain, and, with the foe penetrating head quarters, it is not easy to carry on the war.”⁸⁸

The Relationship of Personality, Physical Infirmities and Mental Struggles

Preaching on fear, Spurgeon acted as physical and spiritual doctor to those who were of a nervous disposition and depressed. In doing this, Spurgeon once again linked physical situations, personality, and mental deficiencies together:

There are certain forms of disease, which seem rather to increase the sufferer’s joy than to diminish it, while there are others, which so affect the brain and the whole nervous system that depression is a melancholy symptom of the disease. Some are constitutionally so nervous that they are afraid that, when they come face to face with death, they will be easily vanquished; but many of us must have noticed that the very people who are most depressed in anticipation of trouble are frequently those who bear it best when it does come. So it may be with you, my poor nervous friend.⁸⁹

Once again, Spurgeon’s understanding of depression was paradoxical. On one hand, he and those around him believed that his physical infirmities were the result of mental anguish. In 1875, Spurgeon found himself in such extreme pain that he had to cancel a planned trip to Mentone and become a “prisoner” in his own home. Both his surgeon and his physician, based on years of observing Spurgeon, advised him that the “disease springs from mental causes” due to “extra pressure of care or labour” from the ministry.⁹⁰ Yet on the other hand, Spurgeon believed that physical maladies could over time

2009), 183.

⁸⁸Spurgeon, *ST*, 18:161.

⁸⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 58:42.

⁹⁰Spurgeon, *ST*, 10:92.

debilitate the mind. “Physical infirmities and social bereavements, for example, may appear very common afflictions, though they plunge the soul into deep grief, but the influence they produce on sensitive minds is often so peculiar that each case requires specific attention.”⁹¹ In 1880 he wrote, “I have been very ill for more than five weeks, and during that time I have been brought into deep waters of mental depression.”⁹²

Spurgeon was well aware that our mind and nerves might induce and exacerbate depression. While everyone has the propensity to be depressed due to mental strain, some, due to their personality, were more likely than others. “As to mental maladies, is any man altogether sane? Are we not all a little off the balance? Some minds appear to have a gloomy tinge essential to their very individuality. . . . prone to forget the silver lining, and to remember only the cloud.”⁹³ A personality prone to melancholy may add to the genuine work of the Holy Spirit’s conviction by making their guilt worse:

In many persons their difficulties in coming to Christ were caused very largely by their melancholy temperament. We are not all alike cheerful by natural constitution. Why, here is one man who is bright-eyed by nature, and when he is down he is higher up than others are when they are up. He is always bright and hopeful. Yonder is another brother who seems inevitably to take a dark view of matters. He is an unhappily constituted person; a person with whom it is not easy to live except in a very large hotel, in which the dinner table is many yards long. You know and avoid the style of man. If there is a melancholy disposition, it tends to darken the work of the Spirit in the heart; and whereas the work of the Spirit makes the man sorrowful, his own melancholy disposition, perhaps caused by mental disease, darkens that sorrow into black despair. Few of us are perfectly sane. In fact, I do not think anybody is altogether so. . . . Some are touched with melancholy from their birth, and so a part of their great terror when under conviction may arise from the fact that they are not absolutely free to form.⁹⁴

While Spurgeon linked personality, physical infirmities, and mental struggles together, he affirmed that mental disease was far worse:

⁹¹Spurgeon, *ST*, 16:92.

⁹²Spurgeon, *ST*, 17:339. The year would have been 1880.

⁹³Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:172.

⁹⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:248-9.

Every man, sooner or later, has some kind of infirmity to bear. It may be that his constitution from the very first will be inclined to certain disease and pains, or possibly he may, in passing through life, suffer from accident or decline of health. He may not, however, have any infirmity of the body, he may enjoy the great blessing of health; but he may have what is even worse, an infirmity of mind.⁹⁵

He provided commentary on Psalm 88 to prove his belief that mental anxiety was deeper than all other factors. “The mind can descend far lower than the body, for there are bottomless pits. The flesh can bear only a certain number of wounds and no more, but the soul can bleed in ten thousand ways, and die over and over again each hour.”⁹⁶

Brain Weariness

Among Spurgeon’s noted skills was his memory. This began to dissolve by the end of 1885. A result of his mental deterioration was his inability to recall data on the spur of the moment like he could in his younger days. Spurgeon would often speak of his “weary mind.”⁹⁷ He described this time in his life as “fidgets, twitches, malaise, depression, and all sorts of deadly apprehensions.”⁹⁸ “Brain weariness” would be a prominent description he would employ about this element in his life, and he hoped that he could “refresh his brain” so that he may be able work again.⁹⁹ A few months later in May 1886 he gave the inaugural address at the college conference but admitted that it was “almost impossible to think connectedly.” The material he prepared was largely forgotten as “no new springs of thought could make channels for themselves while the mind was smothered up in physical suffering.”¹⁰⁰ In 1885, Spurgeon penned another

⁹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:577.

⁹⁶Spurgeon, *TD*, 3:978.

⁹⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:244.

⁹⁸Spurgeon, *ST*, 20:iii.

⁹⁹Spurgeon, *ST*, 21:42.

¹⁰⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 227.

letter to his congregation in which he spoke of this “brain-weariness” and connected it to his personality:

As requested, I append a line or two to the sermon in which my personality must appear far more than I should choose if it were left to my option. This week I am considerably improved, and believe that I have fairly turned the corner and may hope to come back in good order for future service. I cannot yet call myself free from fits of deep depression, which are the result of brain-weariness; but I am having them less frequently, and therefore I hope they will vanish altogether.¹⁰¹

Spurgeon scholar Peter Morden consulted one psychiatrist, Dr. Anil Den, concerning Spurgeon’s mental depression. According to Den’s analysis, he believed that Charles Spurgeon suffered from endogenous depression. This type of depression has as its root cause an imbalance of brain chemicals. “Although this form of depression can be brought on by traumatic event and exacerbated by other illnesses, it remains even when these other factors are removed.” Dr. Den concluded that if Spurgeon “had presented with such symptoms [endogenous depression] today he would certainly have been treated with a mixture of medication and therapy.”¹⁰²

Circumstances That Caused Mental Anguish and Depression

Spurgeon recounted an incident that attracted the attention of the press, which occurred in his first year as pastor of New Park Street Chapel. The episode involved a man of distinction both of education and leadership. This man became so insane that his landlord sought to evict him from his dwellings. When the man resisted, law enforcement

¹⁰¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:173. The letter is at the conclusion of the sermon

¹⁰²Morden, *Communion with Christ and his people*, 261-62. This was a personal conversation with Dr. Anil Den, 22 October 2009, at Spurgeon’s College, London. Den also stated that it “is possible Spurgeon was bi-polar (a condition sometimes termed manic depression), but there is not quite enough evidence to make this diagnosis with certainty.” Dr. Christopher K. Cornine, assistant professor of counseling at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, would diagnose Spurgeon as having “chronic depression” or dysthymia with the data he received about Spurgeon’s struggles. Christopher K. Cornine, interview by the author, Kansas City, MO, June 7, 2015. This dissertation’s goal is not to diagnose Charles Spurgeon psychologically; therefore a lack of thorough interaction with contemporary research from a psychological perspective is purposeful.

was called which led to the man being handcuffed outside the building for crowds to witness. A carriage pulled up and carted this distinguished gentleman to the insane asylum. When people began to inquire about the man's identity, a young student cried out that the man in question was "Mr. Spurgeon." Upon reading this in the newspaper, the real Charles Spurgeon told his congregation,

When I saw that, I felt I could bend my knee with humble gratitude and thank my God that not yet had my reason reeled, not yet had those powers departed. Oh! How thankful we ought to be that our talents are preserved to us, and that our mind is not gone! . . . Bless God my friends, for your talents! Thank him for your reason! Thank him for your intellect! Simple as it may be, it is enough for you, and if you lost it you would soon mark the difference.¹⁰³

While much of Spurgeon's mental depression came from his personality and physical infirmities, a significant portion of Spurgeon's mental distress was due to circumstances outside his control. Toward the end of his life Spurgeon confessed, "I was the subject of fearful depression of spirit. Various troublous events had happened to me; I was also unwell, and my heart sank within me. . . . I suffered greatly in body, but far more in soul, for my spirit was overwhelmed."¹⁰⁴ "Various troublous events" occurred that caused depression. The following episodes are key moments in Spurgeon's life that he was aware his circumstances and mental thoughts collided into massive depression.

Depressed Prior to Conversion

When Spurgeon struggled over the state of his soul prior to his conversion to Christianity, he noted that his condition was "dull, melancholy, sorrowful, and depressed."¹⁰⁵ His only explanation for this "great depression of spirit" was that he "felt sin."¹⁰⁶ This "feeling of sin" was so "great" that Spurgeon wondered how he did not

¹⁰³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:263.

¹⁰⁴Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:45.

¹⁰⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:464.

¹⁰⁶Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:90.

commit bodily harm against himself:

Sickness is a terrible thing, more especially when it is accompanied with pain, when the poor body is racked to an extreme, so that the spirit fails within us, and we are dried up like a potsherd; but I bear witness that sickness, however agonizing, is nothing like the discovery of the evil of sin. I had rather pass through seven years of the most wearisome pain, and the most languishing sickness, than I would ever again pass through the terrible discovery of the evil of sin. It was my sad lot, at that time, to feel the greatness of my sin, without a discovery of the greatness of God's mercy. I had to walk through this world with more than a world upon my shoulders, and sustain a grief that as far exceeds all other griefs as a mountain exceeds a mole-hill; and I often wonder, to this day, how it was that my hand was kept from rending my own body in pieces through the awful agony which I felt when I discovered the greatness of my transgression.¹⁰⁷

Once conversion came, his mother noticed this change immediately. "The appearance of my face was changed; I had a smile, a cheerful, happy, contented look at once, and she could see it; and a few words let her know that her melancholy boy had risen out of his despondency, and had become bright and cheerful."¹⁰⁸

He used his experience to encourage believers to share the gospel boldly to nonbelievers who may be in a similar condition like his. "They are slipping about in the Slough of Despond, and they are almost out of it, but they want just a helping hand to pull them out. This hand of help is stretched out by thus telling them . . . it is in Jesus their help is found, and that trusting him, relying upon him, they shall never perish."¹⁰⁹

Depressed Due to the Cholera Epidemic

In 1855, London was hit with a cholera attack. Spurgeon chronicled his first glimpse of this vicious illness and the affects on his person:

When I had scarcely been in London twelve months, Asiatic cholera visited the neighborhood in which I laboured, and my congregation suffered from its inroads. Family after family summoned me to the bedside of the smitten, and almost every day I was called to visit the grave. I gave myself up with youthful ardor to the visitation of the sick, and was sent for from all corners of the district by persons of

¹⁰⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:90.

¹⁰⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:464.

¹⁰⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:154.

all ranks and religions. I became weary in body and sick at heart. My friends seemed falling one by one, and I felt or fancied that I was sickening like those around me. A little more work and weeping would have laid me low among the rest. I felt my burden was heavier than I could bear, and I was ready to sink under it.¹¹⁰

This feeling would only be natural for any pastor especially a young one. But as often was the case with Spurgeon, God worked in a mysterious way using a newspaper in a store window to encourage him to carry on the work.

Depressed with Immediate Success at New Park Street Chapel

New Park Street Chapel experienced abundant spiritual fruit almost immediately with Spurgeon's arrival. People from all walks of life were converted, the crowds swelled, and a new building to accommodate the masses was planned. Spurgeon in many respects became an overnight sensation. But this did not quell his depression. "When I first became a pastor in London, my success appalled me; and the thought of the career which it seemed to open up, so far from elating me, cast me into the lowest depth, out of which I uttered my miserere, and found no room for a Gloria in excelsis."¹¹¹ Thoughts of inadequacy and escape dominated Spurgeon's thoughts during this time. He even "dreaded the work Providence" gave him. Then he noted his own experience and mental state. "This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing."¹¹²

Depression Due to Surrey Gardens Disaster

On October 19, 1856, Spurgeon experienced what he called "the greatest

¹¹⁰Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:27-28.

¹¹¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:392.

¹¹²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:392-93.

ordeal of [his] life.”¹¹³ Spurgeon’s congregation had rented the Music Hall in Surrey Gardens while the new church building was being planned. The hall could seat an estimated twelve thousand people. Spurgeon had started to preach when a group of antagonists disrupted the service with shouts of “Fire! The galleries are giving way, the place is falling!” Seven people were trampled to death in the ensuing melee. Reports vary as to Spurgeon’s initial reaction, but once he grasped the total situation, he was plunged into a dark depression that he never completely escaped. “Spurgeon’s grief over this almost unseated his reason. He was immediately hidden from the public spent hours in tears by day, and dreams of terror by night. A depression complex deepened upon him from which he never fully recovered.”¹¹⁴ So severe was the Surrey Garden incident that in the aftermath Susannah, Charles’ wife, confessed, “My beloved’s anguish was so deep and violent that reason seemed to totter in her throne, and we sometimes feared that he would never preach again.”¹¹⁵

Twenty-five years after the Surrey Garden disaster, Spurgeon had a brief relapse concerning the Surrey Garden tragedy. He was invited to preach at the session of the Baptist Union at Portsmouth and Southampton. Many people struggled to enter the building after the hall had reached maximum capacity. As Spurgeon attempted to ascend to the platform the crowd pressed and a mild disorder ensued. “He seemed entirely unmanned, and stood in the passage leaning his head on his hand” an eyewitness recalled. “The circumstance so vividly recalled the terrible scene at the Surrey Music Hall, that he felt quite unable to preach.” The eyewitness candidly noted, “But he did preach, and preached well, though he could not entirely recover from the agitation of his nervous

¹¹³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:431.

¹¹⁴Richard Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim: The Life Story of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Heir of the Puritans* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1943), 96.

¹¹⁵Charles Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 166.

system.”¹¹⁶

Pastor William Williams recounted a conversation he had with Spurgeon years after the Surrey Garden tragedy. In that dialogue, Williams was convinced that the circumstance with Surrey Gardens caused mental depression, which affected Spurgeon’s physical well-being, specifically shortening his life:

‘What are you going to preach from tomorrow?’ he once asked me. ‘The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just;’ I answered. He gave a deep sigh; his countenance changed even before I had finished the verse, brief as it was; and he said, in tones of deep solemnity, ‘Ah, me!’ ‘What is the matter, sir?’ I asked. ‘Don’t you know,’ he replied, ‘that is the text I had on that terrible night of the accident at the Surrey Music Hall?’ I did not know it, but I learned, from the mere mention of it, how permanent was the effect upon his mind of that awful night’s disaster. I never alluded either to this text or to the Surrey Gardens calamity after that. I cannot but think, from what I then saw, that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night.¹¹⁷

Spurgeon later confided in Williams about the event, “There are dungeons beneath the Castle of Despair as dreary as the abodes of the lost, and some of us have been in them.”¹¹⁸

Church minutes provided yet another account of this tragedy and its effect on Spurgeon. “This lamentable circumstance produced very serious effects on the nervous system of our Pastor. He was entirely prostrated for some days, and compelled to relinquish his preaching engagements.”¹¹⁹

Less than a year before he died, Spurgeon recounted the Surrey Garden incident one final time publicly. “After the terrible accident in the Surrey Gardens, I had to go away into the country, and keep quite still. The very sight of the Bible made me cry.

¹¹⁶Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:234.

¹¹⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:234; William Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), 46.

¹¹⁸Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 166.

¹¹⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:226-27.

I could only keep alone in the garden; and I was heavy and sad, for people had been killed in the accident; and there I was, half dead myself.”¹²⁰

When one connects these reports together, one gets a more full and horrific description of the mental state of the “Prince of Preachers.” The Surrey Garden incident was described as the “greatest ordeal of his life” which “unseated his reason,” caused “serious effects on his nervous system,” and triggered him to hide “from the public”. He spent hours in “tears by day and dreams of terror by night,” lying “prostrate for days and was compelled to give up any preaching engagements.” Spurgeon himself testified that he “had to go to the country” to be restful, spent many hours “alone,” could not look at a Bible without crying, and was “half dead” himself. When he did return to preaching he “regretted . . . occupying the pulpit” again, did not want “to mention” rather “be silent” about the incident. The tragedy for Spurgeon was a “depression complex deepened upon him from which he never fully recovered.” This seems to be accurate as years later recalling the disaster Spurgeon seemed “entirely unmanned,” and one friend was assured that Spurgeon’s “early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night.”

The Downgrade Controversy

In 1881, Spurgeon delivered an address before the annual Baptist Union meeting at Portsmouth. He expressed his growing dissatisfaction with the Union. He had been sick most of the year and admitted that he had been under the “deep waters of mental depression.”¹²¹ During the Downgrade Controversy, Spurgeon’s physical and mental health became a public issue for his opponents. “The general opinion,” summed up *The Freeman*, “is that Mr. Spurgeon either says too much or he does not say

¹²⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:383-4.

¹²¹Spurgeon, *ST*, 17:92.

enough.”¹²² J. G. Greenhough wrote in *The Christian World* that Spurgeon had taken the position of a would-be Pope. He later commented, “*The Sword and the Trowel* is little read except by members of his own school.” He dismissed Spurgeon's charges of heresy with the observation that they might have been occasioned by Spurgeon's poor health. “Perhaps physical weakness has something to do with his mental irritation.” Greenhough continued that Spurgeon's charges were “shamefully abusive and unjust,” and his pretensions “little short of papal. . . . In many ways he misunderstands and perverts the great thoughts of Jesus.”¹²³ In February 1890, some of the leaders of the Downgrade Controversy claimed that Spurgeon’s intellect had weakened due to his sickness and age.¹²⁴

Despite being seriously ill, Spurgeon was indignant at the suggestion that his maladies had prompted his decision to break with the Union. His critics were seeking to “detract from the truth by pointing to the lameness of its witness. . . . Do our critics think that, like Achilles, our vulnerable point lies not in our head, but in our heel?”¹²⁵ He addressed these insults in a sermon:

They say that some of us are old fogies, because we are jealous for the Lord of hosts. They say that we are nervous and fidgety, and that our fears are the result of advancing age. Yes, at fifty-three I am supposed to be semi-imbecile with years. If I were of their way of thinking, I do not suppose that this would occur to them. We fall into pessimism, I think that is the word they use: I do not know much about such terms.¹²⁶

Although critics misdirected his actions with the Baptist Union as being purely physical debilitations, Spurgeon suffered as the trials spiraled around him. “I am suffering enough

¹²²Editorial, *The Freeman*, August 1, 1887.

¹²³J. G. Greenhough, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Christian World*, September 8, 1887.

¹²⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *The Downgrade Controversy* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 106-107.

¹²⁵Spurgeon, *ST*, 23:462.

¹²⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:283.

just now to drive a man out of his mind,” Spurgeon confided to a friend in November of 1887, “but abuse and scorn have not the sting in them which is found in the hesitancy of friends.”¹²⁷

On April 23, 1888, the Baptist Union Assembly met and voted to uphold the Council’s censure against Spurgeon due to the Downgrade Controversy. The motion passed with only seven dissenting votes, and the results were greeted with “tumultuous cheering, and cheering and cheering yet.”¹²⁸ Spurgeon was demoralized. “I feel so ill and utterly crushed by last Monday that I feel I am only acting like a sensible man if I keep out of all Unions and associations henceforth. We are sold, not betrayed but entrapped by diplomatists.”¹²⁹

In April 1888, Spurgeon withdrew from the London Baptist Association, which he had helped to found in 1865. The following month, the Pastor’s College Conference, an association of all Pastor’s College graduates, was disbanded and re-chartered as the Pastor’s College Evangelical Association after adopting a creed similar to that Spurgeon had suggested to the Baptist Union.¹³⁰ When eighty of his former students refused to join the new association, Spurgeon remarked to his son, “I feel that my candle has been snuffed.”¹³¹ He wrote to a friend, “I have suffered enough for one lifetime from those I lived to serve.”¹³² He had earlier confided, “I cannot tell you by

¹²⁷C. H. Spurgeon, Letter to Rev. Lockheart, November 19, 1887, Spurgeon’s College, London.

¹²⁸E. J. Poole-Connor, *Evangelicalism in England* (London: British Evangelical Council, 1951), 247.

¹²⁹C. H. Spurgeon, Letter to Mr. Wright, April 27, 1888, Spurgeon’s College, London.

¹³⁰Spurgeon, *ST*, 27:446

¹³¹Murray, *Letters*, 85.

¹³²C. H. Spurgeon, Letter to Mr. Near, February 22, 1890, Spurgeon's College, London.

letter what I have endured in the desertion of my own men.”¹³³ While shocked, he resolved to move ahead. “I shall live if I am quite alone; in fact I shall live all the better, for the more associations, the more care and trouble.”¹³⁴ As Kruppa pointed out, “Spurgeon’s journey had taken him full circle, and he was back where he had started, in an Independent parsonage.”¹³⁵

Inevitably, Spurgeon’s circle of friends and associates narrowed as a result of his break with the Baptist Union. In “one dark hour” he felt “as if no man would stand with me.”¹³⁶ He “was happiest with his students, in a situation in which he was both mentor and father, and less at ease in the company of those whose reputation equaled his own.”¹³⁷

In 1888, his mother died and his wife was seriously ill. His health was beginning to deteriorate at a rapid rate, and “this time there were no sources of untapped energy left to draw upon, and there would be no more miraculous recoveries.”¹³⁸ His physical infirmity, coupled with the emotional strain of the Downgrade Controversy, produced in Spurgeon a deep sense of melancholy. “Only those who knew his sufferings,” wrote a student, “know how utterly low his spirits were often brought.”¹³⁹ Left with too much time to brood, Spurgeon wondered aloud if he might be “only a waiter, and not a guest, at the Gospel feast.”¹⁴⁰ In gloomy moments he felt “such a sense

¹³³C. H. Spurgeon, Letter to Mr. Near, February 21, 1888, Spurgeon's College, London.

¹³⁴C. H. Spurgeon, Letter to a “friend,” October 12, 1888, Spurgeon's College, London.

¹³⁵Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 447.

¹³⁶Spurgeon, *ST*, 28:30.

¹³⁷Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 448.

¹³⁸Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 448.

¹³⁹Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 92, 221.

¹⁴⁰Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon*, 113.

of unworthiness as to make him dread being numbered among the unworthy servants.”¹⁴¹

Nervousness

The last College Conference at which Spurgeon was present was held in April 1891. *The Sword and the Trowel* provided the following commentary when on Sunday evening, April 26, Spurgeon was to preach. “For the first time in a ministry of forty years, we entered the pulpit on the Sunday evening, and were obliged to hurry out of it; for a low, nervous condition shut us up.” One Mr. Stott took over the preaching responsibility that evening. It was very remarkable that, in his letter, written to Mr. Stott, four months previously, concerning his appointment as assistant minister for the year 1891, Mr. Spurgeon said, “It would be a great relief to me if I knew that someone was on the spot to take the pulpit should I suddenly fail.”¹⁴² That expression almost implied a premonition of what took place on that Sunday night, April 26, 1891. Remarkably a week later on Sunday, May 3, Spurgeon was back in the same pulpit and speaking openly about the situation:

To my great sorrow, last Sunday night I was unable to preach. I had prepared a sermon upon this text, with much hope of its usefulness; for I intended it to be a supplement to the morning sermon, which was a doctrinal exposition. The evening sermon was intended to be practical, and to commend the whole subject to the attention of enquiring sinners. I came here feeling quite fit to preach, when an overpowering nervousness oppressed me, and I lost all self-control, and left the pulpit in anguish.¹⁴³

He told his brother later that month, “I am overdone and half-dead . . . I am so longing to rest.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 51.

¹⁴²Spurgeon, *ST*, 26:91.

¹⁴³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:241.

¹⁴⁴Murray, *Letters*, 66.

Critics and the Press

When Spurgeon was recuperating from his illness in Mentone, another depression came upon him. His despondency was so severe that he scarcely knew “how to live.” During this time, he received an anonymous letter entitled, “That unprofitable servant, C.H. Spurgeon:”

This letter contained tracts directed to the enemies of the Lord Jesus, with passages marked and underlined, with notes applying them to myself. How many Rabshekahs have in their day written to me! Ordinarily I read them with the patience, which comes of use, and they go to light the fire. I do not look for exemption from this annoyance, nor do I usually feel it hard to bear, but in the hour when my spirits were depressed, and I was in terrible pain, this reviling letter cut me to the quick. I turned upon my bed and asked, ‘Am I, then, an unprofitable servant?’ I grieved exceedingly, and could not lift up my head, or find rest. I reviewed my life, and saw its infirmities and imperfections. . . . By the way, I wonder that any human being should find pleasure in trying to inflict pain upon those who are sick and depressed; yet are there persons who delight to do so. Surely, if there are no evil spirits down below, there are some up above, and the servants of the Lord Jesus receive painful proofs of their activity.¹⁴⁵

The press began to attack Spurgeon immediately when he arrived in London. One reporter noted, “Mr. Spurgeon preaches himself. He is nothing unless he is an actor He is a nine days’ wonder, a comet that has suddenly shot across the religious atmosphere. He has gone up like a rocket, and ere long will come down like a stick.”¹⁴⁶ Another critic claimed, “Whose servant is he? As to the Divine reality of his conversion I have my doubts.”¹⁴⁷ Another wrote, “In both [the church and the world], the tide seems strongly set in favour of ignorance, presumption, and charlatanism. In the case of Mr. Spurgeon, they have both agreed to worship the same idol. Nowhere more abound the vulgar, be they great or little, than at the Surrey Music Hall on Sunday morning.”¹⁴⁸ More critics used the Surrey Garden tragedy as fodder against him. Spurgeon is “nothing more

¹⁴⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:331.

¹⁴⁶Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:55.

¹⁴⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:38.

¹⁴⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:44.

than a ranting charlatan,” charged one critic. “We would keep apart the theatre and the church.” The critic continued, “Would we place in the hand of every right-thinking man, a whip to scourge . . . such vile blasphemies, as, on Sunday night, above the cries of the dead and the dying, and louder than the wails of misery from the maimed and suffering, resounded from the mouth of Spurgeon in the Music Hall of Surrey Gardens?”¹⁴⁹

Spurgeon’s single most important literary contribution, the seven-volume, twenty-year project published, as *The Treasury of David* was not without criticism. Believing Spurgeon’s titled sections, “Notes to the Village Preacher,” was a slight against country pastors, a reader accused Spurgeon of being sectarian. Spurgeon replied to the contrary, “A critic has so greatly mistaken my meaning that he found human vanity in the title to the sermon notes. I am amazed. I do not pretend to be entirely free from that vice, but no trace of it is discovered by my keenest and most conscientious inspection.”¹⁵⁰

Financial Worries

With a large church and a variety of benevolent agencies to fund, financial anxiety would be expected.¹⁵¹ Many times in Spurgeon’s life, his illness was compounded by his financial worry. His anxiety over finances was apparent to many, and those around him were concerned this worry would digress into depression. One man was so motivated to prevent this that he brought to Spurgeon “all the stocks and shares and deeds and available funds he had, putting them down on the bed.” The man performed this radical action for the purpose of comforting his pastor in order to avoid depression. Spurgeon connected the role of financial worries to depression when he frankly

¹⁴⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:207-8.

¹⁵⁰Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:44.

¹⁵¹Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth*, 611-18. Nettles connected Spurgeon’s depression with financial distress and fundraising in a way that perhaps no other biographer has developed.

remarked, “Of course I soon got better and returned it all to my dear friend.”¹⁵²

As Spurgeon prepared to leave in November of 1879 for convalescence in the French Riviera, he was quite concerned about finances. “Our only difficulty is that during our absence funds fall off, and, therefore, it would be a very great relief if the stores were well replenished before we went from home. This would make our holiday doubly restful.”¹⁵³

Financial worry is not an uncommon factor in causing depression. Spurgeon, through no mismanagement of his own, learned that economic factors were outside his control but could easily lead to despondency, and thus sought to curb this urge. One out of four stories that Jesus tells in the gospel narratives deal with money and possessions. Approximately half of Matthew 6 concerns money, and Jesus links finances with spirituality.¹⁵⁴ If you have a man’s money, you have the man’s heart (Matt 6:21). For better or for worse, Spurgeon wanted his heart undisturbed with depression and sought to alleviate through monetary contentment.

Depression and the Pastorate

A depression uncommon to most people, but striking to Spurgeon was the “fainting fits” of pastors. He often wondered concerning the “dark depressions” of the pastorate how many ministers “kept to their work” at all.¹⁵⁵ Pastoral malaise is a universal condition among the clergy:

Fits of depression come over the most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not

¹⁵²Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim*, 175.

¹⁵³Spurgeon, *ST*, 14:497.

¹⁵⁴Notice the three “do not’s”. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. . . . do not be anxious about this life. . . . Do not be anxious about tomorrow.” Rather, “seek first the kingdom and his righteousness. . . . “Serve God not money (Matt 6:19, 25, 34, 33).” The main theme of the Sermon on the Mount is what does true righteousness (spirituality) look like (Matt 5:20)?

¹⁵⁵Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:172.

always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron, to whom wear and tear work no perceptible detriment, but surely the rust frets even these; and as for ordinary men, the Lord knows, and makes them to know, that they are but dust.¹⁵⁶

“The Lord knows, and *makes them to know*, that they are but dust [emphasis added].”

Spurgeon repetitive theological theme is forged in the life of the pastors. God compels pastors to understand they are mere particles of earth by giving them depression. Any faithful pastor that has experienced the “fainting fits” does not need any convincing of this reality. This may explain why pastors have doldrums unique to the ministry:

Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression. Who can bear the weight of souls without sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men’s conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?) consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment. To see the hopeful turn aside, the godly grow cold, professors abusing their privileges, and sinners waxing more bold in sin, are not these sights enough to crush us to the earth? . . . How can we be otherwise than sorrowful, while men believe not our report, and the divine arm is not revealed? All mental work tends to weary and to depress, for much study is a weariness of the flesh but ours is more than mental work, it is heart work, the labour of our inmost soul. . . . Such soul-travail as that of a faithful minister will bring on occasional seasons of exhaustion, when heart and flesh will fail.¹⁵⁷

The heart of the problem in pastoral depression is the problem of the heart, which is the type of labor God calls ministers. The role of the pastor is “heart work.” Much of Spurgeon’s depression can be observed from the lenses of his pastoral office.

Loneliness

Speaking to his students, Spurgeon confronted them with the unique loneliness placed on pastors due to their position and calling. “A minister fully equipped for his work, will usually be a spirit by himself, above, beyond, and apart from others.”¹⁵⁸ This loneliness is a state that many believers will never completely understand. “The most loving of his people cannot enter into his peculiar thoughts, cares, and temptations.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:171.

¹⁵⁷Helmut Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 216.

¹⁵⁸Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:170.

¹⁵⁹Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:170.

One of the tasks of a faithful shepherd is to comfort God's sheep, but few sheep will know how to comfort their pastor, thus making the ministry lonely:

In our churches, the man whom the Lord raises as a leader becomes, in the same degree in which he is a superior man, a solitary man. The mountaintops stand solemnly apart, and talk only with God as he visits their terrible solitudes. Men of God who rise above their fellows into nearer communion with heavenly things, in their weaker moments feel the lack of human sympathy. Like their Lord in Gethsemane, they look in vain for comfort to the disciples sleeping around them; they are shocked at the apathy of their little band of brethren, and return to their secret agony with all the heavier burden pressing upon them, because they have found their dearest companions slumbering. . . . This loneliness, which if I mistake not is felt by many of my brethren, is a fertile source of depression.¹⁶⁰

Pastoral loneliness fans the embers of depression, and a vicious cycle ensues. The shepherd takes on the responsibility of caring for the sheep only to have the pastor be disappointed at their shortcomings. This causes him to cry out for comfort; a comfort he cannot get from those whom he loves. Loneliness begins and soon depression follows.

Inadequacy

A non-scripted qualification of the faithful pastor is the constant feeling of inadequacy. This comes on all pastors regularly and sometimes brutally. Like John the Baptist, pastors are “not worthy to loosen the sandals” of the Lord much less the audacity of speaking for him. Various and regular tasks prompt the pastor's inadequacy: sermon preparation, sermon delivery, sermon prayer, and sermon reflection.¹⁶¹ If the pastor dwells on his inadequacy rather than the sufficiency of Christ, then he will soon grow familiar with despondency.

Failure

Most pastors have experienced exhilaration while preaching a Sunday morning sermon, and the doldrums of the Sunday evening aftermath. The night gets still, all the

¹⁶⁰Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:170-71.

¹⁶¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 4:362.

Lord's Day activities have come to a halt, and the pastor confronts himself. Many pastors, "After the sermon. . . . [have been] depressed by a fear of failure. . . . How often have some of us tossed to and fro upon our couch half the night because of conscious shortcomings in our testimony! How frequently have we longed to rush back to the pulpit again to say over again more vehemently, what we have uttered in so cold a manner!"¹⁶² With eternity hanging in the balance and a perfect Scripture written, pastoral failure is great, and Spurgeon felt this failure.

Often on Sunday evenings, Spurgeon's weariness and sense of failure would turn to depression. His wife, Susannah, recalled many Sunday night conversations through the years reading Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor*, which would "quicken [his] sluggish heart."¹⁶³

Sometimes more than a book will need to cure a pastor's sense of failure. Whether he looks at his fruitlessness, his lack of passion, or his congregation's lethargy, a pastor is prone to feel like a dismal failure. If those failures are not realigned to the work of Christ, depression looms large.

Pressure

Preaching is a weighty endeavor. Heaven and hell often hang in the balance with the listeners. Spurgeon felt this eternal pressure:

I have come forth some Sunday mornings with the burden of the Lord upon my heart, till I have been bowed down with the weight, and there is not a Sunday night, and has not been for many today, when I do not come on this platform in such a state both of body and soul, that I pity a dog who has to suffer what I have, under the terror and the weight of the awful responsibility of having to preach to such a crowd as this.¹⁶⁴

During a sermon, Spurgeon would often be transparent as to his condition. "I am quite

¹⁶²Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:53-54.

¹⁶³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:196-97.

¹⁶⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:557-8.

out of order for addressing you tonight. I feel extremely unwell, excessively heavy and exceedingly depressed” yet he preached anyway.¹⁶⁵

Not only is the act of preaching a pressure, but also the desired results from one’s preaching can often lead to pressure and depression when those results are not realized. Spurgeon fell victim to this, and he had such high expectations, he nearly quit the ministry due to the results not being satisfactory in his eyes. “I remember years ago, when I labored to feel the responsibility of men’s souls upon me, I became very depressed in spirit, and the temptation arose out of it to give up the work in despair.” He continued, “in my own case I saw that I could harp on one chord of my nature till I destroyed my power to do good, for I became so unhappy that the elasticity of my spirit departed from me.”¹⁶⁶ Fortunately Spurgeon recognized the limits of his pleas and the responsibility of his hearers within the work of the Holy Spirit to heed them. He then provided sound advice that was liberating for him and all pastors. “Our responsibility is heavy enough without our exaggerating it. . . . We are not the keepers of other men’s souls in a boundless sense, there is a limit to our responsibility and it is foolish to allow an excessive sensitiveness to burden us into semi-lunacy.”¹⁶⁷

Others believed that the ministry workload and lifestyle Spurgeon had chosen led to his physical and mental fatigue. In 1883 due to Spurgeon’s health problems, James Guinness Rogers (1822–1911) preached for Spurgeon with a few hours notice. After Rogers delivered the sermon at the Tabernacle, he wrote to Spurgeon and communicated his belief that Spurgeon’s frequent sickness was not a result from physical weakness as much as mental strain. “Your great congregation is an inspiration, but it is also an overwhelming responsibility. . . . I do not envy the man who can preach there without

¹⁶⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 52:553.

¹⁶⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:100.

¹⁶⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:101.

having his whole nature strained to the utmost, and that means nervous exhaustion, of all others the most difficult to contend against.” Rogers concluded, “May the Lord spare you many years to do a work to which not one in ten thousand would be equal.”¹⁶⁸

Spurgeon routinely was under stress due to overwork. Here the reader will notice another paradox. On one hand, he had to cancel many preaching engagements due to physical illness. He was often fatigued from the work of the ministry that he asked his friends not to send requests for him to come and preach. He described his condition as “laid aside pretty frequently with depression of spirit and pain of body” and he desired quiet rest.¹⁶⁹ Yet on the other hand, he chastened well-intentioned folks who warned him to slow down. “I look with pity upon people who say ‘Do not preach so often; you will kill yourself. . . . Take care of your constitution, you are rash, you are enthusiastic’.” He then exhorted, “Oh that men should be found calling themselves Christians, who seek to stop our work of faith and labour of love, for the sake of a little consideration about the ‘constitution,’ which gets all the stronger for preaching God’s Word.”¹⁷⁰

Study Habits

Ironically, depression could come upon the preacher of the Word, if he studied the Scriptures too much in one location. “To sit long in one posture, pouring over a book, or driving a quill, is in itself a taxing of nature; but add to this a badly ventilated chamber, a body which has long been without muscular exercise, and a heart burdened with many cares, and we have all the elements for preparing a seething cauldron of despair.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸Spurgeon, *ST*, 18:461.

¹⁶⁹Spurgeon, *ST*, 12:333.

¹⁷⁰Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:180. The fact that this sermon was delivered within his three years of his ministry is suggestive. People evidently saw the propensity of his health breaking, or perhaps his health was already faltering. Regardless, the fact of his work pace coupled with the possibility of broken health is illuminating.

¹⁷¹Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:173-4.

Spurgeon knew by experience that the pastor often needed a change of scenery else his study would undo him. He recommended a tryst in nature:

Let a man be naturally as blithe as a bird, he will hardly be able to bear up year after year against such a suicidal process; he will make his study a prison and his books the warders of a gaol, while nature lies outside his window calling him to health and beckoning him to joy. He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. A day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours' ramble in the beech woods' umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best. The ferns and the rabbits, the streams and the trout, the fir trees and the squirrels, the primroses and the violets, the farm-yard, the new-mown hay, and the fragrant hops, these are the best medicine for hypochondriacs, the surest tonics for the declining, the best refreshments for the weary. For lack of opportunity, or inclination, these great remedies are neglected, and the student becomes a self-immolated victim.¹⁷²

If the pastor does not offer himself variety in study, he will soon lapse into despair, and resent the Word he is studying and probably his people along with the task.

Betrayal of Friends

As previously mentioned in the section on the Downgrade Controversy, Spurgeon knew the sting of disloyalty among "friends." He prepared the pastor that, "One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low. The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor."¹⁷³ David, Paul, and Jesus all experienced the betrayal of friends, and this vile action can send the pastor "very low."

God's Blessings Seem to Cease

Every faithful pastor delights in God's blessings. He takes the Lord's desire as his own to go and "bear much fruit." But when God does not seem to bless with spiritual fruit, the season is like a "death to them." Spurgeon elaborated, "To be preaching and to

¹⁷²Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:174.

¹⁷³Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:175.

have no blessing makes them heavy of heart. . . . They get depressed . . . and if they do not see a manifest blessing resting upon the people, they cry and sigh, and are like dying men.”¹⁷⁴ Spurgeon was convinced God used this trait in the life of the pastors to demonstrate their humanity. Because “if the Lord willed to do so, he might have made automatons to preach; and these would only need to be wound up, and to be allowed to run down again; they would have known no feelings of joy or of sorrow.” Spurgeon further exhorted, “Iron preachers would have been enduring instruments, and would never have been laid aside by mental depression.”¹⁷⁵

God’s withdrawal of blessings seems to be a predominant factor when Spurgeon addressed pastors. In a sermon entitled, “A Dirge for the Down-grade and a Song for the Faith,” Spurgeon provided numerous causes for pastoral depression, chief among them was when pastors do not see God’s prosperity, they tend toward depression.¹⁷⁶ Spurgeon used the phrase “inward bleeding” for the turmoil the pastor faced when he did not see immediate, spiritual results. “To go on tilling a thankless soil, to continue to cast bread upon the waters, and to find no return, has caused many a true heart to faint with inward bleeding.” He continued, “faint hearts of that kind there may be among my fellow-soldiers, ready to lay down the weapons of their warfare because they win no victory at this present.”¹⁷⁷

Neglect and Demands of Church Members

Every preacher of the gospel desires his congregants to attend corporate worship regularly. When a pastor labors weekly to feed his people the Scriptures, and

¹⁷⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 30:7.

¹⁷⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 30:7.

¹⁷⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 35:266.

¹⁷⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 54:340.

those people do not attend, this can discourage him. According to Spurgeon, “nothing depresses the pastor’s spirit like the absence of church members.”¹⁷⁸

Incessant, petty grievances told to pastors by their congregants might lead to minister’s, “sickness, depression, and premature exhaustion. . . . [and even] numerous deaths.”¹⁷⁹ Spurgeon affirmed that the responsibility of the congregation was to prevent this calamity rather than exasperate it. One way pastoral depression could be avoided was for the congregation not to hold unrealistic expectations of their ministers:

Why cause us to serve tables so much as many of us are compelled to do? Why expect us to attend every religious service, and compel us to do so, or else to mourn that the interest flags and the meeting falls off? Why bring every petty matter to us for judgment when there are other spiritual men to be found quite able to decide the question in dispute? Why hound us to the death to attend readings, committees, soirees, conferences, conventions, tea fights, ordinations, recognitions, bazaars, anniversaries, stone-layings, chapel-openings, school-treats, etc., etc.? There must be an end to this slavery, and it ought to come, not through the refusal of the oppressed worker, but from the generous consideration of his friends.¹⁸⁰

The reason that a congregation should cease this behavior is because “worry shortens life, and therefore since we would have them live long and win souls for many years to come, let us minister to their comfort.”¹⁸¹

Pastoral Paradox

As dreadful as depression is in the preacher’s life, Spurgeon believed that despondency was necessary to relate to the minister’s congregation:

Our depressions may also tend to our fruitfulness. A heart bowed down with despair is a dreadful thing. . . . But if you have never had such an experience, my dear brother, you will not be worth a pin as a preacher. You cannot help others who are depressed unless you have been down in the depths yourself. You cannot lift others out of despondency and depression, unless you yourself have sometimes need to be

¹⁷⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 19:218.

¹⁷⁹Spurgeon, *ST*, 11:330-32. This is dated August 1875 in a section on “Dying Ministers,” which is ironic since a contributor to Spurgeon’s death was ministerial fatigue.

¹⁸⁰Spurgeon, *ST*, 4:330-32.

¹⁸¹Spurgeon, *ST*, 4:330-32.

lifted out of such experiences. You must be compassed with this infirmity, too, at times, in order to have compassion on those in a similar case.¹⁸²

While Spurgeon believed a pastor would be “worthless” as a minister if he did not experience depression, Spurgeon also recognized there are perils if a pastor lingers in depression, namely the negative influence on the congregation. “If the pastor’s spirit is depressed, and he does not believe that God is doing good, why, the people begin to catch the infection and feel the same. Hence it is important, my friends, deacons and elders round here, to keep up a cheerful spirit.”¹⁸³ But for all this, Spurgeon addressed the benefits of pastors associating with the mentally depressed. “I would sooner give a young man an hour with inquirers and the mentally depressed than a week in the best of our classes, so far as practical training for the pastorate is concerned.”¹⁸⁴

Depression with No Known Cause

Spurgeon believed that depression, like a thunderstorm, could come without any warning. “I have to speak today to myself; and whilst I shall be endeavoring to encourage those who are distressed and down-hearted, I shall be preaching, I trust, to myself.” He continued, “I need something which shall cheer my heart, *why I cannot tell, wherefore I do not know*, but I have a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me; my soul is cast down within me [emphasis added].”¹⁸⁵ When he addressed the young men at the Pastor’s College, Spurgeon reiterated this mystery. “This evil [depression] will also come upon us, we know not why, and then it is all the more difficult to drive it

¹⁸²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:180.

¹⁸³C. H. Spurgeon, *Able to the Uttermost: Twenty Gospel Sermons by C.H. Spurgeon Selected from His hitherto Unpublished Manuscripts* (London: Marshall Brothers, Limited, 1892), 81-82. Spurgeon provided sound advice of what to do when believers are in a church with a “depressing” minister. See Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:21-22.

¹⁸⁴Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:204.

¹⁸⁵Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 3:390.

away.”¹⁸⁶

Spurgeon mentioned this feeling when preparing for a sermon, “I was feeling very heavy, I scarcely knew why.”¹⁸⁷ He called this state the “inconsistency and contradiction of the human mind.” One cannot pinpoint any specific element that triggered his or her depression. Spurgeon pointed to an experience in his own life where he questioned whether he was a believer yet at the same time was clinging to Jesus “with a death grip.” This seems to be mutually exclusive realities, yet benefits in depression are often are inconsistent and contradict the human mind.” Spurgeon elaborated, “At such times my mind has worked morbidly, and its way has been turned upside down. . . . It is very possible for a man to be a very strong believer and yet to question whether he has a spark of faith.”¹⁸⁸

Readers will once again notice Spurgeon’s paradoxical tone. While some depression has no deliberate cause and is unreasonable, it is nevertheless real to the depressed.

If you once become a sufferer under this wretched complaint, the absurdity of your disease will not lessen its painfulness. Our mental distresses need not be logical; they can be full of anguish, and yet be most unreasonable. You probably know some people who are excessively nervous: they are afraid the skies will fall or the earth will crack: this is very stupid, but the agony caused thereby is very real. . . . No doubt, the doubts which many have of their personal safety are very unreasonable¹⁸⁹

Notice Spurgeon’s descriptions of this kind of depression: “absurd,” “not logical,” “unreasonable,” “excessive,” and “very stupid.” Yet, for him these elements were “no less painful,” “full of anguish,” and “very real.”

¹⁸⁶Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:177.

¹⁸⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:558.

¹⁸⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:558.

¹⁸⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 30:401-2.

Theological Reasons

Spurgeon was not immune to theological tensions. He knew how Scripture revealed God, and on that truth he rarely (if ever) wavered. Yet he also experienced much depression and attempted to reconcile this with his doctrinal convictions. The depressed person fights the temptation to become bitter toward God who gave the despondency. “See how depressed you are in spirit. God is a tyrant to you, he treats you cruelly; *hate* him, set your teeth together and curse him; say *no*, if he treats me thus he is *not* a God that I can love, I will abhor him from my very soul.”¹⁹⁰ Then Spurgeon included himself in this experience. “I have uttered that temptation in startling language because such dark insinuations as this have been very common with much tried and troubled men.”¹⁹¹

Another theological tension in depression is the feeling of God’s abandonment. One Sunday sermon, Spurgeon preached from the text “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” He declared, “though I did not say so, yet I preached my own experience. I heard my own chains clank while I tried to preach to my fellow-prisoners in the dark; but I could not tell why I was brought into such an awful horror of darkness, for which I condemned myself.”¹⁹²

Spurgeon preached a sermon called “Comfort for the Desponding” in which he laid out some causes and cures for being depressed. He mentioned: neglect of prayer and the Word, idolatry, fault of the minister, and self-righteousness.¹⁹³ In another sermon, he warned not to believe that all depression comes from God, but may be through our own neglect of the Bible, prayer, Christian fellowship, and other means through which God encourages and strengthens his children. “There are streams which arise from depressed

¹⁹⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:418.

¹⁹¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:418.

¹⁹²Spurgeon, *All-Round Ministry*, 221.

¹⁹³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:390-2.

spirits, spirits desponding because we have neglected the means of grace and the God of grace,” declared Spurgeon. “The consolations of God are small with us because we have been seldom in secret prayer; we have lived at a distance from the Most High, and we have fallen into a melancholy state of mind.”¹⁹⁴

Conclusion

Many Christians endure various depressions in this life of suffering. For Spurgeon, he persevered through all of them. He experienced the pains of physical maladies, mental tortures, circumstances outside his control, pastoral malaise, and even depressions he could not quantify. Some days these were overwhelming and he even admitted, “Death would be welcomed as a relief by those whose depressed spirits make their existence a living death.”¹⁹⁵ But he recognized that through these dark times, the Christian would gain a greater understanding and appreciation for their Lord. “Rainbows are delightful sights, and a vision of Jesus is rapturous and transporting, but we cannot expect to see him, I say, unless it is when the storm is over or when another storm is coming on.”¹⁹⁶ Spurgeon’s knowledge of God and his works through the Bible is the final medicine that cured him. These theological foundations in understanding Spurgeon’s depression and how he coped are the subjects, to which we now turn.

¹⁹⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:435.

¹⁹⁵Spurgeon, *TD*, 3:970.

¹⁹⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 9:368-9.

CHAPTER 5
SPURGEON'S THEOLOGY OF DEPRESSION

Introduction

To his students at the Pastors' College, Spurgeon warned, "Brethren if you are not theologians, you are in your pastorates just nothing at all. You may be fine rhetoricians, and be rich in polished sentences, but without knowledge of the gospel, and aptness to teach it, you are but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."¹ The London pastor received many accusations throughout his ministry, but weak and shallow on the Bible was not one of them. He expounded and applied Scripture with exactness to every situation. This was no truer than when he addressed weary sufferers while in the midst of depression.

While Spurgeon may not be a systematic theologian in the formal sense as Charles Hodge or A. H. Strong, nor did he, as they, produce a volume of systematic theology, he embraced an orthodox position of Biblical authority coupled with a strong affinity for the creeds and an integration of all doctrines into his preaching.² Spurgeon believed, as one scholar has pointed out, "the only true theology was a fully Christian theology and any attempt to gain a hearing by stopping short of a fully evangelical presentation of the gospel, even in apologetic situations, was a betrayal of the call of the

¹C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:74.

² Spurgeon wrote of Hodge, "with no writer do we more fully agree." C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 178. Concerning Strong, Spurgeon called his *Systematic Theology* "a remarkable body of divinity which may serve for Baptists as Hodge does for Presbyterians." C. H. Spurgeon, *ST* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-1902), 8:141; 22:598.

Christian.”³

This chapter aims to provide theological foundations for Spurgeon’s spirituality of suffering and depression. In the midst of despondency, these doctrines served as medicine for his soul and security for his faith. Though he seemed to be paradoxical at times, Spurgeon never wavered from the comforts of a Triune God, a robust, Calvinistic soteriology, and a Divine Being’s mysterious, yet deliberate dealings with man. Spurgeon did not always reconcile the apparent contradictions of his theology. Rather he was confident in the supreme authority of the Bible that he was content to allow these apparent contradictions to remain firmly planted in his preaching. If the Bible taught these doctrines, who was he to redact them? This was especially true for the complexities of depression, which he attempted to resolve with his theology.

Trinitarian Truth and Depression

In his first published sermon at New Park Street Chapel, Spurgeon set forth his theological position concerning the Godhead’s relationship to those in deep suffering. He advised the weary to run to the Trinity to find comfort:

Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound, in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balm for every sore. Would you lose your sorrows? Would you drown your cares? Then go plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of grief and sorrow; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead.⁴

Spurgeon believed that each member of the Trinity had a vital role in the believer’s suffering and depression. This doctrine of the Father, who is good and does not neglect his children; the Son, whose own standing makes us righteous; the Holy Spirit,

³Tom Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 179-80. Nettles chapter, “Theological Method and Content,” is foundational in understanding Spurgeon’s theological grid.

⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP/NPSP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 1:1.

who comforts his children, should be affirmed, proclaimed and experienced. A right view of God is a core truth in understanding his purposeful intentions in depression. When “musing upon the Godhead,” what is the depressed to discover?

God, the Father of the Depressed

Spurgeon embraced the Christian doctrine of God as Creator and Father to his children. He affirmed that God created a good universe devoid of suffering and depression. “In God’s original empire everything was happiness, and joy, and peace. If there be any evil, any suffering and pain, that is not God’s work.”⁵ Because depression was not God’s original design, Spurgeon concluded, it was a product of a fallen world and the work of a personal devil.⁶ However, Spurgeon embraced and declared that even evil was under the jurisdiction of Providence. God may “permit [evil], overrule [evil], and out of [evil] educe much good.”⁷ While depression and various sufferings were the result of a “cruel enemy,” a Sovereign God trumped the devil’s tactics. Thus Spurgeon spoke of the devil as the “second agent” in suffering and depression, and God was the “Great First Cause.”⁸

Depression, though not part of God’s original design, is a vehicle in this fallen world, which God reveals himself so that we may know and love him thus giving him the glory. “God teaches his people every day by sickness, by affliction, by depression of spirits, by the forsakings of God, by the loss of the Spirit for a season, by the lackings of the joys of his countenance, that he is God, and that beside him there is none else.”⁹

⁵Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 4:9.

⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:569-76.

⁷Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 4:9.

⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:3.

⁹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:46.

In times of suffering, Spurgeon appealed to this sovereign God who was good and took care of his weak and depressed children:

When, some months ago, I was racked with pain to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room, and leave me alone; and then I had nothing I could say to God but this, “Thou art my Father, and I am Thy child; and Thou, as a Father, art tender and full of mercy. I could not bear to see my child suffer as Thou makest me suffer; and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him. Wilt Thou hide Thy face from me, my Father? Wilt Thou still lay on me Thy heavy hand, and not give me a smile from Thy countenance?”¹⁰

Considering God in this manner will provide the assaulted believer with a constant source of strength. The Christian God is not distant, detached, or indifferent to his subjects, rather he is a good and sovereign Father. This doctrine will be of immense comfort to the depressed who might feel abandoned and unloved. In those moments, the despondent should boldly profess, “If He be a Father, let Him show Himself a Father.”¹¹ And when the Father does demonstrate his care by removing depression, the believer should recognize the reason is not our will power, but his Fatherly kindness and love. “Faith mastered it [suffering] by laying hold upon God in His own revealed character, that character in which, in our darkest hour, we are best able to appreciate Him.”¹² Spurgeon appreciated God’s goodness in one of his “darkest hours.” In the midst of the Surrey Gardens Music Hall disaster and the aftermath of an excoriating press, Spurgeon testified of the Father’s goodness:

I have gone to the very bottoms of the mountains, as some of you know, in a night that never can be erased from my memory, a night connected with this place. I have had to pass also through severe suffering and trial from the calumny and scorn of man, with abuse hailed pitilessly on my head. And I have had to pass through severe personal bodily pain. But as far as my witness goes, I can say that he is able to save unto the uttermost and in the last extremity, and he has been a good God to me. Unfaithful I have been; he has forgiven that, and will forgive; but unfaithful to me

¹⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 3:214.

¹¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:215.

¹²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:215.

he never has been.¹³

The great temptation for anyone in despair is to listen to the poor counsel of Job's friends that God hates you. Rather the believer wallowing in the mire of malaise should dwell on the love of God. "Let me assure you that when your mind is most heavy and depressed, you will find this to be a bottle of richest cordial."¹⁴ Those who discover the love of God will find a sweet tonic for their despondent souls. "Live upon this choice dainty, and fear not that you shall grow weary of it," Spurgeon exhorted.¹⁵ The result for basking in the love of God may not be a quick escape of depression but pondering his sweet affection will open up other treasures of the soul. "For the more you know, the more you will want to know; the more your soul is filled, the more you will desire to have your mind enlarged, that you may comprehend more and more the eternal, everlasting, discriminating love of God."¹⁶ But the despair will eventually be lifted, because his love will "come to some of us in nights of the deepest depression through which the human mind could pass, and it has lifted us right up out of the mist and the cloud, and set us in the sunlight of God."¹⁷

Another tension that depressed individuals face is the question of God's sovereignty. Is God in control, and if he is sovereign, why are there less than ideal circumstances that lead to depression? Spurgeon also confronted these tensions, and affirmed a good and loving God was not at odds with a God in charge of all things. These lessons often came through depressing events.

¹³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 5:230. Years later, Spurgeon remained undaunted with his appreciation of the good Father. "I have been a bad enough servant, but never had a servant so lovable a Master or so blessed a service." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:506.

¹⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:723.

¹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:723.

¹⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:723.

¹⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:503.

On August 19, 1855, Spurgeon preached a sermon entitled, “What are the Clouds?” taken from Nahum 1:3. In a reference to the cholera epidemic that swept through London a year earlier, Spurgeon commented, “Pestilence may ravage this fair city once again; the thousands may fall, and the funeral march be constantly seen in our streets. Do we fear it? Nay; the pestilence is but one of our Father’s servants, and we are not afraid of it, although it walketh in darkness.”¹⁸ Firmly fixed in God’s sovereign goodness, Spurgeon saw no conflict but labeled pestilence “one of our Father’s servants.”

Believing pestilence to be one of the Father’s “servants,” Spurgeon embraced God’s proactive ministry with suffering and depression. “God has put me often to the school of suffering.”¹⁹ Spurgeon believed this providential placement in his life and the lives of all believers was by specific design. “The Lord frequently appears to save His heaviest blows for His best-loved ones; if any one affliction be more painful than another it falls to the lot of those whom He most distinguishes in His service. The Gardener prunes His best roses with most care.”²⁰ While God’s sovereignty in times of pain may lead to questions, this reality eventually comforts the despondent saint:

Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe troubles, they believe that Sovereignty hath ordained their afflictions that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children of God ought more earnestly to contend than the dominion of their Master over all creation, the kingship of God over all the works of his own hands, the throne of God, and his right to sit upon that throne.²¹

God, Spurgeon affirmed, had the right to dispense suffering not only to whom he wanted, but how he wanted so that some men, through no fault of their own, may suffer more than others:

¹⁸Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:283.

¹⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:137.

²⁰C.H. Spurgeon, *TD* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1892), 3:108.

²¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:185.

All men are born to sorrow, but some men are born to a double portion of it. . . . They are the Jeremiahs of our race, they do not often know an hour free from pain. Their poor weary bodies have dragged along through a miserable life, diseased, perhaps, even from their birth, suffering some sorrowful infirmity that will not let them know even the gaiety and the frolic of youth. They grow up to mourning, and each year's suffering drives its ploughshare deeper into their brows, and they are apt to murmur, and who can blame them?²²

The sovereignty of God was a major theological component in processing Spurgeon's own depression. One of his great comforts came not in the understanding of why one person is depressed and another is not, but in God's providence:

The experience of every Christian is, in some respects, different from the experience of every other, but it is the result of God's plan. Your being led through a certain state of deep depression and of severe mental exercise is down in the book; and as for my brother yonder, his being led through a state of exultation and rapturous delight is down in the plan too; and it is right, that in one case you should have defeat, and that in the other case you should enjoy triumph. My brother shall be made a perfect man in Christ Jesus by his joys: some excellences will be in him which nothing but joy could have fostered; you also shall be brought to spiritual development by your sorrows, and some powers shall be in you which nothing but sorrow ever could have educated in your case. The experiences of God's servants are very like the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness, they were led here, and there, and round about, and yet their road was the best way to Canaan.²³

Because God is sovereign and will be glorified in each case, Spurgeon saw no discrepancy in saying that God sent his depression. "Today Jesus is the Master of hearts and consciences; he by his secret power, can work upon every one of our minds; he can depress us or he can exalt; he can cast down or he can lift up."²⁴ Spurgeon's congregation shared his belief that depression ultimately is a "visitation" from God. The church wrote to him during one of his excruciating illnesses, "We had hoped that, after a few days rest, you would have been relieved of the bodily pain, the physical weakness, and the mental depression with which it has pleased our Heavenly Father to visit you. The Lord has done it. We accept the affliction, as you do, from the hand of God."²⁵ Depression, Spurgeon's

²²Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:275.

²³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:523.

²⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:405.

²⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:247.

congregation believed, was a “visit” from God who had “done it.” Indeed, this despondency came from his “hand.”

God’s sovereignty was not merely a theological solution to Spurgeon’s depression, but also an experimental one. He would testify late in his life, “How often I have read Elisha Coles on Divine Sovereignty when I have been ill!”²⁶ This helped Spurgeon and others in accepting the fact that depression was not a quick fix, but could linger for a time period that only God knew. Spurgeon made this point by using imagery of meteorological, nautical, and botanical elements. “Winters are not usually long in our favoured climate, but some years have seen the earth covered with snow and fettered in ice for many a dreary month; so also many souls are soon cheered by the light of God’s countenance; but a few find, to their own sorrow, that at times the promise tarries.”²⁷ He then shifted to a nautical analogy to further his point. “All ships do not make speedy voyages: the peculiar build of the vessel, the winds, the waves, and the mistakes of the captain, all affect the time of the journey.”²⁸ And again with a botanical picture, Spurgeon further illustrated that “some seeds send forth their germs in a few days; others abide long in darkness, hidden under the clods.”²⁹ He concluded that God, in His sovereign timing, could cause depression and provide the cure. “The Lord can, when it is His good pleasure, send conviction and comfort as rapidly in succession as the flash of lightning and the clap of thunder; but at times He delays it for purposes which, though we know not now, we shall know hereafter.”³⁰

²⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:141. Spurgeon was so taken by Coles’s work that he republished it and wrote the Preface. Elisha Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God’s Sovereignty* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1866). Coles’s work was originally published in 1673.

²⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 36.

²⁸Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour*, 36.

²⁹Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour*, 36.

³⁰Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour*, 37.

The depressed believer will get manifold comfort during despondency when he looks at God as a Father. He is a Father who is in control of all things: sending depression, holding off in removing depression, allowing depression to “serve” his children. He is also a good Father who never sends depression to abuse or neglect his children, but to shower them in the midst of their heartache with his love.

Our Lord Jesus

Spurgeon embraced the fact that Jesus Christ the Son of God was depressed and sinless while on earth. “The Saviour,” Spurgeon declared, “experienced the anguish and deep depression of his spirit.”³¹ The physical pains of the crucifixion produced “great depression.”³² According to Spurgeon, Jesus experienced “mental depression” in the Garden of Gethsemane due to His “temptation so awful, that, in order to master it, his mental depression caused him to ‘sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground’.”³³

Though Jesus did not suffer depression through his own faults or deficiencies, nevertheless his despondency was authentic. “He hath made him to be sin for us though he knew no sin. This, then, is that which caused the Saviour such extraordinary depression.” Spurgeon believed the substitutionary atonement was the primary cause of the Savior’s despondency. “He was now about to ‘taste death for every man,’ to bear the curse which was due to sinners, because he stood in the sinner’s place and must suffer in the sinner’s stead. Here is the secret of those agonies which it is not possible for me to set forth in order before you, so true is it that.”³⁴

³¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 46:215.

³²Spurgeon, *The Words of Jesus Christ from the Cross* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 2.

³³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 9:103.

³⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 20:593.

The crucifixion of Christ is convincing proof that God cannot be blamed for our suffering and depression since Jesus did not blame the Father for his suffering and depression. Though the cross was an “atrocious crime committed by ungodly men” on one hand, the cross was also “pre-determined in the counsel of God” and this was the fundamental reason why Christ had died.³⁵ For Spurgeon, “the precise relationship between human and demonic responsibility for suffering and God’s sovereignty over it was not a conundrum that needed to be explained but a mystery that needed to be believed.”³⁶ Moreover, once believers accepted the mystery of a sovereign God, they would find it “deeply consoling.”³⁷

Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon connected Christ’s relationship with his people. This was particularly helpful when considering the Lord’s ministry to believers during depression because he went through his own periods of weakness:

Here you can perceive how fully he shares the weakness of our humanity; not in spiritual weakness, so as to become guilty of any sin; but in mental weakness, so as to be capable of great depression of spirit; and in physical weakness, so as to be exhausted to the last degree by his terrible bloody sweat. . . . I think, beloved, that you ought to be glad it was so with your Lord, for now you can see how completely he is made like unto his brethren, in their mental depression and physical weakness, as well as in other respects.³⁸

Since believers are joined to Christ, they can relate to the Lord’s depression though in a limited way. “It is a rule of the kingdom that all members must be like the head. . . . But we must be like the head also in His humiliation, or else we cannot be like Him in His glory. Sometimes even to us the grasshopper must be a burden, that we may

³⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:2; *MTP*, 33:155.

³⁶Peter J. Morden, *Communion with Christ and his people: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 264.

³⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:2. “When under deep depression the mind forgets all this and is only conscious of its unutterable misery,” declared Spurgeon, “it is an unspeakable consolation that our Lord Jesus knows this experience, right well, having with the exception of the sin of it, felt it all and more than all in Gethsemane when he was exceedingly sorrowful even unto death.” Spurgeon, *TD*, 2:4.

³⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:110-11.

in all things be like our head.”³⁹ Even our depression can be a tool for us to understand our Lord’s pain. “Bodily pain should help us to understand the cross, and mental depression should make us apt scholars at Gethsemane.”⁴⁰ The depressed Christian, no matter how he feels, can find solace in an unshakeable Lord who knows the believer’s plight:

We remind you that our Lord himself was in an agony, and was greatly depressed in spirit. We have to assure you that the condition of your frames and feelings does not affect your safety in Christ. We have to remind you that, though you are changed, God is not changed. The promise, the old covenant, stands just as fast when you are down in distress as when you are on the high places of exultation. You are saved by faith, not by feeling; and when feeling ebbs out to the very last degree, still hold on to Jesus; sink or swim, still trust in him. When you see no trace of his actual presence with you, rely upon him all the same, and be of good cheer. This is not hard to say; and when the Spirit of God is with us, we find no lack of consolation for fainting saints.⁴¹

Jesus is patient with those in despondency due to his own experience with depression:

He does not throw up the business in disgust: he does not grow cross or angry with them because they are so foolish as to give way to idle fears. He does not tell them that it is all their nerves, and that they are stupid and silly, and ought to shake themselves out of such nonsense. I have often heard people talk in that fashion, and I have half wished that they had felt a little twinge of depression themselves, just to put them into a more tender humor. The Lord Jesus never overdrives a lame sheep, but he sets the bone, and carries the sheep on his shoulders, so tenderly compassionate is he.⁴²

William Williams noted while in the pulpit Spurgeon occasionally would weep “even to sobs” because his “sympathies” with Christ’s suffering were “so real and intense.”⁴³ Spurgeon had a “theology of suffering in which Christ, and especially the

³⁹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 4:460.

⁴⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:317.

⁴¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 39:399.

⁴²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:416.

⁴³William Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), 103. Peter Morden pointed to “The Shameful Sufferer” as a sermon where Spurgeon might have wept when describing Christ’s sufferings. As Spurgeon spoke of Christ’s suffering he declared, “I must pause, I cannot describe it. I can weep over it, and you can too.” Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 5:57. Morden highlighted that Williams’s account was highly disputed by George Rogers, the Principal of the Pastor’s College at the time that Williams was a student. Rogers called Williams’s account a “mistake”,

cross, was central. The cross displayed God’s sovereignty over suffering and his love for the world. It also set forth an example for believers to follow and provided a dynamic by which Christians could grow in obedient faith.” Because of this perspective a believer’s depression was both “bearable and beneficial.”⁴⁴

Jesus had the sorrows and sins of the world piled on him, and he was in despair due to this pain. Yet he willingly took on these sorrows and demonstrated his love to the ones who caused his pain. He redeems his people and invites them to join him in his sufferings, including depression, and share in his glory.

In one of Spurgeon’s favorite stories from *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian is threatened with death as he begins to drown in a river. But Christian’s friend, Hopeful, embraces Christian and cried out, “Fear not! Brother, I feel the bottom.” Using this as an illustration, Spurgeon remarked, “This is what Jesus does in our trials. He puts his arm around us, points up and says, ‘Fear not! The water may be deep, but the bottom is good’.”⁴⁵ But Spurgeon did not stay there. He looked to Jesus who had conquered suffering and death, and therefore had the power to do the same in the lives of his subjects. Jesus Christ is “the antidote to all depression of spirit, the stimulus to hopeful perseverance, the assurance of joy unspeakable.”⁴⁶

Our Unwearied, Unfailing Comforter

The desponding believer could take great comfort in the fact that he would not go through this melancholy without a minister. Spurgeon summarized the task of the

and Williams later confirmed his account was accurate. Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 266.

⁴⁴Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 268.

⁴⁵Eric Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon: Spurgeon Speaks for Himself* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1973), 185.

⁴⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 25:698.

Holy Spirit as one who helps the believer in times of crisis. “The Holy Spirit helps us to bear the infirmity of our body and of our mind; he helps us to bear our cross, whether it be physical pain, or mental depression. . . . He helps our infirmity; and with a helper so divinely strong we need not fear for the result.”⁴⁷

In Spurgeon’s own process through depression, he looked to the Holy Spirit to enliven his lowly soul. “The great flush of comfort, the sudden inflow of supreme joy, when you were much depressed, this has greatly cheered and invigorated you; at least I know it has often been so with me.” Spurgeon continued, “When very despondent and sad at heart, I have felt a soft stream, as though it were the gulf stream with its warm, genial temperature, flowing into my soul, melting all the icebergs that had gathered round my heart, and I have wondered what it was.” But Spurgeon did not merely have a mystical experience. He knew precisely “what it was.” “You will often have proved, I doubt not, how God uses the comfort of his Spirit to quicken his children.”⁴⁸

Spurgeon relayed his own experience in dealing with various nervous people. He would inquire about their troubles, but often found that there was difficulty in comforting them. “You are told, and you attempt, if possible, to remove it, but while you are preparing your artillery to batter the trouble, you find that it has shifted its quarters, and is occupying quite a different position. You change your argument and begin again; but lo, it is again gone, and you are bewildered.”⁴⁹ Spurgeon was at a quandary as to how to assist these nervous ones. “You meet with persons whom it is impossible to comfort, reminding me of the man who locked himself up in fetters and threw the key away, so that nobody could unlock him. I have found some in the fetters of despair.”⁵⁰ Such people

⁴⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:220.

⁴⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 23:238.

⁴⁹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:36.

⁵⁰Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:36.

often go from bad to worse in their depression. “The more you try to comfort such people, the worse they get; and therefore, out of all heart, we leave them to wander alone among the tombs of their former joys.”⁵¹ Spurgeon felt the disappointment of failing to comfort in such cases, but “the Holy Ghost is never out of heart with those whom he wishes to comfort. He attempts to comfort us and we run away from the sweet cordial; he gives some sweet draught to cure us, and we will not drink it; he gives some wondrous potion to charm away all our troubles, and we put it away from us.”⁵² The difference between the Holy Spirit’s comforts and Spurgeon’s was “still he pursues us; and though we say that we will not be comforted, he says we shall be, and when he has said, he does it, he is not to be wearied by all our sins, not by all our murmurings.” For Spurgeon, the Holy Spirit was the “unwearied Comforter.”⁵³ Most believers desire to comfort and encourage their fellow depressed Christians, but this aim may be unsuccessful. In such cases, believers can obtain assurance that the Holy Spirit will console their despondent friends. “Trials depress the hearts of God’s children, for which the tenderest ministry fails to afford consolation; and then it is most sweet for the failing comforter to remember the unfailing Comforter, and to commit the case of the sorrowful spirit into the divine hands.”⁵⁴

The London Baptist pastor preached a sermon in June of 1880 entitled, “Free Grace a Motive for Free Giving.” He addressed the need to aid the Free Hospitals of London. In a humanitarian plea, he focused curiously on the doctrine of the Trinity. In doing so, Spurgeon’s point was that efforts to comfort the weary though responsible were limited. But a Triune God was unlimited in his power and highly benevolent in

⁵¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:36.

⁵²Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:36.

⁵³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:36.

⁵⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:517.

comforting his weary children:

We, who are constitutionally despondent, must not give way to depression; we must cry to God to help us by the divine Comforter. We must aim at being cheerful Christians. We have abundant reasons for being cheerful, for the Father himself loveth us, and hath given us everlasting consolation in Christ Jesus. Do not let us be so unwise, and so ungrateful, as to neglect these consolations of the Spirit. If the table be sumptuously spread why should we be hungry? If the fountain flows so freely why should we be thirsty?⁵⁵

One of the ways the Spirit teaches us about Christ is through sufferings. “Some parts of that whole you will never learn, except upon a sick bed, or in deep depression of spirit, or in bereavement and adversity; while other truths will only be learned on the bright mountains of assurance and communion with God.”⁵⁶ The Holy Spirit comforts us in depression and in so doing validates our faith and draws us closer to Christ. “When his Holy Spirit cheers us in depression, when he helps us under difficulties, all these things become proofs that we have real faith in him, since our faith has realized him and brought him near, taught us how to life upon him.”⁵⁷

Calvinism and Depression

Influenced greatly by the Puritans, Spurgeon embraced much of the theology made famous by John Calvin. These truths shaped Spurgeon including his struggles with depression. “I confess to you that, when depressed in spirit, I love a bit of thorough Calvinistic doctrine. I turn to Coles on *Divine Sovereignty*, and relish his plain speaking upon sovereign grace.” When he described what these teachings entailed, Spurgeon noted,

The doctrine of election is noble music: predestination is a glorious hallelujah. Grace abounding, love victorious, truth unchanging faithfulness invincible: these are melodies such as my ear delights in. The truth of God is fit music for angels. The harps of the redeemed never resound with more noble music than the doctrines of

⁵⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:341-2.

⁵⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:386.

⁵⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 21:478.

grace. Every truth has its melody, every doctrine is a psalm unto God. When my heart is faint, 'Bring me a minstrel,' and let him sing of free grace and dying love.⁵⁸

For the depressed soul, right theology should lead to soothing doxology. Spurgeon held that "modern" theologies were inferior to Calvinism, and therefore, far less helpful to the despondent soul needing truth to reinvigorate them.

I have often confessed that, when my spirit gets depressed, nothing will sustain it but the good old-fashioned Calvinistic doctrine. You may be content with the fare set before you by the modern school of preachers when you are not hungry, you may enjoy it when there is fine weather; but when storms of tribulation are howling around you, when you are conscious of a great need of soul-satisfying food, then I do believe that the old Augustinian doctrine, which is the doctrine of the apostle Paul and of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, is the only fare upon which your heart can feast with rejoicing. How sweet it is, at such a time, to fall back upon the eternal purposes of God in Christ Jesus! In a spiritual sense, it is the strong drink and the nourishing wine of the doctrines of grace that can alone sustain those who are spiritually ready to perish and heavy of heart.⁵⁹

Spurgeon was convinced that if a man denied these doctrines, he would not find much comfort during times of depression. "If any of you do not believe in the predestination of God, you will, probably, in some hour of depression, ascribe your sorrows to a cruel fate. The human mind . . . is driven at last to this decision, that some things are beyond the control of man and of his will." Then he provided the following advice, "How much better to see that God has fixed them!"⁶⁰

Spurgeon's View of Man and Depression

Throughout his ministry and most of his sermons, Spurgeon drew clear contrasts between the lives and responses of a believer and the unregenerate. This was especially true with issues involving depression. He provided sound pastoral counsel concerning how depression affects both the believer in Christ and those who reject Him.

⁵⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 27:447-8.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 58:380.

⁶⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:189.

Unbelievers and Depression

Christ's work at the cross, Spurgeon understood, was to kill sin's "depressing power upon the conscience."⁶¹ Therefore, when an ungodly man "is aroused to see sin, it weighs on his heart like a night-mare."⁶² This man, depressed by sin, will believe that he "cannot be saved" because his "sin is so evil."⁶³ He will not hope, pray, trust or do anything to drive him to Christ because he has reasoned, "my sin fills me with despair; it makes me drunken with wormwood, and breaks my teeth with gravel-stones."⁶⁴ This is a fundamentally different reaction to the Christian whose "sin has no such depressing power . . . as to drive him to despair" because of Christ's atonement.⁶⁵

The unbeliever often will not respond properly to depression that God uses to bring conviction of sin. In fact, the opposite may take place. "The hypocrite will not pray when in a desponding state. . . . His passions were stirred by the preacher, and fermented by the contagious zeal of the solemn assembly. But now a damp cold mist obscures his view, chills his feelings, and settles in his heart."⁶⁶ The hypocrite will say to himself, "Now I have no enjoyment of religion: it has lost its novelty; I have worn out its delights; I have now no comfort from it; I will give it up."⁶⁷ The godless man's spiritual state is perhaps most clearly revealed during times of depression. "A Christian's despair makes him pray; it is a despair of self. A worldling's despair makes him rave against God, and give up prayer."⁶⁸

⁶¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:381.

⁶²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:381.

⁶³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:381.

⁶⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:381.

⁶⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:381-82.

⁶⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 17:209.

⁶⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 17:209.

⁶⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 17:209.

Spurgeon never presumed that all suffering, which included depression, meant that you were a child of God.⁶⁹ In fact, the ungodly will continue to sin and invite depression in their lives because they are in rebellion against God. Spurgeon confronted a common belief held by many poor Victorian citizens that poverty was often equated with piety.⁷⁰ If one has plight in this life, one will have paradise in the next was the thinking. But Spurgeon demonstrated this is delusion theology. “After all your suffering, you may yet, through much tribulation, enter the kingdom of hell. There is such a thing as through trial going to the pit of perdition, for the road of the wicked is not always easy, nor are the paths of sin ever pleasant.”⁷¹ Some trials are unique to the believer, but other trials are distinctive to unbelievers. “There are trials in the pathway of the ungodly. There are troubles they have to suffer which are quite as acute as those of the children of God.”⁷² To his listeners who presumed they were righteous because of their sufferings, Spurgeon pleaded, “Oh! trust not in your troubles, fix your thoughts on Jesus; make him the only object of your trust.”⁷³ Men should not trust their troubles as a means of grace. But Spurgeon recognized the opposite response could happen to unbelievers. Other godless people could become more hardened toward belief in Christ the longer their trials lasted. “Many an afflicted man has not been a child of God. Many of you no doubt can recollect persons in your lifetime whose afflictions made them worse instead of better.”⁷⁴

The depressed unbeliever is “desolate” with “no one to comfort.” This

⁶⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:3.

⁷⁰Spurgeon called this a “superstitious notion lingering in England.” Apparently many took the parable of Lazarus and the rich man and concluded that it was Lazarus’ plight and poverty that sent him to heaven. Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:105.

⁷¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:270.

⁷²Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:270.

⁷³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:270.

⁷⁴Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:270.

depressed pagan sincerely looked to have the troubles removed. He went to a friend who “tried his best, but he could not succeed in cheering your heavy heart.”⁷⁵ He attended Spurgeon’s Tabernacle, “hoping that I might say a word, but I have only added fuel to the flame, for the truth preached has been far from comfortable to you; it has rather depressed you and brought you lower still.”⁷⁶ The godless man in depression turned to Scripture, but “there does not seem to be a text that speaks comfortably to you, but the threats leap up out of the page, and seem as if they would drag you down, as the dogs dragged down the stag when they seize him for their prey.”⁷⁷ The spiritual state for the “desolate” unbeliever is like “a poor lone wanderer who has lost his way far out in the desert. He looks around upon the horizon, and sees not one single hope or gleam of hope, but far above he sees the cruel vulture, waiting for his lifeless corpse.”⁷⁸

To demonstrate the folly of trying to be rid of depression without Christ, Spurgeon, on several occasions, told the story of Carlini, an Italian actor, who was under “heavy depression of spirit.” Carlini inquired about his condition to a French physician, who apparently did not recognize the actor. After a brief examination the doctor recommended that Carlini attend the Italian theater, and provided the following advice, “If Carlini does not dispel your gloomy complaint, your case must be desperate indeed.” The physician was stunned when Carlini revealed his identity with his confession, “Alas! Sir, I am Carlini; and while I divert all Paris with mirth, and make them almost die with laughter, I myself am dying with melancholy.” Spurgeon used this as a poignant lesson to unbeliever,

How empty and insufficient are the amusements of the world! Even in their laughter

⁷⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:512.

⁷⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:512.

⁷⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:512.

⁷⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:512.

their heart rejoices not. Miserable comforters are all those who would drown seriousness in wine and merriment. When the heart is breaking it is vain to offer music and the dance, or to fill high the flowing bowl. When the arrows of God stick fast in a man's soul, the world's vain songs suit not with the hour; they jar on the ear, and increase the misery, which they would remove.⁷⁹

Spurgeon believed that the ultimate depression for an unbeliever was the reality of being eternally lost with no hope in God to "live" with one's despondency and no freedom:

His spirit sinks with a terrible depression, more frightful than a maniac ever knew in his wildest moods of grief. His soul sinks never to recover itself into the depths of dark despair, where not a ray of hope can ever reach him. Lost to God; lost to heaven; lost to time; lost to the preaching of the gospel; lost to the invitation of mercy; lost to the prayers of the gracious; lost to the mercy-seat; lost to the blood of sprinkling; lost to all hope of every sort; lost, lost, for ever! Compared with this loss the losses of death are nothing.⁸⁰

Being depressed because of the sin of unbelief is a dreadful position for the godless both now and in eternity. "Better to be taught by suffering than to be taught by sin! Better to be in God's dungeon than to revel in the devil's palace" is sound advice for all.⁸¹

Believers and Depression

Spurgeon recognized, "Apart from sin, we may get depressed in spirit; we may be nervous, fearful, timid; we may almost come to the borders of despair."⁸² He was careful not "to attribute each sickness and trial to some actual fault." His reasoning was to look at Christ's atonement. The believer could not "be punished again for those sins which Jesus bore in his own body on the tree."⁸³ The saint was foolish when he "morbidly condemned himself when God condemns not."⁸⁴

⁷⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:471.

⁸⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:578; *MTP*, 15:706.

⁸¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:438.

⁸²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 60:365

⁸³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:10.

⁸⁴Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:10.

A saint may also question their own conversion if they are depressed. “A man may say, ‘I cannot be a child of God, or else I should not feel as I do.’ You do not know what true children of God may feel; strange thoughts pass through their minds in times of storm and doubt.”⁸⁵ Spurgeon used the example of Christ to demonstrate the folly of this reasoning. “Your deep depression is not a proof of reprobation; that is evident, for Christ himself endured even more.”⁸⁶ Using Hannah as a proof, Spurgeon contrasted circumstances with those who are depressed as opposed to those who are not prone to depression. “Many persons feel very happy, but they must not therefore infer that God loves them; while certain others are sadly depressed, it would be most cruel to suggest to them that God is angry with them.”⁸⁷

Spurgeon had little tolerance with those who suggested because one was depressed one was being punished by God. “It will never do to say, ‘I am greatly afflicted in estate, in family, or in depression of spirits, and therefore I cannot be a child of God.’ What! Are not God’s children chastened? What son is there whom the Father chasteneth not?”⁸⁸ Spurgeon continued, “Some of the best children of God have been the most afflicted; aye, and let me say it pointedly, some of the purest Christians that have ever lived have had the most sickness to bear, and by that means they have been made more meet for heaven.”⁸⁹ Using his pastoral exhortation with vivid imagery, Spurgeon urged, “When, therefore, it is suggested that you are not a child of God because you are afflicted, the idea is not to be tolerated, since we are born to trouble as the sparks fly

⁸⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:524.

⁸⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:524.

⁸⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:39.

⁸⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:581.

⁸⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:581.

upward.”⁹⁰ Spurgeon used his wit to prove that not all depressions were the result of God’s punishment for sin. He received a brazen letter from an Anglican clergy who suggested that Spurgeon’s gout was God’s judgment on him for his public opposition to the Church of England. Using the same reasoning, Spurgeon pondered, in print, what was God’s intent as the result of the death of the Bishop of Oxford from a broken neck?⁹¹

Spurgeon was “not among those who believe that every affliction is a judgment upon the particular person to whom it occurs.”⁹² His statement was a response based upon some comments of others who believed that the cholera epidemic was punishment on God for the nation’s sins. Spurgeon explained in another sermon years later, “I do not believe that all those depressions of spirit which come of sickness, that all those wanderings of mind in the heat of fever, that all those shrinkings and drawings back from pain, which are essential to our humanity, are by our heavenly Father set down as sin, though sin is doubtless mixed with them.”⁹³ Spurgeon meant that depression was a result of the fall, but could not be attributed to a sinful act in each individual case. Christ was a prime example of this point:

I [do not] think that our heavenly Father would have us doubt our interest in Christ because in our semi-delirium we could not realize his love, nor would he have us question the grace which is in us because our feverish thoughts were near akin to despair. When the true heart struggles to love and trust and obey, but the poor brain is tortured with dark thoughts, the conflict is not all sinful, nor any of it necessarily so. There may be an awful struggle in the soul and yet the Father may be glorified; the sin lies not in the conflict but in the defeat, if defeat there be: the guilt is not in the shrinking from pain, but in permitting that natural feeling to hinder us from duty or to lead us to rebel against chastisement. “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me,” is not a sinful utterance if it be followed by “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:582.

⁹¹Spurgeon, *ST*, 10:341.

⁹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:446.

⁹³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:4.

⁹⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:4; *NPSP*, 1:63-64.

Not only should the depressed saint look to the work of Christ, but also the believer should look to the character of the Heavenly Father. “A child who is feeling the strokes of the rod is very foolish to say, ‘My father has forgotten me.’ No; those very blows, under which he is smarting, are reminders that his father does not forget him.” Instead the saint should ponder, “Your trials and your troubles, your depressions and your sorrows, are tokens that you are not forgotten of God.”⁹⁵

In an effort to give proof of the Christian faith, some believers will look to their sufferings. Because of this, some deluded saints may actually long to be depressed as a sign that they are in the family of God. Spurgeon found this repulsive:

Some of you are seeking for injurious signs. That depression of spirit which some think would be such an encouragement to them, why it is even sinful; and how should I ask a sinful thing of God? To be distracted in my mind, to be so depressed and melancholy as to make myself and all my household miserable is that a good thing? It is a great sin against God; and am I to ask God to give me this sign in order to help me to believe? Thoughts of suicide! Why, my brethren, they are awful, they are not to be allowed; there is murder in them; he that even thinks of them hath committed murder already in his heart; and are these terrible, these devilish things, to be helps to you to believe? Why, they would just drive you into hell, how can they help you to heaven? You are asking for that which would be your ruin. You ask a scorpion, you ask a stone, you ask a serpent, and then you think that after having all these evil things you would be more fit to receive the bread of the divine blessing. God will deny you, I trust, what you so foolishly ask for.⁹⁶

Spurgeon recognized that there were legitimate moments where soul “darkness” was a result of sinfulness. “Sometimes Christians are guilty of acting a part, which is offensive to their dear Saviour, and therefore He withdraws from them. Darkness spreads itself over them, thick clouds interpose between Him and their souls, and they see not His smiling face.”⁹⁷ Depression may also be sinful for some who focus on their depression and become self-loathing to the point they help no one. In this case, depression becomes the “god” they worship rather than assisting others who have

⁹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 46:195.

⁹⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:608.

⁹⁷Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour*, 276.

legitimate needs:

Too many people are so wrapped up in their own grief that they have no room in their souls for sympathy. . . . The first thing when they rise in the morning is the dreadful story of the night they have passed. Ah, dear! And they have not quite eaten a hearty breakfast, before their usual pain is somewhere or other coming over them. They must have the special care and pity of the whole household. All the day long the one great business is to keep everybody aware of how much the great sufferer is enduring. It is this person's patent right to monopolize all the sympathy, which the market can supply, and then there will be none to spare for the rest of the afflicted. If you are greatly taken up with self, there is not enough of you to run over to anybody else.⁹⁸

Like all other sufferings, depression may be a means God uses to get the attention of erring saints. "When we are not willing to be guided so easily, he will teach us by rough means. The Lord has a bit and a whip for those who need them. He will restrain us by affliction and infirmity, and sometimes chasten us very sore with losses, bereavements, depression of spirit, and the like."⁹⁹ Some believers immediately respond to God's word, but others "will not be tenderly guided." In such cases, "God will make us to do his will as men compel the bullock to do their will when it is rebellions under the yoke, and must be broken in. The Lord will hear our prayer for instruction; but it may not be quite in the way we should have chosen."¹⁰⁰

Spurgeon cautioned those who equated their happiness with conversion. "Do not, therefore, set too much store by your own feelings as evidences of grace. 'The fruit of the Spirit is joy,' but you may not at this moment be conscious of joy. Trees are not always bearing fruit."¹⁰¹ He warned, "Some young people say, 'We know we are saved, because we are so happy.' It is by no means a sure evidence, for joy may be carnal and unspiritual. Certain Christians are afraid that they cannot be in a saved state because they

⁹⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:321.

⁹⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:105.

¹⁰⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:105.

¹⁰¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 27:77.

are not joyous, but we are saved by faith and not by joy.”¹⁰²

Admittedly, Spurgeon found depression to be a mystery in the life of the believer, but he was content to let that mystery stand. “The Christian life is a riddle, and most surely are God’s people familiar with that riddle in their experience. They must work it out before they can understand it.”¹⁰³ What did the believer need to work out? According to Spurgeon, the truth that depression in the Christian experience may have been sent by God to make the saint godly. “This casting down is consistent with the most elevated degree of piety. Depression of spirit is no index of declining grace; the very loss of joy and the absence of assurance may be accompanied by the greatest advancement in the spiritual life.”¹⁰⁴ Spurgeon was, however, aware of the dangers. “Mark you, if it [depression] continues month after month, and even year after year, then it is a sign of great weakness of faith; but if it cometh only occasionally, as clouds pass over our sky, it is well.”¹⁰⁵ When the saint recognized this fact he will come “forth from great and sore troubles, his harp returned, his psaltery vocal with praise, and his lips gratefully confessing to his God, ‘Thou hast increased my greatness, and comforted me on every side’.”¹⁰⁶

Spurgeon continued to press the inevitability of depression in the life of the growing saint by contrasting weak believers whose absence of depression may be a mark of immaturity. “It is true that light-eyed cheerfulness, and airy-footed love, can go through the world without much depression and tribulation: but it is not true that

¹⁰²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 27:77.

¹⁰³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:461.

¹⁰⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:461.

¹⁰⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:461.

¹⁰⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:461.

Christianity will shield a man from trouble; nor ought it to be so represented.”¹⁰⁷ He continued, “In fact, we ought to speak of it in the other way, Soldier of Christ, if thou enlisteth, thou wilt have to do hard battle.”¹⁰⁸ Spurgeon provided details of what this hard life entailed. “There is no bed of down for thee, there is no riding to heaven in a chariot; the rough way must be trodden . . . great trials must be borne. It is not a smooth road to heaven, believe me; for those who have gone but a very few steps therein, have found it to be a rough one.”¹⁰⁹ The “rough road” to heaven was a constant theme of Spurgeon’s but this path was part of a deliberate, redeeming plan. “Now, if God saves us, it will be a trying matter.”¹¹⁰ For Spurgeon, trials, including depression, were by design for his children. “All the way to heaven, we shall only get there by the skin of our teeth. We shall not go to heaven sailing along with sails swelling to the breeze, like sea birds with their white wings but we shall proceed full often with sails rent to ribbons, with masts creaking, and the ship’s pumps at work both by night and day.”¹¹¹ Spurgeon believed this occurred to teach the saints grace and empty self-will. “Though God’s love should thus try you all the journey through, your faith will bear the trying, for while God dashes you down to the earth with one hand in providence, he will lift you up with the other in grace. . . . You shall have daily grace for daily trials.”¹¹²

Spurgeon was resolute in his perspective that only true believers can suffer properly. “Conflicts and pains, such as I have been speaking of, are not possible to those destitute of spiritual life. Spiritual life is the first requisite for spiritual grief and spiritual

¹⁰⁷Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:94.

¹⁰⁸Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:94.

¹⁰⁹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:94.

¹¹⁰Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:37.

¹¹¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:37.

¹¹²Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:37.

contrition. Depend upon it, beloved, that those who suffer as I have described, are the children of God.”¹¹³ In fact, “without affliction no Christian ever can ripen.” How does the believer ripen best? “Our cares, our losses, our crosses, our depression of spirits, our temptations from without and from within, these are all ripening dispensations.”¹¹⁴ Perhaps the most viable attribute that marks the believer against the godless is suffering.¹¹⁵

Part of sanctification, Spurgeon believed, was to feel the pain of trials, which included depression. This pain would then enable us to cry out to Christ for help, which is part of God’s mysterious plan.¹¹⁶ These trials are also for our greater usefulness in the service of the Lord. “Hence it is that the most influential of God’s servants are almost invariably the most tried ones, because our heavenly Father knows that if it were not for great trials and afflictions we should begin to set ourselves up against him, and arrogate to ourselves a glory which we had no right to claim.”¹¹⁷

Perhaps the most repeated reason in the Spurgeon corpus for the presence of depression is to make the believer closer to Christ and to keep the saint from sinning. “Even when we cannot see the reason, God knows that there is a reason for it; and if we cannot see it, it may be all the deeper, and may lie all the nearer to the very heart of our Christian life.”¹¹⁸ He continued, “Your sicknesses, and pains, and griefs, and depression of spirits, and all sorts of trials are often sent to you just to prevent you from sinning.”¹¹⁹

¹¹³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:295.

¹¹⁴Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:457.

¹¹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:295.

¹¹⁶Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:140.

¹¹⁷Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:414.

¹¹⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 53:212.

¹¹⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 53:212.

Using the illustration of an owner who clogs his horse so he does not “lose him,” Spurgeon connected the relationship of suffering to being in the presence of Christ. “So, my brother, you have a clog, because the Lord would rather clog you than lose you; he would sooner make you suffer here than permit you to suffer for ever in hell.”¹²⁰ In a sermon using Hannah as a case study, Spurgeon drove his theology of depression as a means of godliness to a head:

Think of this, but never doubt the fact that a sorrowful spirit is in perfect consistency with the love of God, and the possession of true godliness. It is freely admitted that godliness ought to cheer many a sorrowful spirit more than it does. It is also admitted that much of the experience of Christians is no Christian experience, but a mournful departure from what true believers ought to be and feel.¹²¹

Spurgeon believed that a “tried saint brings more glory to God than an untried one. I do verily think in my own soul that a believer in a dungeon reflects more glory on his Master than a believer in paradise.”¹²² The suffering believer “displays more the glory of Godhead than even he who stands with a crown upon his head, perpetually singing praises before the Eternal throne.”¹²³ Suffering validates the believer’s faith. “If I never had a trial, I would not think myself a heir of heaven.”¹²⁴ Therefore, the Christian should “look” for suffering. “His people must suffer; therefore, expect it Christian; if thou art a child of God, believe it, look for it, and when it comes say, ‘Well suffering, I foresaw thee; thou art no stranger, I have looked for thee continually’.”¹²⁵

Often Spurgeon would use his own personal experience and the experience of

¹²⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 53:212.

¹²¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:39.

¹²²Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:357.

¹²³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:357.

¹²⁴Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:94.

¹²⁵Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:94.

the saints to confirm this belief. Writing to friends, Spurgeon reported about his physical condition upon which he added his comments concerning depression. “I have suffered much from neuralgic pain, for the weather was wet and windy. . . . It is an easy matter to trust when you feel bright and joyous; but we honor the Lord most by believing in him when we feel depressed, and circumstances are saddening.”¹²⁶ Spurgeon appealed to the lives of biblical saints to demonstrate that suffering was preferred over prosperity as a means to godliness. Using Solomon as an illustration, Spurgeon declared, “One secret of Solomon’s wanderings was that he was not afflicted.” Then Spurgeon added, “There is honey in every cup of affliction which God puts into the hand of the Christian; but generally he has to wait until he reaches the bottom before he can taste it.”¹²⁷

Spurgeon dealt with the other extreme that some believers surmise if they are depressed then they must be walking in holiness. He thought this was delusional. “We are quite certain that our Lord Jesus does not desire his disciples to be depressed. To some the fit colour for piety seems to be grey, drab, or full mourning. But it is not so: the saints are arrayed in white linen, which is the emblem of gladness as well as of purity.”¹²⁸ He further articulated what he believed to be God’s will. “The Saviour does not wish his disciples to go through the world as through a twilight of sadness, whispering in fear, because of judgments to come, and suppressing all joy because of the evils with which they are surrounded. No, brethren, Jesus wishes us all to be happy in himself.”¹²⁹ A believer following Jesus should emulate him in such a way that in the Christian’s life “we should not be so often up and so speedily down, today so brimming over and tomorrow so empty, one moment so fast and another so slow, unduly exhilarated at one moment

¹²⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:696. The letter is at the conclusion of the sermon.

¹²⁷Williams, *Personal Reminiscence*, 73-74.

¹²⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:651.

¹²⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:651.

and at the next so needlessly depressed. We ought not to be movable as waves, but fixed as stars.”¹³⁰ To further prove his point about this delusion, Spurgeon documented the following experience:

I once had a letter from a man, who told me that he came to the Tabernacle, but as soon as he entered, he felt that it could not be the house of God because there were so many present, and “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” When he looked at me, he felt sure that I was unsound in the faith, for I should not look so cheerful in the face, neither should I be so bulky in person, if I belonged to the tried people of God. Worst of all, when he looked round upon the congregation, and saw their happy countenances, he said to himself, “These people know nothing about the depravity of their hearts, or the inward struggles of believers.” Then he informed me that he wended his way to a very small chapel, where he saw a minister, who looked as if he had been in the furnace; and though there were only eight persons present, they all looked so depressed that he felt quite at home. . . . I felt glad that the good man was enabled to enjoy a little comfortable misery with his brethren. I did not feel at all envious; nor do I think that such a ministry of misery will ever draw to itself a number that no man can number. The children of light prefer the joy of the Lord, for they find it to be their strength.¹³¹

As intense as Spurgeon’s depression was, he recognized that a good and sovereign God had spared him from further, more intensive plights. In this way, God had limited the depression. He was confident that he had never “yet experienced a trouble which might not have been worse.”¹³² This was not insignificant coming from a man who confessed that most of his life had been “threatened by grievous sickness.” He believed that God had spared or withheld more depressions and sufferings in his life because he had been repeatedly “delivered from the grave.”¹³³

Because of this, Spurgeon understood “if your soul is depressed the Lord does not send you a very heavy burden; but reserves such a load for times when you have had

¹³⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:651.

¹³¹C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 168-9.

¹³²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:3.

¹³³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:1.

joy in the Lord, and that joy has been your strength.”¹³⁴ God recognizes the limits of his children’s ability to withstand depression and trials. “He knows how to prevent our suffering more tribulation than we can bear. He shears us, but not to injure us; He clips away the wool, but sends the genial temperature so that we may be able to flourish under our loss. Let that be noted, and let God be thanked for it.”¹³⁵

Spurgeon was not a fatalist. He embraced a heaven free of all trials including depression. But the depression now makes the future glory sweeter:

Nothing makes rest so sweet as toil; nothing can render security so pleasant as a long exposure to alarms, and fears; and battles. No heaven will be so sweet as a heaven, which has been preceded by torments and pains. Methinks the deeper draughts of woe we drink here below, the sweeter will be those draughts of eternal glory which we shall receive from the golden bowls of bliss; the more we are battered and scarred on earth the more glorious will be our victory above, when the shouts of a thousand times ten thousand angels welcome us to our Father’s palace. The more trials the more bliss, the more sufferings the more ecstasies, the more depression the higher the exaltation. Thus we shall gain more of heaven by the sufferings we shall pass through here below. Let us not then, my brethren, fear to advance through our trials: they are for our good; to stop here awhile is for our benefit. Why! We should not know how to converse in heaven if we had not a few trials and hardships to tell of, and some tales of delivering grace to repeat with joy.¹³⁶

One way the Lord prepares us for heaven is through suffering. “Our God will not suffer his people to build their nests here. You may be sure of that. We are not of the earth, neither will our heavenly Father suffer us to be filled with the earth. If he has ordained us to eternal life by Christ Jesus . . . and he will fetch us to himself.”¹³⁷ In this sense, Spurgeon affirmed that believer’s depression and suffering was limited to this life only, and the reverse would be true for unbelievers.

¹³⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:357.

¹³⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:357.

¹³⁶Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:356-7. Another sermon with a similar theme is Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 5:294.

¹³⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:611.

Biblical and Historical Saints and Depression

“Do not think that you are quite alone in your sorrow.”¹³⁸ This was the advice that Spurgeon provided to those of a “wounded spirit.” One of the consistent ways that he reminded himself and his hearers that they were not alone was the appeal to saints in Scripture and church history. While in variant times and circumstances, these saints struggled with depression and yet their faith never wavered.

Job

Spurgeon used the example of Job to compare prosperity and adversity as God’s way of demonstrating His presence in our lives. Spurgeon was confident that in adversity “we see our God far better.” He used imagery from the body that in prosperity we hear God, but in adversity we see Him and “that is a greater blessing.” He explained, “Sanctified adversity quickens our spiritual sensitiveness. Sorrow after sorrow will wake up the spirit, and it will infuse into it a delicacy of perception which, perhaps, does not often come to us in any other way.”¹³⁹ Spurgeon placed Job as an example for a saint who saw “the Lord with a spiritually enlightened eye” through suffering.¹⁴⁰ Job’s suffering was so intense that “under depression of spirit he felt sure that he must very soon die. . . . He sits upon the dung-hill and scrapes himself with the potsherd, and writhes in anguish, and is depressed in spirit, he realizes his own mortality.”¹⁴¹

Hannah

While Hannah was a godly woman, Spurgeon presented her as a “case with a sorrowful spirit.” He highlighted Hannah as an “inference from sorrow that the subject is

¹³⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:587.

¹³⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:100.

¹⁴⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:100.

¹⁴¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 32:529, 533.

not beloved of God. You might more safely reason in the opposite way, though it would not be always safe to do so, for outward circumstances are poor tests of a man's spiritual state."¹⁴² Spurgeon believed Hannah's case was a constant reminder of the folly of judging godliness with external happiness. "Many persons feel very happy, but they must not therefore infer that God loves them; while certain others are sadly depressed, it would be most cruel to suggest to them that God is angry with them."¹⁴³ The piety of Hannah ran contrast to the spirituality of many in Spurgeon's day, which caused him concern. "Much of the experience of Christians is no Christian experience, but a mournful departure from what true believers ought to be and feel."¹⁴⁴ He meant that few, like Hannah, were depressed and sorrowful. "Never doubt the fact that a sorrowful spirit is in perfect consistency with the love of God, and the possession of true godliness."¹⁴⁵

David

"Some travel to heaven amid sunshine almost all the way there; and some, on the other hand, seems to have storms from beginning to end."¹⁴⁶ For Spurgeon, David represented the truth that godliness could come through trials and prosperity. "No man had fairer weather than the King of Jerusalem, yet no man ever plowed his way through soil that was more deep with mire, nor through an atmosphere more loaded with tempest than did this man of many tribulations."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:38.

¹⁴³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:38.

¹⁴⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:38.

¹⁴⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:39.

¹⁴⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 57:265.

¹⁴⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 57:265.

Elijah

Besides Jesus, Elijah is the saint that Spurgeon addressed more in his struggle with depression than any believer. He described Elijah as “God’s servant who is greatly depressed.” No doubt Spurgeon was drawn to Elijah’s turmoil because he saw himself in the Tishbite. “I suppose some brethren neither have much elevation or depression. I could almost wish to share their peaceful life, for I am much tossed up and down, and although my joy is greater than the most of men, my depression of spirit is such as few can have an idea of.”¹⁴⁸ Elijah was an example that “high exaltations involve deep depressions” and a perpetually reminder that “you who are called thus to fall into the depths of depression; the eternal arms shall be lower than you are.”¹⁴⁹ Many saints relate to Elijah because they, like him, are “subject at times to a sudden fluttering of heart, a nervous depression of spirits, and a great trembling, just when their faith has been in the fullest exercise, and the goodness of God has been most conspicuously displayed to them.”¹⁵⁰

Elijah’s life also served as a warning to those who wish to die. Spurgeon cautioned that this state could be working into the devil’s hand that “seeks our destruction.” “There are times when, in great pain of body, or in deep depression of spirit, the believer, like Elijah under the juniper tree, requests for himself that he may die. If you ever do pray such a prayer, utter it very softly, for the Master does not authorize it, and that is a matter that must be left to the Lord of life and death.”¹⁵¹ But in another sermon, Spurgeon spoke more clearly against such an inclination. “It is very seldom right for us to pray that we may die. It was not right for Elijah, and it is very seldom right for anybody to do so. It is never right for any of you, whose death would be your eternal ruin, to wish

¹⁴⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:188.

¹⁴⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:188.

¹⁵⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:479.

¹⁵¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 40:418.

to die.”¹⁵² Then he provided the following counsel, “Oh, if you are ever tempted in that way, God grant you grace at once to say, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan!’ Even if you feel a desire to die in order to get out of this world of misery, crush it down.”¹⁵³ Here Spurgeon discerned clearly the sinfulness of depression in the life of the unconverted that wished to die. “For any man to lay violent hands on himself in order to escape from trouble, is the maddest of all actions; it is leaping into the fire to escape the sparks; casting yourself into hell in order to avoid some temporary depression of spirit.”¹⁵⁴

Elijah’s triumph at Mount Carmel followed by his rush under a juniper bush served as reminder that “we cannot have great exhilaration without having some measure of depression afterwards”:

Do not condemn yourself if this is your lot; do not excuse yourself if there is any measure of unbelief mingled with your depression, but do not condemn yourself. . . . It must be so; night must follow day, winter must succeed to summer; and joyful spirits that rise aloft must sink again. We may sometimes wish that we could always keep on the level ground where some of our dear friends live. I have often envied them, especially when I have been down in the dumps; but when I have again ascended to the heights, I have not envied them in the least. At such times, I would have pulled them up with me if it had been possible; but that I could not do.¹⁵⁵

Going through great excitement followed by “a corresponding reaction and depression” was understandable to Spurgeon and to Elijah. The prophet had gone to the top of Carmel and pleaded his cause, and the rain floods came in answer to his prayer. He alone had confronted the prophets of Baal providing a glorious victory for his God. “It was almost inevitable that after an excitement so high, and strong, that he should be desponding and depressed in spirits, and we find that he was so depressed.”¹⁵⁶ Believers, Spurgeon

¹⁵²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:214.

¹⁵³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:214.

¹⁵⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:214.

¹⁵⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:208.

¹⁵⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 62:61.

admonished, should not think this experience peculiar. “It is but a physical result from physical causes. The mind has operated upon the body. It has strung the bow too tightly, and now, unless the string be relaxed, there is a danger of its breaking altogether.”¹⁵⁷

Spurgeon used Elijah as an example for a preacher’s depression due to his “intense love to God, and his grievous disappointment with the people.”¹⁵⁸ Elijah could not endure compromise, so Spurgeon reasoned, “I think that the heaviest sorrows to a really gracious heart are the sins of the times, the transgressions of the multitude, the national sins that bite like asps into an earnest soul.”¹⁵⁹ He continued, “especially if you have done something, or have seen it done by others, which ought to have ended the discussion, and settled the matter once for all.”¹⁶⁰ But often the discussion is not settled, and the result is “this kind of conduct eats into a godly man’s spirit, and there is not much cause to wonder that he, who could say, ‘I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts,’ should find himself in such a state of heart that he steals right away into the wilderness, and never wants to return.”¹⁶¹

Elijah’s struggles with depression could also be attributed to his physical weariness. “I should suppose that he had gone a very long way, without resting at all; hot foot, in hasty flight from the cruel Jezebel, he had passed through a great part of the land both of Israel and Judah, and he had gone away alone into the wilderness, so he must have been very tired; and that, of itself, would tend to the lowering of his spirits.”¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 62:61.

¹⁵⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:209.

¹⁵⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:209.

¹⁶⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:209.

¹⁶¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:209.

¹⁶²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:209.

Thomas

Thomas was broken-hearted when he found his Master was dead, and when his fellow disciples told him that Jesus was alive, he could not believe it, he felt that the news was too good to be true. “He had fallen into a fit of despondency, and got away, as broken-hearted, depressed people often do, trying to get quite alone, when Christian company would be one of the best ways of finding comfort and solace.”¹⁶³ Spurgeon used Thomas as an illustration for many melancholic individuals who when depressed prefer to be alone rather than in company. But this is the worst response for such people. Though tempting, other saints should not shun such individuals but seek to reach them. “If there is a Thomas, who is depressed and sad, and who therefore shuns you, do not you shun him; but find him out, and try to tell him what you have learned by way of comfort for your own heart. Mayhap, God will use it to comfort him also.”¹⁶⁴

Paul

The apostle Paul was a saint that Spurgeon focused on as the ideal Christian. The particular experience of Paul was one of regular trials. He was stoned in Lystra, harassed by his malicious countrymen in numerous cities he ventured. He incurred riots and mobs, dangers and perils of all kinds. Inwardly Paul was “suffering at the same time grievous sickness of body, and that the whole together caused very deep depression of mind. His tribulations abounded: without were fightings and within were fears.”¹⁶⁵

Martin Luther

If Spurgeon referenced Elijah more than any other biblical saint in his struggle with depression, Martin Luther (1483–1546) was the most consistent example from

¹⁶³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:167.

¹⁶⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 47:167.

¹⁶⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:266.

church history for the same reasons. Spurgeon asserted that Luther “could never lead the host if he had not been chastened of the Lord in secret places. Men who have stood in the front of the armies of God have been trained by adversity.”¹⁶⁶ Spurgeon urged Christians to read Luther in order to understand that he was “a man so tempted and so tried, and so frequently the victim of depression of spirits and dire despondency, that he was often ready to die in despair.”¹⁶⁷ Spurgeon continued, “There were times when he did not know whether he had any part or lot in the glad tidings, which he loved so well. Though he went on thundering out the gospel for other people, he sometimes could get no comfort himself.”¹⁶⁸

Luther’s depression was so severe that Spurgeon quipped, “Great-souled Martin Luther could believe and doubt against any man of his time; in believing he could excel the angels, and in horrible thoughts of doubting he could almost match the devils.”¹⁶⁹ Spurgeon concluded, “Great-hearted men are subject to horrible fits of faintness and despair, unknown to minds of smaller caliber.”¹⁷⁰ Spurgeon claimed that Luther on “his very death bed was not free from tempests, and he sobbed himself into his last sleep like a great wearied child.”¹⁷¹

One of Spurgeon’s favorite accounts of Luther’s despondent episodes involved his wife Kate:

On one occasion Luther fell so low in spirit that his friends were frightened at what he might say or do. Things were going ill with the great cause, and the Reformer might in his dreadful condition have upset everything. So his friends got him out of

¹⁶⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:478.

¹⁶⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:478.

¹⁶⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:479.

¹⁶⁹Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:171.

¹⁷⁰Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:171.

¹⁷¹Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:171.

the way, saying to themselves, “The man must be alone, his brain is over-worked, he must be quiet.” He rested a bit, and came back, looking as sour and gloomy as ever. Rest and seclusion had not stilled the winds nor lulled the waves. Luther was still in a storm, and judged that the good cause was shipwrecked. I will now give you my own version of the method adopted for the great man’s cure. He went home, but when he came to the door nobody welcomed him. He entered their best room, and there sat Catherine his wife, all dressed in black, weeping as from a death in the house. By her side lay a mourning cloak, such as ladies wear at funerals. “Ah,” says he, “Kate, what matters now, is the child dead?” She shook her head and said the little ones were alive, but something much worse than that had happened. Luther cried “Oh, what has befallen us? Tell me quick! I am sad enough as it is. Tell me quick!” “Good man,” said she, “Have you not heard? Is it possible that the terrible news has not reached you?” This made the Reformer the more inquisitive and ardent, and he pressed to be immediately told of the cause of sorrow. “Why,” said Kate, “have you not been told that our heavenly Father is dead, and his cause in the world is therefore overturned?” Martin stood and looked at her, and at last burst into such a laugh that he could not possibly contain himself, but cried, “Kate, I read thy riddle, what a fool I am! God is not dead, he ever lives, but I have acted as if he were. Thou hast taught me a good lesson.”¹⁷²

Spurgeon used Luther’s life to prove that it is only by realizing the everlasting, abiding love of God that they that trust in the Lord shall come to feel steadfast as mount Zion which shall never be removed.

Luther, like Elijah, lived in moments of triumphs and tragedies. “Those stirring excitements of his brought on him afterwards fearful depressions of spirit, and then he needed faith in God.”¹⁷³ Spurgeon believed that Luther’s depression was so intense that he had “to work hard sometimes for him to keep his soul alive. Being a man of like passions with us, and full of imperfections, he was at times as desponding and despairing as the weakest among us; and the swelling grief within him threatened to burst his mighty heart.”¹⁷⁴

Robert Hall, Jr.

Robert Hall, Jr. (1764–1831) was one of the most celebrated Baptists and

¹⁷²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:718; *MTP*, 38:408.

¹⁷³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:624.

¹⁷⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:624.

“renowned as one of the most eloquent preachers of Great Britain.”¹⁷⁵ His oratory gifts were so pronounced; he was compared to George Whitefield (1714–1770) and was hailed as the original “Prince of Preachers.”¹⁷⁶

Spurgeon used Robert Hall Jr. in his *Lectures to My Students* as an illustration of the divine call to the pastorate.¹⁷⁷ Hall was subject “to fits of terrible depressions of spirits.”¹⁷⁸ Spurgeon recalled an incident following one of Hall’s sermons.

After all were gone Mr. Hall sat down, and there came over him a fit of depression: out of which he strove to rise by conversation with his host. “Ah, sir,” said the great preacher, “I am much burdened, and am led to question my own condition before God. Tell me now what you think is a sure evidence that a man is a child of God.” “Well, Mr. Hall,” said the plain man, “I am sorry to see you so tried; you doubt yourself, but nobody else has any doubt about you. I hope the Lord will cheer and comfort you, but I am afraid I am not qualified to do it.” “Never mind, friend, never mind, tell me what you think the best evidence of a child of God?” “Well, I should say, sir,” said he, “if a man loves God he must be one of God’s children.” “Say you so,” said the mighty preacher, “then it is well with me,” and at that signal he began to magnify the Lord.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵Michael A. G. Haykin, “Robert Hall, Sr. (1728-1791),” in *The British Particular Baptists: 1638-1910*. ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist, 1998), 203.

¹⁷⁶Thomas R. McKibbens, Jr., *The Forgotten Heritage: A Lineage of Great Baptist Preaching* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 61; John Dix, *Pen Pictures of Popular English Preachers* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1852), 112; Henry C. Fish, *Pulpit Eloquence of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1871), 14.

¹⁷⁷One of the most interesting pieces of data I discovered as volunteer research assistant at the Spurgeon Center at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City is what appears to be approximately fifty notations from Spurgeon (this needs to be confirmed by other scholars) in his personal collection of Hall’s Works. What is most remarkable is that the majority of notations are very critical of Hall. To Hall’s citation on modes of preaching, the following is noted in the margin, “A very mistaken idea.” 1:241. Hall commented concerning the French revolution, “In contempt, however of these calumnies, I am free to confess, the French revolution has always appeared to me, and does still appear, the most splendid event recorded in the annals of history.” The personal notation about this comment “what a statement for a Christian minister!” 3:17. Hall preached a sermon on the spirit and tendency of Socinianism using Psalm 19:7 as his text. The personal notation as to the sermon is: “The text seems unsuitable to the sermon” 5:46. At the conclusion of one of Hall’s sermons, the following notation appears, “after a careful reading of the above. I am inclined to think with all respect and admiration for Dr. Hall’s character that he erred in choosing the ministry. It was not his real vocation he would have been more useful in some other profession.” 6:188

¹⁷⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 50:78. I am thankful for the intense research concerning Robert Hall Jr. and his mental breakdowns from Cody McNutt, “The Ministry of Robert Hall Jr.: The Preacher as Theological Exemplar and Cultural Celebrity,” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 41-46.

¹⁷⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:343.

Job Spurgeon

Spurgeon embraced the idea that his generation owed a debt of payment to their fathers in the faith. Believers have been given the gospel from the “hands of martyrs.” Those who grasp the gospel of Jesus firmly should not “trifle with it, nor sit by and hear it denied by traitors, who pretend to love it, but inwardly abhor every line of it.”¹⁸⁰ This was not a theoretical idea, but a personal one for Spurgeon. “The faith I hold bears upon it marks of the blood of my ancestors. Shall I deny their faith, for which they left their native land to sojourn here? Shall we cast away the treasure which was handed to us through the bars of prisons, or came to us charred with the flames of Smithfield?”¹⁸¹ Spurgeon would often lean on his Protestant forbears who suffered for the gospel of Jesus. One ancestor was Job Spurgeon (c.1600–n. d.) who was imprisoned for refusing to pay a fine imposed on him for attending a Nonconformist church. His great grandson’s great grandson was so moved by this firm stand that he was honored to be related to Job Spurgeon even in a curious way with physical malady. “Personally, when my bones have been tortured with rheumatism, I have remembered Job Spurgeon, doubtless of my own stock, who in Chelmsford Jail was allowed a chair, because he could not lie down by reason of rheumatic pain.”¹⁸² Spurgeon concluded, “That Quaker’s broad-brim overshadows my brow. Perhaps I inherit his rheumatism.”¹⁸³

George Whitefield

Evidently Spurgeon looked in vain for depression in the life and ministry of George Whitefield. “I do not find much about depression of spirit in the Journals of Mr.

¹⁸⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:84.

¹⁸¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:84.

¹⁸²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:84.

¹⁸³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:84.

Wesley or Mr. Whitefield.”¹⁸⁴ When given the reason for the lack of depression, Spurgeon concluded that these men “had something to do. . . . [they] spent themselves in the Lord’s service.”¹⁸⁵ In another sermon, Spurgeon stated, “These men [Whitefield and Wesley], seemed to have no time for depression of spirits. They were always about their Master’s business.”¹⁸⁶ While we could agree that this is true on a case-by-case basis, this response seems overstated. One is hard pressed to find a godly man who “spent” himself “in the Lord’s service,” more than Spurgeon, and yet, by his own admission, he struggled with depression most of his life.

Conclusion

The doctrine of the Trinity and Spurgeon’s Calvinism were foundational for framing his understanding of depression. Despondency while genuine suffering for saint and sinner has altogether different purposes. Believers should also look to Scripture and church history to witness other saints who struggled with depression while maintaining their piety.

Spurgeon recognized that the unbelieving world would look at depression in the life of the Christian altogether different than how God was operating in the saint’s life. “The world holds as a theory, that if there be a God, he is very often exceedingly unkind; that he is severe to the best of men, and that some men are the victims of a cruel fate; that they are greatly to be pitied, because they have to suffer much without compensating profit.”¹⁸⁷ But the Christian’s perspective is in opposition to this. The saint

¹⁸⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 40:256; *MTP*, 46:32. Spurgeon partially recanted on this claim, stating years later, “Mr. Whitefield, in his diary, tells of his depression of spirits, but they are comparatively few.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 56:584.

¹⁸⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 40:256.

¹⁸⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 46:32.

¹⁸⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:449.

believes that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose.”¹⁸⁸ The Christian affirms, “as a matter of faith, that he gains by his losses; that he gets health by his sicknesses; and that he makes progress towards heaven by that which threatens to drive him back. This, I say, is the doctrine with which he starts.”¹⁸⁹

Spurgeon held that some depression is consistent with how God reveals himself throughout his word, and how he works in the lives of his people. Understanding how God uses these difficulties for the greater glory of himself and the good of his people is vital for the spirituality of Christians:

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” All of you, who have sounded the deeps of soul-trouble, and have enjoyed the presence of Jesus, can distinctly testify the same. You have found that afterward affliction worketh the comfortable fruits of righteousness, though now, for a season, it is anything but joyous. You have, some of you, passed through very severe difficulties and trials. I have heard you say, and say it confidently, not in moments of religious excitement, but in times of sober quiet, that you would not have had it otherwise for all the world. I have heard you say, and I know you are ready to repeat it in any company and in any place, that if you could have altered your past life, especially as to its trials and its difficulties, you would not now in looking back upon it have had it altered for a thousand worlds. Oh no, the rough was a right way; the tempest purged the pestilential air; the earthquake shook down houses of evil; the fire consumed heaps of wood, hay, and stubble. In this thing may I beg you always clearly and distinctly to state the truth as witnesses for your God.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:449.

¹⁸⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:449.

¹⁹⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:449.

CHAPTER 6

CURES FOR DEPRESSION

Introduction

Life expectancy was much shorter in the nineteenth century than today. In England, rural people lived longer than city dwellers, and members of the upper classes were healthier than manual laborers. Unlike many aspects of daily life, medical care made no dramatic advance during the century. Nutrition was poorly understood, and physicians had very few effective ways to treat most illnesses. Epidemic diseases swept through crowded cities.¹ People who did heavy labor were usually too old to work by the time they reached age forty; their health was depleted from long hours, poor nutrition, and the physical stress of beginning full-time employment before their bodies had matured.²

As a previous chapter has noted, Charles Spurgeon had numerous health issues that were either the cause or the effect of his depression. In addition to these physical maladies, his mental state was also adversely affected. But Spurgeon was a Victorian man and thus was not opposed to treatment of his infirmities, believing that such could also be used for good. This chapter aims to describe the various physical cures that Spurgeon sought to aid in curbing his depression.

Spurgeon's Use of Doctors

Spurgeon did consult with doctors throughout his ministry. Doctors Joseph

¹Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (London: Greenwood Press, 2009), 195.

²Mitchell, *Victorian England*, 196.

Kidd (1824–1918), R.M. Miller (n.d.), and Russell Reynolds (1828–1896) all treated Spurgeon in the last year of his life. Doctor Andrew Clark (1826–1894) had the opportunity to treat Spurgeon as well but declined because he was at odds with Kidd’s methods.³ In addition, Doctor James Y. Simpson (1811–1870) was called to perform a surgery on Susannah.⁴ The fact that the Spurgeons would use Simpson, a leading opponent of homoeopathic medicine, and Kidd, a leading advocate for homoeopathic treatment suggests they were not discriminating as to their choice of doctors based on medical philosophy. Doctor James Henry Bennet (1816–1891) became a close friend of

³See chapter four for a detailed list of these physicians and their relationship with Spurgeon.

⁴James Y. Simpson was appointed professor of medicine and midwifery at Edinburgh in 1839. Distraught after witnessing the practice of surgery without anesthesia, Simpson pioneered chloroform anesthesia in obstetrics. In *Answer to the Religious Arguments advanced Against the Employment of Anaesthetic Agents in Midwifery and Surgery* (Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox, 1848), Simpson sought to demolish all conceivable religious objections to painless surgery and childbirth. Simpson pioneered the uterine sound, long forceps, wire sutures, and improved statistical analysis of operative outcomes. He was considered an expert on sexual productive organs in humans. Many women sought his advice regarding gynecological problems because of his expertise and his promotion of less painful procedures. He was a strong opponent of homoeopathic treatment, writing an expose *Homoeopathy, its Tenets and Tendencies* (London: Simpkin and Marshall, 1853). The surgery on Susannah is thought to be a gynecological issue of some sort, and has only been described as “a difficult operation upon her that had the effect of giving her some relief from pain and resulted in a slightly better state of health.” Charles Ray, *Mrs. Susannah Spurgeon* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1903), 35. We can deduce this for the following reasons: 1) James Simpson a gynecologist who championed chloroform anesthesia in obstetrics personally visited Susannah twice while she was living in Brighton before performing the surgery. 2) The fact that the type of surgery is never specifically mentioned seems to point to the kind of discretion common with the Victorian age of not announcing female problems. 3) Her health issues began to surface after her boys were born (1856) and the surgery was performed when she was in her mid-life (1869). 4) Spurgeon’s good friend, Dr. James Henry Bennet, sent him a book that he had written with a personal note on the title page, “The Rev. C.H. Spurgeon, with the kind regards of the author.” The book was entitled, *A Practical Treatise of Inflammation of the Uterus, Its Cervix, and Appendages, and On Its Connexion with Other Uterine Diseases* (London: Churchill, 1861). The date of this publication (eight years prior to Susannah’s surgery) is significant. This also suggests that Bennet sent this work to Spurgeon for the benefit of Susannah (which seems reasonable to conclude), which would mean that her health problems would have begun long before they were documented. We may also deduce that prior to the surgery, Susannah was in poor health. “Restoration” of her health is a term that some biographers use. W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1920), 83-84. By 1868 her travelling days were done as she admitted, “for many years I was a prisoner in a sick-chamber.” Ray, *Mrs. Susannah Spurgeon*, 35. She was even declared an “invalid” prior to the surgery, and after the surgery was described as “an invalid almost entirely confined to her couch.” Ray, *Mrs. Susannah Spurgeon*, 35. The term “invalid” would be used seven times in Ray’s biography to describe Susannah both before and after Simpson’s surgery.

Spurgeon with whom he spent considerable time in Mentone.⁵

Spurgeon did not merely take up friendships with doctors who were willing to give him medical advice, but he also spoke positively toward the medical community from the pulpit. “If I thought that I was struck with a serious disease I would not wait until it grew incurable, but I would go to a physician, and have the matter attended to before it went further,” he declared in a sermon.⁶ He did use his pulpit in an effort to support hospitals financially. Preaching on “Hospital Sunday” Spurgeon declared, “This is Hospital Sunday, and we must contribute our full share. Do you see any connection between this subject and the collection? I think I do. Here are these poor sick folk who will die unless they be carefully looked to, unless medicine and a physician’s skill be provided for them.”⁷

The amount of medical books in Spurgeon’s personal library attests to the fact that he was interested in matters of health. The additional fact that many of these books were sent to him personally by the authors is suggestive as to their knowledge and interest of his many physical maladies.⁸ Spurgeon’s father owned a copy of *Family*

⁵Bennet was an English physician who popularized the French Riviera as a means of restorative powers to one’s health. He became known as the “Inventor of the Mentone resort.” After contracting tuberculosis, he went to Mentone and he was convinced that he was cured by the change of climate. Besides Spurgeon, his patients included Queen Victoria and Robert Louis Stevenson. The Spurgeon collection at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has more medical books from Bennet than any other author in the medical field. Most of these books have personal inscriptions from Bennet to Spurgeon, which further testifies of their relationship. The most prominent works are: *A Practical Treatise of Inflammation of the Uterus, Its Cervix, and Appendages, and On Its Connexion with Other Uterine Diseases* (London: Churchill, 1861); *Winter and Spring on the Shores of the Mediterranean* (London: Churchill, 1875); *Nutrition in Health and Disease* (London: Churchill, 1878).

⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP/NPSP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 32:83.

⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:360. “Hospital Sunday” was a new work in Spurgeon’s day. Metropolitan Tabernacle partnered with many churches (Catholic, Jewish, and Congregational) throughout London to take up an offering for the poor who were sick and unable to fund their medical needs. Hospitals would sign a petition granting they would receive these funds to aid these sick. The year that Spurgeon died churches collected over three thousand pounds to support the “Hospital Sunday” fund. See Editorial, “The Metropolitan Hospital Sunday Fund,” *The Lancelot*, July 21, 1894.

⁸There are close to thirty volumes of medical works in the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Some that are noteworthy in terms of Spurgeon’s interest are: John Mason

Medicine that he consulted when any member of the household would get sick.⁹

However, Spurgeon was not blurred as to the limitations and flaws of the medical community. He owned a copy of T. Clayton's *An Essay on Quackery and the Dreadful Consequences Arising from Taking Advertised Medicines*. In his humorous spin, Spurgeon spoke of a physician who guaranteed that his drugs would aid the London pastor. In telling the story, Spurgeon enlightened his readers as to his own opinion of the doctor's prescription.

Years ago, when I was suffering from gouty rheumatism, a gentleman sought an

Good, *The Study of Medicine in Four Volumes* (Boston: Wells and Lily, 1822). Good's works are heavily marked in particular sections. The section on consumption is substantially marked 2:742-90, as well as the section on kidney disease 4:474-506. Interestingly, the chapter on cancer has no markings whatsoever. While there is no firm evidence that Spurgeon noted these sections, his observance of these pages would have been unmistakable if he consulted them. W.B. Carpenter, *Outlines of Human Physiology* (London: Ward Publishers, n.d.); Andrew Combe, *Principles of Physiology Applied to the Preservation of Health and Mental Education* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan, 1834); Michael Foster, *Physiology* (London: Macmillan, 1876). Foster's work was personally sent to Spurgeon with the inscription, "with the publisher's compliments." Most of the chapters deal with the nature of blood, how blood moves, how the blood is changed by air and breathing, how the blood is changed by food and digestion, how the blood gets rid of waste matters. William Orr, *Principles of Physiology* (London: Orr Publishers, 1854). Charles Seale, *The Blood in its Relation to Life, Health and Disease* (London: Booth Publishers, 1861). This work contains the following notation, "The Rev. Mr. Spurgeon with compliments from the author." There are significant chapters that pertain to Spurgeon's health. Chapter two deals with functions of organs (including kidneys), chapters eight and nine focus on brain and nervous disease, and chapter ten is devoted entirely to kidney disease. James Henry Bennet, *Nutrition in Health and Disease* (London: Churchill, 1878). There is a personal note inscribed in the work, "The Rev C. H. Spurgeon with the kindest regards and very best wishes. Mentone, Jan 31, 1886." This book covers foods for better digestion as well as a chapter on the use of wines and alcohol. Henry Thompson, *Food and Feeding* (London: Warne Publishers, 1885). This work is book about planning dinner parties and menus. J. Berners, *First Lessons on Health* (London: Macmillan, 1876). Chapters in Berners' work range from fresh air, food and drink, warmth, cleanliness, light, exercise, and rest. T. J. Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health, Invigorating Life by Regulating the Diet and Regimen* (London: Simpkin Press, 1842). Alfred Schofield, *Health and Home Tracts* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1890). Interestingly, in this work there is a chapter entitled, "How to Avoid Dying Before the Time." Among the many reasons given, unhealthy marriage and immorality are two. Another chapter is entitled, "How to be Healthy in One Room." E. Lankester, *On Food* (London: Hardwicke Publishers, 1864). Chapters in this work include the uses of coffee, tea, tobacco and alcohol for health. M. C. Cooke, *The Seven Sisters of Sleep* (London: Blackwood Publishers, n.d.). This is a book entirely about the use of tobacco. T. Clayton, *An Essay on Quackery and the Dreadful Consequences Arising from Taking Advertised Medicines* (London: Houghton and Gloucester, 1805). Charles Robert Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine: A Guide to the Mode of Recognition and the Rational Treatment of Diseases and Emergencies Incidental to Daily Life* (London: E. Gould & Son, 1893). Joseph Kidd, *On the Adaptation of External Nature to the Physical Condition of Man* (London: William Pickering, 1836).

⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:190.

interview, who was confident that he could cure me almost immediately. He was a marvelously positive quack, and before long he had informed me that he had in his exclusive possession a most astounding medicine. I do not know whether a smell of it would not have cured all the ills of humanity. No, he could not even hint what the medicine was; and I did not press the point, for I could not expect to be favoured with the golden secret; but I was indulged with some insight into the preparation of the miraculous drug. The professor said, "These pills are infallible in their effect, because they are so powerful. Their power does not lie in the mere ingredients, which are extremely simple; but their efficacy is the result of the careful preparation of the material by myself." Being a very healthy man, and full of life-force, the professor professed to work up these pills in such a way that he transferred to them the electric or biological energies of his own personality; and thus he infused health-power into the sick. I have never taken the aforesaid pills.¹⁰

Spurgeon expressed his confidence that doctors did have the ability to aid the sick. "Natural disease may be instrumentally healed by men." But he knew their limits, and that ultimately only God had the power to cure. "Even then the honour is to be given to God who giveth virtue unto medicine, and bestoweth power unto the human frame to cast off disease. . . . It is the sole prerogative of God to remove spiritual disease."¹¹ God does use doctors as a means for curing illness, but there is only one Great Physician who should be praised for healing. "Do not attribute to secondary means that which ought to be ascribed to God alone. His fresh air, and warm sun, or bracing wind and refreshing showers do more for our healing than we dream of, or if medicine be used, it is he who gives virtue to the drugs, and so by his own Almighty hand works out our cure."¹² The fact that Spurgeon had the appropriate balance in his relationship with doctors is important in understanding not only how far he was willing to go in his treatment for his physical maladies but also for treatment with his depression.

Medicines and Drugs

Spurgeon was not averse to taking medicines. "Those who will use no medicine whatever certainly have no Scriptural warrant for their conduct," he once

¹⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 35:381.

¹¹C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 489.

¹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:332.

stated.¹³ He used some stimulants during his seizures related to his gout attacks though he never detailed what were those stimulants.¹⁴ Once he admitted, “have you never noticed that some people who are ill and are ordered to take pills are foolish enough to chew them? That is a very nauseous thing to do, though I have done it myself.”¹⁵ He believed one of the advancements of the gospel in China was due to medical opportunities.¹⁶ The primary medicines of Spurgeon’s time to treat gout were: aconite for inflammation, colchicum for relief of gouty paroxysms causing swelling and soreness around the big toe and foot, sulphur to relieve itchiness caused by gout and gout pain during weather changes, bryonia to fight the burning irritation and swelling of the joints, rhus tox to fight stiffness and inflammation in the joints, arnica for muscle and joint soreness and bruise-like symptoms, lycopodium for chronic gout patients, nux vomica for stomach distress and indigestion, pulsatilla for pain that moves from joint to joint, nux moschata for stomach pain caused by gout, and gelsemium for burning pain.¹⁷ Uric acid was believed to be lowered by carbonated soda and in some cases mixed with opium.¹⁸ Ammonia in moderate doses was also thought to aid with indigestion and gout.¹⁹

A crude technique was developed by William Cadogan (1711–1797) to relieve gout by means of friction. The gout patient would rub himself, a handy servant or two would also be employed in rubbing the patient all over, as he “lies in bed, with flannels, or the flesh-brush, which will contribute greatly to brace and strengthen his nerves and

¹³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:332.

¹⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 4:242, 369. For a detailed understanding of Spurgeon’s physical maladies, see chapter four.

¹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:51.

¹⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *ST* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-1902), 9:460.

¹⁷Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 117.

¹⁸Good, *The Study of Medicine in Four Volumes*, 4:505.

¹⁹Good, *The Study of Medicine in Four Volumes*, 4:506.

fibres, and circulate his blood, without any fatigue to himself.” The patient then would ride or walk two to three miles. The entire body should “be rubbed for half an hour, morning and evening, with a flesh-brush, till the parts begin to grow red and warm.”²⁰ If one has ever experienced the pain of gout, the friction method seems unthinkable, let alone useful.

Throughout Queen Victoria’s reign (1837–1901), most medical men relied on drugs during some stage of ongoing depression. Although “administered in conjunction with other forms of therapy, like bed rest or residence at the seaside, drugs were the mainstay of what was hoped to be cures.”²¹ Arsenic was readily available to restore vigor to depressed patients. “Although the Arsenic Act restricted its sale after 1851, no medical qualms limited its use as a nerve tonic for decades thereafter.”²² Arsenic was the primary medicine used to treat the inflammation of the kidneys. “One drop dose, three times a day, after food for several weeks” was the prescription.²³ Opium was the sedative of choice for most depressed people in Spurgeon’s day. Many Victorians believed the drug had “the wonderful properties of mitigating pain, inducing sleep, allaying inordinate action, and diminishing morbid irritability.”²⁴

The author Margaret Oliphant (1828–1897) took opium when she learned that her husband’s illness was incurable consumption. “Whether I took myself, or the doctor gave me, a dose of laudanum, I don’t remember; but I recollect very well the sudden

²⁰Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health, Invigorating Life by Regulating the Diet and Regimen*, 252-53. Graham cited William Temple who embraced friction as a means of curing gout. Temple said, “No man need have the gout who can keep a slave.”

²¹Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 110.

²²Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 112.

²³Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 381.

²⁴Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 111.

floating into ease of body and the dazed condition of mind, a kind of exaltation, as if I were walking upon air, for I could not sleep in the circumstances.”²⁵ Many people took opium as a stimulant. Gladstone took laudanum in his coffee before orating in the House of Commons, and much medical opinion supported his assumption that the drug was a “pick-me-up.”²⁶ Susannah Spurgeon’s surgeon, James Simpson, prescribed “strong doses of opium” for the Scottish theologian, John Tulloch (1823–1886) in 1863, when depression had cast him into “a state of darkness for nearly five weeks.”²⁷ The two-fold impact of opium, Thomas Dowse (1836–1876) made it “the chief” of all the drugs used in “the curative treatment of nervous exhaustion . . . it excites and stimulates for a short time the brain cells and then leaves them in a state of tranquility, which is best adapted to their nutrition and repair.”²⁸ Opium was also the recommended drug to victims of Bright’s disease in their final stages that had lapsed into a state of coma.²⁹ Given the prominence in Victorian medicine, one may surmise that Spurgeon would have been given doses of arsenic and opium both as a sedative to curb his depression and as a medicine to attack his gout and kidney disease. Also, when one factors that James Simpson provided large doses of opium to his depressed patients the evidence seems conclusive. However, there is no record that Spurgeon was administered either opium or arsenic throughout his life.³⁰

²⁵Margaret Oliphant, *Autobiography and Letters of Mrs. Margaret Oliphant* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974), 63.

²⁶Virginia Berridge and Griffith Edwards, *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in the Nineteenth Century*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 65.

²⁷Margaret Oliphant, *A Memoir of the Life of John Tulloch* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood, 1889), 244

²⁸Thomas Stretch Dowse, *On Brain and Nerve Exhaustion: ‘Neurasthenia’: Its Nature and Curative Treatment* (London: Bailliere, Tindall & Cox, 1880), 51-52.

²⁹“Opium has been used [for Bright disease patients in a coma] with benefits.” Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 381.

³⁰Apparently Spurgeon knew some of the effects opium had on those who took it. Spurgeon cited opium use in a sermon illustration when he noted, “drug a man with opium and how will a man’s imagination dance with joy!” Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:153. Spurgeon does not say he knew this by personal

Diet

The belief held by most physicians during the Victorian era was that an individual's diet was linked to his or her temperament. One could become depressed if one had indigestion for instance. But there was little agreement among the medical community as to what types of food and drink could cause both physical and emotional maladies. One opinion advised total abstinence from tea, coffee, wine, and spirits while another found all four beneficial in moderate amounts. One school of thought rejected red meat as too rich for a faulty digestive system, but another pronounced it essential for regaining strength. Still others urged a diet heavy in fats, protein, fruit, vegetables and bread. "While vigorously upholding the merits of their preferred system, doctors acknowledged that no general dietary rule was applicable to all nervous patients whose ailments exhibited strikingly individual traits and whose constitutions, before illness struck, differed as widely."³¹ The diet that one physician prescribed for depressed patients in 1880, for example, definitely required ample means. He suggested choosing among oyster soup, a variety of fresh fish, beef, lamb, turkey, pheasant, partridge, asparagus, other fresh vegetables, and a variety of beverages, such as Chateau Lafitte and Amontillado sherry.³²

Opinions of diet in relationship to physical sufferers were just as varied.

experience. Later in his ministry, he was more negative in his opinions. "False peace is as stupefying and deadly as opium." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:428. He also served on the General Council for Anglo-Oriental Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade. See *Our National Responsibility for the Opium Trade* (London: Anglo-Oriental Society Publishers, 1880). Spurgeon asked his congregation on one occasion, "you will find petitions in the other end of the house against the opium traffic in India and China; I hope you will all sign them. For a government to carry on dram shops for the sake of profit is inexcusable; but that the government should carry on poison shops is utterly abominable." H. L. Wayland, *Charles H. Spurgeon: His Faith and Works* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1982), 39. This put him at odds with his friend, Prime Minister Gladstone. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* 4:131. He addressed his view on this as a problem in advancing the gospel, asking in a sermon, "what kind of religion must ours be that forces opium on the Chinese?" Spurgeon, *MTP*, 50:476.

³¹Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 116.

³²Dowse, *Brain and Nerve Exhaustion*, 61.

Victorian doctors prescribed the following for those suffering with gout,

Light beverages, such as toast water, barley water, milk, or milk and soda water, and lithia water. When the severity of the attack has passed, boiled white fish, such as sole and whiting, also chicken may be allowed with milk puddings; other animal food is objectionable until the patient becomes convalescent. Chronic gout victims should pay attention to the digestive organs avoiding the use of too much animal food, and especially pork, veal, sausages, kidneys, salted meats, and other unsuitable articles such as salmon, cheese, pastry, savoury dishes, and malt liquors. Stimulants, if used at all, should be taken very sparingly and with food only, claret and dry still hock would be preferable to the stronger wines. Exercise and a regular mode of life contribute towards keeping off the attacks.³³

Wine was also a debated dietary supplement especially to gout patients.³⁴ Most doctors recommended the use of wine in moderation for gout. One physician called it, “the milk of old age.”³⁵ Canary was a favorite wine of people who struggled with gout. One gout sufferer drank Canary in order to “drive the gout from his bowels.”³⁶ However, Sherry was the universal choice for the best wine for most gouty men.³⁷ Yet other doctors recommended total abstinence from fermented and fermentable liquors with those suffering kidney problems.³⁸ The art critic, John Ruskin (1819–1900), paid a visit to Spurgeon while the pastor was sick. Ruskin “carried to the house as a present for his friends some charming engravings and some bottles of wine of a rare vintage.”³⁹

While Spurgeon loved food, he was apparently conscious of his dietary habits on his overall health. William Hatcher (1834–1912), an American pastor, visited Spurgeon in the summer of 1888. He recounted a dinner with Spurgeon, which spoke of

³³ Fleury, *Modern Household Medicine*, 115-116.

³⁴ One doctor reported that gout is a disease among the rich who eat too much food, and the poor who drink too much beer, and eat too little. Schofield, *Health at Home Tracts*, 12.

³⁵ Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 74.

³⁶ Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 77.

³⁷ Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 77.

³⁸ Good, *The Study of Medicine in Four Volumes*, 4:484.

³⁹ Ray, *Mrs. Susannah Spurgeon*, 28.

some of the London pastor's peculiar dietary habits at the time. Hatcher and Spurgeon dined at the Gould mansion and apparently all knew, including Hatcher, that Spurgeon was a vegetarian. The meat that night was roast pheasant which Spurgeon "devoured the breast heartily." Hatcher poked fun at Spurgeon saying when he arrived back in America, he would bring his countrymen from darkness to light by letting them know that a "pheasant was a vegetable." After the laughter subsided, Spurgeon retorted, "Blame me not, the woman, she gave it to me."⁴⁰

Another incident involved a mysterious white substance that Spurgeon put in his coffee. "When the lady of the house asked Mr. Spurgeon if he would have coffee, he answered that he would, but that it must be without sugar." As Hatcher and Spurgeon sat next to one another, Hatcher could witness what unfolded. "I noticed that when the coffee was set before him, he took out a little round paper box, opened it, took up a small tablet and pinched the tiniest piece off and dropped it into the coffee." Curious as to what the mystery content was, Hatcher inquired, and Spurgeon replied that it was saccharin. "It took 350 pounds of sugar to make one pound of saccharin" and Spurgeon substituted saccharin for sugar because sugar "aggravated his rheumatic gout, from which as is generally known, he was an almost constant sufferer." Hatcher reported later that evening, "he told me that he did not know what it was to have a moment entirely free from pain, and said that it had been that way for a full score of years. It was under all debility and acute suffering that he did the most valuable part of his work as a student, a preacher, an author, a lecturer and a man of the people."⁴¹

William Hatcher recalled when he visited Spurgeon at his home in the summer

⁴⁰American pastor William Hatcher documents this on a personal visit to Spurgeon in the summer and autumn of 1888. William Hatcher, *Along the Trail of the Friendly Years* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., n/d), 50; Eldridge Hatcher, *William Hatcher: A Biography* (Richmond, VA: W.C. Hill Printing, 1915), 247.

⁴¹Eldridge Hatcher, *William Hatcher: A Biography* (Richmond, VA: W.C. Hill Printing, 1915), 247, 250-51.

of 1888, Spurgeon passed out cigars to all present, and “as he smoked, he discussed the Downgrade movement to which he became a keen character in.”⁴² Many of the medical books in Spurgeon’s library spoke of some of the merits of tobacco. One of these books encouraged smoking for the aim of suppressing appetites.⁴³ While Spurgeon never mentioned this outright, he may have been encouraged to smoke cigars in an effort to lose weight. One role that cigars played in Spurgeon’s life was as a stimulant. “When I have found intense pain relieved, a weary brain soothed, and calm, refreshing sleep obtained by a cigar, I have felt grateful to God, and have blessed His name.”⁴⁴

Spurgeon’s diet was from one extreme to another, and his thoughts on food related to depression were just as various. In his final years of life, Spurgeon had gout seizures and his diet was reduced to oatmeal for lunch and dinner.⁴⁵ Spurgeon understood the link between diet and depression. “Men have more courage after they are fed: many a depressed spirit has been comforted by a good substantial meal. We ought to bless God for strength of heart as well as force of limb, since if we possess them they are both the bounties of his kindness.”⁴⁶ Yet on a trip to southern Europe at San Remo, he was given a sumptuous dinner with wines and viands. He was asked to pray for the meal to which he declared, “Lord, we thank thee that we do not often get a meal such as this else we should be ill.”⁴⁷ On another occasion however, Spurgeon’s pseudonym, John Ploughman

⁴²Hatcher recalled at least two episodes where they smoke cigars together. Hatcher, *Along the Trail of the Friendly Years* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., n/d), 51.

⁴³Henry Thompson, *Food and Feeding* (London: Bradbury, Agnew, and Co., 1885), 121. Another book in the Spurgeon library that was entirely devoted to the use and benefits of tobacco was M. C. Cooke’s, *The Seven Sisters of Sleep* (London: Blackwood Publishers, n.d.).

⁴⁴C. H. Spurgeon, Personal Letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, September 23, 1874, London.

⁴⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography* 4:369. Spurgeon explained that this method was supposed to “starve out” the gout.

⁴⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *TD* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1892), 4:477.

⁴⁷W. E. Leonard, “Society Reports,” *Minnesota Medical Monthly* 3, no. 1 (January 1888): 15. Spurgeon may have gone vegetarian (temporarily) not so much for weight loss as for medicinal purposes.

declared, “There are difficulties in everything except eating pancakes.”⁴⁸ On another occasion, he quipped, “Call me what you like; but don’t call me late for dinner.”⁴⁹

Rest

A Victorian physician spoke for many when he explained, “the nervous system when once exhausted is with difficulty re-established. Drugs seem to have little effect, or are badly tolerated . . . and at the present time rest is the treatment advocated. Rest of body and mind while the system is kept in as hygienic a condition as possible during the period of inactivity.”⁵⁰ As in the case of other health issues, most Victorian doctors had various opinions regarding rest of sick patients. Maurice Craig (1866–1935), a very successful consulting psychiatrist in the Edwardian decade, insisted that “rest in bed will often save the patient months of trouble later,” but nonetheless limited it to “two or three weeks.”⁵¹ William H. B. Stoddart (1868–1950), a medical officer at Bethlehem Royal in the same period, advised one month as the maximum length of time for bed rest; anything longer was liable to make a patient “contract the ‘bed habit’.”⁵² All agreed that, at “the earliest possible moment, the patient should be moved to the couch, then encouraged to

Dr. Joseph Kidd who was Spurgeon’s physician in his final days and probably diagnosed him with Bright’s disease was a strong homoeopathic physician who believed that vegetables acted as a medicine in a way that opium could not. Spurgeon had Joseph Kidd’s work in his personal library. Joseph Kidd, *On the Adaptation of External Nature to the Physical Condition of Man* (London: William Pickering, 1836), 225-32.

⁴⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *John Ploughman’s Pictures* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1884), 157.

⁴⁹C. H. Spurgeon, *The Salt-Cellars: A Collection of Proverbs and Quaint Sayings* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:113.

⁵⁰Ralph Browne, *Neurasthenia and Its Treatment by Hypodermic Transfusions* (London: Church, 1894), 28.

⁵¹Maurice Craig, *Psychological Medicine: A Manual on Mental Diseases for Practitioners and Students* (London: Churchill, 1905), 247.

⁵²W. H. B. Stoddart, *Mind and Its Disorders: A Text-Book for Students and Practitioners* (London: H.K. Lewis, 1908), 366-67.

move around for several hours every day, and finally taken for drives to benefit from fresh air and sunshine.”⁵³

Rest seemed to be the consistent “drug” given to Spurgeon by doctors, friends, and his congregation. In a personal letter to Spurgeon, Henry Law (1797–1884) cautioned him to not return to work too hastily:

While multitudes are rejoicing in your return recruited in health and strength, may one, who only knows you by fame and by your work, add his warm congratulations! May the great Lord, whose you are and whom you serve, long continue to use your faithful testimony! I venture to send a volume to rest on your shelf as a token of respect and Christian love: but not to intrude upon your time. But may a veteran who has had long experience, add an earnest request that you will not spare yourself. The good Simeon used to say to us “Rest soon enough, rest long enough.” You were tardy in taking rest: but for the sake of many, do not return too soon to your usual labours. Pardon this presumption as it comes from one who is not indifferent to your continued work.⁵⁴

Spurgeon’s own congregation was aware of their pastor’s workload and was supportive of any rest he sought. “The demands made upon head and heart by ministering to so great a congregation, and superintending so many forms of Christian work, will never be known except to him who feels them.” The letter continued, “It is no wonder that sometimes the strain is too great, and mind and spirit sink into painful depression, from which there is no recovery but by rest.”⁵⁵ The London pastor agreed with this prescription:

I write only to send my love, and to assure you that I am greatly profiting by the rest, which has been given me. I am weak indeed, but I feel much more myself again. I have learned, by experience, that I must go away in November each year, or else I shall be at home ill. If the Lord will help me through the other months of the year, I might rest in November and December with a clear economy of time. I want to do the most possible; and, on looking over the past, this appears to be the wisest way.⁵⁶

⁵³Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 121.

⁵⁴This letter is from Henry Law and is dated April 1879. The personal correspondence is in the front cover of one of Spurgeon’s personal books written and sent to him by Henry Law. Henry Law, *Christ is All: The Gospel of the Pentateuch-Exodus* (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.).

⁵⁵Spurgeon, *ST*, 5:524.

⁵⁶Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:254.

Spurgeon's amazing work schedule, while doing much good for the gospel of Jesus Christ, was slowly killing him. He recognized the effects of rest on his already deteriorated health:

In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labour, the same affliction may be looked for. The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful to the mind as sleep to the body. Our Sabbaths are our days of toil, and if we do not rest upon some other day we shall break down. Even the earth must lie fallow and have her Sabbaths, and so must we . . . It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. On, on, on forever, without recreation, may suit spirits emancipated from this "heavy clay," but while we are in this tabernacle, we must every now and then cry halt and serve the Lord by holy inaction and consecrated leisure. Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of going out of harness for awhile, but learn from the experience of others the necessity and duty of taking timely rest.⁵⁷

One entry pointed to the medical advice of rest. "The highest medical authorities are agreed that only long rest can restore me."⁵⁸

Spurgeon advised pastors to take advantage of rest times for the overall good of their ministries. "Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength." If the pastor did not take times of rest, Spurgeon warned, he would become "prematurely old," a feature that others remarked about Spurgeon. The London pastor counseled, "It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less." He continued, "Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of going out of harness for awhile, but learn from the experience of others the necessity and duty of taking timely rest."⁵⁹

As early as twenty-one years old, Spurgeon was contemplating rest. "Soon, this voice will never be strained again; soon, these lungs will never have to exert themselves beyond their power; soon, this brain shall not be racked for thought; but I

⁵⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:177-79.

⁵⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:209.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:171-173.

shall sit at the banquet-table of God.”⁶⁰ Tom Nettles observed, “very early [in his life], he was yearning for rest.”⁶¹

Exercise

Victorian physicians consistently reiterated the benefits of exercise. Indeed, “many medical practitioners believed that such activity could ward off depression, or at least keep comparatively mild neurotic complaints from developing into major crisis of health.”⁶² Charles Darwin (1809–1882) followed medical advice to take up horseback riding in the late 1860s.⁶³ During the 1850s, when he was suffering from headaches and depression, Thomas Huxley (1825–1895) found great relief in his work for the Geological Survey, “which occasionally took him out of London, and the open-air occupation and tramping from place to place did him no little good.” For many years afterward, his son reported, “his favorite mode of recovering from the results of a spell of overwork was to take a short walking tour with a friend.”⁶⁴ Generally speaking, Victorian doctors recommended, “walking, fishing, and horseback riding, with cycling and golf added to the list toward the end of the period, but they tailored their advice to fit the specific requirements and capabilities of each patient.”⁶⁵

When John Bright (1811–1899) broke down early in 1856, “hounded by

⁶⁰Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:302.

⁶¹Tom Nettles, *Living By Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 31.

⁶²Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 222.

⁶³Ralph Colp, *To Be An Invalid: The Illness of Charles Darwin* (Chicago: University Press, 1977), 86.

⁶⁴Leonard Huxley, *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley* (New York: D. Appleton, 1900), 1:154-55.

⁶⁵James Crichton-Browne, *Stray Leaves from a Physician's Portfolio* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), 140.

vicious publicity concerning his opposition to the Crimean War and depressed about his future in Parliament, the politician found mental effort an agony.”⁶⁶ Friends provided the following counsel: total rest, a temporary but complete withdrawal from politics, change of diet, and, relaxing in the sunshine. Bright found the best therapy, however, was proposed by doctor, William McLeod (d. 1875), who urged him to renew his acquaintance with the fisherman’s art.⁶⁷ According to George Trevelyan’s (1838–1928) biography, Bright himself insisted, “from this exercise, from spending many hours almost daily on the river’s bank, he recovered the health he had lost in the long nights in the House of Commons, and in the fierce political conflicts of the time.”⁶⁸ When a similar breakdown in 1870 forced Bright to resign as president of the Board of Trade in Gladstone’s first ministry, the process of recovery once again included months of fishing in Scottish waters.⁶⁹

So great was medical confidence in the “therapeutic value of outdoor exercise that it was even incorporated into the regimen of the most advanced Victorian asylums, including the York Retreat and West Riding institution under Crichton-Browne.”⁷⁰ Since it was a Victorian medical commonplace that “stress, overwork, and mental anxiety could exhaust nerve force, it often proved necessary to withdraw a patient from the situation in which tension and worry arose. Hence the reiterated suggestion that change of scene was essential for recovery from nervous collapse.”⁷¹

⁶⁶Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 223.

⁶⁷John Bright, *The Diaries of John Bright*, ed. R. A. J. Walling (London: Cassell: 1930), 204-205, 229, 345-46.

⁶⁸George M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright* (London: Constable, 1913), 254-55.

⁶⁹Herman Ausubel, *John Bright, Victorian Reformer* (New York and London: John Wiley, 1966), 80-81.

⁷⁰Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 123.

⁷¹Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 124.

Many Victorian physicians believed that exercise was considered one of the greatest preventative measures against gout.⁷² “Long walks should be taken as well as long rides, by all gouty people.”⁷³ For Spurgeon, there is no record that he exercised extensively or regularly. He did not like horseback riding, and his only sport, as previously mentioned, was a game of bowls. Given the fact that gout sufferers prefer being off their feet than on them assumes that Spurgeon exercised very little.

The Sea and Weather

Jane Austen (1775–1817) spoke for many physicians when she penned, “The Sea air and Sea Bathing together were nearly infallible, one or the other of them being a match for every Disorder. . . . They were healing, softing, relaxing, fortifying and bracing, seemingly just as was wanted, sometimes one, sometimes the other.”⁷⁴ The number of men and women who were sent to the seaside to recuperate from nervous breakdown certainly indicates the degree of faith that many doctors continued to place in ocean breezes and sea baths. “The ozone in the coastal atmosphere was itself presumed to have many health-giving properties for nervous invalids.”⁷⁵

A sense of peace and renewal was the aim that drove many sufferers to the

⁷²Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 228. “It is upon exercise, associated with regularity and moderation of living, and not upon any of the artifices or felicities of pharmaceutical composition, that the gouty is to depend principally for a defence against the inroads of his painful and fearful malady.” Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 228

⁷³Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 229-30. “The man who wishes to preserve himself from gout, must take bodily exercise. He must find out that kind of exercise which agrees with him, and checks his complaint; and to this he must deliver himself up without reserve, fearing only one thing, that of exercising too little.” Graham cited a case with one of his patients who had gout. “On Mondays, he played tennis for three or four hours; on Tuesdays, he played tennis again; Wednesdays, he hunted; Thursdays, he rode; Fridays, he exercised his arms; Saturdays, he walked several miles. The remedy proved successful, and after eighteen months his gout was cured.” Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 229-30.

⁷⁴Jane Austen, *Sanditon* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2009), 19.

⁷⁵Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 126.

seacoast. The celebrated surgeon, Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie (1783–1862), reminisced fondly in his autobiography about a trip to the coast when he was an overworked young medical man in 1814–15, suffering from depression and losing weight.⁷⁶ John Bright (1811–1889) derived comfort from sea bathing in the autumn of 1870, and Michael Faraday (1791–1867) too, found some solace by the ocean.⁷⁷

Combining all the benefits of sea air, abundant sunshine, and novel surroundings, “the shores of the Mediterranean acted as a particular magnet to draw droves of British invalids to their villas and hotels. In Italy, the French Riviera, Algeria, Egypt, Malaga, and even Malta for a brief period, sickly men and women escaped their native fogs for months at a time.” The great element about the Mediterranean, “was that its climate was varied enough to serve all types of patients: in parts of Italy, the principal effect of the atmosphere was sedative; in areas of the Franco-Italian Riviera, it was mildly tonic; elsewhere still, it was extremely exciting.” Many Victorian medical men believed “it was far better to have a patient addicted to life in the mellow Mediterranean than dependent on morphine.”⁷⁸ In the second half of the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of doctors came to the conclusion that the Mediterranean “could do more to revitalize body and mind than all British pharmacopoeia put together.”⁷⁹ While the “majority of patients who sought Mediterranean refuge from the cold and damp of a British winter suffered from pulmonary disease, the opportunity to pursue outdoor recreation all winter long made the Mediterranean region an appropriate destination for

⁷⁶Benjamin Collins Brodie, *Autobiography of the Late Sir Benjamin C. Brodie, Bart* (London: Longmans, Roberts & Green, 1865), 112-13

⁷⁷Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 210; John Tyndall, *Faraday as a Discoverer* (London: Longmans, Green, 1868), 76; L. Pearce Williams, *Michael Faraday: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 358-59.

⁷⁸Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 127.

⁷⁹John Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford: University Press, 1987), 86.

victims of diverse afflictions, including nervous exhaustion.”⁸⁰

After a nervous breakdown in 1872, James Sully (1842–1923), attempting to launch his career as a freelance writer on philosophical and psychological subjects, fled London to “the magic coast” of the Riviera. His reminiscences, published nearly fifty years later, bore tribute to “recuperative Italy” and the power of Mediterranean sunshine to soothe the psyche.⁸¹

No one in Victorian and Edwardian Britain doubted that fresh air and sunshine were potent curative forces. “Implicit in Victorian paeans to fresh breezes and solar rays was the conviction that these natural aids to health were a precious antidote to precisely those aspects of urban life that fostered neurotic illness, not to mention the poisons inhaled from a polluted urban atmosphere that promoted other kinds of disease.”⁸²

Scottish psychiatrist Thomas Clouston (1840–1915) affirmed the health-giving properties of fresh air, “The winds of heaven not only cure consumption, they strengthen the nerves and promote nutrition of all ages. Bracing air with sunshine was a powerful medicine. . . . It accentuates all the nutritive processes of the body.”⁸³

Winter most certainly had an effect on Spurgeon’s frame. “Midwinter in England brought also to Mentone some cold, wet days, and these acted on the Pastor’s sensitive frame as the atmosphere operates on a barometer.” The account continued, “Dull and dreary days depressed him. . . . but he reveled in the sunshine, and enjoyed basking in its warm beams.”⁸⁴ On another occasion, Spurgeon commented, “The change

⁸⁰Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 127.

⁸¹James Sully, *My Life and Friends: A Psychologist’s Memories* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918), 149-61.

⁸²Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, 128.

⁸³T. S. Clouston, *The Hygiene of Mind* (London: Methuen, 1906), 35, 115, 228.

⁸⁴Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:373.

in the temperature has worked wonders.”⁸⁵

Fresh air was one of the common advocated cures for nervous and depressed patients.⁸⁶ One of the most recommended treatments of gout in the mid-nineteenth century included trips to the sea.⁸⁷ Spurgeon took advantage of this for both the stated reasons: depression and disease. Each winter, he went to Mentone in order renew his health. One witness recorded, “For two months, every morning, I found myself in Mr. Spurgeon’s sitting-room, facing the sea, with the friends who had gathered there for the reading of the Word and prayer.”⁸⁸ In a letter written to his brother on July 27, 1878, Spurgeon stated, “I have suffered so greatly . . . that I can hardly tell whether I am benefited or not by this change. Yet it ought to be a great boon to me, for fresh air, fine scenery, and cheerful company make up a powerful medicine.”⁸⁹

Mentone, the Pearl of France, was a paradise for Spurgeon. His doctor friend James Bennet described the seaside resort as “the beauties of nature, the magnificence of sun, the intoxication of the ever-changing sea.”⁹⁰ In Mentone, Spurgeon could enjoy a subtropical climate, lemon tarts, and ease of pain and depression. With such ease on his body and mind, Spurgeon made annual trips beginning in 1871 typically between mid-November through early February. Spurgeon once wrote to Susannah and described

⁸⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 3:213.

⁸⁶Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 202-204. Graham cited several case studies of depressed and nervous patients (including insane) who tried all types of medicinal treatments only to find exercise and particularly fresh air was the cure.

⁸⁷Graham, *The Best Methods of Improving Health*, 69-70.

⁸⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:232.

⁸⁹In the next line however, Spurgeon opined, “Preaching four sermons is not a help to rest; yet the people are so eager to hear that it ought to be a delight to me.” Murray, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 49.

⁹⁰Bennet, *Winter and Spring on the Shores of the Mediterranean* (London: Churchill, 1875), 12.

Mentone as “calculated to make a sick man leap with health.” Through the years, many friends took refuge with Spurgeon at Mentone, the Muellers, Hudson Taylor, and the Earl of Shaftesbury were a few.⁹¹

Spurgeon encouraged ministers to enjoy nature for good health:

Let a man be naturally as blithe as a bird, he will hardly be able to bear up year after year against such a suicidal process; he will make his study a prison and his books the warders of a gaol, while nature lies outside his window calling him to health and beckoning him to joy. He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. A day’s breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours’ ramble in the beech woods’ umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind’s face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best.

The ferns and the rabbits, the streams and the trout, the fir trees and the squirrels, the primroses and the violets, the farm-yard, the new-mown hay, and the fragrant hops — these are the best medicine for hypochondriacs, the surest tonics for the declining, the best refreshments for the weary. For lack of opportunity, or inclination, these great remedies are neglected, and the student becomes a self-immolated victim.⁹²

Spurgeon once remarked, “Beyond all medicine, stimulant, cordial, or lecturing, I commend quiet hours in calm retreats.”⁹³ In a sermon, Spurgeon declared, “rest is the best, if not the only medicine for those occupied with mental pursuits and subject to frequent depression of spirit.”⁹⁴

Conclusion

During a particularly painful time, Spurgeon candidly wrote, “we need patience under pain and hope under depression of spirit. . . . Our God will either make the

⁹¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:5-13.

⁹²Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:175-76.

⁹³Spurgeon, *ST*, 2:242.

⁹⁴Spurgeon *MTP*, 15:62.

burden lighter or the back stronger; he will diminish the need or increase the supply.”⁹⁵

Spurgeon knew that God answered prayer in a variety of ways and included natural means of doctors, drugs, diet, exercise, rest and vacation.

While Spurgeon encouraged others to avail themselves of natural aids to curb depression and suffering, he rightly understood that these natural aids alone could not completely cure depression and suffering. The cure must come from deeper, spiritual means.

⁹⁵Spurgeon, *ST*, 13:15.

CHAPTER 7

THE SPIRITUALITY FROM DEPRESSION

Introduction

“The coals of orthodoxy are necessary to the fire of piety.”¹ Charles Spurgeon penned these words a few years before his death. He was under excruciating physical torment and regular depression due to his role in the Downgrade Controversy. Though his body was exhausted and his heart dejected, he was resolved in his convictions. The struggle was laudable because Spurgeon understood that a man’s theology, or lack thereof, would dictate his spirituality. While Spurgeon’s statement was in a pastoral context, the truth could apply to all Christians. A man arrives at his spiritual practice based on his belief system guiding him there.

In a previous chapter we observed Spurgeon’s theology of suffering and depression. Now we consider how that theology shaped his spirituality of suffering and depression. Since chapter one has already defined Spurgeon’s spirituality, this chapter will seek to answer two key questions through the filter of Spurgeon’s life and thought: what is the role depression plays for spirituality, and how does God use various disciplines or means during depression for spiritual purposes?² The chapter will allow Spurgeon to speak both as a depressed Christian pursuing his spirituality and as a pastor who desired to direct his fellow believers toward their own spirituality. Most of the

¹C. H. Spurgeon, *ST* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-1902), 21:62.

²While Spurgeon never provided a formal definition of spirituality, he employed terms like “devotion” and “piety” and connected those concepts to beliefs about Christianity, experiencing God, and conducting one’s life in accordance to one’s beliefs. One might define Spurgeon’s spirituality as: total devotion to the Christian God by embracing truths about him, experiencing communion with him, and conducting one’s life in accordance to his word. See Chapter 1:3-4.

chapter will be framed around benefits of depression for spirituality, pastoral exhortations to the depressed that would shape a proper spirituality, and pastoral warnings that if left unheeded would create a distorted spirituality.

The primary motive of Spurgeon's spirituality was to know, love, and become like Christ. All proper theology has this aim as the final end, and spiritual means accomplish this goal. "The Spirit teaches the saints, either at once or by degrees, all the truth of Christ." How does the Spirit teach the believer about Christ? Spurgeon recognized one of the greatest ways was through depression. "Some parts of that whole you will never learn, except upon a sick bed, or in deep depression of spirit, or in bereavement and adversity."³ He saw depression, in some cases, as a catalyst for godliness, "Pain has, probably, in some cases developed genius; hunting out the soul which otherwise might have slept like a lion in its den. Had it not been for the broken wing, some might have lost themselves in the clouds."⁴ Yet, in other cases, depression could enslave the despondent in a prison of their own soul. "Where in body and mind there are predisposing causes to lowness of spirit, it is no marvel if in dark moments the heart succumbs to them."⁵ Understanding the benefits of depression and heeding the warnings in relationship to spirituality helps the believer avoid these pitfalls and attain to the purpose of knowing, loving and becoming like Christ. This is a subject to which we now turn.

Depression's Purpose in Spirituality

For many believers, depression is a regular part of the Christian experience. The saint walking in this world of hurt should expect being "seldom long at ease . . . born

³C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP/NPSP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 31:386.

⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:173.

⁵Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:173.

to sorrow, and . . . [made to] suffer continually.”⁶ The best of God’s children “have their nights.”⁷ While believers might scoff at the value of depression, a good Father sends degrees of despair to his children. Instead of a quick release from dejection, believers should view these gloomy phases as “an inheritance of which we are never deprived.”⁸ A necessary aid for weary saints is to understand the purposes of depression. Spurgeon inquired, “Will it not reconcile us to our sorrows, that they serve some end?”⁹ To what “ends” did Spurgeon recognize depression serving in the Christian’s life? Two primary uses of depression in shaping our spirituality are God’s glory and the believer’s profit.¹⁰ These two factors are presented in sundry, beneficial ways.

Christlikeness

A total devotion to Christ expressed by communion with him was central to Spurgeon’s spirituality.¹¹ Despondency fulfills a major role in this quest, for depression is “the basin and the water and the towel in which our Lord is washing our feet.”¹² The pain of depression is the pleasing tool of the Lord Jesus to remove sin’s grip and shape believers into his image.¹³

Spurgeon identified with this process of sin removal. “It is a wonder that some

⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:466.

⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 1:238.

⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:466.

⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:466.

¹⁰Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 5:45; in another sermon Spurgeon declared, “If it be inquired why the valley of the shadow of death must so often be traversed by the servants of King Jesus, the answer is not far to find. All this is promotive of the Lord’s mode of working.” Helmut Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 222.

¹¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:269-76; *MTP*, 19:13-24.

¹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:273; 27:4

¹³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 17:561.

of us are ever out of the furnace, for our dross is so abundant. I shall not be surprised if I find myself often under the flail, for the straw and the chaff are plentiful in me.”¹⁴ But if Christlikeness is the goal of spirituality and depression a means, then no matter how painful the process, the saint, like Spurgeon, should pray, “sanctify me wholly, spirit, soul, and body, I leave the process to thy discretion. . . . [even] if it means deep depression of soul.”¹⁵

If being conformed to Christ is one of the chief aims of spirituality, then the depressed believer should pursue Jesus at all costs. Spurgeon’s exhortation to draw near to Jesus was unequivocal and regular. “The best remedy for a depressed spirit is nearness to God.”¹⁶ When the Christian suffers depression of spirits, “how sweet it is to behold the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ Spurgeon was not an impervious theologian, coldly detached from pain, lecturing weary subjects. Rather he was “frequently depressed in spirit, perhaps more so than any other person.”¹⁸ He called depression his “horror of great darkness.”¹⁹ His personal struggles had taught him that “no better cure for depression” existed “than to trust in the Lord with all my heart.”²⁰ He regularly drew near to the person and work of Jesus when he was despairing and encouraged others to imitate him. “I do not find in times of pain and depression of spirit that I can keep up upon anything but my Lord,” he professed.²¹ To his weary congregants, he testified, “I have

¹⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:273.

¹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 23:109.

¹⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 25:218.

¹⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 9:367.

¹⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 56:595.

¹⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 13:138.

²⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 56:596.

²¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:271.

never known the matchless music of Jesus' name, in any case, fail to charm the soul out of its despondency."²² Jesus is the bread of heaven for those who are sick in heart, and a well for the parched souls.²³ Throughout his preaching ministry, Spurgeon would use an array of verbal images to urge an all-out pursuit of the Son of God to curb depression. The despondent saint should "run" to Jesus, "touch" Jesus, "look" to Jesus, think about Jesus, trust Jesus, rest in Jesus, and pursue Jesus.²⁴

But was Spurgeon vulnerable to inconsistencies in what he said concerning depression? As previously mentioned, he viewed depression as being a gift from God even to the point of *needing* despondency. How can depression be at the same time a gift from a good Father for our need, and yet the "horror of great darkness" by which we hope to escape? The answer to this tension is that God sends these despondencies so that the weary saint would trust in nothing else except Christ who will then pull his children out of those deep waters of depression thus displaying his glory. "Men have been struck down with depression of spirit. . . . It is often a great mercy when God sends these heavy trials, for if they befall his own children, it is by such trials that he drives them home to himself. . . . so that they return unto their Savior, and Jesus is again precious to them."²⁵ God sends the believer depression, he is to be pursued for aid during depression, and he is the source to deliver the saint from depression. Thus in all things, God will be glorified, which fulfills the goal for a robust, biblical spirituality.

This is vital in understanding Spurgeon's spirituality and maintaining sanity during our own struggles. Depression is the point which theology and personal

²²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:679.

²³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:271; 19:508. Spurgeon uses this same technique in another sermon; Spurgeon, *MTP*, 35:589-600.

²⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:610-11; 22:671; 56:594; 37:333-34; 62:137; 11:337; 13:138; 23:623; 19:508; 35:588-600; 24:221; 28:227.

²⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:610-11.

experience converge. While we cannot discount the primacy of God's role in despondency, we must not concede our own emotions. Human feelings are a reflection of the image of God.²⁶ As stated in chapter five, Jesus, in his humanity, was subject to severe depression while remaining sinless.²⁷ Man tends to drift toward relying on his feelings, and during periods of depression this can be a dangerous crutch. The common reaction to depression is similar to Lot's flight from Sodom and Gomorrah; escape as quickly as our feet will carry us to a better country. But our feelings will ultimately betray us if they are not also grounded in Jesus. Spurgeon discerned that a variety of distorted feelings such as: guilt, fear, and a lack of forgiveness might manifest during periods of depression.²⁸ Flawed feelings in depression would undermine the proper response of weary people running to Christ. When this occurred the door was open to greater sins. "We shall sooner or later endure periods of deep depression. . . .Lest the soul should be beguiled to live upon itself, and feed on its frames and feelings, and by neglect of watchfulness fall into presumptuous sins."²⁹

People in despair often doubt their conversion because they are not experiencing joy, not perceiving any growth in Christ, and not feeling loved by God.³⁰

²⁶God has feelings. He gets angry (Deut 9:22; Ps 7:11; Rom 1:18); he laughs (Ps 2:4; 37:13; Prov 1:26); he has affection (Deut 32:36; Judg 2:18; Ps 135:14; Jer 31:3; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8); he grieves (Gen 6:6; Ps 78:40); he hates (Ps 5:5; 11:5; Prov 6:16); he is jealous (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Josh 24:19); he expresses joy (Isa 62:5; Jer 32:41; Zeph 3:17).

²⁷Mark 14:34; John 12:27; Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:221.

²⁸"Many and many a time have I spoken to people so depressed in spirit that they seemed not far from the madhouse, so heavy was their sense of sin." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:678-79. "I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to." C. H. Spurgeon, *Words of Cheer for Daily Life* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1895), 5; "If we continually sought to live as pardoned men and women ought to live, we should find that nine out of ten of the things that depress us would be driven away." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 56:595.

²⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 52:377.

³⁰The pastoral exhortations of Spurgeon are clear in each excerpt with the "Do not's". "Don't, therefore, conclude that you are no child of God because the joys you once had are gone." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 63:39; "Do not suppose, when you are depressed, that, therefore, you are not growing. Many of God's plants grow best in the dark, and he often puts them in the dark to make them grow. If, on the other hand,

Like a skillful surgeon eradicating cancer, Spurgeon sought to remove emotional diseases that keep the downcast from running to Christ. He confronted those who used guilt to persuade unbelievers that they could not experience conversion to Christ on the basis that they were not depressed about their sinfulness.³¹ Not only was this thinking absurd, but also the argument placed depression at odds with the gospel of faith, a position God had not intended:

Strange to say, we constantly meet with persons who say, "I could believe in Jesus Christ if I felt more burdened by a sense of sin. I could trust him if I were driven more entirely to despondency and to despair; but I am not depressed enough; I am not broken-hearted enough; I am sure I am not brought low enough, and therefore I cannot trust Christ." Strange notion, that if the night were darker we should see the better! Strange idea, that if we were nearer death we should have better hope of life! Now, my friend, you are speaking and acting in distinct disobedience to Christ; for he would have you trust himself, not on the ground of your feeling much or little, or on the ground of your feeling anything at all, but simply because you are sick and he has come to heal you, and is abundantly able to work your cure. If you say, "Lord, I cannot trust thee unless I feel this or that," then you, in effect, say, "I can trust my own feelings, but I cannot trust God's appointed Saviour." What is this but to make a god out of your feelings, and a Saviour out of your inward griefs? Is your own heart to save you by its dark insinuations against divine love? Is unbelief, after all, to bring you salvation because you refuse to believe your God? And despair, wicked despair, which gives the lie to God, is that to be trusted in, and not the Saviour whom God has sent into the world to save sinners? Is there, then, a new gospel, and does it run, "He that denies the power of Jesus and despairs of his love shall be saved?"³²

Equally tragic is for happy individuals to base their standing with God on their excitement and lack of depression:

We must always beware of living by feeling. It is pleasant in summer, but it is an ill

you are deep down in a mine, do not imagine that you are any the smaller for that reason." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 46:533. "Do not ask, 'How can God have loved me? I am so low, so sad, so depressed; it cannot be that he loves me'." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 43:417.

³¹"Some preach, 'Unless you have felt so much depression of spirit, or experienced a certain quantity of brokenness of heart, you must not come to Christ'." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:527. On another occasion he declared, "the true way of coming to Christ is not with a qualification of frames and feeling and mental depressions, but just as you are." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:527.

³²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 27:702. In another sermon, Spurgeon declared, "Many believers mistakenly presume, that you can never believe in Jesus Christ till this depression is removed; but let me tell you your notion is wide of the truth, for the fact is, you are not at all likely to rise out of your depression until you first believe in Jesus." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:719.

way of living in the winter of the soul. We walk by faith, not by sight, nor yet by feeling; for we remember that our feelings are often of a very mixed character, and what we think to be holy joy may be some of it animal excitement, may not be altogether that joy of the Lord which is our strength.³³

Spurgeon was resolute that if the depressed individual relied on feelings more than faith in Christ then that person would always be “blundering and making mistakes” to the point it would be “all over with you.”³⁴ Indeed, if feelings are given more credence than Christ, then who is your master?³⁵

The path toward a Christ-like spirituality during depression is recognizing that feelings alone are not the barometer to gauge our walk with God. One is not to trust moods, circumstances, or volitions but rely on Christ.³⁶ “Care more for a grain of faith than a ton of excitement,” Spurgeon advised weary souls.³⁷ Ironically, Spurgeon used feelings to encourage the believer not to trust feelings, but to trust Christ. He believed that perhaps the worse situation a believer would face in depression was to “feel” as if God was angry with him:

There are times when the joy of religion is gone, and our soul is in the dark . . . to believe in an angry Christ, to hold to his hand and never let him go, though that hand should seem to pull itself away; to lodge with Christ when he gives you no supper; to go and sleep in Christ’s bed when he has not made it, but left it hard for you; to say. . . . May you have faith like that faith that will not, under any difficulties, turn aside from Christ.³⁸

Like Ruth to Naomi, Spurgeon declared his own “where you go, I go” moment with Christ. So confident that Jesus would carry him through depression, Spurgeon staked his

³³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 63:39.

³⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:118; *NPSP*, 3:217.

³⁵Spurgeon addressed both of these extremes in another sermon. Spurgeon, *MTP*, 12:118.

³⁶“Do not measure your growth in grace by your feelings. . . . If we are in Christ, we are in Christ by faith, and not by feelings; and whether your feelings are good or bad, you are no more or less a child of God.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 46:385.

³⁷Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:171.

³⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 62:137-38.

entire life on Christ:

I know I trust Christ. I have no reliance but in Him, and if He falls I shall fall with Him, but if He does not, I shall not. Because He lives, I shall live also, and I spring to my legs again and fight with my depressions of spirit and my down castings, and get the victory through it; and so may you do, and so you must, for there is no other way of escaping from it. In your most depressed seasons you are to get joy and peace through believing.³⁹

With complete devotion to Jesus, Spurgeon firmly followed Christ, and encouraged others to do so, even when feelings were not stirred. “Believe in him, though you see no flashes of delight nor sparkles of joy. We are safe, because we are in the City of Refuge, and not because we are, in ourselves, ill or well.”⁴⁰

Humility

The inclination of man is to divide God’s glory and credit his own successes. This self-aggrandizing is difficult to break, and inevitably creates obstacles rather than a direct path toward Christlikeness. With pastoral savvy tied to personal experience, Spurgeon foretold, “Uninterrupted success and unfading joy . . . would be more than our weak heads could bear.”⁴¹ This advice contradicts our natural proclivities toward fulfillment in our achievements. Why are “uninterrupted success and unfading joy” not qualities to be pursued? Does not God promise these virtues to his children?⁴² To the contrary, Spurgeon foresaw the danger of “uninterrupted success and unfading joy” due to the fact that one is “apt to forget that all our own springs must be in Him.”⁴³ Man neglects pursuing God, the goal of his spirituality, and begins to rely on his own merit. God sends suffering, in an effort to curb man’s selfish ambitions. This starving out man’s

³⁹Spurgeon, *Words of Cheer for Daily Life*, 53.

⁴⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:335.

⁴¹Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon*, 222.

⁴²1 Kgs 2:3; Pss 1:1-3; Prov 16:3; Eccl 9:7

⁴³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 4:460.

self-dependency is necessary to achieve humility, and depression is God’s agent to accomplish the task. “We shall sooner or later endure periods of deep depression. . . .Lest the soul should be beguiled to live upon itself, and feed on its frames and feelings, and by neglect of watchfulness fall into presumptuous sins.”⁴⁴ Spurgeon went so far as to speak of our “need” of depression to fulfill this necessary assignment.⁴⁵ “We *need* clouds and darkness to exercise our faith, to cut off self dependence, and make us put more faith in Christ, and less in evidence, less in experience, less in frames and feelings [emphasis added].”⁴⁶

While this might seem excessively harsh, the humbled saint laid low by depression will look back and praise a good God for giving him despondency and rescuing him from pride. “We thank him for our depressions of spirit . . . [else] we might have become too secure.”⁴⁷ Spurgeon composed his own doxology for this work. “Glory be to God for the furnace, the hammer, and the fire. Heaven shall be all the fuller of bliss because we have been filled with anguish here below, and earth shall be better tilled because of our training in the school of adversity.”⁴⁸ If God exalts the humble, then depression drives them to their knees. Once in that position, the saint can rise and journey the path toward a Christ-centered spirituality.

Thankfulness

Another benefit of depression is “to make us grateful that we have had such

⁴⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 52:377.

⁴⁵Christians of the 21st century speak of the need for accountability to strip man of pride, but rarely the “need” for depression.

⁴⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 1:238.

⁴⁷Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:166.

⁴⁸Thielicke, *Encounter with Spurgeon*, 223.

cheerful spirits, and been blessed with so many comforts.”⁴⁹ While the temptation exists toward bitterness, depression, when properly understood, makes one grateful for the blessings of God. Once again, Spurgeon spoke of the *need* of depression in the believer’s life to accomplish this task. “Some of us *need* to lie a little while upon a sick-bed in order to make us thankful for having had good health for so long; and we *need* to be brought low, and to have our spirits depressed [emphasis added].”⁵⁰ We need despondency to think clearly about God’s blessings. For if God did not give us winters of the soul, “we should not value summers half so much without them.”⁵¹ If we did not have our dark nights, “we might grow weary of the sun himself.”⁵² God gives the saint depression so that the believer may not take for granted God’s blessings, and, in doing so take him for granted.

On this point we wrestle with another tension in Spurgeon. Depressed persons ought to be grateful to God because thankfulness was one of the surest ways to drive depression away.⁵³ Saints should, like Job, praise God during terrible times knowing the tide will turn and they will be free from depression to “make up for lost time” in praise. “I have said to myself, sometimes, when I have been sore sick, and have become fearfully depressed through pain, ‘If I get over this illness, I will give God a sevenfold portion of thankful service and praise.’ Now that I have got rid off it I will let my dear Lord see whether I cannot make up a little for lost time.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 53:71.

⁵⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 53:71.

⁵¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 19:335.

⁵²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 19:335.

⁵³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 16:482.

⁵⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 43:549. While on a trip to the south of France, Spurgeon used the same technique with a friend. Spurgeon, *MTP*, 44:61-72.

When prone to depression, God's people should meditate on the good benefits God has given them with the aim of being thankful.⁵⁵ Meditating on God's benefits protects the saint from complaining, which is a common pitfall during depression. Another way to encourage thankfulness during depression is to remember one's life before conversion to Jesus. "My lot may seem hard, yet it is nothing in comparison with what it would have been if I had been left a prisoner in the land of Egypt. Thank God, I am no longer in bondage to my sins."⁵⁶ The suffering believer may then exclaim, "Thank God, I was a bondman, but the Lord my God has redeemed me, and I will be patient, whatever I am called to bear."⁵⁷

Joy

Spurgeon viewed depression as a vehicle used for the glory of God, and was comfortable living with the tensions presented in a depressed believer's life. These tensions he did not quickly nor clearly resolve. One of the great conflicts is the relationship between joy and depression. If depression is a legitimate means of shaping the saint like Jesus, then what role does joy play? If the saint is commanded to be joyful in all matters, then is not depression sinful at all times? If depression is not sinful at all times, then to what degree?

Spurgeon believed that while many of God's people will drift into depression at some point in their lives, joy, not depression, should be sought. Christians are exhorted to pursue joy and become joyful people. But believers are never commanded to pursue depression nor be characterized by despondency:

⁵⁵"Go home, and sit down, and bless the Lord. Sometimes, even singing is not good enough to present to our God, and music cannot convey all we want to say. Sit still and mediate on all the Lord's goodness to you, and so keep out all sadness while you bless his holy name." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 43:549.

⁵⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:189.

⁵⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:189.

My impression is that I am not right when I give way to depression and melancholy. I certainly should not go to a place of worship seeking for doubt and despondency. Neither should I conclude that I must be on the way to heaven, because I felt in my own heart some of the miseries of hell. When I am despondent, I say to myself, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" I probably know as much about depression of spirit as any man that lives; but I consider myself foolish and blameworthy, a fool for knowing so much darkness, and I do not want to feel any more of it. I would like to drive myself out of it once for all if I could; for we ought to be glad, and rejoice forever in that which God creates. He has created his people a rejoicing: yea, his people to be a joy. Ours is a heritage of joy and peace. My dear brethren and sisters, if anybody in the world ought to be happy, we are the people.⁵⁸

While not being sought by believers, depression inevitably comes, and, as previously noted, not always due to sin.⁵⁹ Depression exists, in part, to shape the believer's joy in Christ, rather than in an experience. "There are certain forms of disease, which seem rather to increase the sufferer's joy than to diminish it."⁶⁰ Joy can be ascertained during depression, which is a gospel work since unbelievers cannot experience this combination.

I know that there are many here who, like myself, understand what deep depression of spirit means, but yet we would not change our lot for all the mirth of fools or pomp of kings. Our joy no man taketh from us: we are singing pilgrims, though the way be rough. Amid the ashes of our pains live the sparks of our joys, ready to flame up when the breath of the Spirit sweetly blows thereon. Our latent happiness is a choicer heritage than the sinner's riotous glee. . . . My soul has a greater inner gladness in her deep despondency than the godless have in their high foaming merriments. Yes, and even pain is tutor to praise, and teaches how to play upon all the keys of our humanity till a completer harmony comes from us than perpetual health could have produced.⁶¹

This world is filled with sorrows and trials, which often bring the saint to depression, and this depression is given in part to bring the saint joy about the prospect of heaven where depressions cease.⁶² This is another way Spurgeon viewed the relationship

⁵⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:357.

⁵⁹See Chapter 5.

⁶⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 58:42.

⁶¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:187-88.

⁶²Even unbelievers recognize this truth instinctively though they will not care to admit God's use of depression in this life brings joy to the next. One will often hear at a funeral someone utter the

between depression and joy. “No heaven will be so sweet as a heaven which has been preceded by torments and pains. . . . The more trials the more bliss, the more sufferings the more ecstasies, the more depression the higher the exaltation. Thus we shall gain more of heaven by the sufferings we shall pass through here below.”⁶³ Momentary depression now makes weary believers appreciate weight of joy soon to come.⁶⁴ The fact of Jesus reigning in heaven is a tonic that produces joy to depressed believers.⁶⁵ With his vintage wit, Spurgeon remarked that suffering would be a conversation piece in heaven. “Why! We should not know how to converse in heaven if we had not a few trials and

words, “He is in a better place.” While we contend against the validity of this claim, nevertheless the statement proves the unbeliever is linking suffering in this life with joy in the next. This truth is also magnified by unbelievers in music during times of depression. Eric Clapton wrote his highly successful song “Tears in Heaven” (interestingly Spurgeon has a sermon entitled, “No More Tears in Heaven”) after his young son, Conor, tragically died. In the worst depression of his life, Clapton notes about this life of dejection and hurt, “time can bring you down, time can bend your knees. Time can break your heart, Have you begging please. Begging please.” Yet in the next line he anticipates the joy of heaven. “Beyond the door, there’s peace I’m sure. And I know there’ll be no more tears in heaven.” Eric Clapton, *Tears in Heaven* (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1992). Elton John re-wrote the lyrics to his classic song, “Candle in the Wind” for the funeral service of Lady Diana. The song is a mixture of depression and loss in this life to the joy of heaven in the next. “Loveliness we’ve lost, these empty days without your smile . . . Now you belong to heaven, where the stars spell out your name.” Elton John, *Candle in the Wind* (Santa Monica, CA: A&R, 1997). Believers especially have held that depression now turns to joy later in their music. One of the greatest songs by guitarist Phil Keaggy is “Let Everything Else Go.” Keaggy wrote the song after a series of deaths of his children (five in all). Written in deep depression, Keaggy penned, “I can’t wait to see you Jesus face to face, nothing in this world can take your place.” Phil Keaggy, *Let Everything Else Go* (Nashville: Myrrh, 1981). Christian hymns especially hold these truths in tandem. “Abide with me: fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide: When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me!” Henry F. Lyte, “Abide with Me,” in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2008), 88. “Be still, my soul! The hour is hastening on, When we shall be forever with the Lord, When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone, Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored. Be still, my soul! When change and tears are past, All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.” Katharina von Schlegel, “Be Still My Soul,” in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2008), 514. “Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; Drive the dark of doubt away; Giver of immortal gladness, Fill us with the light of day!” Henry van Dyke, “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville: Lifeway, 2008), 13.

⁶³Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:356-7.

⁶⁴“I can bear this pain, I can put up with these depressions and these inconveniences, for I know that there is laid up for me, in heaven a crown of life that fadeth not away.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 31:388-89.

⁶⁵“In this we boast in every season of depression and of downcasting, that he is exalted and sits at the right hand of the Father, but the glory of that age shall be that Christ is come, that he sits upon . . . the throne of God; that his enemies bow before him and lick the dust.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:441.

hardships to tell of, and some tales of delivering grace to repeat with joy.”⁶⁶

For Spurgeon there was no contradiction in “happy depression.” What was fundamental for this relationship between depression and joy is that Jesus is to be pursued in both joy and sorrow. Perhaps the boldest and clearest way Spurgeon attempted to reconcile these elements was to urge the saint to pursue Christ because of the worthiness of Christ not to ultimately escape depression or increase joy. While both depression and joy are means toward godliness, Christ is the end. “Now is the time to say, ‘Lord, abide with me. If I have no joy, still let me have thyself.’ It is a blessed thing when a believer does not set his affection so much *upon the joy of the Lord as upon the Lord of his joy* [emphasis added].”⁶⁷ In his provocatively titled sermon, “The Blessed Guest Detained,” Spurgeon further emphasized his point of an all-out pursuit of Christ regardless of joy or depression by dramatically adding, “Better to have to do with a killing God than to have God away. So, cry, ‘Lord, if I never get a smile from thee, if I am never again cheered and comforted by thee, and if I never sing a hymn of gladness, yet still abide with me. Be near, even if I know it not’.” Spurgeon encouraged weary saints to pursue Christ with the plea, “Abide with me, then, even if my reason almost fails me, and my darkened soul dreads a yet more tremendous night. Abide with me, O Lord, even should my sorrow seal my eyes in death.”⁶⁸ This trust in Jesus alone was the glue that held the relationship of depression and joy together. “We who trust in Jesus are the happiest of people, not constitutionally, for some of us have great depression of spirits. . . . but inwardly, truly, really, our heart’s joy, believe us, is not to be excelled”⁶⁹ As this line attests, Spurgeon

⁶⁶Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:357. Spurgeon used the “sweetness” of heaven to comfort the depressed in another sermon. Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:709-20.

⁶⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:227.

⁶⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 28:227.

⁶⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:623.

saw no contradiction in saying that a believer could be depressed and joyful at the same time. The reason for this is to “trust in Jesus alone.” With his pithy proverbs Spurgeon once retorted, “A black hen still lays a white egg,” meaning that black sorrows may still produce joyous results.⁷⁰

While Spurgeon lived with depression, nevertheless he often countered these doldrums with humor. William Williams, a close friend of Spurgeon’s, described him as a “bubbling fountain of humour,” to the extent that Williams “laughed more in his company than during all the rest of my life.”⁷¹ Williams believed this was another one of Spurgeon’s extraordinary gifts. “Charles Spurgeon had himself the most fascinating gift of laughter I ever knew in any man, and he had also the greatest ability for making all who heard him laugh with him.”⁷² Williams concluded, “Did not much of his power for usefulness lie in his bright and sunny disposition?”⁷³ The focus on Spurgeon being a man of laughter, contagious cheer and happy personality is curious when in the next account Williams shifted his focus and declared that Spurgeon “was as familiar with the glades of grief and the dark narrow gorges of depression as any man, or he could never with such consummate art have ministered comfort to the suffering, sorrowing sons of men.”⁷⁴ Williams confirmed what Spurgeon testified, depression and joy instead of competitors might be companions in the quest for godliness.

Spurgeon testified that he used joy and laughter to counter his dark moods, and firmly believed he was healthier because he engaged in humor.⁷⁵ He also recognized that

⁷⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *Salt-Cellars: A Collection of Proverbs and Quaint Sayings* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 1:8.

⁷¹Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 17.

⁷²Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 18.

⁷³Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 18.

⁷⁴Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 19.

⁷⁵C. H. Spurgeon, *Eccentric Preachers* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1888), 31.

God had a sense of humor, and would use it in order to comfort his children. While under depression, Spurgeon began to question his own conversion. He visited a Wesleyan chapel while on vacation. The preacher delivered a sermon “full of the gospel, the tears flowed from my eyes, and I was in such a perfect delirium of joy on hearing the gospel, which I so seldom have an opportunity of doing, that I said, ‘Oh, yes, there is spiritual life within me, for the gospel can touch my heart, and stir my soul’.”⁷⁶ At the conclusion of the service, Spurgeon approached the pastor to thank him for helping him out of his despondency with a powerful message. “He said, ‘Are you not Mr. Spurgeon?’ I replied, ‘Yes.’ ‘Dear, dear,’ said he, ‘why, that is your sermon that I preached this morning!’”⁷⁷ Spurgeon was resolved to live with both depression and joy as working in cooperation with each other for the glory of God. Indeed for Spurgeon, “When pain is most severe, joy has often been at its fullest.”⁷⁸

Believers in the 21st century may struggle with Spurgeon’s embrace of depression and joy. Yet the modern age’s alternative of silencing depression, labeling despondency as always sinful, or relying on remedies outside the parameters of Scripture is troubling. “Don’t, don’t, I beseech you, base your evidence of the possession of salvation upon your joy, because if you do, you will be in sad trouble when your joy varies or flies. Build your hope on something better than unsubstantial delights, namely, on the finished work of faith.”⁷⁹ Perhaps Spurgeon did not reconcile these two elements as tightly as we might hope, yet depression and joy were means to draw us to Christ where we love, know, and become like him was a grand truth that Spurgeon was content to rest.

⁷⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 40:220.

⁷⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 40:220.

⁷⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:503.

⁷⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 63:39.

Depression and the Means of Spirituality

While the Christian may develop his spirituality through prosperity, greater ripening takes place through depression.⁸⁰ The good Father does not allow his child blindly to guess at coping with depression. While the previous section stressed running to Jesus rather than feelings in dealing with depression, this section provides specific means to accomplish this aim. God gives his children a variety of ways: promises from Scripture, prayer, Lord's Supper, fellowship, and service to others.⁸¹ God provides these means to help develop our spirituality by "loosening our roots; cutting the strings which bind us here below; pluming our wings for the last great flight, when, leaving earth with all its ties behind us we shall enter into the realities of the bliss which remaineth for the people of God."⁸² These means of spirituality help prepare us for heaven as we advance in godliness on earth.⁸³

While the following is not exhaustive in the Spurgeon corpus, these spiritual disciplines are those most frequently referenced by him and which most often shaped much of his coping and resolving depression. We shall examine the use of: the Scriptures,

⁸⁰“We may grow in some things by prosperity; but true ripeness in grace can only be obtained in adversity. Our cares, our losses, our crosses, our depression of spirits, our temptations from without and from within, these are all ripening dispensations.” Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:457.

⁸¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:457.

⁸²Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:457.

⁸³These spiritual means are described in a variety of ways. Mark Hopkins and Michael Haykin will refer to the means of Scripture as “the spirituality” of the word. Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 153; Michael Haykin, *The God Who Draws Near: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2007), 41. D. A. Carson prefers “means of grace” rather than “spiritual disciplines” in describing these spiritual virtues. D. A. Carson, “Spiritual Disciplines,” *Themelios* 36, no. 3 (November 2011): 377-80; D. A. Carson, “When is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definition,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 3 (September 1994): 381-94. Richard J. Foster, Donald S. Whitney, and Dallas Willard will employ the term “spiritual disciplines” to refer to these means. Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 1-11; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 9-13; Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 67-68. “Spiritual disciplines” seems to be the most frequent reference today concerning these means.

prayer, and service in relationship with depression.

The Role of Scripture in Spirituality during Depression

As previously mentioned, Spurgeon viewed the Scriptures in high esteem.⁸⁴ His spirituality “found its essential roots in the Bible.”⁸⁵ He believed in the “inexhaustibility of the Scriptures to impart life and to develop spirituality.”⁸⁶ The Bible was “sufficient to guide and to sustain his spirituality.”⁸⁷ His spirituality was “essentially a biblical spirituality.”⁸⁸ He combined, “the objective Scriptures with the existential experience of the living Christ as the sole source of true spirituality.”⁸⁹ According to Morden, the Scriptures were “foundational. . . . crucial. . . . central. . . . [and] at the heart” of Spurgeon’s spirituality.⁹⁰

As is common among Christians suffering from depression, Spurgeon seemed to value the Bible more during his dark nights of the soul rather than the days of prosperity. He confessed that the Bible sustained him “in the hour of bitter bodily pain . . . in the hour of deep depression of spirit . . . in the time of cruel desertion . . . and in the time of slander.”⁹¹ Though the timing and events surrounding his depression were unpredictable, one truth was constant. “I can fall back upon the eternal verities; they are

⁸⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 39:280. Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), 153.

⁸⁵Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1992), 569.

⁸⁶Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 571.

⁸⁷Whitney, “A Gregarious Spirituality: The Personal Piety of Charles H. Spurgeon,” 437.

⁸⁸Drummond, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon,” 130.

⁸⁹Drummond, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon,” 130.

⁹⁰Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon*, 106, 110, 112, 118, 121, 135.

⁹¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 39:280.

the hills from which my help cometh, and they never fail me.”⁹²

Despondency spilled into Spurgeon’s pastoral ministry, and he was perhaps known more for the turbulent divisions of doctrinal controversy than for the calm of ecclesiastical unity. Three theological controversies, each occurred at different intervals of his life, stand out: the battle with Hyper-Calvinism (1855), the debate over Baptismal Regeneration (1864), and the Downgrade Controversy (1887–1888). One of the key components that linked these controversies together was Spurgeon’s value, interpretation, and application of Scripture.

During personal tragedies, Spurgeon turned to Scripture as his primary means of comfort and maturing. After an unfortunate, yet providential mishap with Joseph Angus (1849–1893), principal of Regent’s Park College, that eventually deviated Spurgeon away from formal divinity school, the words of Jeremiah 45:5 consoled him.⁹³ Following the Surrey Garden Music Hall disaster, Philippians 2:8-10 was a central text in bringing him through the tragedy.⁹⁴ Throughout many of his physical maladies, Spurgeon repeatedly pondered the words, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”⁹⁵ During the Downgrade Controversy, Spurgeon turned to many Scriptures and these became his book of daily Bible promises, *The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*, which he said, “during the bitterest season of trial, the writer has stayed himself upon the Lord, and trusted his sacred promises.”⁹⁶ Spurgeon held that the doctrines of the Bible should be personally experienced, not merely agreed upon in a creed. This belief is at the core in

⁹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 39:280.

⁹³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:241-2.

⁹⁴Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:377.

⁹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 32:37-48.

⁹⁶Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 24.

understanding the role of Scripture in Spurgeon's spirituality during his depression. He certainly did not disregard creeds, but he affirmed the most convincing evidence for reliance on Scripture was a holy life experiencing God.⁹⁷

During those moments of depression, Spurgeon's consistent language for Scriptural truth was simply, "the promises." "At any time when a child of God is depressed, if he goes to the Word of God and looks up, he will generally get a hold of some promise or other."⁹⁸ Spurgeon asked his weary listeners, "When you get down in spirits and depressed. . . . Do you not turn to the promises?"⁹⁹ The promises of Scripture provide needed medicine to sick souls. They are "an ointment for every wound, a cordial for every faintness, a remedy for every disease. Blessed is he who is well skilled in heavenly pharmacy and knows how to lay hold on the healing virtues of the promises of God."¹⁰⁰

One of the dangers of depression is that the dark state can cloud the minds of believers so as to forget the promises of God while remembering their troubles.¹⁰¹ This forgetfulness of the promises and reliance on troubles leads to doubting the efficacy of the word altogether. These "marshes of fleshly doubt" are the worst medicine for the depressed soul that will only lapse the weary into deeper waters of despondency.¹⁰² Often portraying depression as a sickness, Scripture the medicine, and himself as the doctor,

⁹⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 35:618.

⁹⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 23:119.

⁹⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:251.

¹⁰⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 8:97.

¹⁰¹"How many a precious text have you and I read again and again without perceiving its joyful meaning, because our minds have been clouded with despondency!" Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:483.

¹⁰²Spurgeon knew the propensity of doubting the word of God during states of depression. "I am not a little ashamed of myself that I do not live more on high, for I know when we get depressed in spirits and down cast, and doubting, we say many unbelieving and God-dishonoring words. . . . We ought not to stay here in these marshes of fleshly doubts. We ought never to doubt our God." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 9:59.

Spurgeon provided the symptom for depressed souls who trust their doubts, and doubt the truth. He did this in at least three ways, claiming the Bible provides the depressed: energy, empathy, and imagery.

Spurgeon was convinced that depression would cause a decrease in energy and the necessary motivation to get out of the doldrums. “When a person is depressed in spirit, weak, and bent towards the ground, the main thing is to increase his stamina and put more life into him; then his spirit revives, and his body becomes erect. In reviving the life, the whole man is renewed.”¹⁰³ The Bible was the answer to energizing life. “It is a grand thing to see a believer in the dust and yet pleading the promise, a man at the grave's mouth crying, ‘quicken me’ and hoping that it shall be done.”¹⁰⁴ Depressed individuals may also react in the opposite energetic extreme. Preferring their doubts to the promises of God, they may become anxious, restless and display a form of semi-lunacy.¹⁰⁵ While Victorian doctors primarily turned to medicine as a stimulant or sedative, Spurgeon believed that the depressed Christian could have his spirit calmed and receive peace of mind from simple faith in the word of God.¹⁰⁶

A second benefit that Scripture provides the depressed is empathy. Doubt and trouble can never match the empathy of the Scriptures for the despondent. From Abraham, the friend of God, to John the Baptist, the greatest preacher who ever lived, the Bible provides illustrations of believers who struggled with doubting God.¹⁰⁷ Questions to God on behalf of the despondent abound in the Bible. Psalms 42 and 43 contain a

¹⁰³Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:1201.

¹⁰⁴Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:1201.

¹⁰⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:101.

¹⁰⁶Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:1201.

¹⁰⁷Gen 12:10-20; Matt 11:3.

dozen different questions to God about the state of the depressed.¹⁰⁸ When “Doubting” Thomas spoke in Scripture, he asked questions during very solemn occasions.¹⁰⁹ Jesus asked one of the most profound questions while he was dying on the cross.¹¹⁰ A good portion of the Psalms was written in times of despair, Jeremiah wrote an entire book about weeping. The book of Habakkuk does not end with “happily ever after,” martyrs in heaven are depicted as pleading God to stop the killing, and the mother’s of Bethlehem babies wept with Rachel as they recovered their son’s dead bodies.¹¹¹ Part of the redemptive quality of the Lord Jesus is his assumption people will be depressed and find their rest in him.¹¹² If a depressed individual wants empathy, he will not obtain that ministry in his doubts and troubles, but he should trust the promises of the Scriptures.

¹⁰⁸Pss 42:2, 5, 9-11; 43:2, 5.

¹⁰⁹John 11:16; 14:5.

¹¹⁰While the central meaning of Matthew 27:46 is not depression, there are many points one may extrapolate to prove the empathy of Jesus to the depressed. First, He asked God “why?” which is the most difficult interrogative to ask in times of depression. (“what?” “how?” “when?” “who?” “where?” questions are easier answered than “why?”) Also, “why?” questions are generally the interrogations depressed people ask God. Rather than “what is he doing to me, God?” the despondent would be more apt to ask, “Why is he doing that to me, God?” Second, Jesus ended the statement with the personal “me.” Depression takes matters personally. The despondent typically does not ask, “God, why are you doing that to them?” Rather, “God, why are you doing to this me?” Third, Jesus is unafraid to address the action done against him, which is being “forsaken.” While the earlier “I thirst” is a cry of need, this statement is a cry of total desperation. Given the fact that Jesus addressed the Almighty not as his Father but as his God and that no disciple, except John was present (although Matthew’s gospel does not mention John’s presence), only heightens this despair. Perhaps the absolute, worst feeling of a depressed Christian is the feeling of being abandoned, deserted, and left alone by God. This is perhaps the worst description about hell, a place where God is not present in the way he is everywhere else (“depart from me”). Finally, Jesus’ address as “God” coupled with “you” takes on personal responsibility. The depressed easily fall into this accusatory tone, “You are God, you are supposed to be good, and you could have prevented this!”

¹¹¹Hab 3:17; Rev 6; Matt 2:16-18. There is a reason most people do not sing the lyrics to “The Coventry Carol” during the Christmas season. The song is usually presented as an instrumental piece. The last two stanzas in particular are so depressing they are difficult to sing. “Herod the King, in his raging, Charged he hath this day; His men of might, in his own sight, All children young, to slay. Then woe is me, poor Child, for Thee, And ever mourn and say; For Thy parting, nor say nor sing, By, by, lully, lullay.” Hugh Keyte and Andrew Parrott, eds., *The New Oxford Book of Carols* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 118.

¹¹²Matt 11:28; John 4:14. Augustine’s prayer applies here. “You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.” Augustine, *Prayers from the Confessions*, John Rotelle, ed. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 15.

When this occurs, he will find there are “no handkerchiefs for the tears of saints like those which are folded up within the golden box of God’s Word.”¹¹³

Finally, Spurgeon used remarkable imagery about the Scriptures to aid the depressed in overcoming their doubts and troubles. He asked the depressed to imagine what it would be like to encounter Jesus in the flesh. After such an experience, Spurgeon surmised, “the very spot of ground on which it occurred would be exceedingly dear and sacred to my spirit.”¹¹⁴ But in times of depression, one may think it was only “a delusion, a figment of imagination, a delirium, and nothing more.”¹¹⁵ Taking a cue from the Apostle Peter, Spurgeon testified that the Bible is to be trusted more than if such an experience occurred.¹¹⁶ “I am as assured that this is thy Book as I am assured of my own existence; and, hence, thou hast done better for the removal of my doubts, and for the assurance of my soul’s eternal salvation, by putting thy promise in thy Book, than if thou hadst thyself personally appeared to me, and spoken with thine own voice.”¹¹⁷ By doing this exercise, Spurgeon encouraged his weary listeners to take up their Bibles (an object they could touch), read (an object they could see), and draw comfort from the promises (a truth they could confirm from personal experience).

On the basis of these three benefits of Scripture: energy, empathy, and imagery, Spurgeon exhorted his depressed listeners to “think of the promises, and as you handle them by thought, they will exhale a sweet perfume which will delight you.”¹¹⁸ Those caught in despondency should replace their fixation on troubles, which are fleeting

¹¹³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:484.

¹¹⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:16-17.

¹¹⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:16-17.

¹¹⁶2 Pet 1:16-21.

¹¹⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:16-17.

¹¹⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 33:484.

with the unfailing, unchanging promises of God.¹¹⁹ The depressed believer should “prostrate . . . cast your feet . . . remember . . . rest. . . . and meditate on the promises” and will be assured they will rise out of their downcast condition.¹²⁰

Once the despondent lean on the promises, they too will testify, “the worst forms of depression are cured when Holy Scripture is believed.”¹²¹

But Spurgeon was convinced in his own experience that Scripture should not only be affirmed, but also grasped and used proactively to counter depression. He held the belief later espoused by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) who wrote, “The main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self.”¹²² Spurgeon was an advocate for this counsel, and practiced this advice. “You see the psalmist here talks to himself. Every man is two men; we are duplicates, if not triplicates, and it is well sometimes to hold a dialogue with one’s own self. ‘Why art thou cast down, O my soul?’”¹²³ Spurgeon then shared his own procedure. “I always notice that, as long as I can argue with myself about my depressions, I can get out of them; but when both the men within me go down at once, it is a downfall indeed. When there is one foot on the solid rock, the other comes up to it pretty soon.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 1:3.

¹²⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 1:3-4.

¹²¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 35:260.

¹²²D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 20.

¹²³Spurgeon does not elaborate on his “duplicate,” or “triplicate” view here. We may conclude based on his full statement that he is merely suggesting we dialogue with ourselves in a similar way that we draw “pros/cons” to make a decision. We put forth an argument and counter the argument in our minds.

¹²⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 43:455. Spurgeon’s comments are in the exposition of the Psalm after the sermon manuscript. “David chides David out of the dumps; and herein he is an example for all desponding ones. To search out the cause of our sorrow is often the best surgery for grief.” Spurgeon, *TD*, 2:467.

Spurgeon was also an advocate to read good books that directed depressed people to the Holy Book. “When at any time I am cast down and dejected, I always find comfort in reading books which are strong on the doctrines of the faith of the gospel.”¹²⁵ He read many works that were written for the depressed and these encouraged him. One manuscript written by Timothy Rogers (1658–1728) was *Trouble of Mind and the Disease of Melancholy*.¹²⁶ Rogers, who struggled with physical maladies and spiritual depression, left his pastorate for eight years under the weight of despondency. The book, in typical Puritan fashion, used the Scriptures to deal with physical and spiritual depression as well as the sense of losing God’s favor. As Spurgeon put it, Rogers was for a “long time sad and sick on account of the hidings of the Lord’s face.”¹²⁷ Spurgeon claimed, through his own testimony that Rogers had been in depression for twenty-eight years.¹²⁸ Spurgeon’s use of Rogers throughout his writings is noteworthy.¹²⁹

Robert Burton’s (1577–1640) *Anatomy of Melancholy*,¹³⁰ Joseph Symond’s (d. 1652) *Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul*,¹³¹ and Simon Browne’s (1680–1732) hymns written out of great depression¹³² were all sources of encouragement to Spurgeon’s

¹²⁵Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:203.

¹²⁶Timothy Rogers, *Trouble of Mind and Disease of Melancholy* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002).

¹²⁷Spurgeon, *The Saint and His Saviour*, 218.

¹²⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 24:425.

¹²⁹Spurgeon, *Lectures* 1:181; *TD*, 1:115, 132-33, 320, 322, 326, 420, 659, 950, 966; 2:43, 464; 3:179, 594; 4:350, 666; *The Saint and His Saviour*, 208, 218; *MTP*, 24:537.

¹³⁰Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Toronto, Ontario: General Publishing Co., 2002). Spurgeon cites Burton in *Lectures*, 1:175

¹³¹Joseph Symonds, *Case and Cure of a Deserted Soul* (London: Badger Publishing, 1641). This particular copy resides in the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Spurgeon cites this work in *TD*, 1:400, 447, 660; 2:120, 320, 363; 4:1484.

¹³²Simon Browne, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (London: Crowder, 1760). This is the copy located in the personal collection at the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Spurgeon mentioned Browne in *Lectures*, 1:181.

tormented soul. During times of physical exhaustion and depression, Susannah would “fetch” Richard Baxter’s (1615–1691) *The Reformed Pastor*¹³³ in order “to quicken [his] sluggish heart.”¹³⁴ While Spurgeon would take refuge in Baxter’s epic work, Susannah remarked that her reading would often be interrupted by his “heart-felt sobs.”¹³⁵ John Bunyan’s (1628–1688) *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was a favorite of Spurgeon’s who employed the allegory characters of The Slough of Despond, Giant Despair, and Doubting Castle throughout his ministry.¹³⁶ Finally, Spurgeon encouraged despondent individuals to purchase a copy of Samuel Clarke’s (1684–1759) *Precious Bible Promises*.¹³⁷ Some believe that Spurgeon carried a copy of this work in his pocket so he could refer to it when he or others were lapsing into depression.¹³⁸

Spurgeon not only read to be encouraged during depression, but he wrote in order to do the same for others. When he finished his first draft of *Morning by Morning*, he spoke of writing these devotionals out of his own depression in an effort to aid those who were struggling as well. “I have written much of it out of my own experience of the Lord’s sustaining hand in trouble, sickness, and depression of spirit, and therefore hope it may meet the cases of the Lord’s tried people; yet my life has been a very cheerful one, and therefore the joyous will not find it sick lied o’er with melancholy.”¹³⁹

¹³³Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (London: Buckland, 1766). This particular copy is found in the personal collection of Charles Spurgeon in the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. There is a possibility this is the copy that Susannah read to him.

¹³⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 2:197.

¹³⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:197.

¹³⁶John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Edinburgh: Stevenson, n.d.). There are three copies in the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This particular copy is thought to be an edition Spurgeon carried in his pocket.

¹³⁷Samuel Clarke, *Precious Bible Promises* (New York: Christian Herald, 1906).

¹³⁸Eric W. Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon: Spurgeon Speaks for Himself* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1973), 178.

¹³⁹Spurgeon, *ST*, 1:193.

In a similar state when he penned *Morning by Morning*, Spurgeon composed much of *The Treasury of David* while sick and suffering,

It may be added, that although the comments were the work of my health, the rest of the volume is the product of my sickness. When protracted illness and weakness laid me aside from daily preaching, I resorted to my pen as an available means of doing good. I would have preached had I been able, but as my Master denied me the privilege of thus serving him, I gladly availed myself of the other method of bearing testimony for his name. O that he may give me fruit in this field also, and his shall be all the praise.¹⁴⁰

The role of Scripture was vital in Spurgeon's spirituality during depression, and deeply personal:

In our darkest seasons nothing has kept us from desperation but the promise of the Lord: yea, at times nothing has stood between us and self destruction save faith in the eternal word of God. When worn with pain until the brain has become dazed and the reason well nigh extinguished, a sweet text has whispered to us its heart cheering assurance, and our poor struggling mind has reposed upon the bosom of God. That which was our delight in prosperity has been our light in adversity; that which in the day kept us from presuming has in the night kept us from perishing.¹⁴¹

He loved and depended on the Scriptures, not for his ministry success or victory in theological strife alone, but for his own spirituality. He was not the professional who studied the Bible as an academic exercise, but one who pursued God through his word. Thus he devoted two decades compiling the largest commentary on the Psalms ever assembled. No publisher commissioned him, and he did not expect to make a profit, yet he wrote it as a man convicted and comforted by the word.¹⁴² The title he gave to this colossal composition can best summarize Scripture's relationship to Spurgeon's spirituality in depression. The Bible is indeed, a "treasure."

¹⁴⁰Spurgeon, *TD*, 1:vi.

¹⁴¹Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:1475.

¹⁴²"I cannot hope to be financially remunerated for this effort. If only the expenses are met, I will be well content." Spurgeon, *TD*, 3:v.

The Role of Prayer in Spirituality during Depression

A crucial aspect of Spurgeon's spirituality was prayer.¹⁴³ "If any one should ask me for an epitome of the Christian religion, I should say it is in that one word, 'prayer.' If I should be asked, 'What will take in the whole of Christian experience?' I should answer, 'prayer'."¹⁴⁴ Prayer was so critical to Spurgeon's spirituality that he compared it to breath itself. "We cannot live without asking favours of the Lord."¹⁴⁵ Amazingly, Spurgeon declared about his pastoral prayers, "I would sooner yield up the sermon than the prayer."¹⁴⁶ During a discouraging time, Spurgeon wrote a short, touching note to Susannah who was absent from him. He confessed, "My love, were you here, how would you comfort me. . . . I shall go upstairs alone and pour out my griefs into my Saviour's ear, Jesus Lover of my soul, I to thy bosom fly."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³Four works that are of immense help in Spurgeon's spirituality of prayer in terms of their detail and organization are: John D. Mashek, "Charles H. Spurgeon: A Study of His Theology and Practice of Prayer" (master's thesis, Concordia Theological Seminary, 1980); Peter J. Morden, "Prayer," in *The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon: Communion with Christ and His People*, 137-64; Kevin W. Regal, "Charles H. Spurgeon's Theology of Prayer" (master's thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000); Donald S. Whitney, "A gregarious spirituality: the personal piety of Charles H. Spurgeon," in *The Pure Flame of Devotion: The History of Christian Spirituality*, eds. G. Stephen Weaver Jr., and Ian Hugh Clary (Ontario, Canada: Joshua Press, 2013), 438-45. Whitney's chapter is particularly well-written although the author of this dissertation would respectfully disagree to Whitney's claim that Spurgeon "maintained a consistent, vibrant, gregarious spirituality. . . .*except* for the noteworthy exceptions of the depressive aftermath of the Surrey Garden Music Hall disaster and the episodic depression related to his health issues [emphasis added]." Whitney, "A gregarious spirituality: the personal piety of Charles H. Spurgeon," in *The Pure Flame of Devotion: The History of Christian Spirituality*, ed. By G. Stephen Weaver Jr., and Ian Hugh Clary, 429 footnote 2. The aim of this thesis has been to prove that Spurgeon did maintain and indeed exemplified a robust spirituality during his depression since that depression was a means of his spirituality.

¹⁴⁴Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:122.

¹⁴⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:15.

¹⁴⁶Charles Cook, *Behold the Throne of Grace: C.H. Spurgeon's Prayers and Hymns* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1934), 10.

¹⁴⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:23.

When God's suffering people get depressed, they should turn to prayer.¹⁴⁸

Spurgeon was incredulous to conceive of a Christian who does not pray during periods of depression. "Have not holy men of old always sustained themselves in their worst times of grief and depression by betaking themselves to prayer?"¹⁴⁹ Or he asked another way, "What better remedy is there for heart sickness and depression [than prayer]?"¹⁵⁰

Spurgeon provided his depressed church members models of prayer to practice when they are in a state of despondency. They should pray: "everyday" prayers, persistent prayers, and "sinner's" prayers. Using the publican as an example of a weary sinner who prayed the "everyday" prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," Spurgeon highlighted while Sunday prayers are lofty, considered, and lengthy, "everyday" prayer for the depressed is child-like, simple, short, and most of all, desperate. This prayer is the prayer of the harlot, the dying thief, and what our Lord taught his disciples when he charged them to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."¹⁵¹ The depressed are often in the midst of great emotions, and so the "everyday" prayer is a benefit as they might imitate the Spirit who, short of words, "groans" petitions to the Father.¹⁵²

The second type of petition that Spurgeon exhorted the depressed to ask was persistent prayer. He realized that his prayers would not be immediately answered as he prayed. He also understood "unanswered" prayer would cause consternation to the

¹⁴⁸"The tried people of God. . . have to cry out very frequently, and they have so many anxieties and cares which, although they cast them upon the Lord, make them realize that they are not, yet pure spirits, but are still in the body." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 51:351.

¹⁴⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 25:349.

¹⁵⁰Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:373.

¹⁵¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 43:448.

¹⁵²Rom 8:26.

depressed and they would be tempted to jettison prayer completely.¹⁵³ But this is one of the worst decisions a depressed soul can make. “Would you see evils magnified and mercies diminished? Would you find your tribulations increased sevenfold, and your faith diminished in proportion? Restrain prayer!”¹⁵⁴ He further explained the perils of neglected prayer. “If thou wilt neglect thy closet, all the troubles thou hast ever had shall be as nothing compared with what will yet come upon thee. The little finger of thy future doubts shall be thicker than the loins of thy present mental anguish.”¹⁵⁵

Because of this tendency to neglect prayer, he exhorted the weary Christian to continue to pray “even if for a while the heavens should seem as brass, and prayer should not be heard, recollect that he did hear you in times gone by, and he is the same God, and changes not, and therefore is hearing still, and will answer by-and-by. Therefore cry mightily to him.”¹⁵⁶ The despondent should lean on the character of God as the motivation for their praying, not their particular mood at the time. If God delays the answer, he has good reason, and will only bring greater reward when the answer comes. “Go on in prayer if you have no immediate answer, and let the answers you have had in years gone by be tokens for good to your soul at this time.”¹⁵⁷

But there was another reason Spurgeon exhorted the depressed not to give up praying. “If a man can pray, his trouble is at once lightened. Prayer is a great outlet for grief; it draws up the sluices, and abates the swelling flood, which else might be too strong for us. We bathe our wound in the lotion of prayer, and the pain is lulled, the fever

¹⁵³“When the time of trial comes, if we get depressed in spirit about it, we are apt not to pray with that fervor and vigor which greater hopefulness would have begotten.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:91.

¹⁵⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 8:152.

¹⁵⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 8:152.

¹⁵⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:534.

¹⁵⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:534-5.

is removed.”¹⁵⁸ The act of prayer was an elixir of the soul bringing comfort to the depressed as they lamented before God and emptied their sorrows. In this sense, depression was a means to prayer, and prayer a means of spirituality. Depression, instead of driving us away from God, should drive us to him on our knees.¹⁵⁹ “To cease from prayer is to renounce the consolations which our case requires. Under all distractions of spirit, and overwhelmings of heart, great God, help us still to pray, and never from the mercy-seat may our footsteps?”¹⁶⁰

The final type of prayer that the depressed should entreat is the “sinner’s” prayer. Using the thief on the cross for a distressed soul who believed God had forgotten him, Spurgeon employed similar petitions for the depressed believer. “I would recommend to every Christian who is in the dark, and has lost his evidences, to go, at once by the old track that sinners have trodden so long.” What was the sinner’s prayer? The depressed soul should appeal to God’s grace by praying, “Remember me. . . . visit me. . . . favor me. . . . restore me with your salvation.”¹⁶¹ When the depressed recognize their need of God, they are apt to cry out to him in prayer.

Depression, when rightly channeled, will lead the weary saint to prayer, which in turn, will lead the weary saint out of depression. Perhaps no more did depression and prayer work in tandem than when weary saints prayed for others. Once this occurred, depressed Christians would realize they were not alone, and the dark fog of melancholy would begin to lift. Spurgeon had personally experienced the pleasure of others praying for him in his own depression. “Often, I have to confess it, I have got two brethren to

¹⁵⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:218.

¹⁵⁹“Let no excess of suffering drive us away from the throne of grace, but rather let it drive us closer to it.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:589.

¹⁶⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:589.

¹⁶¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 62:558-9.

kneel with me in prayer, when I have been depressed through this late illness of mine, and their honest, earnest, hearty prayers in my study have often lifted me right up into joy and peace.”¹⁶² Spurgeon also held that this was a benefit to those who prayed for him. “I believe it has done them good also; I know it has done me good, and I feel sure that you might often be a blessing to others if you did not mind confessing to them when you are depressed and sad at heart.”¹⁶³

But what should happen when you are alone? Of all depressed individuals that Spurgeon advocated for the necessity and benefits of prayer, the discouraged pastor was Spurgeon’s prime target, and he knew what he spoke. “After the sermon, how would a conscientious preacher give vent to his feelings and find solace for his soul if access to the mercy-seat were denied him?”¹⁶⁴ Spurgeon inquired, “Elevated to the highest pitch of excitement, how can we relieve our souls but in importunate pleadings. Or depressed by a fear of failure, how shall we be comforted but in moaning out our complaint before our God?”¹⁶⁵ Faithful pastors cannot be completely candid and transparent in public prayer about all their struggles. But the preacher can pour his needs out before God in private prayer.¹⁶⁶ The pastor will also intercede for his hurting flock and many will find much good in his prayers. “We cannot save them, or even persuade them to be saved, but we can at least bewail their madness and entreat the interference of the Lord. My brethren, let me beseech you to be men of prayer. Great talents you may never have, but you will

¹⁶²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:89.

¹⁶³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:89.

¹⁶⁴Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:53.

¹⁶⁵Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:53.

¹⁶⁶“It is not possible in a public assembly to pour out all our heart’s love to our flock. Like Joseph, the affectionate minister will seek where to weep; his emotions, however freely he may express himself, will be pent up in the pulpit, and only in private prayer can he draw up the sluices and bid them flow forth.” Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:53.

do well enough without them if you abound in intercession.”¹⁶⁷

Spurgeon used several images for prayer.¹⁶⁸ His most consistent image was the picture of business. Like a bank, people take their business that is their prayers, to the one who can handle it for them and leave their transaction with him. This imagery of prayer was particularly needful to those who were depressed,

Many a time I have had great troubles: who can be the pastor of such a church without them? I have done my very best with the matter that has perplexed me, and I have only made it worse; and at last I have laid it before the Lord, and prayed over it; and in such cases I have always said to myself, “I will never have anything to do with that matter again; I have done with it.” I advise you to do the same. Cast thy burden upon the Lord. Put it upon that shelf. But then if you take it down again, what good have you done? No, leave it there; leave it there; and have done with it. . . . If you have done so, let your Advocate see you through with the business. Come, beloved, you shall soon begin to change your mode of talking, if you will go and tell your trouble to God straight away. “Well, I shall see my brother to-morrow.” Do not see your brother; go and see your Father. “Oh, but I want to call in a friend!” That is what I want you to do, but not the friend you are thinking of; call in the Friend of friends. Tell him everything about your trouble and your difficulty; and when you have done that, have done with it, and leave it with him. You will then soon begin to sing.¹⁶⁹

The Role of Service in Spirituality during Depression

“The tongue of the taught belongs only to those who also are men of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”¹⁷⁰ Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon was acutely aware that God gave him depression in many respects to help others in a similar state. He counted this as a special ministry as he thought of his downcast congregants often longing “to see

¹⁶⁷Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 1:54.

¹⁶⁸Spurgeon, “Business Prayers,” in *Only a Prayer Meeting*, (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 32. *The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith: Being Promises Arranged for Daily Use With Brief Experimental Comments* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1888), v. “Pleading the Promises” was a regular expression coined for prayer. This phrase also linked prayer’s relationship with the Scriptures. See Spurgeon, “Growth In Faith,” *MTP*, 59:589-600; J. D. Douglas, *The Prince of Preachers: A Sketch; A Portraiture; And A Tribute* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1893), 98.

¹⁶⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 39:260-1.

¹⁷⁰Richard Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim: The Life Story of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Heir of the Puritans* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1943), 198.

them come forth from their present gloom.”¹⁷¹ He would regularly share his own depressive struggles in an effort to encourage the weary. “It is a great joy to me if I can help them at all by describing my own experience of down-casting and up-lifting.”¹⁷² In talking about his depressed condition to others, he claimed he felt “very much at home.”¹⁷³ He reasoned, “If you have passed through depression of mind, and the Lord has appeared to your comfort, lay yourself out to help others who are where you used to be.”¹⁷⁴ One of the primary functions of depression for the believer is to assist others who are experiencing a similar plight. Thus we observe another function of depression in Spurgeon’s spirituality, the discipline of service.

Others observed this remarkable quality in Spurgeon.¹⁷⁵ William Williams noted how Spurgeon assisted discouraged believers. He “was as familiar with the glades of grief and the dark narrow gorges of depression as any man, or he could never with such consummate art have ministered comfort to the suffering.”¹⁷⁶ J. C. Carlile concurred, “The greater part of his career was lived in fellowship with physical pain. How bravely he endured his cross, and made suffering contribute to the comfort and the strengthening of others.”¹⁷⁷

There was a price to be paid for this ministry to others. As Spurgeon’s depression became more public, the public approached him incessantly for assistance.

¹⁷¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:198.

¹⁷²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:198.

¹⁷³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:200.

¹⁷⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:200.

¹⁷⁵“He always believed that the experience [of depression] could be a source of comfort for others.” Elizabeth Skoglund, *Bright Days; Dark Nights* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000), 122.

¹⁷⁶William Williams, *Personal Reminiscences of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1895), 24.

¹⁷⁷J. C. Carlile, *Charles H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1933), 130.

With so many depressed people to aid, Spurgeon's workload increased all the more. This was particularly true after his sermon "Following Jesus in the Dark," was delivered. Paradoxically Spurgeon opined, "For this cause, I greatly rejoice, but from this happy result I have also had to suffer many things in the following way: it seems as if persons everywhere, having read that address, must write to me an account of their trouble, despondency, and darkness of the soul."¹⁷⁸ He confessed he was limited in ability and time to help these weary souls.¹⁷⁹ He also realized that dealing with depressed people was not a quick fix, and this quandary caused him consternation. "When I visit a sick soul, it requires long and weary nursing. I know, therefore, from that, as well as from my own experience, that if ever a man is delivered from spiritual bondage of heart, it is not by any easy work, or by a hasty word."¹⁸⁰ While on holiday many would join him at his hotel for the purpose of being relieved in their own despair.¹⁸¹

On another occasion, a man approached Spurgeon after a sermon he preached. Spurgeon described him as "nearly insane as he could be to be out of an asylum. His eyes seemed ready to start from his head, and he said that he should utterly have despaired if he had not heard that discourse, which had made him feel that there was one man alive who understood his feelings, and could describe his experience." Spurgeon spoke with the man, encouraged him in the Scriptures, and the two parted company. Five years passed, and the man and Spurgeon reunited. The gentleman told Spurgeon that he had been walking in truth since that conversation.¹⁸² Spurgeon was ecstatic, "I blessed God

¹⁷⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:51.

¹⁷⁹"I have lately been like a doctor who has suddenly had a new practice handed over to him, when I was already as busy as I could be, both night and day." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:51.

¹⁸⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:51.

¹⁸¹"It seemed as if all who were suffering from depression of spirit, whether living in Mentone, Nice, Cannes, Bordighera, or San Remo, found him out, and sought the relief which his sympathetic heart was ever ready to bestow." Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:234.

¹⁸²Spurgeon revealed in a different address that this gentleman was contemplating suicide.

that my fearful experience had prepared me to sympathize with him and guide him, but last night when I saw him perfectly restored, my heart over-flowed with gratitude to God for my former sorrowful feelings.”¹⁸³ Then in an outstanding statement of the role depression played in ministry to others, Spurgeon declared, “I would go into the deeps a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit: it is good for me to have been afflicted that I might know how to speak a word in season to one that is weary.”¹⁸⁴

Because Spurgeon believed that his depression was meant to help others in their own despondency, he was perplexed when ministers had never been depressed themselves. “When I meet with a man that never had an ache or a pain, or a day’s sickness in his life, I used to envy him; but I do not now, because I feel very confident that he is a loser by his unvarying experience.”¹⁸⁵ Spurgeon was not a fatalist looking for depression, but recognized the value of personal experience for ministry. “How can a man sympathize with trouble that he never knew? How can he be tender in heart if he has never been touched with infirmity himself? If one is to be a comforter of others, he must know the sorrows and the sicknesses of others in his measure.”¹⁸⁶ If the minister had not personally experienced depression, his attempt to comfort those who were despondent would tend to be manufactured and portray insincerity.¹⁸⁷ One who was skilled in depression had a tremendous advantage for helping the depressed soul. “If the man has been through a similar experience, he uses another tone of voice altogether. He knows

C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 144-145.

¹⁸³Spurgeon, *ST*, 7:178.

¹⁸⁴Spurgeon, *ST*, 7:179.

¹⁸⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 21:622.

¹⁸⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 21:622.

¹⁸⁷“There are some people who cannot comfort others, even though they try to do so, because they never had any troubles themselves. . . . A man should try to sympathize, he does it very awkwardly.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 54:375.

that, even if it is nonsense to the strong, it is not so to the weak, and he so adapts his remarks that he cheers where the other only inflicts additional pain.”¹⁸⁸

Spurgeon exhorted Christians in numerous ways to serve fellow believers in times of depression. He appealed to two groups: those in depression and those who were not depressed at the moment. Those who were currently experiencing joy and not depressed should deliberately seek despairing people in order to minister to them.¹⁸⁹

Spurgeon recognized this would be easier said than done because many depressed people are unbearable to deal with in their state:

I have sometimes tried to comfort persons that have been tried. You now and then meet with the case of a nervous person. You ask, “What is your trouble?” You are told, and you assay, if possible, to remove it, but while you are preparing your artillery to batter the trouble, you find that it has shifted its quarters, and is occupying quite a different position. You change your argument and begin again; but lo, it is again gone, and you are bewildered. You feel like Hercules cutting off the ever-growing heads of the Hydra, and you give up your task in despair. You meet with persons, whom it is impossible to comfort, reminding me of the man who locked himself up in fetters and threw the key away, so that nobody could unlock him. I have found some in the fetters of despair. “O, I am the man,” say they, “that has seen affliction; pity me, pity me, O my friends;” and the more you try to comfort such people, the worse they get; and therefore, out of all heart, we leave them to wander alone among the tombs of their former joys.¹⁹⁰

When the depressed respond to encouragers with morose behavior, they tend to repel their helpers. One temptation by those seeking to console the uncooperative, despondent person is to be excessively harsh.¹⁹¹ As understandable as this tactic may be, it is ultimately counterproductive. The believer lending a hand to their fellow sufferer out of the Slough of Despond should be: merciful, gentle, and non-condemning.¹⁹² Joyful

¹⁸⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 54:375.

¹⁸⁹“The duty of a happy Christian is to take notice of those who are not so joyous as he is, to seek them out, to condescend to men of low estate.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 43:578.

¹⁹⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 1:36.

¹⁹¹“If you ever meet with any others who are there, do not be rough with them. Some strong-minded people are very apt to be hard upon nervous folk, and to say, ‘They should not get into that state’.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:525.

¹⁹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 48:525; *MTP*, 24:140; *MTP*, 42:582-3.

believers should deal tenderly with depressed people, and they should imagine how they would desire to be treated if they were in the same condition. “You need not encourage them in their sadness; but, let there be no roughness in dealing with them; they have many very sore places, and the hand that touches them should be soft.”¹⁹³

Another temptation by those who are cheerful and not depressed is simply to avoid those who are in a despondent mood. Misery loves company, but many would rather go their own way than to be in company with the depressed.¹⁹⁴ One of the primary reasons for avoidance was because depression was contagious. “Despondent spirits spread the infection of depression, and hence few are glad to see them. . . . There are professors whose presence scatters sadness, and the godly quietly steal out of their company.”¹⁹⁵ A negative person trapped in their misery will invert the proverb and deduce that they need a mountain full of faith to move a little mustard seed. A pessimist is one who while seeing light at the end of the tunnel concludes that it is a train heading his way. All of these negative feelings are contagious. The joyful person trying to lift the despondent out of this mire counts the cost, and surmises that it is too exorbitant attempting to encourage the depressed while becoming discouraged themselves.¹⁹⁶

Spurgeon conveyed his own frustration in dealing with the attitude of depressed people:

When I am seeing troubled people, I enter into one sorrowful case after another till I am more sad than any of them. I try as far as I can to have fellowship with the case of each one, in order to be able to speak a word of comfort to him; and I can say, from personal experience, that I know of nothing that wears the soul down so fast as

¹⁹³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:583.

¹⁹⁴“There are Christian people who always get out of the way of such folks [depressed]; or if they come across them, they say, ‘Who wants to talk with such people? They ought not to be so sad; they really ought to be more cheerful; they are giving way to nervousness,’ and so on.” C. H. Spurgeon, *The Beatitudes* (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 85-86.

¹⁹⁵Spurgeon, *TD*, 4:1410.

¹⁹⁶“I know some few friends who have long been of a broken heart; and when I feel rather dull, I must confess that I do not always go their way, for they are apt to make me feel more depressed.” Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:279.

the outflow of sincere sympathy with the sorrowing, desponding, depressed ones. I have sometimes been the means in God's hand of helping a man who suffered with a desponding spirit; but the help I have rendered has cost me dearly. Hours after, I have been myself depressed, and I have felt an inability to shake it off.¹⁹⁷

After a day of attempting to comfort several despondent souls, Spurgeon confessed that his energy was depleted. He warned of the contagious nature the depressed. "If you have companions in life who are nervous, fretful, fearful, melancholy or, what is worse, full of doubts of God, you will be likely to be warped as they are, and you will soon feel that the sunlight has gone out of your life."¹⁹⁸ However, there are appropriate reasons for believers pursuing the depressed even with the potential spread of despondency. First, Christ did not avoid the despondent. Secondly, the joyful may be depressed at some point in their faith and would not want to be neglected by others.¹⁹⁹

The second group in the service of others during depression that Spurgeon addressed is the depressed person. A great temptation in the midst of despondency is to question one's use for Christ's kingdom. Those who are depressed should rely on the promises of God that he will use them in ministry while in depression.²⁰⁰ Another temptation on the part of those depressed is to stop serving and start pitying. This is a grave mistake on the part of the despondent because service, like Scripture and prayer, is one of God's means to bring people out of their despondency.²⁰¹ A proper remedy for this pitfall is, "to arise from the depths of agony is activity."²⁰² "I entreat you, try active

¹⁹⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:37.

¹⁹⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:632.

¹⁹⁹Spurgeon, *The Beatitudes*, 85-86.

²⁰⁰"While in depression, I reason, he can make me feel his life within me again; and he can make great use of me under all my weaknesses and difficulties." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 26:275.

²⁰¹"Even the sick, the sorrowing, the mournful, the sad, I would fain summon to the battle. If they do not achieve much for the cause, it will help themselves." Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:572.

²⁰²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 15:572.

service as a solace for sorrow.”²⁰³ Spurgeon was consistent with this advice in his treatment of despondent souls. “To have something to do for Jesus, and to go right on with it, is one of the best ways to get over a bereavement, or any other mental depression. . . . If you are a Christian, the best advice that I can give you is this, get to work for Christ, and you will forget your trouble.”²⁰⁴

Perhaps a worse situation than neglect of service is taking needed energy away from others because of depression. “Those of you who are of a nervous temperament and of retired habits of life must take care that you do not too much indulge your natural propensity, lest you should be useless to the Church.”²⁰⁵ The inclination on the part of the depressed is to wallow in one’s despondency, which is a detriment to the body of Christ. Spurgeon noticed this danger. “Depression of spirit often leads to slackness of hand. Many, through sad hearts, have ceased to labor for Christ. A want of gladness has restrained their activity.”²⁰⁶ Spurgeon had little patience for this type of person who said, ““Oh! I am under such horror of darkness, so terribly am I afflicted. . . . Though I go to God’s house, I feel as if I could not pray. As for singing, I dare not. I dare not read my Bible. I think I must give it up’.” Spurgeon’s responded to this behavior, “God does not like sulky children, and there are many of his children fainting out of pure sulkiness, and nothing else.”²⁰⁷

The role of service during depression was vital for Spurgeon’s spirituality. The joyful Christian should not be deterred from ministering to the depressed, and the despondent should recognize, by God’s grace, that the Holy Spirit might use them in the

²⁰³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 34:524.

²⁰⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:294.

²⁰⁵Spurgeon, *MTP*, 8:57.

²⁰⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 19:94.

²⁰⁷Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:368.

midst of their depression for the good of others. Spurgeon combined his pastoral exhortations, responsibilities of believers to one another and his personal experience together in a sermon on service and depression:

You probably know some people who are excessively nervous: they are afraid the skies will fall or the earth will crack: this is very stupid, but the agony caused thereby is very real. There is little of the Christian spirit in the man who can increase mental torment by turning it into jest. This is not to pour oil into the wound, but to rub salt into it. No doubt, the doubts which many have of their personal safety are very unreasonable; but a servant of God is not therefore to scorn the subject of them, for the Lord Jesus Christ had compassion on the ignorant. He did not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, nor must we. I am personally taught to be tender of poor doubters, for I have often been one myself. I would sometimes give all that I have to be able to feel myself to be even the least in the Lord's family. Just now I enjoy a full assurance, but I am not always on the mount; and therefore I have bowels for others because I am myself compassed with infirmity.²⁰⁸

Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, Spurgeon embraced the truth that “depressions of spirit. . . . are choice blessings from God. . . . when we see them in the light eternal, as many covenant mercies.”²⁰⁹ He indulged the benefits and heeded the warnings related to depression, and encouraged others to do the same. In his goodness, God has given his children spiritual means to use during times of depression to lay hold of these covenant mercies and the one who provides these mercies to his children.

We must repair the waste of the soul by feeding upon the Book of God, or by listening to the preached Word, or by the soul-fattening table of the ordinances. How depressed are our graces when means are neglected! What poor starvelings some saints are who live without the diligent use of the Word of God and secret prayer! If our piety can live without God it is not of divine creating; it is but a dream.²¹⁰

While Spurgeon believed in employing all the means that God provided to cope with depression, he found hope ultimately in Christ and his gospel. “The proof of

²⁰⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 30:401-2.

²⁰⁹Spurgeon, *The Covenant of Grace*, (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 85.

²¹⁰Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, (Albany, OR: Ages Library, 2001), 6.

the gospel is not to be found in theories and problems . . . the proof of the gospel lies in what it does; and if it does not raise the depressed. . . . then let it be thrown on a dunghill, or cast away, for if the salt have lost its savor it is thenceforth good for nothing.”²¹¹

As a forty-nine year old, with less than a decade to live, Spurgeon waxed sentimental in a sermon. “I do not know what may ever happen to me in this life; perhaps it shall come to pass that I may be visited with severe physical infirmities, and possibly these may cause me mental depression and anguish.” The fact that he did encounter these is probably spoken out of personal experience rather than mere prophecy. Nevertheless, Charles Haddon Spurgeon continued with his unbending resolution,

But this one thing I know, I have committed my mind, my heart, my whole intellectual nature to his keeping who has promised to preserve his own. I desire to believe nothing but what he tells me, to do nothing but what he bids me, and to yield myself to no influence but that which he ordains for my direction; and, therefore, it seems to me that having done this for many a day I can with unstaggering confidence say at the last, “Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit.”²¹²

²¹¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 19:611-2.

²¹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 29:610.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Arthur T. Pierson (1837–1911), the American preacher who succeeded Spurgeon as pastor of The Metropolitan Tabernacle, claimed, “No man can dispute that Mr. Spurgeon was pre-eminently a spiritually-minded man.”¹ When one analyzes Spurgeon’s life and ministry, few would dispute Pierson’s claim. Whether preaching, evangelism, writing, or philanthropy, Spurgeon’s goal was to know, love, and become like Christ, which embodied his spirituality.

This project has sought to prove that Spurgeon’s depression was abundantly manifest throughout his life and ministry as a central component of his spirituality. In this dissertation, the suffering and depression of Charles Spurgeon has been probed through a critical examination of his life, ministry, theology, and spirituality revealed in his sermons, published writings, letters, lectures, autobiography, and other personal books. The argument has been that depression is used in a variety of ways with the goal of total devotion to the Christian God by embracing truths about him, experiencing communion with him, and conducting one’s life in accordance to his word, which was the essence of Spurgeon’s spirituality. In this conclusion, the central questions that were asked at the beginning of this project are revisited and framed around summary statements reflective of Spurgeon’s spirituality of suffering and depression. Considerations as to the significance of this thesis and further research conclude this thesis.

¹Spurgeon, *ST* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865-1902), 28:464. Pierson was a Presbyterian pastor who filled the pulpit at Metropolitan Tabernacle on several occasions prior to becoming co-pastor after Spurgeon’s death. He served less than two years in that capacity.

Complex Depression and Spirituality

A key question this thesis sought to address regarded facts and factors surrounding Spurgeon's depression. The answer to this was as multifaceted as Spurgeon himself. He was a complex man who delighted in books, but despised arduous preparation of sermons.² While endowed with an amazing memory and stellar intellect, he was inclined toward the feelings of human emotions.³ Spurgeon was uncoordinated and prone to falls and sickness, yet he had amazing stamina.⁴ He was sharp, witty, and tough, yet particularly sensitive to criticism. Fearful of crowds, Spurgeon possibly preached to more people than any other human being in the nineteenth century.⁵

Add to the complexity of the time that Spurgeon lived, a diagnosis of depression was akin to the days of the judges.⁶ Depression was a highly individual form of illness that followed no predictable pattern, as many Victorian medical men realized. While Spurgeon followed some of the medical advice of his age such as physical rest and vacation at the sea to curb his depression, he refused the common counsel of his time such as extended hospitalization and opium usage. The broad, subjective analysis of Victorian doctors combined with Spurgeon's willy-nilly adherence to the physicians of the day makes a clean, succinct diagnosis of his depression nearly impossible.

While Spurgeon was a complex man living in a complex period, an analysis of Spurgeon's despondency demonstrates his vulnerabilities with a "complex depression." He claimed that depression was "the worst cloud of all . . . the worst ills . . . chief" among

²C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: His Diary, Letters and Records* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1992), 1:22; C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP/NPSP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1970-2006), 3:255.

³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 36:604-5.

⁴W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Northgate, 1920), 185.

⁵His only rival on this point may have been D. L. Moody (1837-1899).

⁶"Everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judg 17:6)."

all trials, yet he welcomed despondency for his good and the glory of God. He viewed depression as a means to worship God, cultivate humility, and foster joy.⁷ However, he also testified that depression could be the result of blatant sin, which will rob the believer of the joy. He believed that individuals should be corrected for being insensitive to the despondent, yet if a person is depressed frequently he should be willing to accept rebuke. The Christian should seek to comfort the depressed, yet people prone to melancholy are some of the most frustrating individuals to interact since they often do not seem willing to alleviate their despondent mood. Believers should utilize humor as an antidote against depression, yet making light of despair is akin to “rubbing salt in the wound.”

Spurgeon’s emotional and mental state was complex during depression. He viewed his own depression as more intense than other people; yet he would castigate others who practiced self-loathing to the point they refused to serve others.⁸ Using Elijah as a model in total despair, Spurgeon claimed he could relate with the prophet who wished his life would end; yet in another setting Spurgeon remarked to think such ideas was devilish.

His physical maladies were also complex and were linked to his depression.⁹ He struggled with kidney disorder most of his life which ultimately led to his death, but this was compounded by gout, poor knees, arms, feet and hands which led to many falls. He had severe nerve damage, aches in his muscles, hips, ankles and back that would cause excruciating pain depending on the weather or the flu. He carried smallpox and was possibly diabetic. “The Prince of Preachers” was fearless in the face of gospel heresy, but would be laid low in his spirits by the weather. All of these ailments left him nearly immobile and in constant pain, which triggered depression. In many contexts, Spurgeon

⁷Spurgeon, *MTP*, 11:623.

⁸Spurgeon, *MTP*, 10:352; 15:640; 36:31; 42:183.

⁹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 27:75.

suggested that his mental anguish caused many of his physical illnesses. Yet in other periods of his life, he firmly charged that his physical maladies were slowly debilitating his mind.

Spurgeon's complexities teach us that depression does not come from one source, nor manifests itself at one time, nor bears one solution. We are aware of our own complexities as we examine Spurgeon. We have variant personalities, a multitude of professional diagnosis, and a cacophony of inward moods. Like Spurgeon, we should view whatever inconsistencies in our own plight, as developing into a tool that God uses for his glory and our good.

Holistic Depression and Spirituality

God created man in his own image; therefore man is a physical, mental, emotional and spiritual being. Because of this, depression cannot be limited to one region of man's state without eventually impacting other portions of his existence. Holistic depression is another major component explored throughout this work.

Spurgeon's depression was not limited to one particular manner. Physical debilitations, mental nervousness, vicious critics, financial worries, and pastoral pressures all were elements that spiraled him into depression. His statement, "I do not suppose there is any person who knows what it is to be cast down so low as I am," was a constant refrain throughout his life.¹⁰ But this testimony spoke to the extent of his depression. Spurgeon's despair was so great he questioned his conversion, his pastoral call, and his very life.

His depression was not limited to one particular time. From an adolescent struggling with his conversion to a prematurely old man embroiled in theological controversy, his depression was a constant staple throughout his life. From a spiritual

¹⁰Spurgeon, *MTP*, 42:183.

perspective, depression came prior to a blessing of God, after abundance of blessings, or with no particular cause at all.

Holistic depression is a reality for those created in the image of God. While despondency may be due to spiritual reasons, malaise is also physical, a result of our personality or illness; mental, from nervousness or intellectual fatigue; or circumstances beyond our control. Therefore, depression is not always removed by attempts to treat, cure or heal one part of our nature while neglecting others.

Theocentric Depression and Spirituality

Another primary question explored in this study had to do with how Spurgeon's theological framework played out in his depression. A total devotion to Christ through experiencing communion with him was at the heart of Spurgeon's spirituality.¹¹

In the midst of despondency, robust, Christian truth coupled with personal experience served as medicine for his soul and security for his faith. Though he seemed to be paradoxical at times, Spurgeon never wavered from the comforts of a Triune God, a rich, Calvinistic soteriology, and a Divine Being's mysterious, yet deliberate dealings with man. He did not always reconcile the apparent contradictions of his theology particularly as it related to suffering and depression. Rather he was confident in the supreme authority of the Bible and was content to allow these apparent contradictions to remain firmly planted in his preaching.

Spurgeon was consistent throughout his ministry that the depressed individual finds great hope and comfort when he embraces the person and work of Jesus Christ "O rely on him . . . and thou shalt find thy depression vanish."¹² God also provides his

¹¹Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 1:269-76; *MTP*, 19:13-24.

¹²Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:719.

children the means of Scripture, prayer and service to partner with depression in the development of spirituality.

A believer's spirituality will, most particularly in times of depression, reflect the saint's theology. A theocentric depression teaches that Christians should respond with joy because of their relationship in Jesus (Ps 69:9; Matt 5:10-11; 10:22; 24:9; John 15:19-20; Acts 5:41; 17:6f; Rom 5:3-5; 8:36; Jas 1:2, 12; 1 Pet 4:12-14; 1 John 3:12-13; Jude 15). The righteous should be joyful in depression due to their joining the company of other saints who have suffered previously (2 Chr 36:16; Matt 5:10-12; Acts 7:52; Jas 5:10), and the reward they will receive (Luke 16:25; Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 1:5; 1 Pet 5:9-10). Christian suffering and depression will lead to prayer (Jas 5:13) and further endurance toward glory (Isa 40:30-31; Mark 13:13; Acts 20:23-24; Gal 6:9). Therefore, the Christian ought to be encouraged during times of suffering and depression knowing that he is not alone (Ps 34:19; 37:39; 71:20; 2 Cor 1:4-11).

Concluding Reflections

In drawing to a conclusion, it is appropriate to consider the contribution of this study to the field of Spurgeon scholarship and Christian spirituality. Several considerations are in order. First, this thesis has sought to present continuity between Spurgeon's depression and his spirituality. While this study has focused on various components of Spurgeon's life and ministry, the research has confirmed that Spurgeon believed depression could be designed for spiritual measures. He firmly embraced that suffering, which included depression, was predicted by the Scriptures, rooted and illustrated by Jesus Christ, sustained and nourished by faith in the living Christ, and maintained through the conscientious practice of spiritual devotion. This conclusion confronts many of tensions raised in the modern era. Even among believers, depression as a means of spirituality is, on one extreme, a taboo subject, and on the other extreme, completely jettisoned for artificial substitutes.

While there is a renaissance in examining the depression of Charles Spurgeon, there are only a handful of works that connect Spurgeon's depression with spirituality, and no scholarly work exists thus far that treats this subject in entirety like this dissertation. Scholars have a vast array of material to exhaust this important subject. Often, Spurgeon is viewed and studied too narrowly. He is hailed with his contribution as a preacher or at a minimum he is a vault for pithy quotes in a Twitter age that often is disconnected to the context of his theology and spirituality particularly in suffering and depression. Most recognize Spurgeon as the "Prince of Preachers;" few ever notice him as the "Prince of Pain."

As a second point of conclusion, it is worth noting several questions for further research raised by this study. First, what roles did other disciplines play in Spurgeon's spirituality of suffering and depression? Did Spurgeon's understanding of the suffering of Jesus conveyed in part in the Lord's Supper have any relationship with spirituality in relationship to depression? What role did evangelism play in depression toward spirituality? Second, what impact did Spurgeon's friendships aid in his encouragement through depression, and did his depression have any influence in the deterioration of other relationships? How did these friendships influence his spirituality during times of depression? Third, how did Spurgeon's preaching develop through the years in regard to presenting his spirituality in the midst of depression? Was his preaching consistent or was presentation of suffering and depression modified in anyway? Fourth, how can Spurgeon's view of the Psalms aid in spirituality during depression? To what degree did Augustine's *Finis Christus* in the Psalms influence Spurgeon's spirituality during depression? What role should *The Treasury of David* have in studies of Spurgeon's spirituality during depression? Fifth, how can researchers resolve the tension in Spurgeon's depression when he does not feel the need to resolve those conflicts? Such questions must await another study but demonstrate the significance of the present work.

A third reflection on this study is related to the field of spirituality and

depression as a window into practical piety. Spurgeon once observed, “In all times of depression of spirit hasten away to the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . you can resort at once to him and you shall find that he strengthens the hands that hang down and confirms the feeble knees.”¹³ The truth behind this statement calls for more studies like this present thesis. Spurgeon should not be assessed on the merits of his accomplishments alone. His personal affection for Christ, particularly in times of suffering and depression, deserve the attention of today’s scholars, both for developing a better understanding of Spurgeon himself and also for the benefit of the church today.

This brings us to the final contribution of this study, namely, its bearing for today’s church. As Western culture gradually neglects fundamental convictions of Christianity, spiritual conduct is reshaped into something less than God’s ideal. Among these behaviors are the response to and the proper cure for suffering and depression. Charles Spurgeon would have never envisioned a Christian culture where psychiatric therapy, medicines, support groups, and social celebrities disguised as professionals would be considered the primary sources for dealing with depression and suffering. Although he would have been perplexed by this trend, Spurgeon would have directed the church to turn to the Scriptures for guidance, Jesus Christ for comfort, and fellow believers for support.

As this study began, it seems fitting to conclude with the last sermon Spurgeon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The Downgrade Controversy had left him physically debilitated, emotionally depleted, and mentally weak. He had collapsed a few weeks prior to preaching this message; once again proving that his fragile body and the ministerial demands placed upon him had rejected its expiration date. He would not live to see the full consequences of The Downgrade Controversy; he would not live to see the new century; indeed, when he preached his sermon on June 7, 1891, he would not live to

¹³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 22:673.

see another summer. He would be gone, but his legacy would not vanish. A quarter of a century later, individuals would see the last of his delivered sermons published, and well into the twentieth century Metropolitan Tabernacle would be referred to as simply, “Mr. Spurgeon’s Tabernacle.” But more importantly, his God would not be gone. And that same good, mysterious God, who blessed Spurgeon with the unparalleled gifts and remarkable fruit, also aided him in some of the worst abyss of depression one can imagine.

His final paragraph from his last sermon is fitting to understand depression’s role in the formation of Spurgeon’s spirituality, and ours as well. “If you wear the livery of Christ, you will find him so meek and lowly of heart that you will find rest unto your souls . . . He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill.”¹⁴ One cannot see Spurgeon preach this sermon, but one can feel him preach it. Just as the term depression is not used, as if, Spurgeon’s entire view of depression was some crafted technical jargon. But depression and suffering are there with an imagery of feeling; described as a cold, wind blowing. Herein lies the core of Spurgeon’s spirituality in depression. When the cold winds of depression blow, there is a Savior who relates to his people, who is to be experienced by his people, and who is always present with his people.

¹⁴Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:324.

APPENDIX
SERMONS ON DEPRESSION

The following is a list of sermons Spurgeon preached, which the main theme or secondary theme was suffering and depression.

- “The Immutability of God” (*NPSP* 1:1-8)
- “The Comforter” (*NPSP* 1:33-40)
- “Sweet Comfort for Feeble Saints” (*NPSP* 1:41-48)
- “The Peculiar Sleep of the Beloved” (*NPSP* 1:85-92)
- “Consolation Proportionate to Spiritual Sufferings” (*NPSP* 1:93-100)
- “David’s Dying Song” (*NPSP* 1:141-48)
- “The Desire of the Soul in Spiritual Darkness” (*NPSP* 1:237-44)
- “God’s People in the Furnace” (*NPSP* 1:269-76)
- “What are the Clouds?” (*NPSP* 1:277-84)
- “Christ’s Prayer for His People” (*NPSP* 1:355-62)
- “Comfort for the Desponding” (*NPSP* 1:387-94)
- “Healing for the Wounded” (*NPSP* 1:403-11)
- “Sovereignty and Salvation” (*NPSP* 2:49-57)
- “Divine Sovereignty” (*NPSP* 2:185-92)
- “The Exaltation of Christ” (*NPSP* 2:377-84)
- “Fear Not” (*NPSP* 3:389-97)
- “The Christian’s True Blessedness” (*NPSP* 3:413-20)
- “Light at Evening Time” (*NPSP* 3:421-28)
- “The Loved Ones Chastened” (*NPSP* 3:453-61)
- “Providence,” (*NPSP* 4:177-84)
- “The Desolations of the Lord; the Consolations of the Saints” (*NPSP* 4:201-208)
- “The Sympathy of Two Worlds” (*NPSP* 4:305-12)
- “Love” (*NPSP* 5:33-40)
- “The Fainting Warrior” (*NPSP* 5:81-88)
- “The Shameful Sufferer” (*NPSP* 5:89-96)
- “Weak Hands and Feeble Knees” (*NPSP* 5:145-52)
- “Mr. Fearing Comforted” (*NPSP* 5:169-76)
- “A Psalm of Remembrance” (*NPSP* 5:225-32)
- “The Sweet Uses of Adversity” (*NPSP* 5:465-72)
- “One Antidote for Many Ills” (*NPSP* 5:473-80)
- “Mr. Evil-Questioning Tried and Executing” (*NPSP* 6:89-100)
- “Spiritual Peace” (*NPSP* 6:109-116)
- “A Blast Trumpet Against False Peace” (*NPSP* 6:117-124)
- “Contentment” (*NPSP* 6:269-76)
- “Everywhere and Yet Forgotten” (*NPSP* 6:317-24)
- “Man’s Weakness and God’s Anointing” (*NPSP* 6:381-88)
- “A Basket of Summer Fruit” (*NPSP* 6:453-62)
- “All Sufficiency Magnified” (*NPSP* 6:477-84)

“Consolation in Christ” (MTP 7:1-8)
 “The Wailing of Risca” (MTP 7:9-16)
 “The Glorious Right Hand of the Lord” (MTP 7:121-134)
 “Our Miseries, Messengers of Mercy” (MTP 7:417-24)
 “The Infallibility of God’s Purpose” (MTP 7:465-72)
 “Bread for the Hungry” (MTP 7:561-68)
 “The Roaring Lion” (MTP 7:569-576)
 “Obtaining Promises” (MTP 8:97-108)
 “Cheer for the Faint-Hearted” (MTP 8:157-168)
 “Christ-Perfect through Sufferings” (MTP 8:613-24)
 “Our Stronghold” (MTP 9:49-60)
 “Gethsemane” (MTP 9:73-84)
 “The Procession of the Sorrow” (MTP 9:121-132)
 “Comfort to Seekers from what the Lord has not said” (MTP 9:253-64)
 “The Sinner’s Advocate” (MTP 9:337-48)
 “The Rainbow” (MTP 9:361-73)
 “Direction in Dilemma” (MTP 9:649-60)
 “Suffering and Reigning with Jesus” (MTP 10:1-12)
 “A Desperate Case-How to Meet It” (MTP 10:25-36)
 “The Pierced One Pierces the Heart” (MTP 10:341-52)
 “God Pleading for Saints, and the Saints Pleading for God” (MTP 10:389-400)
 “God is with Us” (MTP 10:401-12)
 “Children Brought to Christ and Not to the Font” (MTP 10:413-24)
 “Inward Conflicts” (MTP 10:561-72)
 “An Awful Premonition” (MTP 10:573-84)
 “Mary’s Song” (MTP 10:717-26)
 “Zechariah’s Vision of Joshua the High Priest” (MTP 11:49-60)
 “The Believer Sinking in the Mire” (MTP 11:289-300)
 “No Tears in Heaven” (MTP 11:433-44)
 “Song for the Desolate Heart” (MTP 11:505-16)
 “From the Dunghill to the Throne” (MTP 11:613-24)
 “Consolation in the Furnace” (MTP 11:661-72)
 “Faith Versus Sight” (MTP 12:109-120)
 “No Hope, Yet Hope” (MTP 12:193-204)
 “The Garden of the Soul” (MTP 12:301-12)
 “God’s Cure for Man’s Weakness” (MTP 12:349-60)
 “A Feast for Faith” (MTP 12:517-28)
 “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled” (MTP 13:25-38)
 “A Troubled Prayer” (MTP 13:157-168)
 “The Sweet Harp of Consolation” (MTP 13:385-96)
 “A Song, A Solace, A Sermon, A Summons” (MTP 13:709-18)
 “Creation’s Groans and the Saints Sighs” (MTP 14:1-12)
 “Israel’s God and God’s Israel” (MTP 14:181-192)
 “Hope in Hopeless Cases” (MTP 14:397-408)
 “The Faculty Baffled, the Great Physician Successful” (MTP 14:569-80)
 “The Perfuming of the Heart” (MTP 14:493-504)
 “Rest” (MTP 15:217-28)
 “The Overflowing Cup” (MTP 15:313-24)
 “Strong Consolation” (MTP 15:541-52)
 “A Summons to Battle” (MTP 15:565-76)
 “The Upper Hand” (MTP 15:637-48)
 “Safe Shelter” (MTP 15:649-660)
 “The Soul’s Crisis” (MTP 15:697-708)
 “Away with Fear” (MTP 16:265-76)

“Rest, Rest” (*MTP 17:13-24*)
 “A Touchstone of Godly Sincerity” (*MTP 17:205-16*)
 “Marah, or the Bitter Waters Sweetened” (*MTP 17:229-40*)
 “Prosperity Under Persecution” (*MTP 17:349-60*)
 “Light for those who sit in darkness” (*MTP 17:505-16*)
 “Beauty for Ashes” (*MTP 17:577-88*)
 “The Joy of the Lord, the Strength of His People” (*MTP 17:709-18*)
 “Faiths Dawn and Its Clouds” (*MTP 18:61-72*)
 “A Bright Light in Deep Shades” (*MTP 18:265-76*)
 “Labouring and Not Fainting” (*MTP 18:493-504*)
 “Wrecked, but not Reckless” (*MTP 18:505-16*)
 “For the Troubled” (*MTP 19:13-24*)
 “Medicine for the Distracted” (*MTP 19:325-336*)
 “The Spur” (*MTP 19:361-72*)
 “A Welcome Discovery” (*MTP 19:409-20*)
 “Good News for the Destitute” (*MTP 19:625-636*)
 “Consolation for the Despairing” (*MTP 19:685-96*)
 “My Restorer” (*MTP 19:721-29*)
 “Stephen’s Death” (*MTP 20:301-12*)
 “A Word for the Persecuted” (*MTP 20:457-68*)
 “The Agony in Gethsemane” (*MTP 20:589-600*)
 “Strengthening Medicine for God’s Servants” (*MTP 21:49-60*)
 “To Souls in Agony” (*MTP 21:73-84*)
 “Rivers of Water in a Dry Place” (*MTP 21:385-96*)
 “The First Day of Creation” (*MTP 21:493-504*)
 “The Oil of Gladness” (*MTP 22:25-36*)
 “For the Sick and Afflicted” (*MTP 22:37-48*)
 “The Unknown Ways of Love” (*MTP 22:265-76*)
 “Our Lord’s Humanity and Sweet Source for Comfort” (*MTP 22:289-300*)
 “Good Cheer for the Outcasts” (*MTP 22:377-84*)
 “The Secret of a Happy Life” (*MTP 22:409-20*)
 “The Blind Befriended” (*MTP 22:469-80*)
 “God of the Hills and God of the Valleys” (*MTP 22:481-92*)
 “Wherefore Should I Weep?” (*MTP 22:589-600*)
 “Rest for the Labouring” (*MTP 22:613-24*)
 “Christ: The Overcomer of the World” (*MTP 22:673-84*)
 “The Great Birthday” (*MTP 22:709-18*)
 “Rest in the Lord” (*MTP 23:25-36*)
 “A Cheery Word in Troublesome Times” (*MTP 23:49-60*)
 “Manoah’s Wife and Her Excellent Argument” (*MTP 23:109-120*)
 “Strong Consolation for the Lord’s Refugees” (*MTP 23:253-64*)
 “Mourning for Christ” (*MTP 23:373-84*)
 “Sudden Sorrow” (*MTP 23:385-96*)
 “The Touch” (*MTP 23:613-24*)
 “A Golden Prayer” (*MTP 24:1-12*)
 “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?” (*MTP 24:97-108*)
 “The Reason Many Cannot Find Peace” (*MTP 24:205-16*)
 “The Shortest of the Seven Cries” (*MTP 24:217-28*)
 “A Wilderness Cry” (*MTP 24:433-44*)
 “Refined, but Not with Silver” (*MTP 24:469-80*)
 “The Prosperous Man’s Reminder” (*MTP 24:601-12*)
 “Three Crosses” (*MTP 24:673-84*)
 “Constant, Instant, Expectant” (*MTP 25:349-60*)
 “Choice Comfort for a Young Believer” (*MTP 25:661-672*)

“The Best of All Sights” (MTP 25:697-701)
 “Cheer Up Comrades” (MTP 26:13-24)
 “A Key Note of Choice Sonnet” (MTP 26:25-36)
 “A Woman of a Sorrowful Spirit” (MTP 26:37-48)
 “Beloved, Yet Afflicted” (MTP 26:73-76)
 “Fear Not” (MTP 26:229-40)
 “Salvation by Works: A Criminal Doctrine” (MTP 26:241-52)
 “The Sentence of Death, the Death of Self-Trust” (MTP 26:265-76)
 “Free Grace a Motive for Free Giving” (MTP 26:337-48)
 “The Sheep Before the Shearers” (MTP 26:349-60)
 “Desires Toward God: A Sermon for the Weak” (MTP 26:589-600)
 “The Sitting of the Refiner” (MTP 27:1-12)
 “The Fruit of the Spirit: Joy” (MTP 27:73-84)
 “Hearken and Look; Encouragement for Believers” (MTP 27:241-256)
 “Only Trust Him! Only Trust Him!” (MTP 27:701-12)
 “Chastened Happiness” (MTP 27:713-22)
 “The Singing Pilgrim” (MTP 28:181-92)
 “My Solace in My Affliction” (MTP 28:229-240)
 “Despair Denounced and Grace Glorified” (MTP 28:469-80)
 “The Still, Small Voice” (MTP 28:373-84)
 “Christ’s Word with You” (MTP 28:649-60)
 “Gladness for Sadness” (MTP 29:37-48)
 “All Joy in All Trials” (MTP 29:73-84)
 “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled” (MTP 29:517-28)
 “The Exeter Hall Sermon to Young Men” (MTP 29:505-16)
 “Renewing Strength” (MTP 29:697-705)
 “Helps to Full Assurance” (MTP 30:397-408)
 “How to Meet the Doctrine of Election” (MTP 30:469-80)
 “Strength and Recovery” (MTP 30:565-76)
 “The Horns of the Altar” (MTP 31:113-120)
 “Exceeding Gladness” (MTP 31:121-132)
 “The Private Tutor” (MTP 31:289-300)
 “The Pitifulness of the Lord and Comfort of the Afflicted” (MTP 31:325-36)
 “What is the Verdict?” (MTP 31:445-56)
 “My Comfort in Affliction” (MTP 31:641-48)
 “A Lesson and Fortune for Christian Men of Business” (MTP 32:37-48)
 “A Seasonable Exhortation” (MTP 32:373-84)
 “Grace for Communion” (MTP 33:37-40)
 “Earthquake but not Heartquake” (MTP 33:121-32)
 “The Pleading of the Last Messenger” (MTP 33:133-141)
 “The Search for Faith” (MTP 33:277-88)
 “The Folly of Unbelief” (MTP 33:481-92)
 “Sweet Peace for Tried Believers” (MTP 33:649-60)
 “Nathanael and the Ready Believer for the Lord” (MTP 34:241-52)
 “The Saddest of the Sad” (MTP 34:301-12)
 “The Whole Heartedness of God in Blessing His People” (MTP 34:421-32)
 “Consolation from Resurrection” (MTP 34:541-52)
 “The Trial of Your Faith” (MTP 34:649-60)
 “Man Unknown to Man” (MTP 35:193-204)
 “The Bible Tried and Proved” (MTP 35:253-64)
 “A Dirge for the Down-grade and a Song of Faith” (MTP 35:265-76)
 “Concerning the Consolations of God” (MTP 35:433-444)
 “Peace: How Gained; How Broken” (MTP 35:589-600)
 “Witnesses Against You” (MTP 36:25-32)

“Help for Your Sickness” (*MTP 36:33-40*)
 “The Shank-Bone Sermon; Or True Believers and Their Helpers” (*MTP 36:193-204*)
 “A Homily for Humble Folks” (*MTP 36:217-28*)
 “Joy, Joy, Forever” (*MTP 36:289-300*)
 “Lo, I Come: An Application” (*MTP 37:253-64*)
 “The Statue of David for the Sharing of the Spoil” (*MTP 37:313-24*)
 “The Best Strengthening Medicine” (*MTP 37:325-36*)
 “God Rejoicing in the New Creation” (*MTP 37:349-60*)
 “Gratitude for Deliverance from the Grave” (*MTP 38:1-12*)
 “A Stanza of Deliverance” (*MTP 38:49-60*)
 “Our Compassionate High Priest” (*MTP 38:169-180*)
 “Alone, Yet Not Alone” (*MTP 38:409-17*)
 “Belief, Baptism and Blessing” (*MTP 38:457-65*)
 “Saints Guarded From Stumbling” (*MTP 39:85-96*)
 “Howling Changed to Singing” (*MTP 39:253-64*)
 “When Can We Find Comforters?” (*MTP 39:397-408*)
 “Faint but Not Faint Hearted” (*MTP 40:13-24*)
 “Out of the Depths” (*MTP 40:133-144*)
 “Hopeful, Yet Doubtful” (*MTP 40:229-40*)
 “Comfort and Constancy” (*MTP 40:253-64*)
 “A Discourse to the Despairing” (*MTP 40:445-56*)
 “Good Advice for Troublesome Times” (*MTP 40:541-52*)
 “A Comforting Message for the Closing Year” (*MTP 40:613-22*)
 “Christ the Cure for Troubled Hearts” (*MTP 41:169-180*)
 “A Great Sermon by the Greatest Preacher” (*MTP 41:181-92*)
 “God and Not Man-What Does It Mean?” (*MTP 42:13-24*)
 “A Cure for the Weak Heart” (*MTP 42:109-120*)
 “Darkness Before the Dawn” (*MTP 42:373-84*)
 “Paul’s Persuasion” (*MTP 42:553-64*)
 “The Cause and Cure of a Wounded Spirit” (*MTP 42:577-88*)
 “Deliverance from the Pit” (*MTP 43:85-96*)
 “A Sad Interior and a Cheery Messenger” (*MTP 43:241-52*)
 “Joy in Place of Sorrow” (*MTP 43:325-36*)
 “God’s Love Shamefully Questioned” (*MTP 43:409-20*)
 “A Singular Plea in Prayer” (*MTP 43:445-56*)
 “Good Reasons for Good Resolutions” (*MTP 43:541-52*)
 “A Message to the Glad and Sad” (*MTP 43:577-88*)
 “Joy in God” (*MTP 44:1-12*)
 “God’s Knowledge of Sin” (*MTP 44:13-24*)
 “A Vexed Soul Comforted” (*MTP 44:85-96*)
 “Songs in the Night” (*MTP 44:97-108*)
 “Persecuted but not forsaken” (*MTP 44:277-88*)
 “Comfort for the Tempted” (*MTP 45:1-12*)
 “Comforted and Comforting” (*MTP 45:445-56*)
 “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble” (*MTP 45:505-16*)
 “The Sorrowful Man’s Question” (*MTP 46:121-132*)
 “Comfort from Christ’s Omniscience” (*MTP 46:157-168*)
 “Neither Forsaken Nor Forgotten” (*MTP 46:193-204*)
 “Christ Crucified” (*MTP 46:205-16*)
 “Comfort from the Future” (*MTP 46:241-52*)
 “A Song and a Solace” (*MTP 46:313-24*)
 “Sorrow and Sorrow” (*MTP 46:421-32*)
 “Faith Without Sight” (*MTP 47:157-168*)

"Elijah Fainting" (MTP 47:205-16)
 "Believers Tested by Trials" (MTP 47:289-300)
 "Patience, Comfort and Hope from the Scriptures" (MTP 47:541-52)
 "Jesus in Gethsemane" (MTP 48:85-96)
 "The Weakened Christ Strengthened" (MTP 48:109-120)
 "Sweet Stimulants for the Fainting Soul" (MTP 48:457-68)
 "The Saddest Cry from the Cross" (MTP 48:517-29)
 "Causes and Cures of Fainting" (MTP 49:1-12)
 "Comfort for the Fearful" (MTP 49:481-92)
 "Lame Sheep" (MTP 49:505-16)
 "Trials Expected and Conquered" (MTP 50:157-168)
 "Restless! Peaceless!" (MTP 50:265-76)
 "Comfort for Tried Believers" (MTP 50:577-88)
 "Reasons for Doubting Christ" (MTP 51:109-120)
 "Dead and Yet Alive" (MTP 51:205-16)
 "Christ's Joy and Ours" (MTP 51:229-40)
 "Night and Jesus Not There" (MTP 51:349-60)
 "Forgetting God" (MTP 52:85-96)
 "Battlements" (MTP 52:373-84)
 "God Comforting His People" (MTP 52:529-40)
 "Sermon from a Sick Preacher" (MTP 52:553-64)
 "God's Time for Comforting" (MTP 53:85-108)
 "The Shadow of a Great Rock" (MTP 53:133-144)
 "Christians Kept from Sin" (MTP 53:205-16)
 "Going and Weeping" (MTP 53:349-60)
 "Christ's Loneliness and Ours" (MTP 53:385-96)
 "The Cause and Effect of Heart Trouble" (MTP 54:37-48)
 "Comfort for Those Whose Prayers are Feeble" (MTP 54:121-132)
 "Needless Fears" (MTP 54:301-12)
 "Plain Talk Upon an Encouraging Topic" (MTP 54:337-48)
 "Binding Up the Broken Hearts" (MTP 54:373-84)
 "The House of Mourning and the House of Feasting" (MTP 54:421-32)
 "Faintness and Refreshing" (MTP 54:445-56)
 "Good Cheer from Christ's Real Presence" (MTP 55:37-48)
 "The Fifth Beatitude" (MTP 55:397-408)
 "Positivism" (MTP 55:433-44)
 "The Mission of Affliction" (MTP 55:469-80)
 "The Believer's Present Rest" (MTP 55:529-40)
 "Cheer for Despondency" (MTP 56:61-72)
 "The Tenderness of God's Comfort" (MTP 56:133-144)
 "Our Light Affliction" (MTP 57:157-168)
 "Faith Tried and Triumphant" (MTP 57:409-20)
 "A Sermon to Ministers and Other Tried Believers" (MTP 57:505-16)
 "The Fear of Death" (MTP 58:37-48)
 "God in Nature and Revelation" (MTP 58:373-84)
 "Solace for Sad Hearts" (MTP 58:505-16)
 "The Oil of Joy for Mourning" (MTP 59:73-84)
 "Fearing and Trusting, Trusting Not Fearing" (MTP 59:325-36)
 "Our Leader Through the Darkness" (MTP 59:421-32)
 "Christ Our Peace" (MTP 59:613-22)
 "Hoping in God's Mercy" (MTP 60:37-48)
 "God's Mercy Going Before" (MTP 60:313-24)
 "Our Youth Renewed" (MTP 60:361-72)
 "A Call to the Depressed" (MTP 60:421-32)

“Sanctified Sorrow” (*MTP* 60:577-88)
“Strong Faith in a Faithful God” (*MTP* 61:61-72)
“Consolation for Poor Petitioners” (*MTP* 61:337-48)
“Encouragement for the Depressed” (*MTP* 61:577-88)
“God’s Gentle Power” (*MTP* 62:61-72)
“Following Christ” (*MTP* 62:133-144)
“The Fainting Soul Revived” (*MTP* 62:205-16)
“Fine Pleading” (*MTP* 62:553-64)
“The Saint’s Trials and Divine Deliverances” (*MTP* 63:37-48)
“The Soul’s Desertion” (*MTP* 63:85-96)

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ABSTRACT

“WHEN THE WIND BLOWS COLD”: THE SPIRITUALITY OF SUFFERING AND DEPRESSION IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF CHARLES SPURGEON

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
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This dissertation examines the spirituality of suffering and depression in the life and ministry of Charles Spurgeon. Chapter one frames the dissertation by presenting general facts concerning Spurgeon’s depression and the relationship that his depression has to his spirituality.

Chapter 2 emphasizes particular facts and features of Spurgeon’s life and ministry that demonstrate his depression. This section places Spurgeon within the historical context of the nineteenth century, and especially within significant movements and events that established the setting for his depression.

Chapter 3 features specific aspects of Spurgeon’s personality that influenced his depression and further document that he was in fact a depressed man. This section highlights certain dangers based on Spurgeon’s proclivity toward despondency.

Chapter 4 highlights specific causes in Spurgeon’s depression. Specific focus is on physical, mental, circumstantial, ministerial, and other elements that contributed to his depression. A section on Spurgeon’s theological tension within this depression is also discussed.

Chapter 5 discusses Spurgeon’s theology as it relates to his suffering and depression. For Spurgeon, a Trinitarian and Calvinistic doctrine was paramount in dealing with depression. These teachings would frame his understanding of man and

human conduct both in life of the believer and unbeliever. The chapter also demonstrates Spurgeon's understanding of church history within the context of a suffering faith.

Chapter 6 examines the cures for Spurgeon's physical and mental depression. Spurgeon had no aversion to medicine and doctors in assisting his physical maladies and depression. Diet, rest, exercise, the weather and the sea were all factors that aided in temporary recovery of Spurgeon when depressed.

Chapter 7 explores the range of spiritual disciplines that Spurgeon practiced himself and which he encouraged other Christians to perform to maintain a vital experience of communion with God during times of depression. Spurgeon believed that means such as meditation of Scripture, prayer, service and the sacraments were essential practices for maintaining genuine Christian piety.

Chapter 8 summarizes answers given to the research question and related questions. This section also provides concluding reflections and recommended further research on this topic.

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