

Foreword

HARDLY ANYONE OUTSIDE of Scripture speaks to me like Charles Spurgeon does. He had incredible depth and biblical insight, and his sermons and writings, full of grace and truth and sheer eloquence, always draw me to Jesus.

Spurgeon preached to approximately ten million people in his lifetime, often speaking ten times a week. His 3,561 sermons are bound in sixty-three volumes, and in addition he wrote many books.

Wonderful as those accomplishments were, they put demands on his life that no doubt contributed to his battles with depression—not least of all that he often worked eighteen hours a day!

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Spurgeon took great solace in Scripture, especially in the Psalms he loved so much, as evidenced in his massive commentary set *The Treasury of David*. God's words, as Spurgeon well knew, are far more valuable than anyone else's. God promises that his word "shall not return to [him] empty, but it shall accomplish that which [he purposes], and shall succeed in the thing for which [he] sent it" (Isa. 55:11 ESV). God does not make that promise about your words or my words or even Spurgeon's words, but only his word. In the face of great criticism, Spurgeon took great pains to conform his preaching and writing to Scripture. We need to hear Spurgeon's voice because he was faithful to speak God's word, and today there aren't nearly enough voices like his.

Spurgeon also serves as a reminder that people of great trust in God can nonetheless be brought

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low in depression. While that thought may be, well, depressing to those who haven't experienced depression, it is liberating to those of us who have.

I have known depression at times in my life. Several years ago, for no apparent reason, a cloud of depression descended on me. Day after day, it was my constant companion. During that time, I was encouraged by the perspectives of Spurgeon, whose long-term struggles with depression were far worse than mine. I blogged about my depression and shared a few Spurgeon quotations that can be found in this book.

Many people have since written to tell me their own stories of how God has used Spurgeon's perspectives on depression in their lives. After I wrote a subsequent blog post about Spurgeon and the suffering he endured, I received this note: "I was depressed because once again I was not feeling

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well. It's amazing to realize even great leaders suffered so much. It gives me hope, as I suffer from near constant pain. Thanks. This really encouraged me—I needed it!”

Would Spurgeon have ever guessed that nearly two centuries later his sufferings from depression would be a source of comfort to God's people? (Who is being, and will be, touched by our sufferings and our perspectives that we won't know about until eternity?) I am confident that God will use Spurgeon's words in this little book to encourage many more believers who struggle with depression.

Spurgeon writes, “I have suffered many times from severe sickness and frightful mental depression sinking almost to despair. Almost every year I've been laid aside for a season, for flesh and blood cannot bear the strain, at least such flesh and blood as mine. [However,] I believe . . . that

affliction was necessary to me and has answered salutary ends.”¹

Those words were written by a man who lived with great physical pain for a large part of his life. While his dear wife, Susanna, was bedridden for decades, Spurgeon contracted smallpox and suffered from gout, rheumatism, and Bright’s disease (inflammation of the kidneys). His health became progressively worse, so that nearly a third of his last twenty-two years were spent away from the pulpit. This physical hardship took a great emotional toll on him.

When Spurgeon was twenty-two years old, a tragedy took place that still haunted him years later. He was preaching for the first time in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens because his own church

1 From an address by Spurgeon on May 19, 1879. Cited in Ernest LeVos, *C. H. Spurgeon and the Metropolitan Tabernacle* (iUniverse, 2014), 48.

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wasn't large enough. The ten-thousand-person seating capacity was far exceeded by the crowds pressing in. Someone shouted, "Fire!" and though there was no fire, the resulting stampede caused many injuries and the deaths of seven people. Years later, Spurgeon said this horrifying incident took him "near the burning furnace of insanity."²

Still, Spurgeon found that his great suffering drew him closer to God. In an address to ministers and students, he said, "I daresay the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness. . . . If some men that I know of could only be favoured with a month of rheumatism, it would, by God's grace, mellow them marvelously."³

- 2 Charles Spurgeon, cited in *Great Preaching on the Deity of Christ*, comp. Curtis Hutson (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 2000), 206.
- 3 Charles Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 384.

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As you'll see in the pages that follow, Spurgeon said of pastoral ministry,

Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression. Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men's conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?), consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment. To see the hopeful turn aside, the godly grow cold, professors abusing their privileges, and sinners waxing more bold in sin—are not these sights enough to crush us to the earth. . . . How often, on Lord's Day evenings, do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! After pouring out our souls over our congregations, we feel like empty earthen pitchers that a child might break.

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He also wrote, “I am afraid that all the grace I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. . . . Affliction is . . . the best book in a minister’s library.”⁴

Like the apostle Paul, the often jovial Spurgeon was “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10 ESV). Near the end of his words that you’re about to read, Spurgeon says, “Glory be to God for the furnace, the hammer, and the file. Heaven shall be all the fuller of bliss because we have been filled with anguish here below, and earth shall be better tilled because of our training in the school of adversity.”

Thank you, Charles Spurgeon, for your integrity, devotion to God’s word, honest sharing of

4 Charles Spurgeon, cited in Darrel W. Amundsen, “The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon,” in *Christian History* 29, no. 1 (1991): 25.

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your own weaknesses, and unquenchable passion for God not just in times of good cheer, but in times of desolate darkness. And thank you, sovereign Lord, for encouraging us through your servant, who, like Abel, though he is dead (while fully alive in your presence), still speaks through his example and life-giving words (Heb. 11:4).

May God give us ears to hear, and may our hearts be full of hope and expectancy as we await the day when King Jesus, true to his blood-bought promise, will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:4).

Randy Alcorn
Founder and director,
Eternal Perspective Ministries

Series Preface

JOHN PIPER ONCE WROTE that books do not change people, but paragraphs do. This pithy statement gets close to the idea at the heart of the Crossway Short Classics series: some of the greatest and most powerful Christian messages are also some of the shortest and most accessible. The broad stream of confessional Christianity contains an astonishing wealth of timeless sermons, essays, lectures, and other short pieces of writing. These pieces have challenged, inspired, and borne fruit in the lives of millions of believers across church history and around the globe.

Series Preface

The Crossway Short Classics series seeks to serve two purposes. First, it aims to beautifully preserve these short historic pieces of writing through new high-quality physical editions. Second, it aims to transmit them to a new generation of readers, especially readers who may not be inclined or able to access a larger volume. Short-form content is especially valuable today, as the challenge of focusing in a distracting, constantly moving world becomes more intense. The volumes in the Short Classics series present incisive, gospel-centered grace and truth through a concise, memorable medium. By connecting readers with these accessible works, the Short Classics series hopes to introduce Christians to those great heroes of the faith who wrote them, providing readers with representative works that both nourish the soul and inspire further study.

Series Preface

Readers should note that the spelling and punctuation of these works have been lightly updated where applicable. Scripture references and other citations have also been added where appropriate. Language that reflects a work's origin as a sermon or public address has been retained. Our goal is to preserve as much as possible the authentic text of these classic works.

Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will use these short works to arrest your attention, preach the gospel to your soul, and motivate you to continue exploring the treasure chest of church history, to the praise and glory of God in Christ.

Biography of Charles Spurgeon

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON (1834–1892) was one of the greatest Baptist preachers and theologians of the nineteenth century. Born June 19, 1834, in England, Spurgeon was converted to genuine Christian faith at fifteen years of age, when, entering a church’s Sunday service to get out of inclement weather, he heard a Methodist minister explain the gospel from Isaiah 45:22: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” Spurgeon’s preaching career began soon afterward, and at only nineteen he was called as pastor of London’s largest Baptist church.

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Spurgeon quickly became famous in London for the power of his preaching, which combined serious Reformed theology with passionate gospel pleas for the souls of his hearers. His sermons used the whole content of the Bible to point the audience to the all-satisfying, all-sufficient, all-important person and work of Christ. His unique blend of biblical insight, theological rigor, and practical exhortation and encouragement have helped Spurgeon endure as one of the most admired and influential gospel preachers in church history, earning him the affectionate title “The Prince of Preachers.”

Spurgeon’s work expanded far beyond the pulpit. He founded a pastor’s college in 1856, where he taught and mentored hundreds of ministers. In addition to his published sermons, Spurgeon authored many books and delivered many lectures. Arguably his most famous works

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are his devotionals, which include *Morning and Evening* and *The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith* (re-published in 2019 as *The Promises of God*). He also authored a three-volume commentary on the Psalms and published many theological essays. A tireless public theologian, Spurgeon engaged the pressing religious and cultural issues of his day, taking a stand for theological orthodoxy, personal evangelism, the care of orphans, and the abolition of slavery.

ENCOURAGEMENT
FOR THE
DEPRESSED

*“For who hath despised the
day of small things?”*

Zechariah 4:10

I

ZECHARIAH WAS ENGAGED in the building of the temple. When its foundations were laid, it struck everybody as being a very small edifice compared with the former glorious structure of Solomon. The friends of the enterprise lamented that it should be so small; the foes of it rejoiced and uttered strong expressions of contempt. Both friends and foes doubted whether, even on that small scale, the structure would ever be completed. They might lay the foundations, and they might rear the walls a little way, but they were too feeble a folk, possessed of too little riches and too little strength, to carry out the enterprise. It was the day of small things. Friends

trembled; foes jeered. But the prophet rebuked them both—rebuked the unbelief of friends, and the contempt of enemies, by this question, “Who hath despised the day of small things?” and by a subsequent prophecy that removed the fear.

Now we shall use this question at this time for the comfort of two sorts of people—first, for *weak believers*, and second, for *feeble workers*. Our object shall be the strengthening of the hands that hang down and the confirming of the feeble knees.

Let us describe them. It is with them a day of small things. Probably you have only been lately brought into the family of God. A few months ago, you were a stranger to the divine life and to the things of God. You have been born again, and you have the weakness of the infant. You are not strong yet, as you will be when you have grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and

Savior Jesus Christ. It is the early day with you, and it is also the day of small things.

Now your *knowledge* is small. My dear brother, you have not been a Bible student long: thank God that you know yourself a sinner, and Christ your Savior. That is precious knowledge; but you feel now what you once would not have confessed—your own ignorance of the things of God. Especially do the deep things of God trouble you. There are some doctrines that are very simple to other believers that appear to be mysterious, and even to be depressing to you. They are high—you cannot attain to them. They are to you what hard nuts would be to children whose teeth have not yet appeared.

Well, be not at all alarmed about this. All the men in God's family have once been children too. There are some that seem to be born with knowledge—Christians that come to a height in