

CHAPTER I

A summary of the book...

“SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION”

by Martyn Lloyd-Jones
(1899–1981)

The psalmist David writes, “Why are you cast down, O my soul” (Ps 42:5) – David was sad, troubled, perplexed, disquieted, unhappy and spiritually depressed – a very common condition; obviously he felt overwhelmed within himself. Some of the greatest saints are *introverts*; the *extrovert* is generally a more superficial person. In the natural realm there is the type of person who is always analyzing himself, analyzing everything he does. The danger for such people is to become “morbid.” The great Henry Martyn was this type of man – he was a highly introspective, an introvert who suffered from an obvious tendency to morbidity. Introspective individuals seem to be highly centered on themselves. When we get depressed it is because we have “forgotten God” – hence the psalmist says to himself, “Hope thou in God!” (Ps 42:5)

Notice the psalmist addresses himself – “he talks to himself,” and herein he discovers the cure.

The main problem in the whole matter of “spiritual depression” in a sense is this – we allow our “self” to talk to us instead of “*talking to ourself.*” Most unhappiness in life is due to the fact that we “listen to ourselves” instead of “talking to ourselves.” David, in effect, says, “Self, listen for a moment to what I have to say – why are you so cast down?” The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself, question yourself, and preach to yourself – you must remind yourself who God is, and what God has done, and what God has promised to do – this is the essence of the treatment in a nutshell. We must understand that this “*self*” of ours – this *other man* within us has got to be handled; do not listen to him! turn on him! speak to him! remind him of what you know! So rather than listening to him and allowing him to drag you down and depress you – *you must take control!*

Deliverance from spiritual depression begins with an understanding of “justification,” not sanctification, as one might suspect. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). “This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent” (Jn 17:3). As a believer, are you truly enjoying God? Is He the center of your life? He is meant to be. If He is not, you are living in sin – that is the essence of sin. Remember the “good news” – God made Christ to be the propitiation for our sins – that is, God made Christ responsible for our sins; they were all placed upon Him and God dealt with them and punished them in His Son. So Christ is our salvation – we simply accept Him as our Deliverer and Savior by faith. God then imputed Christ’s righteousness to us – ***here is the great exchange: He took our wickedness and gave us His righteousness!*** To get rid of “spiritual depression” you must say farewell to your past! No matter how dark the stains may be, they have all been blotted out! It is finished! Never look back on your sins again! They will only “depress” you! ***If you focus on “your sinfulness,” you will only conclude that “you are not good enough!”*** And whether you believe it or not, *nobody* is good enough! The issue is not our goodness... the issue is God’s goodness.

It is only THEN that true happiness and joy are possible for you. Deliverance is not found in making resolutions to live a better life, fasting, grieving or praying. No “action” on your part. Repeatedly tell yourself, “I rest my faith on Christ alone, who died for my transgressions to atone.” Remember, a man is justified by “faith” – not by the “deeds” of the Law – your works and behavior have nothing to do with your being saved. Furthermore, since we are “eternally saved by faith,” our salvation is not maintained by “good works.” ***As long as you see your “sins” as a detriment with regard to your acceptance before***

God, you will negate the work of the cross in your life – because you will live as though “your sins” really have not been fully dealt with. This is a “*critical issue*” for many Christians – they have been “set free” from the prison of sin... their prison cell has been unlocked... yet they continue to live in it! Jesus is the Savior of *sinners*, among whom I am foremost of all! (1 Tim 1:15). (9-35)

It is sad and tragic that so many Christians are frustrated and miserable – The Protestant Reformation brought peace and happiness because the central doctrine of “justification by faith” was rediscovered. One of the most remarkable miracles our Lord performed was the healing of a “blind man” (Mk 8:22-26). When Jesus spat upon His eyes, He asked the blind man what he saw – he said he saw “trees walking.” Though one can say the man is *no longer blind*, yet you hesitate to say that he sees perfectly – that description is precisely where most Christians find themselves – they are disquieted and unhappy because of this lack of clarity regarding the doctrine of “justification by faith.” They simply see men as “trees walking” – there is confusion in what they see; they don’t understand certain basic truths. What they do is mix-in their own ideas with spiritual truth... and stop reading the Bible and praying.

What is the cure? What saved the “blind man” in the above illustration was his *absolute honesty* – he fully submitted himself to Christ, and did not object to further treatment. Conversely, our response must be similar: “I want the truth whatever it costs me.” The blind man listened to Jesus and his sight was *fully restored* – “he saw every man clearly.” If you are unhappy about yourself – go to Christ, go to His Word, wait upon Him, plead with Him, hold on to Him, and ask Him in the words of the hymn –

*Holy Spirit, Truth Divine, Dawn upon this soul of mine;
Word of God, and inward Light, Wake my spirit, clear my sight.*

Spiritual depression or unhappiness in the Christian life is very often due to our failure to realize the greatness of the *gospel*. Some think that it is merely a message of “forgiveness;” others conceive of it as only “moral” in nature; still others see it as “something good and beautiful.” The truth of the matter is, the gospel is a “whole view of life” – it is not partial or piecemeal – consequently the “whole man” must be involved in it – the *mind*, the *heart* and the *will*. There is a danger in having a purely “intellectual” experience, just as there is a danger in having a purely “emotional” experience – many Christians are content to simply live on their “feelings” (their head isn’t engaged at all). By the way, we must put things in the right order – mind, heart, and will. “Truth” must be first – once we know the truth, it will move the heart, and once the heart is engaged, your greatest desire will be to live it. The *heart* is always to be influenced through the *understanding*, which in turn will work upon the *will*. (36-63)

Paul wrote to Timothy, “Keep the faith and a good conscience; some have suffered shipwreck with regard to their faith” (1 Tim 1:19). That lack of balance is one of the great causes not only of unhappiness, but of failure and of stumbling in the Christian life. Many suffer shipwreck because their soul is troubled, but every Christian will experience a “*troubled soul*” – the Christian life is a “fight of faith,” a “test of faith,” and the devil will do all he can to rob us of our joy and make our lives miserable. Where believers go astray is that they tend to focus on their *performance* (they are preoccupied with themselves), rather than on their *relationship to God* (justification). When we come back to the gospel of grace, it is all a matter of belief or unbelief – faith or feeling. The problem is *unbelief* – the solution is *belief*. If you find yourself dwelling on your “sin,” you have not fully resolved in your heart the work of Christ on the cross – “*the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from all sin*” (1 Jn 1:7 – present tense!). That is what happens when you become a believer – believe it! We must be very clear about the “justification” – not only do we experience the “forgiveness of our sins,” but we have also been “declared righteous” by God Himself.

Ultimately it all comes down to this – *the real cause of “troubled souls” is the failure to realize that we are “one with Christ” – “united with Christ.”* We died with Christ... we have been buried with Christ... we have been raised with Christ... and we are now seated in heavenly places in Christ! (Rom 6:3-11; Eph 2:6). Paul says we are to “reckon these things as being so” (Rom 6:11). If you are looking at your past and your sins and you are depressed, it means that you are *listening to the devil*. Rejoice in the grace and mercy of God that has blotted out your sins and made you His child. Stop looking at yourself and begin to enjoy *Him!* By God’s grace you are what you are – it is all “*grace!*” Become absorbed in the “grace and love of God” and you will forget all about yourself – it will deliver you from self-interest, self-concern, and from depression (which is the result of focusing on self). (64-105)

The number one subject that brings people to counsel with their pastor is the “problem of feelings.” That is really natural, because we all desire to be “*happy*” – nobody wants to be miserable. Our feelings, and emotions, and sensibilities obviously are of vital importance to us – we have been made in such a way that they play a dominant part in our make-up. Probably the biggest problem for people worldwide, is their inability to handle their “*feelings and emotions.*” Timothy was a naturally nervous person who was given to *depression* – both things are often found in the same person. We all have certain problems in the Christian life – every man has his own burden to carry – those who are more naturally given to introspection are more often given to depression. The danger comes in submitting to our “*feelings*” and allowing them to govern and control our lives. Obviously, if you are guilty of sin, you are going to “feel miserable” – “the way of the transgressor is hard.” If you break God’s laws and violate His rules you will not be happy.

There is only one recourse: “Go to God at once and bare your soul” – acknowledge your sin and believe that because you have done so, He really forgives you. Avoid the common mistake of concentrating too much on your *feelings* – this is an extremely common error frequently made by Christians; they are too preoccupied with their “feelings” – the dynamic of the flesh is “feeling,” and the dynamic of the Spirit is “faith” – we are called to “believe God’s Word” even when our feelings send us another message! You have to speak the Word of God to yourself – “Why are you cast down my soul? Hope in God... believe what He has said... trust Him” (Ps 42). Scripture says, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness” – not after happiness! ***Seek for happiness and you will never find it; seek righteousness and you will discover you are happy!*** Do you want to experience true happiness? There is only one thing to do – *seek Christ*. He is our joy and our happiness. Seek Him, seek His face, and all other things shall be added unto you (Mt 6:33). (107-118)

There is no part of the Christian life that is without its “dangers” – Not only do we have to contend with our “enemy Satan,” but we also have to contend with our “old nature.” The parable of the *Kingdom of Heaven* in Matthew 20:1-16 is about a landowner who “hires laborers” to work in his vineyard at all hours of the day, including the “eleventh hour” – and each of them was paid the same wage. Those who worked “several hours” thought they should receive more than those who only worked one hour. The landowner responded, “Did I not pay you what you agreed to? Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with my own money? Is your eye full of evil because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last.” The principle of this parable is this – the Christian life is *all of grace* from the beginning to the end. Jesus is the landowner in this parable – and what we see here is that it is *never too late* to be saved! The question is this: Why did those who worked longer hours “*feel cheated*”?

1. Their “attitude” towards themselves and their work was wrong – They had “happily agreed” to accept what Jesus paid them; thus something is wrong with their “attitude.” These men were clearly conscious of everything *they* did – they had their eyes on “themselves.”
2. They were “assessing” their work – They were keeping an account of others also, and keeping a careful record of all they did and how long they had been working. The Lord is concerned with that kind of attitude – it is fatal in the Kingdom of God. He detected it in Peter’s statement: “We have left all and followed Thee, what do we get?” That kind of attitude is entirely antithetical to the realm of the Spirit and of the Kingdom. This parable exposes men for who they really are – they are men with a “*very selfish spirit.*” There was not the slightest bit of “rejoicing over how gracious the Lord was with others.” They had completely forgotten the “*principle of grace*” – they felt they were entitled to more than the others; as such, they were clearly “upset!”
3. They began to “murmur” – Their happiness and joy were completely gone, and they “murmured” because they felt they were not being treated fairly; they actually felt they were being dealt with harshly. What a tragic thing it is that Christians should be *murmuring* when they should be *rejoicing* in Christ. That is not all – their murmuring led to “having contempt for others,” and “being jealous of others.” It is the same principle of the “elder brother” in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The attitude of the laborers was “*selfish and self-centered.*”
4. They had a feeling in their heart that the landowner was “unjust” – The Christian is often tempted by the devil to feel that God is *not being fair*. What a miserable thing “self” is. The devil comes to us and we listen, and we begin to doubt whether God is just and righteous in His dealings with us. “*Self*” needs to be exposed for what it is – it is the greatest enemy of the soul, and it leads to misery and unhappiness! Many of us in reading these “charges” against the laborers are still siding with them in their response! Our *flesh* still is not convinced they were wrong! We are still prone to question God’s method of operation, and whether or not He is really being fair! That’s the flesh!

What is the cure for this problem? It is to understand the controlling principle of the Kingdom of God – the principle is that in the Kingdom of God everything is essentially different from everything in every other kingdom. For, Jesus says in effect, the Kingdom of God is *not like* that which you have always known; it is something completely new and different. The first thing you have to realize is that “if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away, and all things become new” (2 Cor 5:17). The entire realm in which we now live is different. It has nothing to do with the principle of the old life. All of our thinking as Christians has to be different. We must stop bringing all of our “*old ideas*” to the table. There is nothing so “wrong” as the spirit which argues that “because I do this, I have a right to expect something in return.” God is not a celestial vending machine. There is nothing you can do to manipulate God. No matter what you do, be it praying or anything else, we must never argue that because we have “done” something, we are “entitled” to get something. Never! Let us get rid of this *bargaining spirit*, that if I do this then that will happen. Such thinking makes faith mechanical. Remember, even our “rewards” are of grace! God doesn’t need to give them to us! In short, to think in terms of “bargains” and to “murmur” at unacceptable results, implies a distrust of Him – watch your spirit lest you harbor the thought that God is not dealing with you justly or fairly. This is an extremely common problem.

Do not keep a record or an account of your work! Give up being a bookkeeper. In the Christian life we must “*desire nothing but His glory!*” nothing but to “*please Him!*” Leave the bookkeeping to Him and to His grace. Let Him keep the accounts. The truth is, there is nothing so gracious as God’s method of accountancy. Be prepared for surprises in this Kingdom. The truth is, you never know what is going to

happen! The last shall be first! What a complete reversal of our materialistic outlook – everything in God’s kingdom is upside down! When Jesus separates the “sheep” from the “goats” on judgment day (Mt 25:31-40), He will say to us His sheep, “To the extent that you served one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you served Me – come inherit the Kingdom prepared for you!” We will be totally surprised by many of our acts of kindness and service. This life is all of grace! “By the grace of God we are what we are!” The secret of a happy Christian life is not only to realize that it is all of grace, but to “rejoice in that fact!” (120-132)

Jesus asked His disciples, “Where is your faith?” The whole issue here is the problem and question of the nature of faith. Many believers are often troubled because they have never clearly understood the nature of faith. Remember all believers have been given the “gift of faith,” that enables us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, but that does not mean that they fully understand the nature of faith. Though faith is given as a “gift,” from there on we have to do certain things about it – there is a vital difference between the *gift of faith* and the *walk of faith* or the life of faith. God starts us off in this Christian life and then we have to walk in it – “*we walk by faith, not by sight*” (2 Cor 5:7). When Jesus rebuked the disciples during the storm that raged on the sea of Galilee, He did not rebuke them because of their alarm or their terror, but for their “*lack of faith.*” Jesus marveled at their “unbelief.” The disciples had done everything they could in the storm, but it did not seem to be of any avail. Here is a critical point: *Jesus rebuked them for being in that state of agitation and terror while He was with them in the boat!* A Christian should never, like the worldly person, be depressed, agitated, alarmed, frantic, not knowing what to do. Paul said, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I’m in” (Phil 4:11). That is what the Christian is meant to be like. The Christian is never meant to be carried away by his feelings, and “lack self-control” – whatever his circumstances. That is why the disciples were so alarmed, agitated, miserable and unhappy.

The disciples condition also implied a “lack of trust and confidence in God” – Jesus said in effect: “Do you feel like this in spite of the fact that I am with you? Do you not trust Me?” Remember the words of the disciples: “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” (Mk 4:38). Such a response shows a lack of faith in Christ’s concern and care for us – as such, we become agitated and disturbed. It is the same response as the unbeliever. The issue is this: We must never allow ourselves to be agitated and disturbed whatever the circumstances, because to do so implies a “lack of faith and confidence in Christ” – at this point we simply do not believe God. One might call this kind of situation “*the trial of faith.*” Take the eleventh chapter of Hebrews – every one of those men was “tried.” They had been given the gift of faith and great promises, and then their faith was tried. Peter says the same thing: “Though you are distressed by various trials, the reason for the trials is that the *proof of your faith*, being more precious than gold which is perishable, though it be tested with fire, might be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6-7). That is the theme of all Scripture.

Storms and trials are a vital part of life for the believer – they are allowed by God for a reason... our faith is being *tried – proven – tested – purified*. James says, “Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials” (Jam 1:2). Paul writes, “Unto you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29). Jesus said, “In this world you will have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Likewise Paul also says, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). When everything seems to be against us; when the Lord Himself appears to be utterly unconcerned; when we are fearful and desperate; when we may even be in danger of our lives – that is where the real trial of faith comes in. In just such circumstances, follow the words of the Christian poet –

*When all things seem against us
To drive us to despair,
We know one gate is open
One ear will hear our prayer.*

What is the nature of “your faith”? Observe our Lord’s response when dealing with His disciples in the midst of the storm – He knows perfectly well that *“they have faith.”* The question He asks them is this: “You have faith – but where is it at the moment?” That gives us the “key” to understanding the nature of faith. First, faith is not merely a matter of *“feeling”* – it can’t be, because our feelings change from one minute to the next; as such, our faith would be there one minute, and gone the next. Faith involves the *“mind,”* the understanding – it is a “response to truth” (truth implies intelligibility). Faith is not something that acts automatically or magically. Faith has to be exercised. Faith does not come into operation by itself, you have to put it into operation.

So, how does one put faith into operation? The first thing you must do when you find yourself in a difficult position is to *refuse to allow yourself to be controlled by the situation* – that was the disciples problem; they allowed the situation to control them. Faith is a refusal to panic. That is the very nature of faith – it is a refusal to panic, come what may. Faith has been described thus: ***“Faith is perpetual unbelief kept quiet” – faith does not allow unbelief to surface.*** Genuine faith does not entertain the temptation – it immediately rejects the temptation – by considering temptation, you allow it to *“take root”* in your heart. Believers do not have the capacity to fully consider temptation and then turn away from it, because it *“engages the flesh!”* Satan isn’t stupid! He knows if you will just “listen” to him and consider what he has to say – he’s got you!!! Faith immediately responds to difficult situations with these words: “I am not going to entertain these thoughts! And I am not going to be controlled by these circumstances!” Right out of the shoot, you take charge of yourself! and pull yourself up! and control yourself! You do not let your thoughts wander into Satan’s territory! You assert yourself! *Now* is the time to control your thinking! You need to remind yourself *immediately* of what you believe and what you know! That is faith – it holds on to truth and reasons from what it knows to be fact. That is the way faith reasons. The foundation stone of faith is *Truth – God’s Word – Scripture.* Faith reasons, “All right, I see the waves and the billows... BUT (and then you remind yourself of ultimate reality – “truth” – God is God, and He is in charge). To reiterate, one of the most critical steps you can take when faced with a difficult situation, is to *“immediately reject the temptation and refuse to consider it,”* and then *“affirm what you know to be the truth,”* including the acknowledgment of your own weakness. Faith agrees with everything God says about reality – and that includes the need for you to be utterly dependent upon Him. Here is an example of what to say –

*God, all things seem to be against me to “drive me to despair.”
I don’t understand what is happening, but this I know – I know
that You so loved me that You sent Your only begotten Son into
this world for me. You did that for me while I was an enemy,
a rebellious alien. I know that Jesus loves me and gave Himself
for me. I know that at the cost of His life’s blood I have salvation
and that I am now Your child and an heir to everlasting joy and
peace. I know that.*

Faith argues like that – it amounts to “logically thinking through what we know to be true.” Faith reminds itself of what the Scripture calls “the exceeding great and precious promises.” Faith says, “I cannot believe that He who has brought me so far is going to let me down at this point. It is impossible,

because it would be inconsistent with the character of God. So faith, having refused to be controlled by circumstances, reminds itself of what it believes and what it knows to be true. Jesus in effect said to His disciples, “Where is your faith? You have it! Why don’t you apply it?” ***Bring all you know to be true of your relationship to God to bear upon it*** – then you will know full well that He will never allow anything to happen to you that is harmful. Remember the words of Paul: “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.” Not a hair of your head shall be harmed. He loves you with an everlasting love. You may not have a full understanding of your predicament, but this you know for certain – “God is not unconcerned.” God permits everything that happens to you because it is ultimately for your good. That is the way faith works – but you have to exercise it. You refuse to be moved. You stand on your faith. “This is the victory that overcomes the world – *your faith!*” (1 Jn 5:4).

By the way, God honors the “smallest degree of faith.” The disciples, even though they were in a “state of panic,” still had a sufficient amount of faith to make them do the right thing in the end – *they went to Jesus!* They still had some kind of feeling that He could do something about it, and so they woke Him and said, “Master, are You not going to do something about this?” That is very poor faith you may say, very weak faith – but it is faith, thank God! Scripture says, “*even faith like a grain of mustard seed is valuable because it takes us to Christ!*” When you finally come to Him in your despair, He may rebuke you for not reasoning things out (which is mature faith), and ask you why you did not apply your faith, and question why you have behaved as if you were not a Christian at all? And then you hear Him say, “I would have been so pleased if I could have watched you standing like a man in the midst of the hurricane or storm – why didn’t you?” He will let us know that He is disappointed in us and He will rebuke us; but, praise to Him, *He will nevertheless still receive us!* He does not drive us away. He did not drive these disciples away, He received them and He will receive you and me as well! And incredible as it may seem, He will not only receive us, but He will bless us and give us His peace! How can it be that our God is so gracious and kind and forgiving? Jesus rebuked the wind and the sea, and it became absolutely calm – think of it – He produced the condition they were so anxious to enjoy . . . in spite of their lack of faith! Such is the gracious Lord that you and I believe in and follow – that He is truly “gracious” in His dealings with us is really “too wonderful” for words. Though we stumble hourly, and stumble terribly, still He never rejects us or gives up on us, and He forever remains faithful to us – even when we are faithless! Why? Because we are His children – how can He deny Himself? (2 Tim 2:13). (135-147)

Matthew 14 describes Peter’s experience of “walking on the water” (Mt 14:22-33). Like the previous story of the disciples in a storm tossed sea, this incident also concentrates on the nature and the character of faith. Here again we see Jesus commanding and controlling the elements. Peter bids Jesus to have him come to him on the water – He starts off so well, so full of faith . . . then He gets into trouble and ends up being a miserable failure, crying out in desperation. How quickly it all happened. We are told in this story *when Peter “looked at the wind and the waves” he became afraid and began to sink.* The circumstances began to occupy his attention. . . the conditions hadn’t changed. . . the wind and the waves were there before he started to walk on the water. . . so there was no new factor. . . yet Peter got into trouble and became frightened and desperate. Why? The answer is that the trouble was entirely “in Peter.” Our Lord gives us a precise diagnosis – it was “*little faith!*”

Peter’s great characteristic was his energy and his capacity for quick decision, and his active personality. He was enthusiastic and impulsive, and that was the thing that was constantly getting him into trouble. The trouble with this kind of person is that he tends to act without thinking – *his faith was not been based upon sufficient thought.* The difficulty with him was that he did not think things all the way through, he did not work them out right. In the Gospels, he was always the first man to volunteer –

he was always first in everything, and that was his trouble. The apostle Paul had to rebuke Peter over the fact that he did not work out the question of justification by faith only, as he should have done. He had no excuse, because he was the first man to admit the Gentiles into the Christian Church – you remember the Cornelius incident (Acts 10). It was a tremendous thing for a Jew to bring a Gentile into the Church. What was the matter with Peter? He accepted a position without working out all its implications – this is a very common cause of spiritual depression.

Conversely, when Peter looked at the waves “he began to doubt” – Peter led himself into doubting by “focusing on those things that are in juxtaposition to faith” – he focused on the waves – and that temptation gave birth to sin, and he sank. We will always be tempted to let “problems” overwhelm us – and when they do, they cause us not to trust. By the way, doubts are *not* incompatible with faith. Some people seem to think that once you become a Christian you will never doubt – but that is not so; Peter still had faith even though he doubted – Jesus said to him, “O ye of little faith.” We are all tempted to “doubt” – *doubting is a sign of “weak faith,”* and all of us from time to time “*struggle with faith.*” That is the *great fight* for the believer (1 Tim 6:12); and make no mistake about it, it is a fight! The key is not to let doubts “master and control us” – when they do, that is a spiritual warning sign that we need to “*grow more in our faith;*” obviously, we want to be a people of “great faith,” not “weak faith.” Great faith is a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and His power, and a steady trust and confidence in Him – faith begins and ends with a knowledge of the Lord – not a feeling, or an act of the will. Christianity is Christ, and Christian faith means believing certain things about Him and knowing Him. It is precisely here where many Christians are troubled – their “lack of faith” (weak faith) is the root cause of their unhappiness.

So, the great antidote to spiritual depression is the “knowledge of Christ,” and a knowledge of Christian doctrine, and you get that in His Word. You must take the time to learn it! The tragedy of the hour is that people are far too dependent for their happiness upon “*meetings and fellowship,*” and that is why so many Christians are depressed and miserable. Their knowledge of the “truth” is defective. Jesus said, “*knowing the truth will set you free*” (Jn 8:32). It is the truth that frees – the truth about Him, His Person, and His work.

Great faith “persists in looking at Christ – the Author and Perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). Faith says, “What God has begun to do He can continue to do.” The beginning of the work was a miracle; so if He can initiate a miraculous work when I was at enmity with Him, He has the ability to keep it going – “Be confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). *Remember this, you will “never doubt” if you look at Christ and are clear about Him – without Him we are utterly hopeless.* It doesn’t matter how long you have been a Christian, you are “dependent” upon Him for every step – “*without Him you can do nothing*” (Jn 15:5). We can only conquer our doubts by looking steadily at Him, and not looking at our doubts. Remember, “*we walk by faith*” (2 Cor 5:7) – and that means living with our eyes on Christ, because we need Him all the time. That is the Lord’s method – He does not give us enough “manna” for a *month*; we need a fresh supply *every day*, so start your day with Him and keep in touch with Him. That was Peter’s fatal error – he looked away from Him. Remember, you are walking on *turbulent waves* and the only way to keep walking is keep looking at Him; He will never let you sink. “Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” (Jude 1:24). (148-160)

“You have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again” (Rom 8:15) – That is one of the most significant statements found in all of Scripture. Why did Paul ever make that statement? He was anxious to save these Roman Christians from a *spirit of discouragement*. A spirit of bondage, a spirit of defeat,

is always threatening us in the Christian life. The problem is “dealing with sin” – there is sin within and without, and a host of potential failures in the Christian life – a failure to realize certain truths; a failure to realize what is possible for us as Christians; a failure to understand doctrine; and a failure to persist with the application of faith — *FAITH MUST BE APPROPRIATED! Paul’s fear is that they might have a “slave-like attitude” toward the Christian life – a “higher law” if you will – where the believer thinks of the Christian life as a “great task” which they have to take up and to which now they are to apply themselves.* In other words, holiness becomes a “great task” to them, and they begin to plan and organize their lives and take up certain “disciplines” in order to enable them to carry it out. This attitude is seen in a classic manner in Roman Catholicism and her teaching – in the whole idea of “monasticism” – where the cultivation of holiness and the spiritual life becomes a *full-time occupation* that you must devote yourself exclusively to, and have your rules, to enable you to live it. According to Paul – that is nothing but a “spirit of bondage” that ultimately brings with it a “wrong fear of God” – a fear that hath torment; it regards God as a taskmaster; as someone who is constantly watching them to discover their faults; a stern Lawgiver who metes out punishment accordingly. So the fear is also a “fear” at not fulfilling the task that they have been given. That is why they thought the spiritual life could only be lived if one segregated himself from the world – hence, they have “no joy” because the gigantic nature of the task is something that fills them with a spirit of fear; furthermore, they actually fear themselves and have a fear of failure. It is a “no win” proposition all the way around; a miserable existence. They say something like this – “I have come into this Christian life, but the question is, “*Can I live it?*”

Paul says, “You need not live in a spirit of bondage.” Why not? Because the *Holy Spirit* is in you and He will empower you and strengthen you. “God is at work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). *We must look to Him and rely upon Him – as we believe and wrestle, He enables and empowers us... He transforms our outlook... and we lose the spirit of bondage.* Because God cares for us, our desire should not be to *keep the law*, but to *please the Father*. There is nothing that promotes holiness as the realization that we are “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ,” that our destiny is certain and secure, that nothing in all creation can prevent it. Realizing that, we purify ourselves even as He is pure, and we feel that there is no time to waste (1 Jn 3:1-3). Do not worry about what you feel; the truth about you is glorious. Take your salvation and prevail. (163-189)

“Do not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time you shall reap” (Gal 6:9) – The ills of the spiritual life are always the same, they never vary though their particular guise may differ, and the cause of it all is the “devil.” After years of following Christ, and the thrill of new discovery suddenly seems to have gone, many believers are often beset with trials and difficulties... and *weariness* sets in. At this stage of development in the Christian life the believer says to himself, “Well whatever happens I’m going on; I’m not giving in; I will not lose heart” – so they go on, but they go on in a hopeless, dragging condition. Resigning oneself to such a fate is the greatest danger of all – one of the great temptations of the devil is to get God’s people to “lose hope.” Many Christians at this point just move forward in a formal spirit and as a matter of duty – wearily trudging along. Actually, if we regard the Christian life as merely a wearisome task or a duty to be performed, and we have to goad ourselves to get through it, somewhere along the way we got off the “narrow road” and got onto the “broad road.” ***Go back to the beginning of your life and retrace your steps to the gate through which you passed.*** Look at the world in its evil state, and look to the hell to which it was leading you, and then look forward and realize that you are sent into the midst of the most glorious campaign a man could ever enter, and that you are on the noblest road that the world has ever known.

When the world becomes too much for us, we are immersed too much in our problems – look ahead to the eternal glories gleaming in the distance. “Set your affections on things above and not on the things of earth” (Col 3:2). “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). *Go on with your work whatever your feelings; God will give the increase; He will send the rain of His gracious mercies as we need it; there will be an abundant harvest – look forward to it – you will reap!* (Gal 6:9). Remember Jesus – “who for joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2) – that is how He did it. The absolute glorious certainty of the future moved Him to endure the cross. Remind yourself of your blessed Master... look to Him and ask Him to forgive you for ever having allowed yourself to become weary... and you will find that you are again thrilled with the privilege and joy of it all, and you will hate yourself for having grumbled and complained, and you will go forward still more gloriously until eventually you hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of the Lord. Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mt 25:34). (191-202)

Peter wrote his second epistle to encourage people who were discouraged, to the point they began to “*doubt their faith*,” they were barren and unfruitful, and had “forgotten that they had been purged from their old sins” (2 Pet 1:9). These are Christians Peter is writing to, but they are downcast, unhappy, and shaken by doubts. Their faith did not fill them with joy and certainty, and they were not growing in the knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet 3:18). Why are they this way? The ultimate case is a “*lack of discipline*,” and that stems from having a “*wrong view of faith*.” Peter exhorts them to “apply all diligence in adding to their faith” (2 Pet 1:5). They seemed to have had a kind of “*magical view of faith*” – the idea that as long as they had faith all would go well, and that their will would automatically work in their lives. Peter tells them that faith needs to be supplemented by virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. They had one formula only – as long as they “*look to the Lord*” there is nothing else to do. They felt that any attempt to do anything else is dropping back to the “*salvation by works*” position. This is a very common error even in the church today. But Peter says, “*You must supplement your faith!*” Growing in faith does not happen automatically! Fight the fight of faith! (1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7).

Most Christians live their lives seriously “lacking in discipline.” The most difficult thing in life is to “order your life” and “manage your life” – if we don’t we will cave to the danger of “*drifting*.” Obviously, there are a myriad of things that can distract us – newspaper, television, meetings, work, chores, hobbies, sports, etc. The fact is everyone of us is “*fighting for his life*” – fighting to possess and master and live our own life. ***We all have the time – the whole secret of success in this respect is to “take that time and insist that it is given to this matter of the soul,” instead of to these other things!*** Peter says, “apply all diligence,” “make every effort,” “be zealous to do these things.” If you read the lives of the “greatest saints,” the number one characteristic in their lives was “*discipline and order*.” Hebrews says, “*God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*” (Heb 11:6). We must be diligent and zealous in our seeking. Those who have never experienced a “*warm heart*” have never really sought it. Those who have experienced it believed in the culture and discipline of the spiritual life. If you are an unhappy and depressed Christian it is more than likely that it is all due to a “lack of discipline.” You must “insist” upon the disciplines of *Scripture, Prayer, Study, and Meditation*. Furthermore, we must then be diligent to ***supplement our faith with*** –

1. “***virtue***” – its meaning here is moral energy, power and vigor
2. “***knowledge***” – this means a kind of insight, understanding and enlightenment of the truth
3. “***temperance***” – this means “self-control” over every aspect of your life
4. “***patience***” – patient endurance to keep on through every discouragement

5. **“godliness”** – which means paying careful attention to our relationship with God
6. **“brotherly kindness”** – our relationship to our fellow Christians
7. **“charity”** – love toward those who are outside the faith (202-216)

Peter wrote his first epistle to address the matter of “spiritual depression” – the *“heaviness”* they felt because of the manifold temptations they were experiencing simply robbed them of their joy. They had a superficial view of Christianity – they thought they should be *“happy all day long,”* and not have to go through *“fiery trials.”* Obviously, they were totally disillusioned. The truth is, there are a series of **PARADOXES** that the apostle Paul uses to describe himself – “we are *afflicted* in every way, but not crushed; we are *perplexed*, but not despairing; we are *persecuted*, but not forsaken; we are *struck down*, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8-9). Grief and suffering are things to which the Christian is subject; he is not immune to such things. The saints of God are subject to human frailties, grief, sorrow, feeling lonely, failure, and being disappointed. The glory of the Christian life is that we can rise above these things even though we feel them. It is not an absence of feeling – that is a very important dividing line – according to Scripture, ***it is a law that the more we resemble Christ in our life and living, the more likely we are to have met troubles in this world.*** The godliest saints in history all were subjected to rigorous trials – start with all twelve of Jesus’ disciples and the apostle Paul; they were all martyred with the exception of John. And throughout the “Church age” we have a seemingly endless list of saints to whom we could point.

The manifold trials to which we are subjected, writes Peter, are “good for us,” because they are part of our discipline in this life and in this world – *God has appointed it so* – in order that He might bring us to perfection. Sometimes these things happen to us to *chasten us*; other times it is to *prepare us* for something (like Joseph and David). Notice the words Peter uses – *“if need be”* (1 Pet 1:6) – if a particular thing we are being subjected to proves needful, God will do whatever is necessary. God puts us through times of testing in order that the things which do not belong to the essence of faith may fall off. Furthermore, God develops the *“trust element”* in our faith by trying us. God so deals with us in this life as to bring us to trust Him in the dark when we can see no light at all. Trials happen to us in order that the genuineness of our faith may be revealed – and that is the most important thing. It should be noted that God does not keep us permanently under trial – He knows the right amount that is needed, and when we have responded, He will withdraw it. *It is only for a season.* By the way, the greater and the more genuine our faith, the greater our glory will be.

God uses a “variety of methods” in the sanctifying process – “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Th 4:3), “that we should be holy and blameless” (Eph 1:4). God’s great concern for us primarily is not our happiness but *“our holiness.”* Like foolish children, we often misunderstand God’s dealings with us and feel He is being *“unkind to us”* – that, of course, leads to depression and it is all due to our failure to realize God’s glorious purposes with respect to us. Scripture tells us that God sometimes promotes sanctification by *“chastening us”* – “whom the Lord loves He chastens” (Heb 12:6). God has His ways of producing holiness in us. Another way God transforms us is through the instruction of *“His Word.”* Paul was given a *“thorn in the flesh”* to keep him spiritually right and to keep him from exalting himself; and through it all Paul learned that “when he was weak, then he was strong spiritually” (2 Cor 12:10); as a result, he then learned to rejoice in infirmity rather than in health in order that God’s glory might be promoted. Incidentally, the word *chastise* means “to train” – we tend to confuse it with the word punishment; not so, instead it includes correction, instruction, and rebuke; the essential object of chastisement is to train and develop the child so as to produce maturity.

How does God chastise His children? Most often thru “*circumstances;*” in particular God often uses *financial loss – illness – persecution*. Again, God chastens us that we become partakers of His holiness. There are certain faults in all of us that need to be corrected – spiritual pride; self-dependence; self-confidence; worldly values; fleshly lusts; lack of humility; arrogance; need of patience. The psalmist said, “It is good for me that I was afflicted” (Ps 119:71). We all have to be humbled in order to arrive at humility – and “*failure*” is one of the most effective ways to accomplish this. Think of it this way – it is very difficult to be humble if you are always successful, so God chastens us with failure at times in order to humble us. (218-245)

There are a number of “wrong ways” of reacting to trials, troubles, and chastisement – We can despise them... become hardened by them... resent them... become bitter... feel hopeless... become angry... despair... give up... grumble and complain... or faint under the pressure – “Oh, that I had wings like a dove for then I would fly away and be at rest!” (Ps 55:6). Scripture says, “*Pull yourself together and stop behaving as a child*” – *stop fainting; stop whimpering; stop crying; stop sulking*. “You say you are men, but you continue to act like a child!” Listen to what the Word of God has to say – follow the logic of it; bring intelligence to the Scriptures. The great argument of Scripture is that it is “God” who is doing this, and God is doing it to you because you are His child, and He is doing it for your good; but it only does good when you “*submit to the process.*”

What is the process? The psalmist tells us that God is going to do these things to us by putting us into a “*gymnasium.*” That is the original meaning of the word translated “*trained*” (Heb 12:11). It is a wonderful picture. We are told that the very root of this word gymnasium is a word which signifies “*being stripped naked*” – so the picture we have here is of ourselves being taken into a gymnasium and there we are told to strip down, that we may go through the exercises unhindered by our clothing. “Lay aside every encumbrance and sin that so easily entangles you, and run with endurance the race that is set before you” (Heb 12:1). The instructor takes his student and puts him through his exercises in order that he might become a fine specimen of manhood. *When you are naked, all of your flaws and infirmities are exposed, and the instructor can prescribe the exercises that are needed to correct them.*

Listen to the Instructor (Christ), and go through the exercises and training that He has prescribed for you – if you do so, it will “yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” (Heb 12:11). Submit to the examination of God’s Word, and when you have been trained you will say as the psalmist said, “It was good for me that I was afflicted – before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I keep Thy Word” (Ps 119:67, 71). Follow after holiness with all your might! pursue it! hunt for it! and you will find it! It should be tremendously comforting to know that you are in God’s hands, that He loves you, and that *He is determined to produce holiness in you* and bring you to heaven without spot or blemish. Should you not listen to God’s Word, He will deal with you in another way. One way or another, *God is going to bring you to heaven a “fit specimen.”* Take the training, do the exercises, hurry to the gymnasium, and do what He tells you – practice it all whatever the cost, however great the pain, and enter into the joy of the Lord. (247-259)

“Be anxious for nothing... pour out your heart to God... and His peace will flood your soul” (Phil 4:6-7). This is one of the most comforting statements in all of Scripture. Therefore, “rejoice in the Lord always!” Paul has shown us how “desiring our own way” produces an unquiet spirit and robs us of our joy. We are to be “anxious for nothing” – *anxiety is all due to the activity of the heart and mind; this is a profound piece of psychology. What Paul is saying here is this: “we can control many things in our lives and outside our lives, but we cannot control our hearts and minds.” The condition of anxiety, says Paul, “is something which is in a sense outside our control; it happens apart from you and in spite of you.”*

The heart is the central part of our personality, and the seat of our emotions. A prolific cause of anxiety is the *imagination*, and sometimes it simply runs rampant. We are the victims of our thoughts, and oftentimes they are outside our control and master us. The apostle tells us that this is something which at all costs we must avoid. In the state of anxiety we spend the whole of our time reasoning and arguing and chasing imaginations – and in that state we are useless, and we lose the joy of the Lord.

Psychology says, “Stop worrying and pull yourself together” – that’s repression. If you happen to be a strong-willed person you can hold these things from the conscious mind with the result that they then go on working in the subconscious mind. That condition, however, is worse than anxiety itself. What then does the apostle say? “Let your requests be made known to God” – that is the answer! First you “*pray*” – that is the essence of worship and adoration. Then you bring your “*supplications*” to the Lord – the particular things that are troubling you. And you do so with “*thanksgiving*” – we must have positive reasons for thanking God. We thank God for our salvation... that He cares about us... that He is present in our trouble... for all of His provisions... that He is at work in us for “good”... that He is able to do more than we could ever ask or think... that He is faithful to His Word – “we shall be kept whether something happens or it doesn’t happen.” Remember the glory of the gospel is that God is concerned about “*us*” – not about our “*circumstances*.”

We tend to be “tyrannized by circumstances” because we depend upon them, and we would like them to be governed and controlled, but that is not the position of Scripture. God promises to “give us His peace, which passes all understanding; and His peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” – so He promises to give us peace in our hearts in spite of the circumstances. Prayer does not mean we are going to “feel better,” or that our circumstances are going to be “changed.” Furthermore, *prayer* itself is not the vehicle that “does the work” – *God* is the one who gives us His peace. (261-272)

One of the high-water marks of the Christian experience is “learning to be content in all situations.” The real meaning of the word translated “*content*” is this – “I have learned in whatever circumstance I am in to be self-sufficient, independent of circumstances and conditions.” Paul tells us how he learned to be independent of “the thorn in the flesh,” self-sufficient in spite of it. He told Timothy: “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6). ***The first thing you have to learn is to be independent of circumstances and conditions – we are not to be mastered or controlled by circumstances.*** If you can improve your circumstances rightly, by all means do so... but if you cannot, do not be mastered by it; do not let it get you down; do not let it control you; do not let it determine your misery or your joy. We must not depend on our circumstances to make us happy. Paul says, “My life is not controlled and determined by what is happening to me; I am in a state in which I rise above them.” One of the greatest tasks in life is to discover how to suffer all things without feeling a sense of grudge or bitterness of spirit... to discover how not to be worried or anxious. Paul had experienced every kind of trial and tribulation and yet he was unaffected by them – thus in effect he said, “My life and happiness and joy are not determined or controlled by what happens to me.”

Professor Whitehead defined religion thus: “Religion is what a man does with his own solitude.” You and I, in the final analysis, are what we are when we are alone. Paul had a love for God that rendered him independent of all that was happening to him – whatever was happening to him, he was content. How did the apostle reach this condition? “I have come to learn [by sheer experience].” Paul learned the important lesson, “*My grace is sufficient for you*” (2 Cor 12:10) – experience is a great teacher; it teaches all of us. Paul had come to learn this great truth by working out a ***great argument*** –

- Conditions are always *changing*, therefore I must not be dependent upon them.
- What matters supremely is *my soul* and my relationship with God.
- God is concerned about *me*, and nothing happens to me apart for His approving it.
- God's will and God's ways are a great mystery, and whatever He permits is *for my good*.
- Every situation in life is the unfolding of some manifestation of *God's love* and goodness.
- I must regard circumstances and conditions as a part of God's work of *perfecting my soul*.
- Whatever my conditions may be at the present moment, they are only *temporary*.

Our job is to look for the particular manifestation of God's goodness and kindness in life, and be prepared for surprises and blessings, because "His ways are not our ways" (Is 55:8-9). Paul had learned to find his pleasure and his satisfaction in Christ – his intimacy with Christ grew so deep that he had become independent of everything else. Let this become our first ambition.

The apostle Paul writes, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). A better translation would be – "*I am strong for all things in the One who constantly infuses strength into me.*" What Paul is really saying is not so much that he can do certain things himself, as he is enabled to do certain things by the One who infuses His strength to him. Christ is all-sufficient for every circumstance. The essence of the Christian life is that it is a mighty power that enters into us; it is a life, if you like, that is pulsating in us. It is an activity, and an activity on the part of God. "He who began a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). God is working out His will in your life – that is what Christians really are (Phil 2:12-13). The Christian life is "God's activity," not merely our activity. ***The life of God in the souls of men – that is who Christians are.*** To be a Christian is to be so vitally related to Christ that His life and power are working in us – that is it what it means to be "in Christ." "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col 1:27). Reflect again upon Paul's words, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). Note "I can" and "through Christ" – both play an integral role in the sanctifying process. "*I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me*" (Gal 2:20). The Christian life is not a life that I live myself by my own power – neither is it a life in which Christ does everything – "***both of us***" ***have responsibilities.*** That is the incredible romance of the Christian life. "I am able to accomplish God's purposes because He constantly infuses me with His strength" (Phil 4:13). As my friend Dr. Steve Brown (author of the next chapter) would say, "You think about that." (275-300)