

# Charles Spurgeon and Depression

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[ 0 : 00 ] I feel very sad all the time. They asked if the student felt overwhelmed by all they had to do, and 87% said yes, totally overwhelmed by the life they left.

When students were asked if they felt exhausted, but not from physical activity, 12 out of 13 said yes, I'm exhausted all the time. When asking if they were so depressed that it was difficult to function, one out of three said yes.

One out of three. Said if they were so depressed it was difficult to function. When asked if they experienced overwhelming anxiety, one out of two said yes.

Asked if they had overwhelming anger, 40% said yes. When they asked if they had seriously considered suicide, 7% said yes.

Roughly one out of 13 students. And when asking if they'd attempted suicide, over 1% said yes.

One in 100 students in this survey had tried to kill themselves.

[ 1 : 01 ] The broken generation. So why speak on depression? Because despondency, anxiety, fatigue, apathy, hopelessness, and isolation increasingly defined the global mood of the next generation.

And I should also mention, this isn't a young person involved. In another survey in America, we found that the denomination of the population that had the greatest case of depression growing the fastest were people aged over 65.

So this isn't exclusively a young person problem. It's actually increasingly a problem for seniors. So we've asked, what is depression?

Why speak on depression? And now, is depression a modern problem? Is this a new thing? Have we created this in the last 50 years? Some would argue, sort of.

Yes, kind of. There's a Christian psychiatrist named Archibald Hart, who works at Fuller Seminary, and he's given most of his 50-plus clinical career to counselling church workers, namely pastors, who suffer from depression, anxiety disorder, or burnout.

[ 2 : 10 ] And he feels that depression is ever-increasing in our modern world. And he defines it as a modern epidemic. The rates globally of clinical depression are rising, with the most conservative models suggesting about a 35% increase in the next 30 years.

And the most extreme projections suggesting people may be going to our counsellors in 30 years, like people go to the dentist today. Is depression new? And is it especially new amongst the people of God?

And here I would argue no. Well, we know in the Bible, lots of people seem to experience seasons of depression. Perhaps the most famous of them is David. In all of his psalms, we see such despondency and sorrow.

I'd like to read to you, we're not positive this is David's psalm, but the psalmist who writes, it clearly identifies with what we're talking about. This is Psalm 102. Hear my prayer, O Lord.

Let my cry come to you. Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me. Answer me speedily, the day when I call.

[ 3 : 20 ] For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is struck down like grass and is withered.

I forget to eat my bread because of my loud groaning. My bones cling to the flesh. I am like a desert owl of the wilderness. Like an owl of the waste places, I lie awake.

I am like a lovely sparrow on the housetop. All the day my enemies taunt me. Those who drive me use my name for a curse. For I eat ashes like bread, and I mingle tears with my drink because of your indignation and anger.

For you have taken me up and thrown me down. My days are like an evening shadow. I wither away like grass. Seems a good example of someone who may have experienced depression all those years ago.

The prophet Elijah, in 1 Kings 19, verse 4, asks God that he might die, saying, It is enough now, O Lord. Take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.

[ 4 : 22 ] Another example in the Bible, Hannah, the mother of Samuel. In 1 Samuel 1, verse 7, we are told that Hannah wept and would not eat.

She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. I don't want you to think this is an Old Testament problem. The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 1, We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us.

On him we have set our hope, and he will deliver us again. And finally, some in the counseling world argue that Jesus himself perhaps experienced depression around his own death.

Luke chapter 22, verse 41 reads, Jesus withdrew from his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, saying, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.

[ 5 : 28 ] Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him, and being in agony for great more earnestness, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling to the ground.

Matthew records Jesus as saying, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Depression is not new, but its prevalence in the world does seem to be.

So why is depression on the rise today? And I'm going to again refer to Archibald Hart, who I think his research is really fascinating on the issue. Archibald Hart, I was introduced to, because he was asked to speak to all the pastors in the Sydney Diocese, all the priests and all the bishops, came to a conference, and Archibald Hart gave a series of lectures on depression, and burnout among his pastors specifically.

And he did a really wonderful job of explaining that the human body in our modern paradigm is being forced to live outside the box, outside the bounds of human existence that God has created us for.

And just briefly, if you're scientifically minded, I'll explain. Dr. Hart explores this tranquilizer the body naturally produces called cortisone. And what happens is cortisone is naturally released and circulated through our bodies after a high adrenaline event.

[ 6 : 51 ] So you can imagine a hunter going out for the hunt and he catches his catch and then that night he rests. And he's resting and he can relax because the adrenaline has been offset by this cortisone, which makes him feel actually kind of depressed.

Apathetic, lethargic, tired, all the symptoms we would associate with depression. And Dr. Hart has tracked cortisone over time, as we can analyze bodies over the centuries and just see what's happened to this cortisone naturally in the body.

And he found that it was an incredibly low level until about the late 19th century when it saw a little spike. And interestingly, the spike occurred right around the advent of lightbulb.

So as soon as the lightbulb was invented, all of our cortisone went up a little bit. as a general population, our tranquilizer in our body increased a little bit to offset this new overexcitement caused by light.

The next spike in the natural history of humanity was when the television was invented in the mid-20th century. So again, it was a bigger spike now. People have more cortisone pulsing through their blood.

[ 8 : 00 ] And then in the mid-1990s, which is around when the internet was invented, we see an exponential rise in cortisone. Now, how is this relevant to depression?

Because as cortisol gets higher and higher and higher and higher, as our body is being forced to pump out more and more and more tranquilizer to calm us down because we're overstimulated, eventually the circuit breaks.

And when the circuit breaks, the cortisone hugely spikes and we have nothing to offset it. And that's what depression is. Now, I should say briefly, that is not all depression.

It's not like depression started in 1890 and it was never before. We just read examples from Scripture, in fact. So depression can come from other sources. For Charles Spurgeon, it did come from another source.

But our chart, arguing why is it today, says we are so overstimulated all the time that our body is having to overcompensate by more and more and more natural tranquilizer. And the way our body gets us to stop and rest is by making us depressed.

[ 9 : 03 ] That's our chart's work. And if you're interested, his book is called *Dark Clouds, Silver Linings*. And he also has written a number of books on ministering to people who experience depression.

So that is a very brief tack on the modern scene. Depression seems to be rising exponentially. And so now having defined what depression is, why it's important, looking at the history of the people of God and exploring just one contemporary explanation, not everyone buys into our charts theory, but I thought it was fascinating.

We now have to explore Charles Spurgeon and glean insight from his experience of depression in how to better love, serve, and support those we know who suffer from depression.

So now moving to Spurgeon. In sum, depression is a contemporary pandemic characterized by a downcast mind with prolonged feelings of dejection and responsiveness often manifested in physical apathy.

Perhaps surprisingly, Christians who hold an eternal hope of God's good news are just as susceptible to depression as others. A Christian counselor named Elizabeth Ruth Scoblin, who is a scholar and practicing counselor, wrote, If Christian human beings have one major area of vulnerability psychologically, perhaps it is depression above all the other negative emotions.

[ 10 : 29 ] Read that again. A counselor writes, If Christian human beings have one major area of vulnerability psychologically, perhaps it is depression above all the other negative emotions.

So looking at the history of Christian spirituality, it becomes apparent that depression amongst believers has been a constant reality through the centuries. Now one man, held to be amongst one of the greatest Christian preachers and proclaimers of the good news, Charles Adam Spurgeon, suffered under crippling depression for almost his entire act of church ministry.

Spurgeon examines depression spiritually through his sermons, exploring what it is and how God uses it for the good of his people. I will argue that Charles Spurgeon develops and demonstrates a spiritual understanding of mental depression, arguing that depression is a God-ordained condition to enable spiritual growth through humility and dependence on God.

I will show this firstly by stating what depression is according to Charles Spurgeon, having now looked at our modern definition. And note that Spurgeon adds a spiritual reality to the mental definition we know.

Secondly, the causes of depression will be explored based on Spurgeon's theological understanding and his personal experience. And then lastly, I want to analyze how Spurgeon demonstrates that God uses depression for the good of the believer being afflicted as well as for his own glory.

[ 11 : 56 ] So in these three loci, Spurgeon articulates common truths to commit their people with life backwards through the history of the Christian church and also forwards to Christians today suffering to inflict depression.

So before an examination of Spurgeon's theology of depression is analyzed, we should perhaps first briefly chart his life.

Charles Spurgeon was a preacher in London from 1854 to 1892, nearly 40 years, who was known for his powerful elements. He was celebrated as the Prince of Preachers, a brilliant expositor and famous communicator of the Christian message.

Less known, he suffered for most of his life physically from rheumatoid gout and likely kidney disease, which prevented him from preaching on successive Sundays from 1867 onwards.

He was often shut in at home, he was unable to climb stairs, and he needed to recuperate in South France for one to three months a year. alongside his physical ailments, Spurgeon described himself as having deep fits of depression, regular mood swings, insomnia, and brain weariness as he depended.

[ 13 : 11 ] These symptoms appear to have started around 1864, just 12 years into his ministry, when during a sermon he was delivering in the Surrey Gardens Music Hall, one of the thousands of listeners yelled, fire!

Prompting widespread panic in the overcrowded building that led to seven people being trampled to death in the aftermath in the middle of his preaching. Spurgeon's official biographer, Richard Jay, writes, Spurgeon's grief over this almost unseated his reasons.

He was immediately hidden from the public, spent hours in tears by day, and experienced dreams of terror by night. Scoglin, our counselor, could at least the moment cause a, quote, depression complex to deepen the content from which he never recovered, close to him.

Spurgeon viewed his condition as an opportunity for spiritual development, a special cross or discipline God had bestowed upon him in order to grow in godliness.

Spurgeon wrote and preached extensively on depression, using his own personal experience to expound truths found in scripture. And Spurgeon did this firstly by defining what depression is.

[ 14 : 26 ] Although no well-established medical understanding of depression existed, it wouldn't exist for another 50 years, Spurgeon recognized in himself a propensity to be cast down. He writes that, quote, depression is a leak through which the soul's force wastes itself, drop by drop.

Close to him. Spurgeon saw that physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being were connected and that everyone was susceptible to periods of depression and feeling down. Spurgeon proclaimed in one of his sermons, such pain does not discriminate between the rich and poor or even the godly and the ungodly.

You may be surrounded with all the comforts of life and yet be in wretchedness more gloomy than death if the spirits be depressed. You may have no outward cause whatsoever for sorrow and yet in the mind be dejected and the brightest sunshine will not relieve your gloom.

At such time, you may be vexed with cares, haunted with dreams and scared with thoughts which distract you. You fear that your sins are not pardoned, that your past transgressions are brought to remembrance and that punishment is being meted out to you in full measure.

Sounds like a man who experienced and knew these expressions forward. Spurgeon wrote of how fits of depression come over most of us and how everyone, no matter how strong, cheerful, brave, or joyous, goes through seasons of varying lengths of vulnerability, weakness, and despondency.

[ 15 : 58 ] But having defined what depression is in his spiritual framework, Spurgeon continues by exploring what causes it. Ultimately, he reiterates the Calvinist understanding that all suffering ultimately is the result of original sin and humanity's sinful condition.

Spurgeon adds that suffering can also be caused by the devil's activity in the world. He points to God's sovereignty as overruling Satan's attempt to cause distress. Instead, God uses suffering for good.

This is most clearly exemplified by Spurgeon and Christ's cross. where from sin and defeat through suffering, God actually triumphs over Satan, sin, and death in the passion of his Son.

And in this light, he sees depression, although originating from Satan's scheming in our sinful state, as discipline from the end of God. And although often viewed by the suffering human as punishment for sin, it is not, and is rather an instrument, God uses for spiritual growth.

On an individual level, Spurgeon recognized that depression can be caused by a great variety of circumstances unique to every person. Some of these causes, he suggests, include success, ironically, circumstance, overwork, working in ministry, unconfessed sin, or as purely a trial from God with no seeming cause or rationality.

[ 17 : 19 ] Each of these causes I'm now going to briefly explore to further understand Spurgeon's spirituality and depression. Firstly, Spurgeon outlines that depression can be caused by great success.

He writes, quote, When at last a long-term desire is fulfilled, when God has been glorified greatly by our means, a great triumph is attained, and we are apt to faint.

Excessive joy or excitement must be paid for by subsequent depressions. Close words. Similarly, before any great achievement, Spurgeon argues depression is common as the difficulties before us loom large.

Spurgeon speaks to his own experience here, recounting when he first became a pastor. And he says, My success followed me, and the thought of the career which it seemed to open up so far from elating me cast me into the lowest of death.

That was a line he gave to students in the lecture. into his training and the third pastor. Another cause of depression, Spurgeon suggests, is a circumstance or event of tragedy.

[ 18 : 28 ] And this was his experience. This came from him in the form of that panicked crowd during his sermon in 1864, leading to seven congregants' deaths before his eyes. This leads to

Spurgeon feeling clergy are predisposed to depression.

He writes, our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression. Who can bear the weight of souls without sinking to the dust?

Passionate longings after men and women's conversion, if not fully satisfied, and when are they, consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment. Similarly, a disloyal or antagonistic church member can cause a minister to enter into depression, according to Spurgeon.

Next, Spurgeon suggests, overwork can cause depression. He writes, quote, In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labor, the same affliction may be looked for.

The bow cannot always be bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful for the mind as sleep to the body. God's ambassador must rest or faint, must recruit his vigor or grow prematurely old.

[ 19 : 40 ] In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. Wonderful insight. I mentioned that all of Spurgeon's insights I find so fascinating because they perfectly line up with Archibald Hart's insights in the 21st century.

He seemed to be on to something and it's as relevant then as it is today. Spurgeon also recognizes that depression is not always caused situationally. Sometimes it can appear totally irrational.

He writes, One affords himself no pity when in this case, because it seems so unreasonable and even sinful to be troubled without manifest cause, and yet troubled the person is, even in the very depths of the spirit.

The physician and the divine may unite their skill in such cases and both find their hands full and more than full. In light of all the circumstances that might lead to depression, Spurgeon urges suffering Christians to keep their dependence and hope upon God.

This is another lecture he gave to his students. Count it no strange thing but part of the ordinary experience. Should the power of depression be more than ordinary, think not that all is over with your gracefulness?

[ 20 : 57 ] Even if the enemy's foot be on your neck, expect to rise and overthrow him. Cast the burden on the present along with the sin of the past and the fear of the future upon the Lord who forsaketh not his saints.

Spurgeon urges that depression is not sinful and that people may, irrespective of spiritual maturity or life situation, find themselves feeling low. From his own experience, he defines depression as a form of downcast spirit and he sees that it can be caused by circumstance, success, vocation, overwork, unconfessed sin or from seemingly no external situation at all, totally irrational.

Once he has laid his foundation in this way, Spurgeon spends most of his energy exploring how God uses the depression of his saints to develop holiness and humility.

And this is where hope enters the equation. Spurgeon argues suffering in the form of depression draws a Christian closer to Christ in his sufferings, enabling the Christian to grow in compassion for others, to cultivate humility and to mature in holiness.

In short, depression is a sharp tool God uses to engender deeper faith and closer union with him. And before the uses of depression are more closely examined, it must be conceded that spiritual darkness and depression do not always develop the faith of the believer.

[ 22 : 28 ] Spurgeon himself recognized this and wrote, two Christians could have similar experiences of depression and yet respond in markedly different ways. There is a real danger that suffering would make a believer impatient, hardened, and bitter.

Spurgeon, recognizing this, goes on to say, going through the fire of suffering was an essential part of the process of sanctification and growth towards Christian maturity. But a fire to purify and not consume, it had to be sanctified to the believer.

For this to happen, God had to be at work in the believer's life as they experienced trials. For Spurgeon, depression is a tool used by God predominantly to enable the Christian to grow in imitation and union with Christ.

Suffering challenges the disciples of Jesus to grow in communion with Christ through suffering as he did. Spurgeon said, when under a deep depression the mind is only conscious of its unutterable misery, it is an unspeakable consolation that our Lord Jesus knows this experience right well, having, with the exception of the sin of it, felt it all and more in that garden of Gethsemane when he was exceedingly sore, even to death.

Jesus knows our suffering. Spurgeon nuances depression, connecting it to suffering generally and presenting it to the Christian as a cross given by Christ which draws a believer closer to Jesus through suffering as he did.

[ 23 : 59 ] Sorrows revealed to us the man of sorrows and grief swathed us to the bosom of God. This idea is most beautifully developed in one of his sermons. For in heaviness we often learn lessons that we could never attain elsewhere.

do you know that God has beauties for every part of the world and he has beauties for every place of experience? There are views to be seen from the tops of the alps that you can never see elsewhere.

There are beauties to be seen in the depths of the dell that you can never see on the tops of the mountains. Men and women will never become great in divinity until they become great in suffering. Ah, said Luther, affliction is the best book in my library. And let me add, the best leaf in the book of affliction is that blackest of all the leaves, that leaf called heaviness, when the spirit sinks within us and we cannot endure as we would wish.

Union with Christ, especially communion with him and his suffering, was paramount for Spurgeon in growing in maturity as a Christian. He taught the first qualification for serving God with any amount of success and for doing God's work well and triumphantly is a sense of your own weakness.

[ 25 : 18 ] God will not go forth with that man who goes forth in his own strength. Your weakness is but the preparation for your own being filled, and your casting down is but the making ready for lifting up.

And at least one of us in this room has written an excellent book on this called Weakness is the Way, which is a wonderful exposition of 2 Corinthians in the same way. But why was weakness, pain, isolation, and inner turmoil so essential for growth in godliness for the believer?

Charles Spurgeon felt that when Christians suffered, especially through depression, and if the believer sought God throughout the trial, that it would lead to a more tangible experience of God's grace and God's glory.

Spurgeon writes, the Lord has a choice way of manifesting himself unto his servants in their times of weakness. I speak for what I know, for I have trodden the path upon which shines the inward personal revelation of God.

He draws the curtain about the bed of his chosen sufferer, and at the same time, he withdraws another curtain, which before conceals his glory. With this new, more intimate union with God through suffering, a Christian is better equipped to feel compassion for those who suffer around them.

[ 26 : 37 ] Spurgeon said, I would go into the deep a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit. It is good for me to have been given affliction that I might know how to speak a word in season to one that is weary.

Spurgeon urges his parishioners to pursue the depressed and the downcast believer, and not to avoid them. Quote, speak a kind word always, find out those who are weary, do not avoid them because they are melancholy, but rather pursue them, hunt them out, do not let them be quiet in their nested forms, and carry your friend with you, and lift them above the clouds.

In this way, depression can lead not only to greater awareness of Christ and his sufferings, but also greater communion for one neighbor who suffers. Spurgeon argues other spiritual qualities also develop and blossom when one experiences depression.

Firstly, as the cross of Christ affirms, suffering has a purpose, and depression causes multiple fruits to ripen in the downcast Christian. Firstly, it teaches the discipline of obedience to God, just as it did to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed, take this cup away from me, but not my will, but yours be done.

Spurgeon believed that prosperity softened a Christian, whereas adversity had the opposite effect, raising the soul and strengthening. Also, Spurgeon taught depression and other sufferings for tools used by God to awaken lethargic Christians.

[ 28 : 16 ] He said, quote, a glass of water might look clear, but a little stirring disturbed the sediment and made the water cloudy. So it was with believers. The agitation caused by suffering brought the sin and compromise, which had been present before, although not visible, to the surface.

Whether a believer was sleepwalking aimlessly through the Christian life, or gloating of sinless perfection, suffering acted as a spiritual wake-up call. Another use of depression for the Christian is growing in courage.

As one relinquishes control and trustfully in God, the Christian becomes more courageous and depending upon God for provision rather than upon themselves. As long as you have confidence in yourself, Spurgeon writes, you are like a man who keeps his anchor on board his boat and you will never come to a resting place.

Over with your faith unto the great depths of eternal love and power and trust in the infinitely faithful one. Then shall you be glad because your heart is quiet. Stay yourself upon God because he commands you to do so.

In summary and conclusion, suffering, including depression, has the experience of the Christian has been the experience of the Christian since the moment Jesus called his disciples to deny themselves, carry their cross, and follow him.

[ 29 : 43 ] Christians seen as heroes of the faith through the centuries were often afflicted with mental turmoil and a downcast heart. Charles Spurgeon, a godly man and prolific preacher, does not shy away from the reality of depression in Christian spirituality.

Instead, he embraces mental suffering as a cross given by God to catalyze imitation of Christ and grow the Christian in godliness. Spurgeon does this firstly by defining what depression is as both a result of human sinful condition as well as a tool the devil attempts to use to shape wreck a Christian's faith.

Secondly, Spurgeon goes to great lengths to explore what he feels causes depression, citing situational and vocational reasons, but also recognizing that sometimes depression will befall a believer, perceiving the memory of the world.

Finally, and most expansively, Spurgeon seeks to comfort followers suffering from a downcast heart, showing that God uses depression in a variety of ways for good.

Spurgeon articulates that God in his mercy and power ordains what is the result of sin, or the demonic, as a tool to produce godliness in Christians. As Christians suffer through depression, Spurgeon urges them to see God as their Savior and their model, to grow in imitation of Christ.

[ 31 : 00 ] To become more prayerful and compassionate to others, and to trust in God's goodness to both deliver and uphold them. Spurgeon's work develops a spirituality of depression, which Elizabeth Scoglund writes and affirms, if the history of great men and women of God is any indication of the incidence of depression amongst the godly, then rather than being indicative of sinfulness or indifference to God, depression may often be an indicator that God intends to use and bless.

That individual, according to Charles Spurgeon. So having explored what depression is in the modern paradigm, what depression was to Charles Spurgeon, I now want to spend very little time, and I hope this will bleed into our dialogue together, talking about what ought we to do when ministering to people with depression, Christian or not, friends or family, or even ourselves.

I was raised to be at a lecture a couple weeks ago led by none other than a run, Dr. Packard, and he gave several insights, and I'd like to share two of them.

And these insights, I believe, are loosely based on the work of Richard Baxter, who also spoke in this talk. And one of the insights given was to recognize supportive fellowship is a wonderful counter-depressor.

I've never had depression, but in my own life I know there are people who have been depressed and they're difficult to be around, so you tend to avoid them. And Dr. Packard wisely quoted Galatians 6, verse 2, Bear one another's burdens, and in so doing, fulfill the law of Christ.

[ 32 : 35 ] We are to draw near, as Spurgeon told us, to those with depression, and we will grow in community, fellowship, and faith together. The second insight I received is to recognize caring for Christians in depression is itself a very significant ministry.

And indeed, as I would, I'd be becoming more and more significant as more and more of our population is separate from the Christians. We as Christians have a great hope that we ought to share. And we have a great ministry that any of us can pursue.

And so the job of the church, perhaps, is to train us and have to. And the job of us is to go out and to do so. And I'd like to finish with one example.

My wife gave me, she's doing pastoral care currently, with children and families with special needs. And she was talking to a mom, who's a single mom, with a child with severe autism, and the mom

had just been diagnosed with a brain tumor and given a little chance to survive.

A very dire situation. Melissa knows I'm giving this example, by the way. And when you hear a situation like that that is so hopeless, you can't help but just spew out whatever wisdom comes to mind, or lack of wisdom, and you just want to instruct, you need to do this and then do that, and then pursue this and then pursue that.

[ 33 : 58 ] And the woman stopped my wife in her tracks and said, Melissa, I don't need you to solve this. I just need you to be with her. And I think that's a lesson we will never forget.

And it's the same for people with depression. Our presence is powerful. And perhaps that's more powerful often than giving them a sermon on their bedside. So that is Charles Spurgeon, his spirituality of depression.

And I would love to now hear from some of our pastors or clinical counselors or doctors, or people who've experienced depression, or someone close to them at, and continue to dialogue together.

Thank you.

Thank you.