

Katoomba Baptist Church Bulletin

Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. Psalm 34:4

41 Waratah Street, Katoomba NSW 2780.

August 2021.

Pastor: Steve Cooper. Contact: mob. 0451 954 675; email cooper.steve.j@gmail.com.

Sunday service 10am. The messages are available to watch on YouTube.

Katoomba Baptist Church website: <https://katoombabaptist.org.au>.

Bible Study: Second and Fourth Wednesday of the month in the church hall.

Church prayer meeting: each Saturday, 9am. Prayer for Israel: third Friday of the month, 1.30pm.

*****All services and meetings in person are suspended until further notice
in compliance with NSW government Covid-19 restrictions*****

*****Please check the KBC website for resources and previous sermons*****

From the Pastor

'Devote yourselves to prayer', wrote Paul to the Colossians, 'devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful' (Col 4:2). There is much that we can't do at present during this lockdown. However, we can pray! Often life is so busy or distracting that we don't have time to pray. But at present, each of us has more opportunity to go deeper, to ponder the words of Scripture, to grow in the knowledge of God, to draw closer to God, to bring our concerns to God, to remember others in our prayers. As we pray, Paul tells us, we should be 'watchful' as we guard against distractions which lead us away from the Lord Jesus Christ. We can be 'thankful', as we recall the many blessings God has graciously given us in Christ.

As we pray, let's particularly pray for each other in our church family. Many are finding life difficult and stressful. Some are lonely and isolated. Many are feeling 'glum' and worried. Let me encourage you to contact some in our church, and ask how they are going. It means so much to people to know they are remembered, even if only by a brief phone call. Make a list of those in need, and pray for them.

Here is a verse to guide your prayers for yourself and others: 'I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD' (Psalm 27:13-14).

Your companion on the journey,

Pastor Steve Cooper

KBC in August

While the current lockdown continues, our church continues to operate in a different way. Fortunately, we can keep in contact with each other through phone, text and email. Many find it meaningful to follow the Pastor's suggestions for worshipping God on Sunday mornings at 10am. Meetings can take place through zoom – Saturday Prayer Meetings (9am), leadership meetings etc. Some events are postponed. Fumigation and repair-work on church property will take place, but might have to wait until restrictions are lifted. We will hold an AGM later in the year, about a month after Sunday services recommence.

Have you thought about becoming a member of our church?

All regular attenders of our church who are Christians, and have been baptised by full immersion as a believer in Christ, are invited to become members of Katoomba Baptist Church. Becoming a member means you make a **public stand** about what you believe, and your commitment to our church as **your** local church. It means you can **participate** as a voting person in our regular congregational meetings as we discern where the Lord Jesus might be leading our church and make important decisions together. If you would like to find out more, or apply to become a church member, please contact Pastor Steve.

Remember our Mission Partners.

Please keep praying for our Mission Partners. They all face challenges during the spread of the COVID virus. Rob and Bev Griffith serve in Thailand. Peter and Jo Ong (with children Lucas, Cay Cay and Teaghan) work in Malawi. We sponsor two girls, along with community projects in their villages: Alysa (The Philippines) and Martha (Uganda). John Burke leads Special Religious Education at Katoomba High School.

The Bible Project: Learn Colossians

This is an excellent teaching resource, especially for those who are inclined to visual learning, which may be helpful as KBC continues to study Paul's epistle. Please follow this link to the Bible Project's lesson on Colossians: <https://bibleproject.com/learn/colossians/>

August birthdays.

Grahame M 4th, Margaret N 5th, Simeon W 9th, Peter B 10th, Tony S 17th, Merryanne M. 21st, Paul T 26th, Judith H 29th, Anne H 30th. May the Lord bless you through the year ahead in your walk with Him.

"A truly humble man is sensible of his natural distance from God; of his dependence on Him; of the insufficiency of his own power and wisdom; and that it is by God's power that he is upheld and provided for, and that he needs God's wisdom to lead and guide him, and His might to enable him to do what he ought to do for Him." [Jonathan Edwards]

Please pray

- for our Pastor Steve and our church leaders, for the Lord to guide and bless them.
- for the Holy Spirit to deepen and enrich our faith through the Word, prayer and communion with God.
- for the Lord to have mercy in this time of pandemic; for our nation to repent, turning to Him.
- for the Lord's guidance and strengthening of those in authority who daily have to make difficult decisions affecting the lives of millions.
- for the Lord to protect doctors, nurses, medical staff, paramedics, police and all who serve others.
- for this church and faithful churches throughout our community to be as salt and light.
- that the Lord will minister to all who are undergoing trials and suffering, here and everywhere.
- for missions to be fruitful, especially those we support as a church, and for the preservation of converts.
- for Israel, for the "Peace of Jerusalem" (Ps 122:6) and for the Gospel to reach Jewish people (Rom 1:16).
- for our persecuted brothers and sisters in nations rich and poor and for those who persecute them.
- for the Lord's mercy in these tumultuous times; for His love and comfort to every person in need.
- with thanks for all His blessings, in our lives, in our church, in our nation, in all creation.
- that the Lord will help us to use our gifts for His glory and to share the Gospel with others.
- that the Lord will draw to Him our unsaved loved ones and all for whom we have a burden.
- that we continue to grow in Christian love as a church, serving the Lord and each other.
- with thanks and praise for the blessed hope that purifies, the hope of the Lord's return.
- Maranatha! ("Come, O Lord!")

**"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks:
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).**

Spurgeon on forgiving one another as Christ forgave us

... If you will not forgive, say so, and expect eternal perdition; but if you profess to be a Christian obey this great and essential precept, and forgive as Christ forgave you. Be honest, be straight with God, for he will be honest and straight with you; but if you cannot and will not forgive, then look forward to a portion with the tormentors; for even the loving Jesus says, "Neither shall my heavenly Father forgive you."

In urging you to this copying of Christ, let me notice that this forgiveness of those who offend against us is gloriously ennobling. We are not asked to perform a duty which will in the least degrade us. Revenge is paltry, forgiveness is great-minded. Was not David infinitely greater than Saul, when he spared his life in the cave, and when he would not smite him as he lay asleep on the battle-field? Did not the king humble himself before David when he perceived his forbearance? If you would be the greatest among men, bear injuries with the greatest gentleness; if you would win the noblest of conquests, subdue yourself. To win a battle is a little thing if it be fought out with sword and gun; but to win it in God's way, with no weapons but love, and patience, and forgiveness, this is the most glorious of victories. Blessed is that man who is more than a conqueror, because he inflicts no wounds in the conflict, but overcomes evil with good. In the process of such a conquest the warrior is himself a gainer. A nation in fighting, even if it wins the campaign, has to suffer great expense and loss of life; but he that overcomes by love, is the better and stronger man through what he has done. He comes out of the conflict not only victor over his adversary, but victor over sin within himself, and all the readier for future war against evil. He glorifies God and himself becomes strong in grace. Nothing is more glorious than love. Your Master, who is King of kings, set you an example of gaining glory by enduring wrong: if you would be knights of his company, imitate his graciousness.

Notice that this imitation of Christ is logically appropriate to you all Brothers, if Christ has forgiven you, the parable we read just now shows that it is imperative that you should forgive your fellows. If our Lord has forgiven us our ten thousand talents, how can we take our brother by the throat for the hundred pence, and say, "Pay me what thou owest"? If we are indeed members of Christ, should we not be like our Head? If we profess to be his servants, are we to pretend to a dignity greater than our Master, who washed his disciples' feet? If he forgave so freely, how dare we call ourselves his brethren if our spirit is hard and malice lingers within us?

I say, to conclude, that this copying of Christ is most forcibly sustained by the example given in the text. We are to forbear and to forgive; "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

[Charles Spurgeon, from the sermon "Divine Forgiveness Admired and Imitated", Colossians 3:13.]

Keep praying for Israel:

***Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I hope in Him!"
[Lamentations 3:22-24]***

Giving: Please remember that you can give online to Katoomba Baptist Church at BSB 704-922 and Account Number 100008926. Thank you for your faithful commitment to giving.

Contributions welcome: The KBC bulletin is available in print on the first Sunday service of the month and as a PDF version on the church website: <https://katoombabaptist.org.au/library/bulletins/>. Contributions of a devotional nature and enquiries can be made to the editor, Bill Fewer (email: hillbillyfewer@gmail.com).

**Call to Prayer for the COVID Crisis & Let's Pray Together August & September 2021
by Carolyn Altman, Prayer Coordinator, Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT
August & September 2021**

Dear Praying Partners

A Call to Prayer with the COVID crisis: We are calling on everyone in our Churches to pray for the COVID crisis in NSW, Australia and around the world. Please consider holding a Zoom prayer meeting with your Church family either this week or next week to pray. Please find below a prayer that you can use if you would like to:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:6-7

Loving Father, we come before You and praise Your name for You are the Lord God Almighty, yet You also love and care for every single person on this earth. We thank you Father that we are able to talk to You in this way, and thank you that You hear our prayers, and answer them according to Your will.

We pray that You will forgive us for times that we have only thought about this COVID crisis with how it affects us personally, instead of seeing it from a worldly perspective. We pray for those in places like Indonesia, who yesterday had the highest daily death toll in the world and are running out of oxygen tanks to help those that have been fortunate enough to secure a hospital bed. We pray for the thousands of children in India that have been left orphans due to the death of their parents, and for the children that are now left with raising their younger siblings. We pray for all the people in the countries around the world that are in a worse situation than what we are here in Australia. We pray for Baptist World Aid and their partners, as they seek to be Your hands and feet on our behalf in so many countries in crisis.

We pray for those in leadership in our Federal, State & Local Government, Health Department, Law Enforcement and Therapeutic Goods Administration/ATAGI that are making decisions on our behalf that affects each one of us, especially regarding lockdowns, vaccine rollouts and COVID support payments. Please give them wisdom and discernment to make wise decisions, not political decisions.

We pray for our frontline health workers, including those working in hospitals, aged care, disability care, doctors' surgeries, pharmacies, COVID testing clinics and vaccination centres. We also pray for our essential workers that need to leave their homes each day to allow us to have essential goods such as food, power, heating, water, deliveries and to keep our streets free from garbage, and our streets safe. We also pray for those that are working long hours doing Contact Tracing and Pathology. We pray for a ring of protection around each of these people, that they will be kept safe from this virus, and will have the strength to keep going. We thank you for each and every person that is making this sacrifice on our behalf and ask for a special blessing upon each one of them.

We pray for those in our country affected by lockdown orders, especially those in NSW with the extended lockdown. Lord, please care for every person who has lost their job, had their workplaces close, had their income reduced, or who have had to close their businesses. Please provide for their every need and show each of us how we can love and care for each other. We pray for parents that are needing to home school their children, often while needing to also work themselves. We also pray for those doing their HSC, with such uncertainty with regards to major works, performances and exams, and are missing out on all the milestones associated with their final year at school. We pray for families that are grieving the loss of a loved one and haven't been able to grieve with their families/extended families/friends, or to give their loved one the celebration of life they deserved. We pray for those who have missed out on special times of celebration such as weddings, engagements, births, and birthdays, and missed out on going on holidays. In this season of lockdown, we pray that You will give us strength, patience and courage.

Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayers. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

[From Baptist Churches of NSW & ACT. You can receive the bi-monthly prayer email by visiting the website and requesting that you are added to the list: <https://nswactbaptists.org.au/contact-us-2>]

“When Our World Shakes: Six Ways to Respond to Covid-19”
by Rev. Dr Keith Condie, Co-Founder of the Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute

Recent times have brought significant challenges to many within the Australian community. Drought, bushfires, severe storms have each taken their toll.

And now there is the coronavirus. While certain words – catastrophic, unprecedented – have almost become clichés, the reality is that every one of us is being affected, often in ways we’ve never before experienced. Once again, lives and livelihoods are at risk. The comforts and security that so many of us take for granted are under threat. And the uncertainty of both creates concern for all us; for some, there is significant fear and anxiety.

How might those of us who put our faith in Jesus Christ respond in the midst of this global trial? Certainly, each Christian’s response will be unique to their situation. But here are six reminders that can help all of us as we encounter the challenges of coronavirus:

1. TAKE EXPERT ADVICE SERIOUSLY

In our connected world, misinformation abounds and feeds fear. It’s best to keep up to date with accurate information from a few government and health sources, such as the Australian Government Department of Health [<https://www.health.gov.au>], and to put a limit on how much information you can consume each day. Don’t try to read everything out there!

Then once you have a sense of the practical and factual information, put the advice into action. Follow the social isolation recommendations. Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly. Remain at home if you’re feeling unwell.

2. THINK OF OTHERS, ESPECIALLY THE VULNERABLE

We saw remarkable community spirit during the bushfire crisis with people reaching out to others kindly and selflessly. Unfortunately, a pandemic like COVID-19 has the potential to drive us apart rather than drawing us together. But Christ’s love challenges us to do otherwise.

Christians have a long history of selfless action in serving those most at risk and providing care to others, often at great personal cost. And so as Christians:

- *we don’t hoard groceries or toilet paper, knowing that others also have need when items are in short supply;*
- *we stay away from vulnerable people like the elderly or immunosuppressed to avoid transmitting disease **but...***
- *we don’t forget about vulnerable people. Instead, we find other ways (texts, phone calls, etc.) to stay in touch and we pray for them while also providing support, such as cooking or shopping for them when we can;*
- *we check in regularly with family, friends and neighbours living alone;*
- *we provide a listening ear to those feeling anxious and troubled whenever we can;*
- *we look for other creative ways to demonstrate Christian love in action.*

3. REMEMBER SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

We are always in need of the nourishment of Scripture, no more so than at a time like this.

Often we live under the illusion that we are in control of our lives. This pandemic reminds us that we are not. But there are no surprises and no uncertainty for our Creator and Redeemer, the one “who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Ephesians 1:11).

While circumstances change, our God does not. He is in complete control and he is completely good, watching over us with compassion and love. We have a hope that transcends the uncertainties of our lives and even death itself (1 Corinthians 15:54-58; Hebrews 2:14-15).

So, let’s remember that, “God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

4. CALL UPON GOD IN PRAYER

Our heavenly Father loves to hear of our needs, our heartaches and our longings. He promises to draw near to us as we draw near to him (James 4:8).

Prayer can ease the struggle in troubling times. As Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:5b-7, "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

I've always loved how the great nineteenth-century Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, put it: "Carry your desires to the Lord of your life, the guardian of your soul. ... This shall bring you God's own peace. You shall not be able to understand the peace which you shall enjoy."

So, let's call upon our great God for those affected by the illness, for the bereaved, for health professionals, those working on a vaccine, etc.

5. LOOK AFTER YOURSELF SO YOU CAN KEEP LOOKING AFTER OTHERS

We are earthly creatures as well as Christians with a heavenly home. We need to care for our physical, emotional and spiritual needs to be able to continue to care for others, even if we're at home self-isolating.

That means we need to take time to rest and to try to get good sleep and exercise. We need to eat nutritious food and think of creative ways to have fun (Doing a jigsaw puzzle? Listening to music? A sewing or woodwork project? Those books we bought but never got to?) in this new context.

6. CLING TO HOPE

Three great Christian virtues – faith, hope and love – are so important at a time like this. We trust our ever-faithful God. Though the circumstances might seem bleak and the future uncertain, we don't despair, knowing that we have a sure and certain hope in the grace of our Lord Jesus. He already encountered death for our sake that we might live forever in his love and presence.

That hope and confidence in him remains the source of our joy, as we reflect the love of God to others and look to the needs of those around us. "Take heart", Jesus said, "I have overcome the world."

[Sourced from the Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute website, <http://www.mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/resources/when-our-world-shakes-six-ways-to-respond-to-covid-19>, viewed 27/7/21]

Redeemer Ministries, <https://www.redeemerministries.net>

ABOUT US

Two Australian Christians, Pastor Stephen Downie and Mick Cory, met some of the many families that have become indebted to brick kiln owners on a mission trip to Pakistan in 2019. The families live in the brick kilns, their children must help meet the daily quota of bricks and they have no chance to attend school. The work is labour intensive and the wages are minimal – resulting in an entrapment of the whole family in a never-ending cycle of debt and servitude.

This cycle is often continuous down through many generations of the one family – with many never knowing life outside of the brick kiln.

After much prayer and seeking God's will, Redeemer Ministries was born - with the aim to free families from a life of slavery in the brick kilns of Pakistan.

WHAT WE DO

Redeeming Families From The Brick Kilns

Breaking the bonds of slavery

Through the generosity of our donors, the debt that is keeping a family in a life of servitude in the brick kilns of Pakistan is paid out. The family is connected with a local Christian community and provided with the means to start a new way of life and set on a path to becoming self sufficient

Education For The Children Of The Brick Kilns

Bringing Schools to the Children

In response to the pleas of those who have spent their lives in the brick kilns - 'please pray for a school for our children so they will be able to read and write' the creation and support of schools in the brick kilns was birthed. Currently Redeemer Ministries supports 14 Brick Kiln Schools and there are plans for more

Mobile Medical Vans

Injuries and illness are common for the workers in the brick kilns

Redeemer Ministries has provided and supports a mobile medical van to provide vital help to the brick kiln workers and their families. Another mobile medical van which can be used as an ambulance is being obtained - watch this space!

OTHER MINISTRY AREAS

Redeemer Ministries also supports a Missionary couple, Jario and Sandra Hiedel, in the Amazon Jungle. Jario is developing an evangelical team that will make pastoral visits by boat. Sandra is establishing a Christian school.

Redeemer Ministries also supports Bible teaching to 50 students in Indonesia

CONTACT REDEEMER MINISTRIES

We'd love to hear from you. Let us know if you'd like to receive updates.

Contact us using the details below or alternatively complete the online form
<https://www.redeemerministries.net/contact-us>

Postal Address: 5A Macquarie Rd. Morisset Park NSW 2264

Field Worker, Pastor Stephen Downie: 0400475921

J.I. Packer on Living to the End "Flat Out"

Article by John Piper, Founder & Teacher, desiringGod.org

July 25, 2014

*This week J.I. Packer turned 88. He has written a book on aging. It's titled, *Finishing Our Course with Joy: Guidance from God for Engaging with Our Aging*. At age 68 I found it riveting. It made me want to live "flat out" to the end. That was his goal. You could call it "Don't Waste Your Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties." It's worth reading at any age.*

He is not naïve. He is 88! There is no romantic idealization for the final years of this life. It will be hard. "Aging," he says, "is not for wimps." Some may paint a rosy picture of life after seventy. Even John Wesley, Packer observes, said that at eighty-five "the only sign of deterioration that he could see in himself was that he could not run as fast as he used to." With characteristic understatement Packer says: "With all due deference to that wonderful, seemingly tireless little man, we may reasonably suspect that he was overlooking some things."

Nevertheless Packer realizes that

the assumption that was general in my youth, that only a small minority would be fit and active after about seventy, has become a thing of the past. Churches, society, and seniors themselves are still adjusting to the likelihood that most Christians who hit seventy still have before them at least a decade in which some form of active service for Christ remains practicable.

So, what shall we do with these final years? Packer notes that "the image of running was central to Paul's understanding of his own life [1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 2:16], and I urge now that it ought to be the central focus in the minds and hearts of all aging Christians, who know and feel that their bodies are slowing down."

And how should we run? "My contention is . . . that, so far as our bodily health allows, we should aim to be found running the last lap of the race of our Christian life, as we would say, flat out." "The challenge that faces us is . . . to cultivate the maximum zeal for the closing phase of our earthly lives."

A Wrongheaded Agenda

The world does not see it this way, and Packer is unsparing in his criticism of “worldliness” and “folly.”

Retirees are admonished, both explicitly and implicitly, in terms that boil down to this: Relax. Slow down. Take it easy. Amuse yourself. Do only what you enjoy. [It is] a warrant for taking it easy across the board and prioritizing self-indulgence for the rest of our lives.

This agenda, he says, “is wrongheaded in the extreme.”

The agenda as a whole turns out to be a recipe for isolating oneself and trivializing one’s life, with apathetic boredom becoming one’s default mood day after day. . . . Over time, [it] will generate a burdensome sense that one’s life is no longer significant, but has become, quite simply, useless. . . . “Wrong way!” That is what I affirm with regard to our culture’s agenda for aging. I think it is one of the huge follies of our time, about which some frank speaking is in order and indeed overdue.

“Whatever admonitions Paul might have addressed to aging Christians . . . recommending relaxation and taking things easy would not have been among them.”

Zeal Fed by Hope

When the world tells us to follow this pattern of self-indulgence, it is satanic: “By moving us to think this way Satan undermines, diminishes, and deflates our discipleship, reducing us from laborers in Christ’s kingdom to sympathetic spectators.”

No mature Christian of any age is

exempt from the twin tasks of learning and leading, just because they do not inhabit the world of wage and salary earning any longer, and for aging Christians to think of themselves in this way, as if they have no more to do now than have fun, is worldliness in a strikingly intense and, be it said, strikingly foolish form.

If we are to live “flat out” and full of zeal to the end, the key is hope. “Zeal should be unflagging every day, all day, and all the way. But if this is to happen, zeal must be fed by hope.”

The Roman Empire was a world that, like our world today, lacked any energizing hope of its own, which explains why so many listened hungrily to the Christian message. . . . Recovering and reappropriating this hope is a prime task for us who are aging today.

The hope he unpacks is the resurrection of the dead.

We know that the experience of moving into this upgraded accommodation, our resurrection body, linked as it will be in some way with the body we have now . . . will come to us as an enormous enrichment of the embodied life as we have known it up till now. . . . In heaven, clothed in our new bodies, we shall see and be at home with Jesus our Lord in a way that while we inhabit our present bodies is not possible.

You Won’t Regret It

“Paul’s knowledge of his hope in Christ had great invigorating, driving, and refreshing force.” This is the key to aging with undiminished zeal. And this is our calling: Maintaining zeal Godward as our bodies wear out is the special discipline to which we aging Christians are called.

Whatever it takes, you won’t regret it. This kind of “spiritual ripeness is worth far more than material wealth in any form.”

[Sourced from the *Desiring God* website, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/j-i-packer-on-living-to-the-end-flat-out>, viewed 26/7/21]

[Editor’s note: J.I. Packer *Finishing Our Course with Joy: Guidance from God for Engaging with Our Aging* (Crossway, 2014) is available from Koorong, <https://www.koorong.com>, and local Katoomba bookseller The Wandering Bookseller, <https://wanderingbookseller.com.au>]



Mrs. Jones got a little too used to watching online worship from home.

“Did You Know That Charles Spurgeon Struggled with Depression?”

by **Michael Reeves**

February 24, 2018

A Surprising Truth

It comes as a surprise to some that Charles Spurgeon had a lifelong battle with depression. His reputation as a famed and powerful preacher, his cheery wit, and his cigar-smoking manliness might lead us to imagine there could never be a chink in his Victorian Englishman’s armour. It shouldn’t be a surprise, of course: being full of life in a fallen world must mean distress, and Spurgeon’s life was indeed full of physical and mental pain.

Aged twenty-two, as pastor of a large church and with twin babies at home to look after, he was preaching to thousands in the Surrey Gardens Music Hall when pranksters yelled “fire,” starting a panic to exit the building which killed seven and left twenty-eight severely injured. His mind was never the same again. His wife, Susannah, wrote, “My beloved’s anguish was so deep and violent, that reason seemed to totter in her throne, and we sometimes feared that he would never preach again.”¹

Then, from the age of thirty-three, physical pain became a large and constant feature of life for him. He suffered from a burning kidney inflammation called Bright’s Disease, as well as gout, rheumatism, and neuritis. The pain was such that it soon kept him from preaching for one-third of the time. Added to that, overwork, stress, and guilt about the stress began to take their toll. And all this was in the public eye and was jumped on by his many critics, not making it easier to bear. The suffering, they argued rather predictably, was a judgment from God.

The pain, the politics, the opposition, and the overwork (as well as bereavements, like that of his young grandson) all affected him deeply, in waves. So much so that today he would almost certainly be diagnosed as clinically depressed and treated with medication and therapy. The depression could hit him so intensely that, he once said, “I could say with Job, ‘My soul chooseth strangling rather than life’ [Job 7:15]. I could readily enough have laid violent hands upon myself, to escape from my misery of spirit.”²

Suffering and Ministry

In all this, Spurgeon believed that God had a good purpose in all his suffering, and because of it felt he had become a better prepared and more compassionate pastor. It enabled him to deliver a striking and most unusual lecture to his students titled “The Minister’s Fainting Fits,” in which he said:

Knowing by most 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.³

Before seeking relief from such melancholy, Spurgeon sought to understand God’s purposes in these things that he might actually profit from the experience. It is quite clear from Scripture that through believers’ suffering, God refines them like gold in a furnace (1 Pet. 1:6–7). Yet, Spurgeon wrote, “when the gold knows why and wherefore it is in the fire . . . [it] will thank the Refiner for putting it into the crucible, and will find a sweet satisfaction even in the flames.”⁴

Spurgeon saw that our heavenly Father ordains suffering for believers. Though our trials may come from the world, the flesh, and the Devil, they are overruled and ordained by God, who treats them as an important part of our new life in Christ.⁵ For a start, we simply could not be like Christ if we are not treated like him, if we have a life of ease when he had so much pain. "Do you expect to be crowned with gold where he was crowned with thorns? Shall lilies grow for you and briars for him?"⁶

Theology for the Suffering

This might all seem like bad news for the believer. After all, who wants to hurt? Yet, studying the lives of eminent men, Spurgeon came to the conclusion that those who never have to push through the waves of difficulty never grow in strength and maturity like those who do. Those who live in the lap of luxury and never experience the discipline of trouble tend always to be more frail and feeble in their faith. On the whole, therefore, "it is good for a man to bear the yoke; good for a man to breast the billows; good for a man to pass through fire and through water, and so to learn sublime lessons."⁷ Trouble can strengthen, and trouble can reveal the work that needs to be done in us. Tears, Spurgeon discovered through experience, can clear the eye so that we see with an improved vision and perspective. Losses reveal the insufficiency of all the things around us that we cherish, enabling us to appreciate the all-sufficiency of Christ more.

Being a pastor, he was sensitively aware of how to give such theology to people who are in the throes of pain. The ways a believer can profit from suffering cannot be trotted out coolly to those who are reeling and weeping. There is a time simply to sit and weep with them. And yet, he found, there is for all believers, regardless of their emotional state, a wonderful comfort to be found in knowing God's Fatherly providence.

As well as hearing of God's loving and mighty Fatherliness, Christians in the midst of suffering often need to hear of how suffering is a covenant mark. Naturally, we are quick to take suffering to mean that God is against us or has somehow weakened in his love and care for us. That is not so. "Depression of spirit is no index of declining grace; the very loss of joy and the absence of assurance may be accompanied by the greatest advancement in the spiritual life."⁸ We should therefore not be too easily dismayed by our troubles: in a failing world, friends will fail us, we will hurt, and we will feel our frailty and emptiness. But none of that is any indication that our Father has forgotten or failed us, nor that we might no longer be useful.

Strategies for Coping

From 1871 he sought each winter to escape the darkness, cold, and dirt of London by retreating to Mentone, on the French Riviera. There he found in the balmy warmth and the light a natural reviver for body and mind. And when he couldn't make it that far, he found a simple walk in the countryside would help. For him, cigars were an acceptable and agreeable means of relaxation when life was otherwise overwhelming. "I have felt grateful to God," he wrote to *The Daily Telegraph*, when "I have found intense pain relieved, a weary brain soothed, and calm, refreshing sleep obtained by a cigar."⁹

As well as recommending such physical palliatives for the mental sufferer, Spurgeon urged patient carefulness in making any assessment of the situation. He knew how quick we are to assume, when set back and depressed, that grace has left us, or that we have become pointless. In such times, instead of seeking a definite understanding of the "what" and the "why" of our situation, we should simply hold fast to God's promises. Having at all times an objective truth that does not depend on our ability to feel their truth, the promises of God are like a light that cannot be overcome by our darkness. They are an immovable and infinite comfort beyond the reach of our finite trouble and doubt. It was for that reason that Susannah Spurgeon had Matthew 5:11-12 framed for them to see every day in their bedroom: "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" (KJV).

Comfort in Christ

When ministering to the downcast, pastors commonly point people to the resurrection and the victory of Christ. And the thought of death defeated, tears wiped away, and exchanging the helmets and swords of our struggle for palm branches and crowns was all essential comfort for Spurgeon. However, when pastoring the suffering and depressed, he seemed most often to have focused people on Christ crucified and as the Man of Sorrows.

Spurgeon found for himself that in seasons of great pain, the "sympathy of Jesus is the next most precious thing to his sacrifice."¹⁰ Again and again Spurgeon, therefore, returned to the theme of Christ's compassion for his suffering people. In an 1890 sermon titled "The Tenderness of Jesus," for example, he spoke, while feeling his own weakness, about Christ as the High Priest who feels for us in our infirmities. He said:

This morning, being myself more than usually compassed with infirmities, I desire to speak, as a weak and suffering preacher, of that High Priest who is full of compassion: and my longing is that any who are low in spirit, faint, despondent, and even out of the way, may take heart to approach the Lord Jesus. . . .

. . . Jesus is touched, not with a feeling of your strength, but of your infirmity. Down here, poor, feeble nothings affect the heart of their great High Priest on high, who is crowned with glory and honor. As the mother feels with the weakness of her babe, so does Jesus feel with the poorest, saddest, and weakest of his chosen.¹¹

In suffering, then, it is not only the case that we get to draw nearer to Christ, becoming more like him and leaning more fully on him. In such times Christ draws near to us to walk with his people in the furnace. And not only to walk with us but to bear us through.

Notes:

1. Charles Ray, "The Life of Susannah Spurgeon," in *Morning Devotions by Susannah Spurgeon: Free Grace and Dying Love (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006)*, 166.
2. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855–1917),* vol. 36, 200.*
3. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students, Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1889) vol. 1, 167.*
4. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Sword and Trowel (London: Passmore & Alabaster), 36.*
5. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855–1917),* vol. 38, 2–3.*
6. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855–1917),* vol. 23, 270.*
7. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855–1917),* vol. 31:327–28.*
8. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855–1917),* vol. 48, 461.*
9. *Letter to the Daily Telegraph (September 23, 1874), cited in Lewis A. Drummond, Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 506.*
10. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855–1917),* vol. 19, 124–25.*
11. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons, 63 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1855–1917),* vol. 36, 315, 320.*

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From the editor

The Bible is the living Word of God. It is also a book of lives. Adam was created by God. Eve was created by God from Adam. They lived in the most perfect sin-free conditions, physical and spiritual, able to commune directly with God in Whose image they were made. The Fall changed everything and the Bible records Man's struggle with sin and the necessity to have his broken relationship with God restored. This is only possible through the salvation that God has graciously provided in His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is tempting to skip through the extensive genealogies in the early chapters of Genesis, where there are seemingly unending lists of someone who "begat" someone else and who eventually "died and went to rest with the fathers". But God is showing right from the beginning of the Bible that what follows in the scriptures are accounts of real people. The men and women in the Bible are not legendary or mythic. They were born, they lived, they died. They are people like you and me who had to deal with the challenges of life. Who lived in a fallen world, battling a sinful nature, who needed a Saviour. For this reason, it's probably best not to use the phrase "Bible stories and characters" when referring to the people in the Bible. The Holy Scriptures are not a work of fiction!

Of the Bible's people, all fell short of God's perfect standards, although there were some like Daniel and Enoch who were commended. Some of the most significant people were deeply flawed: Jacob, Solomon, Samson, Lot, Saul (Paul), Peter — each had very human failings. Incredibly, David, "a friend of God", was an adulterer and murderer. But his repentance and love for God were greater than his sins and God forgave him. However, the aftermath of his affair with Bathsheba had consequences throughout David's life and his family was torn with calamities. Our sins, even when forgiven, can impact others for all that sin touches is afflicted and spoilt.

The only sinless, perfect life was that of the Lord Jesus. When you read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation His appearance in the Gospels is made the more remarkable by His difference to any other person. There is simply no one else like Jesus Christ. Obviously, as God the Son, He is unique among humanity. And yet the Bible also reveals Him as the Son of Man. He is not like some idealized 'super hero'. He was raised in an ordinary home and worked hard as a carpenter for His living. He was tempted. He knew the limits of a body of flesh. He experienced thirst, hunger, weariness, pain. He had emotional highs and lows. He endured the horrific physical, emotional and spiritual torments of the cross, suffering as no other man ever has. The Creator entered into His Creation and served sinful mankind with unfailing, sacrificial love. In all Jesus did, He faithfully sought to do His Father's will, living obediently day by day. In obedience, He went to the cross to save us from our sins.

Born again, Christians are called to live like our Lord through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Growing spiritually, feeding on the living bread of the Word, our lives bearing witness to our Saviour to the glory of God the Father. The life of a Christian is not one of complacency though and our struggle is with "the world, the flesh and the devil". But there is joy and peace and love in the abundance of God's grace. There is the unshakeable promise that all the people who have been saved by Jesus will be "conformed to His image", sanctified by the Holy Spirit in this life and then glorified at the resurrection. In this multitude each individual will be Christ-like in character and yet each will still have a distinct personality, living eternally sinless, faithful lives with Him and for Him (Rom. 8:28-30).

If you are saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus, then you can find your own life mentioned in the Bible. For you are one of those for whom the Lord prayed (John 17:20-26) and your name will not be blotted from the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5). Is your name among its pages? Is the Lord Jesus Christ your Saviour?

Your brother in Christ,
Bill.

Matthew 14: 22-34

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," He said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," He said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to Him and begged Him to let the sick just touch the edge of His cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Editor's devotional:

It is my prayer that the above passage will be an encouragement to you. When the Lord Jesus gave this sublime lesson on faith He chose to demonstrate it with action instead of teaching in the safety of the temple or synagogue. He chose the dangerous lake with the wind and waves roaring. Peter, showing great courage in following his Master, stepped out of the boat only to begin to sink as soon as he took his eyes off the Lord. This is a lesson in faith for us all. We are only "more than conquerors" because of the Lord, and the power that sustains us through the troubles of life is His through the Holy Spirit. And we need the strong hand of the Lord to reach down and save us when we become overwhelmed.

Notice too the coda in verse 34: the demonstration of faith when the boat was safely on the shore. The people brought the sick and suffering to Jesus because of their faith in Him. They were humble and reverent as they approached Him — they "begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak". As Peter was in the stormy lake, so too were they utterly dependent on the grace and mercy of the Lord — "and all who touched it were healed."

So from this passage we see that faith involves walking with the Lord wherever He leads us, as well as bringing our needs, our brokenness to Him. By doing both we have to trust Him completely: His way is the only way, no matter how impossible it may seem to us at times; and only in Him are we healed, made whole, and cleansed from sin.

May the Lord bless and keep you and your loved ones safe. May your walk of faith be ever closer to Him.
Your brother in Christ,
Bill.