

# Help! I'm Struggling With Depression

## INTRODUCTION:

- I. His name is Charles Spurgeon and he is perhaps one of the best known preachers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He preached for the Metropolitan Tabernacle Church in London, England for 38 years. *"He preached over 600 times before he was 20 years old. His sermons sold about 20,000 copies a week and were translated into 20 languages. The collected sermons fill 63 volumes equivalent to the 27 volume ninth edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, and 'stands' as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity."*<sup>1</sup>
- II. Every time this man got in the pulpit crowds of 10,000 would gather to hear him. However, throughout his entire ministry Spurgeon carried with him the burden of depression cause by difficult life circumstances.
  - a. On October 19, 1856 he preached for the first time in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens because his own church would not hold the people. The 10,000 seating capacity was far exceeded as the crowds pressed in. Someone shouted, "Fire!" and there was great panic in parts of the building. Seven people were killed in the stampede and scores were injured.
  - b. He had married Susannah Thomson January 8 in the same year of the calamity at Surrey Gardens. His only two children, twin sons were born the day after the calamity on October 20. Susannah was never able to have more children. In 1865 (nine years later), when she was 33 years old she became a virtual invalid and seldom heard her husband preach for the next 27 years till his death.
  - c. He suffered from gout, rheumatism and Bright's disease (inflammation of the kidneys). His first attack of gout came in 1869 at the age of 35. It became progressively worse so that "approximately one third of the last twenty-two years of his ministry was spent out of the Tabernacle pulpit, either suffering, or convalescing, or taking precautions against the return of illness"

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1. John Piper, "Charles Spurgeon: Preaching through Adversity," (January, 31, 1995) [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1469 Charles Spurgeon Preaching Through Adversity](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1469_Charles_Spurgeon_Preaching_Through_Adversity) Accessed, February 10, 2010.

- d. On top of the physical suffering, Spurgeon had to endure a lifetime of public ridicule and slander, sometimes of the most vicious kind.
- e. His depression....
  - i. In 1858, at age 24 it happened for the first time. He said, “*My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for.*”<sup>2</sup>
  - ii. Spurgeon said, “*Causeless depression cannot be reasoned with, nor can David's harp charm it away by sweet discourings. As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness ... The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison, needs a heavenly hand to push it back.*”<sup>3</sup>
  - iii. “*Despondency,*” he said, “*is not a virtue; I believe it is a vice. I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into it, but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God.*”<sup>4</sup>

- III. Depression is a common struggle for people as it affects approximately 15 million American adults or about 8% of adults 18 and up.<sup>5</sup>
  - a. Depression affects women more than men and approximately 12% of women struggle with depression at some point.<sup>6</sup>
  - b. This is a common struggle that people from all backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, genders, ages and stripes.
  - c. “Approximately 4 out of 100 teenagers get seriously depressed each year.”<sup>7</sup>
  - d. Depression is not a respecter of persons. You might say that depression is an equal-opportunity destroyer.
  - e. Here is a scary statistic: “80% of people experiencing depression are currently not receiving any treatment.”<sup>8</sup>

- IV. I imagine many of us in here this morning are a part of that 80%.
  - a. Like Spurgeon many of us wake up not wanting to get out of bed.

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2. Darrel W. Amundsen, “The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon,” *Christian History*, Volume 5.1 (January 1, 1991): 24.

3. Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 163.

4. Amundsen, “The Anguish and Agonies of Charles Spurgeon,” 24.

5. “Depression: Out of the Shadows,” [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/takeonestep/depression/pdf/dep\\_stats.pdf](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/takeonestep/depression/pdf/dep_stats.pdf) Accessed, February 10, 2010.

6. Ibid.

7. Donald J. Franklin, “Depression in Teenagers,” *Psychology Information Online*, <http://www.psychologyinfo.com/depression/teens.htm> Accessed February 10, 2010.

8. Ibid.

- b. What used to give us so much joy like work, sports, and playing with our children now seems to be a difficult task.
  - c. Perhaps some of us come home from work and all we want do is watch TV.
  - d. Maybe you find yourselves crying uncontrollably when there seems to be no specific reason for the tears.
  - e. I was looking through my song library and thought about some songs that speak to depression in some sense...
    - i. "I guess that's why they call it the blues," by Elton John
    - ii. "Who'll Stop the Rain," CCR
    - iii. "Solsbury Hill," Peter Gabriel
- V. So is there hope for us if we struggle with depression? What is the point of living if there seems to be no point in my life?
- a. I am here to tell you that this is not an easy sermon.
  - b. I am also here to tell you that there is hope and redemption found in a resurrected Savior who lives.
  - c. There are many complexities to depression. Some struggle with bi-polar disorder while some struggle with manic depression. Chronic depression never leaves a person but one can have a meaningful life with the right kind of therapy. Some depression requires proper medication to increase serotonin levels which is said to be a contributing factor to one's depression. Some depression can be helped with cognitive therapy from a Christian counselor.
  - d. All that to say that if you struggle with depression or feel you have symptoms we need to say these words together: THERE IS HOPE!!!
- VI. Today we look at a biblical character who struggled with depression and maybe together we might discern some lessons at which we can find the hope that does not disappoint which Paul talked about in Romans 5.

**BODY:**

Turn to 1 Kings 19...

Perhaps you have heard this preached before but I am so amazed at this story that I can't help but to go to the text. I guess we like the story of Elijah because it has some good endings to it where as chronic depression often does not have neat endings. Chronic depression could be described using Paul's terminology in 2 Corinthians 12 as a "thorn in the flesh."

But Elijah serves as a template for those of us looking to engage Christianity and make sense of it while going through some really tough times.

**1 Kings 19:1-2 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say,**

**“May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”**

- I. Jezebel, Jezebel. Fresh after his victory against all of the prophets of Baal there is a threat from, apparently, this enraged woman seeking to kill Elijah.
- II. I find it weird, even contradictory that Jezebel is threatening the man who clearly has the power of God with him.
- III. That would be like me trying to tell a world boxing champion the day after his championship I am going to utterly defeat him.
- IV. It doesn't make sense does it? Or does it? Something I have noticed about sports and people in general is that a team is sometimes at its weakest after its greatest victory. In 2008 when the Tennessee Men's basketball team defeated Memphis and gained the #1 National ranking they followed up that monumental win with a monumental loss to Vanderbilt.
- V. Perhaps Jezebel is smarter than we give her credit for.

**1 Kings 19:3-4 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”**

- I. This seems to be a strange turn of events for Elijah. It is so easy for me to stand in my position and say, “How could you do this to Elijah when god has been on your side all along?”
- II. But like earthquakes and many natural disasters, depression comes with little to no warning. It just comes.
- III. Beersheba is the southernmost city in Israel and he could not have run any further. To make matters worse...he isolated himself in the desert and asked God for death.
- IV. Charles Swindoll relays some good advice that Elijah could have listened to when in down times, *“My dad taught me a simple principle as I was growing up: ‘Son, when a mule kicks you, don't let it bother you. Just consider the source.’”*<sup>9</sup>
- V. But Elijah separated himself from all relationships which is never a good thing when struggling with depression. Perhaps we could surmise that Elijah is physically bankrupt at this point. Anguish and fear take the very life out of you and then mix that with a long journey to Beersheba and then a day's journey on his own.
- VI. This is a recipe for disaster. Sometimes our greatest enemy is ourselves. There is no greater critic, doubter or disbeliever in our work than simply the man in the mirror.
- VII. For Elijah, depression went from manageable to worse because, I believe, he was on his own.

Or so he thought...

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9. Charles Swindoll, *Elijah*, (Nashville: W Publishing, 2000):

**1 Kings 19:5-8** Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

- I. Luciano Pavarotti (one of the three tenors) once said this, *“One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing and devote our attention to eating.”*
- II. One of the articles I read about depression is that a good way to overcome depression is to have a balanced diet and to exercise daily.
- III. God knew this three thousand years earlier when he told Elijah to get up and eat. God gave Elijah a period to rest and gain strength and then gave him a task to work.
- IV. God didn’t look at Elijah in his depression and say, “Get up you fool and get back to preaching! How dare you wallow in your own sorrow?” Instead he gave him something to eat and gave him time to rest.

**1 Kings 19:9-13** There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

- I. Notice what God is trying to do to Elijah.
- II. He is desperately trying to keep him from wallowing in self-despair. He is not giving up on Elijah even though Elijah gave up on himself 40 days ago. God is still pursuing this man.
- III. David wrote about this years before Elijah saying, *“Surely his goodness and steadfast love will pursue me all of the days of my life”* (Psalm 23:6).
- IV. God is true to his character in pursuing Elijah and showing him who he was. God still wanted to use Elijah even if Elijah had given up on himself and maybe even given up on God.
- V. Many of us are in this deep, dark cave. We ignore the times God makes himself known through a friend calling us or perhaps a bible class that

touched us more than we would like to admit.

- VI. We dismiss it and say, “God doesn’t care about me? I am not even struggling to begin with!” But the entire time we are in our caves God is looking at his saying, “What are you doing here?”

**1 Kings 19:15-18 The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”**

- I. In Elijah’s most trying time of depression God eventually told him that there was much more to do.
- II. Remember in verse 14 Elijah said he was the only one left. God was not willing to let him off the hook.
- III. God told him to get up, go out because there were still 7,000 people in Israel who did not worship the Baals and perhaps those 7,000 people need Elijah now more than ever.
- IV. Maybe God is telling us that right now. Maybe in our darkest moments of despondency God is calling us to look past our hurt and to see that there are people who need us. Our brothers, our sister, our children, our grandchildren. They all need us. If we have no family then maybe God is calling us to help others on this journey.
- V. Look at what God gave Elijah as we close.

**1 Kings 19:19-21 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother good-by,” he said, “and then I will come with you.” “Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?” So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.**

- I. I love this! God saw Elijah’s loneliness and led him to Elisha.
- II. The Ecclesiastical writer said, “Two are better than one,” and in the case of depression it is completely true.
- III. Depression for some is a daily struggle against forces out of their control. What better way to combat forces than with a united front with two or three people who would die for you if you asked them to.
- IV. Elisha became (literally in Hebrew) Elijah’s minister.
- V. God would not let Elijah be on his own again...God does not give up on his people. He does not.

## CONCLUSION:

Charles Swindoll relays a story about a man he met in a VA hospital many years ago who suffered a series of heart attacks and had many surgeries and was in rehabilitation at the hospital.

*The day I arrived to visit, I saw a touching scene. This man has a young son, and during his confinement in the hospital, he had made a little wooden truck for his boy. Since the boy was not allowed to go into the ward and visit his father, an orderly had brought the gift down to the child who was waiting in front of the hospital with his mother. The father was looking out of a fifth-floor window, watching his son unwrap the gift. The little boy opened the package and his eyes got wide when he saw that wonderful little truck. He hugged it to his chest. Meanwhile, the father was walking back and forth waving his arms behind the windowpane, trying to get his son's attention. The little boy put the truck down and reached up and hugged the orderly and thanked him for the truck. And all the while the frustrated father was going through these dramatic gestures, trying to say, "It's me, son. I made that truck for you. I gave that to you. Look here!" I could almost read his lips. Finally the mother and the orderly turned the boy's attention up to that fifth-floor window. It was then the boy cried, "Daddy! Oh, thank you! I miss you, Daddy! Come home, Daddy. Thank you for my truck." And the father stood in the window with tears pouring down his cheeks.<sup>10</sup>*

Like the boy...like Elijah...we often are in the deepest darkest caves and we don't even see God waving his hands at us with tears in his eyes wanting us to look to him!

You remember we began this sermon discussing Charles Spurgeon and his struggles with depression his entire life. He did not use his affliction as an excuse of weakness but as an example of strength. For when he was weak he became strong! Listen to this quote toward the end of his life:

*"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."*

Like the boy may you rejoice in the father and be filled with the knowledge that your depression has produced joy beyond which anyone can measure.

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10. Swindoll, *Elijah*, 121-22.