

“When Godly People Get Depressed” // *Something Better #4* // 1 Kings 19:1–18

Video:

- Don't ever take for granted this...
- We have 170... (They are families with teenagers; families with small kids; all the way to recent college graduates like these!) WANT 5000!

As you may have heard this week on **The City**, we have some **important news about ServeRDU**.

- Each year, we typically have our **week of ServeRDU in the month of July**. Many of you may, in fact, be wondering why you **haven't heard** about it yet.
- That's because this year, we're **moving it to Oct 10-12th**.
- We're doing this for a few reasons. 1- we value you **servng together with your small group** and we know that many of our small groups don't meet over the summer. 2- We want our **college students** to be able to participate with us, and many of them are gone for the summer. This change puts this week at a much more strategic time for our whole church, which is going to be great.

If you're bummed that we don't have anything going on this summer, I've got good news for you. We're **ALSO going to do a SPECIAL** day of ServeRDU projects on Saturday, **July 13!** These projects will **focus exclusively on the local schools** we partner with, allowing us to tackle some big projects that we want to do for these schools that can't be pulled off in October while classes are in session.

- **GATEWAY**

- All the information on this **Saturday of projects** is at serverdu.com, and **registration is open** today, so make sure you check it out.

Introduction

I'm **not a huge fan of movies** with weird endings that don't resolve. I was **watching one the other day** and it really seemed like the director just turned the camera off and said, “OK, I'm tired. That's a wrap.”

- (I know they are **supposed to be more lifelike** but I don't go into the movies for lifelike. I go to the movies to **take a break from life**.)

I love movies with a “happy, ever after” ending. The **battle is won**; the **couple gets** together; they ride off into the sunset to **revel in their victories** for the rest of their lives.

That's **really what should happen** here in this story: Elijah, as you recall, has **just won a great victory** over ba'al before all of Israel.

- Essentially, Elijah had rented out the **Madison Square Gardens** of his day and challenged ba'al to a public duel.
- His victory was **epic...**
 - He was **outnumbered**: 850 to 1. There was a lot of righteous **smack-talking** and **holy sarcasm**;
 - God **answered decisively** with fire from heaven (didn't squeak out an **undeserved victory** in the last 2 minutes of game 7); at the end the whole **crowd is on their faces** chanting, ‘Eli-Jah’ (the Lord is God!)
- **What a moment!** Confetti falling from the ceiling. That's when you **put your hands up** and say, “I'm out, ladies and gentlemen!” *Leave on a high*—ride off into the sunset.
- We'd **expect Elijah to retire** and revel in this victory for the rest of his life.

But **instead, his “high” on Mt. Carmel** is followed by a spiritual low—almost, as you'll see, a kind of depression.

Before we get into this, could we acknowledge: *Isn't your life like that, sometimes?* Right after some victory, some spiritual high, you go back into some spiritual low? Fall back into some **old temptation**? Or something goes wrong?

- ***It certainly has been that way for me.*** Some of my lowest points in struggling with sin came after some great spiritual victory.
- ***It was that way for Jesus, too...*** Right after having God the Father declare to him from heaven, "This is my beloved son," (that's a baptism moment) he is driven into wilderness for 40 days w/o food and water to be tempted by Satan! I sometimes tell people after their baptism: it's coming!
- ***For many of you,*** you obeyed God, and experienced some success, but then life took a turn you weren't expecting—the **marriage** fell apart; the **kids didn't follow** Jesus; the **business tanked**—and you find yourself wondering,
 - *"God, I really thought I could see where this was going.*
 - *God, did I do something wrong?"*
 - *Are you even there?"*

This is the experience this passage deals with. It's dealing with **godly people getting depressed.**

- I realize that is a **loaded word**—because there are so many different kinds, ranging from **people who are just really discouraged** to those with **clinical, chemical issues** going on.
- My purpose this weekend is **not to diagnose** the different kinds of depression or **provide one solution** to all of them—but I think in this passage you'll see **a lot of things that speak to different dimensions of depression.**

1 Kings 19:1–18

Context:

- Here's where we left Elijah. **After this stunning victory** on Mt. Carmel, he, empowered by the Holy Spirit, **outruns Ahab's chariot** to **Jezreel**, which is the Northern Kingdom of Israel's capital.

- You can imagine that **Elijah, at this point, is expecting a revolution**—
 - the people are supposed to **rise up in unified commitment** to God;
 - **Ahab**, the spineless wimp-king and his wicked-witch-of-the-west-wife Jezebel, **will either repent or be deposed.**
 - He's supposed to come riding into Jezreel to a **hero's welcome**; holding hands singing **Kum-ba-yah** and "I love you Lord"; they give him Elijah a **nice house** next to the palace where he can give **godly guidance** to the next king,
 - Get a **syndicated TV show**:
 - **Prodigy Prophet**
 - **Israelite Idol**
 - **Elijah's Got Talent**
 - **Drought Dynasty**
 - and any time they see him in the street they'll chant "Eli-jah."

1 Kings 19:2, "Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not (kill you) by this time tomorrow."

- **No revolution. No deposition.** Elijah doesn't even get a **plaque.**
- **Jezebel hasn't repented nor has she been deposed**—far from that; she's still on the throne **barking out** orders, ordering his death. He's got to go **back into hiding.**

[3] Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

[4] And he went (by himself) a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

- Safe to say. Elijah is depressed. He **wants to die.** What he's **hoped would** happen, **expected to happen**, has not happened.

- He's **angry with God**. He **thought he knew God**, and what he could expect, but now he's just not so sure anymore.

Only a **few months after Charles Spurgeon** became pastor in London (of New Park Street Chapel), the church exploded. Crowds numbering **10,000** or more came to hear him (in a day when churches were not ever close to that big). The church was **forced to change venues** to accommodate the growing numbers. (They considered going multi-site, which Spurgeon was up for, but the other elders were so backwards—still using flip phones! and didn't think video would work so they decided against it.)

Well, Spurgeon had a lot of enemies, which always happens—saying he was a **fundamentalist**, or a **cult-leader**, or that churches **shouldn't be that big** and this was **all about his ego**. They launched all sorts of **nasty attacks** at him. One day, while he was speaking to huge crowd, someone came into the crowd, yelled "Fire," and created a stampede. Seven people were trampled to death.

The disaster **devastated** him, and he **spiraled into a depression** for years that some say he never quite got over.¹

Have you ever felt like this? You do everything right. God seems to come through. And then, Bam! Setback. **"Where did that come from?"**

[5] And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, "Arise and eat." [6] And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. [7] And the angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you." [8] And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God." (high protein pancakes)

¹ <http://www.tlogical.net/biospurgeon.htm>

[9] ...And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" [10] He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."

What do you see there? God does 3 things (Tim Keller pointed this out):

1. God sends an angel of rest.

- Angels in the Bible, in case you don't know, are **always on assignment**. They're never just out roaming around and then come back to God, saying, "Wow, you ain't never believe this." This one is **sent to Elijah** to take care of him.
- **What does the angel say to Elijah?** "Hey, why don't you **show some faith!**" Or, "Elijah: **get it together.**" "Elijah, here's a **John Piper** book—read and think about this!"
- He **touches** him; makes some nice, hot **food** for him, and then take a **nap**, and then sends him to a cabin in the mountains.

2. God listens. He said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Whenever God asks a question, it's not to seek information, of course. He's giving Elijah a chance to express his own feelings.

- And he listens.
- **Did you see in vs. 2 that Elijah had pushed away his best friend?** This is what **NOT to do** in a time of depression. I know **you feel like it**, but like Christian counselor **David Powlison** says, "Things in a secret garden always grow mutant."

3. God gives his word. He is going to address some lapses of faith with Elijah, and try to broaden his perspective a little (we'll get to what that "word" is in just a minute).

But first, let me point out that you've here got 3 different approaches in dealing with depression.

He ministers to him physical (touch, food, nap), **spiritually** (deal with wrong view of God), **and psychologically** (listens to him).

- Some people view humanity as if we were exclusively or primarily **physical**. So, any time you are depressed, you should simply take some time off; get rid of anything causing you stress; take a pill.
- Others view humanity as if we were exclusively **spiritual**. These are the people who say, “Oh, are you depressed? Show some faith. Quit sinning. Get over it.” They think the idea of taking a pill or identifying physical causes to depression is essentially to betray the faith.
- The third group views depression as primarily **psychological**. Just talk it out.

But God uses all 3:

- God made you as a **psychosomatic being**. You’re not just a soul (or a soul floating around in there) you’re a **soul united to, clothed with a body**—and you can’t neatly separate the two. So he ministers to Elijah **physically**.
 - Sometimes (never heard da preacher say this) you **don’t need prayer** or a sermon; you need a **nap**. Or a **vacation**. Or to be **touched**. A weekend away with your spouse. You need to read a good book.
 - Not just “How not to be depressed.” Historical fiction. Amish love stories.
 - Churchill’s 3 ways: movies; novels; painting. At the height of WW2: movie or novel.
 - In college I was talking to one of my professors who was a kind of mentor to me, and I was struggling with frustration, and burnout, and he said, “*J.D., the most godly thing you can do sometimes is take a nap. In your case, that will do as much to help you with the fruits of the Spirit as memorizing another verse.*”
 - This might be **your action step** from this sermon. **Take a nap**. (I’d prefer you wait till afterward... OR I can see some of you have already started to apply)

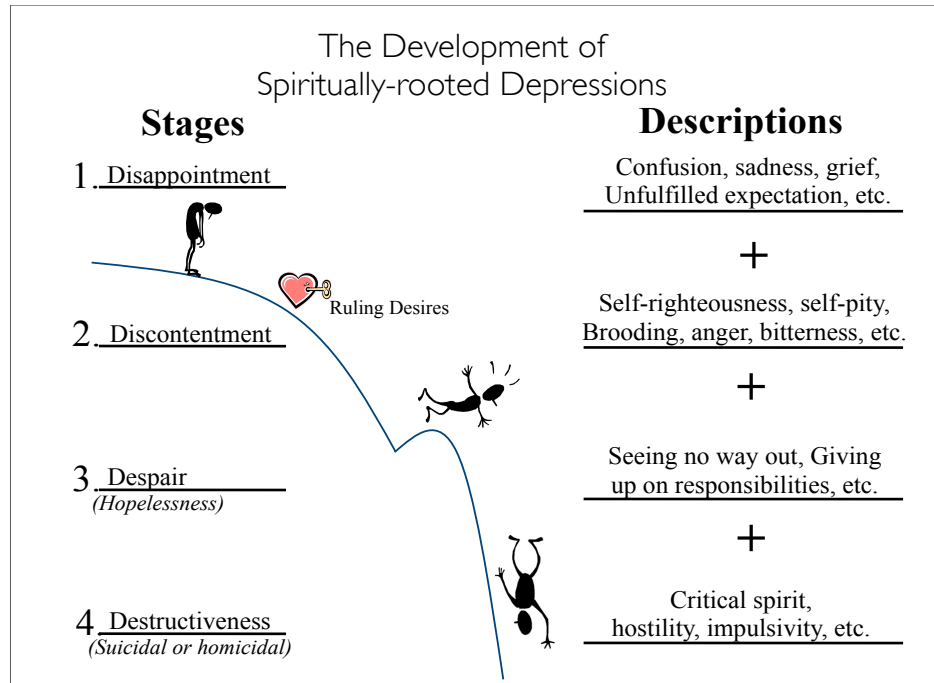
- He ministers to Elijah **psychologically** by allowing Elijah to talk out his feelings. He is a friend to him.
 - The Psalms are filled with people **venting to God**. Being godly does not mean pretending your emotions aren’t there. Sure, some of them need to be corrected. Not every emotion is legitimate, but **you can’t correct** the source of the emotion if you don’t get it out there.
 - Our **emotions are not usually good or bad**; our emotions are simply indicators of what is going on inside of us.
 - So **expressing the emotion often helps you figure out** what is going on down in your heart so you can correct it, if need be.
 - Get a journal and **write out your feelings**, like David did. The Psalms are **David’s prayer journal**. Some of them are quite **salty**. Are you allowed to say that to God?
 - And get people **around you**. Some of you, like Elijah, have left your friend behind. Terrible mistake. **I know you want to be alone** to wallow in your pain, but **things that grow in a secret garden always grow mutant!**
- He ministers to Elijah **spiritually** by giving him his word.

I can’t diagnose which one yours is: **usually (not always)** it’s a combination of these things:

Now: What I’m going to say from here on out applies **mostly to spiritually-based depressions** and discouragement, but **even if you don’t think your depression** is spiritual, you should listen, because there are **probably more spiritual dimensions** tied up in your emotion than you realize.

CHART: "The Development of Spiritually-Rooted Depressions"²
 (from the *Biblical Counseling Coalition*)

(PUT CHART UP ON PPT)



Sunday, May 5, 13

God's Word to the Discouraged:

[11] And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. [12] And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And

after the fire the sound of a low whisper. [13] And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

- Alright, so what is this all about?
- Very important detail. He's at Mount Horeb. You know that **Mount Horeb's other name** is? Mt. Sinai. Do you remember Mt. Sinai? That's where **God gave Moses the 10 commandments** and made a covenant with Israel, and when he did, **do you remember the scene?** God descended upon Mt Sinai in **thunder and earthquakes**. God had appeared to Elijah knew those stories! At that point, **God was in the fire**; he was in the thunder; he was in the earthquake, all on this very mountain. In fact, those are all **frequent representations** of God's presence.³ (Elijah **knew those stories.**)

But now, the **Lord is not in** those things. He is in a **small, low whisper** that Elijah heard after those things.

What is the meaning? God's voice in our lives doesn't always come in the ways we expect him to, but that doesn't mean he's not speaking. Just because God is not working like you expected him to doesn't mean he is less at work.

- Vv. **15-18**, God reveals to Elijah his plan. He's working in a **pagan king** Elijah's never heard of to bring judgment on Ahab and Jezebel. And he's got **7000 secret agents** in Israel Elijah knows nothing of.
- Elijah, you see, had put God in a box like we often do. He expected that God could only work one way.
- **Elijah thinks that God has let him down, but God has not let Elijah down. Elijah's limited view of God and how God works has let Elijah down.**

³ These are all frequent images of God's presence. *Wind*: Acts 2; Job. *Fire*: Acts 2. Moses and the burning bush. *Earthquake*: Exodus 19; Calvary.

So, write down #1:

1. You must DEFER to the wisdom of God

- *You ever gotten to a stage in your life when you looked back and you see that a time when it **looked like God was absent, but he was actually** at work doing something good? If already, from your limited perspective, you can look back and see a purpose for some of the pain and struggle in your life, don't you think that given enough time and perspective you'll be able to look back and see a purpose for ALL of it?*

We'll come back to that.

But here's a second thing being taught:

2. You must EMBRACE the love and grace of God

God calls Elijah out of the cave in vs. 11, but Elijah doesn't actually get out until vs. 13. Why? What happened in vs. 12?
(Look at your Bible)

A tornado and an earthquake came that **broke the mountain into pieces**... if these things tore a mountain into pieces, wouldn't they have torn Elijah into pieces?

So **God keeps Elijah** in the mountain so that the mountain absorbs the intensity of the tornado, fire and earthquake, and when Elijah comes out all that he experiences of God is a still, small, gentle voice.

- The **tornado, the earthquake and the fire are all pictures of God's judgment**. Elijah was **hidden in a cleft of the rock**, or a cave, so that the mountain absorbed those things and they didn't touch Elijah. The mountain absorbed the judgment so that Elijah got grace.
- It was a **low whisper: (INTIMATE)** When somebody whispers it is **intimate**. They are close.

God is giving to Elijah a picture of something we see much more clearly:

Elijah shows up again in the GOSPELS in person. Did you know that? Who's he with? **MOSES**. GET THIS. **Moses had experienced** this exact same thing that Elijah did—God had **hidden him, sheltered him in the cleft of the rock** while his glory passed by—who knows maybe at this very spot?

- **RIGHT BEFORE HE DIES**, the disciples see Jesus on top of a mountain, in all his glory, standing between Moses and Elijah and talking with them.⁴ Yet, this time, the glory **did not KILL THEM**.
- Jesus was the Rock, that mountain, into which these prophets were hidden from God's judgment. On the Mount of Transfiguration, they saw in person the Rock in which had hidden them.

What Elijah and Moses got to see in a **shadow**, we see in **substance**. What they experienced in **mystery**, we get to see with **clarity**.

- Jesus, on the cross, **got the tornado, the earthquake, and the fire of God's wrath** (he 'inherited the wind', a Hebrew metaphor for judgment; ⁵there literally was an earthquake; **so that we could hear** the gentle, still, small, **gracious voice** of the Holy Spirit speaking God's love and blessing and promise over us; then **blowing through us in power** like a mighty wind (Acts 2:2); putting into us the **fire of the resurrection** (Acts 2:3), and **shaking us with holy boldness** when we are filled with the Spirit (Acts 4:31).
- Jesus would take the tornado, earthquake and fire God's judgment so I could receive only the low whisper of intimacy: **"ABBA, FATHER" (TENDERNESS)**

⁴ Matthew 17:1-7

⁵ Proverbs 11:29; Isaiah 57:13

And that means whenever God doesn't do what I think he really should do, I don't have to doubt his goodness or his control.

Think about it:

- **God's goodness toward** me was forever demonstrated at the cross; he **prayed for my forgiveness** even when I was pounding nails into his hands; **DO I NEED TO DOUBT his goodness** toward me now? THE GREATEST INSULT... If he loved me when I was his enemy, will he not now also continue to give me good things?
- When I'm discouraged or depressed, I may **feel alone**, but I am not.
 - He went through **Gethsemane**. **He prayed** "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" **so that in my dark days I'd never have to question if God had forsaken me.**
- I may **feel like all hope** is lost, or it's **all out of control**. It's not. **THINK ABOUT IT:** There has **never been a time** when it looked like more like God was out of control than when his **Son was slain** by wicked men. **Pilate, like Ahab**, won't confront all the Jezebels of his day trying to kill Jesus. **Yet there was never** a time when he was actually more in control, working our salvation for our good and his glory.
- **If a good, all-powerful, all-wise God was fully in charge at the cross, I can be sure he is in charge in my life even when he's not doing those things that I expected him to do.**

3. You must CONFRONT the lie

Twice in this passage God asks Elijah why he's depressed. Twice Elijah responds with a **mixture of truth and error**.

- "I have been zealous for you." *True.*
- "The Israelites have rejected you." *True.*
- "They have killed your prophets." *True.*
- "I'm the only one left." **False.**

God's got **7000 faithful people in Israel** Elijah doesn't know about, and he's about to **raise up another prophet** with twice the

power Elijah had, a man named Elisha, whom we'll study later this summer, and ultimately God is going to **bring into all this mess Jesus** who will be the fulfillment of everything Elijah has presented in a weak shadow.

- "He alone is left." (?) **Do you realize how wrong that is? Elisha** is coming. AND THEN **JESUS!**

But this is **how despair/depression** often works. The **momentum of a few true things** leads you to a **dangerously false** conclusion.

- "It's all lost." *False.*
- "God, it's useless. My **family** will never change. My **friends will never listen**. My **workplace** will never change." *False.*
- "It's never going to **get any better**." *False.*
- "There's **no one who cares** about me." *False.*
- I'll never be happy. *False*"

Your depressed self is whispering these conclusions to you, and you must stop listening to them.

- Jared Wilson says: You must **defy them**. "You must **defy your depressed self**."⁶
- *Stop listening; start talking.* Start **preaching gospel** over your life. And **don't mumble**.
- Take **hold of yourself** and preach! And be **long-winded** if you have to. (I shouldn't be the only long-winded preacher!)
 - "I am not alone. Gethsemane and the cross prove that."
 - "My future is not dim. The resurrection declares that."
 - "I will be happy again."
 - "I will have joy again."
- **Tell your depression and sadness that its days are numbered, and even if it should – God forbid – last till your dying breath**, it will be vanquished for all eternity⁷ while you (your redeemed, glorified soul), will escape to **everlasting joy in the Father's presence**, in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures forevermore.

⁶ Jared Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness*, 157.

⁷ Jared Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness*.

**SO IF YOU NEVER GET OVER IT, IT'S STILL NOT PERMANENT.
(I.E. IN THIS LIFE)**

God says to Elijah:

- I'm working on a **plan beyond anything** you ever considered. It even involves **God's Son himself** coming to earth.
- Elijah, you feel like your **efforts have failed** and are wasted. They were not..

Church: ***When you get to heaven, you will see that there was no wasted act of faithfulness; no unanswered prayer.***

- **Nothing done in God's name** is ever wasted.
- In every "**cross**" of pain and suffering and deprivation you go through in faith, God works the **miracle of the resurrection**.
- *"So, therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:58)*

4. You must GET BACK to your assignment

- **vs. 15:** This **story ends** with God telling Elijah to get back to the business of **being a prophet; giving the word** of God, **anointing** rulers, **training up** more men of God.
- For you, whatever you should be doing, **no matter how despondent** you feel doing it, you need to **get back** to doing it!
- Being a **dad**. A **mom**. A **wife** or a **faithful husband**. (**UNDER-APPRECIATED?**)
- A **witness** to your friends.
- To keep pressing in on that **unreached people group** (to our **church planters** listening) until God sends the **flood of a revival** into your nation.
- A **good, God-honoring, gospel-demonstrating boss** or employee, and

...be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

- He's working. He's always working.

Conclusion (*INSTRUMENTALISTS here*)

People tend to think that in the past, in **Bible times, God's work was always clear and easy to trace**. But that's **not true**. Elijah **had questions** just like you. He was **despondent; depressed**.

But God was always working. *And he's working in your situation*. His **still, small, powerful, earth-shattering, mountain-moving** voice of tenderness and grace is **always speaking**.

I told you that **Charles Spurgeon** struggled with depression, for most of his life. Doctors later discovered it was brought on by **gout** and some medical complications.

- Spurgeon decided to **see depression not** as the absence of God's word, but **itself a word from God**. He opted to **use it**, to trust that God meant something by it or through it.
- He assumed that **God, through his depression, was giving a picture** of something. Something that went **better and deeper than the joys of a happy, healthy, life**, and those were the joys of being with Jesus in eternity.

Once to his congregation he said:

"I find myself frequently depressed - perhaps more so than any other person here.

I find no better cure for that depression than to trust in the Lord with all my heart, and seek to realize afresh the power of the peace-speaking blood of Jesus, and his infinite love in dying upon the cross to put away all my transgressions."

He preached to himself! You need to preach to yourself.

- **WHO IS THE PRIMARY PREACHER IN YOUR LIFE?** It should not be me. The Holy Spirit and you should be.

- Say to your soul like David in **Psalm 103**: Bless the Lord, *o my soul...* who is he talking to? His soul! Do you talk to your soul?

Are you in a deep well of despondency and despair?

- *“There is no pit so deep that Christ is not deeper still.”*⁸

The only thing that can overcome a deep well of despondency is an even deeper arm of God’s grace.

- **THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION SHOW YOU THAT THE LORD’S ARM IS NOT SHORTENED THAT IT CANNOT SAVE...**

⁸ Corrie Ten Boom’s sister, Betsie. Jared Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness*, 153–59. The Spurgeon story is taken in part from there, too.