

(Biographies) Charles Spurgeon

by John Piper

John Piper's sermon on Charles Spurgeon highlights the challenges of preaching through adversity and the enduring legacy of Spurgeon's truth-driven ministry.

Duration: 1:13:42

Scripture: Psalm 22:1, Psalm 46:7, Psalm 119:160, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 27:46, Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 1:18

Topics: "Perseverance In Ministry", "Overcoming Adversity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of perseverance in preaching, even in the face of adversity and criticism. He encourages preachers to have a long-term perspective, recognizing that their afflictions are temporary and that God will ultimately triumph. The speaker also highlights the need to have a strong sense of identity and not be paralyzed by external criticism or internal self-doubt. He shares personal experiences of depression and how it unexpectedly gave power to his ministry. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the importance of staying steadfast in preaching the word of God, regardless of the challenges faced.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org My topic this year is preaching, preaching through adversity. And the man that I would like us to focus on is Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who on this day, January 31st, 103 years ago, died at the age of 57 after preaching for 38 years at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

And there are very personal reasons for me why I chose the topic and why I chose the man for this biographical study. Everybody faces adversity, without exception in the world, and everybody must learn how to live through adversity. Everybody has to get up in the morning, make breakfast and wash clothes and go to work and pay bills and discipline children and generally keep life going when the heart is breaking.

But it's different, it's not totally different, but it's different for pastors, for preachers, because the heart is the instrument of our vocation. Spurgeon said, ours is more than mental work, it is heart work, the labor of our inmost soul. So when our heart is breaking, we must labor with a broken instrument.

And preaching is heart work, not just mental work. So the question for us is not just how do you live through adversity, but a much more difficult question. How do you preach through adversity? When the

marriage is blank, when the child runs away, when the finances don't reach, when the pews are bare, when the friends forsake you, the question is far bigger than how do you live.

But how do you preach next Sunday? And week after week, and month after month, it's one thing to survive adversity, it's another thing to preach through adversity. Spurgeon said to his pastor's college once, One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low. The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor.

Ten years of toil do not take so much life out of us as we lose in a few hours by Ahithophel, the traitor, or Demas, the apostate. The question for us is not how do you live through unremitting criticism and distrust and accusation and abandonment. For us the question is, how do you preach through it? How do you do heart work when the heart is under siege, week after week, and ready to fall? For just over a year now, that has been probably the uppermost question in my life.

And if I'm not mistaken, it is an uppermost question for many of you. Preaching great and glorious truth in an atmosphere that is not great and glorious is a great difficulty. To be reminded week in and week out that many people regard your preaching of the glory of the grace of God as sheer hypocrisy pushes a preacher not just into the hills of introspection, but to the precipice of self-extinction.

And I don't mean suicide, I mean something far more complex than suicide. I mean the deranging inability to know any longer who you are. What begins as a searching introspection for the sake of holiness and humility gradually becomes, for various reasons, a carnival of mirrors.

Picture the scene now. Week after week, relentless criticism pushes you first to introspection because you want to be humble, you want to be holy, you want to listen to the truth in what's being said. You don't want to elevate yourself above correction.

But it pushes you beyond introspection to this deranging inability to know anymore who you are if you're not careful. What begins with that searching introspection for the sake of holiness and humility gradually becomes, for various reasons, a carnival of mirrors in your soul. You look into one mirror, and you're short and fat.

And then you look into another mirror, and you're tall and skinny. And you look into another mirror, and you're upside down. And little by little, you start to tremble that you don't know which one is you.

The center isn't holding. And if the center doesn't hold, if there is no fixed, solid I able to relate to the fixed and solid thou, namely God, who will preach next Sunday? Which one will preach? When the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, By the grace of God, I am what I am. He said something that is so utterly essential for enduring in the preaching office through adversity.

If by grace, the identity of the I, the I created by Christ and united to Christ, but still the human I, if that center doesn't hold, there will be no more authentic preaching, because there will be no more authentic preacher, but only a collection of echoes. Echoing off of this feedback, and that feedback, and this feedback, and this feedback, and just a collection of echoes with no center anymore. Know how fortunate we are, brothers of the pulpit, that we are not the first to face these things.

We are so fortunate. I thank God for the healing of history. Do you read history? Are you slipping into the abyss of the present? It is an abyss, brothers.

You cannot know yourself, or your times, or your God, if you only know the present. I bless God for history in books. And I have turned to Charles Spurgeon in these days, and I have been helped.

And that's what I want to do for you, is help you the way I've been helped. My aim is to give strength so that you'll keep on preaching through the adversity until Darius arises and pays your bill. Why Spurgeon? I think I've got about seven reasons here.

Number one, he was a preacher. He preached 600 times before he was 20 years old. His sermons were sold at the rate of about \$25,000 a week.

By the way, let's insert something here. This manuscript that I'm working off of will be available to you tonight or tomorrow. You can just sit and relax, and everything I say and more will be in that manuscript.

Okay? Although, we were going to charge you a dollar just to cover the costs of the... See, you might want to take notes if you have a dollar. He was a preacher 600 times before he was 20. 25,000 copies a week went out.

The collected volumes, you know these from Pilgrim Press down in Pasadena. 63 volumes equal to the 27th edition or the 9th edition of the 27 volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The biggest collection of writings of any Christian writer in the whole world and the whole of history.

He stands alone. His son Charles is biased, but he speaks truth, I think, when he says, There was no one who could preach like my father. He must, at least in my opinion, ever be regarded as the prince of preachers.

So number one reason he was a preacher, we are preachers. Number two, he was a truth-driven preacher. I am not interested in the counsel of anyone going through adversity who does not find the solution to that challenge in the truth.

If he wants to give me other kinds of counsel and abandon the truth in order to survive, I turn away from that counsel. That's not Spurgeon. He is truth-driven.

He defined the work of preaching like this. To know the truth and to love it as it should be loved and to proclaim it in the right spirit in its proper proportions. So he defined preaching in terms of truth, dissemination and recognition.

He said to his students, to be an effective preacher, you must be a sound theologian. He warned that those who do away with Christian doctrine, whether they are aware of it or not, are the worst enemies of Christian living because the coals of orthodoxy are necessary to the fire of piety. Two years before he died, he said this.

This is so significant to me. He's just filled with imagery, as you know. Here's one of them.

Some excellent brethren seem to think more of life than of truth. In my controversy, the issue is love versus truth. That's more common today.

And when I warned them that the enemy has poisoned the children's bread, they answer, dear brother, we are sorry to hear it. And to counteract the evil, we will open the window and give the children fresh air. Yes, open the window.

And give them fresh air by all means. But at the same time, this you ought to have done and not to have left the other undone. Arrest the poisoners and open the windows too.

While men go on preaching false doctrine, you may talk as often as you like about deepening their spiritual life, but you will fail in it. Doctrinal truth was at the foundation and the superstructure of his preaching in life. Number three, why Spurgeon? He was a Bible-believing preacher.

The truth was biblical truth. Here's what he said about the Bible. These words are God's words.

Thou book of vast authority. Thou art a proclamation from the emperor of heaven. Far be it from me to exercise my reason in contradicting thee.

This is the book untainted by error, but it is pure, unalloyed, perfect truth. Why? Because God wrote it. Number four, he was a soul winning preacher.

There wasn't one week he said went by, but that his written sermons did not win somebody to Jesus. Not to mention the many that were saved week in and week out at the tabernacle. He did what he called the watch for souls.

He put his elders on watch and he had one brother, he said, who earned the name for himself. My hunting dog, for he's always ready to pick up the wounded bird. Spurgeon, like John commended us this morning, pled for decision, sought decision and got decision that were deep and life changing.

He wasn't exaggerating when he said, I remember when I have preached at different times in country, in the country. And sometimes here that my whole soul was agonized over men. Every nerve of my body has been strained and I have.

I could have wept my very being out of my eyes and carried my whole frame into a flood of tears. If I could but win souls, he was consumed with the glory of God and the salvation of men. I'm interested in hearing a man like that and how he perseveres in adversity.

Number five, why Spurgeon? He was a Calvinistic preacher, my kind of Calvinist, I believe. I mean, give you a flavor of his Calvinism and why it drew five thousand people a week instead of sending five thousand people a week away from. To me, he said, Calvinism means the placing of the eternal God at the head of all things.

I look at everything through its relation to the glory of God. That couldn't define my view of Calvinism better. I look at everything in relation to the glory of God.

I see God first and man far down the list. Brethren, if we live in sympathy with God, we delight to hear him say, I am God and there is none else. The spirit of that is what he meant by the spirit of Calvinism.

He said this Puritanism, Protestantism, Calvinism, poor names, which the world has given to our great and glorious faith. The doctrine of Paul, the apostle and Jesus, our savior. But he did make distinctions.

He did make distinctions between the full system, which he embraced. And some central evangelical doctrines shared by others who didn't embrace the whole system, which bound him together with them. For example, most precious to him, the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ, which he thought was at the center of all things.

He said, Far be it from me to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls or that there are none saved who do not hold our views. He said, I am not an outrageous Protestant. Generally, I rejoice to confess that I feel sure there are some of God's people even in the Romish church.

He chose a pedo Baptist as the first principle of his pastor's college. Blew my mind away when I read that. I wouldn't do that, I don't think.

And he did not make being a pedo Baptist a prerequisite for preaching in his pulpit, though he said, I would rather give up my pastorate than admit any man to the church who's not obedient to the Lord's command of baptism. So it was a prerequisite for membership in his local church. His first words in the Metropolitan Tabernacle that he built there with so many seats that he could preach to his first words were these.

I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house, as long as this platform shall stand, shall be the person of Jesus Christ. I am never ashamed to avow myself a Calvinist. I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist.

But if I am asked, what is my creed? I reply, it is Jesus Christ. He preached Calvinism because he believed it honored this Christ more fully than any other system of doctrine. And he preached it explicitly and he tried to build it into the minds of his people, not just slip it in sideways.

He said Calvin Calvinism has in it a conservative force which helps to hold men to vital truth. I think that is right and very, very significant. It has a conservative force, which, if you believe.

It holds you to many, many other things that are of importance. And therefore, he was unashamed in his preaching. And he said this people come to me for one thing.

I preach to them a Calvinistic creed and a Puritan morality. That is what they want. That is what they get.

If they want anything else, they must go elsewhere. Number six, he was a hard working preacher. I don't want to go to a soft and leisurely man when I'm going through adversity and have him say what you need is a vacation.

That may be true. But if that's the sum of his counsel to me. I will go to another counselor.

This man worked several lives, even though he died at 57. He did the work of 50 men, according to Lord Shaftesbury. He wrote, No one living knows the toil and care I have to bear.

I have to look after the orphanage. I have a church with 4000 members. Sometimes there are marriages and burials to be undertaken.

There is the weekly sermon to be revised. There's the sword and trial the magazine to be edited. And besides all that, a weekly average of 500 letters.

To be answered, this, however, is only half of my duty. For there are the innumerable churches established by my friends. With the affairs of which I am closely connected to say nothing of the cases of difficulty which are constantly being referred to me at his 50th birthday celebration.

They listed 66 institutions he had founded and was overseeing. He typically read six books of substantial theology every week and could remember what he read and tell you where it was found. So forget all

imitation right now.

Just relax. OK, I used to read history for imitation purposes, and now I read it for gratitude that God creates such an impossible people to admire. There are a few things we might be able to imitate, but forget he had a mind that was in a class by itself.

He often worked 18 hours a day. David Livingstone, the missionary, asked him one time, how do you manage to do two men's work in a single day? And Spurgeon replied, you have forgotten there are two of us. And I think he meant Colossians 1:29, where Paul said, I labor striving according to his power, which mightily works within me.

There are two of us. Spurgeon's attitude towards sacrificial labor would not go over today where wellness is a great priority. He said, if by excessive labor we die before reaching the average age of man worn out in the master's service, then glory be to God.

We shall have so much less of earth and so much more of heaven. It is our duty and our privilege to be exhausted or to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living sacrifices whose lot is to be consumed.

He will qualify that in a few minutes. But that was the temperament of his life. I think the word indefatigable was created for people like Spurgeon.

Finally, number seven, why Spurgeon? He was a maligned and suffering preacher that makes him a prime candidate for counseling me in my question. And I have six ways or so that he was maligned and and suffered. Number one, he knew the everyday homegrown variety of frustration and disappointment of lukewarm church members.

He said, you know what one cold hearted man can do if he gets at you on Sunday morning with a lump of ice and freezes you with the information that Mrs. Smith and all her family are offended and their pew is vacant. You did not want to know of that lady's protest just before entering the pulpit. And it does not help you or perhaps worse after the sermon.

What terrible blankets some professors are, their remarks after a sermon are enough to stagger you. You have been pleading as for life or death, and they have been calculating how many seconds the sermon occupied and grudging you the five odd minutes beyond the usual hour. I tell you, it is a cold thing to the soul to pour your heart out and have somebody say, why did he stand in front of the candles when he sang? Number two, he also knew the extraordinary calamities that befall us once in a lifetime.

October 19, 1856, the music hall, the Royal Surrey Gardens, 10,000 people gathered to hear him preach. He's 22 years old and someone in the service cries fire. And there is a huge panic and a stampede and seven people are crushed and killed and dozens are hurt.

And the press rips him to shreds and he must be carried away. And he says, perhaps never soul went so near the burning furnace of insanity and yet came away unharmed. And not all of his friends believed he came away unharmed.

One of his friends and biographers said, I cannot but think from what I saw that this comparatively early death might that his comparatively early death might be in some measure due to the furnace of mental suffering he endured on and after that fearful night. Number three, Spurgeon also knew the adversity of

family pain. He married Susanna Thompson on January 8 in the same year of the Surrey Gardens calamity.

They immediately became pregnant and the sons, twin sons were born the day after the calamity. She never had another child. There was, I can't track it down exactly and they probably didn't have the categories for understanding it.

But in 1869, the boys were born in 56, 1869, 13 years later, the father of modern day gynecology, James Simpson, did a very unusual surgery attempting something for Susanna and it did not work. There was a cervical problem. She became an invalid at age 33 and basically rarely left the house.

And for the last 20 years or so of his ministry, never heard him preach except on rare occasions. Therefore, on top of all of his other problems, he had a sickly wife who stayed at home. She was not a morose wife by any means.

She developed what she could, a ministry. And Doug Nichols brought this copy of lectures to his students and gave it to me, bless his heart, this morning. And it's got her signature in the front here.

What she did was she would send out books to pastors all over the world. And so here's one to James Beresford presented by Mrs. C.H. Spurgeon, October 1891. This is her ministry right out of her hand.

She held this book in her hand. Wonderful. I can't believe you let me have this book.

You're crazy. But crazy for Jesus. I've knew that before.

Number four. Spurgeon knew unbelievable physical suffering. He suffered from three diseases.

The gout, which is an inflammation of the joints, rheumatism, and Bright's disease, which is an inflammation of the kidneys. The first attack of gout came in 1869 when he was 35 years old. And it became progressively more frequent and worse so that the last 22 years of his ministry, he missed at least a third of his Sunday morning preaching engagements at the tabernacle because of needing to recuperate or protect himself from standing too long.

Lucian, this is a quote from Spurgeon to give you a glimpse into gout. Lucian says, I thought a cobra had bitten me and filled my veins with poison, but it was worse. It was gout.

That was written from experience. I know, he said. So for over half of his ministry, Spurgeon dealt with ever increasingly recurrent pain in his joints that cut him down from the pulpit again and again until those three diseases conspired to kill him at age 57.

Number five, on top of the physical suffering, Spurgeon had to endure a life of public ridicule and slander, sometimes of the most vicious kind. April 1855, he's been at the church there at New Park Street just a year, and the Essex Standard carries an article that says his style is that of the vulgar colloquial varied by rant. All the most solemn mysteries of our holy religion are by him rudely, roughly and impiously handled.

Common sense is outraged and decency disgusted. His rantings are interspersed with coarse anecdotes. That's the newspaper.

That's the Minneapolis Tribune. The Sheffield and Rotterdam Independent same year. He is a nine days wonder, a comment, a comment that has suddenly shot across the religious atmosphere.

He has gone up like a rocket and air long will come down like a stick. Hot. Some of it was easy to brush off.

Most of it wasn't. 1857, he wrote down on my knees. Have I often fallen with the hot sweat rising from my brow under some fresh slander poured upon me in an agony of grief? My heart has been well, not broken.

Maybe one of the worst was what fellow ministers in London said about him from the right and from the left. Joseph Parker on the left across town wrote Spurgeon was absolutely destitute of intellectual benevolence. Mr. Spurgeon's was a superlative egotism.

And on the on the right, James Wells, the hyper Calvinist, said, I have most solemnly have my doubts as to the divine reality of his conversion. All the embattlements of his life come to climax in the downgrade controversy, which was his effort to bring doctrinal integrity to the Baptist Union. In October of 1887, he withdrew from the Baptist Union.

And the following January would be four years before he died. They censured him public with a vote that was humiliating to him, and it looked as though almost everyone had turned against him. Eight years earlier, he had written.

Men cannot say anything worse of me than they have said. I have been belied from head to foot and misrepresented to the last degree. My looks are gone and none can damage me now.

But even though he sounded rough and ready most of the time, the pain was almost overwhelming during the downgrade. He wrote in 1891, eight months before he died to a friend. Goodbye.

You will never see me again. This fight is killing me. And finally, the adversity of depression.

I put it last because I think it was the most debilitating and difficult and everything else fed into it. And if it could be conquered, the other things would be durable. It's not easy for me.

I don't know if it is for you to imagine the omnicompetent, eloquent, brilliant, full of energy, mighty Spurgeon weeping like a baby for no reason that he could think of. You ever done that? He said, my spirits were sunken so low. This is age 24, 1858, the first serious bout with depression.

My spirits were sunken so low that I could weep by the hour like a child. And yet I knew not what I wept for. He wrote, causeless depression cannot be reasoned with, nor can David's harp charm it away by sweet discoursing.

You may as well fight with the mist as with the shapeless, undefinable, yet all be clouding hopelessness. The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope and holds our spirits in gloomy prison needs a heavenly hand to push it back. He regarded his despondency or his depression as his worst feature.

That's his phrase. Worst feature. He said, despondency is not a virtue.

I believe it is a vice. I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into it, but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God. And yet somehow this man preached again and again and again until June 7, 1891, for the last time in the Metropolitan Tabernacle before he went off to Mentone, France to try to recuperate where he died.

Now the question then is, my last question is, how did he persevere and preach through this adversity and all? How many are the strategies of grace? If I had my notes here, I just got page after page of notes on his strategies and nowhere near can I give you all that I have seen. You must find them and you must forgive the utter subjectivity of my selectivity. I'm coming from where I'm coming from.

I land on where I land on because I get help from them. And if they're not the ones that help you, then read on, brothers, because there is lots, lots more in Spurgeon than what I'm going to tell you. Number one, Spurgeon saw his depression and I put depression first year because I said, if you can tackle that one, if you can rise above the causeless darkness and hopelessness that is like an iron prison on the heart.

Then you can conquer the others. His depression, he saw as the design of God for the good of his ministry and for the glory of Christ. In other words, the rock bottom salvation of Charles Spurgeon for preaching month after month in and out of depression was the sovereignty of God.

That God was over it, in it, turning it, controlling it, assigning it, designing it. He never lost that faith. He could always say that no matter how black it was, he could at least confess that.

Listen, these words which are so out of step with the way contemporary man and even contemporary evangelicalism attempts to solve its problems of adversity. He said it would be a very sharp and trying experience to me to think I have an affliction which God never sent me. Turn the world upside down, Spurgeon.

Continuing that sentence, that the bitter cup was never filled by his hand, that my trials were never measured out by him, nor sent to me by his arrangement of their weight and quantity. What kept him going was the absolute confidence that every blackness over his soul was a cloud sent by the living God. I hope that you will hold fast to this vision of God and beware of new paradigms being offered you today who think not only does he not control the future, he doesn't even know what's coming.

And the review in Christianity today, two issues ago, the title over Doug Kelly's article was very perceptive, afraid of infinity. Mark you, that is what is epidemic today. Afraid of infinity.

Spurgeon was not afraid. This was his life. If God is not God over my depression, what shall I do? It is not the sovereignty of God for Spurgeon, the absolute control of all events, even the most horrible gout pain, which we'll see later on.

If that is not controlled and ruled and assigned and appointed by a heavenly physician who knows and loves, then it's not something to be debated. But there's just no survival. The doctrine of God's sovereignty is not first debate for Spurgeon.

It's a means of survival. Our afflictions are the health regimen of an infinitely wise physician. He told his students this.

I dare say the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health. With the exception of sickness, if some men that I know of could only be favored with a month of rheumatism, it would be God's grace to mellow them marvelously. And he meant that for himself because he said, I'm afraid that all the grace that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny.

But the good that I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. He had three designs. He saw three designs of God in his in his depression.

Number one, it functioned like the apostle Paul's thorn of the flesh to keep him humble and to show that the power belongs to the Lord. He said those who are honored of their Lord in public. And he was honored and he knew he was honored.

He knew he had the biggest church in the world. He knew he was eloquent. He knew his books were selling by the millions.

He knew he could make as much money as he wanted. He knew God had honored him. Those who are honored of the Lord in public have usually to endure a secret chastening or to carry a peculiar cross, lest by any means they exalt themselves and fall into the snare of the devil.

I think the same can be said of churches, probably. Second design of depression. It gave an unexpected power to his ministry.

Listen to this story. And you all know stories like this from your own life, I'll bet. One Sabbath morning, I preached from the text.

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And though I did not say so, yet I preached my own experience. I heard my own chains clank while I tried to preach to my fellow prisoners in the dark. But I could not tell why I was brought into such an awful horror of darkness for which I condemned myself.

On the following Monday evening, a man came to see me who bore all the marks of despair upon his countenance. His hair seemed to stand upright. His eyes were ready to start from their sockets.

He said to me after a little parleying, I never before in my life heard any man speak who seemed to know my heart. Mine is a terrible case. But on Sunday morning, you painted me to the life and preached as if you had been inside my soul.

By God's grace, I saved that man from suicide and led him into gospel light and liberty. But I know I could not have done it if I had not myself been confined in the dungeon in which he lay. I tell you the story, brethren, because you sometimes may not understand your own experience and the perfect people may condemn you for having it.

But what know they of God's servants? It was an unusual one. Has to do with this. Hit the art of Xerxes, the rise thing.

He said, I have learned that it is a prophetic signal for the future. Quote, this depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry. The cloud is black before it breaks and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy.

Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing. A John the Baptist heralding the nearer coming of my Lord's Richard Bennisson. So I would say on this first point that the sovereignty of God holding, controlling, designing the darkest of our days corporately as a people, individually, family.

Are Joseph like days in the dungeon just before you become the king of Egypt or are Xerxes days when the temple is shut down just before Darius not only revives the temple, but says, and I'll pay for it. And I don't know what that will look like in your life. But if you believe number one in Romans eight, 28 and number two in the sovereignty of God, that will carry you through.

Number two, we're talking about Spurgeon's tactics of enduring adversity. Number two, with the theological survival strategy comes the natural means of survival that God has appointed in his providence, in nature and in rest. You might wonder why I put this second, because I have more spiritual ones to come.

I just put it second because it just seems so essential as I've counseled some of you and as I've taken stock of myself and I try to explain for all of his talk about spending and being spent and being burned up for the kingdom and laying down your life and dying early. Nevertheless, he said, take a day off and keep the Sabbath in that way. He said our Sabbath is is a day of toil.

And if we do not rest on some other day, we shall break down. Eric Hayden, who who preached, I mean, who is the pastor of the tabernacle in the 50s, reminds us that Spurgeon, quote, kept when possible. I don't know what that word means when possible Wednesday as his day of rest.

And what makes it possible? More than that, Spurgeon said to his students, it is wisdom to take occasional furlough in the long run. We shall do more by sometimes doing less on, on, on, forever on without recreation may suit spirits emancipated from this heavy clay. But while we are in this tabernacle, we must every now and then cry halt and serve the Lord by holy inaction and consecrated leisure.

Let no tender conscience hear this now. Let no tender conscience doubt the lawfulness of going out of the harness for a while. I can testify that four weeks extra that the church gave me last summer were precious and crucial beyond measure so that when I came back, I could come back and I could go on.

And I thank them, bless them for it. The press of duty, the foul air, the sedentary position, the season of fog in Minnesota, we would say February, March. Does this thing ever end? He confesses sedentary habits have tendency to create despondency, especially in the months of fog.

And then he counsels a mouthful of sea air or a stiff walk in the wind's face would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best. Which is perhaps why I put it next best. Let me just give you a personal word.

I am finishing my 15th year at Bethlehem. And I turned 49 this month. I have maintained some close watch over this body for the last decade, watching it and what happens here.

And my soul and the intertwining of my soul and my body. What I have noticed is that things are changing, have changed. Circumstances have changed.

It's different to be the pastor of a church 15 years into it than the first five years. The atmosphere is totally different. You know, you're no big deal after 15 years when you're a big deal and you're new.

Everything clicks. Nothing goes wrong when you're no big deal and you're part of the furniture. Then it's more realistic because everybody knows your flaws and and and and they will tell you.

So there are different circumstances. But but I'm on nature right now. I'm on I'm on this body rest nature issue.

I cannot eat today like I could eat at 34. I cannot unless I want to put on weight, which I regard as being a very bad stewardship of my energy and my my heart and my life and my example. So I just you cannot keep going the way you were going.

That's one change. Here's another more important one. In the last eight, I can't quite put my finger on it.

You measure eight to seven years. I am far less emotionally resilient than I used to be. There were early days when I could work without any regard to sleep in my first five, six, seven years here.

And who cares about sleep? Good night. There are books to be written, you know, and there are people to be talked to and their sermons to be prepared and their problems to be solved. Ah, one of my biggest theological problems is why God created sleep.

Waste a third of your life unconscious like a dog. And that's close to heresy because God did design it to teach us. We're not God.

I could do it. I could go, go, go. And it took no emotional toll.

Check with Noel if that's true or not. I don't remember it having quite the same emotional toll. I got three hours sleep last night.

Just because that's the way I prepare for things like this. I know what I must do now because I feel great now. The adrenaline is just coursing and and it's just terrific.

But I've got a debt to pay to this body and I'll better pay. Or when somebody tells me that somebody standing in front of the candles on Sunday, I might punch him worse, worse than losing your your control. When you are tired is losing your future.

My future disappears in proportion to how much sleep disappears. It is totally irrational, as far as I can tell, that loss of sleep would mean the future shuts down. That's just irrational.

I deal with facts. Those are the facts, folks. That is a fact.

And at forty nine, I reckon with facts. And that means go to bed if you want to survive the ministry. That's all it means.

I can I could talk a big talk and say, stay up. I don't burn candles at both ends. And I would be out of here and I would choose to be out of here because I would say there's no hope for Bethlehem.

There's no hope for Piper. I don't want to preach anymore. I can't decide anything in the more indecisiveness is another result of tiredness and depression.

So I've got a debt to pay. And many of you have debts to pay. And I want you to pay them, brothers, pay your debts to your body so that you have a future.

It's irrational. I don't understand it, but it is there. Spurgeon said the condition of your body must be attended to.

A little more common sense would be a great gain to some who are ultra spiritual and attribute all their moods of feeling to some supernatural cause. When the real reason lies nearer to hand. OK, that's number two.

Nature rest. Pay attention to your aging, learn your body and pay your debts. Number three, Spurgeon consistently nourished his soul, a communion with Christ through prayer and meditation.

You know, it was a great mercy to me. How many of you were here last year? Heard John Owen last year, then I was a great mercy to me to take up. Oh, and we were right in the middle of some horrid stuff while I was ministering Owen last year.

And you remember, I talked about communion with God and I was just getting into it. That book all year long has been precious to me. Because communion with God is probably more important than than what I just talked about in the body and the rest.

None of these can be abandoned without devastation. But John Owen has been for me a place of refuge again and again, because I felt like when I was with him, I was with a rock. I was with a pillar.

I was with somebody whose head was in heaven, whose feet were on the pillars of the deep, who had seen the living God, who was opening him before me with a heart of affection for him. And I was just in the presence of the king's man. And when the atmosphere is not like that elsewhere, that's good.

That's helpful. Spurgeon said, never neglect your spiritual meals or you will lack stamina and your spirits will sink. Live on the substantial doctrines of grace and you will outlive and outwork those who delight in the pastry and syllabus of modern thought.

I think he made up that word syllabus of modern thought. I think one of the reasons Spurgeon is so rich in language, so full of doctrine, so strong in spirit, is that he read six books a week of Puritan theology. That is, he lived above himself, outside himself and outside his century.

He lived and coursed and fellowshiped and communed with God through what others saw of God. If you only read books published in this century, you, as C.S. Lewis taught us, starve yourself. He was immersed in great, great books.

They gave him matter. They gave him language. They gave him perspective.

They gave him God. We need everybody needs. I cannot read.

I read slower than almost everybody in this room. I have a disability. I've concluded that does not allow me to read faster than I can form words in my throat.

That's what I've concluded. I've took I've taken speed reading courses. I've tried everything to be able to read fast.

Spurgeon, he would just he would read like this. I figured it out. That's the way you'd have to read if you're going to do six a week, given the time he had to read to me.

And he remembered the page that the coat was on. Now, I'm content with being me. We'll talk about this in a minute.

Sort of ask Noel again about that one. I can't do it. I've tried.

I've given up. I'm not going to any more courses, but I know what I've got to do. I've got to set aside 15 minutes or half an hour and just plug away at one book of Owen for six months.

And it's great. I will never be a Spurgeon. I'll never have that liberty of language.

I'll never have that magnitude. He said one time, he said one time, picture this now. I typically have eight thoughts go through my mind at one time while I'm preaching, while I'm preaching.

Well, no wonder he could choose seven out of eight and have great language. I mean, he's just up there preaching. And he said one time he prays for people by name while he's preaching to them.

So he's got eight thoughts going through his mind. He's praying for Mrs. Smith by name. He is spilling out perfect theology in perfect order with magnificent illustration and all kinds of ordered language.

And there's probably seven or eight that he never uses or five or six that he never uses. Don't don't try to imitate this guy. He is unbelievable in his.

How did I get onto this? I'm on the I'm on communion. I'm on communion with God. Above all else, feed the flame with intimate fellowship with Christ.

No man was ever cold in heart who lived with Jesus on such terms as John and Mary did of old. I never met with a half hearted preacher who was much in communion with the Lord Jesus. I'm going to pass over some great quotes about his his prayer life, where one time I'll just summarize a long one.

One time he was in exquisite pain. He just was crying out, just screaming. And he said to the people, you must leave the room.

And he went to his father and the prayer he quoted was like a little child. If I had a son and he was screaming like I'm screaming, I would put my hand under his head and I would do everything I could to help him. I am your child.

You are my father. Help me. And the pain lifted.

He called them back in and he said. I think my father has heard me and that will not come back. He was a child at heart.

This man was amazingly childlike person in his relationship to the Lord communion with the Lord. Sustain it for the sake of your perseverance. Number four, he rekindled zeal to preach by fixing on eternal realities again and again.

Like the Apostle Paul, this outer nature is wasting away, but our inner nature is being renewed. This light momentary affliction is working for us a what? Eternal weight of glory, and therefore we set our eyes not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. That's the way Spurgeon kept going.

He said, it's all working for me, an eternal weight of glory. Oh, brethren, he said, we shall soon have to die. We look each other in the face today in health.

But there will come a day when others will look down upon our pallid countenances as we lie in the coffins. And it will matter little to us who gazes upon us then. But it will matter eternally how we have discharged our work during our lifetime.

And with regard to this whole issue of annihilationism and the eternality of hell. That was a red hot issue for him, just like it is for some today. And here's what he said.

Meditate with deep solemnity upon the fate of the lost sinner. Shun all views of future punishment, which would make it appear less terrible. And so take off the edge of your anxiety to save mortals from the quenchless flame.

There will be no fear of your being lethargic in preaching if you are continually familiar with the eternal realities. And not only did he look at eternal realities out there, he looked at the long view of history. I wrote the president of a college recently who I heard was embattled over doctrinal things.

And I just said, oh, brother, take the long view, take the long view. And I wish I'd been into Spurgeon. And I would have quoted him this quote.

Posterity must be considered. I do not look so much at what is to happen today for these things relate to eternity. For my part, I am willing to be eaten by dogs for the next 50 years.

But the more distant future shall vindicate me. I have dealt honestly before the living God. My brother do the same.

So to keep on preaching through adversity, you have to have the long view that reaches into eternity, that this light momentary affliction is working an eternal weight of glory and the long view in history that even on Earth, God will triumph. Number five, the key to perseverance in preaching is that he had settled who he was and was not paralyzed with external criticism or internal second guessing. Now, I'm almost done.

This is my it's not the last point is just a sentence or two. This is my next to last point. But this is the one where I'm addressing what I started with that carnival of mirrors, that self-doubt, that losing of the center that seems to start not to hold when the criticism is so relentless and criticism is always don't be like you are.

You are wrong to be like you are. Stop being like you are. If you hear that long enough and you try to listen to it long enough, there's some real dangerous things that can start to happen inside.

And the center not holding is one of them. And this part of Spurgeon has been a great, great help to me. Not being able to say with the Apostle Paul, by the grace of God, I am what I am would be a horrifying thing to me.

Spurgeon, in comparing ministerial identity with one another, pastor with pastor and person with person and what you might be if you changed and all of this. He found an analogy and he said in the night in which Jesus was betrayed, there was a chalice for drinking wine and there was a basin for washing, washing feet. And then he said, I protest that I have no choice whether to be the chalice or the basin.

Fain would I be whichever the Lord wills so long as he will, but use me. So you, my brother, you may be the cup and I will be the basin, but let the cup be the cup and let the basin be the basin and each one of us just what he is fitted to be. Be yourself here, brother, for if you are not yourself, you cannot be anybody else.

And so you see, you must be nobody. Do not be a mere copyist, a borrower, a spoiler of other men's notes. Say what God has said to you and say it in your own way.

And when it is so said, plead personally for the Lord's blessing upon it. And that's the end of the quote. And I would add.

Also, plead personally for the blood to be upon it. And I said that in my annual report that I wrote a couple of weeks ago, I said, I have played my fiddle, I've blown my trumpet, I've done my best. And I now put it under the blood because there is no perfect performance.

Period. You don't just need the blessing of God to prosper what you do, you need the forgiveness of God to cancel what you do every time you act. If you believe, as I do, the sentence be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.

It is not hard to second guess yourself if you have standards that I have. What's hard is when others join you in second guessing yourself and you begin to lose any fixed point of reference. Because I have always told young men as they struggle to find their gifts.

One crucial means of finding your gifts is to get into the body of Christ and serve and listen to what what people say you're fruitful at. The body is crucial for helping us maintain the center. Eleven years later, after that quote, 1886, he hit the same anvil again.

Friend, be true to your own destiny. One man would make a splendid preacher of downright hard hitting Saxon. Why must he ruin himself by cultivating an ornate style? Apollos has the gift of eloquence.

Why must he copy blunt Cephas? Every man in his own order. And then he illustrates his own struggle, his own struggle with his critics in his day. And the barrage of relentless criticism that he received as he struggled to figure out who am I and how shall I respond? And for a long time, he tried to respond appropriately to all of his critics.

And then he wrote this. This is a refreshing paragraph to me. I have found it utterly impossible to please.

Let me say or do what I will. One becomes somewhat indifferent when dealing with those whom every word offends. I noticed that when I have measured my words and weighed my sentences most carefully, I have been offended most.

I know exactly what he means. While some of my stronger utterances have passed unnoticed. Therefore, I am comparatively careless as to how my expressions may be received.

And the only and only anxious that they may be true and just in themselves. That's the word of a very long embattled man who did not lose the center. If we're going to survive and go on preaching in an atmosphere of controversy, there comes a point where you've done your best to weigh the claims of your critics.

To take them to heart, to confess what you've done wrong and then say. By the grace of God, I am what I am. And if you don't get to that point, you will leave.

And you will fall. Finally, just a word. He endured because he trusted in the final triumph of Christ.

I love this picture that I'll leave you with. The picture of the tide of truth going out in the downgrade controversy, the tide of truth going out. And I close with this quote.

You never met an old salt down by the sea who was in trouble because the tide had been going out for hours. No, he waits confidently for the turn of the tide and it comes in due time. Yonder rock has been uncovered during the last half hour.

And if the sea continues to ebb out for weeks, there'll be no water in the English Channel and the French will walk over from Scherberg. Nobody talks like that. For no such ebb will ever come, nor will we speak as though the gospel would be routed and eternal truth driven out of the land.

We never we serve an almighty master. If our Lord does but stamp his foot, he can win for himself all the nations of the earth against heathenism and Mohammed ism and agnosticism and modern thought and every other foul error. Who is he that can harm us if we follow Jesus? How can his cause be defeated at his will? Converts will flock to his truth as numerous as the sands of the sea.

Wherefore, be of good courage and go on singing and preaching. The winds of hell have blown the world. Its hate hath shown, yet it is not or thrown.

Hallelujah for the cross. It shall never suffer loss. The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge. Father, I praise you for Charles Haddon Spurgeon and your grace in his life. And I ask that whatever measure of truth there is in what I have shared would take root in the lives of these brothers and sisters so that they would, through every adversity, press on with their calling.

And would you make clear, oh God, make clear the call and cause the center to hold. In Jesus name. Amen.

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