MILESTONE CHURCH

SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION

Its Causes and Its Cure

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

A six-part summary for a healthier body, mind, and soul

– MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

“Being a Christian does not mean you never get down. It means you do not have to stay down.”

Too many believers assume that following Jesus should mean never feeling low. Martyn Lloyd-Jones refused to hand hurting people that kind of cheap answer. A physician of the body became a physician of the soul, and he taught discouraged Christians to diagnose honestly and answer themselves with truth.

WHO WAS MARTYN LLOYD-JONES?

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) was a Welsh medical doctor who walked away from a promising career because God called him to preach. He eventually became the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, and his verse-by-verse preaching shaped generations of pastors and Christians. People called him “the Doctor,” and the name fit. He looked at hurting people with the careful eye of a physician, but he treated their souls with the truth of Scripture.

WHY SHOULD WE LISTEN TO HIM?

We should listen to him because he refused to hand hurting people cheap Christian answers. You cannot fix every dark season by saying, “Pray harder,” “Cheer up,” or “You just need more faith.” Sometimes your body is exhausted. Sometimes your thinking is twisted. Sometimes your past is screaming. Sometimes you are under spiritual attack. Most of the time several things are tangled together.

Lloyd-Jones helps us look honestly at the body, biblically at the mind, and hopefully at the soul. The book started as a series of sermons, especially from Psalm 42. That is the psalm where the writer looks straight at his own soul and asks, “Why are you so down?” Then he tells himself, “Put your hope in God.” That is the heartbeat of the book: recognize what is happening inside you and answer it with the gospel.

THE GOVERNING PICTURE: TALK TO YOURSELF

Here is the problem: most of us spend all day listening to ourselves. We listen to fear. We listen to shame. We listen to the voice that says nothing will ever change. The psalmist interrupts that voice. He grabs his own soul by the shoulders and says, “Why are you down? Hope in God!” Lloyd-Jones says there comes a time when you have to stop listening to yourself and start preaching to yourself.

That does not mean pretending you are fine when you are not. Biblical faith is not fake smiling. It is refusing to let your pain tell you who God is. You can be honest about the darkness and still remind yourself: God is faithful, Jesus is enough, and this story is not over.

SO HERE’S THE STICKY STATEMENT:

- Your feelings are real — but they are terrible pastors.
- Let Scripture, not your mood, have the final word.
- You can be honest about the darkness and still preach truth to yourself.
- Being down is not the same as being abandoned.

– PART TWO: THE CAUSES

“Spiritual depression rarely has one neat cause. Look at the whole person before reaching for one shallow answer.”

Spiritual depression rarely has one neat cause. The wise response begins by looking at the whole person instead of reaching for one shallow answer. Here are five of the most common causes Lloyd-Jones identified.

1. **TEMPERAMENT, BODY, AND CIRCUMSTANCES** Some people naturally feel everything deeply. Some overthink everything. Others are simply running on empty. Sickness, pain, hormones, grief, loneliness, disappointment, too much work, and too little sleep can beat you down. Do not call every physical crash a spiritual failure. After Mount Carmel, Elijah did not need a conference or somebody yelling at him to have more faith. He needed food, sleep, quiet, and the gentle presence of God.
2. **AN INCOMPLETE GRASP OF THE GOSPEL** Some Christians know enough gospel to get saved, but not enough gospel to get settled. They still judge their relationship with God by how well they performed that week. When they do well, they feel proud. When they fail, they feel condemned. They keep staring at themselves when they should be staring at Jesus. Peace does not come from becoming more impressed with yourself. It comes from becoming more convinced that what Jesus did was enough.
3. **CONFUSING CONVICTION WITH CONDEMNATION** The Holy Spirit puts His finger on something specific: “That was sinful. Confess it. Make it right.” Condemnation just beats you bloody: “You are awful. You will never change. God is finished with you.” Conviction pulls you toward Jesus. Condemnation drives you away from Him. When sin is real, confess it, turn from it, repair what you can, and believe God when He says you are forgiven. Stop trying to punish yourself for something Jesus already paid for.
4. **LOOKING BACKWARD OR INWARD TOO LONG** Some people keep digging through yesterday like they expect to find life buried there. They replay old sins, missed opportunities, and old wounds until the past becomes the loudest voice in the room. There is a place for examining your heart, but you can stare at yourself so long that you stop looking at Jesus. The question is not, “Am I finally good enough?” The question is, “Is Jesus enough?” Learn from your past, but do not let it sentence your future.
5. **WARFARE AND UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS** Following Jesus does not remove the fight. You will face temptation, accusation, doubt, and seasons when God feels far away. That does not automatically mean something is wrong with your salvation. It means you live in a fallen world and fight a real enemy. Mature faith is not living on a permanent spiritual high. Mature faith keeps holding on to God when your feelings go up, down, and sideways.

SO ASK THIS FIRST:

- What am I actually fighting?
- An exhausted body? Painful circumstances?
- Crooked thinking? Unconfessed sin?
- Spiritual attack — or a pileup of all five?
- You cannot fight clearly until you name the battle honestly.

– PART THREE: DIAGNOSIS

“You cannot fight clearly until you name the battle honestly.”

You cannot fight clearly until you name the battle honestly. Slow down, look for patterns, and let truth — not panic — guide the diagnosis. If we were sitting across the table from you, these are the six questions we would walk through.

1. **START WITH THE BODY.** Ask what changed in your sleep, energy, pain, appetite, hormones, medication, caffeine, or workload. If rest, food, movement, or treatment consistently changes the darkness, your body is probably carrying part of the load.
2. **CHECK THE TIMELINE.** Ask, “When did this begin, and what happened around that time?” Grief, conflict, disappointment, trauma, isolation, or a major transition may explain why your soul feels bruised.
3. **WRITE DOWN THE LOUDEST THOUGHT.** Crooked thinking usually speaks in absolutes: “Nothing will change. Nobody cares. I always fail. God has left me.” If the conclusion is bigger than the facts and contradicts Scripture, challenge the thought instead of automatically believing it.
4. **ASK GOD ABOUT SIN.** Pray, “Lord, is there anything I am hiding, excusing, or refusing to obey?” Real conviction is usually specific and leads toward confession and hope. Vague, crushing shame that says you are beyond grace is condemnation — not the voice of your Father.
5. **LOOK FOR FINGERPRINTS OF ATTACK.** Spiritual warfare often intensifies accusation, isolation, temptation, confusion, and lies about God. But do not call everything a demon. Test the message by Scripture, resist it in prayer, and bring it into the light with mature believers.
6. **ASSUME OVERLAP BEFORE CHOOSING ONE BOX.** You may be tired, grieving, thinking wrongly, and under attack at the same time. Ask a trusted pastor, friend, counselor, or doctor what they see. The goal is not a perfect label; it is choosing the next wise response.

Lloyd-Jones does not tell us to “just cheer up,” but he does not let our feelings run the house either. Pray, pay attention to patterns, ask honest questions, invite outside perspective, and give it time. Name what is happening, bring it under Scripture, and get the right kind of help for the actual problem.

REMEMBER

The goal is not a perfect label. It is choosing the next wise response.

– PART FOUR: THE CURE

“Your feelings are real — but they are terrible pastors. Let Scripture, not your mood, have the final word.”

Truth cannot just sit on the page. It has to get into the conversation in your head. The turning point comes when you stop treating every feeling as a verdict and begin answering the loudest voice with the finished work of Jesus.

STOP MERELY LISTENING; BEGIN ANSWERING

A downcast soul gets stuck on repeat: “Nothing will change. God forgot me. My failure defines me.” You have to break that loop. Ask what your fear is claiming. Hold that claim up next to the character and promises of God. Then answer it with truth. This is not positive thinking. It is God-centered thinking.

LOOK AWAY FROM SELF TO CHRIST

Your assurance rests on what Jesus has done, not on how spiritual you feel today. You have been justified by faith, joined to Christ, adopted by the Father, and held by grace. You can feel weak while Jesus is still strong. Sometimes faith means standing on what you know is true before your emotions catch up.

RECEIVE GRACE INSTEAD OF NEGOTIATING

Some believers are miserable because they still treat God like a boss handing out wages. Good day? God must love me. Bad day? God must be done with me. Both reactions keep the spotlight on you. Grace puts it back on Jesus. Obedience matters, but you obey because you are accepted — not to talk God into accepting you.

REFUSE FALSE GUILT; RESPOND TO REAL GUILT

If you sinned, do not rename it, excuse it, or hide it. Confess it. Turn from it. Make it right where you can. Then receive forgiveness. If the enemy drags a confessed sin back into the courtroom, point him to the cross. Jesus did not make a down payment on your forgiveness. He said, “It is finished.”

PRACTICE TRUTH THROUGH THE MEANS OF GRACE

God keeps feeding us through Scripture, prayer, worship, communion, Christian friendship, and service. Isolation makes every lie louder. Sometimes you need another believer to tell you what you cannot see for yourself. These habits do not earn grace. They simply keep you close to the places where God regularly gives it.

WAIT ACTIVELY FOR RENEWED JOY

Psalm 42 does not end with every problem fixed. It ends with hope. The writer believes he will praise God again. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is keep praying, keep obeying, keep showing up, and keep hoping while your heart catches up. God may feel quiet, but quiet does not mean absent.

SO HERE’S THE BATTLE PLAN:

- Name the lie.
- Bring it to Scripture.
- Answer it with the gospel.
- Take the next faithful step.
- Repeat tomorrow if you have to.

– PART FIVE: THE ANCHORS

“A spiritual high is not the same thing as spiritual health.”

Dark seasons distort perspective. These anchors help you recover balance, resist shame, and keep taking the next faithful step. When your soul gets loud, come back to them.

JOY IS A RESULT, NOT A GOD

If you spend all day chasing a feeling, you will end up staring at yourself. Chase God. Obey what is true. Let joy be the gift, not the god. A spiritual high is not the same thing as spiritual health.

FAITH INCLUDES REASONING

Faith does not mean turning off your brain. Remind yourself who God is, what Jesus accomplished, what God promised, and how He has carried you before. You are not trying to think your way out of needing God. You are thinking your way back to trusting Him.

BALANCE MATTERS

Not every wound needs the same medicine. Some darkness calls for repentance. Some calls for rest. Some calls for patience, a trusted friend, or professional care. Maturity is learning not to hand everybody the same shallow answer.

TEMPTATION IS NOT DEFEAT

A thought showing up in your head does not mean you invited it in. Temptation is not the same as surrender. Resist the lie, but do not assume every ugly thought proves you are a hypocrite or that God has abandoned you.

DO NOT LIVE ON YESTERDAY

Thank God for what He did yesterday, but do not try to live on yesterday’s manna. God may not repeat the same method or emotion. Your experience changes. His truth does not.

AVOID PASSIVITY AND FRANTIC STRIVING

Passivity says, “I cannot do anything until I feel better.” Pride says, “I can fix myself if I try harder.” Grace says, “I will do what God has put in front of me, and I will trust Him with what only He can do.” Pray. Think. Rest. Confess. Get help. Take the next step.

COMMUNITY IS PART OF THE CURE

Isolation turns your mind into an echo chamber. God often gives strength through another believer’s presence, prayer, correction, and perspective. Asking for help is not betraying your faith. It may be the most faithful thing you do this week.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

- Do not make peace with spiritual depression.
- Do not be ashamed that you are struggling.
- Do not fight a whole-person battle with only one kind of weapon.

– A NECESSARY CAUTION

“Getting help is not a lack of faith. God can use all of it.”

Lloyd-Jones was a doctor before he was a pastor, so he understood something Christians sometimes forget: some struggles need more than encouragement and a devotional. Getting help is not a lack of faith.

WHEN TO INVOLVE A PROFESSIONAL

Persistent depression, thoughts of harming yourself, severe anxiety, mania, psychosis, inability to function, or major changes in sleep and appetite need prompt attention from a qualified medical or mental-health professional. These are not signs that your faith failed. They are signs that a person made of body and soul needs care for both.

You can love Jesus, pray, read your Bible, talk to your pastor, and see a counselor or doctor. Those things are not enemies. God can use all of them, and He often does His deepest work through ordinary means and patient people.

IF SOMEONE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER:

- Do not wait it out alone, and do not counsel it alone.
- In the U.S., call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline).
- Call 911 if there is immediate risk.
- Stay with the person and involve family.
- Connect them to professional care the same day.

WHAT DO I DO NOW?

Whole-person health is built through small, honest practices repeated over time — not one emotional breakthrough or one perfect week. Work the three areas together.

BODY — STEWARD THE INSTRUMENT

1. **Protect sleep.** Keep a consistent bedtime and waking time; fatigue makes every spiritual battle feel larger.
2. **Move most days.** Walk, lift, or stretch in a sustainable way; sunlight and movement help regulate mood.
3. **Eat and hydrate steadily.** Avoid using sugar, alcohol, or caffeine to manage every emotional swing.
4. **Respect medical realities.** Schedule checkups and discuss persistent symptoms with a clinician.
5. **Build margin.** Treat rest, recreation, and limits as stewardship — not laziness.

– PART SIX: THE PLAN

“Whole-person health is built through small, honest practices repeated over time.”

MIND — CHALLENGE THE INNER NARRATOR

1. **Name the thought.** “What am I telling myself right now?” Write it down so it can be examined.
2. **Test it.** Is it true, fully true, and biblically true? Separate facts from predictions and accusations.
3. **Answer it.** State a specific truth about God, the gospel, or your identity in Christ.
4. **Reduce noise.** Set boundaries around doomscrolling, comparison, and outrage.
5. **Invite wise help.** Speak with a trusted friend, pastor, counselor, or doctor early.

SOUL — RETURN TO THE SOURCES OF GRACE

1. **Read to hear God,** not merely to finish a plan. Begin with a psalm and answer your fears with its truth.
2. **Pray honestly.** Lament is faith speaking from pain; bring the real condition of your heart to God.
3. **Confess specifically.** Receive forgiveness; do not confuse self-punishment with repentance.
4. **Stay gathered.** Worship, communion, friendship, and service pull the soul out of isolation.
5. **Serve within your strength.** Purposeful love turns the heart outward; overcommitment deepens depletion.

A SIMPLE DAILY RHYTHM:

MORNING — receive one promise from Scripture, name one reason for gratitude, choose the next faithful step.

MIDDAY — pause, breathe, move, and challenge the loudest false thought.

EVENING — review the day without condemnation. Where did I see grace? What can I release before sleep?

WHEN YOUR SOUL SINKS

“Hope in God. I am going to praise Him again.” — Psalm 42