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THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN
THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLES AND
SUSANNAH SPURGEON

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THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN
THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLES AND
SUSANNAH SPURGEON

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“Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful!” (Song of Sol 4:1)

I dedicate this thesis to Lori Rhodes.

On the evening of November 1, 1986, we exited a formal dinner and took a walk outside on a golf course. The first embers of true love sparkled that night beneath a beautiful Georgia sky. For 29 years of marriage we have continued our walk, joined now by our ever-growing family. You were beautiful then. You are more beautiful today. Thank you for taking that first walk, and thank you for walking with me through my doctoral studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Familiarity with the Literature	3
Void in the Literature	13
Thesis	13
2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF CHARLES AND SUSANNAH SPURGEON’S FAITH	14
The Role of Scripture in the Formative Years of Charles Spurgeon	15
Grandparents’ Influence	16
Parents’ Influence	18
The Role of Scripture during the Formative Years of Susannah Spurgeon	24
Charles Spurgeon’s View of Bible Reading	28
Spurgeon’s Perspective on Prayer	46
3. THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN THE EARLY RELATIONSHIP OF CHARLES SPURGEON AND SUSANNAH THOMPSON	58
Charles, Susannah, and the Providence of God	58
Susannah and New Park Street Chapel’s Spiritual Challenges	61
<i>The Pilgrim’s Progress</i> as a Means of Spiritual Help	63
Charles, Susannah, and The Crystal Palace	69
Charles and Susannah’s Engagement	71

Chapter	Page
Private Prayer, Family Prayer, Congregational Prayer	78
Conclusion	83
4. THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLES AND SUSANNAH SPURGEON	85
Charles and Susannah Spurgeon’s Wedding Day	85
Spurgeon’s Personal Piety and His Leadership in Family Worship	89
Charles, Susannah and Their Sons	96
Living by Scripture and Prayer in the Midst of Tragedy: The Surrey Music Hall Disaster	100
Learning from Suffering	106
Trusting God through Seasons of Poor Health	107
Susannah Spurgeon and the Book Fund	109
Bible Intake and Prayer during The Down-Grade Controversy	113
Spurgeon’s Continued Suffering and His Refuge at Mentone	116
Bible Intake and Prayer during the Final Period of Charles’ Life	118
5. APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION OF THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLES AND SUSANNAH SPURGEON	124
An Example Worthy of Imitation	127
Spiritual Means	133
Relying on Scripture in Suffering	135
Communication	136
Gospel Vision	139
Concluding Thoughts	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY	147

PREFACE

To amass the literature penned by and about Charles Spurgeon would create a small mountain. However, much “terrain on Mt. Spurgeon” has yet to be adequately explored. For example, Spurgeon’s thirty-six year marriage to Susannah, though given cursory attention in most Spurgeon biographies, has yet to be significantly contemplated. I am hopeful that this thesis is a positive contribution to a subject that deserves much more attention. This project was not developed in isolation; it bears the fingerprints of numerous people who generously contributed.

Donald Whitney, my doctoral supervisor, was tireless in support through his encouragement and by his skillful oversight of my thesis from conception to completion. His expertise on the subject of biblical spirituality, his treasury of knowledge concerning Spurgeon, and his friendship are inestimable.

The investment by other professors and staff at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was much appreciated. Joe Harrod, the second reader for this thesis, helped to shape my thinking both in the classroom and by his personal counsel. I am also thankful to Tom Nettles, Michael Haykin, Michael Wilder, Miguel Echevarria, and Coleman Ford for their assistance. The collective wisdom of these men and their service to God’s kingdom are inspiring. I am thankful for Summer Corn and Jessica McMichael for their kindness and help through the Professional Doctoral Studies office.

My successful completion of doctoral studies was greatly facilitated by a substantial commitment from Grace Community Church, where I have the privilege of serving as pastor. To my fellow elder, Kevin Jarrard, and members of GCC, I owe a great debt. The church supported my research and writing by their sacrifice of time, through their allowing me to travel for study, and with their provision for my wife, Lori, and me

to visit London for further research.

During our London trip, Lori and I appreciated the hospitality of William and Maureen Gardner, Jonathan Gardner, Susannah Spurgeon Cochrane (great-great-granddaughter of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon), Hannah Wyncoll (daughter of Peter Masters, pastor of The Metropolitan Tabernacle), Martin and Angela Ensell (Martin is pastor of Waterbeach Baptist Church, Spurgeon's first pastorate), and Peter Morden (vice-principal, Spurgeon's College), all of whom generously assisted Lori and me.

I am thankful to Christian George (Curator of The Spurgeon Library) and his team of young Spurgeon scholars who welcomed me to The Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and provided full access to the resources housed there. Along with his godly counsel, Christian George shared an excellent Spurgeon bibliography with me. As well, I am grateful to my alma mater, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary for providing access to Spurgeon resources. Jeff Griffin and Kyara St. Amant made the library special collections available for my research.

Other people who kindly assisted me include Laura Mustafa (librarian for Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary), Betsy Fredrick (my excellent thesis editor), George Scondras (who read and gave editorial counsel for all of my SBTS papers), Athanasios and Ruth Bardis (who allowed me usage of their apartment for a quiet place to study), Brian Albert (who provided resources and counsel), and my long-time friend, David Bailey, a constant source of inspiration.

The support of my family will never be forgotten. My mother's love for me and her interest in my studies encouraged me. My father's (1937–2011) desire that I pursue doctoral work long preceded my acceptance to SBTS. The kindness of my in-laws is also a constant source of strength.

Lori and I are blessed with six daughters, one son-in-law, and three grandchildren. Adrian and Rachel Rink and their children (our grandchildren), Susannah, Josiah, and Caleb, and our other daughters Hannah, Sarah, Mary, Lydia, and Abigail,

displayed exceptional patience with and love for me during times when I was anxious or absent. Finally, I am most thankful to my beloved wife, Lori (“Oh Most Beautiful among Women”). With unwavering love, Lori cared for our family while I travelled, listened patiently when I was discouraged, and prayed for me each morning.

To those who contributed in any way to the completion of this thesis, I pray that Charles and Susannah Spurgeon’s marriage will warmly encourage them to pursue Christ-likeness in all relationships.

Ray Rhodes

Dawsonville, Georgia

May 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On January 31, 1892, at 11:05 p.m., Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) died in his room at the Hotel Beau Rivage in Mentone, France.¹ Susannah (1832–1903), his wife of thirty-six years, was by his bedside. She bowed her head and “thanked the Lord for the precious treasure so long lent to her, and sought, at the throne of grace, strength and guidance for the future.”² Some years later, Susannah penned words that offer evidence of her confident reliance on Scripture for comfort:

The salt drops which steal down our cheeks through physical suffering—wrung from our eyes by mortal pain and weakness are all seen by our loving Lord; they are put into his bottle; his purpose concerning them shall be manifest when their mission is accomplished, and then the source from whence they sprang shall be forever dried up. “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”³

For Charles and Susannah, prayer to God and reliance on Scripture were almost as natural as breathing. Their marriage was, in every way, “a spiritual partnership.”⁴ Susannah, as much as Charles, provided strength to their spiritual union. Their devotion to God resulted in a happy marriage, grounded deep in Scripture, and characterized by ardent love.

¹Spurgeon often retreated to this hotel in Mentone over the years of his ill health in order to recover. He found that the warmer climate by the seaside was good for him.

²C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897–99; repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992), 4:371. Hereafter, this work will be referenced as *Autobiography*.

³Susannah Spurgeon, *A Carillion of Bells* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, n.d.), 34–35. The Scripture passage referenced is Rev 21:4 from the King James Version.

⁴Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 45.

Though the Spurgeons' marriage was joyful, it was not easy. When Charles Spurgeon and Susannah Thompson married on January 8, 1856, Spurgeon was already a popular London preacher. As his congregation at New Park Street Chapel grew, so did his fame and its accompanying trials. Opposition to Spurgeon's ministry reached a fever pitch following the evening of October 19, 1856, at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, where more than ten thousand people gathered to hear him preach. "Fire" was the word shouted by wicked men in the crowded hall as Spurgeon was preaching. Panic ensued, seven people were trampled to death, and numerous others were injured. During that trying time, it was the Spurgeons' remembrance of Scripture that relieved their despair and sustained them.⁵

After ten years of marriage, Susannah's health declined, and she was mostly homebound for the remainder of her life. Spurgeon's own health deteriorated, and for a significant portion of his ministry, he suffered episodes of gout-induced pain. By 1879, he was often traveling to Mentone on the coast of France for recovery.⁶ His trips to France required his separation from Susannah since she was too unhealthy to travel with him. Along with his physical trials, Spurgeon faced several controversies in his ministry.⁷ The suffering of varying sorts that Charles and Susannah encountered was significant, yet their faith remained strong in the midst of challenges. This thesis argues that Charles and Susannah Spurgeon's engagement in prayer and intake of Scripture sustained their joyful marriage.

⁵Charles Ray, *Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1903), 43-44. During a particular walk, as he was struggling with depression from the episode, Spurgeon suddenly recalled Phil 2:9-11, and that recollection began his recovery. Mrs. Spurgeon printed and framed a passage of Scripture (Matt 5:11-12) and hung it on their bedroom wall. Spurgeon regularly looked at that framed passage and was encouraged. See chap. 4 of this thesis for more detailed information.

⁶Arnold Dallimore, *C. H. Spurgeon: The New Biography* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 164. Gout was just one of the physical afflictions faced by Spurgeon.

⁷For a thorough treatment of the controversies associated with Spurgeon's ministry, see Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (2008; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012).

Marriage is a consequential theme in the Bible. The New Testament teaches that the ultimate purpose of marriage is to display the gospel of Christ (Eph 5:22–33). The union of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon serves as a powerful illustration of a biblically-minded and gospel-saturated marriage. This thesis recounts the impact of Scripture and prayer on the Spurgeons’ relationship from their first meeting, to their wedding day, and through various episodes of their life together.

The Spurgeons’ marriage is an example to all Christians. The principles they employed, especially regarding their mutual practice of Bible reading and prayer, are the same principles that can and should be practiced by Christian couples today. As with the Spurgeons, the faithful application of spiritual disciplines such as these, will tend to cultivate joy in one’s marriage. This thesis includes application and encouragement to empower Christian couples to pursue a joyful marriage through the spiritual disciplines of Bible intake and prayer.

Familiarity with the Literature

Spurgeon wrote prolifically, and many of his works remain in print. As Hayden describes, Spurgeon’s sermons alone filled dozens of volumes:

The New Park Street Pulpit and *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*—the collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry with that congregation—fill 63 volumes. The sermons’ 20–25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The series stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity.⁸

⁸Eric W. Hayden, “Did You Know?” *Christian History* 10, no. 1 (1991), accessed January 3, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1991/issue29/2902.html?start=1>. The ninth edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* actually consisted of 25 volumes. However, the point is that Spurgeon’s 63 volumes is a massive collection and the statement seems to be accurate that it “stands as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity.” In 2009, Day One Publications released C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Sermons Beyond, Volume 63: An Authentic Supplement to the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, comp. Terence Peter Crosby (Leominster: Day One), 2009. Publisher’s note: “Here are 45 sermons which were awaiting publication in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit when it came to an abrupt end in 1917. The 63 volumes and 3563 sermons of Spurgeon’s New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpits were a remarkable achievement, and it was only on account of the shortage of paper and metal caused by the First World War that publication ceased on 10th May 1917. Many hundreds of sermons were ready and waiting for their weekly publication and notices in the last two sermons indicated that it was the intention to resume publication once peace had been restored. However, only twenty hitherto

Along with editing sermons for publication, Spurgeon's writing prolificacy is evident in numerous ways. For example, Spurgeon edited and served as the primary contributor to a monthly magazine, *The Sword and the Trowel*, published from 1865 through 1892.⁹ Spurgeon displayed a propensity for writing early in his life. At age eleven he published a small magazine entitled, *The Home Juvenile Society*.¹⁰ When he was 15, he penned a 295-page "essay" entitled "Anti-Christ and His Brood; Or Popery Unmasked." In this work he attacked what he considered to be the unbiblical nature and practices of the Pope.¹¹ In 1853, at age nineteen, he produced the "Waterbeach Tracts."¹² Lewis Drummond posits concerning Spurgeon,

He produced one hundred thirty-five books and edited another twenty-eight. Furthermore, he has been constantly republished through the years until the present moment. . . . There are more books in print by Spurgeon one hundred years after his death than any English author.¹³

Over one dozen journals by Spurgeon, long forgotten, were recently uncovered in the archives of Spurgeon's College in London. These journals, consisting of 400-plus sermons and outlines dated from 1849–1854, are scheduled to be published in 2017.¹⁴ Christian George, Spurgeon scholar and curator of the C. H. Spurgeon Library at

unpublished sermons were to appear in 1922 in a volume entitled 'Able to the Uttermost.' It is the purpose of this volume to bring to light the sermons which probably would have appeared in the remainder of Volume 63 and at the start of volume 64 of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, sermons which originally appeared only in magazine format from 1877 to 1881." Also see C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Forgotten Early Sermons: A Companion to the New Park Street Pulpit: Twenty-Eight Sermons Compiled from the Sword and the Trowel*, comp. Terence Peter Crosby (Leominster: Day One), 2010.

⁹Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 9.

¹⁰Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 312.

¹¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1: 57-59.

¹²Drummond, *Spurgeon*, 312.

¹³*Ibid.*, 315.

¹⁴Bob Smietana, "Spurgeon's Lost Sermons Slated for Release," *Baptist Press*, July 23, 2014, accessed September 30, 2014, <http://www.bpnews.net/43019/spurgeons-lost-sermons-slated-for-release>.

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, contends, “It is sometimes overlooked that Charles Spurgeon published more words in the English language than any other Christian in history.”¹⁵ Though Spurgeon died almost 125 years ago, his work still lives. This thesis relies, in part, on many of Spurgeon’s own writings.

Spurgeon’s life story has long captured the attention of authors. Arnold Dallimore writes, “Following Spurgeon’s death in 1892, for two years or more, new biographies appeared at the rate of about one a month.”¹⁶ Though the number of Spurgeon biographies has diminished from those early years, works about Spurgeon have continued to the present day. Biographies of Spurgeon usually contain at least some information about his marriage to Susannah, and these have been resources for this project.

Charles Spurgeon himself chronicled various episodes of his ministry. His *Autobiography* notes,

In the occasional intervals of comparative leisure that he was able to snatch from his busy life’s labours,—and mainly in the bright sunshine at Mentone,—he recorded many of the principal incidents in his wonderful career. As each one was completed, he used joyfully to exclaim, “There’s another chapter for my *Autobiography*;” and had he been spared long enough, he would doubtless have given to the church and the world a full account of his life as it appeared from his own standpoint. This he has virtually done from the commencement of his public ministry, though not in the connected form in which it is now issued.¹⁷

Sketching out his life story was not a priority for Spurgeon, but over time, his notes proved to be sufficient to form the foundation and substance of a four-volume autobiography.¹⁸

The autobiography was not completed in Spurgeon’s lifetime but was later compiled by Susannah along with Spurgeon’s secretary, Joseph Harrald. Susannah and Harrald used

¹⁵Smietana, “Spurgeon’s Lost Sermons.”

¹⁶Dallimore, *C. H. Spurgeon*, ix.

¹⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:1.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

Spurgeon's notes, many of which were written from his time in Mentone, and added their own reflections.¹⁹

The *Autobiography* of C. H. Spurgeon is the essential work on his life. In volume 2 of the original four-volume work, the first three chapters are titled, "Love," "Courtship," and "Marriage." The pens of Charles, Susannah, and Joseph Harrald provide a firsthand account of Charles and Susannah's love story and the spiritual trajectory of their lives together. From their writings flow a wealth of material from which it is possible to distill key elements of the application of the spiritual disciplines of Bible reception and prayer in their relationship. The original four-volume biography has been reprinted in its entirety, in a large two-volume set, by Pilgrim Publications.²⁰

G. Holden Pike wrote a six-volume biography on Spurgeon entitled, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*.²¹ This set was released soon after Spurgeon's death. Tom Nettles considers this work important because "it contains a large amount of primary sources to which only Pike, as a co-editor of *The Sword and the Trowel*, had access."²² Pike writes with an intimate knowledge of Spurgeon and uses more than 1,100 pages to tell Spurgeon's story. He includes helpful insights into Spurgeon's marriage and his life at home.

Robert Schindler's treatise, *From the Usher's Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit: The Life and Labors of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* is a fascinating account of Spurgeon.

¹⁹C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography: The Early Years*, comp. Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 1:277-301. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as *Banner Autobiography*.

²⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: His Diary, Letters, and Records*, comp. Susannah Spurgeon and Joseph Harrald, 2 vols. (1897; repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992).

²¹G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of C. H. Spurgeon*, 6 vols. (London: Cassell and Company, 1892).

²²Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 9.

It is a fresh rendering, published the year of Spurgeon's death, by one who knew him well. Though the book does not delve in-depth into the home life of the Spurgeons, it does give a clear perspective of their spirituality. For example, the book recounts a particular day in which Spurgeon took his friend John Gough on a tour of the orphanage, one of the many ministries that Spurgeon founded and led. Schindler records Gough's description of Charles comforting a poor young boy who was on his deathbed:

I have seen Spurgeon holding by his power sixty-five hundred people in breathless interest; I knew him as a great man universally esteemed and beloved; but as he sat by the bedside of a dying child, whom his beneficence had rescued, he was to me a greater and grander man than when swaying the mighty multitude at his will.²³

Concerning the spirituality of Susannah and her work of supplying needy pastors with books, Schindler comments,

The beautiful and truly Christian spirit of the much afflicted but much honored lady who, in the sweetest, tenderest, and most unaffectedly humble way, does the work of God's almoner towards some of the worthiest of the Master's many servants, respecting neither livery nor badge, name nor denomination.²⁴

Russell H. Conwell's *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon* was also published the year of Spurgeon's death.²⁵ In this work, Conwell devotes a significant amount of material to the importance and influence of Susannah. Conwell sees the unlikely union of Susannah the city girl and Spurgeon the country man as the providential working of God and a means God would use in making Charles a better person. Conwell reports, "She was as remarkable a woman as he was a man."²⁶ David Livingston once inquired of Spurgeon as to how he was able to accomplish so much, he replied, "You have forgotten that there are

²³Robert Schindler, *From the Usher's Desk to The Tabernacle Pulpit: The Life and Labors of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1892), 186.

²⁴Ibid. See chap. 4 of this thesis for more detailed information about the Book Fund.

²⁵Russell H. Conwell, *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon: The World's Great Preacher* (Philadelphia: Edgewood, 1892).

²⁶Ibid., 228.

two of us and the one you see the least of, often does the most work.”²⁷ Though not all Spurgeon biographers agree, Conwell believed that he was referring to Susannah.²⁸

Regarding the Spurgeons’ home life, Conwell points to “their cheerful trust in God, unshakable love for each other, and a domestic peace, such as only the most perfect of English homes enjoy.”²⁹ Mrs. Spurgeon described her first home: “The very walls might cry out against us as ungrateful did we not silence them by our ceaseless thanksgiving; for the Lord has here loaded us with benefits and consecrated every inch of space with tokens of His great loving kindness.”³⁰

Conwell portrays Charles praying for Susannah during her illnesses and indicates how their struggles drew them closer to one another. He tells of Mrs. Spurgeon’s prayers that she might be of greater help to her husband in his ministry. Conwell believes that the Book-Fund was an answer to that prayer.³¹

W. Y. Fullerton authored an early and definitive work on Spurgeon, entitled *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography*. He offers, “This biography is only historic in its earlier chapters; beyond these it seeks to focus the light on different aspects of the man, rather than to diffuse it in a narrative of the years and their happenings.”³² Fullerton, a personal

²⁷Conwell, *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 235.

²⁸John Piper thinks Spurgeon is referring to the energizing power of Christ referenced in Col 1:29. John Piper, “Charles Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity,” accessed January 4, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/biographies/charles-spurgeon-preaching-through-adversity>. “He was a hard-working preacher.”

²⁹Conwell, *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 236.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 237.

³¹*Ibid.*, 240-41. Susannah started the Book-Fund in 1875 as a means to provide her husband’s books to poor pastors. See chap. 4 of this thesis for further information.

³²W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), viii. Spurgeon moved to London in 1854. The Waterbeach Chapel burned in the early 1860s. Spurgeon and The Metropolitan Tabernacle assisted in rebuilding the church and Spurgeon laid the foundation stone in 1863. I visited the Waterbeach building and saw the foundation stone and other Spurgeon memorabilia located there. The present pastor, Martin Ensell, recounted that after Spurgeon left Waterbeach for his pastorate in London, he returned annually to preach for the congregation of his first church. The pulpit from which

friend and student of Spurgeon, provides numerous nuggets of intimate insight into Spurgeon's life and ministry. As with most Spurgeon biographers, he includes a section on the courtship and marriage of Charles and Susannah and gives a warm perspective of their happy home.

A fascinating work on Spurgeon is *C. H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* by J. C. Carlile. This book was published in 1933, forty-one years after Spurgeon's death. The author was one of Spurgeon's students at his pastors' college, as well as his avowed friend. He attempts both an accurate and balanced portrait of Spurgeon. Carlile saw his work as a corrective to many of the biographies that appeared soon after Spurgeon's death. He includes a helpful chapter "A Domestic Group" that recounts the Spurgeons' marriage: "Mr. Spurgeon's love story is like a chapter of a New England novel; Nathaniel Hawthorne might have written it; it is quaint and intriguing."³³ This biography is a helpful resource due to its overall perspective on the life, spirituality, and marriage of the Spurgeons. Carlile notes that their romance only grew as they got older, and he underlines the importance of Mrs. Spurgeon's assistance as a helper to Charles.

Lewis Drummond's biography, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, is one of the more substantial biographies of Spurgeon published in the last fifty years. Thirty-two pages contain information specific to Mrs. Spurgeon, including a helpful section on her marriage to Charles. One of the primary benefits of this book is that it includes a wellspring of bibliographical helps. The exhaustive nature of Drummond's work makes it an important contribution and essential source for all things Spurgeon.³⁴

Spurgeon preached on those return visits, from 1863, is still at the Waterbeach church.

³³J. C. Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon* (London: The Religious Tract Society and Kingsgate, 1933), 187. See also Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 11-13, for a critique of Carlile and other Spurgeon biographers.

³⁴Drummond, *Spurgeon*. Drummond's work is not without its issues. See William Brian Albert, "'As the Wind Blows Cold': The Spirituality of Suffering and Depression in the Life and Ministry of Charles Spurgeon" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 7n24.

Peter Morden's contribution, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon*, is one of the more recent works on Spurgeon. As vice-principal of Spurgeon's College in London, Morden had access to primary source material, much of which previously had rarely been dealt with. The book is a "revised edition" of Morden's Ph.D. thesis.³⁵ Because of Morden's access to primary sources, his work reads with a freshness that is not always found in such academic books. Morden's book considers Spurgeon's theology and includes important chapters dealing with Spurgeon's view of and commitment to the Bible and prayer. These chapters are important to this thesis because Spurgeon's theology of Scripture and prayer were foundational to his practice of those spiritual disciplines in his marriage to Susannah.³⁶

No thesis on Spurgeon would be complete without consulting the work of Iain H. Murray, whose *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* offers a wide selection of letters that give insight into Spurgeon's thinking. In *Letters*, Murray arranges Spurgeon's correspondences into various categories. He includes several letters from Charles to Susannah both before and after their marriage. Also giving perspective on the family life and spirituality of Spurgeon are letters written to his children, which provides a glimpse into the marriage of Charles and Susannah, especially their parenting. In his personal correspondence with Susannah, Charles never failed to show his affection for her, but he always points her heavenward.³⁷

³⁵Peter Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), xiii.

³⁶Morden does not provide much in the way of insight into Spurgeon's marriage. However, his chapters on the Bible and prayer are helpful in providing a framework from which the reader can better understand Spurgeon's practice of spiritual disciplines in his marriage.

³⁷Iain Murray, *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 60.

Tom Nettles' *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* is the most recent scholarly treatment of Spurgeon. Nettles relies heavily on primary source material, especially *The Sword and The Trowel*, as he draws a detailed portrait of Spurgeon.³⁸ He includes in his work the early acquaintance of Charles and Susannah and follows them through the years of their marriage. He underlines the spiritual interest that Charles first displayed toward Susannah as well as her conversion, spiritual development, and church membership:

The revelation of the depth of her Christian experience made Spurgeon evaluate the gift of her hand even more, knowing that God himself loves the gift and he may love it too. . . . Spurgeon's letters to 'Susie' always exhibited an indivisible solution of ardent spirituality, intense love for her, deep desire for greater usefulness, unfettered love of God and the gospel along with a consciousness of the need for more purity and single-mindedness in his love for Christ.³⁹

Charles Ray's *Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon* is the only full-length biography available on Susannah.⁴⁰ Ray's book provides a personal, in-depth, and intimate picture of Susannah, first written in 1903 (the year of Mrs. Spurgeon's death). Throughout the book, Ray draws attention to Susannah's spirituality. He writes as one well acquainted with her. As the only book of its kind, and because it was written by one who knew Mrs. Spurgeon personally, this book is an essential work for this thesis.

Ten Years After! is one of two books that Susannah Spurgeon wrote chronicling her ministry with the Book Fund. Susannah collected money to cover purchase and shipping prices to send books to poor pastors.⁴¹ Though much of the work includes thank

³⁸*The Sword and the Trowel*, a monthly magazine, published in London from 1865 to 1892, was edited by Spurgeon and contained various material, including sermons, articles, book reviews, and information about his church. Nettles writes in *Living by Revealed Truth*: "This volume has used these bound volumes, heavily emphasizing the notices and reviews, for information about Spurgeon's life and ideas on a large variety of subjects." Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 12n3.

³⁹Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 85-86.

⁴⁰Ray, *Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon*.

⁴¹Susannah Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1895), v. The Book

you letters to Mrs. Spurgeon from pastors, and Book Fund reports, Susannah inserts numerous biographical nuggets about her husband, marriage, and her grief following Spurgeon's death. This book takes its reader into the depths of Susannah's heart as she expressed her love for Charles and her confidence in God.

Spurgeon and His Friendships, by A. Cunningham Burley, provides an intimate account of some of Spurgeon's important relationships. The book is helpful to this thesis because, prior to dealing with Spurgeon's friends outside of his family, Burley first considers his relationships with Susannah, their sons Charles and Thomas, and his brother James Archer. Burley considered Spurgeon's son Charles as "the best earthly friend I ever had—the best indeed, I ever hope to have."⁴² The close personal relationship that Burley enjoyed with Spurgeon's son Charles provides a first-hand account of Spurgeon as a family man.⁴³

Along with the books previously mentioned, I am indebted to various journals and other scholarly works, including Christian T. George's doctoral thesis on Spurgeon. Especially helpful for the purposes of this thesis was George's interaction with Spurgeon's understanding of allegory and symbolism in his approach to reading and interpreting Scripture.⁴⁴

Fund began after the publication of Charles Spurgeon's, *Lectures to My Students*. Susannah wanted to distribute the book widely to pastors throughout England. This endeavor led to giving money herself and raising outside financial support to send books to needy pastors. See Dallimore, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 145-50.

⁴²A. Cunningham Burley, *Spurgeon and His Friendships* (London: Epworth, 1933), 29.

⁴³Murray has a low opinion of Burley's work; however, because of Burley's close personal friendship with Spurgeon's son Charles, the book is a helpful addition. See Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 12.

⁴⁴Christian T. George, "Jesus Christ, the 'Prince of Pilgrims': A Critical Analysis of the Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)" (Ph.D. thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2011), accessed March 3, 2015, <http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/10023/3211/3/ChristianGeorgePhDThesis.pdf>.

Void in the Literature

While Charles Spurgeon remains one of the most admired Baptist preachers in history and studies of his life abound, no published work gives adequate attention to the role of the spiritual disciplines of Bible intake and prayer in his marriage. This thesis addresses this gap in the literature by and about Spurgeon. Tom Nettles indicates, “I don’t know of a specific book on their [Charles and Susannah Spurgeon] marriage, but the material is ripe for picking. Much of it is unused but rich on implications for their relationship.”⁴⁵ The chapters that follow argue that Charles and Susannah exemplified godliness by applying the spiritual disciplines of Bible intake and prayer to their thirty-six year marriage.

Thesis

The practice of the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer was an indispensable element to the joyful marriage of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon. This thesis considers the important theme of marriage in the Bible and the Spurgeons’ commitment to applying the Scripture in their marital relationship. The union of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon serves as a powerful illustration of a joyful, biblically-minded, God-glorifying, and gospel-centered marriage. The following chapters demonstrate that Charles and Susannah were faithful to apply the disciplines of Bible reading and prayer in their relationship with one another. The gospel was positively displayed through their union as a result of applying these disciplines. By following the pattern of the Spurgeons, couples today may experience some of the same marital harmony that Charles and Susannah enjoyed.

⁴⁵Tom Nettles, email to author, July 21, 2013.

CHAPTER 2

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF CHARLES AND SUSANNAH SPURGEON'S FAITH

On Sunday evening, March 18, 1855, Charles Spurgeon looked to his Bible and declared in his sermon: “If these words were written by a man, we might reject them; but O let me think the solemn thought, that this book is God’s handwriting—that these words are God’s!”¹ For Spurgeon, a reasonable person might reject words spoken by a mere man. However, he considered it beyond the pale of sound reasoning for anyone to reject God’s words. He was not alone in embracing such strong convictions about the Bible. His wife Susannah also believed in the divine authorship of the Scripture. Reflecting on John 14:27, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,” Susannah asserted that those “tender words” were words of “Jesus Christ himself, my gracious Lord and Master, who thus speaks, and I shall do well to ponder every weighty sentence as I listen to his loving voice.”² For Susannah, the words of Scripture were “the loving voice” of Jesus Christ.

Hearing Scripture as the very voice of God formed the foundation of Charles and Susannah’s marriage. Charles found in the Bible the instruction and example that he

¹C. H. Spurgeon, “Sermon 15: The Bible,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970-2006), 1:111. The text was Hos 8:12: “I have written to him the great things of my law; but they were counted as a strange thing.” Spurgeon’s first point concerned the author of the Law, “I have written.” From this phrase Spurgeon established the essential reason that the Bible should be valued, read, studied, and loved: Because it is the Word of God. *The New Park Street Pulpit* constitutes the first six volumes of C. H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970-2006). Hereafter, *The New Park Street Pulpit* will be referred to *NPSP*, and *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* will be referred to as *MTP*.

²Susannah Spurgeon, *Free Grace and Dying Love: Morning Devotions by Susannah Spurgeon* (1896; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 64.

needed to love his wife and build his marriage on the Word of God. Commenting on Ephesians 5:25, Spurgeon declared, “As a husband, the Christian is to look upon the portrait of Christ Jesus, and he is to paint according to that copy.”³ Loving Susannah required him to heed the words of the one he was to imitate. Such regard for the Bible did not grow in a vacuum, but from the earliest days of their lives Charles and Susannah Spurgeon developed a love for the Scriptures from the example of family members, ministers, and friends. Some of those influences, until just after the time of Charles Spurgeon’s move to London in 1854, are examined in this chapter. This chapter also analyzes a sermon that Spurgeon preached in 1879, “How to Read the Bible,” to better understand his perspective on the Bible in general and Bible reading in particular.⁴

The Role of Scripture in the Formative Years of Charles Spurgeon

Charles Spurgeon was born June 19, 1834, in the village of Kelvedon in Essex, England, the first-born son of John and Eliza Spurgeon. Grief was a constant companion in the Spurgeon home because out of seventeen children born to John and Eliza, only eight survived infancy. Nevertheless, the steady hands of godly parents guided the family. Charles’s brother, James Archer Spurgeon, testified of his mother that she was “the starting point of all greatness and goodness that any of us by the grace of God have enjoyed.”⁵ Charles’s father was a businessman and a Nonconformist pastor. Soon after his birth, Charles’s parents moved to Colchester, and when he was eighteen months old, he was sent to live with his grandparents at Stambourne. Charles remained with them for

³Charles H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, 5th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 161.

⁴C. H. Spurgeon, “Sermon 1,503: How to Read the Bible,” in *MTP*, 25:625-36. Spurgeon, although addressing particular topics in his sermons, began with a Bible text and then took his topic from the text. Though not technically an expository preacher, his sermons were biblical and Christ-centered.

⁵W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), 5.

five years before returning home to his parents.⁶ Stambourne and life with his grandparents was forever etched on Charles's heart. Indeed, even after rejoining his parents, Charles regularly visited Stambourne for extended stays and there he enjoyed the warm influence of his godly grandparents. His grandfather James (1776–1864) served as minister of the Meeting House of Stambourne for fifty-four years. A man once remarked to Charles, "I heard your grandfather [preach], and I would run my shoes off my feet to hear a Spurgeon."⁷ His grandmother was described as a "dear, good, kind soul."⁸

Grandparents' Influence

Charles's childhood was happy during his formative years in Stambourne. At his grandparents' home he learned about God during family worship, was introduced to the writings of the Puritans, and encountered *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan for the first time. His initial reading of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was at age six and he continued to read Bunyan's masterpiece throughout his life, totaling some 100 times before he died.⁹ Charles's grandfather was the primary early influence on him in at least four ways. First, his grandfather was a faithful preacher. Charles often sat on the floor near where his grandfather prepared his sermons, receiving the benefit of witnessing his grandfather in

⁶Stambourne was a village rich in beauty with its pastures, streams, and animal life. For more information, see C. H. Spurgeon, *Memories of Stambourne* (New York: American Tract Society, 1891). The reasons for Spurgeon's move to his grandparents' home are unknown. Fullerton offers the explanation that it was the birth of the eldest of his six sisters, in January 1836 that precipitated Spurgeon's move. Charles's remaining there for several years, until he was six years old, was likely the result of the birth of more siblings, which was taxing for his parents. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 6.

⁷Spurgeon, *Memories of Stambourne*, 123.

⁸Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 6.

⁹The influence of *Pilgrim's Progress* on the Spurgeons is explored in chap. 3. *The Pilgrim's Progress* is but one (likely the most important) of many books that had a significant positive spiritual impact on Spurgeon from the days of his youth. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come* (1676; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977). Spurgeon estimated that he read *The Pilgrim's Progress* "at least a hundred times." C. H. Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress: A Commentary on Portions of John Bunyan's Immortal Allegory* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 5-6.

study in addition to hearing his sermons at church.¹⁰ Second, James Spurgeon regularly hosted godly men in his home, some of whom had a profound influence on young Charles.¹¹ Third, family worship was a staple in the Stambourne manse, and when Charles was old enough to read, he was the designated Bible reader.¹² Fourth, the Stambourne manse had a wonderful library of Puritan volumes that whet Charles's appetite for Puritan literature, an appetite that would deepen and remain with him throughout his life. Spurgeon described the library that was located in the attic of his grandparents' home:

Here I first struck up acquaintance with the martyrs and specially with "Old Bonner" who burned them; next with Bunyan and his "Pilgrim"; and further on, with the great masters of Scriptural theology, with whom no moderns are worthy to be named in the same day. Even the old editions of their works, with their margins and old-fashioned notes, are precious to me. It is easy to tell a real Puritan book even by its shape and by the appearance of the type.¹³

Recalling his early reading of the Puritans, Spurgeon once commented, "Never was I happier than when in their company."¹⁴ It may be hard to imagine that young Charles found great joy in reading Puritan literature of such depth and breadth, but a foundation was laid through Spurgeon's interaction with these Puritan writings, which shaped him

¹⁰J. Manton Smith, *The Essex Lad Who Became England's Greatest Preacher: The Life of C. H. Spurgeon for Young People* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1892), 26-27.

¹¹One powerful example of the influence of a godly visitor to Spurgeon's grandparents' home is Richard Knill, who predicted in 1844, when Charles was ten years old: "This child will one day preach the gospel, and he will preach it to great multitudes." C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-1899; repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992), 1:33-34. Smith notes that Charles would accompany his grandfather to visit the "squire's house to take tea with him." Smith, *The Essex Lad*, 33. Likely, Charles learned much theology from visitors to his grandparents' home as well as the times when he accompanied his grandfather to visit the homes of other ministers.

¹²Spurgeon recalls, "When I was a very small boy, I was allowed to read the Scriptures at family prayer." He follows with an interesting account about reading for several days, to his grandfather's frustration, about the bottomless pit in the book of Revelation. See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:17-18. Once Charles received an explanation from his grandfather about the pit, the description horrified and remained with him. Spurgeon was a strong advocate for family worship throughout his ministry. Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 256.

¹³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:23.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

for the remainder of his life. Out of the 12,000 books that comprised Spurgeon's personal library when he died, approximately 7,000 of them were either by or about the Puritans.¹⁵

Not only was his grandfather's influence instrumental in Charles's early spiritual development, but grandmother Spurgeon was also a shining example of godliness to him. Mrs. James Spurgeon was characterized as "everything that a minister's wife should be" and was noted for her "kindness, her love, and her piety."¹⁶ She diligently cultivated biblical truth in the mind of Charles through Scripture reading and prayer. One example of her spiritual investment in young Spurgeon was the reward system that she developed for him to memorize hymns. The reward was a penny per hymn memorized and Charles zealously earned his pay. So successful was Charles in his grandmother's venture that she had to change her strategy: "Charlie, I see danger of becoming bankrupt, and I must reduce the price to a penny a dozen." Even so, Charles memorized most of the hymns in Isaac Watts's hymnbook. When he was older, he remembered those biblically informed hymns, and it was common for him when preaching to recall a hymn and insert it into his sermon.¹⁷

Parents' Influence

Charles's mother was an important mentor in his early spiritual training and in his ultimate conversion to Christ. Since his father, John, was often away from home engaged in business and preaching, much of Spurgeon's instruction was left to his mother. One evening, while in route to a preaching engagement, John was troubled over not spending sufficient time with his family. He turned back home and, upon arriving, overheard his wife "pleading most earnestly for the salvation of all her children, and

¹⁵Duncan Ferguson, "The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy: The Hermeneutics of Charles Spurgeon," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 4 (1982): 457.

¹⁶Smith, *The Essex Lad*, 32-33.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 25-26.

specifically for Charles, her first-born and strong-willed son.” Hearing her prayers gave him confidence that his family was in good hands. Spurgeon wrote, “My father felt that he might safely go about his Master’s business while his dear wife was caring so well for the spiritual interests of the boys and girls at home, so he did not disturb her, but proceeded at once to fulfill his preaching engagement.”¹⁸ In May of 1892, three months after Charles’s death, his father, John, then eighty-two years old, wrote a moving preface to a book for young people about his son:

And I would urge the mothers who may read this book to be as careful in the training of their children for Christ as was *his* [speaking of Charles] saintly mother who is now in heaven. I had something to do with his upbringing, but I was so frequently from home that more of the responsibility was thrown upon my dear wife, and with constant and prayerful thought she nobly fulfilled the task. Now she has met her dear son in glory and rejoices with him. I too shall soon join them and mingle my praises with theirs.¹⁹

Charles enjoyed the blessings of godly parents and he recognized the special place they had in his upbringing. Describing their effect on him, he affectionately wrote,

It would not be easy for some of us to recall the hour when we first heard the name of Jesus. In very infancy that sweet sound was as familiar to us as the hush of lullaby. Our earliest recollections are associated with the house of God, the family altar, the Holy Bible, the sacred song, and the fervent prayer. Like young Samuels, we were lighted to our rest by the lamps of the sanctuary, and were awakened by the sound of the morning hymn. Many a time has the man of God, whom a parent’s hospitality has entertained, implored a blessing on our head, desiring in all sincerity that we might early call the Redeemer blessed; and to his petition a mother’s request “Amen” has solemnly responded. 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.²⁰

From the time of his infancy, Spurgeon learned about God from his parents and grandparents. He remembered his mother praying, “Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift

¹⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:69.

¹⁹Smith, *The Essex Lad*, 7.

²⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:67.

witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold on Christ.”²¹ That prayer pierced Spurgeon’s conscience. He recalled, “How can I ever forget when she bowed her knee, and with her arms about my neck, prayed, ‘Oh, that my son might live before Thee!’”²² Throughout his life, Charles believed parents should point their children to Christ: “Fathers and mothers are the most natural agents for God to use in the salvation of their children.”²³ The training by his parents and grandparents, and Charles’s own experience under their influence, convinced him that children could indeed learn Bible doctrine. He stated, “I would have children taught all the great doctrines of truth without a solitary exception, that they in their after days hold fast by them.”²⁴ In later years he asserted, “It strikes me, that here in England we greatly need more Bible catechizing for the children of all classes.”²⁵

Though Charles Spurgeon was grounded in Scripture, acquainted with the theology of the Puritans, brilliant beyond his years, and raised in a godly home where family worship was a staple, and though he regularly attended church, he did not know Christ. However, while Charles was walking to church on Sunday morning January 6, 1850, a snowstorm sent him looking for shelter. Feeling that he could not safely make it to the church that he had planned to attend, he stepped inside of a Primitive Methodist Chapel at Colchester instead. At that sparsely attended Methodist gathering, Charles took a seat and listened to a lay preacher’s challenge from Isaiah 54:22 to “look unto Christ and be saved, all the ends of the earth.”²⁶ Spurgeon wrote, “Between half-past ten

²¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:68.

²²*Ibid.*, 1:69.

²³*Ibid.*, 1:68.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 1:70.

²⁵C. H. Spurgeon, “The Bible,” in *Speeches At Home and Abroad* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1878), 12.

²⁶Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:105. In the corpus of literature about Spurgeon there is some

o'clock, when I entered that chapel and half-past twelve o'clock when I was back again at home, what a change had taken place in me! I had passed from darkness into marvelous light, from death to life."²⁷ Charles Spurgeon was converted under the simple preaching of God's Word from the lips of a Primitive Methodist preacher.

Even before his conversion, the effect of Scripture on Charles was obvious. In 1848, Charles and his brother James were in Maidstone for the furtherance of their education. While there, Charles became convinced of the propriety of believer's baptism. Tom Nettles describes how Spurgeon's thinking about baptism changed:

When in Maidstone, Spurgeon confronted a reasoned argument on baptism. The Anglican teacher sought to press him into an admission that the Congregational baptism of infants was invalid. The reasoning proved more ingenious than the teacher accounted for. The Bible records that only those who repent of sin and believe in Christ should be baptized. Infant baptism involves no repentance and belief; that practice, therefore, is not scriptural. The Anglican Church, however, provides sponsors for the child to pledge repentance and faith in its stead. Anglican baptism conforms to Scripture, therefore, and demands the adherence of all non-conformists, so reasoned the clergyman. Spurgeon responded, "Oh no! I have been baptized once, before I ought; I will wait next time till I am fit for it." In later reflections Spurgeon wryly reported, "It is due to the Church of England catechism that I am a Baptist."²⁸

This account is evidence of Spurgeon's willingness to be convinced by Scripture of any point of theology or ethical requirement. Even though his grandparents and parents believed in infant baptism, and Spurgeon himself had been baptized as an infant, he changed his position when confronted by Scripture. He wrote to his parents, soon after his conversion:

From the Scriptures, is it not apparent that, immediately upon receiving the Lord Jesus, it is a part of duty openly to profess Him? I firmly believe and consider that

debate as to the actual date of Spurgeon's conversion (some imagining, for example, that the date was a week later than Spurgeon recorded it). There is also a difference of opinion as to whether the preacher was a "lay preacher" or an ordained minister.

²⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:108.

²⁸Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 33.

baptism is the command of Christ, and shall not feel quite comfortable if I do not receive it. I am unworthy of such things, but so am I unworthy of Jesu's [sic.] love.²⁹

Spurgeon looked to the Bible for answers to doctrinal and practical questions. Therefore, he was baptized on May 3, 1850. After a brief time as a member of a Congregational church, he moved to Cambridge and joined the St. Andrew's Baptist Church, October 2, 1850.³⁰ God's Word, planted in Charles from his earliest days, resulted in his conversion and, as Spurgeon intimated, also made him a Baptist.

Following his salvation, Spurgeon's love of Scripture only deepened, and reading the Bible was a delight to him. He wrote to his parents on January 30, 1850: "How beautiful is the Bible! I never loved it so before; it seems to me as necessary food."³¹

Late in October of 1851, because of his recent experience as a Sunday school teacher and lay preacher, young Spurgeon was asked to preach for a small church in the village of Waterbeach, which was located about six miles from Cambridge. Soon after, the Waterbeach congregation called Spurgeon to serve as their pastor.³² Spurgeon led the church for two years, and during that time the congregation swelled from forty to over four hundred people. Word spread about the popular young preacher, and interest in him increased.

²⁹C. H. Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1923), 14.

³⁰Though Spurgeon was a Baptist by biblical conviction, he maintained a unity of heart toward gospel-loving people from diverse denominational and non-denominational perspectives. To a group of men from a variety of baptismal perspectives he told a humorous story during a speech for the Annual Meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, on May 5, 1875: "I am never afraid of the Bible myself on Baptist grounds, and when any young person comes to me and says, 'Can you recommend a work which sets forth your views of baptism?' I always say, 'Yes, there is a little book which you may buy for 2d.—the New Testament—a wonderful Baptist book—in fact I never give them any other. . . . Spread the Bible, dear friends, because *that will bring us together*. If anything will ever knit together the visible Church of God, it must be around Holy Scripture that we shall unite—certainly never anywhere else." For Spurgeon anyone was his brother, Baptist or not, who "sincerely loves Jesus Christ." C. H. Spurgeon, "The Bible—II," in *Speeches at Home and Abroad*, 18-19, emphasis original.

³¹Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 13.

³²Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 47.

November 27, 1853, proved to be a pivotal day in the life of young Charles. He received an invitation from the leaders of the New Park Street Chapel in London to preach at their historic church. Legendary pastors such as Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) and John Gill (1697–1771) had once served the notable congregation. However, New Park Street was then without a pastor, experiencing decline, and facing dim prospects. Nevertheless, the chapel was still highly regarded among Baptists. The church invited Spurgeon to preach on December 18, 1853.³³ Though only a few people attended Spurgeon’s first sermon at New Park Street, the congregation was soon taken with him. In April of 1854, after a three-month testing period, nineteen-year-old Charles Spurgeon officially became the pastor of the New Park Street Chapel. The decline of the church not only halted as a result of Spurgeon’s ministry, but it experienced unprecedented growth. Spurgeon skyrocketed to fame, yet with his ever-growing popularity came stinging criticism. One critic called him “a nine days wonder.”³⁴ Spurgeon did not allow the mounting criticism to steer him off course. He said, “My business is to follow my Savior, and not to pick out smooth paths for myself.”³⁵

The formative years of Charles Spurgeon are replete with examples of how God prepared him for pastoral ministry and eventually for marriage to Susannah. Charles’s father, John, testified late in his life:

My cup is full; I am an old man now, but I still need the same Saviour as much as ever I did, to save me from my sins. Jesus Christ is everything to me. I have preached the Gospel for many years and I do not want another. In the faith of it I have lived, and in the faith of it I shall die. My father’s God is mine; He is my sons’ God too, and my grandsons are following in the same path. Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.³⁶

³³Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 58–59.

³⁴Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:17.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 1:133.

³⁶Smith, *The Essex Lad*, 8.

Such was the heritage from which Charles Spurgeon came. From birth his family taught him the Bible. Upon their shoulders he stood, and from their example he loved the Bible that had served them so well. From childhood, to conversion, to Waterbeach, and ultimately to London, God kneaded deep into the heart of Spurgeon a lifetime regard for God's Word. After Charles and Susannah were married, their love for and commitment to the Bible continued through all of their days together.³⁷

The Role of Scripture during the Formative Years of Susannah Spurgeon

Susannah Thompson was born January 15, 1832, the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Thompson. The Thompsons enjoyed wealth sufficient to provide Susannah many opportunities for intellectual and cultural growth in Victorian England. Victoria (1819–1901) was crowned queen in 1837, when Susannah was only five years old. Susannah died in 1903, two years after Victoria, and all of her life she was inseparably connected to Victorian culture. She “had a typical upper class English upbringing, highly cultured and refined, speaking fluent French.”³⁸ The proper young ladies of Susannah's day were focused, not on world events, as described in the London newspapers, but on cultivating proper English femininity.³⁹ Though the depth of England's love for Scripture is debatable, the Bible was nevertheless the central book of Victorian culture. Timothy Larsen argues, “The Bible was a dominant presence in Victorian thought and culture.”⁴⁰ He further indicates, “The Scriptures were the foundational textbook in schools and the

³⁷Charles and Susannah's love for and application of Scripture are further considered in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

³⁸Michael Haykin, quoted in Don Theobald, “Added Material,” in Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon, *A Cluster of Camphire: Words of Cheer & Comfort to Sick & Sorrowful Souls* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1898; repr., Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2009), 134.

³⁹Charles Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, in *Free Grace and Dying Love*, 125.

⁴⁰Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

main volume through which people gained basic literary skills.”⁴¹ Even after the nation enacted “universal state education,” it was the Bible that enjoyed primacy in the public educational system of Victorian England.⁴² Victorian literature and art was saturated with references to Scripture in its stories, poems, and biographies.⁴³ The cultural sentiment regarding the importance of the Bible was often realized in Victorian-era families through both “morning and evening private and household devotions.” Larsen writes that the Bible “was the lens through which people saw their own experiences.”⁴⁴ However, though the Bible dominated the Victorian era, its dominance lay primarily on the veneer of the culture.

Though little is known about the depth of Susannah’s early encounters with Scripture, it is apparent that, like the culture at large, she was well acquainted with it. She regularly attended church services with her father and mother, both members of the New Park Street Chapel. However, by the early 1850s, her parents were no longer as actively involved in the life of church.⁴⁵ The Thompson family was friends with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Olney, who were committed members of New Park Street. Thomas Olney was a deacon, and he and his wife treated Susannah as if she were their own daughter. Charles Ray recalled that Susannah’s church attendance was more frequent as a result of her friendship with the Olneys than it otherwise would have been. He surmises,

From the fact that old Mr. and Mrs. Olney were very fond of her and often invited her to visit them. Naturally on Sundays, during those visits, she usually accompanied

⁴¹Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 2.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 2-4.

⁴⁴Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 125.

Mr. and Mrs. Olney to the chapel and thus she had more than one association with the place, which was to play so large a part in her after-history.⁴⁶

Ray continues, “Brought up in a godly family and having earnest Christian friends, Susannah Thompson was not indifferent to the importance of religion in the individual life”⁴⁷ James Smith, pastor of New Park Street Chapel from 1841–1850, was another significant influence in Susannah’s life. She remembered him as

a quaint and rugged preacher, but one well-versed in the blessed act of bringing souls to Christ. Often have I seen him administer the ordinance of baptism to the candidates, wondering with a tearful longing whether I should ever be able thus to confess my faith in the Lord Jesus.⁴⁸

Though raised in a culture where the Bible was prominent, and convicted of her need for Christ, Susannah found neither assurance nor ability to actually confess personal faith in Jesus. However, that changed in 1852 when Susannah attended a special service at the Poultry Chapel in London and heard the preaching of S. B. Bergen. Bergen took his sermon from Romans 10, and sometime during that sermon, Susannah was convicted of her sins and of her need for a Savior. She writes, “From that service, I date the dawning of the true light in my soul. The Lord said to me, through His servant, ‘Give Me thy heart,’ and constrained by His love, that night witnessed my solemn resolution of entire surrender to Himself.”⁴⁹ Following that “dawning of the true light,” Susannah encountered a period of spiritual decline that caused her many doubts and resulted in a lack of zeal towards Christ. She writes, “Seasons of darkness, despondency, and doubt had passed over me but I had kept all my religious experiences carefully concealed in my own breast.”⁵⁰ Questions about her spiritual health bothered Susannah for the better part of a year. In chapter 3, Susannah’s spiritual pilgrimage will be further examined, yet it is

⁴⁶Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 127.

⁴⁷Ibid., 128.

⁴⁸Ibid., 125-26.

⁴⁹Ibid., 128.

⁵⁰Ibid.

important to presently note a positive spiritual transformation came, in part, through the ministry of Charles Spurgeon during his early days at New Park Street Chapel. Charles's discipleship of Susannah eventually led her to seek baptism and church membership. The membership requirements at New Park Street Chapel obliged candidates to write out their testimony of faith in Christ. Charles was happily encouraged when he read Susannah's declaration of the gospel and its impact on her life. By this time Charles's pastoral concern for Susannah had blossomed into love for her, now his fiancée. Therefore, his joyous prose concerning Susannah's spiritual depth is sprinkled with emotion:

Oh! I could weep for joy (as I certainly am doing now) to think that my beloved can so well testify to a work of grace in her soul. I knew that you were *really* a child of God, but I did not think you had been led in such a path. I see my Master has been ploughing deep and it is the deep-sown seed, struggling with the clods, which makes your bosom heave with distress. . . . I flatter no one, but allow me to say, honestly, that few cases which have come under my notice are so satisfactory as yours. Mark, I write not now as your *admiring friend*, but impartially as your Pastor.⁵¹

Charles recounted Susannah's maturity and described her as "deeply schooled in the lessons of the heart" and being "so thoroughly versed in soul-knowledge."⁵²

It is striking that Charles testified to such a depth of spiritual maturity in Susannah since she had been converted for only a year and then had fallen into a season of uncertainty. Susannah's swift spiritual growth argues that she had faithfully read the Scriptures from the time of her childhood, and her reading, coupled with years of hearing biblical preaching, paved the way for her spiritual progress. Her spiritual maturity did not spring from the untilled soil of a non-Christian heritage, but just the opposite. Therefore, when she heard Romans expounded at the Poultry Chapel, and afterwards came under the influence of Charles's biblical ministry, the seed of God's Word fell into a prepared heart. Spurgeon alludes to this when he wrote that God had been "ploughing deep" and that he had planted "deep-sown seed" in the heart of Susannah. The previous twenty-two

⁵¹Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 143-44.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 144.

years of her life had been years of spiritual preparation for God's Word, by the power of his Spirit, to work regeneration into the well-tilled soil of her heart.

Realizing the sheer amount of time, energy, and purposeful biblical training they had received prior to their union enriches understanding of the Spurgeons' marriage. The practice of Bible reading and prayer that they enjoined in their marriage was planted, watered, and pruned from the earliest days of their lives. Charles and Susannah had rich soil from which to grow as they cultivated a prosperous marriage that was informed and characterized by a commitment to the Bible as the very Word of God.

Charles Spurgeon's View of Bible Reading

Charles Spurgeon's philosophy of Bible reading provides the reasoning for how he and Susannah employed Scripture intake and prayer in their marriage.⁵³ The character of Spurgeon's life is a strong indicator that he was a practitioner of the things he preached; therefore, it is safe to assume that he and Susannah diligently read, studied, and sought to apply the Bible in their daily lives. Charles encouraged his congregation to be faithful in reading the Scripture. His perspective of Bible reading is exemplified in a sermon he preached from Matthew 12:3-7:⁵⁴

⁵³This thesis illustrates the Spurgeons' practice of Bible intake and prayer in their marriage. Because Charles and Susannah embraced the Bible as God's Word, their theology and practice of prayer naturally sprang from their view of and commitment to Scripture. This section focuses on the Bible because their commitment to Scripture was foundational to their spiritual practices, including prayer. Eric Hayden, *Letting the Lion Loose: C. H. Spurgeon and the Bible* (Glasgow: Ambassador, 1984), 17, writes, "The Bible was Spurgeon's infallible guide in all things, in every circumstance and situation of life." The Bible then was Spurgeon's "infallible guide" to his (and Susannah's) commitment to prayer.

⁵⁴Spurgeon, "Sermon 1,503: How to Read the Bible," 625-36. This following section focuses on "Sermon 1,503: How to Read the Bible" because it is reflective of Spurgeon's view of Bible reading throughout his life. Parenthetical references in the text of this chapter from this page to page 40 refer to "Sermon 1,503: How to Read the Bible." Allusions to other sermons are referenced but not explored with the same depth as this one. Though Spurgeon preached numerous sermons on the Bible, a somewhat thorough examination of one sermon is more efficient for the purpose of this thesis and could more readily be analyzed, and, it is hoped, applied. Other sermons by Spurgeon that reveal his view of the Bible and/or Bible reading and hearing, include C. H. Spurgeon, "Sermon 2,054: The Bible Tried and Proved, (Psalm 12:6)," in *MTP*, 35:253-64; idem, "Sermon 1,017: The Talking Book (Proverbs 6:22)," in *MTP*, 17:6-22; idem, "Sermon, 2,114: The Burden of the Word of the Lord (Malachi 1:1)," in *MTP*, 35:613-24, idem, "Sermon, 2,013: The Infallibility of Scripture (Isaiah 1:20)," in *MTP*, 34:145-56; idem, "Sermon, 1,792:

But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was hungry, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice; ye would not have condemned the guiltless. (AV)

He noted that Jesus twice asked the Pharisees, “Have ye not read?” (625). The Pharisees were stunned by Jesus’ question. Of course they had read the Law of God. They had studied it word-for-word and made copious notes from their studies. However, Jesus demonstrated that they had never *really* read the Scriptures. Spurgeon equated really reading the Bible with understanding the Bible. The Pharisees did not truly read God’s Law as evident by their errant interpretation (625-626).⁵⁵ Spurgeon purposefully develops his theme of *fully* reading the Bible because he has an aim of helping his hearers to profit from their own reading of the Scripture. Spurgeon was convinced that a true reading of Scripture meant that one understood what they read. In other words, reading without understanding is not *real* reading (626). Spurgeon’s sermon characterizes what it means to truly read the Bible.

Spurgeon emphasized that it was necessary for Christians to be “fed upon the truth of Holy Scripture” (626). He lamented that many people in his day were frequent readers of magazines, newspapers, and periodicals to the neglect of reading the Bible in a substantive manner (626). Though the Victorians in general had a high regard for the Bible, Spurgeon felt that many people, in the culture at large, were distracted by other

Understandest Thou What Thou Readest? (Acts 8:30-33),” in *MTP*, 30:409-20; idem, “Sermon, 2,010: The Word a Sword” (Hebrews 4:12),” in *MTP*, 34:109-20; idem, “Sermon, 2,278: Feeding on the Word (Isaiah 40:2),” in *MTP*, 38:493-501; idem, “Sermon 172: Search the Scriptures (Isaiah 8:20),” in *NPSP*, 4:57-64.

⁵⁵In a speech from 1864, Spurgeon told his audience, “We must ourselves labour more and more to get into the spirit and soul of Scripture.” He then gave testimony to his personal struggles in Bible reading: “My heart has often turned away in sadness when I have read my Bible without being profited thereby, as I am certain I have.” He saw the problem: “For I hold that the mere reading of a chapter is nothing. ‘The letter killeth,’ we say of it; but it is when we get into the chapter, and when the chapter gets into us—when we not only gather the sense, but mark, learn, and inwardly digest the bread of life—then it is that we get the good out of it.” Spurgeon, “The Bible,” 13.

literature. In contrast, Spurgeon urged his congregation to look to the Puritans as a model for reading and understanding the Bible: “Almost every sentence of theirs seems to cast side lights upon a text of Scripture; not only the one they are preaching about, but many others as well are set in a new light as the discourse proceeds” (626). Spurgeon aimed for a congregation trained in the Puritan practice of examining one passage of Scripture by a corresponding passage of Scripture. In doing this they would find light to understand the primary text as well as any other texts they were consulting. The end result was that they were “fed upon the truth of Holy Scripture” (626). Spurgeon believed that Scripture comparison would lead Bible readers to a deeper and fuller understanding of the Bible. He imitated his Puritan heroes in interpreting Scripture with Scripture and this contributed to Spurgeon himself being thoroughly saturated in the Bible.⁵⁶

Spurgeon advocated hearing sermons and reading good books, but argued that sermons and books were insufficient substitutes for Bible reading “You shall find that reading the Word of God for yourselves, reading it rather than notes upon it is the surest way of growing in grace” (626). Spurgeon was concerned that “much apparent Bible reading is not Bible reading at all” (626). He posits, “The verses pass under the eye and the sentences glide over the mind, but there is not true reading” (626). Such reading would not do for Spurgeon; he was not content with congregational ignorance in this regard. However, he was first interested in quality of Bible reading rather than mere quantity. He lamented the possibility of a person reading a significant quantity of the Bible but not really grasping its meaning. He warns, “The eye glances, the mind never rests. The soul does not light upon the truth and stay there” (627). Spurgeon desired that his hearers would cultivate “an interior reading” (627). He considered such reading “a true and living reading of the Word” (627). Anything less was “a mere mechanical exercise” (627). He

⁵⁶Spurgeon often referred to John Bunyan metaphorically as having Scripture for blood. Eric Hayden notes the same thing about Spurgeon: “Prick him anywhere (like John Bunyan) and he bleeds the Bible!” Hayden, *Letting the Lion Loose*, vii.

declared to his congregation, “Now, Beloved, unless we understand what we read we have not read it; the heart of reading is absent” (627).

Spurgeon, embracing the perspicuity of Scripture, believed that Christians could understand God’s Word.⁵⁷ Perspicuity refers to the essential clarity of Scripture. It does not mean that every passage of the Bible is equally clear, nor is it opposed to careful biblical scholarship. The doctrine of perspicuity argues that the meaning of the Bible is not locked up in the ivory towers of academia, but is accessible to any Bible reader who depends on God for understanding. Ferguson, reflecting on Spurgeon’s view of perspicuity, argued, “The Bible is an understandable book and should be read by and studied by all believers. Every Christian, guided by the Holy Spirit, can comprehend in its pages all that is necessary for holy living and salvation.”⁵⁸

Spurgeon preached that Bible reading was vital because “the Lord speaks to us in these words [from the Bible]” (628). He saw no value in merely having a Bible if the Bible was not read. He declared: “There is no virtue in the Bible any more than there is harm in a three-volume novel, if I do not read the one or the other. If they lie there on the shelf unread, the one will do me no good and the other no harm.”⁵⁹ He also recognized the importance of communicating God’s Word through preaching in clear and vivid language. Hayden asserts of Spurgeon, “He was as able to present God’s Word in plain Anglo-Saxon English to the ordinary man as the modern translations have done for men and women of this twentieth century.”⁶⁰ Spurgeon, like many Christian leaders before him, was pleased that the Bible was available in the common language of the people. For

⁵⁷Ferguson, “The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy,” 461.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Spurgeon, “The Bible,” 10.

⁶⁰Hayden, *Letting the Lion Loose*, 15.

Spurgeon, the Bible was not a museum piece to be admired and then walked away from, rather it was the very voice of God to be read and obeyed.

Understanding the Bible required reading, but not reading only. Spurgeon advocated that reading should be coupled with meditation. He acknowledged that some passages were rather clear. He called them “shallows in which the lambs may wade” (628). However, other passages are more difficult and are designed to make the reader think. It is especially the more difficult passages of Scripture that drive the reader to meditate on God’s words. The difficult passages “compel the mind to be active” (628-29). Meditation was no passive exercise for Spurgeon; it involved actively marshalling all of one’s intellectual resources so as to make “sweet truth” accessible (629). Spurgeon was adamant: “We must mediate” (629), and regarding the words of Scripture, “These grapes will yield no wine until we tread on them” (629). The grapes are the words of Scripture. Meditation, for Spurgeon, meant to actively engage one’s mind by treading on the grapes of Scripture for the purpose of squeezing out the sweet wine of God’s counsel. He further illustrated by describing a worm that bores a hole in a shell so as to get inside of a nut. In Bible meditation, the reader seeks to bore down through the shell, into the kernel, and then to feast (629). Spurgeon exclaimed, “The Word of God is always most precious to the man who most lives upon it” (629). Meditation on the Word was, for Spurgeon, a way to get the most profit from the Word.

Along with reading and meditating on Scripture, Spurgeon argued for the importance of prayer in connection with Bible reading. He asked his audience, “Do you wish to begin to be true readers? Will you henceforth labor to understand?” He answered, “Then you must get to your knees. You must cry to God for direction” (629). He declared that no one understands a book like the author of a book (629). Therefore, he encouraged his congregation to seek help from the Holy Spirit to understand the Bible (629-30). From an address on May 4, 1864, at the annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Spurgeon declared, “Now the Word of God is nothing but a dead letter till the

Spirit of God, with omnipotent arm, grasp it, and then it cuts to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”⁶¹ For Spurgeon, prayer was the means by which the Holy Spirit provided assistance in understanding Scripture.

Along with Bible reading, meditation, and prayer, one should use “all means and helps towards the understanding of the Scriptures” (630). The Bible reader should be a Bible student and gather the best resources available to assist him in his study. Spurgeon looked to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 to illustrate the necessity of Bible study (630). The Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah, but recognized he could not understand the text unless someone taught him. Spurgeon railed against those who were too self-sufficient to seek help in understanding the Bible (630). He pointedly stated, “It would be most wicked of us to say we will not have the heavenly treasure which exists in earthen vessels” (630). The treasure was the Word, rightly understood, in the “earthen vessel” of other students of the Bible. Understanding the importance of aids to Bible reading, Spurgeon produced books of sermons, commentaries on Scripture, and aids to family worship.⁶² Yet, as he wrote in the preface to *The Interpreter* (a book designed to aid heads of families in leading family worship), “I should be deeply grieved if this Book should, in any case, tempt a single member of the family to neglect the reading of the Bible itself; this would be the reverse of my design.”⁶³ Spurgeon wanted Christians to dig deep in the Bible itself: “If the heavenly gold is not worth digging for, you are not likely to discover

⁶¹Spurgeon, “The Bible,” 10.

⁶²Outside of the *MTP*, Spurgeon’s greatest work was *The Treasury of David*, which was produced over a twenty-year period, appearing first in sections of the *Sword and the Trowel*. Ultimately it was published in seven volumes with the final edition in 1885. Susannah believed this to be his most important work for posterity. The Spurgeon Archive, *The Treasury of David*, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://www.spurgeon.org/treasury/treasury.htm>.

⁶³C. H. Spurgeon, *The Interpreter or Scripture for Family Worship: Being Selected Passages of the Word of God For Every Morning and Evening Throughout the Year, Accompanied by a Running Comment and Suitable Hymns* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, n.d.,) iv.

it” (630). He was quick to point out that Scripture was not the Savior of sinners, however, he knew faith and Scripture were wedded together (631). He believed that reading Scripture cultivated faith and that faith laid hold of Christ; study of Scripture was essential for both (631). While Spurgeon urged young ministers to rely on the Holy Spirit and prayer, he stressed to them that they must study. Hayden comments, “Neither of the former [reliance on the Spirit and prayer] are to detract from the preacher’s conscientious reading and studying Scripture himself.”⁶⁴ Therefore, Spurgeon believed that one should take advantage of studying “books, commentaries, but most of all the Bible itself.”⁶⁵

It was important to Spurgeon that his congregation read the Bible carefully. He discouraged them from reading in “a hurried way” (631). He imagined that many people read the Bible very quickly before rushing off to some other activity. He lamented that such a hurried approach to Bible reading resulted in quick forgetfulness of what was read and consequently, there was no ultimate profit from rushed reading:

How few of you are resolved to get at its soul, its juice, its life, its essence, and to drink in its meaning. Well, if you do not do that, I tell you again your reading is miserable reading, dead reading, unprofitable reading; it is not reading at all, . . . May the blessed Spirit give you repentance touching this thing.

Spurgeon also taught that those who read the Bible should seek out the spiritual teaching of the Bible (631). He justified his position from Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees for not knowing the true meaning of the passage that they had quoted (631). The Pharisees misunderstood the purpose of the Sabbath Day because they did not understand that Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath. Not knowing what the passage really meant led them to wrong conclusions and, as the passage indicates, they “condemned the guiltless” (Matt 12:7-8). Spurgeon declared,

They overlooked the spiritual meaning of the text, namely that God prefers that we should care for our fellow creatures rather than we should observe any ceremony of

⁶⁴Hayden, *Letting the Lion Loose*, 60.

⁶⁵Ibid.

his law, so as to cause hunger or thirst and thereby death, to the creatures that his hands have made. (631)

The Pharisees problem, according to Spurgeon, was, in part, that they never got beyond the outward (words of the text) to the spiritual (meaning of the text) (631). Far from discounting the plain meaning of the text, Spurgeon adamantly argued that the Bible was to be faithfully studied. He exhorted his congregation concerning Bible study:

If the Lord has recorded his words in a Book, search its pages with a believing heart. If you do not accept it as God's inspired word, I cannot invite you to pay any particular attention to it; but if you regard it as the Book of God, I charge you, as I shall meet you at the judgment-seat of Christ, study the Bible daily. Treat not the Eternal God with disrespect, but delight in his Word.⁶⁶

Bible study for Spurgeon meant taking the Scripture in context and working to get at the heart of the meaning of the text using sound Bible study methods.⁶⁷ Therefore,

⁶⁶Spurgeon, "Sermon 2,054: The Bible Tried and Proved, (Psalm 12:6)," 35:263.

⁶⁷For more on Spurgeon's approach to Bible study and his hermeneutical method, see Peter J. Morden, "The Bible: O Living Christ, Make This a Living Word to Me," in *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 106-36. Morden argues that Spurgeon believed the "whole Bible pointed to Christ" (121). He quotes Spurgeon: "We may begin at Genesis and go on to the Book of Revelation, and say of all the holy histories, 'These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.'" Morden writes, "Whether it was the Old Testament or the New, Spurgeon's approach to the Bible had a strong Christological focus. He advised his students that Christ should be the 'diamond setting' of every sermon" (121). Morden provides examples from Spurgeon's preaching, illustrating that Spurgeon followed his own counsel of pointing to Christ in his sermons (121-22). At the heart of Spurgeon's exegetical method were many hours of reading Scripture. Though his sermon outlines were generally produced in a relatively brief period on Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons, this was "only possible because Spurgeon had spent many other hours reading and reflecting" (127). Morden notes, "This reading included commentaries and works of theology but was primarily in the scriptures themselves. The Bible that Spurgeon habitually used in his study from 1856 onward was worn to pieces by 1870 when it was sent for rebinding" (127). This Bible is on display at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the James. P. Boyce Centennial Library archives. For Spurgeon, the Bible was not just a book to be studied for preaching but, as Morden concludes, "The Bible was central to the sustaining of Spurgeon's spirituality" (135). See also Steven J. Lawson, "Unshakable Foundations," in *The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2012), 19-36; Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 247-76; and C. H. Spurgeon, "Notices of Books," in *The Sword and the Trowel*, vol. 8 (repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 2006). Spurgeon wrote in a review of *The New Testament in Original Greek*: "The more reading of the Scriptures the better; and it is best of all when that reading occupies itself with the original. Every member of our churches, who has a fair English education, should aim to acquire sufficient Greek to read the New Testament; we specially include in this exhortation our sisters in Christ. . . . Every vestry should have its Greek class." Spurgeon, "Notices of Books," 154. For Spurgeon, the Bible should be frequently read and every effort should be made to learn and read the New Testament in Greek. This is a strong indicator that Spurgeon himself was diligent in studying the Bible in its original languages as he sought to grasp the context, meaning, and proper application of the text. The spiritual understanding of any text, for Spurgeon, came from a careful exegesis of the text.

Spurgeon's understanding of the spiritual meaning of a text was that the text, carefully studied, should then be centered on Jesus. Spurgeon explained, "Such a reading of Scripture, as implies the understanding of, and the entrance into its spiritual meaning, and the discovery of the divine person, who is the spiritual meaning is profitable" (635). Spurgeon believed one should read the text and find Christ. Spurgeon did not mean that the reader was to illegitimately insert Christ into a passage of Scripture, but he compared every text to a village in England whose roads led to London (634). From Spurgeon's perspective, the Bible reader was to read the text and discern a pathway to Christ. This looking for Christ is the key to understanding Spurgeon's spiritualizing of passages. In this respect, the spiritual meaning of the text was the Christological, and therefore gospel, reading.⁶⁸ Had the Pharisees truly understood who Jesus was, they would have understood the true meaning, purpose, and fulfillment of the Sabbath. If they had really understood the Old Testament they would have discovered its message was about Jesus. For Spurgeon, everything in Scripture was ultimately about Jesus.

Searching for the spiritual meaning of the text led Spurgeon to appreciate the various literary forms in Scripture as well as their usage in church history. Sometimes the form was allegory.⁶⁹ Spurgeon's purpose of employing allegory in preaching was to

⁶⁸C. H. Spurgeon, "The Garden of Paradise," in *The Teachings of Nature in the Kingdom of Grace* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1896). In "The Garden of Paradise," Spurgeon addressed the fall of man and the gospel of Christ, even though the passage he referenced does not explicitly speak of Christ. He further discusses, in some depth, man's fall in Adam: Spurgeon says that we were "in his loins" and that "He was the father of us all" (8). Spurgeon declares, "Let it never be forgotten, in connection with the Garden of Eden, that we are not now a pure and sinless race, and cannot be by nature, however civilized we may become" (8). Man is born with "a heavy weight of original sin in the scale" (8). Spurgeon warned, "Beware of thinking too little of the fall. Slight thoughts upon the fall are at the root of false theologies." Spurgeon's concern for truth is connected to his concern for the gospel itself. Since man is fallen and without ability to change his condition then: "Only the Divine Hand can reclaim us." Spurgeon wrote, "Man must be made new by the same creating hand that first made him, or he can never be a dwelling place fit for God. Let those who boast of their natural goodness look to the Garden of Eden and be ashamed of their pride, and then examine their own actions by the glass of God's most holy law, and be confounded that they should dream of purity" (8). Spurgeon lays the foundation of man's fall so that he can say, "If we are to be accepted by God, we must be born again, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus" (9).

⁶⁹Ryken defines allegory as "a work of literature, usually a story, in which many of the details have a corresponding 'other' level of meaning. This technique is akin to symbolism in the sense that a

communicate, as clearly as he could, in the language of the common person.⁷⁰ However, Spurgeon's search for the spiritual meaning of a text, at times, seems unnatural. Larsen describes Spurgeon's interpretation of the Song of Solomon: "Indeed he delighted in spiritualizing the erotic language of the Song of Songs, returning to that canonical book again and again throughout his ministry until he had accumulated an impressive total of sixty-three sermons with a main text from it."⁷¹ Using Larsen's example, it is true that human marriage is ultimately about Christ and the church (Eph 5). However, just as one might argue for an allegorical reading of the Song of Songs, it can also be strongly asserted that Solomon's imagery first of all describes the love between a husband and wife. Spurgeon, in his rightful desire to find a pathway to Christ seemed to have not considered such a straightforward interpretation of the Song of Songs. Solomon's Song never mentions Christ specifically but it does flow with expressions of love between a husband and his wife. Spurgeon is right that the Song is about Jesus, but perhaps primarily as marriage itself is ultimately about Christ. Knowing that marriage is designed to reflect Christ's love for his church does not negate that marriage is also about the love between a man and his wife.⁷² While Christ-centeredness in Bible reading is commendable, such a reading requires careful exegesis as to the first meaning of the text. Spurgeon did strongly instruct his students to discover the "first sense," which he felt was the primary meaning

detail in the text stands for something else." Leland Ryken, *A Complete Handbook of Literary Forms in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 20. For Spurgeon's usage of allegory and symbolism, see Christian T. George, "Jesus Christ, the 'Prince of Pilgrims': A Critical Analysis of the Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1894-1892)" (Ph.D. thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2011), 88, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/10023/3211/3/ChristianGeorgePhDThesis.pdf>.

⁷⁰George, "Jesus Christ, the 'Prince of Pilgrims,'" 88.

⁷¹Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 257.

⁷²For an excellent and balanced treatment of the Song as allegory, typology, and an account of human love, see James M. Hamilton, Jr., *Song of Songs: A Biblical-Theological, Allegorical, Christological Interpretation* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2015).

of the text. After discovering the “first sense” they were to go beyond the surface and find a spiritual meaning. However, he warned, “There must always be a connection . . . a real relationship between the sermon and the text.”⁷³ That statement offers strong evidence that Spurgeon’s exegetical methods were sound. Spurgeon, though firmly committed to the “first sense,” nevertheless had appreciation for the Alexandrian school of interpretation, which sought out the spiritual and/or allegorical understanding of the Bible. Spurgeon was careful in this approach and encouraged wisdom about the usage of allegory. He was critical toward some allegorical interpreters, accusing them of over-spiritualizing the Bible, but he was lenient toward others, like John Bunyan.⁷⁴

⁷³Spurgeon, quoted in Ferguson, “The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy,” 463.

⁷⁴For an in-depth analysis of Spurgeon’s use of metaphor and allegory, see George, “Jesus Christ, the ‘Prince of Pilgrims,’” especially the section in chap. 2, “Charles Spurgeon and the Alexandrian School” (84-122). In this section, Christian George examines Spurgeon’s use of allegory, speculating that his first lessons in metaphor and allegory were rooted in his early years with his grandparents in Stambourne, where he enjoyed the pastoral serenity of country life (84-85). George notes Spurgeon’s usage of various word pictures in his sermons that reflected country life (85-89). However, it was not only the fields of Stambourne that Spurgeon recalled and made usage of, but he also developed vivid verbal descriptions from studying the rooms and decorations in his grandfather’s manse (85-86). J. Manton Smith points to specific examples of how life with his grandfather had an impact on Spurgeon’s preaching—especially regarding his use of word pictures. See Smith, *The Essex Lad*, 25-34. More influential to Spurgeon’s wide-usage of metaphors, verbal descriptors, and allegory was his early exposure to Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (and other tomes) that he first discovered in his grandfather’s library (George, “Jesus Christ, the ‘Prince of Pilgrims,’” 86-87). In C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), Spurgeon commended John Bunyan’s “allegorical and spiritual” commentary on Genesis (87). Second only to *Pilgrim’s Progress*, regarding allegory, was John Spencer’s *New and Old* dated 1658 (88-89). I was able to view John Spencer’s *Things New and Old* (London: W. Wilson and J. Streater, n.d.) in the Special Collections of John T. Christian Library at New Orleans Baptist Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana. Spurgeon inscribed “The richest book in my library” on the first blank page of the book. The inscription appears to be from 1858. Spurgeon believed that using allegory in preaching enriched sermons (George, “Jesus Christ, the ‘Prince of Pilgrims,’” v89). George considers sixteenth and seventeenth Puritanism and its influence on Spurgeon. The Puritans embraced a sound exegetical hermeneutic while recognizing the important place of allegory in Scripture (89-90). John Flavel appealed to Augustine in his defense of allegory (90). Bunyan’s use of allegory was consistent with the Alexandrian hermeneutic (90). George notes, “The Puritan tradition significantly influenced Spurgeon’s use of allegory; however, Spurgeon’s familiarity with the works of the Alexandrian Fathers also played a leading role in his hermeneutic” (91). Though Spurgeon was sometimes critical of the way allegory was used by Origen, he nevertheless employed allegory in his writings and sermons (92). For Spurgeon, the use of allegory was always secondary to the “first sense” meaning of Scripture. The primary meaning was of first importance (92-93). Nothing less than the gospel was at stake (93). For example, Spurgeon affirmed a straightforward reading of Genesis 1-3, including a literal Adam (94). George writes, “Reserving exegetical suspicion for the allegorical interpretation of the Fathers, Spurgeon wrote, ‘So full, indeed, were they in their expositions, and so minute in their details, that at length they went too far, and degenerated into trifling’”

Though Spurgeon's practice of looking for the spiritual meaning served to help him to focus on Christ, the Bible interpreter should proceed carefully so as to not read into the text what is not actually there. Spurgeon's goals in looking for the spiritual meaning of every passage of Scripture were honorable: (1) look for Christ in the vivid imagery of Scripture in ways that are consistent with the literal meaning of the text, and (2) see in the literary devices of Scripture God's design for the common reader to understand the Bible. Allegory (and figures of speech) was helpful to Spurgeon in fulfilling those goals. It seems likely that it was because Spurgeon had a high view of Scripture (accepting it as the very words of God) and a robust Reformation/Puritan theology that he was able to maintain doctrinal fidelity even as he engaged in spiritualizing texts.⁷⁵

Spurgeon took to task those who had no interest in the real meaning of the Bible and had no personal acquaintance with the Scripture: "Never be satisfied with a sound creed, but desire to have it graven on the tablets of your heart. The doctrines of grace are good but the grace of the doctrines is better still" (633). Here Spurgeon clarifies what he means by the spiritual meaning of the text. When one reads with an eye toward understanding, he reads carefully, meditatively, prayerfully, using all means available, and he looks for the spiritual meaning (Christ) in the text, then he sees his need of Jesus. He also believes that "Jesus is present with us whenever we read the Word" (633). The Pharisees knew the letter of the law but they did not know the Lord of the law. Knowledge of Bible facts, without personal knowledge of Jesus, and without experiential knowledge

(95). For Spurgeon, once the primary meaning of a passage was established then the interpreter could look for the spiritual sense (96). Spurgeon justified looking for allegories in Scripture because, Jesus taught, at times, in allegories (97). It is not clear that Spurgeon made clean distinctions between symbolism and allegory (98). He did provide guidelines (and warnings) to his students at the Pastors' College about using metaphors and urged caution and wisdom (105-6 ff).

⁷⁵For an example of how Spurgeon did *not* follow the Puritans in their Bible teaching, see Hayden, *Letting the Lion Loose*, 62. Hayden argues that in Spurgeon's preaching "he never really favoured their [The Puritans] method of detailed, verse by verse study of Scripture." Spurgeon thought that it was difficult for a congregation to endure long series of sermons.

of the things of God, Spurgeon considered empty and dead knowledge. It brought no spiritual profit to the reader. Spurgeon argues,

Oh when you have got hold of a creed, or of an ordinance, or anything that is outward in the letter, pray that the Lord to make you feel that there is something greater than the printed book and something better than the mere shell of the creed. There is one person greater than all and to him should we cry that he might ever be with us. Thy Word is life but not without the Holy Spirit. Be present here, that I may look up from the book and look to the Lord; from the precept to him who fulfilled it; from the law to him who honored it; from the threatening to him who has bourn it for me, and from the promise to him in whom it is 'Yea and Amen.' Ah then we shall read the book so differently. (633-34)

Bible reading for Spurgeon was important because when one read Scripture, Jesus was present:

He leans over me, he puts his finger on the lines, I can see his pierced hands: I will read it as in his presence. I will read it knowing that he is the substance of it, that he is the proof of this book as well as the writer of it; the sum of Scriptures as well as the author of it. This is the way for true students to become wise. You will get to the soul of Scripture when you can keep Jesus with you while you are reading. (634)

Reading the Bible as Spurgeon read the Bible is profitable reading. He explained, "It will save us from making a great many mistakes if we get to understand the Word of God" (635). Spurgeon charged his congregation to love the Bible and to read it with an eye toward understanding. He wanted his people to make the Bible their constant companion. Despite this, Spurgeon should not be accused of Bible idolatry because though the Christian should cling to the Bible, the Bible is not Christ. However, "it is the silken clue which shall lead you to him" (635), and leading people to Christ was at the heart of Spurgeon's life and ministry.⁷⁶

Moreover, Spurgeon was not satisfied with reading the Bible as one "to-do-item" on a person's list of priorities. He understood Bible reading as holy work that

⁷⁶For a concise treatment of Spurgeon's focus on the gospel in his life and preaching, see Lawson, *The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon*. In this book, Lawson surveys Spurgeon's commitment to the trustworthiness of Scripture, his Calvinistic theology, and his evangelistic passion that was centered on the gospel of Christ. Lawson writes, "Throughout his ministry, Charles Spurgeon's preaching rested squarely on this impregnable rock—that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be, the inspired Word of the living God." (19) Lawson further notes, "Spurgeon was consumed with a gospel zeal" (2). Regarding Spurgeon's preaching method, Lawson posits, "He made it his practice to isolate one or a few verses as a springboard to proclaim the gospel" (2). He quotes Spurgeon, "I take my text and make a beeline to the cross" (2).

would result in spiritual profit to a thoughtful reader. The exemplary reader should expect to find blessings from their reading. God, through the Bible, leads sinners to the Savior and provides comfort, instruction, and guidance to Christians. Spurgeon wanted the Bible down deep in the Christians heart. In “The Talking Book,” preached on October 22, 1871, from Proverbs 6, Spurgeon expounded,

The law of God should be so dear to us, that it should be bound about the most vital organ of our being, braided about our heart. That which a man carries in his hand he may forget and lose, that which he wears upon his heart will remain there as long as life remains. We are to love the Word of God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; with the full force of our nature we are to embrace it; all our warmest affections are to be bound up with it.⁷⁷

Ultimately, according to Spurgeon, Scripture should be read because it is God’s voice. The voice of God in the words of Scripture was the authority upon which Spurgeon based all of his spiritual convictions. Larsen insightfully reflects, “Spurgeon resolutely insisted that the whole canon of the Bible was the Word of God and therefore it ought to be encountered in sermons, corporate worship, and daily devotional reading.”⁷⁸ He notes that Spurgeon’s insistence on the total trustworthiness of the sixty-six books of the Bible and its usefulness congregationally and privately was maintained in the context of growing opposition to this conviction.⁷⁹ Such opposition from opponents to the authority of Scripture only fueled Spurgeon’s pronouncements. Larsen quotes Spurgeon: “The Scriptures are as true in Genesis as they are in Revelation, and the first five books of Moses are as inspired as the four Gospels.”⁸⁰ Spurgeon did not fear opponents of Scripture. In a speech, he declared,

⁷⁷Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Messages to the Multitude: Being Ten Representative Sermons Selected at Mentone, and Two Unpublished Addresses Delivered on Memorable Occasions*, 2nd ed. (London: S. C. Brown, Langham and Company, 1905), 31-32.

⁷⁸Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 254.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

My metal is of such a kind, that I thank God when the adversaries of truth are loudest. A slumbering devil is more to be feared than a roaring devil. Let the devil roar, he shall but wake us up from our slumbers and make us the more earnestly to contend for truth.⁸¹

Spurgeon's regard for the Puritans also served to reinforce his high regard for the Bible.

Duncan Ferguson posits,

The Puritan movement was steeped in Reformed Theology and produced the historic *Westminster Confession of Faith* and innumerable volumes of dogmatics. The foundation of their confessional and theological system was the assertion that the Bible was the very voice and message of God to humankind. It was the infallibly inspired work of the Holy Spirit and authoritative in all matters.⁸²

Spurgeon, like his grandparents, parents, and his Puritan heroes, believed that the Bible was the very voice of God and therefore true. Ferguson writes of the Puritans, "The literal word of Scripture was a direct message from God, spoken as much in the present as in the past."⁸³ His characterization of Spurgeon is that he "can be best understood as a nineteenth-century representative of Protestant orthodoxy, and more particularly of the Puritans."⁸⁴

Ferguson understands Spurgeon's Puritan perspective of Scripture: "At the foundation of his approach to Scripture was his deep Christian faith and belief in the truth of the Biblical testimony."⁸⁵ Ferguson continues by describing Spurgeon's hermeneutical method:

Faith in the redemptive acts of God as revealed in Scripture is the ground of Spurgeon's hermeneutical system. . . . But more specifically, what form does his faith in God's saving work take? Part of the answer to this question is found in his adherence to the main tenets of the Puritans.⁸⁶

However, Spurgeon was driven to his conclusions about Scripture by more than the Puritans. The primary reason that Spurgeon so revered the Bible was because of his

⁸¹Spurgeon, "The Bible," 11.

⁸²Ferguson, "The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy," 456.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., 457.

⁸⁵Ibid., 458-59.

⁸⁶Ibid., 459.

conviction that the Bible was the very voice of God. In a sermon from 1855, Spurgeon proclaimed, “This volume is the writing of the living God: each letter was penned with an Almighty finger; each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips, each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit.”⁸⁷ Since the Bible was true, Spurgeon insisted that Christians should hear it at church, study it privately, and read it at home with their family:

Come and drink out of this fair fount of knowledge and wisdom, and ye shall find yourselves made wise unto salvation. Wise and foolish, babes and men, grey-headed sires, youths and maidens,—I speak to you, I plead with you, I beg of you respect your Bibles and search them out, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Christ.⁸⁸

Spurgeon was committed to helping his congregation with Bible reading and, consequently, he developed several resources to assist them.⁸⁹ One such example is *Morning by Morning: or Daily Readings for the Family or Closet*.⁹⁰ Larsen notes,

As the subtitle ‘closet’ is biblical language for a private, individual time of prayer (Matthew 6:6), and thus Spurgeon was commending this volume as an aid to either personal or household devotions. As to the former, Spurgeon suggested that private morning devotions should be completed before meeting another human being; to go straight to work without doing this would be like neglecting to get dressed.⁹¹

Spurgeon also penned several other practical devotional helps, including *Morning and Evening Daily Readings*, *Evening by Evening: or, Readings at Eventide for the Family or the Closet*, and *The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith; Being Precious Promises arranged for Daily Use*. These books, along with *The Interpreter* were designed, in part, for family devotion and illustrate that Spurgeon expected the families of his congregation to read Scripture together in family worship.

⁸⁷Spurgeon, “Sermon 15: The Bible,” 1:110.

⁸⁸Ibid., 1:116.

⁸⁹Other Bible reading resources by Spurgeon are referred to later in this project. This portion of the project shows Spurgeon’s commitment to Bible intake.

⁹⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *Morning by Morning: or, Daily Readings for the Family or the Closet* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1865).

⁹¹Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 262.

The strengths of Spurgeon’s approach to Scripture are evident. The Bible is God’s Word to man. All of the instruction necessary for salvation and sanctification is contained in the Bible. Therefore, the Bible should be read, meditated on, studied carefully with the use of means, and by faith in Christ and dependency on the Holy Spirit, read prayerfully. Spurgeon’s high view of Scripture has led some to imagine that he exalted the Bible to a place reserved for God alone. Some have conjectured that Spurgeon’s doctrine of Scripture leads to a worship of the Bible itself. If one must have faith in the Bible, it is reasoned, then there is an object of faith along with Christ.⁹² However, though Spurgeon had a high view of Scripture, the object of saving faith, for Spurgeon, was always Christ. It is a misunderstanding of Spurgeon to insist that his view of Scripture was rooted in idolatry of the Bible. Rather, Spurgeon believed that the Bible pointed him and his congregation to Jesus who was able and willing to save them from their sins.

On the other hand, Spurgeon’s spiritualizing of the Bible is a matter of some concern.⁹³ It has been argued that Spurgeon’s “spiritualizing” of texts

may lead to a misunderstanding of the meaning of Scripture. . . . He, of course, does not intentionally distort the Bible’s meaning, nor does he miss the sense of its passages and/or fail to comprehend its basic message. . . . It does mean that when he ‘spiritualizes’ a passage he obscures the original intention of the author and fails to state its primary meaning.⁹⁴

Spurgeon’s spiritualizing is an important consideration because the first responsibility of the Bible reader, as Spurgeon stated, is to get to the “first meaning” of the text. However,

⁹²Ferguson, “The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy,” 465.

⁹³Consider C. H. Spurgeon, “The Order of Creation,” in *Teachings of Nature in the Kingdom of Grace*, 1-5 as an example of Spurgeon’s imaginative interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 and his belief that “this world has been fitted up and destroyed, re-fitted and then destroyed again, many times before the last arranging of it for the habitation of men” (1). Spurgeon believed that following original creation, “then came a long interval, and at length, at the appointed time, during seven days, the Lord prepared the earth for the human race” (1). He then makes a comparison to salvation when he writes, “So it is in the new creation. When the Lord newly creates us, He borrows nothing from the old man, but makes all things new” (1). Spurgeon’s accepts a literal creation and the seven days of creation. However, he allows for a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 and, in good Spurgeon fashion, makes a “beeline” to the gospel and man’s need to be re-created (2-5).

⁹⁴Ferguson, “The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy,” 466.

one must be careful when looking beneath the surface of the “first meaning” to a supposed spiritual meaning, not to fall into error. Spurgeon esteemed Scripture and that esteem, coupled with his robust Puritan theology, kept him from swerving into doctrinal error. Even though his aim was to lead people to look to Christ, his method of spiritualizing could lead one astray who is less versed in Bible knowledge and Reformation theology. Ferguson acknowledges that in interpreting the Scripture there is with any text the “possibility of messianic prophecy” and of a “Christological interpretation of certain Old Testament passages.” However, he declares, “It is necessary to insist on the importance of historical study in determining the primary meaning of all Scripture.”⁹⁵ Spurgeon would agree in theory and mostly in practice, but at times (like with his handling of the Song of Solomon) he was so concerned to find Christ in the text that he overlooked the “first meaning.” Notwithstanding, Spurgeon is admirable in his Christ-centered view of the Bible and for wanting to communicate clearly by using common word pictures.⁹⁶

Spurgeon’s perspective of Bible intake remained with him throughout his ministry. His life, church, and marriage all reflected his commitment to Scripture. His understanding of theology, including the doctrine of prayer, grew out of his commitment to Scripture as the very utterance of God. He helped people apply God’s Word and believed Christians should be “labouring to bring it [Bible] home to the masses, and to make them read as well as to possess it, and to understand it as well as to regard it as the

⁹⁵Ferguson, “The Bible and Protestant Orthodoxy,” 466.

⁹⁶In “Harvest Time,” it is evident that Spurgeon’s background in Stambourne framed the context for his descriptive language. Speaking of harvest time, Spurgeon proclaimed, “I suppose the dwellers in the cities think less of times and seasons than dwellers in the country. Men who were born, trained up, nourished and nurtured among the corn-fields, harvests, sowings, and reapings, are more likely to notice such things than you who are always engaged in mercantile pursuits, and think less of these things than rustics do.” C. H. Spurgeon, “Harvest Time,” in *The Teachings of Nature in the Kingdom of Grace*, 320-38. Interestingly, inscribed at the bottom of the first page of this sermon are these words: “This was the first printed Sermon by C. H. Spurgeon. I Samuel xii.17.” This sermon also offers an example of Spurgeon lifting a small phrase from a verse and developing a theme, true to Scripture, from that phrase.

divine Word.”⁹⁷ Not only did Spurgeon want the masses of people to read, understand, and regard the Bible as “the divine Word” but he and Susannah read, sought to understand, and regarded the Bible as God’s Word. As has been shown, it was because of Spurgeon’s view that Scripture was the very Word of God that he zealously emphasized the importance of reading, knowing, loving, and applying, the Bible.⁹⁸

A firm commitment to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture was at the heart of the Spurgeons’ marriage. Understanding Charles Spurgeon’s philosophy on how to read the Bible helps to frame the context for the application of Bible reading in his marriage to Susannah. Spurgeon’s theology and practice of Bible reading is also instructive to the modern reader. Charles and Susannah properly exalted Scripture and both sought to diligently understand the real meaning of the text. Did Spurgeon always come to a right understanding of every particular text? Perhaps not, for at times, by looking for the spiritual meaning of the text, he over-spiritualized. However, on the whole, Spurgeon read the Bible rightly because he was always on the lookout for Christ. After all it was Jesus who said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39 ESV).

Spurgeon’s Perspective on Prayer

On Sunday Morning, September 13, 1874, Charles Spurgeon exhorted his congregation: “To those who do pray, prayer is a most precious thing, for it is the channel by which priceless blessings come to them, the window through which their needs are

⁹⁷Spurgeon, “The Bible,” 9.

⁹⁸For further reading concerning Spurgeon’s preaching about the Bible, see Hayden, *Letting the Lion Loose*, 34-53. Hayden’s chap. 2 is titled “Preaching from the Bible.” Here Hayden writes about Spurgeon’s method of Bible interpretation that “we shall confine ourselves to those that he preached on the Bible or the Word of God” (39). Hayden provides a summary of numerous Spurgeon sermons where Spurgeon emphasizes the authority of the Bible, the value of the Scripture, and the trustworthiness of Scripture. Spurgeon encourages his hearers/readers to reverence the Bible, be faithful to the Scripture, receive God’s Word, and learn from God’s Word. Hayden writes, “Spurgeon spoke from Scripture and believed what he preached” (53).

supplied by a gracious God.”⁹⁹ Spurgeon was committed to private, congregational, and family prayer. He saw prayer as a means of “soul enrichment” and “the vessel which trades with heaven, and comes home from the celestial country laden with treasures.”¹⁰⁰ He believed that prayer was precious because it was the avenue by which Christians obtained help from God. Embracing the blessing of prayer, Spurgeon urged his congregation to live their lives so as not to create barriers to communion with God: “Indeed, to true believers prayer is so invaluable that the danger of hindering it is used by Peter [1 Peter 3:7] as a motive why, in their marriage relationships, and household concerns, they should behave themselves with great wisdom.”¹⁰¹ For Spurgeon, behaving “with great wisdom” meant cultivating spiritual unity in marriage, therefore opening the door to prayer. By his comment from 1 Peter 3:7, it is evident that Spurgeon was convinced that only “true believers” could appreciate the true worth of prayer. However, he was not dismissive of the prayers of non-Christians, believing that God sometimes answered their pleas. When God chose to answer an unbeliever’s prayers, he had a salvific aim in mind. Spurgeon explained, “God has heard the prayers of unregenerate persons because he meant eventually to save them; and hearing their prayers led them to believe in him, and helped them to exercise that real spiritual faith which brought salvation to their souls.”¹⁰² He further argued that God always answered the prayers of

⁹⁹Spurgeon, “Sermon 1,192: Hindrances to Prayer,” in *MTP*, 20:506. Spurgeon’s text was from 1 Pet 3:7: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Spurgeon, “Sermon 2,950: True and Not True,” in *MTP*, 51:416. Spurgeon’s text was from John 4:31: “Now we know that God heareth not sinners.” He first addresses how those words were often taken out of context and misunderstood. He then builds his sermon on two main considerations: (1) how the statement is true, and (2) how it is not true. Considering how the statement is not true (as often understood), Spurgeon states, “Neither is it true that God does not sometimes hear and answer the prayers of unregenerate men” (415). See pp. 415-418. See also Spurgeon, “Sermon 1,091: Prayer Certified of Success,” in *MTP*, 19:24-36.

unbelievers who “pray to him for mercy, confessing their sins, and believing in Jesus Christ his Son.”¹⁰³ That being said, it was Christians who were specifically directed to employ congregational prayer, private prayer, and family prayer.

Congregational Prayer

Charles Spurgeon gathered with his church on Monday nights to pray. He was grieved when people considered one of these meetings to be “*only* a prayer meeting.” That prayer meetings might be devalued by the attitudes of some professing Christians was heartbreaking to him. However, when the faithful gathered for earnest prayer, Spurgeon’s heart was filled “with gladness” and his “eyes with tears of joy.”¹⁰⁴ He asserted: “It is good for us to draw nigh unto God in prayer, and specially good to make up a great congregation for such a purpose.”¹⁰⁵ Though he was delighted when even a few people assembled for sincere prayer, he was saddened “to see so little attention given to united prayer by many of our churches.” He continued, “Brethren, we shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer-meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians.”¹⁰⁶ It was not only on Monday nights that Spurgeon organized prayer at his church, but every time the congregation met. Tom Nettles writes, “Spurgeon made sure that each service of worship in the church was preceded by a prayer meeting.”¹⁰⁷ For Spurgeon, it was unthinkable that Christians would assemble at church for any purpose and fail to pray. On Sundays a prayer gathering ran concurrent with the worship service and was held in a room just beneath the

¹⁰³Spurgeon, “Sermon 2,950: True and Not True,” 417.

¹⁰⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1901; repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1973), 11, emphasis added.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 257.

auditorium.¹⁰⁸ However, according to Nettles, it was “Monday evening prayer meetings” that “fueled the ministries and other services of the church.”¹⁰⁹ Nettles further notes that it was common for 1,500 people to attend the Monday prayer times.¹¹⁰

Reflecting on the value that Spurgeon placed on prayer, Nettles concludes,

Prayer is not a second-rate activity, but is a grand cement for unity of purpose, the proper discernment of gifts, and the submissive appeal of the children of God before the throne of his power for those ends that he judges most conducive to his glory. In prayer the child of God shoves aside self-confidence and absorption in worldly wisdom and finds greater conformity to the sovereign wisdom of his Redeemer. God intends to receive glory to himself through answered prayer and the urge to pray for the health of those that are sick, for the health of the church through the success of its various ministries, and for one’s own spiritual advancement will receive answers from God according to his promise.¹¹¹

Such was the mindset of Spurgeon. He viewed prayer as of utmost importance for the church and for him personally. He pleaded with fellow Christians to pray regarding him and his preaching “for his own strength in his heavy and distressing responsibilities . . . and for the sake of their own spiritual well-being.”¹¹² For Spurgeon, to have his congregation pray for him was “the greatest kindness you can do [for] me.”¹¹³

Private Prayer: An Essential Activity of Life

It was not only the congregational prayer meeting that Spurgeon prioritized, but he was also a strong proponent of private prayer as an essential activity of life.

¹⁰⁸Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 257.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 258.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid., 259.

¹¹³Ibid. Nettles quotes Spurgeon: “If I have been useful to you in any measure, pray for me; it is the greatest kindness you can do me. If the word as spoken by these lips has been a means of grace to your children, plead for me that others of the young may be brought to Jesus, by my teaching. If you would find my ministry more profitable to your souls, pray for me still more, and let it not be said of your minister that you do not profit by his preaching, and that you have not because you ask not.”

Spurgeon taught, “It is a good rule never to look into the face of man in the morning till you have looked into the face of God; and equally a good rule always to have business with heaven before you have any business with earth.”¹¹⁴ When Spurgeon spoke of “business with heaven” he was referring to private prayer. So important was this that he said, “Neglect of private prayer is the locust which devours the strength of the church.”¹¹⁵ Though Spurgeon admonished those who did not have prayer scheduled each day, it was not just a “set time” that was important for him, he was concerned that Christians maintain “continued communion with God through prayer throughout the day.”¹¹⁶

Spurgeon delivered a message from John 16:26-27 on Sunday evening, November 3, 1878, titled, “Pray, Always Pray.”¹¹⁷ For Spurgeon, prayer was to “ask, and to continue asking” (482) He exclaimed, “Whatever else a believer may fail to do, he should never fail, surely, in asking. . . . If we have never asked God for anything at all, we may be quite sure that we were never converted” (483). With even greater emphasis Spurgeon asserted, “A prayer-less soul must be a Christless soul.” (483). He considered that negligence in prayer was a great failure and an indicator of one’s poor spiritual health.

¹¹⁴Spurgeon, “Sermon 1,138: Morning and Evening Songs,” in *MTP*, 19:597.

¹¹⁵Spurgeon, “Sermon 981: Carried by Four,” in *MTP*, 17:157.

¹¹⁶Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 142.

¹¹⁷Spurgeon, “Sermon 2,800: Pray Always Pray,” in *MTP*, 48:481-92. This sermon provides helpful insight into Spurgeon’s perspective on prayer, and will be given brief analysis in the remainder of this chapter. Parenthetical references in the text of this chapter from this page to the end refer to “Pray Always Pray.” John 16:26, 27 reads, “At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.” Other sermons by Spurgeon that reveal his perspective of prayer include: C. H. Spurgeon, “Sermon 2,788: Prayer for the Church (Daniel 9:17),” in *MTP*, 48:337-348; idem, “Sermon 1,419: Encouragement to Trust and Pray (Isaiah 30:19),” in *MTP*, 24:337-348; idem, “Sermon, 2,437: Prayer the Proof of Godliness (Psalm 32:6),” in *MTP*, 41:517-528, idem, “Sermon, 354: A Sermon for the Week of Prayer (Colossians 4:2),” in *MTP*, 7:49-56; idem, “Sermon, 2,869: Prayer found in the Heart (2 Samuel 7:27),” in *MTP*, 50:61-72; idem, “Sermon, 2,943: Restraining Prayer” (Job 15:4),” in *MTP*, 51:325-336; idem, “Sermon 138: Prayer—the Forerunner of Mercy (Ezekiel 36:37),” in *NPSP*, 3:249-256.

In this sermon, Spurgeon employed the language of family as he taught about prayer. Pointedly, he declared, “If there be any necessity in our homes, let us ask, for our Heavenly Father can supply it” (483). Using illustrations from family life, Spurgeon compared Christians to children who “state their need” to their parents “in childish language.” He urged Christians to pray by bringing their desires to God, as a child would to his parents. He appealed to parental love that moved loving parents to “grant their [child’s] request if it is a right and proper one, and compliance with it is within your power” (483). A child brings requests to his parents in simple language. Therefore, Spurgeon asked, “Do you think that God is pleased with a display of oratory, or that he takes notice of your elocution when you come to the throne of grace?” (483). Spurgeon knew that God was much more interested in one’s “desires” than with their “words.” He wanted Christians to approach God with a freeness of expression and earnestness of heart. They should then ask God for whatever they felt their needs were (483).

Spurgeon asserted that prayer must not be an occasional activity but that one’s “whole life should be spent in asking” (483). Also, prayer was not reserved only for times of trial, but was to be employed in both good and bad times. He reminded his hearers of God’s delight in giving “great things to those who ask them at his hands” (483).

Praying in Jesus’ Name

Yet it was not asking *alone* that Spurgeon insisted upon, but asking in Jesus’ name as commanded in John 16:26. Spurgeon exhorted his church that to ask in the name of Jesus was to consider what Christ accomplished on behalf of his people. He envisioned one praying to God with these words: “Because of what Jesus did, wilt thou not deal favorably with me? I have done nothing that can ensure a favorable answer to my supplication, but wilt thou not give it because Jesus deserves it?” (484). Spurgeon’s conviction was that God does not answer prayer because of the supplicant’s merit, but rather, he answers prayer because of the righteousness of Jesus. He further explained that prayer is like going to a shop to purchase items in another’s name, at their insistence. The

one sending his servant to the shop had previously spoken to the shopkeeper: “Whatever he comes for in my name, let him have it” (484). The shopkeeper is not much concerned about the poverty or wealth of the person who arrives to claim the merchandise; however, he does have utmost confidence in the one who sent the man to pick up the items. Therefore, when one of his children comes to God praying in Jesus name, the Father delights to hear and answer the request. Praying in Jesus name is, therefore, the exclusive privilege of those who belong to Christ by faith.

Earnest Prayer

Spurgeon was concerned that for some people prayer was not taken seriously.

He asked penetrating questions of his congregation:

Is prayer a reality with you, dear friends, or is it a mere mockery? Is it a sort of religious rite that you feel bound to perform, or has it become as essential to your spiritual being as breathing is to your natural being? Is it now to you a matter of course that you should pray? Is it as natural for you to ask of your Father who is in heaven as it is for your little children to ask of you who are fathers on earth? I feel that it must be so with me;—not praying at a certain hour because it is the set time for prayer, but praying because I want to pray, praying because I must pray. A man scarcely needs to be reminded that he must breathe. It is essential to his very life that he should breathe, and it is essential to our spiritual life that we should pray. (486)

Consistent with Spurgeon’s attitude toward Bible reading, he did not want people to pray *merely* out of duty or with a lack of earnestness. Christians should pray heartily because “they have the Holy Spirit to prompt them” (487). For Spurgeon, the Holy Spirit stirred up Christians to pray and led them to know for what they ought to pray. The reality of God’s divine decree, as administered by the Holy Spirit, far from being an excuse not to pray, was the “very reason that we do pray” (487).

The Spirit of God leads us to desire exactly what God has decreed, and though we cannot open and read the book of his decrees, the Holy Spirit can read that book, so he guides us to pray in accordance with its sweet records, and he also maketh intercession for us ‘according to the will of God.’ (487)

Therefore, according to Spurgeon, when Christians pray, they give “echo of the divine purpose” (487).

Trinitarian Theology: A Foundation of Prayer

Spurgeon encouraged his listeners to pray because Christ was interceding for them. Followers of Christ should not hesitate to bring their “blotted, and blurred, and stained with sin” prayers to God because Jesus himself “purifies them, and then, with his own dear hand, he lays them before the mercy seat, and for his sake they are sure to be accepted” (488). The Holy Spirit stirs up prayer, and the work of Christ purifies prayer. Jesus is “our advocate with the Father,” Spurgeon said, “he is always pleading for us,” and therefore, “we have a Divine Intercessor, within the veil, who never forgets to present our prayers before his Father’s throne of grace.” Resting on that great truth, Spurgeon declared, “How boldly ought we to come to the mercy-seat, and what large things we out to ask of God in Christ’s name!” (488). Spurgeon’s Trinitarian theology is obvious throughout his sermon. Seamlessly he moves between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as he encourages his congregation to pray. He asserts that Christians ought to pray because “the Spirit prompts us, and the Son intercedes for us, but [also] because the Father himself loveth us” (488). Knowing these truths is a great encouragement to prayer. Christians are not left alone in their prayers but each member of the Trinity is at work every time a believer in Christ prays. Spurgeon anchored his teaching on prayer solidly to the Bible, in this case, the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

Power in Praying by Faith

Spurgeon concludes his sermon by reminding his hearers that God gave them tremendous power through prayer:

What power I have, at the mercy-seat, with the Spirit to prompt me, Christ to plead for me, and the Father himself smiling at me as I came, and saying to me, “Come and welcome, for I love thee; none can be more welcome than thou art. Come, my child, ask what thou wilt, and it shall be done unto thee.” (490)

Spurgeon then looked out over his congregation and asked, “But, beloved, have you ever really believed that you have this power? Have you not asked and hoped when you ought to have asked and believed?” (490). Herein, Spurgeon underlines the importance of

praying with faith. His desire for his congregation was that they would be able to say: “I am God’s child, and he loves me; and coming to him, through Jesus Christ his Son, and moved by his Holy Spirit, I will ask of him whatsoever I need, for I know that I shall receive that which I have asked of him in the name of Jesus, and for his sake” (490). Once again, Spurgeon employed family language when pleading with his people to pray with power: “Use it [power in prayer] for your children, use it for all your relatives, use it for any of the seat-holders, who sit near you, and are unconverted” (490). Knowing the truths that Spurgeon laid out in his sermon, it was incumbent upon Christians to engage in prayer. The way to make the devil “tremble and flee” was for faithful “men and women” to pray. Strikingly, Spurgeon declared, “The keys of heaven swing at the girdle of the man who knows how to pray” (491). By that he did not mean “commonplace praying” but “such prayer as I have been speaking of,—promoted by the Spirit of God, —first purified and then presented by the Saviour,— and offered by a man who knows that the Father himself loveth him” (491). Spurgeon was “awestruck” as he contemplated “the tremendous power of which prayer is capable.” Though prayer itself is not “omnipotent, yet it commands omnipotence” (491).

It is not enough to pray, but one should always give thanks to God for answered prayer (491). Spurgeon believed that the prayer-less man was an unhappy man. Such a person might be very powerful in the world but his earthly power is of no ultimate use if he does not have power with God (492).

Peter Morden analyzed Spurgeon’s perspective on prayer and concluded: “Spurgeon’s approach to prayer is deeply revealing of the vital place of prayer in his life.” He continues,

Analysis of his practice of prayer reveals a stress on experimental ‘heart’ religion and a particular focus on the cross of Christ. Prayer was an essential means to communion with God. This was sometimes conceived of as communion with the Father through the Son, but often as direct communion with Christ. Spurgeon’s desire for communion with Christ was repeatedly given voice in his published prayers. Also, although he believed wholeheartedly in praying on his own, he

accorded an important place to the corporate. Prayer, both solitary and corporate, was a means by which intense communion with Christ was regularly experienced.¹¹⁸

Family Prayer

As previously noted, Spurgeon learned the value of prayer from his parents and grandparents, and by reading the Puritans.¹¹⁹ Peter Morden argues that the influence of Puritanism framed Spurgeon’s perspective on and practice of family prayer: “The culture of family prayer in the Puritan mould became deeply ingrained in him.”¹²⁰ Morden, quoting Spurgeon, writes,

In the good old Puritan times, it was said, that if you had walked down Cheapside you would have heard in every house the voice of a Psalm at a certain hour of the morning and evening, for there was no house then of professed Christians without family prayer.¹²¹

In a sermon titled, “Prayer-The Forerunner of Mercy” Spurgeon urged his congregation, “Pray for yourselves, pray for your families, pray for the Churches, pray for the one great kingdom of our Lord on earth.”¹²² Regarding families, he pleaded,

Pray for your children. If they be pious you can still pray for them that their piety may be real, that they may be upheld in their profession. And if they be ungodly, you have a whole fountain of arguments for prayer. So long as thou hast a child unpardoned, pray for it; so long as thou hast a child alive that is saved, pray for him, that he may be kept. . . . Pray for your households.¹²³

¹¹⁸Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 143.

¹¹⁹See earlier section of this chapter on Spurgeon’s family influences.

¹²⁰Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People*, 147.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Spurgeon, “Sermon 138: Prayer,” in *NPSP*, 3:254.

¹²³Spurgeon, “Sermon 138: Prayer,” in *NPSP*, 3:255. For an excellent and brief treatment on family worship, see Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016). In this book, Whitney uses Spurgeon (among others) as a model worthy of imitation regarding family worship. See chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis for further information on Spurgeon’s practice of family worship.

Concluding Thoughts

In this section, Spurgeon's perspective on prayer was considered. Spurgeon held prayer to be of great value because it was the means by which God heard and supplied the needs of his children. For Spurgeon, prayer was a heavenly transaction made between a Christian and God. Therefore, Christians should pray persistently and earnestly in the name of Jesus. Encouragingly, Spurgeon reminded his congregation that Jesus was interceding for them. Though prayer was to be made in Jesus' name, for Spurgeon, prayer was a Trinitarian activity. The Father, Son, and Spirit were all engaged when Christians prayed by faith in Christ. Spurgeon was concerned that many professing Christians did not properly esteem communion with God and that, therefore, they did not gather more faithfully for congregational prayer. Throughout this section, attention was frequently drawn to Spurgeon's emphasis on family prayer. Spurgeon not only called his congregation to pray for and with their families, but he used family relationships to illustrate how one is to pray. Just like little children, Christians approach God with simple language in anticipation of a favorable response. Regarding marriage, Spurgeon, appealing to 1 Peter 3, argued that prayer was a motivation to pursue a harmonious relationship with one's spouse. Chapters 3 through 5 of this thesis repeatedly demonstrate that Spurgeon practiced what he preached. He asked Susannah to pray for him, he prayed with Susannah, and he was faithful to make sure that family worship was devotedly practiced in his home.¹²⁴ Spurgeon's theology of prayer and Bible reading was not merely theoretical but also immensely practical as is evident in a study of his life and ministry.

Susannah Spurgeon was one with her husband in her attitude toward prayer. She wrote about her times of private prayer, "Kneeling before the Lord in prayer, in the early morning—it seems so easy to hate sin and dwell in Him that one looks forward to the day's trials and perplexities, that they can all be overcome."¹²⁵ However, as she left

¹²⁴See chaps 3 through 5 of this thesis.

¹²⁵Susannah Spurgeon, *A Basket of Summer Fruit* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1901; repr., Forest, VA: Corner Pillar, 2010), 100.

the “mercy-seat” of prayer and entered into her “daily work and service” she felt the challenge of keeping God in her thoughts. She wrote transparently about her struggle with sin. The remedy for Susannah and for her readers was to “pray in the Spirit” and “walk in the Spirit.”¹²⁶ Susannah prayed, “Blessed Jesus, put forth Your hand, and take Your poor, silly, fluttering dove into the ark of Your love!”¹²⁷ She concluded,

What a revolution there would be in all our Christian circles if each one of us carried into every thought and word and action of the day the fragrance and freshness of our seasons of sweet communion with our Master! It is good to talk with God; it is far better to walk with Him.¹²⁸

Susannah met God in the mornings in prayer and yet she acknowledged the challenge of keeping her heart in tune with God throughout the day when her trials and duties summoned her attention. However, like her husband, she recognized the value of persistent prayer.

As will be evident in subsequent chapters, Charles and Susannah Spurgeon enjoyed a robust spirituality throughout their thirty-six years of marriage, a spirituality that was rooted and grounded in Scripture and prayer.¹²⁹

¹²⁶Spurgeon, *A Basket of Summer Fruit*, 100-1.

¹²⁷Ibid., 102.

¹²⁸Ibid., 102-3.

¹²⁹For a sample of Spurgeon’s answered prayers, see Harold Lindsell, “Charles Spurgeon’s Life Changing Prayers,” *Leadership Journal*, accessed April 23, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1980/summer/8013056.html>.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN THE EARLY RELATIONSHIP OF CHARLES SPURGEON AND SUSANNAH THOMPSON

Though Charles Spurgeon did not know the joys or sorrows that awaited him with his move to London and subsequent marriage to Susannah, he was anchored in the truth of God's sovereign providence over every aspect of his life. He saw the hand of God clearly in creation, salvation, and in the most intricate details of the universe. He was convinced "that every matter which concerns all of us in daily life, bears itself the evident trace of being the handiwork of Jehovah, our God."¹ Spurgeon's view of providence was in line with that of John Gill (1697-1771), a previous pastor of New Park Street Chapel (1720-1771). Gill defined providence as one of the eternal works of God "by which all creatures God has made are preserved, governed, guided and directed."²

Charles, Susannah, and the Providence of God

Susannah shared Charles's understanding of providence as is evident in her recollection of the first time that she heard him preach. Though initially she was not impressed with him, she later interpreted that first encounter through the lens of God's sovereign governance. After Spurgeon's death she wrote,

¹C. H. Spurgeon, "Providence," in *NPSP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970-2006), 4:178. Several other sermons by Spurgeon that deal with the providence of God include C. H. Spurgeon, "The Hair on Your Head Numbered (Matthew 10:30)," in *MTP*, 34:49-60; idem, "Sermon 3114 God's Providence (Ezekiel 1:15-19)," in *MTP*, 54:493-504; idem, "Sermon 1,201: Providence, As Seen in the Book of Esther (Esther 9:1)," in *MTP*, 20:613-624.

²John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (1839; repr., Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1995), 277.

Ah! How little I then thought that my eyes looked on him who was to be my life's beloved; how little I dreamed of the honor God was preparing for me in the near future! It is a mercy that our lives are not left for us to plan, but that our Father chooses for us; else might we sometimes turn away from our best blessings, and put from us the choicest and loveliest gifts of His providence.³

From Susannah's perspective, God's providence included his planning of the lives of His people, His choice of everything that happens to His people, and His good gifts to His people.

Susannah was familiar with New Park Street Chapel in London since she attended church services there with her parents. She once wrote of the Chapel, "I was no stranger to the place" (2:3). It was Sunday morning December 18, 1853, that Charles first preached at the church.⁴ Though Susannah was not in attendance at the morning service, through the persuasion of deacon Thomas Olney, at whose home she was visiting, Susannah attended the evening service.⁵ Olney and his family were encouraged about Spurgeon, and they believed that his morning sermon was an indicator of great things to

³C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897–99; repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992), 2:5. Parenthetical page numbers referenced within the text of this chapter are from this book.

⁴There is some confusion over the actual date Spurgeon first preached in London. In a letter from Spurgeon to New Park Street Chapel he agreed to preach for them on December 11, 1853 (1:317). Later in the *Autobiography* the date given for the first sermon at New Park Street is December 18, 1853 (1:321). J. C. Carlile places Spurgeon's first sermon as December 11, and called it "the most memorable date in the history of modern Baptists." He goes further and refers to the 11th as "one of the two or three great dates in the history of Christianity in England." J. C. Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society and The Kingsgate Press, 1933), 90. Carlile's estimation of the day is significant because his biography of Spurgeon is viewed as a corrective to biographies that had not, in Carlile's view, treated Spurgeon objectively (5). Charles Ray records the day of Spurgeon's first sermon as December 18. Charles Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, in *Free Grace and Dying Love* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 131; as do others, such as Arnold Dallimore, *C. H. Spurgeon: The New Biography* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 43. It may be that the original date scheduled was December 11, but it was changed to the December 18.

⁵Susannah referred to Thomas Olney as "Father Olney." She writes, "From my childhood I have been the greatly-privileged favourite with Mr. and Mrs. Olney, Senr. And I was a constant visitor to their homes, both in the Borough and West Croydon, and it was by reason of this mutual love that I found myself in their pew at the dear old chapel on that Sabbath evening, December 18th, 1853" (2:4). Tom Nettles states that Susannah Thompson was a niece of the Olneys. Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 67.

come (2:4). Susannah described the excitement of the Olney family after they returned from the morning service: “They had never before heard such preaching; they were bewildered and amazed, but they had been fed with royal dainties” (2:4). However, Spurgeon was discouraged because attendance at that first service was scant and he longed to be back at Waterbeach among the people who loved and supported him (2:4).⁶ The Olney’s determined to encourage the nineteen-year-old preacher by securing a larger crowd for the Sunday night service. Therefore, they spent Sunday afternoon enlisting friends to attend the evening’s sermon.

Susannah’s mind swelled with fond memories of the historic chapel as she awaited the appearance of Spurgeon at the pulpit. She was fascinated by the architecture as well as the order of service that unfolded at the church each Sunday. She recalled select memories from a lifetime of experiences at the church, and she remembered everything from a deacon’s attire, to the “curious pulpit without any stairs,” and to the manner that the previous pastor, James Smith, came to the pulpit. Smith was a godly man and Susannah had benefitted much from his ministry (2:3-4). The Olney’s referred to Susannah as “little Susie,” and they were thankful that she would join them to hear Spurgeon preach. Susannah loved the Olney family, but she was unenthusiastic about hearing Spurgeon. Her “ideas of the dignity and propriety of ministry were rather shocked . . . by the reports which the morning worshippers had brought back concerning the young man’s unconventional outward appearance!” Susannah’s concern about Spurgeon’s appearance provides a glimpse into her spiritual immaturity. However, she wanted to please the Olneys and, as she would write many years later, she “was present at the second sermon, which my precious husband preached in London” (2:5).

⁶Spurgeon had not sought out New Park Street Chapel (or any other church). Two letters from Spurgeon to New Park Street reveal that he had a warm and loving relationship with the people of the village of Waterbeach, though he recognized they could not fully support him financially over the long haul. Even so, he was content to remain with the village people as long as God determined. Robert Schindler, *From the Usher’s Desk to the Tabernacle Pulpit: The Life and Labors of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1892), 65-70.

With an eye to propriety that was cultivated by Victorian culture and her refined upbringing, Susannah was indeed offended by the appearance, mannerisms, style, and preaching of the guest preacher. She declared, “For, if the whole truth be told, I was not at all fascinated by the young orator’s eloquence, while his countrified manner and speech excited more regret than reverence” (2:5). After Spurgeon’s death, reflecting on the ill-informed sentiments of her younger days, she lamented that she had been “foolish” and that she “was not spiritually-minded enough to understand his earnest presentation of the gospel, and his powerful pleading with sinners” (2:8).

Susannah and New Park Street Chapel’s Spiritual Challenges

Though Susannah’s sensitivities were initially challenged by Spurgeon’s appearance and mannerisms, more substantive issues troubled her. She was distressed over her spiritual condition. She confessed to not being “spiritually minded enough” to see beyond Spurgeon’s country exterior and into the depths of his gospel-saturated heart. She allowed her offended sensibilities to hinder her from giving him a fair hearing. Indeed, though she had been awakened to true salvation a year prior at the Poultry Chapel, she lacked assurance of true faith and had fallen captive to doubt.⁷ She later reflected, “None could have more needed the quickening and awakening which I received from the earnest pleadings and warnings of that voice,—soon to be the sweetest in all the world to me” (2:6). Susannah “needed” biblical preaching and she found help for her travails through the ministry of Charles Spurgeon.

New Park Street Chapel had its own problems and was greatly diminished from its former days of vibrancy. Like Susannah, the church needed the ministry of the Word. Though the church faced significant obstacles they still had a remnant of people who prayed that God would bring revival to the church (1:339). Minutes from a church meeting

⁷For an account of the Poultry Chapel experience, see chap. 2 of this thesis. See also Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:5-6.

on December 14, 1853, offer insight into difficulties the church faced: “Dear Brethren, We regret that, during the past year, we have made no additions to our numbers in consequence of our being without a Pastor.” Finances had decreased along with church attendance. The minutes, which were sent to the London Baptist Association, closed with these revealing words: “We enclose our statistics. Brethren, pray for us” (1:340).⁸ After hearing Spurgeon preach, the church was hopeful that better days were ahead. Following a trial period of three months (which began in late January 1854), the church overwhelmingly extended a call for Spurgeon to serve as their pastor. On April 28, 1854, he sent a letter to the church in which he simply stated, “I ACCEPT IT” (1:352).⁹ He further requested that the church cooperate with him by assisting in his ministry: “I entreat of you to remember me in prayer,” and “I ask for your co-operation in every good work; in visiting the sick, in bringing in enquirers, and in mutual edification” (1:353). Though he was but a young man, he demonstrated maturity by his request for help, and by God’s grace he was ready for the task at hand.¹⁰ Through Spurgeon’s ministry, the church was

⁸New Park Street Chapel was not the only Baptist congregation facing challenges. Carlile refers to a report from The Baptist Annual Assembly meeting in 1854 that indicated that churches in the Baptist Union were increasing at a rate “smaller than in preceding years, and smaller than it has been in any year since 1834. . . . The October meeting of the London Association in 1855, was attended by six ministers and three laymen, representing thirty-three churches. . . . The denominational outlook afforded no inspiration to the visiting minister.” Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 90-91. London itself was under duress of difficult times, including poverty, immorality, and unsanitary conditions. Carlile recounted that “two-thirds of the whole child population [was] growing up not only practically without schooling or religious influences of any kind, but also indescribably brutal and immoral; living amid the unthinkable filth of vilely overcrowded courts unprovided with water supply or sanitary conveniences, existing always at the lowest level of physical health, and constantly decimated by disease; incessantly under temptation by the flaring gin palaces which alone relieved the monotony of the mean streets and dark alleys to which they were doomed; graduating almost inevitably into vice and crime amid the now incredible street life of an unpoliced metropolis” (94). Though Spurgeon did not initially like London, by the time the evening service was complete, his attitude towards the city and church changed in a more positive direction (101-2).

⁹Emphasis original.

¹⁰Though it might seem unusual that New Park Street, with their prominent history of esteemed pastors such as John Gill and Benjamin Keach, would call a nineteen-year-old to serve as their pastor, it was not without precedence in the history of the church. Patricia Kruppa notes, “Two of his famous predecessors, John Gill and John Rippon, had also been only nineteen when called to preach to the congregation, so Spurgeon’s youth was not a great deterrent, and may have tempted some to hope that history would repeat itself. Spurgeon confided to his father that many had ‘expressed their belief that my

revitalized and experienced both numerical and spiritual growth, and Susannah also recovered from her spiritual decline.

The Pilgrim's Progress as a Means of Spiritual Help

After Spurgeon's death, Susannah recounted how in the early days of his pastorate at New Park Street he had reached out to help her. She remembered that she was "alarmed at my backsliding state" and that she "sought spiritual help and guidance from Mr. William Olney (Father Olney's second son, and my cousin by marriage)" (2:6). Susannah imagined that William Olney communicated with Spurgeon concerning her spiritual condition. She recalled being "greatly surprised to receive from Mr. Spurgeon an illustrated copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in which he had written the inscription:— 'Miss Thompson, with desires for her progress in the blessed pilgrimage. From C. H. Spurgeon, April, 20, 1854'" (2:6-7).¹¹

Spurgeon displayed remarkable insight when he turned to John Bunyan's (1628–1688) *Pilgrim's Progress* as a means of help for Susannah. What was it about Bunyan's allegory that Spurgeon found useful to assist Susannah in "her progress in the blessed pilgrimage?" In 1903, eleven years after the death of his father, Thomas Spurgeon wrote in the foreword of *Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress* that his father was "in love

originality, or even eccentricity, was the very thing to draw a London audience.' It seems likely that the congregation at the New Park Street Chapel decided to gamble on Spurgeon, hoping that his fresh manner and unconventional sermons might revive their sagging fortunes." Patricia Stallings Kruppa, *A Preacher's Progress* (New York: Garland, 1982), 70.

¹¹Interestingly, Susannah referred to William Olney as "a true Mr. Greatheart" (2:6). "Greatheart" is a character from *Pilgrim's Progress*. The language of *Pilgrim's Progress* was a part of the vocabulary of both Charles and Susannah. Tom Nettles, commenting on Spurgeon's love for *Pilgrim's Progress*, writes, "At the top of the Puritan standard for spirituality, creativity, and practical knowledge—the book that rendered all mere novelists as pretenders to literary art—was *Pilgrim's Progress* by the tinker from Bedford, John Bunyan. Throughout Spurgeon's life he "sought to review every edition" of *Pilgrim's* "and, if possible, commended it for a particular audience appropriate to the binding, type-press, and price." Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 443.

with John Bunyan” and was “akin to him in faith and thought and language.”¹² Spurgeon’s *Pictures* first appeared over a two-year period in *The Sword and The Trowel*. Spurgeon knew *Pilgrim’s Progress* best of all the Puritan books that he had devoured from childhood. The “pictures” were not only included in Spurgeon’s monthly missive *The Sword and The Trowel*, but they were also the subjects of numerous Monday night prayer meetings at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.¹³ The Monday night addresses were especially designed for newer Christians, but, as Thomas Spurgeon explained, “The more advanced in his congregation . . . were eager and delighted listeners, too.” Thomas surmised, “Here [in *Pilgrim’s Progress*] is milk for babes and meat for men. . . . Moreover, the meat is such that the ‘babes’ will enjoy a taste of it, and the ‘men’ will be all the better for a sip or two of the milk.”¹⁴ Thomas Spurgeon’s insight provides evidence that his father believed that *Pilgrim’s Progress*, though especially helpful for new Christians, was beneficial to all followers of Christ. Therefore, it is not surprising that Spurgeon considered *Pilgrim’s* beneficial to Susannah in her progress of faith. Peter Morden argues that Bunyan’s writing influenced Spurgeon by providing “a framework for understanding the Christian life” and by offering a way for Spurgeon to “make sense of particular experiences that occurred

¹²C. H. Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim’s Progress: A Commentary on Portions of John Bunyan’s Immortal Allegory* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 4.

¹³The Metropolitan Tabernacle was first considered in 1856 as a solution to the growing number of people who came to hear Spurgeon preach. The Tabernacle would replace the New Park Street Chapel. Some people “laughed at the idea of erecting as a place of worship an edifice to hold five thousand persons.” However, Spurgeon travelled widely and collected funds for the Tabernacle. It is noted, “In 1860 a large and enthusiastic meeting was held in the building before it was finished, at which much money was given and more promised.” The official opening service was on March 25, 1861. Henry Davenport Northrop, *Life and Works of Charles H. Spurgeon: Being a Graphic Account of the Greatest Preacher of Modern Times* (Cincinnati: W. H. Ferguson, 1890), 73-76.

¹⁴Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim’s Progress*, 4.

along a Christian's journey."¹⁵ Certainly, Spurgeon hoped for such positive results with Susannah.

It is interesting to ponder why Spurgeon, who loved the Bible above all books, did not simply give Susannah a copy of the Bible with relevant passages marked which would help her to recover from her spiritual regression. Though the answer to that question cannot be known with certainty, it is likely that he chose *Pilgrim's Progress* instead because Susannah already had ready access to and familiarity with the Bible. *Pilgrim's Progress* focused on the Christian life allegorically and with vivid word pictures that were inviting and attractive. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan masterfully wove a story of the book's primary character "Christian," his repentance from sin, faith in Christ, and his pilgrimage to heaven. Spurgeon's love of Bunyan's book was not a blind and uncritical love: "I am a great lover of John Bunyan, but I do not believe him infallible"¹⁶ Notwithstanding, *Pilgrim's Progress* was, in Spurgeon's view, the right book for Susannah. She, though twenty-two years old, was a new convert and a discouraged one at

¹⁵Peter Morden, *Communion with Christ and His People: The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 29. Morden's book includes a detailed account of Bunyan's influence on Spurgeon (26–30). He notes the importance of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* to Spurgeon but argues that the writings of John Bunyan "were of greater significance" with *Pilgrim's Progress* having "the greatest impact" (26). Morden asserts that it is significant that "Bunyan's language, metaphors, and imagery became crucial to the way Spurgeon described his spiritual experience, crucial, indeed, to his conception of the Christian life." (26). Morden draws attention to a "spiritual diary" that Spurgeon kept "between April and June 1850" that contained numerous references to characters and places in Bunyan's allegory (26-27). He also points to a number of Spurgeon's early sermons that clearly display Bunyan's influence on Spurgeon. Morden writes, "*Pilgrim's Progress* provided the imagery by which the teenage pastor could speak to others about the Christian life" (27). Spurgeon's references to Bunyan's writings continued after he moved from Waterbeach to London as is evident in his sermons and in *The Sword and Trowel* (28).

¹⁶Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress*, 23. Spurgeon believed that Bunyan ought to have placed the cross before the wicket gate instead of inside of the gate. Spurgeon declared, "We must not say to the sinner: 'Now, sinner, if thou wilt be saved, go to the baptismal pool; go to the wicket-gate; go to the church; do this or that.' No, the cross should be right in front of the wicket-gate; and we should say to the sinner: 'Throw thyself down there, and thou art safe; but thou art not safe till thou canst cast off thy burden, and lie at the foot of the cross, and find peace in Jesus.'" Of course Bunyan understood that the cross of Christ was of first importance. He believed that Bunyan described how things often are for the new convert rather than how they ought to be (23-24).

that.¹⁷ Just as Bunyan’s writings had helped Charles from the time of his childhood, Spurgeon was confident that Bunyan’s allegory would reverse Susannah’s spiritual decline. She considered Spurgeon’s gift to her as indicative of his desire to “help a struggling soul heavenward” (2:7). She said of Spurgeon, “I was greatly impressed by his concern for me, and the book became very precious as well as helpful” (2:7).¹⁸

Since both Charles and Susannah were regular visitors at the Olney home, they had occasion to see one another often. As Susannah got to know Charles better, she increasingly confided in him by sharing her spiritual concerns. Spurgeon proved to be a helpful counselor to Susannah through their regular interaction as well as by his preaching. Susannah recalled,

By degrees, though with much trembling, I told him of my state before God, and he gently led me, by his preaching, and by his conversations, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the cross of Christ for the peace and pardon my weary soul was longing for. (2:7)

That *Pilgrim’s Progress* was so dear to Charles Spurgeon reveals why he viewed it as a helpful tool for cultivating spirituality in his church, in his friend Susannah, and in himself. Thomas Spurgeon wrote, “He has spoken of him [John Bunyan] over and over again as ‘my great favorite.’ He stated as the reason for Spurgeon’s appreciation for Bunyan as that they both loved, ‘The Book of Books.’”¹⁹ Bunyan and Spurgeon loved the Bible and both sought to skillfully communicate it to their hearers. Spurgeon’s love of Scripture is

¹⁷Susannah had been converted a year prior under the preaching of S. B. Bergne of the nearby Poultry Chapel. See chap. 2 of this thesis.

¹⁸Certainly Susannah was familiar with *Pilgrim’s Progress*, but her statement, that the book became “very precious as well as helpful” to her, indicates that either she had not read the book or had not highly valued it. An article in *Christianity Today* states, “Samuel Taylor Coleridge thought that Bunyan’s allegory the best *Summa Theologiae Evangelicae* ever produced by a writer not miraculously inspired. Adulation continued unabated throughout the nineteenth century and reached a peak in the evangelical fervor of the Victorian era.” James F. Forrest, “The Pilgrim’s Progress: A Dream that Endures,” *Christianity Today*, July 1, 1986, accessed April 17, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1986/issue11/1124.html>. With the popularity of *Pilgrim’s Progress* it is likely that Susannah had read it, but it obviously had a different effect on her when she read it again as a gift from her pastor Charles Spurgeon.

¹⁹Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim’s Progress*, 5. See chap. 2 of this thesis for further insight into Spurgeon’s love for *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

exactly why he chose Bunyan's book as a means to help Susannah grow in her own knowledge of the Bible. Spurgeon believed that by reading Bunyan, Susannah would better understand Scripture. Thomas Spurgeon commented,

Urging the earnest study of the Scriptures, C. H. Spurgeon once said: "Oh, that you and I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, and get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat into the leaf, and consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord—not crawl over its surface, but eat right into it till we have taken it into our inmost parts. It is idle merely to let the eye glance over the words, or to recollect the poetical expressions, or the historic facts; but it is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in Scriptural language, and your very style is fashioned upon Scripture models, and, what is better still, your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord. I would quote John Bunyan as an instance of what I mean. Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself. He had read it till his very soul was saturated with Scripture; and, though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his *Pilgrim's Progress*—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, 'Why, this man is a living Bible!' Prick him anywhere; his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God. I commend his example to you, beloved."²⁰

For Spurgeon, reading Bunyan was "almost like reading the Bible itself." He came to that conclusion because Bunyan was "saturated with Scripture" and "the very essence of the Bible flows through him." It is apparent when reading Spurgeon that he is, in this regard, like Bunyan. Spurgeon's sermons are saturated with allusions to Scripture as a means of supporting or illustrating his primary text. Spurgeon confessed,

Next to the Bible, the book that I value most is John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times. It is a volume of which I never seem to tire; and the secret of its freshness is that it is so largely compiled from the Scriptures. It is really Biblical teaching put into the form of a simple yet very striking allegory.²¹

It is likely, therefore, that Spurgeon chose to give Susannah the gift of *Pilgrim's Progress* for numerous reasons. First, Bunyan's classic had a shaping influence on Spurgeon himself. Second, Spurgeon believed that *The Pilgrim's Progress* faithfully communicated Scripture. As Susannah read Bunyan's masterpiece, she would take in

²⁰Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress*, 5-6.

²¹Ibid., 11.

biblical teaching. Third, it was accessible to readers in a way that was not as tedious as other great, but more scholarly writers, such as John Owen or John Gill.²² Spurgeon certainly believed that Bunyan's book could also be counted on as a reliable tool to open for Susannah a greater understanding of the importance of Bible reading *and* prayer.

“Christian,” the primary character in *Pilgrim's Progress*, seeks God in prayer and searches for answers in the Scripture.²³ Bunyan also introduces a character, “Pliable,” in the story. Pliable was more interested in hearing Christian's descriptions, taken from “the Book” about heaven, than he was in reading the “Book” itself. Spurgeon laments Pliable's desire for heavenly pictures without a commitment to prayer, personal Scripture reading, and without considering the problem of sin. Spurgeon argued that Christian's desire to read from the “Book” was commendable, but Bunyan also intended to teach that Bible reading and prayer go hand-in-hand. Spurgeon, contrasting Christian's commitment to the Scripture with Pliable's superficial interest, wrote,

What he [Pliable] heard Christian read from the Book did not make him sorrowful, but enchanted and delighted him. He only thought of the Celestial Country, not of the plague of his own heart, nor of the damnable nature of his sin. These things had never come home with power to him as they had to Christian, and therefore he did not say: “Come, let us kneel together, and plead for mercy;” but he said, “Well, my good companion, glad am I to hear of these things; come on, let us mend our pace.” Yes, at first, there are none who are so enthusiastic as these empty, hollow ones. “Let us mend our pace,” said Pliable. Surely, brethren, the advice is good, but I do not like it from such lips. It is a very proper exhortation in its place, but not when it comes from one who has never been burdened on account of sin, nor broken under the hammer of God's law, nor made to feel his own nothingness and worthlessness.²⁴

Spurgeon's own conversion transpired as he was drawn to Christ by a sense of his sin and his need for a Savior. Such had led him to pray and seek God through the Scripture. Once a Christian, Spurgeon continued his battle against sin. Therefore, he identified with Christian and was able to see through Pliable's superficial desires for the “Celestial

²²Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress*, 6.

²³Bunyan refers to the Bible as “The Book.”

²⁴Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress*, 19-20.

Country.” It is reasonable to conclude that Spurgeon envisioned Susannah reading *Pilgrim’s Progress* with a keen perception that allowed the full-orbed scriptural doctrines of salvation and sanctification, communicated in Bunyan’s work, to be planted deep in her heart. It is likely that Spurgeon imagined that Susannah would learn, from the positive example of Christian and the negative example of Pliable, to deeper commitment to Scripture reading and prayer.

Spurgeon wanted to assist Susannah in her journey to the Celestial City by his gift of Bunyan’s masterpiece to her. From it she would read in poignant and simple language and with vivid descriptors, the pathway of righteousness. Spurgeon believed in the supremacy of Scripture over all other books, yet he valued a helpful guide like Bunyan to creatively explain the path to heaven and to help Susannah with her doubts.²⁵

Charles, Susannah, and The Crystal Palace

Spurgeon’s pastoral concern for Susannah soon developed into romantic affection. The story of Spurgeon expressing his growing love for Susannah is also a testimony of God’s providence in uniting their hearts. Additionally, it provides another example of how Spurgeon used books in his communication with Susannah.

June 10, 1854, was a day of fanfare in London with the re-opening of the Crystal Palace. The Palace, crafted with iron and glass, was the genius of the famed designer Sir Joseph Paxton (1803–1865) and was an architectural marvel. It had originally been built at London’s Hyde Park as a temporary hall for the Great Exhibition of 1851. Constructed in less than a year, it was dismantled six months after the Exhibition and later moved to a

²⁵To better understand the impact of John Bunyan on the ministry of Spurgeon, see Christian T. George, “Jesus Christ, the ‘Prince of Pilgrims’: A Critical Analysis of the Ontological, Functional, and Exegetical Christologies in the Sermons, Writings, and Lectures of Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1894-1892)” (Ph.D. thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2011), 261-68, accessed March 3, 2015, <http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/bitstream/10023/3211/3/ChristianGeorgePhDThesis.pdf>.

permanent location in the south London suburb, Sydenham Hill.²⁶ Beyond the magnificent building itself were the stunning grounds surrounding the palace, which contained gardens, fountains, and numerous models of extinct animals. In the midst of the excitement of the Palace's grand celebration a similarly impressive love-story was unfolding.

Charles Spurgeon and Susannah Thompson were seated together with friends from the New Park Street Chapel. The crowd anxiously anticipated the Palace's opening ceremony when Charles Spurgeon handed a copy of Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* to Susannah. The book was opened to a section titled, "Of Marriage." In that poem, Tupper wrote that a man should prayerfully seek a wife from God:

Seek a good wife of thy God, for she is the best gift of his providence;
Yet ask not in bold confidence that which he hath not promised.
Thou knowest not his good will:—be thy prayer then submissive thereunto;
And leave the petition to his mercy, assured that he will deal well with thee.
If thou art to have a wife of thy youth, she is now living on the earth
Therefore think of her, and pray for her weal; yea, though thou has not seen her.²⁷

Spurgeon pointed to Tupper's words and whispered to Susannah, "Do you pray for him who is to be your husband?"²⁸ Susannah, recalling that day, wrote,

I do not remember that the question received any vocal answer; but my fast beating heart, which sent a tell-tale flush to my cheeks, and my downcast eyes, which feared to reveal the light which at once dawned in them, may have spoken a language which love understood. From that moment, a very quiet and subdued little maiden sat by the young Pastor's side, and while the brilliant procession passed round the Palace, I do not think she took so much note of the glittering pageant defiling before her, as of the crowd of newly-awakened emotions which were palpitating within her heart. (2:8)

Charles and Susannah were able to slip away from the group that they were seated with and walk together throughout the building, around the Palace gardens, and down to the lake. At the lake they viewed the "colossal forms of extinct monsters." These dinosaur

²⁶"AD Classics: The Crystal Palace/Joseph Paxton," accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.archdaily.com/397949/ad-classic-the-crystal-palace-joseph-paxton/>.

²⁷M. F. Tupper, *The Poetical Works of Martin Tupper: Including Proverbial Philosophy, A Thousand Lines, Hactenus, Geraldine, and Other Poems*, series 1, *Proverbial Philosophy*, "Of Marriage" (New York: John Wilen, 1859), 156.

²⁸Ibid.

models were fascinating to the couple, but more importantly, God was creating a life-long bond of love between them. Susannah described the experience: “During that walk, on that memorable day in June, I believe God Himself united us to each other forever. From that time our friendship grew apace, and quickly ripened into deepest love” (2:8). Susannah said of the Crystal Palace that it “was a favorite resort with us.” She declared, “It possessed great attractions of its own, and perhaps the associations of the opening day gave it added grace in our eyes” (2:13). Both Charles and Susannah had season tickets to the Palace, and from that time forward, met regularly there to walk and talk with one another (2:13-14). The Palace with its colorful gardens provided a helpful context for their love to grow.

Though the Crystal Palace was destroyed by fire in 1936, remnants of its former glory remain, including the dinosaur models. Today one can view the Palace ruins, walk the grounds, visit the lake, and observe the representations of the extinct creatures that Susannah wrote about. It is not difficult to imagine Charles and Susannah exiting the great Palace, stopping by the fountains, taking a path to the lake, and viewing those same creature models. Though it is a moving experience to walk in the steps of Charles and Susannah, the greater opportunity is to follow the imprints of their spirituality. Just as Spurgeon had helped Susannah in her spiritual development with his gift of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he used Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy* not only to unveil his love for her but also to highlight the importance of prayer in the relationship between a man and a woman. All of the events of that June evening are further evidences of the superintending hand of God in the union of Charles and Susannah.

Charles and Susannah's Engagement

Just two months after Spurgeon revealed his love to Susannah at the Crystal Palace, he proposed to her on August 2, 1854, in her grandparents' garden. Later Susannah reflected upon that experience: “To this day, I think of that old garden as a sacred place, a paradise of happiness, since there my beloved sought me for his very own, and told me

how much he loved me” (2:8-9). An example of Susannah’s commitment to prayer is seen in the way she responded to the proposal. Overcome with thanksgiving, she retreated to a private room in her grandparents’ home. She wrote, “I knelt before God, and praised and thanked him with happy tears, for his great mercy in giving me the love of so good a man” (2:8-9). She confessed to not fully knowing, at that time, the extent of Spurgeon’s greatness. She intimated that had she had fully grasped what being Spurgeon’s wife would entail, she would have been “overwhelmed.” Susannah’s growing spirituality is obvious in her account of looking to God in prayer and acknowledging his providence (2:8-9). She recorded in her diary, “August 2, 1854: It is impossible to write down all that occurred to me this morning. I can only adore in silence the mercy of my God, and praise Him for all His benefits” (2:9).

Charles Continues to Facilitate Susannah’s Spiritual Growth

The couple’s engagement period is replete with examples of how Charles took Susannah’s spiritual growth seriously and understood his role in her development in godliness. The gift of *Pilgrim’s Progress* was an early evidence of Spurgeon’s commitment to Susannah’s sanctification. The usage of Tupper’s book pointed to their need for prayer, and Spurgeon looked to yet another book, this one by Puritan pastor and author Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), as an encouragement to Susannah during the months preceding their marriage.²⁹ All three books played a part in underlining the importance of Bible intake

²⁹Susannah described the volume by Thomas Brooks as a “rusty-looking book.” Spurgeon asked her to “go carefully through *this* volume” (emphasis added). Spurgeon wanted Susannah to find edifying statements in the book and mark them. From Susannah’s markings, Spurgeon later published *Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks*. Though Susannah does not refer to the title of the “rusty-looking book,” the modern reprint by The Banner of Truth Trust states that *Smooth Stones* was “gathered by Spurgeon out of the 6 volume set of Brooks’s *Works*.” Thomas Brooks, *Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks*, ed. C. H. Spurgeon (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), back cover. The statement by Banner is unintentionally a bit misleading. The dust jacket of the Banner edition of *Works of Thomas Brooks* states, “The definitive edition of the Works of Brooks, here reissued, was first published by James Nichol in 1866.” Thomas Brooks, *Works of Thomas Brooks*, 6 vols. (1867-1967; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001). An 1860 edition of *Smooth Stones* referred to it as “being a collection of sentences, illustrations, and quaint sayings, from the works of that renowned Puritan, Thomas Brooks.”

and prayer. *Pilgrim's Progress* by its explanation of Scripture via allegory, *Proverbial Philosophy* with its intimation that one should pray for their spouse, and Brooks with his rich, scripturally-grounded Puritan theology.³⁰

The Works of Thomas Brooks

Susannah was rather stunned when Charles said to her, “I want you to go carefully through this volume, marking all those paragraphs and sentences that strike you as being particularly sweet, or quaint, or instructive; will you do this for me?” Such an undertaking was a first for Susannah, but she described her findings in the Brooks volume as “bright diamonds and red gold.” She elaborated,

Love . . . was a matchless teacher, and I was a willing pupil; and so, with help and suggestion from so dear a tutor, the work went on from day to day till, in due time, a small volume made its appearance, which he called, *Smooth Stones Taken From Ancient Brooks*. This title was a pleasant and Puritanic play upon the author's name,

Thomas Brooks, *Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks*, ed. C. H. Spurgeon (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1860), accessed October 19, 2015. https://books.google.com/books?id=ZVENAAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false. *Smooth Stones* was written prior to the publication of the six-volume set. I did a brief survey of some of the statements in *Smooth Stones* and found that the quotes came from a variety of Brooks' writings. Spurgeon referred to Brooks as “head and shoulders above all the people, not in his stature (like Saul), but in mind, and soul, and grace.” Spurgeon, in Brooks, *Smooth Stones*, Banner ed., v. Spurgeon wrote of *Works of Thomas Brooks*, “The volumes now before us are by that marvelously rich author Thomas Brooks, whose wealth of imagery surpasses all others of his age. The mere marginal notes of Brooks are more valuable than pages of ordinary writers. . . . Of all the Puritans he is the most readable, if we except John Bunyan.” C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel* (1866), dust jacket. One of the book titles in *Works of Thomas Brooks* includes the well-known *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*. Brooks was educated at Cambridge and licensed as a preacher around 1640. Later he became the minister at Thomas Apostle's, London, and still later at St Margaret's, London. Brooks, *Works of Thomas Brooks*, dust jacket.

³⁰In the preface to *Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks*, Spurgeon wrote, “One of these pithy extracts may assist our meditations for a whole day, and may open up some sweet passage of Scripture to our understandings, and perhaps some brief sentence may stick in the sinner's conscience, like an arrow from the bow of God.” C. H. Spurgeon, in Thomas Brooks, *Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks: Collected Sayings of Thomas Brooks*, ed. C. H. Spurgeon (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1860; repr., Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), iv. Spurgeon wrote that Brooks wanted his readers and hearers to “make Christ and Scripture the only foundation for your souls, and for faith to build upon” (vii). One selection Charles and Susannah included in *Smooth Stones* suffices to illustrate that Brooks saw prayer as a significant discipline in one's spiritual growth: “Much of a Christian's spiritual strength lies in secret prayer, as Samson's did in his hair. Nothing disarms Satan and weakens sin like this. Secret prayers are the pillars of smoke wherein the soul ascends to God out of the wilderness of this world. Secret prayer is Jacob's ladder, where you have God descending into the soul, and the soul sweetly ascending to God. Secret meals are very fattening, and secret duties are very soul-enriching” (30-31).

and I think the compilers were well pleased with the results of their happy work together. I believe the little book is out of print now, and copies are very rarely to be met with; but those who possess them may feel an added interest in their perusal, now that they know the sweet love-story which hides between their pages. (2:19)³¹

What did Spurgeon hope to accomplish by asking Susannah to read and mark the book by Thomas Brooks? He was providing biblical instruction for her. Spurgeon believed that the sermons and writings of Brooks were solid biblical expositions. He said of Brooks, “He had an eagle eye of faith, as well as the eagle wing of imagination.”³² A strong foundation was being laid, upon which both Charles and Susannah would be able to stand upon as they weathered the storms and navigated the challenges of marriage and ministry.

It was under such tutelage by Charles that Susannah applied for church membership at New Park Street Chapel. The membership requirements necessitated that Susannah write out her testimony of faith in Christ. This testimony was presented to a church leader who noted his analysis in an official church book.³³ Susannah’s account of her faith in Christ delighted Charles, and he wrote to her both to share his joy and to offer further counsel:

If I know anything of spiritual symptoms, I think I know a cure for you. Your position is not the sphere for earnest labour for Christ. You have done all you could in more ways than one; but you are not brought into actual contact either with the saints or with the sinful, sick, or miserable, whom you could serve. Active service brings with it warmth, and this tends to remove doubting, for our works thus become evidence of our calling and election.³⁴

Spurgeon discerningly avoided blurring the lines between his pastoral duties and his growing romantic affection for Susannah. In the aforementioned letter he wrote, “Mark, I

³¹Brooks, *Smooth Stones*, Banner ed., references a first publication date of 1855. This was during Charles and Susannah’s engagement. No edition of *Smooth Stones* mentions Susannah’s contribution to the book.

³²Ibid., v.

³³I had the opportunity to view some of the official books of baptisms and testimonies (from Spurgeon’s day) at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. After the elders met with potential member candidates, Spurgeon himself would examine the record and his margin notes can be seen in the books. As far as present day Tabernacle leaders know, the book containing Susannah’s testimony record no longer exists.

³⁴Iain Murray, *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992) 54.

write not now as your *admiring friend* but impartially as your Pastor” (2:10). Spurgeon’s response to Susannah’s testimony indicates that he recognized the disciplines of Bible reading and prayer that she had employed for her spiritual growth (certainly, including the reading of Bunyan and Brooks). However, he gently encouraged her to engage her faith in acts of service. He believed that active service to fellow Christians would result in Susannah finding relief from her doubt and evidence of her salvation. Through *Pilgrim’s Progress* Susannah learned when in “Doubting Castle” to remember the promises of God. When “Giant Despair” held Christian and Hopeful captive they only needed to pray and bring to mind God’s promises in order to be set free. Bunyan wrote,

Well, on *Saturday* about midnight they began to *pray*, and they continued in Prayer till almost break of day. Now, a little before it was Day, good *Christian* as one half amazed, brake out in this passionate speech; What a Fool, quoth he, am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, where I may as well walk at liberty? I have a key in my bosom, called *Promise*, that will I am persuaded open any loci in *Doubting-Castle*. Then said *Hopeful*, That’s good news, good brother, pluck it out of thy bosom and try. Then *Christian* pulled it out of his bosom, and began to try at the dungeon door. Whose bolt (as he turned the Key gave back, and the door flew open with ease, and *Christian* and *Hopeful* both came out.³⁵

For Spurgeon, Susannah had to first remember the promises of God and then she had to act upon them. She had to insert the key and open the gate and return to the “King’s Highway.”³⁶ Travelling the “King’s Highway” included serving others. Susannah heeded his counsel. Spurgeon encouraged Susannah and then he rejoiced in her joyful testimony of faith. Careful not to flatter her, Spurgeon nevertheless shared his conviction with Susannah that he believed her to be a true Christian: “God in his mercy showed me that you were indeed *elect*.” Spurgeon’s conclusion about Susannah’s spirituality came through observation and in large part through reading of her conversion experience, and spiritual growth. As Spurgeon contemplated Susannah’s robust love for Christ, he was almost overcome with emotion. He declared, “Dear purchase of a Saviour’s blood, you

³⁵John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1865; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 134.

³⁶*Ibid.*

are to me a Saviour's gift, and my heart is full to over-flowing with the thought of such continued goodness." Spurgeon never doubted that God was good but, upon reading Susannah's account of her faith, he could not help "but lift up the voice of joy at his manifold mercies."³⁷ Spurgeon's sentiments should first of all be read as the joy of a pastor over a fellow Christian's testimony of faith in Christ and secondly the double joy he expressed because she was his fiancée. Susannah was baptized and became a member of New Park Street Chapel on February 1, 1855. She described her baptism: "I was baptized there [New Park Street Chapel] by my beloved, upon my profession of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:9).

Charles and Susannah's engagement may seem odd to modern readers. Other than their weekly escapes to the Crystal Palace to spend "an hour or two of rest and relaxation in those lovely gardens, and that pure air," much of their time together occurred while Spurgeon was hard at work (2:13). Spurgeon, ever the teacher, did not neglect to care for Susannah's soul. Though he was subtler than openly declaring he was instructing her, he put her in the pathway of opportunities for spiritual growth. In the midst of his busy ministry, time with Susannah often consisted of Monday evenings as he edited his just-preached Sunday sermon for publication.³⁸ Susannah sat by his side, and it is not difficult to imagine that such times were sanctifying to her as she, along with Charles, recalled the sermon from the day prior. Susannah considered those times as "a good discipline for the Pastor's intended wife" and as a means of equipping her "in any measure for the post that she was to occupy" (2:14-15). Though Spurgeon did not specify he was training Susannah, she nevertheless understood that her beloved friend was teaching her.

³⁷Murray, *Letters*, 55.

³⁸G. Holden Pike noted of Spurgeon, "The preacher does not write his sermons; if questioned on that point he will declare that he would prefer being hanged to going through such an ordeal, and this process of revising is to him, therefore, equivalent to an exercise in composition." G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Cassell and Company, n.d.), 4:379. It might be imagined that while Spurgeon went through the hard work of revision on Monday evenings that he felt more at ease having his beloved Susannah by his side.

Deepening Love and Requests for Prayer

Charles and Susannah's relationship blossomed and Susannah's spiritual wisdom grew. Susannah was the partner that Spurgeon needed, prayed for, and increasingly depended on. They visited with his parents in Colchester in April 1855, where she was warmly welcomed. Since he was so busy in London, Susannah was especially thankful for the extended time with Charles that the trip afforded. Lovingly she wrote of "the joy of being all the day long with my beloved, and this for three or four days together" and that time with Charles "was enough to fill my heart with gladness, and render me oblivious of any other pleasure" (2:17). Following their time at Colchester, Spurgeon wrote asking for "Susie" to pray for him: "Pray for me, my love; and may our united petitions win a blessing through the Saviour's merit." Wisely he understood the temptation that they might feel to elevate their love for one another to idolatrous heights. He urged, "Let us take heed of putting ourselves too prominently in our own hearts. But let us commit our way unto the Lord" (2:18). Susannah's spirituality is evident during their engagement, especially in her letters of response to Charles. Spurgeon, growing in popularity with the common people, increasingly faced criticism from local newspapers. However, Susannah reminded Charles that they lived under the control of God. She offered, "May His blessing rest in an especial manner on you to-night, my dearly-beloved" (2:18). Spurgeon was sometimes lonely as he strengthened his faith beneath the attacks of his enemies. In January 1855 (a year prior to his marriage), while away from home on a preaching tour, he felt the weight of the assaults and he reminded himself of the promises of God: "I know and believe the promise, and am not afraid to rest upon it." Obviously he longed to talk to Susannah. He wrote to her: "My love, were you here, how you would comfort me; but since you are not, I shall do what is better still, go upstairs alone, and pour out my griefs into my Saviour's ear" (2:19). Charles did what he what he was accustomed to do in times of trial, he prayed. He also set an example to Susannah that the "Saviour's ear" was open to hear the requests of his servants. Susannah was his partner in prayer and in comfort.

Private Prayer, Family Prayer, Congregational Prayer

In a sermon preached at Exeter Hall on Sunday morning, January 6, 1861, from Colossians 4:2 “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (KJV), Spurgeon urged his congregation to persevere in prayer and then asked, “But why should the Church . . . continue in prayer?” Spurgeon replied, “God will answer her.”³⁹ For Spurgeon, prayer must be accompanied with faith so that God would hear and answer the honest cries of his children. Peter Morden provides perspective:

As to the daily rhythm of Spurgeon’s prayer life, a set time of prayer early in the morning and another in the evening constituted his pattern. He sought to observe this discipline for himself and stated his belief, near the beginning of his public ministry, that “Secret prayer is the test of a Christian.”⁴⁰

Morden posits, “But his daily habit of prayer also included, from at least the time of his marriage onwards, leading morning and evening prayers for his own household. In these times hymn singing was included alongside of scripture reading and prayer.”⁴¹ Spurgeon urged his congregation to prayer: “Brethren, we shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians.”⁴² For Spurgeon, prayer was not to “degenerate into formality” nor should Christians “waver in unbelief.” To pray only as a formality or without faith was to pray “in vain.” Spurgeon desired “great faith with which to offer great prayers.”⁴³ Lewis Drummond examined the prayer life of Spurgeon and concluded that though Spurgeon did not typically engage in long hours of prayer, “he lived in a constant attitude of prayer.” He

³⁹C. H. Spurgeon, “A Sermon for the Week of Prayer (Colossians 4:2),” in *MTP*, 7:51. Tom Nettles writes of Spurgeon’s belief that prayers precede the worship services of the church. It was Monday evenings that were especially devoted to prayer for all of the worship services and ministries of the church. Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth*, 257-60.

⁴⁰Morden, *Communion with Christ*, 140n16.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 140.

⁴²C. H. Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting: Studies on Prayer Meetings and Prayer Meeting Addresses* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 7.

⁴³Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting*, 7.

argued, “Prayer became such a vital part of Spurgeon’s life that he simply breathed the atmosphere of God’s presence.”⁴⁴

Charles and Susannah’s Love Letters (1855-1856)

Though Charles and Susannah looked forward to their marriage, it was apparent that their relationship must facilitate and not hinder their spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading. It is evident by both their example and communication (verbal and written) that both Charles and Susannah sought God in prayer. In July 1855, Spurgeon left for Scotland. His intention was to find rest and refreshment while engaging in a number of preaching appointments. It turned out that he had little time for rest. While away, he desired to return home. In a letter to Susannah he requested of her, “Pray for me, my love” (2:24). Susannah felt tension as she recounted her love story in the *Autobiography* concerning how much she should reveal concerning their love for one another. However, she allowed enough light into her account that the reader might see something of the tenderness, sweetness, and sheer joy of their relationship (2:1).⁴⁵ Spurgeon not only

⁴⁴Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 573. See also C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (1875-1894; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2008), 186. With unflinching honesty, Spurgeon described his early bouts with depression soon after he arrived in London. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 186. As is obvious in his early letters to Susannah, he saw her as a helpful comforter to him, and when she could not comfort him in person, he felt her comfort via her prayers. Of his depression, soon after assuming the pastorate of New Park Street, he wrote, “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*. . . . I hope I was not faithless, but I was timorous and filled with a sense of my own unfitness. I dreaded the work which a gracious providence had prepared for me. I felt myself a mere child, and trembled as I heard the voice which said, ‘Arise, and thresh the mountains, and make them as chaff.’ 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” (186). Spurgeon’s view of depression, though it was a “cloud” was ultimately positive: “The Lord is revealed in the backside of the desert, while his servant keepeth the sheep and waits in solitary awe. The wilderness is the way to Canaan.” Ibid. He was comforted knowing that Susannah was praying for him.

⁴⁵Susannah wrote of the tension she felt in determining how much to write of their love story. She believed she had two options: “The one, to conceal, as gracefully as possible, under conventional phraseology and common-place details, the tender truth and sweetness of our mutual love-story;—the other, to write out of the fullness of my very soul, and suffer my pen to describe the fair visions of the past as, one by one, they grew again before my eyes into living and loving realities” (2:1). She chose the latter: “I felt

poured out his heart to her, asking for prayer—he wrote to hear the words of a “devoted lover” (2:24).⁴⁶ Susannah described their mutual affection and told of the “little rills of tenderness that run between all the sentences” (2:23). Those sentences she described, “Like the singing, dancing waters among the boulders of a brook, and I cannot still the music altogether” (2:23-24). Spurgeon’s affectionate words, written to Susannah, she said, did not “dry up” with the years but “the stream grew deeper and broader, and the rhythm of its song waxed sweeter and stronger” (2:24). From Scotland on July 17, 1855, Spurgeon described the success of his preaching labors and the challenges of his work. However, he quickly turned back in his letter to Susannah and his love for her: “Now to return to you again, I have had day-dreams of you while driving along, I thought you were near me. It is not long, dearest, before I shall again enjoy your sweet society, if the providence of God permit” (2:24).⁴⁷ Susannah was much on his mind but he recognized that their relationship, and any future meetings that they might have, ultimately rested on the sovereign providence of God. This letter, like previous correspondence, unveils how much he viewed Susannah as a true partner to him: “I knew I loved you very much before, but now I feel how necessary you are to me” (2:24). He was quick to consider Susannah and how much she also missed him: “My darling, accept love of the deepest and purest kind from one who is not prone to exaggerate, but who feels that here there is no room

compelled to do so. My hand has but obeyed the dictates of my heart, and, I trust also, the guidance of the unerring Spirit.” (1). Let the reader rejoice that Susannah revealed as much as she did about their love-story. However, I was often hopeful that she would tell even more of their romance.

⁴⁶J. C. Carlile posits, “The love stories of preachers might prove an interesting study. Jonathan Edwards is at his very best in his love letters, and John Calvin is very human in his correspondence; their letters tell stories that ought not to be forgotten. Mr. Spurgeon’s love story is like a chapter of a New England novel; Nathaniel Hawthorne might have written it; it is quaint and intriguing.” Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 187.

⁴⁷From a letter to his father, July 19, 1855, Spurgeon wrote about missing Susannah: “I am happy, but had rather be home again;—you will guess the reason. I only want that one person to make the trip a very fine one;—but patience.” C. H. Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, comp. Charles Spurgeon (London: Marshall Brothers, 1923; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009).

for hyperbole” (2:24). Though he was sleepy when he penned that letter he did not want Susannah to imagine that “I weary myself by writing” (2:24). The reason he did not view writing to his beloved as a burden was because “it is my delight to please you” (2:24). He closed his letter by underlining the importance of prayer—that though he was weary and his body desperately needed sleep—he could not, he would not, fail to seek God in prayer:

My eyes ache for sleep, but they shall keep open till I have invoked the blessings from above—mercies temporal and eternal—to rest on the head of one whose name is sweet to me, and who equally loves the name of her own, her much-loved, C. H. S. (2:24)⁴⁸

His letters to Susannah from Scotland contain reports of his preaching, sightseeing, and his reflections on the entire experience. However, it is impossible to miss in them his growing love for Susannah and how much he longed for her to pray for him. The humility, honesty, and spiritual neediness that he felt, he shared with Susannah. He longed to be in warm communion with Christ, but sometimes felt as if his heart was cold (2:26). Movingly he expressed,

I shall feel deeply indebted to you, if you will pray very earnestly for me. I fear I am not so full of love to God as I used to be. I lament my sad decline in spiritual things. You and others may not have observed it, but I am now conscious of it, and a sense thereof has put bitterness in my cup of joy. Oh! What is it to be popular, to be successful, to have abundance, even to have love so sweet as yours,—if I should be left of God to fall, and to depart from His ways? I tremble at the giddy height on which I stand, and could wish myself unknown, for indeed I am unworthy of all my honours and my fame. I trust I shall now commence anew, and wear no longer the linsey-woolsey garment; but I beseech you, blend your hearty prayers with mine, that two of us may be agreed, and thus will you promote the usefulness, and holiness, and happiness of one whom you love. (2:26)

Spurgeon revealed his humble heart, desires for ministry, need for Christ and his aim to honor him, and his love for Susannah. The letters also illustrate that Spurgeon truly viewed Susannah as a partner with him in the ministry. They reveal that, at heart, prayer was the glue that bound them close when miles separated them. Though their letters

⁴⁸Along with his letters to Susannah, it is estimated that Spurgeon wrote approximately 500 letters each week: C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography: The Full Harvest* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, revised, 1995), 2:192.

overflow with words of romantic affection, it is impossible to miss the importance of Scripture and prayer to Charles *and* Susannah. The letters were instructive to Susannah. And in this—he wanted to bless her. During the Christmas season of 1855, Spurgeon left London to visit his parents in Colchester—just weeks before the day of his wedding. Soon after he wrote,

Sweet One,—How I love you? I long to see you; and yet it is but half-an-hour since I left you. Comfort yourself in my absence by the thought that my heart is with you. My own gracious God bless you in all things,—in heart, in feeling, in life, in death, in Heaven! May your virtues be perfected, your prospects realized, your zeal continued, your love to Him increased, and your knowledge of Him rendered deeper, higher, broader,—in fact, may more than even *my heart* can wish, or *my hope* anticipate, be yours forever!

Prior to leaving for Colchester he gave a gift of a book to Susannah. This time it was not Bunyan, Tupper, or Brooks—the book was from Spurgeon’s own hand. After Spurgeon died, Susannah wrote,

There is just one relic of this memorable time. On my desk, as I write this chapter, there is a book bearing the title of *The Pulpit Library*; it is the first published volume of my beloved’s sermons, and its fly-leaf has the following inscription:

In a few days it will be out of my power to present anything to Miss Thompson. Let this be a remembrance of our happy meetings and sweet conversations.

December 22/55

C. H. Spurgeon (2:27)

The reason Spurgeon would no longer be able to present a gift to “Miss Thompson” was because on January 8, 1856, she would be Mrs. Spurgeon. Being the husband of C. H. Spurgeon would be challenging. Susannah, reflecting on the day of her engagement, wrote of Charles, “If I had known, then, *how* good he was, and how great he would become, I should have been overwhelmed, not so much with the happiness of being his, as with the responsibility which such a position would entail” (2:9). Perhaps the adage, “ignorance is bliss” was applicable to Susannah, for many trials awaited her, not only due to the loss of her own health ten years later, but also due to the many other trials that came from being married to Charles Spurgeon. In the spring of 1859, Spurgeon officiated a wedding ceremony for a pastor and his fiancée. Susannah remembered the ceremony and

stated: “He trusted that they would both be ‘dearly-beloved’ not only at the beginning of their united career, but all through to the end, and then for ever and ever; and that, while their sorrows would be mutually shared, their joys would all be multiplied” (2:348). By then, Spurgeon knew by experience some of the sufferings that were part-and-parcel of a faithful ministry; sufferings that would be most keenly felt by his wife. Years later, at another wedding ceremony for a pastor and his bride-to-be, Spurgeon, humorously described the difficulties and privileges of a pastor’s wife:

If I was a young woman, and was thinking of being married, I would not marry a minister, because the position of minister’s wife is a very difficult one for anyone to fill. Churches do not give a married minister two salaries, one for the husband and the other for the wife’ but, in many cases, they look for the services of the wife, whether they pay for them or not. The Pastor’s wife is expected to know everything about the church, and in another sense she is to know nothing of it; and she is equally blamed by some people whether she knows everything of nothing. Her duties consist in being *always at home* to attend to her husband and her family, and being *always out*, visiting other people, and doing all sorts of things for the whole church! Well, of course, that is impossible; she cannot be at everybody’s beck and call, and she cannot expect to please everybody. Her husband cannot do *that*, and I think he is very foolish if he tries to do it; and I am certain that, as the husband cannot please everybody, neither can the wife. . . . Difficulties arise continually in the best-regulated churches; and the position of the minister’s wife is always a very trying one. Still, I think that, if I was a Christian young woman, I would marry a Christian minister if I could, because there is an opportunity of doing so much good in helping him in his service for Christ. (3:348-49)

Difficulties and suffering awaited Charles and Susannah. Spurgeon was aware of various hardships that accompanied the pastor’s home since both his grandfather and father were pastors. The momentous sufferings that awaited him, he could not have known.

Conclusion

This chapter, while highlighting the providence of God in the early relationship of Charles Spurgeon and Susannah Thompson, considered, in part, the discipleship method Spurgeon used with Susannah. Charles was fully committed to Scripture as the means that God used in sanctification but he also understood the valuable role Christian literature held in explaining and applying the Bible. Therefore, especially in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the *Works of Thomas Brooks*, he found able tools for effectively helping Susannah in her spiritual growth. Tupper’s *Proverbial Philosophy* was not only a creative way to

express his affection for Susannah, but it also served as a reminder of the importance of prayer in their relationship. Along with the books Spurgeon looked to for help was his ongoing preaching ministry and the weekly editing of sermons, both of which Susannah was exposed to. And, not surprisingly, the last gift he gave Susannah, prior to their marriage, was a copy of his own sermons in *The Pulpit Library*. This chapter briefly illustrated Spurgeon's personal and pastoral commitment to prayer as evident in his practice and preaching. Also considered is the importance that Charles and Susannah gave to prayer in their relationship, especially evident in their letters to one another.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLES AND SUSANNAH SPURGEON

Charles and Susannah Spurgeon's Wedding Day

The air was cold and damp in London on January 8, 1856. However, the weather did not prohibit crowds from lining the streets, blocking the roads, and flooding into the sanctuary of the New Park Street Chapel. Over 2,000 people had to be turned away from the overcrowded building, and so they then took their places with the rest of the throng who filled the streets, pressing as near to the chapel as possible. The people were gathered in hopes of catching a glimpse of London's famous newlyweds. Though the clouds hung low, and the air was chilled, that Saturday in January was a day of great joy, for it was the wedding day of Charles Spurgeon and Susannah Thompson.¹

Susannah, in later years, reflected on the wedding ceremony and spoke of her feelings that day as “a deep and tender gladness.” She and Charles “clasped each other's hand, and then placed them both in that of the Master.” She saw their wedding as the beginning of a “journey” and she was “assured that [God] would be their Guide.”² Susannah considered Charles as “the best man on God's earth.”³ She remembered, with

¹Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 229.

²The order of the marriage ceremony and other details of the Spurgeons' wedding day may be found in C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records by His Wife, and His Private Secretary* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-99; repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992), 2:28.

³*Ibid.*

utmost tenderness, the events of that wonderful day that began early in the morning on her knees in prayer:

I see a young girl kneeling by her bedside in the early morning; she is awed and deeply moved by a sense of the responsibilities to be taken up that day, yet happy beyond expression that the Lord has so favoured her; and there alone with Him she earnestly seeks strength, and blessing, and guidance through the new life opening before her.⁴

This reliance on God for the resources that she and Charles would need in their marriage is strong evidence for Susannah's godliness.

The extent of Charles Spurgeon's involvement in the ordering of worship for the wedding ceremony is unknown. However, it was certainly the sort of gospel-saturated service that he would have approved of. The ceremony, led by Alexander Fletcher of Finsbury Chapel, opened with the congregation singing "Salvation, O the Joyful Sound."⁵ Such a salvation-exalting hymn was an appropriate way to usher in the Spurgeons' marriage, and it highlighted the gospel mindset that was so characteristic of Charles and Susannah. After reading Psalm 100, Fletcher reminded the congregation that their pastor [Spurgeon] had often spoken of the smiles of Christ in his preaching: "He [Christ] must surely have smiled upon the bride and bridegroom whose marriage feast was graced by His presence." Turning to the couple, Fletcher exhorted them that God had "more blessings in reserve for their enjoyment, felicity, and usefulness."⁶

Though the Spurgeons' enjoyed much happiness together, their marriage was not easy. Along with challenges in ministry, both Charles and Susannah later experienced prolonged health problems. In 1888, Susannah described one year of their suffering and wrote that it had brought "a series of varied trials to us, and a great fight of afflictions

⁴Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*, 2:28.

⁵Ibid., 2:29.

⁶Ibid., 2:30.

beset both my dear husband and myself.”⁷ Such a year was not unusual for Charles and Susannah, but though they faced trials both individually and as a couple, Susannah declared that she wanted “with all my heart, and soul, and strength, to praise the Lord, who has been to us ‘a very present help in trouble.’”⁸ Early in their marriage Susannah experienced difficulties related to her husband’s popularity and the demands of his calling. However, she determined never to be an obstacle to him: “It was ever the settled purpose of my married life that I should never hinder him from fulfilling his engagements, never plead my own ill-health as a reason why he should remain at home with me.”⁹ Charles wrote to her, “I have served the Lord far more and never less for your sweet companionship.”¹⁰

With hearts aflame in prayer, grounded in Scripture, and joined together in the bonds of holy matrimony, Charles and Susannah began their marriage on that cold Saturday in London. They entered upon their labors with joyful hearts and courageous convictions that would last a lifetime. Late in her widowhood, Susannah reflected on her wedding service: “But the golden circlet then placed on my finger, though worn and thin now, speaks of love beyond the grave, and is the cherished pledge of a spiritual union which shall last throughout eternity.”¹¹ Though Susannah understood that human marriage has no part in heaven, the “spiritual union” that believers share with one another on earth is but a beginning, and it will never end. Susannah realized that in Charles she had a partner with whom she would worship God eternally.

The exceptional nature of the Spurgeons’ “spiritual union” is worthy of extensive consideration. It was spiritual purposes that brought Charles and Susannah

⁷Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1895), 63.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:16.

¹⁰Ibid., 2:17.

¹¹Ibid., 2:28.

together, spiritual means that they employed on the day of their wedding, and spiritual objectives that kept them together throughout the years. They looked to God, sought his help, and joined their hands together in service to him. Alexander Fletcher prayed at their wedding ceremony that God would “bless them with increasing usefulness, increasing happiness, increasing enjoyment of Thy fellowship!”¹² Charles often recounted God’s kindness in bringing Susannah to his side. He referred to her as “the ideal wife” and said she was designed by God “to be the greatest of all earthly blessings to him.”¹³

Biographer Russell Conwell analyzed the Spurgeons’ marriage, and believed that Charles and Susannah were especially suited for one another. Charles invited Susannah to help him put away his “uncouth eccentricities” and to “correct his mistakes in language or history.” She was able to assist him, and, Conwell was convinced that Spurgeon “could never have attained the eminence which he reached” without Susannah’s help. Though Conwell’s perspective may be exaggerated, Susannah’s value to Spurgeon was still significant. Conwell maintained that had Spurgeon “allied himself with a wife who was less pious and sincere,” his reputation and ministry would have been damaged. However, “she worked with him, prayed with him, believed in him, and most affectionately loved him through those many years of work.”¹⁴

Susannah was the most loyal friend and helper to Charles. A ministry like Spurgeon’s that drew massive crowds was ripe for slander and misunderstanding. Large churches and popular preachers were not rare in London, but Spurgeon’s passionate evangelism, Puritan theology, and practical methodology stood in contrast to London’s more refined ministers. According to Conwell, Susannah was an encouraging comforter

¹²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:30.

¹³*Ibid.*, 2:17.

¹⁴Russell H. Conwell, *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon: The World’s Great Preacher* (Philadelphia: Edgewood, 1892), 233-34.

when Spurgeon faced attacks from opponents: “[She] stood like a shield between him and the arrows of wickedness, quenching their fiery darts most easily with the shield of domestic love.”¹⁵ Writing from a scholar’s perspective, Patricia Kruppa posits: “Spurgeon’s marriage helped sustain him through some very rugged experiences during his early years.”¹⁶ The love Charles and Susannah experienced was cultivated in their marriage as demonstrated by Charles’s ongoing commitment to Susannah’s spirituality. This is especially evident by his devotion to family worship.

Spurgeon’s Personal Piety and His Leadership in Family Worship

Spurgeon’s childhood experiences of family worship were influential in his own marriage and family. His parents and grandparents raised him near the glowing embers of Scripture reading and prayer and he never departed from the hearth of family worship. Spurgeon’s grandmother on his father’s side was an early influence on him. Ernest Bacon writes, “Charles long remembered her with her open Bible sitting by the great fireplace and speaking of the love of God.”¹⁷ Appropriate to her consistency in Bible reading and prayer, she died reading Scripture:

One Sunday morning . . . she remarked to her old husband that she did not feel well, and would stay at home and read her Bible and pray, while he preached. On his return he found her in the old armchair, her Bible spread out on her lap, her spectacles across it, her head bowed upon her breast, still in death. And her finger rested upon Job xix, 21: ‘The hand of God hath touched me!’¹⁸

Within their marriage, though Susannah was a faithful instrument of piety, it was Charles who shouldered the responsibility for assuring that Scripture and prayer

¹⁵Conwell, *Life of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 235

¹⁶Patricia Stallings Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher’s Progress* (New York: Garland, 1982), 110.

¹⁷Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 12.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 12-13.

permeated family life. Emphasizing to students at his Pastors' College¹⁹ the importance of family, he argued,

We ought to be such husbands that every husband in the parish may safely be such as we are. Is it so? We ought to be the best of fathers. Alas! Some ministers, to my knowledge, are far from this, for as to their families, they have kept the vineyards of others, but their own vineyards they have not kept. Their children are neglected, and do not grow up as a godly seed. Is it so with yours?²⁰

For Spurgeon, it was important for the father to keep the “vineyard” of his own home by not neglecting his family. Loving and leading his wife and children was not only a husband’s responsibility, it was also essential to his witness to others. Spurgeon, therefore, believed that husbands should be examples worthy of imitation by other men.

Reading Spurgeon’s lofty challenge to pastors might cause one to feel inadequate for the task at hand. Perhaps, many pastors do not feel that they are “the best of fathers” nor the kind of husbands “that every husband in the parish” longs to imitate. Spurgeon, anticipating such a sentiment, simply pointed husbands to Christ. In a sermon titled “A Glorious Church” from Ephesians 5:25-27, Spurgeon proclaimed,

The Christian should take nothing short of Christ for his model. Under no circumstances ought we to be content unless we reflect the grace, which was in Christ Jesus. Even as a husband, which is a relationship that the Christian sustains in common with the rest of men, he is to look upon Christ Jesus as being set before him as the picture, and he is to paint according to that copy. Christ himself being the bridegroom of the Church, the true Christian is to seek to be such a husband as Christ was to his spouse.²¹

¹⁹The Pastors' College began with only one student a couple of years after Charles and Susannah were married. W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920), 227. Spurgeon referred to the College as “his first-born and best beloved” (227). The college had its roots in the conversion and subsequent preaching of Thomas Medhurst. Medhurst met with Spurgeon for several hours each week, beginning in 1855 (229). Spurgeon’s students grew in number through the years. Fullerton notes, “It was clearly understood that the College did not exist to make ministers, but to train them” (231). Initially the College met at the Tabernacle and in 1873 moved to a more permanent location (232). Fullerton writes, “In the College the great event of the week was the Friday afternoon lecture by the President” (233).

²⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (1875-1894; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2008), 237.

²¹C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970-2006), 11:253. Spurgeon’s text was from Ephesians 5:25-27: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might

Spurgeon practiced what he preached. His friend and student, William Williams, often visited with Charles and Susannah at their home. He remembered,

One of the most helpful hours of my visits to Westwood was the hour of family prayer. At six o'clock all the household gathered into the study for worship. Usually Mr. Spurgeon would himself lead the devotions. The portion read was invariably accompanied with exposition. . . . Then, how full of tender pleading, of serene confidence in God, of world-embracing sympathy were his prayers! With what gracious familiarity he would talk with his Divine Master! Yet what reverence ever marked his address to his Lord. His public prayers were an inspiration and a benediction, but his prayers with the family were to me more wonderful still. . . . Mr. Spurgeon, bowed before God in family prayer, appeared a grander man even than when holding thousands spellbound by his oratory. Often have I risen from my knees strengthened, as Daniel was when the mysterious hand had laid its gentle pressure upon his head. I owe much; my people owe much, to the family prayers at Westwood.²²

Spurgeon did not typically (during family worship or otherwise) engage in lengthy prayers, believing that long prayers generally testified to “unbelief.”²³ That being said, he was constant in prayer: “I think I can say that seldom many minutes elapse without my heart speaking to God in either prayer or praise.”²⁴ Spurgeon, influenced by George Müller (1805-1898), simply asked God to provide for the needs of the orphans in two orphanages he founded. Like Müller, Spurgeon viewed prayer as looking “to God absolutely” to provide for his needs.²⁵ Those needs included his marriage and family.

present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

²²William Williams, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Personal Reminiscences*, rev. and ed. Marguerite Williams (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.), 36. Westwood was the name of Spurgeon’s house in London.

²³Ibid., 16. Spurgeon imagined that long prayers were like a man going to the bank to cash a check and then “loafing about the premises” after he had received his money (16). Spurgeon compared God’s promises to taking a “cheque [sic.] issued by God Himself on the bank of heaven. . . . He [God] cashes it for me, and I go and use what He has given me, to His glory.” Spurgeon saw no need to linger in prayer after bringing his requests to God (16). Instead of “loafing” the praying man should employ God’s promises.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 17. George Müller is most remembered for his ministry to orphans in Bristol, England. He directly asked no person for funds but prayed that God would provide for the needs of the orphans to whom he ministered. See Arthur T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1899) and Roger Steer, *George Müller: Delighted in God* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006). Spurgeon

Spurgeon said, “A home should be a Bethel. If I had no home, the world would be a great prison to me.”²⁶

In the *Autobiography*, Susannah provided numerous glimpses into their home-life. On Saturdays they entertained guests up until six o’clock in the evening. She explains,

At the tea-table, the conversation was bright, witty, and always interesting; and after the meal was over, an adjournment was made to the study for family worship, and it was at these seasons that my beloved’s prayers were remarkable for their tender childlikeness, their spiritual pathos, and their intense devotion. He seemed to come as near to God as a little child to a loving father, and we were often moved to tears as he talked thus face to face with his Lord.²⁷

Spurgeon would then dismiss his guests and retire to his study where he would prepare for the Lord’s Day services.

Family Bible reading and prayer were a priority for Spurgeon throughout his life. Susannah remembered that whether they “lodged in some rough inn on the mountains or in the luxurious rooms of a palatial hotel in a city” they did not neglect reading the Bible and praying together.²⁸ Spurgeon’s book, *The Interpreter* provides insight into his convictions regarding family devotions. There he argues, “Family devotion is one of the greatest of Christian institutions.”²⁹ Speaking with approval of the Puritans’ commitment to family piety, he continues, “They would sooner have omitted a meal than have given

scholar Tom Nettles notes, “Müller’s approach, however, suited neither Spurgeon’s personality nor his view of how he must employ the people in maintaining support for the benevolent institutions [such as the orphanages]. Spurgeon regularly summarized Müller’s yearly report of his Bristol work and added positive evaluations and encouragements to his readers [of the *Sword and Trowel*] to support it.” Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 346. While Spurgeon asked God directly to support the orphans, he saw no reason not to appeal to others for funds as well.

²⁶Williams, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 33.

²⁷Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:64.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 3:103.

²⁹C. H. Spurgeon, *The Interpreter: Scripture for Family Worship* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, n.d.), iii. Spurgeon used “family worship” and “family devotions” interchangeably.

up morning or evening prayers.”³⁰ He recognized benefits of family worship as including “nurturing an intelligent piety” in one’s children as well as “sanctifying the whole household.”³¹ Concerned about the decline of family worship in both practice and vitality, it was Spurgeon’s objective in the book to use “every means to remedy this evil.”³² Thus for Spurgeon, failure to practice or offering a half-hearted performance of family devotions was “evil.” His vision for writing *The Interpreter* was to help the “heads of families” in leading family worship.³³ He imagined that some families would gather, in good Puritan fashion, twice a day. For these families his book was designed on a one-year plan. However, he recognized that other families would be unable to gather more than once a day, and therefore, he provided a two-year regimen for family worship.³⁴ Though he did not include written prayers in each day’s devotional exercises, it was expected that prayer would be an important element of family worship. Spurgeon’s reason for not including written prayers was convictional.³⁵ He had been strongly

³⁰Spurgeon, *The Interpreter*, iii.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid. Spurgeon was often absent from Susannah and their children due to his ministry travels and health retreats. However, just as Spurgeon’s grandmother and mother had been instrumental in leading family worship while their husbands were away, it is reasonable to believe that his wife, Susannah, led family devotions while Spurgeon travelled. For more about Susannah’s spiritual training of Charles and her twin sons see Charles Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon, in Free Grace and Dying Love: Morning Devotions by Susannah Spurgeon* (1896, repr.; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 191-92.

³⁴Spurgeon, *The Interpreter*, iv.

³⁵Spurgeon was like John Bunyan before him in his view of written prayers. See John Bunyan, *Prayer* (repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012). Bunyan deduced that God’s Spirit is “debased” when one prays, not with the Spirit, but instead depends on “forms” (59). The “forms” Bunyan refers to are written prayers. Those who are happy with forms enjoy the “leisure of the alehouses of England” (to use a colorful illustration from Bunyan). Many of those who “occupy the jails of England” are those who are mighty in praying with God’s Spirit (59). Those who occupied the England’s jails, were Nonconformist pastors. Some of Spurgeon’s pulpit prayers from his London ministry were recorded in Charles Spurgeon, *Behold the Throne of Grace: C. H. Spurgeon’s Prayers and Hymns*, sel. and arr. Chas. T. Cook (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d.). The prayers are “*extempore* utterances” initially written down by a stenographer in the congregation for Spurgeon’s own later use with no plan for publication (10-11). The

encouraged to include prayers in his book but said, “My conscience will not allow me to do so.” He wanted the Christian parent to “pray from his heart” and not rely on “forms of prayer.” He also indicated that for him to include “forms of prayer” would be hypocritical since he did not consider such “forms” appropriate.³⁶ Along with prayer and Scripture reading, Spurgeon included “suitable hymns” to be used with each day’s activities.³⁷ As for Scripture readings in *The Interpreter*, Spurgeon included “the gist of the entire Bible.”³⁸ In the book’s first reading (January 1, Morning Reading) Spurgeon highlighted the importance of reading the Scripture while depending on the Holy Spirit. He encouraged readers to “pray that he who commanded light to shine out of darkness may shine in our hearts and give us to know the inner meaning of his word.”³⁹ Spurgeon challenged his readers from Genesis 1:3: “See the power of the Word of God! He speaks, and it is done. Thus powerful is the word of the gospel when heard in the soul. May its enlightening power be felt by us all.”⁴⁰ Spurgeon’s focus on the gospel from the opening pages of *The Interpreter* is striking. Quoting Scripture and commenting on Genesis 1:2, Spurgeon declares, “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of

time frame of this selection of collected prayers of Spurgeon is described in the book as “a long period of years” (10). I examined the dates given after each prayer and discovered that this collection was selected from 1863 to 1890. The prayers were published after Spurgeon’s death. See also C. H. Spurgeon, *The Pastor in Prayer: A Collection of the Sunday Morning Prayers of C. H. Spurgeon* (1893, repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004). These prayers were “taken down verbatim as they were uttered.” Spurgeon would not have imagined publishing these prayers.

³⁶Spurgeon, *The Interpreter*, iv.

³⁷Ibid. Spurgeon included comments on many verses, though he did not want *The Interpreter* to be considered a commentary in the formal sense. “The comments are made to suit the capacities of ordinary households. The Book is not meant to be a Commentary, and must not be judged in that light: being written with one object, it could not aim at another, or it would have missed the mark” (iii).

³⁸Ibid., iii.

³⁹Ibid., 1. See chap. 2 of this thesis for further understanding of Spurgeon’s philosophy of Bible reading.

⁴⁰Ibid.

the deep.” He underscores that “by nature” we are “dark” and “disordered” because of sin. Completing that verse, “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,” Spurgeon reminds the reader, “The Spirit of God is the first efficient mover in the new creation. He visits the dead and dark heart and begins the work of salvation within.”⁴¹ From the December 9 evening devotion, Spurgeon commented on 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “Never let us forget this. The whole of the Bible is inspired, and is to be devoutly received as the infallible truth of God. Get away from this, and we have nothing left to hold by. Whatever we do, let us never give up the Bible.”⁴² Spurgeon considered false teachers who undermined confidence in the Bible as “our worst enemies.”⁴³ Whatever text Spurgeon read, quoted, or on which he commented, he focused on Christ and the gospel. Spurgeon quotes John Ryland (1753–1825) as stating, “No sermon is likely to be useful which has not the three R’s in it—Ruin by the Fall; Redemption by Christ; Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁴ Spurgeon then declares, “My aim in every sermon is to call sinners, to quicken the saints, and be made a blessing to all.”⁴⁵ Such was the essence in Spurgeon’s ministry and was at the heart of his family worship. In an address to the College Conference in 1874, Spurgeon told students, “Our main business is to study the Scriptures.”⁴⁶ An examination of Spurgeon’s home-life indicates that studying the

⁴¹Spurgeon, *The Interpreter*, 1.

⁴²Ibid., 729.

⁴³Ibid. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16-17 AV).

⁴⁴Ibid., 730.

⁴⁵Ibid. Spurgeon was commenting on 2 Timothy 4:1-2: “I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.”

⁴⁶C. H. Spurgeon, ed., “Foreward,” in *The Sword and Trowel* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1978), 4:221.

Scriptures indeed was his commitment, not only as a pastor but also as a husband and father. His devotion to family worship grounded his marriage to Susannah and was at the heart of his methodology of parenting their twin sons.

In Victorian England, the family was regarded as essential to the well-being of culture at large. Historian and Victorian-era scholar Walter E. Houghton described the Victorian family: “Its ritual is well known: the gathering of the whole household for family prayers, the attendance together at church on Sunday morning, the reading aloud in the evenings, the annual family vacation.”⁴⁷ As noted, Spurgeon’s parents and grandparents were the earliest primary influences in his life. It was through their reading of Scripture, prayer, and example that he was introduced to family worship. However, even though from childhood he was nurtured in a culture where family Bible reading and prayers were a part of the fabric of society, his overriding influence concerning the family was not traditions, his family, or the culture, but the Word of God.⁴⁸ For Spurgeon it was faith in the Scripture that led him to read the Bible, pray, and lead his family in spiritual devotion.

Charles, Susannah and Their Sons

Charles and Susannah’s twin sons Charles, (1856–1926) and Thomas (1856–1917), were born on September 20, 1856. Spurgeon considered them “the best of sons.”⁴⁹ Charles was referred to as the older of the twins as he was delivered first. The elder son Charles and author A. Cunningham Burley were close friends. They shared a “mutual

⁴⁷Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (London: Yale University Press, 1956), 341.

⁴⁸For a treatise on the Victorian family, love, and with special attention to the wife and mother during Victorian times, see chap. 13, “Love,” in Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, 341-93. Houghton points to the woman as an “angel in the house” that was a calming influence in an industrial culture. Spurgeon referred to Susannah as “our angel and delight.” Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 165. Spurgeon also referred to Susannah as “an angel of God unto me.” Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:258.

⁴⁹A. Cunningham Burley, *Spurgeon and His Friendships* (London: Epworth, 1933), 29.

admiration of C. H. S. [Charles Haddon Spurgeon].”⁵⁰ Later in Charles’s life, Burley suggested that he write a biography of his father. Charles felt that the “power of hero worship was too strong in him to do justice to the many-sided character of his father.”⁵¹ Burley recalls that the Spurgeon boys, in their early years, did not experience as much personal time with their beloved father as they would have enjoyed. He surmises, “Loving friendship was there [between Spurgeon and his sons] and most happy relations also, but a curious restraint . . . fettered their fellowship.”⁵² Surprisingly, it was not Spurgeon who led his sons to Christ. Burley recalls, “One of the deepest desires of Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon’s heart had been to bring a sense of vital religion home to their children. This was their constant aim and prayer.”⁵³ It was not due to neglect that Spurgeon was not the one to lead his children to Christ because, as Burley notes, “There were ceaseless displays of tenderness with signs of deep solicitude that were sufficient to move one to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus.”⁵⁴ Susannah’s spiritual influence on Thomas and Charles should also not be minimized. Charles Ray surmises,

Mrs. Spurgeon was a faithful trainer of her twin sons in the Christian doctrine, and she had the joy of seeing them both brought to the Lord at an early age. “I trace my early conversion,” Pastor Thomas Spurgeon has written, “directly to her earnest pleading and bright example. She denied herself the pleasure of attending Sunday evening services that she might minister the Word of Life to her household.” “My dear brother was brought to Christ through the pointed word of a missionary; but he, too, gladly owns that mother’s influence and teaching and their part in the matter.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰Burley, *Spurgeon and His Friendships*, 30.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 31.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 32. The “curious restraint” was due to Spurgeon’s frequent travels and busy schedule, even when he was at home.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 191.

Spurgeon baptized his sons at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1874, when they were eighteen years old; they were then received into church membership.⁵⁶ Charles Spurgeon grew in his regard for his famous father, and their relationship deepened when he began his first pastorate in Greenwich.⁵⁷ Burley writes that Charles shared many of his father's gifts, but "he was the first to admit that he was not his father."⁵⁸ Instead, he charted his own course, always regarding his father's counsel. Charles stated, "Many say to me: 'Let me shake hands with you for your father's sake.' I always feel highly complimented when anybody says that. I am head and ears in love with my father. I do not know whether even mother loves him more than I do."⁵⁹ In Spurgeon's numerous travels he wrote to his sons. In November 1868, from Rome, he penned a letter that reveals his concern for the spiritual well-being of Charles:

One of my sweetest joys is to hear that a spirit of prayer is in your school, and that you participate in it. To know that you love the Lord and are mighty in prayer would be my crowning joy, and the hope that you do so already is a happy one to me. Dear boy, I should like you to *preach*, but it is best that you *pray*. Many a preacher has proved a castaway, but never one person who had truly learned to pray.

Be careful that your life is consistent with your prayers. You and your brother are differently constituted, and have different temptations, but God is able to bless you both alike, and I pray that He may do so richly.

I wish you were with me here, for you are a nice companion, and if your dear mother were here, too, it would be a joyous day. We will pray to God for her daily. Give my regards to Mr. Olding. Receive my love for yourself.

Your loving father,
C. H. Spurgeon.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Burley, *Spurgeon and His Friendships*, 33.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1923; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 77.

Burley wrote of Spurgeon's other son Thomas: "Never once did I hear him refer to C. H. Spurgeon without moistened eyes and deepest emotion."⁶¹ Thomas also became a pastor. Preaching a sermon in January 1898, at a memorial for his father, Thomas proclaimed that he would "exalt my father's God by preaching the self-same truths that he preached by passing on the message that was on his lips."⁶² Thomas, like his brother Charles, deeply admired his father and counted him as a wise counselor. On November 23, 1877, Spurgeon wrote to Thomas from London:

My dear Son Tom,—

I have been greatly delighted with your letters and they have caused great joy all round; especially has your own dear mother been much cheered and comforted. Write all you can for her sake—though we all share the pleasure.

God has been very gracious to you in opening so many hearts and ears to you. May His grace abide with you that these golden opportunities may all be used to the best possible result. I am overwhelmed with your reception, accepting it as a token of the acceptance, which my works have among the people. When I have you and Char (sic.) at my side to preach the same great truths we shall by God's grace make England know more of the Gospel's power.

Char (sic.) is working well at College and will, I trust, come forth thoroughly furnished. When you come home I hope that your practice in Australia will lessen your need of college training so that one year may suffice. Still every man regrets when in the field that he did not prepare better before he entered it. We shall see.⁶³

This letter, along with offering encouragement for Thomas, reveals Spurgeon's concern for Susannah. He viewed letters from Thomas as a means of cheering and comforting her. Thomas was in Australia preaching and would later pastor in New Zealand (the warmer climate being less deleterious to his own poor health). Spurgeon encouraged his son to rely on God's grace in his evangelistic work, imagining a day when he, along with his sons, would labor side-by-side in the gospel ministry. After Spurgeon's death, Thomas returned to London to serve as pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle (1893-1908).

⁶¹Burley, *Spurgeon and His Friendships*, 35.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Spurgeon, *The Letters*, 93–94.

However, Spurgeon never realized his hope of the three of them laboring together at the same time and place.

Living by Scripture and Prayer in the Midst of Tragedy: The Surrey Music Hall Disaster

The first ten years of Charles and Susannah's life together were their most comfortable in regard to their physical strength (though both of them had some early health issues).⁶⁴ However, early in their marriage they faced a challenge of such substance that Spurgeon considered resigning from the ministry because of it. His ministry in London was growing rapidly, and crowds filled the sanctuary of the New Park Street Chapel beyond capacity. This growth led Spurgeon and the church leaders to consider venues that would be more accommodating for the large crowds who clamored to hear his preaching.⁶⁵ The church agreed to expand the New Park Street Chapel. While it was being expanded, facilities were rented that could better handle the large crowds. When they returned to New Park Street they found that, even though it had been enlarged, it was still insufficient for their growing congregation. Eventually it was decided to purchase land for the construction of a new building, The Metropolitan Tabernacle. The Tabernacle opened in 1861, seated over 5,000 people, and overflowed with people each Sunday. During the construction of the Tabernacle, the church met in various places, including the Surrey Gardens Music Hall. There, one of the defining events in Spurgeon's ministry occurred. The church's first gathering at the Hall was on Sunday evening, October 19,

⁶⁴Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 130.

⁶⁵Large churches with popular pastors were not uncommon in London. Ian Randall referred to Spurgeon as "the most outstanding preacher of the Victorian era." He described the era of Spurgeon as "marked by great pulpiteers who attracted large congregations." Ian M. Randall, *A School of the Prophets: 150 Years of Spurgeon's College* (London: Spurgeon's College, 2005), 1. One of London's popular preachers was Joseph Parker. Whereas Spurgeon addressed over 5,000 people each Lord's Day at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Joseph Parker preached to three to four thousand. Burley, *Spurgeon and His Friendships*, 47. See also G. Holden Pike, *Dr. Parker and His Friends* (London: T. Fisher, 1904).

1856. Prior to the service, Charles and Susannah prayed together at home where Susannah was recovering from giving birth to twin boys only a month earlier.⁶⁶ She offered God's blessing to Charles as he left for the Music Hall.⁶⁷ After he departed, Susannah persisted in prayer for her beloved husband and for the worship service.⁶⁸ Approaching the Music Hall, Spurgeon noticed that crowds of people lined the streets. It was only with some measure of difficulty that he gained entrance to the building. Twelve thousand people filled the Hall, and ten thousand more swelled the gardens and streets. Early in the service, mischief-makers yelled "Fire!," "The galleries are giving away!," and "The place is falling."⁶⁹ Though there was no fire, and no structural failure in the building, the damage was done. Panic ensued, resulting in seven people being trampled to death and twenty-eight others hospitalized with serious injuries. A reporter describes the evening:

But in proportion to the joy and hope thus inspired [the large gathering to hear gospel preaching], were the sorrow and disappointment arising from the terrible catastrophe by which the very first service was attended and cut short! At the most solemn moment of the occasion, the wicked rose in their strength, like a whirlwind, sin entered, followed by terror, flight, disorder, and death.⁷⁰

Spurgeon was inconsolable, and the tragedy threatened to undo his ministry. Rumor spread that he died that night at the Music Hall. Spurgeon responded, "I was not dead, thank God, but the bystanders might well have imagined that the terrible shock had killed me."⁷¹ It almost did.

Church historian, Mark Hopkins writes that the Music Hall tragedy was "an episode whose importance in Spurgeon's spiritual experience was second only to that of

⁶⁶Spurgeon's sons were born September 20, 1856.

⁶⁷Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 164.

⁶⁸Ibid

⁶⁹Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon*, 91.

⁷⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:202.

⁷¹Ibid., 2:207.

his conversion.”⁷² Though Hopkins’ assessment may be an overstatement, the horrific night left its imprint on Spurgeon for the rest of his life. A deacon rushed to Spurgeon’s home to give Susannah the news. She recalls, “He [the deacon] knelt by the couch and prayed that we might have grace and strength to bear the terrible tragedy which had so suddenly come upon us.”⁷³ As soon as the deacon left, Susannah cried to God in prayer. It was a night of deep sorrow. Even though she was still weak from giving birth, she faithfully cared for her children while also comforting her beloved husband in the aftermath.⁷⁴ Spurgeon’s pain was deep, and he struggled to make sense of what had happened. Charles Ray recounts that Spurgeon “was taken by friends to Croydon where he stayed in the house of Mr. Winsor, one of his deacons, and Mrs. Spurgeon with the babies joined him there.”⁷⁵ While at Croydon, Spurgeon penned a letter to his mother that unveils his grief.

Dear Mother,

I could not write till now for my poor brain was hot with grief—but it is all right now—all right—I shall rest for some days then at it again. God is on my side why should I fear. I am not dismayed for God shall help me. Dear Susie cannot write, she is so ill—The Doctor has been today and says she is very, very ill, and then says but not seriously— Do not mention the accident in the Gardens to me at present, but pray for me—I am now almost restored to spirits but I shall never forget this burning furnace. I will thrash the devil yet—I will seek to be yet more valiant for God. The Lord nerved me that evening and no unaided man in the universe could have been as brave, as calm, as fearless as I by God’s grace—Ah Mother, this is no small honour to be maligned for Jesus—Tremble not I do not—In God’s name I say to timid friends and boisterous foes my word is On, still On—for Christ and for his truth—My most fervent love to you and, my dear father—all. Your much-loved son, Charles.⁷⁶

⁷²Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, 128.

⁷³Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 165.

⁷⁴Ibid., 166.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶This letter is kept at the Metropolitan Tabernacle Archives in London. I had an opportunity to view a number of Spurgeon’s letters during a visit to the Tabernacle in May 2015. This letter to his mother, in contrast to other letters I viewed, is written with poor handwriting, whereas Spurgeon’s penmanship was normally excellent. His son Charles reflected, “In early days it [Spurgeon’s penmanship] was like copper-plate, and to the end of his life, unless deformed by pain, it was always singularly chaste and clear.” Spurgeon,

While at Winsor's home, Spurgeon experienced something of a spiritual revival.⁷⁷ The renewal was likely just prior to writing to his mother as Spurgeon writes to her of his "almost" restoration. Charles and Susannah were walking together and meditating on Paul's letter to the Philippians. Suddenly Charles stopped and said, "Oh, Wifey, I see it all now! Praise the Lord with me."⁷⁸ What Spurgeon saw from Scripture was the exalted and reigning Christ that he so loved. Certainly, pondering Christ's exaltation following his crucifixion and resurrection sped hope to his heart.⁷⁹ He went from almost resigning from ministry to renewed strength, passion, and vision for pastoral work.⁸⁰ While at Winsor's home, Charles and Susannah decided to dedicate their twins to the Lord. The dedication of the infants was spent in "prayer and praise."⁸¹ Spurgeon returned to New Park Street Chapel for services two weeks later on November 2, 1856.⁸² Spurgeon prayed and referred to the feelings of "joy and sorrow" felt by the congregation.

The Letters, 7. It is possible that the poor handwriting, reflected in this letter, was due to physical pain, but his problems with gout came later in his life. Therefore, it is more likely that his poor handwriting was due to the effects of the Music Hall disaster. The letter includes very few periods; instead Spurgeon uses dashes to separate one sentence from the other. I was unable to discern at least one word and, therefore, inserted a line. In a couple of other cases, where I could reasonably guess the word, I filled it in. There are also water stains on the letter, which could be evidence that Spurgeon shed tears while writing to his mother. Used by permission.

⁷⁷Though I was unable to determine the exact timing of the revival, it seems to have been just before Spurgeon returned to the pulpit on November 2, 1856.

⁷⁸Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 167. The passage was from Phil 2:9-11: "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. Spurgeon said "let him do as he pleases with me; my one prayer shall be, that I may die to self and live wholly for him and for his honour" (167).

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰See Christian George, "Spurgeon Almost Quit," *B & H Academic Blog*, May 6, 2015, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.bhacademicblog.com/spurgeon-almost-quit/>.

⁸¹Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 167.

⁸²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:213.

He cried out in prayer: “Thanks to Thy Name! Thy servant feared that he should never be able to meet this congregation again; but Thou has brought him up out of the fiery furnace.”⁸³ The first words from his sermon were, “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.”⁸⁴ Prior to the service he imagined that “the effects of that terrible tragedy” would not hinder him.⁸⁵ However, he lamented, “I feel somewhat of those same painful emotions which well nigh prostrated me before.” He then asked the congregation to “excuse” him if he made “no allusion to that solemn event, or scarcely any.”⁸⁶ He encouraged them with his intent to preach at the Surrey Gardens Music Hall again, as he was confident God would help him.⁸⁷ Spurgeon then did what he was most accustomed to doing: he preached Christ. The title of Spurgeon’s sermon was “The Exaltation of Christ.”⁸⁸

Services at the Music Hall resumed on the morning of November 23, 1856, and continued until December 11, 1859. On Spurgeon’s return to the Music Hall, his sermon title was “Love’s Commendation” from Romans 5:8. From that text he proclaimed: “Christ died for us.”⁸⁹

Though Spurgeon experienced God’s enabling strength to minister again, he never fully recovered from the tragedy. At a preaching event some months later, Spurgeon

⁸³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:213.

⁸⁴Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:377.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 2:377-84. Strikingly, Spurgeon chose the very text that had been the subject of his revival during his walk and conversation with Susannah.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 2:401.

was “leaning his head on his hand” in the passageway of a crowded hall. It was obvious to his most intimate companions that the impact of the tragedy affected his nervous system.⁹⁰ Spurgeon’s friend, William Williams, was convinced 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.”⁹¹ Struggles with depression that Spurgeon faced prior to the Music Hall disaster were exacerbated due to the events of that October evening. Sometime later he gave a lecture to his students at the Pastors’ College titled, “The Minister’s Fainting Fits.” He stated,

The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not 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. Knowing by painful experience what deep depression of spirit means, being visited therewith at seasons by no means few or far between, I thought it might be consolatory to some of my brethren if I gave my thoughts thereon, that younger men might not fancy that some strange thing had happened to them when they became for a season possessed by melancholy; and that sadder men might know that one upon whom the sun has shone right joyously did not always walk in the light.⁹²

Spurgeon’s mind was heavily burdened as he considered the loss of life, the horrific suffering, and the overall impact of that first service at the Music Hall. However, that season of trial reveals important truths about the Spurgeons’ marriage that are also evident in later experiences of suffering. Prayer and Scripture were the means employed to lift Spurgeon out of the depths of despair and restore joy to his heart. The night of the tragedy began with Charles and Susannah praying, and it continued and ended with Susannah praying. While he was still in the grips of despondency, God used Paul’s letter to the Philippians to shine the light of hope on Charles. The grieving pastor’s energy was restored, and he and Susannah dedicated their twin sons to the Lord in a time of prayer

⁹⁰Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 2:219-20.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 2:220. Spurgeon died at age 57 on January 31, 1892.

⁹²Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 179.

and praise. Though the press was vicious in their attacks on Spurgeon, Susannah comforted her beloved husband. She printed Matthew 5:11-12⁹³ in large old English type and “enclosed it in a pretty Oxford frame.” Susannah wrote, “The text was hung up in our own room and was read over by the dear preacher every morning. Fulfilling its purpose—most blessedly, for it strengthened his heart”⁹⁴ Charles and Susannah sought God in prayer and looked to the Bible for direction in the midst of their sufferings.

Learning from Suffering

Susannah did not sit idly by as her husband suffered various trials. Often on Sunday evenings, Charles “would sit in an easy chair by the fire while ‘Susie’ would read a page or two of *Good Master George Herbert*. Sometimes the end of the day found him very depressed, and then the ministry of ‘the pastor’s pastor’ was a benediction.”⁹⁵ In 1889, Susannah recorded that Charles asked her to read to him from a devotional book that included Scripture readings she was working through.⁹⁶ Whether it was books or Scripture, Susannah’s readings comforted her beloved husband. Ernest Bacon wrote of their marriage: “God had certainly made them for each other. It was a love match, but also a spiritual partnership, as every true marriage should be.”⁹⁷ Their “spiritual partnership” was most pronounced through their times of suffering.

⁹³“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt 5:11-12). Susannah chose this text to comfort Charles because of the ferocity of the attacks by the press after the Music Hall tragedy.

⁹⁴Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 168.

⁹⁵J. C. Carlile, *C. H. Spurgeon: An Interpretative Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1933), 189. The “pastor’s pastor” in the quote refers to Richard Baxter.

⁹⁶Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 133.

⁹⁷Bacon, *Spurgeon*, 45.

The Music Hall disaster did not create their biblical spirituality, but it did reveal the depth and value of their spirituality in many ways. If Spurgeon had not so highly revered Scripture, then his ministry might well have collapsed under the weight of death and injury. Because he held to the inspiration, infallibility, authority, and sufficiency of Scripture, he was anchored when the storms of trial pummeled him, and he was able to see a purpose in the suffering. Spurgeon wrote of suffering: “We have suffered, and can testify that there is a point where suffering and pain are the vestibule of bliss. When they bring men as near to Jesus as they carried us, they are not angels in disguise, but seraphs all unveiled.”⁹⁸ The purpose of suffering, in Spurgeon’s view, was to bring men “near to Jesus” and to a “conscious dependence upon God.”⁹⁹ Spurgeon argued, “When the Bible is fully accepted as God’s own revelation of Himself, the mind has come to a quiet anchorage; and this is no small gain. A safe resting-place is an urgent need of the soul.”¹⁰⁰ In suffering as well as in times of comfort, Spurgeon found the Bible a “safe resting place.” Other resting places were insufficient as Spurgeon intimated: “We prefer for our own part to cast anchor once for all in an infallible revelation.”¹⁰¹ Firmly anchored in the Bible and diligent in prayer, Charles and Susannah found that their suffering increased their sense of dependency on God and undergirded their joyful marriage.

Trusting God through Seasons of Poor Health

After ten years of marriage, Susannah’s health declined, as did that of Charles soon after. Susannah’s afflictions eventually resulted in her being homebound and no

⁹⁸Spurgeon, quoted in Hopkins, *Nonconformity’s Romantic Generation*, 130.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰C. H. Spurgeon, *The Clew of The Maze and The Spare Half-Hour* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 40.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

longer able to attend church services with her husband.¹⁰² One can imagine the strain that might have been placed on the Spurgeons' marriage as a result of Charles's growing sphere of ministry, his own less-than-stellar health, and a wife who was afflicted to the point that she rarely could leave home. It must have been difficult for Susannah to be confined while Charles was engaged in such a public ministry. However, there is no indication that their love for one another ever faltered. Patricia Kruppa writes, "The constancy of the Spurgeons' affections for one another remained undiminished through a series of crises."¹⁰³ There is also no reason to imagine that Susannah's spirituality declined during her long illness. Charles and Susannah not only learned to face grief faithfully, they also continued to deepen in their love for one another. Kruppa surmises,

To the end of their lives, they were lovers; and what could be more touching than these two old invalids, she had grown plump and looking slightly absurd wearing the

¹⁰²Patricia Kruppa attempted an explanation of Susannah's illness: "Early in the marriage, Mrs. Spurgeon became seriously ill. She remained an invalid for the rest of her life." Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 108. Kruppa further stated: "The exact nature of Mrs. Spurgeon's illness remains shrouded in those twin phrases dear to the prose of Victorian chroniclers, 'delicacy forbids,' and 'there are some things too sacred to discuss.' Sir James Y. Simpson operated her on in 1869, a man described by his biographer as a 'religious crank,' yet nonetheless regarded as one of the founders of modern gynecology. Sir James, who was professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Edinburgh, normally received 1,000 guineas for an operation but he sent the Spurgeon's no bill. He told Spurgeon he would send the bill when Spurgeon became Archbishop of Canterbury. The fact of this operation, the failure of the Spurgeons to have more children, and the presence in the Spurgeon library of a book entitled *A Practical Treatise on the Inflammation of the Uterus, the Cervix, and on its Connections with Other Uterine Diseases*—rather glaringly out of place amid the scriptural commentaries—suggests the nature of her problem" (108n). I was able to see and read from the book at the Spurgeon Library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, which is home to approximately 6,000 volumes that were in Spurgeon's library when he died. The edition that I saw, the same one to which Kruppa refers, is inscribed, "The Rev. C.H. Spurgeon with the kind regards of the author." James Henry Bennet, *A Practical Treatise of Inflammation of the Uterus, Its Cervix and Appendages, and on Its Connexion with Other Uterine Diseases*, 4th ed. (London: John Churchill, 1861). Susannah's surgery was in 1869 and she may have suffered with issues related to her uterus for eight to ten years based on the dating of the book. Kruppa suggests that books, other than "scriptural commentaries" were out of place in Spurgeon's library. Having examined many of the books that remain (about 6,000 volumes) in Spurgeon's library at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the wide variety included a large section of literature, books about health, poetry, and a significant section on birds (to name a few categories). However, Bennet's book on cervical problems is also out of place among the other health and medical books in the library. Therefore, her argument is valid. Also see William Brian Albert, "'As the Wind Blows Cold': The Spirituality of Suffering and Depression in the Life and Ministry of Charles Spurgeon" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 147n4.

¹⁰³Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 108.

girlish curls, he prematurely tired and aged, yet writing each other love poems as though they were still twenty and courting under the dome of the Crystal Palace.¹⁰⁴

A later example of Susannah's spiritual stamina can be found a year after Charles died, in 1893. Susannah writes, "Dear fellow-Christian, do not faint or fear when the blessed Husbandman cuts, and grafts, and wounds thee!" She encouraged her readers to not "be as much concerned about the pain the grafting causes" but more that fruit should come through suffering. She understood that God does not forget his people, but "watches with loving scrutiny every indication of developing fruit-buds" and that "great will be His joy, when, in full strength and beauty, thou shalt glorify Him by thy abundant fruitfulness."¹⁰⁵ She writes of her husband's death as "the time of my sorrow," during which she suffered through "bitter griefs."¹⁰⁶ However, she testifies, "Yet how good God has been to me! He has upheld me through days of darkness, and seasons of sorrow, of which none knew but Himself and my own soul."¹⁰⁷ The depth of her godliness after Charles's death argues she had a spiritual maturity not only then but also throughout her life.

Though Susannah was often confined to her home, the Lord sustained her by His Word and through prayer. From home, she served God faithfully, finding in Charles a true encourager and supporter in her labors. Susannah said of Charles that he offered to her "sweet sympathy" in her troubles. He had a "great heart of love and plenty of room for the bestowal of my burdens and fears."¹⁰⁸

Susannah Spurgeon and the Book Fund

Though Susannah was afflicted with poor health, she engaged herself, as she

¹⁰⁴Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 110.

¹⁰⁵Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 238.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 213.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 270.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 280.

was able, in good work. This is especially evident as the caretaker of the Book Fund, a means by which she ministered to pastors throughout the British Isles and beyond. Upon the completion of volume 1 of Spurgeon's *Lectures to My Students* in 1875, Susannah longed to provide a copy to "every Minister in England."¹⁰⁹ Charles encouraged her to raise the funds and to serve as the first donor for the Book Fund. Susannah, a "gentle and pious lady," was described as "the true heart-friend and intellectual comrade of Charles Haddon Spurgeon."¹¹⁰ Therefore, with Spurgeon's encouragement, Susannah engaged in the book ministry, which distributed thousands of books, free of charge, to needy pastors whose library was relatively bare. Spurgeon stated that God "directed my beloved wife to a work which has been to her fruitful in unutterable happiness."¹¹¹ Spurgeon viewed the Book Fund not simply as a help to pastors, but he believed it was God's provision for Susannah's encouragement. Spurgeon states, "By this means He called her away from her personal griefs, gave tone and concentration to her life, led her to continual dealings with Himself, and raised her nearer the center of that region where other than earthly joy and sorrows reign supreme."¹¹² Spurgeon's perspective is important. Just as he was concerned for and engaged in Susannah's spiritual growth early in their relationship, he maintained his commitment to her spiritual wellbeing throughout their marriage. He believed God provided comfort to Susannah through the Book Fund, and it helped to focus her on spiritual things during her affliction when she certainly would have been tempted to discouragement. Spurgeon viewed the Book Fund as "needed," "useful," and "urgently

¹⁰⁹Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 196-97.

¹¹⁰*Charles H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie, n.d.), 171.

¹¹¹Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon, *Ten Years of My Life in the Service of the Book Fund*, 2nd ed. (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1886), iii.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

called for.”¹¹³ However, occasionally the work placed an overwhelming burden on Susannah. During those times, Spurgeon rushed to her aid: “I must place an urgent veto upon the continuation of this labor *at its present rate*.”¹¹⁴ However, he faithfully encouraged Susannah:

I think of you as one that gathers herbs and distils them that they may be medicines for the spreading sicknesses. If you cannot be the surgeon to deal with the patients, you are the herbalist, to send in a supply of heal-alls for them. The epidemic of spiritual influenza can only be met by holy influences which will stream from voices and pens, which the Lord has filled with his saving health; and you do your part by sending out the sacred drugs in book form.¹¹⁵

Susannah’s Book Fund account from 1886 describes a year in which she had distributed 9,941 volumes. Charles was at Mentone recovering from illness as Susannah writes,

I write the concluding sentences of this year’s record under almost precisely similar circumstances to those of many preceding years. The dim and silent study,—the Pastor’s empty chair,—the long, grim rows of unused books,—the closed inkstand, in which the very pens have a forlorn and drooping pose,—the lack of scattered papers, and other signs of a busy life-work,—all these proclaim the dear husband’s absence, and my solitude. Anxieties, too, concerning my beloved have again assailed me. Ill, and a thousand miles from wife and home! Oh, this were indeed hard to bear for us both, but for the given grace to commit all into the Father’s loving hand, and the granted faith to believe that, “He hath done all things well.”¹¹⁶

On this occasion, Spurgeon’s strength returned and Susannah praised God:

“And verily God answers prayer, for almost before we had time to pour out our complaint before Him, He turned the captivity of His dear servant, and sent forth His Word, and healed him! Surely, ‘His mercy endureth for ever!’”¹¹⁷ Susannah’s account in 1887 is similar: “I went into my husband’s study, to fetch from his inkstand the pen which he had

¹¹³Spurgeon, *Ten Years of My Life*, iii.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, iv.

¹¹⁵Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 98.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*

been lately using.”¹¹⁸ Of his pen she writes, “It bore the traces of recent work; it had written words which would kindle the spiritual fire in men’s hearts; it had transcribed weighty sentences which would move sinful souls to seek a waiting Savior.”¹¹⁹ She recognized, of course, that there was no magical value in the pen because it was “but a shapely piece of steel, inert, disabled.”¹²⁰ However, reminded of how Charles used the pen to help people look to the Savior, she looked to God to supply her needs: “I laid it [the pen] down, and in my helplessness looked up entreatingly to Him who alone could move brain, and heart, and hand; and the answer to my unspoken prayer will be found in the following pages [her report on the Book Fund].”¹²¹ Susannah’s words unveil her concern for others. She valued her husband’s work and how God used it to stir up the hearts of men and point sinners to the Savior. Her comments indicate her faith and dependence on God in prayer for help as she took Spurgeon’s pen to write her report.¹²² Susannah’s regular reports convey her deep regard for Scripture and sound doctrine. In 1889, she wrote of her desire to help pastors by gifting them books that were sound in the faith. It was her objective to distribute books:

Not to help them find a “new theology,” but to enable them better to extol the old “Gospel of the Grace of God,” is the one main object of my gifts; and not a single book whose author would dare to tamper with God’s holy truth, or profess to know more, and see deeper, and understand more clearly than all the prophets and apostles!¹²³

Susannah wrote these lines in the aftermath of the Downgrade Controversy, which is discussed in the next section. Regardless of what others chose to do, the Spurgeons held

¹¹⁸Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 27.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., 77-78.

tenaciously to the “prophets and apostles” and the “Gospel of the Grace of God.” Such was their commitment to Scripture.

Spurgeon died in Mentone, France, on January 31, 1892, and Susannah returned to London in March.¹²⁴ She described her home as “beautiful but desolate” and “very dear to my beloved.” She wondered what God’s plans were for her now that she was separated from Charles. She said: “I found that to ‘do the next thing’ was earnestly to set to work at the Book Fund.” Money was still flowing into the Fund and confidently Susannah declared, “I fully believe that God constrained me to the service, and strengthened me for it, in order to keep heart and mind from dwelling too constantly upon my loneliness and grief”¹²⁵ In this assessment she was concurring with Spurgeon’s opinion of the usefulness of the Fund not only for pastors, but also for herself. She credited God for using the Fund for her benefit, saying, “Many a trial has been lightened by the uplifting of its sweet ministry; and many a dark day has been made bright at eventide by the encouragement granted to my loving efforts.” She described the Fund as serving her “in the deepest sorrow my life can ever know,” pointing out to her “the consoling power of active service for the Lord and His poor servants.”¹²⁶

Bible Intake and Prayer during The Down-Grade Controversy

If the Surrey Gardens Music Hall Disaster, in October of 1856, had deeply wounded Spurgeon, it may have been that the last great controversy of his life was the instrumental cause of his death at age fifty-seven.¹²⁷ Regarding the significance of that

¹²⁴Comparing the dates of various accounts of Spurgeon’s death, it is evident that though Susannah attended the memorial service in Mentone, prior to Spurgeon’s body being transported to London, she did not attend the funeral services in London. See Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, 240.

¹²⁵Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 171.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Spurgeon believed that The Down-Grade controversy was costing him his life. Spurgeon,

crisis, Susannah employed Martin Luther's words: "I can do no other" to describe Spurgeon's experience.¹²⁸ Spurgeon declared,

A Christian minister must expect to lose his repute among men; he must be willing to suffer every reproach for Christ's sake; but, then, he may rest assured that he will never lose his real honour if it be risked for truth's sake, and placed in the Redeemer's hand.¹²⁹

Indeed Spurgeon lost friends, bore reproach, and risked much as he engaged in a great battle for truth. The Down-Grade Controversy began in 1887, though its shadows were cast earlier. The phrase "down-grade" was used by Spurgeon in his magazine *The Sword and the Trowel* early in 1887.¹³⁰ Robert Schindler penned an article for the monthly missive entitled "The Down-Grade" in March of 1887.¹³¹ For Spurgeon, theological "down-grade" began with doubting the inspiration of the Bible.¹³² Spurgeon described the problem as a new kind of theology that was gaining influence among evangelicals in the United Kingdom. The "new theology" had many problems, including an errant view of God, portraying him as Father but diminishing him as Judge. Spurgeon wrote, "Sin, according to these men, is a disorder rather than an offense, an error rather than a crime. Love is the only attribute they can discern, and the full-orbed Deity they have not known."¹³³ The heart of the controversy, however, was over the nature of Scripture itself. Spurgeon raised the issue in *The Sword and the Trowel* in 1887, responding to a book by

Autobiography, 4:253.

¹²⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:255. Spurgeon also compared the episode to Luther's experiences (256).

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 4:253.

¹³⁰Nettles, *Revealed Truth*, 542.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 542-43.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 543. Nettles quotes a footnote by Spurgeon to Schindler's article: "We are going down hill at break-neck speed."

¹³³Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:275.

R. F. Horton titled, *Inspiration and the Bible*.¹³⁴ Spurgeon believed Horton undermined the authority of Scripture, the very thing Spurgeon spent his life seeking to uphold. Horton's view was a rejection of the full inspiration of Scripture and, therefore, an eroding of its accompanying doctrines. Spurgeon warned his own denomination, initially thinking that the errant teaching did not have deep roots among Baptists. He later realized that the error among Baptists was much worse than he first thought.¹³⁵ Due to the heightening tensions in his denomination and Spurgeon's belief that he could not compromise his position, he withdrew from the Baptist Union on October 28, 1887.¹³⁶ That same year, Susannah wrote of the need for the existence of the Book Fund because the time was one of "doubt, and deliberate divergence from the plain paths of the old Gospel."¹³⁷ The books she mailed to poor pastors served to point them "to the right road."¹³⁸ Drawing from *Pilgrim's Progress*, she said that those who follow counsel from the resources that she

¹³⁴Iain H. Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* (1966; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2012), 151. For a detailed account of The Down-Grade Controversy see chaps. 6-8 in Murray's work. Murray surveys the growth in philosophy, history, language, and science during the nineteenth century. With the growth of those disciplines some also had a desire for a "new definition of inspiration" (147). By the 1850s the seed of the new views were sprouting and many believed there would not be much immediate impact on the church, that the new views would be "gradually assimilated" (149). Spurgeon fought against such thinking in his preaching and writing. As a result of denying inspiration, some, like R. W. Dale, denied eternal punishment and embraced annihilationism. Furthermore, Dale denied the necessity of believing in the deity of Jesus as essential to saving faith (150). He advocated his views in *The Living Christ and the Four Gospels*. Dale also did not think it was essential to believe in an inspired Bible for one to believe in Jesus. For Dale, the fact that Jesus is the "Truth" is sufficient, regardless of whether the Bible is inspired or not (150-51). Others embraced similar views. Spurgeon did not believe that true Christians could "fraternize" with those who held to such serious error. Spurgeon pointed out that the errors had infected the Baptist Union of which he was a part. The errors were not sufficiently addressed, in Spurgeon's view, by the Baptist Union. Therefore, Spurgeon withdrew from the Union on October 28, 1887 (152). Spurgeon could not be in "confederation" with those who denied verbal inspiration (153). The end result was that Spurgeon was censured by the Union (155). All Spurgeon wanted was for the Union to be "formed on a biblical basis" (155).

¹³⁵Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 152.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, xiii.

¹³⁷Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 28.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*

sent forth “need not fear being belated in the grounds of Giant Despair, or finding themselves shut up in Doubting Castle.”¹³⁹ Charles and Susannah were committed to a theology markedly different from those who swerved from “the plain paths of the old Gospel.” The Spurgeons’ response to the Down-Grade Controversy provides further evidence of their mutual confidence in the Bible. Those who received books from Susannah and read her Book Fund reports wanted “solid, old-fashioned, Scriptural, Puritanic theology” and nothing else.¹⁴⁰ Susannah recognized the tremendous cost to Spurgeon’s health that the controversy delivered, but she asserted, “He never regretted the step he had taken.”¹⁴¹ Of course Susannah was referring to Spurgeon sounding the alarm, defending the faith against error, and withdrawing from the Baptist Union. The trial indeed was painful, but God brought good from the bad. Though many churches faltered, there was “a return in some churches to preaching Evangelical doctrines with greater clarity.”¹⁴²

Spurgeon’s Continued Suffering and His Refuge at Mentone

Beginning in 1872, Spurgeon often retreated to Mentone, France, to escape the cold London winters and seek rest and restoration of his health.¹⁴³ At the height of the

¹³⁹Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 28.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:255.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Ian M. Randall, “C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): A Lover of France,” *European Journal of Theology* 24, no. 1 (2015): 57-65. This article considers Spurgeon’s love of France from his introduction to Paris by Susannah in 1856, through his preaching trips, his travel trips with Susannah, and his visits to Mentone from 1872 until his death in 1892. Spurgeon died in Mentone, France, on January 31, 1892. Spurgeon had numerous books on health and medicine in his library. One example will suffice: Alfred Schofield, *Health At Home Tracts* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1890). The first “tract” is titled: “How to Avoid Dying before the Time,” 1-16. Though the author admits, “No one ever dies until his time comes,” he also argues that such a sentiment “is too often used as a cover for our own carelessness in a way which is little short of criminal.” To not care for one’s body is to end one’s own life “indirectly” (1). Spurgeon’s death at 57 might be attributed to depression, Bright’s disease, gout, overwork, being overweight,

Down-Grade Controversy and the deep blows of emotional and physical pain that resulted, his health declined more rapidly. He looked to Mentone as a place of refuge. Though he rested, the theological battle was never far from his mind, as his letters home reveal. He realized that he faced a real spiritual battle with the “Serpent.” However, his confidence was in the “Serpent-Killer,” his Savior.¹⁴⁴ For years a generous benefactor had supported Spurgeon’s ministry financially. However, the controversy found his benevolent friend on the other side of the argument. Susannah wrote that Charles whose

Whole life is consecrated, and whose utmost energies are dedicated to the service of the Master, was constantly helped, “backed up” as we usually put it, by one to whom God had given abundance of this world’s wealth. . . . Generous supplies for the work of the Lord came with such regularity and freeness, that the worker rejoiced greatly in the liberty thus secured, and the exemption from cares which would otherwise have burdened his heart.¹⁴⁵

The benefactor withdrew his support from Spurgeon due to a “failure of friendship and sympathy,” and he sent a letter to Spurgeon letting him know.¹⁴⁶ Susannah first received and read the letter:

At once, I took the letter and spread it before the Lord, pleading, as Hezekiah did that He would “hear and see” the words written therein; and He gave me so strong a confidence in His overruling and delivering power that, as I knelt in His presence, and told Him how completely I trusted Him on my husband’s behalf, the words of petition ceased from my lips, and I absolutely *laughed out loud*, so little did I fear what man could do, and so blessedly reliant did He make me on His own love and omnipotence!¹⁴⁷

Susannah’s reaction is a powerful indicator of her strong and stable faith. The withdrawal of financial support might have thrown a less spiritually-minded woman into despair, but Susannah responded in prayer and reliance upon God, and even laughed in

the stress he felt as he battled through various controversies, or more likely, a combination of some or all of these factors.

¹⁴⁴Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:255-56. Spurgeon’s reference to the “Serpent” was a reference to Satan.

¹⁴⁵Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 19-20.

¹⁴⁶Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:258.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*

the face of trouble. She wrote to Charles in Mentone and told him of the loss of financial support and of her response. He wrote back, “I laugh with you. The Lord will not fail us, nor forsake us. . . . You are as an angel of God unto me. . . . Bravest of women, strong in faith, you have ministered unto me in deed and of a truth. God bless thee out of the seventh heavens!”¹⁴⁸ Susannah said of Charles, “His faith was fixed on God, not on man.”¹⁴⁹ She saw the event as a testing in which God “found that his [Charles’] faith did not fail.” God supplied the financial need through a lady who, not knowing about the situation, felt compelled to bring money to Spurgeon.¹⁵⁰ He wrote to Susannah: “What a dear soul you are! How I love you! Our inward and spiritual union has come out in this trial and deliverance. We will record all this to the glory of the Lord our God.”¹⁵¹ Spurgeon’s letter to his wife of over thirty years conveys the depth of their relationship as a spiritual union, revealing how their trials called forth from within them the employment of spiritual means. Spurgeon did not ignore the pain that the Down-Grade Controversy had caused him, but he saw the hand of his faithful God in the midst of it all. He told Susannah, “Send a check to [the] bank. Sing the Doxology. Keep all my love, and rest under the blessing of the Lord our God.”¹⁵² He knew that in Susannah he had a godly wife, and he felt her strengthening hand of encouragement in good times and bad.

Bible Intake and Prayer during the Final Period of Charles’s Life

Wracked with pain and burdened over controversy, Charles Spurgeon left for Mentone again in 1890. Mentone had long delighted Spurgeon with its warm weather and

¹⁴⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:258.

¹⁴⁹Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 20.

¹⁵⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:259.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, 4:260.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 4:261.

beautiful scenery. Spurgeon's secretary, Joseph Harrald, wrote of Mentone as a "charming region."¹⁵³ For Harrald, the true beauty of the place could not properly be described by words or photography. To grasp "a full idea of the loveliness" of Mentone, it must be seen.¹⁵⁴ Spurgeon needed the beautiful scenery and restful shores of the southern coast of France. While there, he wrote to Susannah:

What an immeasurable blessing you have been to me, and you are still! Your patience in suffering, and diligence in service, are works of the Holy Spirit in you, for which I adore His name. Your love to me is not only a product of nature, but it has been so sanctified by grace that it has become a spiritual blessing to me. . . . My love to you grows, and yet I do not know how at any time it could have been greater.¹⁵⁵

Once again, Susannah had been unable to travel to Mentone with Charles.

Though many prayed for Spurgeon's recovery, and he occasionally rallied and resumed his ministry with vigor, Spurgeon's health struggles continued. He regained strength sufficient to return to London briefly. However, June 7, 1891, was the last time he was able to preach at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Following that sermon he travelled to Stambourne to visit his grandfather's land, but poor health sent him quickly back home. He determined to make yet another trip to Mentone where he hoped he would recover.¹⁵⁶ On Monday, October 26, 1891, Charles left London for Mentone with Susannah, his secretary Joseph Harrald, and his brother J. A. Spurgeon and his wife. They arrived on October 29, 1891. This was the first and only time that Susannah was able to visit Mentone with Spurgeon. Susannah and Charles enjoyed three months of "perfect happiness" before the "sorrowful separation."¹⁵⁷ Spurgeon worked when he could and delighted in serving as Susannah's tour guide, taking her to places that were "precious to

¹⁵³Joseph W. Harrald, "Mentone Meditations," in *The Sword and the Trowel*, ed. C. H. Spurgeon (London: Passmore & Alabaster, January 1892), 17.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:348.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 4:365.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

him.”¹⁵⁸ Susannah refers to her time with Charles as “glorious days. . . . Never shall I cease to bless God for His tender mercy in permitting me to be with my beloved, and to minister to his happiness and comfort during those three blessed months!”¹⁵⁹ She further describes Charles during those days as “full of fun and child-like pleasure,” finding ways to surprise her and laugh with her. She said that at meal times “he was the life and soul of the party, with a cheerful smile, and a kind word,” and everyone appreciated the “sweetness of disposition” that Charles conveyed.¹⁶⁰ Susannah recalls,

I can never describe the pride and joy with which he introduced me to his favourite haunts, and the eagerness with which he showed me each lovely glimpse of mountain, sea, and landscape. He was hungry for my loving appreciation, and I satisfied him to the full. . . . We took long daily drives, and every place we visited was a triumphal entry for him. His enjoyment was intense, his delight exuberant. He *looked* in perfect health, and rejoiced in the brightest of spirits. . . . Not a care burdened him, not a grief weighed upon his heart, not a desire remained unfulfilled, not a wish unsatisfied; he was permitted to enjoy an earthly Eden before his translation to the Paradise above.¹⁶¹

Spurgeon turned to Susannah during one of their walks, pointed to a lovely scene, and affectionately declared, “There, wifey, isn’t that worth coming all the way to see?”¹⁶² After his death Susannah remembered his words and said: “Yes, truly, and if there had been nothing else to see than his exultant happiness at my long-desired presence with him, this would have well repaid any effort of love on my part.”¹⁶³ Spurgeon was able to mostly complete his final work, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, an exposition of Matthew’s Gospel during his time at Mentone. Susannah wrote in the introductory note that the book

¹⁵⁸Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:365.

¹⁵⁹Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 163.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁶¹Susannah Spurgeon, “‘Mrs. Spurgeon’s Message of Thanks,’ To the Many Correspondents Who Have so Lovingly Shared Her Sorrow,” in *The Sword and the Trowel*, ed. C. H. Spurgeon (London: Passmore & Alabaster, March 1892), 109-10.

¹⁶²Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 168.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 168-69.

was his “last precious legacy” and “the last sweet song from lips that were ever sounding forth the praises of his King.” Of the later portions of the book, it “was written on the very border-land of heaven . . . almost within sight of the Golden Gates.”¹⁶⁴ Though Spurgeon did not live to fully revise the manuscripts, his secretary Joseph Harrald (1849–1912) “with loving care, entirely from his [Spurgeon’s] own spoken and written words” finished the work in January of 1893.¹⁶⁵

It was Spurgeon’s custom to visit the Stockwell orphanages on Christmas Day, to the great delight of the children.¹⁶⁶ Though Charles and Susannah were at Mentone, miles away from the orphans on what would be his last Christmas, he wrote to them: “Dear Boys and Girls,—I send you all my love, as far as the post can carry love at two pence-halfpenny for a half-ounce. I wish you a real glorious Christmas.” He encouraged the children to enjoy themselves, to be kind to those who assisted them, and to give thanks to “our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus for great goodness shown to you and me; and then pray for me that I may get quite well. Mrs. Spurgeon and I both send our love to all the Stockwell family.”¹⁶⁷ The children responded to Spurgeon’s letter by cheering, and then they sent him a letter containing a flower. One line from their letter will suffice to show the deep affection they had for him: “We did not write to you when you were so ill,

¹⁶⁴C. H. Spurgeon, *Commentary on Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom* (1893, repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), ix-x.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, xn2, states that Joseph Harrald was the friend who completed *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

¹⁶⁶In 1866, Spurgeon challenged his congregation to pray for a new ministry opportunity. The result was that God provided funds, and an orphanage was planned, designed around the concept of family. The first orphanage was for boys and ten years later another one, for girls, was built. Arnold Dallimore, *C. H. Spurgeon: The New Biography* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 126-30. Dallimore notes “Whenever Spurgeon visited the orphanage the children thronged around him. He knew virtually all of them by name, and he always had a penny—a coin of some value in those days—for each of them” (129).

¹⁶⁷C. H. Spurgeon, “The Christmas Festivities at the Orphanage,” December 21, 1891, in *The Sword and the Trowel*, ed. C. H. Spurgeon (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1892), 78.

but we prayed for you every day, that God would make you well again, for what should we do without you.”¹⁶⁸

It was an amazing providence of God that Susannah, after being homebound for so many years, was able to travel the thousand miles from London for Spurgeon’s last visit to Mentone. Of course neither he nor she had any idea it would be his last trip. In a letter published in the *Sword and Trowel*, in March 1892, Susannah wrote of their last three months together. She pointed to Spurgeon’s desire, through the years, for her to accompany him: “For fifteen years my beloved had longed to bring me here; but it had never before been possible. Now, we are both strengthened for the long journey; and the desire of his heart was fully given him.”¹⁶⁹ The love that Charles had for Susannah is striking, evident in the happiness he displayed during their last three months together.

On New Year’s Eve of 1891, and New Year’s Day of 1892, he gave two addresses to a small gathering of friends, and on January 10 and 17 he conducted two brief services in his room. Susannah remembered,

On the second Sabbath evening, January 17, 1892, before offering the closing prayer at the final service in which he took part on earth, he gave out the last hymn he was ever to announce to a company of worshippers here below. If he could have foreseen what was to happen only a fortnight later, he could hardly have chosen a more appropriate farewell than the poem founded on some words of the sainted Samuel Rutherford, ‘The sands of time are sinking, The dawn of Heaven breaks, The summer morn I’ve sighed for, The Fair, sweet morn awakes. Dark, dark hath been the midnight, But dayspring is at hand, and glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel’s land.’¹⁷⁰

On Wednesday January 20, Spurgeon went to bed and, due to his now rapidly declining health, there remained until he died. Toward the end of the week he was able to muster the strength to tell his longtime secretary, Joseph Harrald, “My work is done.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸Spurgeon, “The Christmas Festivities,” 78.

¹⁶⁹Spurgeon, “Mrs. Spurgeon’s Message of Thanks,” 110.

¹⁷⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:370.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 4:371.

By Tuesday, January 26, he was in and out of consciousness. He rallied a bit and posted an offering to the Metropolitan Tabernacle with the message, “Love to all friends.” On Sunday night, January 31, 1892, Spurgeon died with Susannah by his side. The *Autobiography* states, “Then all was over, Mr. Harrald offered prayer, and Mrs. Spurgeon thanked the Lord for the precious treasure so long lent to her, and sought, at the throne of grace, strength and guidance for the future.”¹⁷² Susannah looked to God but she still felt the pain of loss: “Oh! My husband, my husband, every moment of my now desolate life I wonder how I can live without thee! The heart, that for so many years has been filled and satisfied with thy love, must needs be very empty and stricken now that thou art gone!”¹⁷³ After his death, Susannah reflected on the sense of deepening loss that she felt. However, coupled with the loss, she also felt the “Divine power of healing to my sorrowing soul.” Reflecting on Scripture, she realized, “It is ‘far better’ for him to be ‘with Christ,’” and that helped her to “patiently and even cheerfully endure” what she described as her “lonely life.”¹⁷⁴ She writes, “I can sometimes dwell with such joy on the thought of his eternal glory ‘with Christ,’ that I forget to sorrow over my own great and unspeakable loss.”¹⁷⁵

Whether in days of relative comfort or days of suffering, Charles and Susannah Spurgeon were committed to Bible intake and prayer. Charles and Susannah’s own words along with several episodes from their lives demonstrate beyond doubt that prayer and Scripture were at the heart of their marriage, parenting, and ministry.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷²Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 4:371.

¹⁷³Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 164.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶The scope of Spurgeon’s life and ministry is so vast that only a few episodes were chosen to argue the importance of Scripture reading and prayer to Charles and Susannah Spurgeon.

CHAPTER 5

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION OF THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLES AND SUSANNAH SPURGEON

When Charles Spurgeon addressed a small group of Christians, gathered in his hotel in Mentone, on December 31, 1891, and again on January 1, 1892, he may have been unaware that he was near death. For Spurgeon, ignorance concerning specific future events was a blessing. He declared, “Could we procure a telescope which would enable us to see to the end of the year, should we be wise to use it? I think not. . . . What a mercy that these things are hidden from us!”¹ Spurgeon believed that if Christians knew their “best blessings” in advance, the blessings “would lose their freshness and sweetness” while they were waited on.² He was also convinced that if believers knew their trials ahead of time that they would fret and “miss the joy of our present blessings.” He concluded, “Great mercy has hung up a veil between us and the future; and there let it hang.”³

Though Spurgeon suffered great physical and emotional pain throughout his life, in previous times his health had been sufficiently restored enabling him to return again to his ministry. During the final three months of his earthly journey, and having once more retreated to Mentone, France, Spurgeon had again expected to recover from his afflictions. Meanwhile, he and Susannah enjoyed a most wonderful time together.

¹Robert Schindler, *From the Pulpit to the Palm-Branch* (New York: Gospel, n.d.), 27.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Spurgeon's long-time friend and secretary, J. A. Harrald, wrote of Charles and Susannah's experience at Mentone:

Those last three months seemed to make their earthly bliss complete; husband and wife often said it was their honeymoon over again. They celebrated together at Mentone their thirty-sixth wedding-day, also Mrs. Spurgeon's birthday, and from the family standpoint . . . it was all that one could have desired.⁴

Spurgeon was thrilled that Susannah was with him and he was convinced he would be able to return to London in February 1892, to resume his ministry, stating, "I shall be home in February."⁵ However, a "veil" hid the timing of his death from him. His friend and biographer, Robert Schindler, remembered that indeed Spurgeon *was* at home in February "in a far more real sense than any of us had supposed when we heard the words."

Schindler continued:

Home! How sweet it sounds, and especially for him who, after a sojourn in the South [Mentone], was ever so eager, when he turned his face homewards, to reach as quickly as possible his happy home on earth! What an intense joy he must have entered his glorious home in heaven!⁶

Spurgeon went to his *real* home, heaven, just before midnight on January 31, 1892, where his beloved Susannah would join him in 1903. News of Spurgeon's death spread quickly and Susannah was inundated with messages from friends and dignitaries, including a message from the Prince and Princess of Wales.⁷ Plates were attached to Spurgeon's casket, inscribed, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith," a verse chosen, not by Spurgeon, but by his beloved secretary, J. A. Harrald, soon after Spurgeon died.⁸ During one of Spurgeon's memorial services at the

⁴Schindler, *From the Pulpit to the Palm-Branch*, 111.

⁵Ibid., 40.

⁶Ibid.

⁷C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-1899; repr., Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1992), 4:371.

⁸Ibid., 372.

Metropolitan Tabernacle in early February, Harrard stated about the inscription, “Let it be known, as distinctly as possible, the Pastor did not say it at all.”⁹ Harrard wanted the congregation to know that Spurgeon would not have chosen such a glowing testimony for himself. He was far too humble a man to identify, in that way, with the apostle Paul. Harrard suggested the inscription to Susannah, and she responded, “How is it that you always think of just what I have been thinking? There is no other text for him.”¹⁰ Spurgeon had indeed fought a good fight, but his fight, including his final battle with suffering, was not waged alone. Near to his side was his beloved Susannah, who had been a true helper, fellow sufferer, comforter, wife, and friend to him.

Soon after Spurgeon died, and prior to the transport of his body back to London, it was determined to have a memorial service at the Scotch Presbyterian Church in Mentone, where a year earlier Spurgeon had preached for the opening of the church building.¹¹ Among the many flowers that were kindly sent for the service, Susannah contributed palm-branches, a symbol of her confidence that her beloved husband was now “before the throne, and before the Lamb” where he worshipped with the “great multitude,” and she was confident that he was then declaring, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”¹² Susannah was applying Revelation 7:10 to the new heavenly context of her husband. It was as natural as breathing for Susannah, like her husband before her, to employ scriptural descriptors for whatever matter was at hand. Though Susannah did not travel back to London to participate in the numerous memorial services held for her beloved husband, she did send a note along that was

⁹Schindler, *From the Pulpit to the Palm-Branch*, 111.

¹⁰Ibid., 112-13.

¹¹Ibid., 50.

¹²Ibid., 51.

attached to his casket.¹³ The note read: “With Christ, which is far better.’ I will follow thee, my husband. Undying love from ‘the wife of thy youth.’”¹⁴

An Example Worthy of Imitation

Though the Spurgeons’ are now home in heaven, they left behind a trail of faithfulness to God and to one another. Those who are wise can follow that trail and gather life-lessons in their own journeys to the Celestial City.¹⁵ Spurgeon understood the power and importance of a person’s example, which was especially true for the minister, whom Spurgeon said is

the parish-clock, many take their time from him, and if he be incorrect, then they all go wrongly, more or less, and he is in great measure accountable for all the sin which he occasions. This we cannot endure to think of, my brethren. It will not bear a moment’s comfortable consideration, and yet it must be looked at that we may guard against it.¹⁶

Spurgeon uttered those words to students at the Pastor’s College; however, he reminded them that though they were to be a godly example to others, they were not

¹³Schindler, *From the Pulpit to the Palm-Branch*, 51. Susannah remained in Mentone and surrounding areas for a few months. She sent a letter for A.T. Pierson to read at the February 10, 1892, service for the members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Pierson was not the formal pastor of The Metropolitan Tabernacle but supplied the pulpit for an extended period during Spurgeon’s last prolonged illness and after his death. At the February 10 service, Pierson stated, “I must unburden myself of the last message at hand from dear Mrs. Spurgeon, who cannot be here today, and from whom, perhaps without design on her part, I have only this morning received a beautiful, tender, and sisterly letter, a portion of which certainly belongs to you” (102). He then read the parts of the letter that were directed to the church. Susannah penned the letter a week after Spurgeon died. She looked to Scripture and wrote, “‘He is not here; he is risen,’ is as true of my beloved as of my beloved’s Lord. Today he has been a week in heaven. Oh, the bliss, the rapture, of seeing his Saviour’s face! Oh, the welcome home which awaited him as he left this sad earth! Not for a moment do I wish him back, though he was dearer to me than tongue can tell. I shall pray much for you all during the week of grief. I feel myself like a shipwrecked mariner who has with difficulty reached the shore, and now looks with streaming eyes and fainting heart on others still struggling through those awful waves of sorrow. With Christian love and intensest sympathy, Your grateful friend, Susie Spurgeon” (103).

¹⁴Ibid., 96.

¹⁵The Celestial City was John Bunyan’s descriptor for heaven in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

¹⁶C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (1875-1894; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2008), 10-11.

bound by every whim or fashion of the society . . . we are men, not slaves; and are not to relinquish our manly freedom, to be the lackeys of those who affect gentility or boast refinement [however] anything that verges upon the coarseness which is akin to sin, we must shun as we would a viper.¹⁷

While Charles and Susannah were circumspect regarding their faithfulness to Christ, their freedom from a slavish concern about “every whim and fashion of society” makes them all the more approachable as their lives together are pondered and imitated.

The legacy of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon is one of love to God and to one another. Their practice of looking to Scripture and seeking God in prayer provides an example worthy of imitation. It is left for interested Christians to consider practical ways by which they might pattern their lives after the Spurgeons, especially regarding the role of Bible intake and prayer in their relationships with one another.

Modern news reports are saturated with horrific stories of abuse within some families, and sadly it is not uncommon to read of one family member abusing or even murdering a parent, child, or sibling. Positive examples of family unity and love are increasingly rare. The Spurgeons’ have much to offer a culture that is often defined by such family dysfunction. Family was important to Spurgeon, and he painted a warm and inviting portrait of “home” with his word pictures:

That word *home* always sounds like poetry to me. It rings like a peal of bells at a wedding, only more soft and sweet, and it chimes deeper into the ears of my heart. It does not matter whether it means thatched cottage or manor house, home is home, be it ever so homely, and there’s no place on earth like it.¹⁸

Spurgeon wondered why some men looked for places other than with their families for companionship and relief from the business of the day. He was appalled that men sat “hour after hour, boozing and talking nonsense” while “forgetting the dear good souls at

¹⁷Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 18.

¹⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Practical Wisdom: Or John Ploughman’s Talk & John Ploughman’s Pictures: Plain Advice for Plain People* (1869; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 67.

home who are half-starved and weary with waiting for them.”¹⁹ He railed against men who spent their money on beer while neglecting the needs of their wives and children.²⁰ Spurgeon wrote, “Husbands should try to make home happy and holy. It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest, a bad man who makes his home wretched.”²¹ Spurgeon’s choice of the words “happy” and “holy” are instructive. The words were not intended to be mere philosophical musings for a husband to ponder, but rather they were goals to be actively pursued. Charles and Susannah Spurgeon are not rightly considered if they are viewed, as sort of museum pieces to be admired; their lives and teachings need to be weighed and their godly example followed. As the apostle Paul urged the church at Corinth: “Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me” (1 Cor 4:16), so should godly people walk in the pathway of the Spurgeons. Spurgeon declared about home and family, “Our house ought to be a little church with ‘Holiness to the Lord’ over the door, but it ought never to be a prison where there is plenty of rule and order, but little love and no pleasure.”²² The influence of Puritan theology on Spurgeon is evident in the phrase “little church.” “Holiness to the Lord,” from Exodus 28:36, is another example of how Spurgeon freely used Scripture in reference to family-life. Happiness in the home was inseparably linked to holiness, and for Spurgeon that meant the family would function as a little church. The joyful marriage of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon was organically linked to their pursuit of holiness through their practices of Bible intake and prayer.

Spurgeon’s vision of and commitment to a happy home life might seem unattainable in a world of broken families and relational disharmony. He had a realistic view of marriage that it “is not all sugar.” However, he believed that “grace in the heart

¹⁹Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Practical Wisdom*, 69.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 70.

²²Ibid.

will keep away most of the sours. . . . It should be the husband's pleasure to please his wife, and the wife's care to care for her husband. He is kind to himself who is kind to his wife."²³ Spurgeon was simply echoing Paul's words in Ephesians 5:28: "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself." Spurgeon did not believe that an "unkind and domineering" husband was a real Christian.²⁴ He was convinced that husbands and fathers should assume the "reins" of the home and lead with "love and firmness." Children should be obedient; else the family falls into the "ditch."²⁵ Encouragingly, Spurgeon counseled, "When home is ruled according to God's word, angels might be asked to stay the night with us, and they would not find themselves out of their element."²⁶ It is evident that Spurgeon thought a happy home was worthy of one's attention and living in accordance with Scripture was essential to this happiness. What Charles and Susannah provide for those who will consider the pattern of their lives is not only a vision for a happy marriage, but Scripture as an anchor that holds strong amidst trials and temptations.

Spurgeon felt that home was the special "place" of wives. He believed that their happiness was integrally connected to family and he encouraged the wife to reverence her husband rather than continually "wrangling and railing at him."²⁷ Again, Spurgeon is not simply offering up wise maxims with his counsel, but he is applying Scripture, specifically Ephesians 5:33: "Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

²³Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Practical Wisdom*, 70.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 71.

²⁷Ibid.

At home, Spurgeon delighted in “weeding the little garden [family] and teaching the children their hymns.”²⁸ Because of his impeccable character, one can be certain that he was a practitioner of his convictions as he worked toward a happy and holy home for Susannah, their sons, and himself. Spurgeon considered the family to be “the grandest of all institutions.”²⁹ He sought to please Susannah, even in the small things of life. This is what Scripture required, love demanded, and Spurgeon delighted in. As Susannah recovered from surgery in 1869, the Spurgeons were also preparing a move to a new home. Susannah’s affliction was so severe that she could contribute little in the way of planning for their move. Perhaps many readers of and about Spurgeon primarily imagine him pouring over books, preparing for sermons, writing tomes, and leading various ministries. However, though Spurgeon was very busy with all of the above and more, he never failed to display the most tender of affections for Susannah and he found ways to show her, in very practical ways, that he loved her. Spurgeon purchased items for their new home that would make it more enjoyable and accessible for her. The lengthy quote below, from a letter Charles sent to Susannah during this time, reveals his attention to detail and love for his invalid wife as *he* prepared their new home. Spurgeon’s humor, creativity, and thoughtfulness are evident in every line:

I have been quite a long round today, if a “round” can be “long.” First, to Finsbury, to buy the wardrobe,—a beauty. I hope you will live long to hang your garments in it, every thread of them precious to me for your dear sake. Next, to Hewlett’s, for a chandelier for the dining room. Found one quite to my taste and yours. Then, to Negretti & Zambra’s to buy a barometer for my very own fancy, for I have promised to treat myself to one. On the road, I obtained the Presburg biscuits, and within their box I send this note, hoping it may reach you the more quickly. They are sweetened with my love and prayers. The bedroom will look well with the wardrobe in it; at least, so I hope. It is well made; and, I believe, as nearly as I could tell, precisely all you wished for. . . . I bought also a table for you in case you should have to keep your bed. It rises and falls by a screw, and also winds sideways, so as to go over the bed, and then it has a flap for a book or paper, so that my dear one may read or write in comfort while lying down. I could not resist the pleasure of making this little gift

²⁸Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Practical Wisdom*, 72

²⁹*Ibid.*

to my poor suffering wifey, only hoping it might not often be in requisition, but might be a help when there was a needs-be for it. Remember, all I buy, I pay for. I have paid for everything as yet with the earnings of my pen, graciously sent me in time of need. It is my ambition to leave nothing for you to be anxious about. I shall find the money for the curtains, etc., and you will amuse yourself by giving orders for them after your own delightful taste.³⁰

Spurgeon believed that loving his family required that he put Susannah's needs above his own. However, his conviction was not merely dutiful. Spurgeon's letter reveals a husband who delighted in serving his wife. His creative attention to Susannah is inspiring, evidenced by him enclosing the letter in a beautiful biscuit canister. In *Lectures to My Students*, Spurgeon further amplified his belief that it was a husband's responsibility to put his wife above himself. He opposed any postulating that the husband was the center of all things. He denounced men who believed that "their wives exist; for them, their children are born; for them, everything is placed where it appears in God's universe; and that judge all things according to this one rule, 'How will it benefit me?'"³¹ In *An All Round Ministry*, he echoed a similar idea as he posited that the leader of a family "usually finds that his pre-eminence is one of superior self-denial, rather than of self-assertion."³² Spurgeon's view of husbands practicing "self-denial" sprung forth from the pages of Scripture:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:25-27 ESV).

The spiritual disciplines of Bible intake and prayer in the marriage of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon were a primary reason for their happy marriage. However, it was not *merely* Bible reading and prayer but also the practical outworking of those devotional exercises that made the Spurgeons' marriage what it was and that makes their marriage an attractive

³⁰Iain H. Murray, *Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 163-64.

³¹Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 605.

³²C. H. Spurgeon, *An All Round Ministry* (1900; repr., London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), 242.

and godly example for modern readers. Their practice of the spiritual disciplines resulted in godly living.

Spiritual Means

The Spurgeon's marriage provides a model of employing spiritual means in the regular routine of family life. As discussed in chapter 4, Charles Spurgeon was committed to leading family worship whenever he was with his family.³³ *The Interpreter* envisioned that godly families would engage in family worship once or twice a day.³⁴ Though the specific regularity of family worship might be debated among Christians, Spurgeon's example encourages consistency and regularity. In a sermon from Philemon 1:2, Spurgeon explains that the church that met in Philemon's home mostly or even exclusively consisted of his own family. Spurgeon asked the people of his congregation if they, like Philemon had a church in their homes. He then challenged his congregants:

In order to form a Church, they must worship together. Happy is the household, which meets every morning for prayer! Happy are they who let not the evening depart without uniting in supplication! Brothers and Sisters, I wish it were more common—I wish it were universal, with all professors of religion—to have family prayer! We sometimes hear of the children of Christian parents who do not grow up in the fear of God and we are asked how it is that they turn out so badly. In many, very many cases, I fear there is such a neglect of family worship that it is not probable that the children are at all impressed by any piety supposed to be possessed by their parents! Family prayer in our old Puritan households was a matter of very great importance. Let me tell you what Philip Henry used to do. He was a minister and of course had more time to give to it than many of you in business have. But he went through the whole Bible in course, expounding it, chapter by chapter, and accompanying it by prayer and singing. One reason he gave for singing was that it was like Rahab's tying the crimson line in the window—everyone who went by would know what she had done—and he said that the sound of singing at family prayers was a distinct confession that that family loved and worshipped God!³⁵

Once again, Spurgeon connects family happiness with the spiritual exercise of Bible intake, prayer, and singing in family worship. Note especially how he says, “Happy are

³³See chap. 4 of this thesis. Group gatherings, other than with one's family might also be considered as “family worship.”

³⁴Spurgeon, *The Interpreter*, iv, see chap. 4 of this thesis.

³⁵C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970-2006), 54:362-63.

they who let not the evening depart without uniting in supplication.” When Charles was away from home, Susannah maintained family devotions with their twin sons. This practice of godly women leading family worship had been modeled for Spurgeon from his own childhood. His grandfather or father led family devotions when they were at home, but when they were away, their wives kept up the spiritual discipline.³⁶ Charles and Susannah’s example is an encouragement to every Christian, including single mothers and wives of husbands who are often way from home on business. Whenever there is a Christian in the home who can read the Bible and pray, family worship is possible.³⁷ Spurgeon asserted, “Parents—and mothers in particular—have a sweet influence on the family and the little ones.”³⁸ Family worship need not be complicated. The elements modeled in the Spurgeon home are Bible reading, prayer, and hymn singing. Spurgeon quoted Puritan Matthew Henry, as an example: “They who pray in the family, do well. They, who read and pray, do better. But they who sing, and read, and pray, do best of all.”³⁹ At an afternoon memorial service for Spurgeon, attended by ministers and students, Congregationalist leader Herber Evans said, “Mr. Spurgeon was the strongest believer in prayer that I ever met.”⁴⁰ Spurgeon’s belief in prayer is obvious, in part, by his

³⁶Both Spurgeon and his sons pointed to their mothers influence. See chap. 2 of this thesis.

³⁷The Puritan pastor, Thomas Manton, encouraged women to be faithful in instructing their children: “Especially women should be careful of this duty; because as they are most about their children, and have early and frequent opportunities to instruct them, so this is the principal service they can do to God in this world, being restrained from more publick (sic.) work. And doubtless many an excellent magistrate hath been sent into the Commonwealth, and many an excellent pastor into the Church, and many a precious saint to heaven, through the happy preparations of a holy education, perhaps by a woman that thought herself useless and unserviceable to the Church.” Thomas Manton, “Epistle to the Reader” in *The Confession of Faith; The Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, 8, accessed January 5, 2016, https://books.google.com/books?id=3dIUAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

³⁸C. H. Spurgeon, *MTP* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1970-2006), 54:367.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 54:363.

⁴⁰Schindler, *From the Pulpit to the Palm-Branch*, 138.

commitment to it during family worship. Charles and Susannah's spiritual piety in the home is a challenge and encouragement to Christian families today to worship God together.

Relying on Scripture in Suffering

As has been previously discussed, the Spurgeons faced trying times and did so with full confidence in Scripture and by crying out to God in prayer. Whether it was the Music Hall disaster, constant physical afflictions experienced by both Charles and Susannah, theological upheaval such as the Down-Grade Controversy, or some other trial, they anchored their lives, and marriage, to the Bible. In the Scripture they found a faithful, kind, and generous God who supplied all of their needs. Spurgeon proclaimed,

It is often worthwhile being afflicted in order to experience the great loving kindness of God, which He bestows so abundantly on us in the hour of trouble and perplexity. Yes, God turns our fasts into feasts, and we are glad in the midst of our sorrow! We can praise and bless His name for all that He does.⁴¹

In every situation, Charles and Susannah depended on the Bible for wisdom, comfort, and direction. The Down-Grade Controversy itself was over the nature of Scripture, and during that time Spurgeon earnestly attempted to stem the tide of doctrinal compromise crashing against the shores of biblical fidelity.

Four years prior to Spurgeon's death, and in the midst of the Controversy, Susannah reflected on God's care for Charles and her: "We have proved His power to sustain and comfort under every trial; we have recognized the Hand which wounded us, as the Hand which once was wounded for us; and have found it true that 'He, who roused the storm, is the Hiding-place from it.'"⁴² What Susannah conveyed is enlightening, considering how the Spurgeons faced numerous heart-wrenching difficulties in their marriage. They accepted their trials as from God's hand. Susannah believed that the "Hand,

⁴¹Spurgeon, *MTP*, 38:142.

⁴²Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!: A Sequel to "Ten Years of My Life in the Service of the Book Fund"* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1895), 63.

which wounded us” was also “the Hand which once was wounded for us.” Charles and Susannah knew that God was trustworthy and that he provided help for them in the midst of their troubles. The Savior who was wounded for them sympathized with them in their weaknesses. In their trials, Charles and Susannah relied on Scripture. Spurgeon argued that it was not quantity of Bible reading that helped the reader but it was essential that the Bible “take possession of brain and heart.”⁴³ Charles and Susannah Spurgeon leaned on the Bible and trusted it as solid food that nourished their intellects, warmed their hearts, and provided enablement for daily Christian living.

Communication

Charles and Susannah Spurgeon’s relationship highlights the value of biblically saturated and affectionate communication in marriage. Their communication with one another also reveals the significant influence Bible reading and prayer had on their marriage. Great discipline was required for Spurgeon to have written the number of letters he penned each week.⁴⁴ However, his correspondence with others, helpful and lovely as it was, paled in comparison to the beauty and intimacy evident in his loving communication with Susannah. The Victorian era experienced numerous communication-oriented technological advances. However, Spurgeon’s world was still one in which the primary form of correspondence between family, friends, and business associates, separated by distance, was the handwritten letter.⁴⁵ Spurgeon’s preference was to dip his

⁴³Spurgeon, *MTP*, 37:29.

⁴⁴See chap, 3 of this thesis.

⁴⁵*Newsweek* columnist Malcolm Jones described the decline of letter writing in modern times and asked, “But where would Western civilization be without letters? For starters we wouldn’t have most of the New Testament—whatever you may think of St. Paul, he was indisputably a tireless letter writer. By the 18th century, letter writing was so commonplace that one of the first prose narratives to be considered a novel, Samuel Richardson’s ‘Pamela,’ was composed entirely of letters of a daughter to her parents, and the epistolary method lent that novel what realism it possessed.” Malcolm Jones, “The History and Lost Art of Letter Writing,” *Newsweek*, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/history-and-lost-art-letter-writing-78365>.

pen in ink and express his thoughts and feelings on paper.⁴⁶ His letters to Susannah provide insight into the role of Scripture and prayer in his life and marriage. They contain humor, personal anecdotes, requests for prayer, his intimate feelings about Susannah, and encouragements to her. In a lecture on prayer to students at the Pastor's College, Spurgeon connected prayer to writing: "If you can dip your pens into your hearts, appealing in earnestness to the Lord, you will write well; and if you can gather on your knees at the gate of heaven, you will not fail to speak well."⁴⁷ Though Spurgeon was referencing the writing of and preaching of sermons, the application is apropos for letter writing as well. Spurgeon's correspondence to Susannah indeed seemed to come from the "gate of heaven." In 1869, during Susannah's recovery from surgery, Spurgeon wrote to her as "My own dear Sufferer." He encouraged her: "Oh, may the ever-merciful God be pleased to give you ease!"⁴⁸ Spurgeon closed the letter by referencing Scripture:

I must not write more; and, indeed, matter runs short, except the old, old story of a love, which grieves over you, and would fain work a miracle, and raise you up to perfect health. I fear the heat afflicts you. Well did the elder say to John in Patmos, concerning those who are before the throne of God, "neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." Yours to love in life, and death, and eternally, C. H. S.⁴⁹

In this letter, Spurgeon looked to God on Susannah's behalf; he expressed his love for her and displayed his concern for her by looking to Scripture and a future day when God's servants would no longer feel the pain of suffering.

As in his preaching and publishing, and so in his letters to his bride, Spurgeon was a wordsmith: expressive, compassionate, and even poetic. A fitting example of

⁴⁶For a glimpse into Spurgeon's busy life and letter writing, see Donald S. Whitney, "Too Busy to Lead Family Worship?," accessed January 7, 2015, <http://biblicalspirituality.org/tag/spurgeon/>.

⁴⁷Spurgeon, *Lectures*, 43-44. Perhaps Spurgeon, like C. S. Lewis after him, found a rhythm in using a dip pen. For an explanation of why C. S. Lewis preferred a dip pen, see Tony Reinke, "Jack's Typewriter," *Desiring God*, accessed January 7, 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jack-s-typewriter>.

⁴⁸Murray, *Letters*, 163.

⁴⁹Ibid. The Scripture passage that Spurgeon references is from Rev 7:16.

Spurgeon's poetic gift is the "love-song" he wrote to Susannah in September of 1865.

Three out of eleven stanzas suffice to provide a glimpse into Spurgeon's creative writing:

"Married Love—To my wife."
Over the space which parts us, my wife,
I'll cast me a bridge of song.
Our hearts shall meet, O joy of my life,
On its arch, unseen, but strong.
As the river never forgets the sea,
But lashes to the ocean's breast,
My constant soul flows onward to thee,
And finds in thy love its rest.
Beyond and above the wedlock tie
Our union to Christ, we feel;
Uniting bonds which were made on high,
Shall hold us when earth shall reel.⁵⁰

Susannah reflected,

None can be expected to feel the same rapturous delight in the sweet verses as I did, when I first read them; I was far more proud of them that I should have been of chains of gold or strings of pearls; and they have still the power to move my soul to an overwhelming tenderness both of memory and anticipation;--but they may at least touch a chord of sympathy in some loving heart, and set it trembling with the tones of the long-forgotten music of bygone years.⁵¹

Susannah's response demonstrates how precious the words of her beloved husband were to her. His sentences were more prized by her than precious metal. She also felt that Spurgeon's musical prose had the power to influence others.

Spurgeon's letters and other writings to Susannah are a treasury of intimate, creative, and godly expression. In modern times, there are many means of instant

⁵⁰Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:298. I included only three stanzas of the "song."

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 2:297-298.

communication, and it is increasingly rare for one to write a personal letter. A headline from an article in 2011 tells the story: “U.S. Postal Service Survey Reveals Personal Letters at Record Low.” The article states,

In the future old love letters may not be found in boxes in the attic but rather circulating through the Internet, if people care to look for them,” said Webster Newbold, a professor of English at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind. . . . Last year [2010] the typical home received a personal letter about every seven weeks, according to the annual survey done by the post office. As recently as 1987 it was once every two weeks.⁵²

Perhaps married couples can learn from Charles and Susannah Spurgeon’s example the value of writing to one another. Whereas email, texting, and other forms of digital communication are helpful in keeping in touch with one’s spouse, arguably they are poor substitutes for the love and thoughtfulness that pen and paper communicate. If examined by literary scholars, Spurgeon’s poetry would probably fall short; however, his lovely language, written down, certainly achieved their purpose of touching Susannah’s heart and pointing her to Christ.

Gospel Vision

The Spurgeons’ marriage displayed gospel vision beyond earthly life—a union beyond the grave. Marriage is designed to display, on earth, the relationship between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:22-33). Jesus taught that human marriage ends at death.⁵³ However, because the relationship between Christ and His people is never severed, even by death, Christian fellowship remains constant throughout eternity. Though there is no marriage in heaven, there is an even greater union between Christians *in heaven* than between husband and wife on earth. Charles and Susannah both looked forward to a

⁵²Randolph E. Schmid, “U.S. Postal Service Survey Reveals Personal Letters at Record Low,” *Huffington Post*, October 3, 2011, accessed January 7, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/03/postal-service-annual-survey-personal-letters_n_992432.html.

⁵³“For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matt 22:30).

reunion in heaven where they would forever share in the joys of living in perfect love for Christ and one another.

At the February 10, 1892, morning memorial service for Spurgeon, held at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, a telegram Susannah sent from Mentone was read: “My heart bleeds with yours, but our beloved’s joy is full. We shall see him again, and our hearts shall rejoice. Death shall be swallowed up in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.”⁵⁴ Susannah fully expected that she, along with the congregants of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, would enjoy fellowship with Spurgeon again, and that a future day of rejoicing with him in heaven awaited. Charles had shared Susannah’s conviction. His “Love Song” included a stanza that illustrates a heavenly vision of marriage.

All earthborn love must sleep in the grave,
To its native dust return;
What God hath kindled shall death outbrave,
And in heaven itself shall burn.
Though He who chose us all worlds before
Must reign in our hearts alone,
We fondly believe that we shall adore,
Together before his throne.⁵⁵

In a sermon from Matthew 22:30, Spurgeon declared, “The saints of heaven are like the angels in their persons in the fact that sex is forever obliterated there. . . . Marriage will be out of the question.”⁵⁶ Though there is no marriage in heaven, earthly marriage, if it is to be godly, requires heavenly vision. The love between Charles and

⁵⁴Schindler, *From the Pulpit to the Palm-Branch*, 122.

⁵⁵Spurgeon, *Autobiography*: 2:299.

⁵⁶Spurgeon, *MTP*, 14:650.

Susannah is much stronger today in heaven than it was when they walked the pathways of England. However, their biblical vision of marriage turned their hearts heavenward and caused them to look forward to the time when together they would “adore” God “before His throne.”

In 1895, three years after the death of Spurgeon, Susannah wrote, “God comforted me in my affliction, and in His wondrous pity and compassion uplifted me, from the sorrow of my loss, into the joyful hope of eternal re-union in the land that knows no death.”⁵⁷ She described her life’s journey with Charles as “two pilgrims treading this highway of life together, hand in hand,—heart linked to heart.”⁵⁸ She described their trials together as “rivers to ford, and mountains to cross, and fierce enemies to fight, and many dangers to go through.”⁵⁹ Though in the midst of their challenges she said that “their Guide was watchful, their Deliverer unailing.” Their journey was one of mostly “singing.” However, eventually

They came to a place on the road where two ways met; and here, amidst the terrors of a storm such as they had never before encountered, they parted company,—the one being caught up to the invisible glory,—the other, battered and bruised by the awful tempest, henceforth toiling along the road,—alone!⁶⁰

Susannah knew that God was her helper:

But the “goodness and mercy” which, for so many years had followed the two travelers, did not leave the solitary one [but rather] the Lord “lead on softly,” and chose green pastures for the tired feet, and still waters for the solace and refreshment of His trembling child.⁶¹

A year after Spurgeon died, Susannah described a tender scene as she wrote from her husband’s study. Her description takes the reader deep into her thoughts and provides a fitting final perspective on her marriage to Charles.

⁵⁷Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, v.

⁵⁸Ibid., vi.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., vi-viii.

⁶¹Ibid., vii.

I am writing in my husband's study, where he thought, and prayed, and wrote. Every inch of the place is sacred ground. Everything remains precisely as he left it. His books (now my most precious possessions), stand in shining rows upon the shelves, in exactly the order in which he placed them, and one might almost fancy the room was ready and waiting for its master. But oh! That empty chair! That great portrait over the door! The strange, solemn silence, which pervades the place now that he is no longer on earth! I kneel sometimes by his chair, and laying my head on the cushioned arms, which so long supported his dear form, I pour out my grief before the Lord, and tell Him again that though I am left alone, yet I know that "He hath done all things well." Then wandering from room to room, looking with tear-dimmed eyes at the home treasures my dear one loved and admired, almost expecting to hear the sound of his footsteps behind me, and the sweet tones of his tender voice in loving greeting,—I have, alas to realize afresh how true were King David's words when he said in his sorrow, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."⁶²

Concluding Thoughts

This study considered the role of Bible intake and prayer in the marriage of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon. No reader should be left with the impression that Charles and Susannah primarily spent almost all their waking hours reading, meditating on, and memorizing Scripture. Such thinking would miss the larger picture of the Spurgeons' spirituality. Certainly they were faithful to read the Bible and pray, but the impact of Scripture and prayer reached far beyond their daily devotions, which is evident by their response to suffering, their approach to family worship and their reaction to controversy. Charles's and Susannah's lives put forth an aroma of biblical spirituality evident in everything from daily conversation, letters to one another, to appreciating the beauties of Creation. Spurgeon's friend and student, William Williams enjoyed intimate access to Spurgeon. He described a visit to Spurgeon's home:

Mr. Spurgeon delighted in his garden at Westwood. He knew every plant and flower in his conservatories; he used to linger over them as over verses of the Bible when he was commenting. 'Is not that exquisite? Look at the veins and colors in these leaves; don't you think God has put His own thoughts in them? The plant has His laughable thoughts . . . this His loving thoughts . . . this His serious ones. All nature is full of God. His autograph is on every leaf and in every flower.'⁶³

⁶²Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 213.

⁶³William Williams, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: Personal Reminiscences*, rev. and ed. Marguerite Williams (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.), 15.

Spurgeon's regular intake of Scripture allowed him to see the handiwork of God in the plants and flowers that dotted his landscape. For Spurgeon, his admiration of God's artistic beauty in creation was not in anyway less spiritual than when he was reading the Bible itself. Certainly, Bible reading was more important than tracing the creativity of God in the trees of Westwood, but Scripture provided a framework to more fully appreciate trees, flowers, and birds. Williams reported:

Mr. Spurgeon once spoke strongly against the conception of religion, which led some men to shut their eyes to the beauties of the world. He said: 'I remember sorrowfully reading the expressions of a godly person who, in sailing down one of the most famous rivers in the world, closed his eyes lest the picturesque beauties of the scene should divert his mind from Scriptural topics. This may be regarded by some as profound spirituality; to me it savors of absurdity. There may be persons who think they have grown in grace when they have attained to this; it seems to me they are growing out of their senses.'⁶⁴

Spurgeon saw the world through the lens of Scripture and nothing escaped his attention as a matter of prayer. Williams testified, "He is careful to consult God about every detail of life."⁶⁵

Susannah benefitted from a similar awareness of Scripture in day-to-day life. She recounted that one evening she took a stroll along the grounds of Westwood to "gather roses—to preserve their perfumed leaves." She described how her roses had stood up to the "fervid glances of the sun, and the hot kisses of the South wind" and yet, in the midst of such a trial, she found them "blooming in clusters of unusual beauty . . . apparently as fresh, and cool, and invigorated as if the blessed rain for which we had prayed had already fallen." As she gathered the roses, when catching a bloom that was falling to the ground, she noticed that the bloom was "besprinkled with water." She then recognized that the "shake of the rose" had brought forth water from its "inmost recesses." The reservoir of water, contained within *all* of Susannah's roses, had strengthened them

⁶⁴Williams, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 15.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

“against the heat of the day” and refreshed them with water from within.⁶⁶ She applied her discovery to Christians struggling under the “heat and burden of the day”:

Think a moment on my roses and how tenderly God has provided for their need. Could He be less thoughtful for thine? Has He made such wonderful provision for their sustenance and refreshment during the days of drought, and “forgotten to be gracious” to thee? Ah, no! Thou well knowest it is not so.⁶⁷

Like her husband, Susannah made Scriptural parallels to nature. In the account of her roses, she reflected on Psalm 77:9: “Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? Selah.”

The approach in this thesis has been primarily biographical. Through episodes in Charles and Susannah’s lives, a connection has been drawn from their joyful marriage to their commitment to Scripture reading and prayer. The Spurgeons’ love story cannot be properly appreciated apart from their spiritual disciplines; disciplines that they practiced personally and they applied in their marriage and family. It was the disciplines of Bible intake and prayer that informed their lives and that helped them to better see the glory of God in the world. It was Scripture and prayer that gave them perspective and kept them faithful to Christ during the many days of suffering that they faced together. An account by Spurgeon’s friend Jesse Page demonstrates this perspective:

It was after a committee meeting held in his house. Business over. We had risen from tea and walked through the beautiful grounds, and were once again in the house. He opened up the Bible and read, read and expounded as only he could, opening up the very heart of the Scriptures. Dear Mrs. Spurgeon, slowly recovering from a long and wearisome sickness was lying on the couch, sharing our joyful communion. Reading finished, the dear one said, “We are part of the family of God: Shall we draw near and talk to Him?” As we turned to kneel, he moved towards the couch, and with one arm around the loved form, he poured out his very soul in a passion of importunate prayer. Never can we forget that hour. It was as if heavens gates had been widely opened, and some lustrous beam, alight with our Father’s smile, had strayed into the room.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Spurgeon, *Ten Years After!*, 37.

⁶⁷Ibid., 38.

⁶⁸Jesse Page, *C. H. Spurgeon: His Life and Ministry* (London: S. W. Partridge & Co., n.d.), 96-97.

Charles and Susannah Spurgeon’s commitment to Bible intake and prayer helped them to know true joy, such as David described in Psalm 4:7: “You have put more joy in my heart that they have when their grain and wine abound.” The Spurgeons enjoyed happiness that was not dependent on positive external circumstances, but was instead rooted in knowing and walking with God. Their relationship with God, along with their happy marriage, was a direct result of reading the Bible and praying, in all of the ways that have been discussed.

On New Year’s Day, 1892, Spurgeon gathered with a small group of Christians at his hotel in Mentone. This was one of the final times that he proclaimed God’s Word, prior to his death. He reminded his little congregation of the priority of their earthly life; a priority that is eternal in practice:

The vista of a praiseful life will never close, but continue throughout eternity. From psalm to psalm, from hallelujah to hallelujah, we will ascend the hill of the Lord; until we come into the Holiest of all, where, with veiled faces, we will bow before the Divine Majesty in the bliss of endless adoration.⁶⁹

Charles and Susannah Spurgeon lived “praiseful” lives. Like Hebrews 11:4 declares of faithful Abel, “he being dead yet speaketh,” Charles and Susannah are still speaking in heaven as they go “from psalm to psalm” in “endless adoration.” They still speak, to all who will listen on earth, by their faithful examples. Charles Ray remembered Susannah, in the last weeks of her life, manifesting “strong faith in the God whom she had trusted for so long.” Susannah was able to muster the strength to declare: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” Near the end of her life she was relying on Scripture (Job 13:15) to aid her as she approached death. Confidently she asserted, “His love in times past forbids me to think, He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink.” She requested that those in the room with her “complete the verse.”⁷⁰ Susannah lived a few more weeks, and near the

⁶⁹Schindler, *From the Pulpit to the Palm-Branch*, 31.

⁷⁰Charles Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*, in *Free Grace and Dying Love* (Edinburg: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 247. The lines quoted by Susannah are from a hymn by John Newton. See

very end of her life she testified, “Blessed Jesus! Blessed Jesus! I can see the King in his glory.”⁷¹ Susannah Spurgeon died on Thursday, October 22, 1903, and was buried alongside of her beloved husband.⁷² Like Charles before her, she died with confidence in the truthfulness of Scripture.

John Newton, “Be Gone, Unbelief; My Savior Is Near,” accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.oremus.org/hymnal/b/b004.html>.

⁷¹Ray, *The Life of Susannah Spurgeon*.

⁷²Ibid.

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF BIBLE INTAKE AND PRAYER IN THE MARRIAGE OF CHARLES AND SUSANNAH SPURGEON

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This thesis connects the joyful marriage of Charles and Susannah Spurgeon to their commitment to Bible reading and prayer. Chapter 1 offers an overview of Charles Spurgeon's ministry and marriage and holds them up as an example worthy of imitation. Chapter 2 traces the biblical foundation of Charles and Susannah with special emphasis on their view of the Bible, Bible reading, and prayer. Chapter 3 examines the pre-marital relationship of Charles Spurgeon and Susannah Thompson with a focus on Spurgeon's discipleship method with Susannah, especially in regard to his use of the *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Chapter 4 provides a sweeping overview of the Spurgeons' marriage through several key episodes, up to and including the death of Charles. Chapter 5 offers suggestions to modern readers on how to apply principles from the Spurgeons' marriage to their own marital relationships.

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