

## BIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD

There was no one in the twentieth century more suited to preach, counsel and write on this subject of spiritual depression than Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. This subject has always been addressed by pastors, but particularly so from the time of the Reformation. During this time the wrappings of human traditions were being removed from the church, leaving a more Biblical Christianity. The Puritan period especially excelled as an age when sermons were life and power, and many kinds of men and women were drawn to faith in the Lord Christ. As all converts do, they brought their past with them into the kingdom of God and were troubled with doubts and periods of darkness. Their pastors became physicians of the soul and learned to deal with various conditions of spiritual desertion and depression and their books on this subject are still read today. Dr Lloyd-Jones was a living representative of that tradition. He was exceptionally gifted in dealing with this subject, and *Spiritual Depression* has done much pastoral good in the last fifty years. We ministers give it to particular people whom we believe would profit from it. Perhaps we point out to them one of the sermons in the book which we feel could help them. I am especially fond of the message entitled "That One Sin" and a striking incident recounted there by the Doctor from the days of his ministry in Wales. It has often done homiletical duty for me. Why was Dr. Lloyd-Jones so well-equipped to write on a subject like this?

I. **He was such a well-rounded, intelligent, and tender personality.** Although a mighty intellect with a formidable presence he was accessible and not at all intimidating. There was not a trace of snobbery in him whatsoever; he loathed that sin. He had a particularly blessed marriage. Mrs. Bethan Lloyd-Jones, herself a qualified doctor, came from one of the foremost Calvinistic Methodist families in Wales rooted in the ethos of the local countryside of south Cardiganshire, an evangelical home where warm affec-

tion, godly living, the importance of education and reverence for God were prized and natural graces. Her father was an ophthalmic surgeon and her grandfather was one of the leading preachers in Wales who ministered in one congregation in Newcastle Emlyn for half a century, preaching there throughout both the 1859 and 1904 revivals. Mrs. Lloyd-Jones was also a descendant of the Baptist preacher Christmas Evans. Out of the harmony and affection of that home, together with the two daughters they were given, came the pastoral ministry and counseling that strengthened multitudes. I remember telling the Doctor on one occasion that my parents were moving from South Wales to live just around the corner from us in Aberystwyth, and his face lit up with delight at that news. His family was vitally important to him.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones once spoke to a group of doctors about the essentials needed to counsel men and women. He said this:

[The counsellor] is not doing something outside himself. He is giving something of himself and his experience, and there is an exchange taking place between the patient and himself. Hence the most important thing of all in counselling is the character and personality of the counsellor. What is the greatest essential in a counsellor? I would say that it is a quiet mind, and that he is at rest in himself. You will remember how our Lord put this on one occasion—‘Can the blind lead the blind? If the blind lead the blind they will both fall in the ditch.’ In other words, if a man is in trouble within himself, and is restless, he is really in need of counselling himself. How can he give useful counsel to another? The first requisite, therefore, in a counsellor is that he himself is possessed of a quiet mind, a mind that is restful. It is at that point, of course, that the importance of the Christian faith comes in. I am prepared to defend the proposition that no man ultimately can have a quiet mind, a heart at rest, and at leisure from itself unless he is a Christian. He needs to know a true peace within—the peace of God which is able to keep both mind and heart. The patient comes in to see him in an agitated troubled condition, and can detect if there are similar manifestations in the counsellor (D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Doctor Himself*, Christian Medical Fellowship Publications, 1982, p. 43).

2. **He was also utterly committed to the faith of the Scriptures.** Confessionally he stood in the tradition of the 1823 Confession of the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales. In 1952 he began a series of sermons on Friday nights which was to last for three years on the Great Doctrines of the Bible. They have been published in an 800 page book and they show his grasp of the subtlety of biblical theology, his total trust in the teaching of the Bible and his desire that all his thinking should be controlled by it. I wish many more knew this book; it is truth that lives and involves you, moving you to doxology through its lucidity and the preacher's love for his God. Could he have counseled the depressed if he did not know the Bible's analysis of the human condition, man's depravity and inability, human responsibility and also God's sovereignty, the battle in the regenerate man of the flesh and the spirit, the certainty of the work begun by Christ also completed by him, irresistible grace and man's chief end being to glorify this God?

It is not enough to have an unusual testimony; in itself that will not enable a man to deliver others from spiritual depression. It can even be a hindrance, as Dr. Lloyd-Jones told that group of doctors:

For example, when Christians have come suffering from various forms of spiritual depression they have been treated by other Christians to a thumping slap on the back and the suggestion—'Pull yourself together, cheer up!' But that may do more harm than good, because it is the one thing which the poor man cannot do at the time. I have known problems exaggerated and aggravated by this sheer lack of knowledge of skilled 'doctoring'. It is not enough to have had the experience yourself. You need to reason with people and to take them on step by step, until you have brought them out of their difficulty. But you can only do that if your answers, and your whole approach, are governed by an understanding of the Christian life as a whole. It is a whole life (*ibid*, p. 44).

Dr. Lloyd-Jones read theology. He discovered the value of Jonathan Edwards at a time when no one in Britain and few in the USA were reading him. He devoured the volumes of Benjamin

B. Warfield's Works, and he followed both those men into the schools of thought of which they were leading lights, Puritanism with Edwards and the Princeton school of Presbyterianism with Warfield. He did not neglect his own roots. While other thinkers, weary of the rationalism of 20th century religion, opted for Rome Dr Lloyd-Jones read the two volumes of the Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales (Banner of Truth) to discover experiential religion. He also kept abreast of contemporary religious thought, for example of Barthian teaching. There is a happy pen portrait of him in his dark suit sitting on a beach with his family reading Brunner's Divine Imperative, but though acquainted with that theology it had no attraction to him. Where has a congregation been revived and multitudes converted through that neo-orthodoxy? Has it raised up any evangelists? Historic Christianity found another of its great champions in the pastor of Westminster Chapel.

3. **He was a man who maintained the disciplines of private devotion.** He would preach in our town alternate years and would stay for a couple of days with a local doctor who as a medical student had sat at his feet in London. I was invited to our General Practitioner's home for coffee with the Doctor on one of these occasions. I came across him completing reading from his pocket Bible with its tiny print, his portion for that day. He had, from the early days of his ministry adopted Robert Murray M'Cheyne's daily Bible passages as his own, portions which take the reader through the Scriptures each year, and he commended such a scheme to his congregation. His special exhortation about praying is significant. This is what he said:

This I regard as the most important of all—always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text. I would make an absolute law of this—always obey such an impulse. Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. This often leads to some of the most remarkable experiences in the life of the minister. So never resist, never postpone it, never push it aside because you are busy. Give yourself to it, yield to it; and you will find not only that you have not been wasting time with

respect to the matter with which you are dealing, but that actually it has helped you greatly in that respect. You will experience an ease and a facility in understanding what you were reading, in thinking, in ordering matter for a sermon, in writing, in everything, which is quite astonishing. Such a call to prayer must never be regarded as a distraction; always respond to it immediately, and thank God if it happens to you frequently.

He told me smilingly of his little room high up in Barts Hospital while he was still working for Sir Thomas Horder before he became a preacher, saying "I had some good times there." His counseling and pastoring as much as his preaching came from a man who knew communion with God, and the mark of deliverance from spiritual depression would result in a return to a former blessed fellowship.

4. **He was a man to whom people went for spiritual help.** At the end of his services he retired to his room behind the pulpit, was taken a cup of tea and soon a line of people would wait to have a private conversation with him. Some were there merely to bring greetings from their pastors in Australia or the USA, but others brought their concerns about a call to the ministry or their lack of assurance about a personal knowledge of God. He would give himself totally to these people, listening, questioning, advising and praying with them. A friend was a member of Westminster Chapel and what she missed most of all after his retirement from the pastorate there was a minister to consult as once she had. "I could say anything to him," she said to me. For example, in 1954 an American evangelist held a long campaign in London which was not supported by Lloyd-Jones but was enthusiastically taken up by churches all over England, in fact claims were made that this was a revival. My friend had become a counselor at this crusade and was excited with the whole event and its methods of evangelism, so much so that she went to see her beloved minister and sat down with him in his room at Westminster Chapel and said to him, "We don't preach the gospel in this church." She repeated the story to me slightly blushing and shaking her head in amazement

at herself that she had actually said those words to the Doctor. He asked her had she been to the crusade, and then he explained to her why he did not give an altar call and ask for an immediate public response by walking to the front. He explained to her his theology of evangelism from the Scriptures, and the methodology that he had erected on these convictions. He saw his own calling most of all as an evangelist to London. He addressed her question and criticisms to her entire satisfaction and she came to appreciate his counsels all the more as time passed. He asked her on that night if she was a counsellor at the crusade and she told him that she was. He prayed for her that God would help her.

“Later on I went to see him again,” she told me, at a time of darkness in her life, when she had said to him, “We don’t love one another in this church.” “Don’t say that,” he said to her tenderly. “It’s the devil makes you say that.” Again she shook her head ruefully at her uncharacteristic boldness and folly that had made her speak out like that. Yet the point she was making to me was her trust in him, that she could go to him whenever she desired and speak her mind and share her fears and worries and he would not disdain her at all, or pretend to be shocked, or show annoyance. How she missed that when his ministry ended. I quote those examples to underline the tenderness of Dr. Lloyd-Jones. Speaking to the group of doctors about counseling people he told this:

What is needed is great patience and sympathy, and the power to put oneself in those people’s situation. The adviser must not hold to his own rigid position otherwise the man will simply become a tangent to a closed circle. The adviser may end by feeling that he has taken the ‘Christian stand’ and said all that was right. He may feel happy; but he may, by this very fact, have left the person in extreme misery. This is obviously bad counseling. The point is that we must be very careful not to foist our opinions on others. The counsellor is not a dictator, he is simply there to give help. While he may give his views and, with care, put them quite strongly if asked, yet all that is put to the patient must be in a spirit of real sympathy, love and understanding. As counsellors we must never be in the position of dictating to another person’s conscience. We have no right to imagine our-

selves as ‘the conscience’ of another! We are there to share with those who consult us experience, knowledge, wisdom and suggestions concerning the way of cure. There are, unfortunately, Christians who feel it their duty to impose their own legalistic views on others. Our business, however, is to persuade, never to force. We must always be careful to avoid condemnation—especially in the case of a sick or agitated person. If the plain truth of the situation comes home to the patient that is one thing; but it is not our place to condemn (*ibid.* p.48).

5. **He believed in the *sufficiency* of Scripture.** This meant he had confidence that the weekly preaching of the Bible would encourage Christians to understand and appropriate the person and work of Christ, that they would come thus under the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and would be so energized by him as to give obedience to the ethical demands of the Word of God. Preaching the Word in the power of the Spirit, he believed, would itself constantly lift up the downcast—transforming, elevating, ennobling and enriching their lives beyond measure. He told me that the question he was asked virtually more than any other was whether he could recommend a Christian psychiatrist to the questioner. No doubt there were such men, and he did recommend them, but speaking to a general congregation he was giving the solution that applied, by far, to the majority of them. His confidence was supremely in the sanctifying energy of the public means of grace, week by week: Sunday worship, the prayers and praises, the preaching of the Word and the mysterious influence which Christians have over one another. These were the chief means of transforming men and women, of ‘lifting up the downcast’ Christian. A balanced preaching ministry would solve the majority of the personal problems of a congregation. Of course Dr. Lloyd-Jones had the highest view of gospel preaching. He expressed it like this:

One thing I have looked for and longed for and desired. I can forgive a man for a bad sermon, I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God, if he gives me something for my soul, if he gives me the sense that, though he is inadequate himself, he is handling something which is very

great and very glorious, if he gives me some dim glimpse of the majesty and the glory of God, the love of Christ my Saviour, and the magnificence of the Gospel. If he does that I am his debtor, and I am profoundly grateful to him. Preaching is the most amazing, and the most thrilling activity that one can ever be engaged in, because of all that it holds out for all of us in the present, and because of the glorious endless possibilities in an eternal future.

He was confident of the power of the preached word of God to deliver people from the darkness of sin and keep them in the joy of salvation.

**6. He was a man who was prepared to help people in every way he could.** He would stay at Westminster Chapel until the last person had been counseled. He would write letters to people all over the world. When he began his ministry in Aberavon people wrote to him requesting medical advice and he examined them as they traveled to his manse. My father's twin brother, Bryn, was a theological student in the Congregational College in Brecon, but in his first week there he was informed that he was not in a good enough shape physically to become and continue as a pastor. His heart wouldn't be strong enough for this work. He was quite crestfallen about this and then a friend told him about a heart specialist named Lloyd-Jones who had come to pastor a church in Aberavon. Why shouldn't he write to him and explain his dilemma to him? Perhaps he could have a medical examination from the Doctor. So it was that Uncle Bryn became one of hundreds who sought such help from Dr. Lloyd-Jones. The result was that the Doctor pronounced my uncle in fine shape, that there was no problem with his heart at all, and so he returned to college and entered the ministry. When I recounted this incident to Dr. Lloyd-Jones he had no recollection of the incident at all, and then he asked me how Uncle Bryn had got on. "He lived until he was 82," I told him. He beamed and laughed out loud smacking his hands, "Oh very good!"

He also journeyed extensively all over the United Kingdom to support ministers and evangelical causes. What anticipation to have Dr. Lloyd-Jones preaching for you. No one else could draw a congregation except him and no one since his decease. How we miss him, the full church, earnest, moving singing of great hymns, happy crowds staying around for an hour after the service was over, quietly talking together and the central themes of the gospel preached by the Doctor with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. These occasions are remembered by some from 70 years ago, and people will tell you they remember the text on which Dr. Lloyd-Jones preached at that distant meeting. Men struggling in divided, small congregations would get such an uplift when he visited them. "This is the preaching, and these are the kinds of services we are aiming for," they would tell their church officers.

**7. He was a man with a lucidity in explaining the human condition, engaging men's minds in such an interesting and increasingly gripping manner that the troubles and fears that they had brought with them soon became forgotten distractions.** They were being filled with the word of the Lord as they felt themselves addressed by the Lord of the word. So their cares were put into perspective as God was magnified before them. On one occasion I was walking home hand in hand with my 8 year old daughter Eleri after we had heard Dr. Lloyd-Jones preaching in Aberystwyth. I said to her, "What did you think of the meeting?" She replied, "It was like Sunday mornings, only simpler." Ouch! There is no doubt that his preaching was so clear that young children could follow his reasoning.

The sermons of *Spiritual Depression* are accessible and very understandable. I also found *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* most helpful, and yet Dr. Michael Haykin says,

Personally I will never forget the impact made upon me by the reading of the first volume of Iain Murray's biography of the Doctor, as he came to be affectionately called. It transformed my whole view of pastoral ministry and planted my feet in the rich loam of biblical Christianity. I had read his *Studies in the*

*Sermon on the Mount* in the mid-1970's, but they had little effect on my thinking at the time. But after that first volume of Murray's biography, I became an ardent reader of as many of Lloyd-Jones' books as I could find.

His lectures given at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia on his retirement from Westminster Chapel entitled *Preaching and Preachers* are a fascinating read to any Christian and indispensable to any pastor. It has revolutionized the approach to ministry of many preachers.

**8. He was a man persuaded that the person who had come to seek his counsels had more knowledge of all the circumstances involved than he himself had.** So he would interrogate the inquirer, who might have wanted a straight directive word to his problem, asking him, "Now what do you think?" Leigh Powell of Toronto was once a member of Westminster Chapel. He went to Dr. Lloyd-Jones as he had met a certain dilemma, but he was constrained by the Doctor to think through the issue as clearly and biblically as he could. Leigh Powell was helped and impressed by this approach. This is his thought:

If there was no contradiction of Christian teaching, then the Doctor encouraged the individual to think it through logically and then to take the appropriate action. His counselling was a lifting up of the downcast. He used a variety of methods but would invariably engage the responsibility of the counsellee by requiring him to respond to a series of logical questions. The counsellee was taught to stand back from his small self-absorbed world and to view it from new perspectives. We often carry our own burdens of worries as if we were some mighty Atlas. In fact, we are sinfully usurping the place of the Almighty sovereign Lord "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). I found the Doctor's personal advice a great help when he showed me the biblical method of asking one's self questions: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me?" (Psalm 42:5). You do not slip into neutral gear and thereby open your mind to all the temptations of the devil. I later discovered that the psalms of lamentation began

with these arresting questions and invariably ended in doxology, songs of praise and adoration: “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Psalm 42:11) (*Eusebeia*, Spring 2007, Leigh Powell, “Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a Doxological Ministry”, p.80).

This is the minister who wrote these studies on spiritual depression. May their counsels do much good to all who read them.

ABERSTWYTH, WALES,  
*February, 2011*

GEOFF THOMAS