

## Encouragement for the Depressed

#### The Crossway Short Classics Series

Encouragement for the Depressed
CHARLES SPURGEON

The Expulsive Power of a New Affection
THOMAS CHALMERS

Heaven Is a World of Love

JONATHAN EDWARDS

# FOR THE DEPRESSED

CHARLES SPURGEON



Encouragement for the Depressed Copyright © 2020 by Crossway Published by Crossway 1300 Crescent Street

Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jordan Singer

Cover image: "Single Stem" wallpaper design, William Morris (1834–1896), Bridgeman Images

First printing 2020

Printed in China

Scripture quotations in the foreword are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

All other Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-7063-6 ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-7066-7 PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-7064-3 Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-7065-0

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Spurgeon, C. H. (Charles Haddon), 1834-1892, author. Title: Encouragement for the depressed / Charles Spurgeon. Description: Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2020. | Series: The Crossway short classics series | Includes bibliographical references and index. Identifiers: LCCN 2020005166 (print) | LCCN 2020005167 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433570636 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781433570643 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433570650 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433570667 (epub) Subjects: LCSH: Depressed persons—Religious life. | Depression, Mental— Religious aspects—Christianity. | Depression, Mental—Biblical teaching. Classification: LCC BV4910.34 .S695 2020 (print) | LCC BV4910.34 (ebook) | DDC 248.8/6-dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020005166 LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020005167

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

### Contents

Foreword by Randy Alcorn 9	
Series Preface 19	
Biography of Charles Spurgeon	23
Encouragement for the Depressed 27	
The Minister's Fainting Fits 61	
Scripture Index 101	

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!

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

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 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."<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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."<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, cited in Great Preaching on the Deity of Christ, comp. Curtis Hutson (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord, 2000), 206.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, An All-Round Ministry (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 384.

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.

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."

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

<sup>4</sup> Charles Spurgeon, cited in Darrel W. Amundsen, "The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon," in Christian History 29, no. 1 (1991): 25.

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.

#### Biography of Charles Spurgeon

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

#### Biography of Charles Spurgeon

are his devotionals, which include Morning and Evening and The Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith (republished 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

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

#### Charles Spurgeon

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

#### Charles Spurgeon

Christ very rapidly. But these are only here and there. Israel did not produce a Samson every day. Most have to go through a long period of spiritual infancy and youth. And, alas! There are but few in the church, even now, who might be called fathers there. Do not marvel, therefore, if you are somewhat small in your knowledge.

Your discernment, too, is small. It is possible that anybody with a fluent tongue would lead you into error. You have, however, discernment, if you are a child of God, sufficient to be kept from deadly errors, for though there are some who would, if it were possible, deceive even the very elect, yet the elect cannot be deceived, for, the life of God being in them, they discern between the precious and the vile—they choose not the things of the world, but they follow after the things of God.

Your discernment, however, seeming so small, need not afflict you. It is by reason of use, when the senses are exercised, that we fully discern between all that is good and all that is evil. Thank God for a little discernment—though you see men as trees walking, and your eyes are only half opened. A little light is better than none at all. Not long since you were in total darkness. Now if there be a glimmer, be thankful, for remember that where a glimmer can enter, the full noontide can come, yea, and shall come in due season. Therefore, despise not the time of small discernment.

Of course, you, my dear brother or sister, have small experience. I trust you will not ape experience and try to talk as if you had the experience of the veteran saints when you are as yet only a raw recruit. You have not yet done business on the great waters. The more fierce temptations of Satan have not assailed you—the wind has been tempered as yet to the shorn lamb; God has not hung heavy

#### Charles Spurgeon

weights on slender threads, but hath put a small burden on a weak back. Be thankful that it is so. Thank him for the experience that you have, and do not be desponding because you have not more. It will all come in due time.

Despise not the day of small things. It is always unwise to get down a biography and say, "Oh! I cannot be right, because I have not felt all this good man did." If a child of ten years of age were to take down the diary of his grandfather and were to say, "Because I do not feel my grandfather's weakness, do not require to use his spectacles or lean upon his staff, therefore I am not one of the same family," it would be very foolish reasoning. Your experience will ripen. As yet it is but natural that it should be green. Wait a while, and bless God for what you have.

Probably this, however, does not trouble you so much as one other thing, that you have but small faith, and, that faith being small, your feelings are very variable. I often hear this from young beginners in the divine life: "I was so happy a month ago, but I have lost that happiness now." Perhaps tomorrow, after they have been at the house of God, they will be as cheerful as possible, but the next day their joy will be gone. Beware, my dear Christian friends, of living by feeling. John Bunyan puts down Mr. Live-by-Feeling as one of the worst enemies of the town of Mansoul. I think he said he was hanged. I am afraid he, somehow or other, escaped from the executioner, for I very commonly meet him, and there is no villain that hates the souls of men and causes more sorrow to the people of God than this Mr. Live-by-Feeling.

He that lives by feeling will be happy today and unhappy tomorrow; and if our salvation depended upon our feelings, we should be lost one day and saved another, for they are as fickle as

#### Charles Spurgeon

the weather, and go up and down like a barometer. We live by faith, and if that faith be weak, bless God that weak faith is faith, and that weak faith is true faith. If thou believest in Christ Jesus, though thy faith be as a grain of mustard seed, it will save thee, and it will, by and by, grow into something stronger. A diamond is a diamond, and the smallest scrap of it is of the same nature as the Koh-i-Noor,¹ and he that hath but little faith hath faith for all that; and it is not great faith that is essential to salvation, but faith that links the soul to Christ; and that soul is, therefore, saved.

Instead of mourning so much that thy faith is not strong, bless God that thou hast any faith at all, for if he sees that thou despisest the faith he has given thee, it may be long before he gives thee more. Prize that little, and when he sees that thou

<sup>1</sup> At 105.6 carats, the Koh-i-Noor ("Mountain of Light") is among the world's largest cut diamonds. It is one of the British Crown Jewels.

art so glad and thankful for that little, then will he multiply it and increase it, and thy faith shall mount even to the full assurance of faith.

I think I hear you also add to all this the complaint that your other graces seem to be small too. "Oh," say you, "my patience is so little. If I have a little pain I begin to cry out. I was in hopes I should be able to bear it without murmuring. My courage is so little: the blush is on my cheek if anybody asks me about Christ—I think I could hardly confess him before half a dozen, much less before the world. I am very weak indeed." Ah! I don't wonder. I have known some who have been strong by reason of years, and have still been lacking in that virtue. But where faith is weak, of course, the rest will be weak. A plant that has a weak root will naturally have a weak stem and then will have but weak fruit. Your weakness of faith sends a weakness through the whole.

#### Charles Spurgeon

But for all this, though you are to seek for more faith, and consequently for more grace—for stronger graces—yet do not despise what graces you have. Thank God for them, and pray that the few clusters that are now upon you may be multiplied a thousandfold to the praise of the glory of his grace.

Π

Thus, I have tried to describe those who are passing through the day of small things.

But the text says, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Well, some have, but there is a great comfort in this—God the Father has not. He has looked upon you—you, with little grace, and little love, and little faith—and he has not despised you. No, God is always near the feeble saint. If I saw a young man crossing a common alone, I

