



The Gospel Focus of

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Charles  
Spurgeon

S T E V E N J . L A W S O N



A Long Line of Godly Men Profile

## ENDORSEMENTS

“Steve Lawson, a great preacher in his own right, has emerged as our generation’s finest biographer of great preachers. His works on John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards are both masterpieces. Steve has a knack for pointing out and explaining the outstanding traits that made each of these unique preachers truly important and influential. This work on Charles Spurgeon is likewise brilliant, highlighting Spurgeon’s Calvinistic convictions alongside his evangelistic zeal—showing why those two characteristics are perfectly harmonious and equally essential characteristics of any truly biblical ministry. A riveting work, this book will fuel your enthusiasm for both sound doctrine and earnest evangelism.”

—DR. JOHN MACARTHUR  
Pastor-teacher, Grace Community Church  
Sun Valley, Calif.

“Charles Spurgeon was a model pastor-theologian. His theology came to life in his plea for sinners to be reconciled to God. Lawson points us to the necessity of a theology fueled by fervor for evangelism in this excellent primer on the prince of preachers.”

—DR. ED STETZER  
Billy Graham Distinguished Chair of Church, Mission, and  
Evangelism  
Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill.

“I own at least three dozen different biographies of the prince of preachers, but Steve Lawson’s new book on Charles Spurgeon will from now on have a key place of prominence in my short list of favorites. Dr. Lawson understands what made the great preacher’s heart beat: it was the gospel, charged with a passion for the souls of lost people and kept steady by the doctrines of grace. The clear rhythm of that pulse reverberates through this book, and it’s a catchy beat. I’m profoundly glad for that, and I hope countless readers will be moved to get in step with the cadence.”

—PHIL JOHNSON

Executive director, Grace to You  
Curator, The Spurgeon Archive

“Steve Lawson provides a succinct and captivating analysis of the heart of one of the greatest preachers of all time. Spurgeon’s ministry is legendary, but what animated and motivated his life and ministry is often overlooked. With ample extracts from Spurgeon’s own writings and sermons, this book reveals how the gospel of Jesus Christ provided both the power and content of his preaching. Far from being a distraction to the gospel, those doctrines that are historically known as Calvinism caused Spurgeon to understand the person and work of Jesus more clearly and preach Christ more passionately. While some who do not hold to Spurgeon’s view of the doctrines of grace might wonder how he could be a Calvinist and *yet* be evangelistic, Lawson clearly demonstrates that the prince of preachers was a bold evangelist precisely *because* of his Calvinism. There is much wisdom in this book both for preachers and for those who value preaching.”

—DR. THOMAS K. ASCOL

Senior pastor, Grace Baptist Church, Cape Coral, Fla.

“For more than thirty-six years, Steve Lawson has had an intense interest in the ministry of Charles Spurgeon. In April 1976, he wrote a paper on Spurgeon’s theological controversies for a Baptist history class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In that paper, Lawson said about Spurgeon, ‘He magnified God’s grace and glorified God’s Son.’ Lawson has shown in this book how those traits of Spurgeon’s ministry, plus his thorough commitment to the infallibility of Scripture, his fervent grace-centered evangelism, his utter dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit, and his personal courage, make Spurgeon transcend the ages as a model for church-centered gospel ministry. Every Christian will be encouraged by Lawson’s description of Spurgeon’s life and his analysis of Spurgeon’s driving commitments to the whole counsel of God. Loaded with pungent quotes from Spurgeon and punctuated with helpful and pertinent exhortations from Lawson, this is a book for us all.”

—DR. THOMAS J. NETTLES

Professor of historical theology (retired)

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

## **The Long Line of Godly Men Profiles**

Series editor, Steven J. Lawson

*The Expository Genius of John Calvin*

by Steven J. Lawson

*The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards*

by Steven J. Lawson

*The Mighty Weakness of John Knox*

by Douglas Bond

*The Gospel Focus of Charles Spurgeon*

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# Charles Spurgeon

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES



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To Iain H. Murray,  
whose tireless efforts for  
more than a half century  
have introduced Reformed truth  
to a new generation,  
and whose book  
*The Forgotten Spurgeon*  
made a dramatic and lasting impact  
on my life for good



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# Followers Worthy to Be Followed

Down through the centuries, God has raised up a long line of godly men, those whom He has mightily used at critical junctures of church history. These valiant individuals have come from all walks of life—from the ivy-covered halls of elite schools to the dusty back rooms of tradesmen’s shops. They have arisen from all points of this world—from highly visible venues in densely populated cities to obscure hamlets in remote places. Yet despite their differences, these pivotal figures, trophies of God’s grace, have had much in common.

Certainly each man possessed stalwart faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ, but more can be said. Each of them held deep convictions concerning the God-exalting truths

known as the doctrines of grace. Though they differed in secondary matters of theology, they stood shoulder to shoulder in championing the doctrines that magnify the sovereign grace of God in His saving purposes in the world. To a man, they upheld the essential truth that “salvation is of the Lord” (Ps. 3:8; Jonah 2:9).

How did these truths affect their lives? Far from paralyzing them, the doctrines of grace enflamed their hearts with reverential awe for God and humbled their souls before His throne. Moreover, the truths of sovereign grace emboldened these men to further the cause of Christ on the earth. This fact should not surprise us, as history reveals that those who embrace these truths are granted extraordinary confidence in their God. With an enlarged vision of Him, they step forward and accomplish the work of many men, leaving a godly influence on generations to come. They arise with wings like eagles and soar over their times in history. Experientially, the doctrines of grace renew their spirits and empower them to serve God in their divinely appointed hours.

The Long Line of Godly Men Profiles aim to highlight key figures from this procession of sovereign-grace men. It is the purpose of this series to explore how these figures used their God-given gifts and abilities to further the kingdom of heaven. Because they were stalwart followers of Christ, their examples are worthy of emulation today.

In this volume, I want to introduce you to the revered British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon. Spurgeon’s voice

thundered with the truth throughout England and beyond in a day when the church stood in great need of red-hot, straightforward, no-holds-barred gospel preaching—and that of a Calvinistic strand. Despite the theological and methodological declines of his day, Spurgeon was deeply devoted to preaching Christ and Him crucified. As the Lord empowered him, his pulpit became one of the most prolific sounding boards the kingdom of God has ever known. To this day, Spurgeon remains “the Prince of Preachers,” eminently worthy to be profiled in this series.

May the Lord use this book to greatly embolden you, so that, like Spurgeon, you will leave an indelible mark on this world. May you be strengthened with the gospel to walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

*Soli Deo gloria!*

—Steven J. Lawson  
Series editor





# Why Spurgeon?

It was more than thirty years ago, as a young seminary student, when I was first confronted with the biblical truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation. To that point, I had viewed salvation as a joint venture between God and man. I assumed that God extends the offer of salvation, but man has the ability to accept or reject it. But unexpectedly, the sovereign grace of God toward those whom He chose in eternity past to save was made known to me. To my amazement, my eyes were opened to behold God as I had never seen Him before.

A thick fog lifted. Suddenly I could see those truths in the Bible known as the doctrines of grace. Astonishingly, they had been there all along. As my eyes raced through the Scriptures,

I became absorbed with an endless number of verses teaching the predestining grace of God. For every one verse I saw, there were a hundred more virtually leaping from the pages of God's Word, screaming for my attention. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible was now declaring, "Salvation is of the Lord."

This discovery was, at first, devastating. I was shaken to the core of my being. My whole orientation to the Bible was in upheaval. This biblical teaching was pride-crushing. I was laid low in the dust, my soul desolate. But at the same time, these doctrines were God glorifying and Christ exalting. They lifted me up with a sense of awe toward God and filled me with excitement. Joy flooded my being. These glorious truths ignited a great awakening within me, one from which I have not recovered.

This deeper understanding of God's grace, however, created an enormous dilemma for me. How would the doctrines of sovereign grace affect my preaching? If God is sovereign in salvation, *why* preach the gospel? If I am to do so, *how* do I preach the gospel? *Why* witness? *Why* pray for the lost? *Why* make sacrifices for the gospel? These questions haunted me, especially since I was called to preach. Perhaps they have challenged you.

As I wrestled through these issues, I walked into the semi-nary bookstore one day to browse among the books. On this occasion, I noticed several volumes of sermons by Charles Spurgeon. Curious, I pulled one off the shelf and began reading. Quite frankly, I was not prepared for what I found. As

I pored over the pages, I found message after message dripping with the biblical truths of sovereign grace. But at the same time, each message was on fire with evangelistic fervor, as Spurgeon pleaded with sinners to be saved. Never had I read anything like this. These sermons were like an electric current running through my soul. They shocked my senses and enlightened my mind.

Here is what captivated me. This gifted preacher, perhaps the greatest since the Apostle Paul, was, by his own admission, a *Calvinist*—Reformed to the core, deeply committed to the doctrines of grace. But at the same time, he was an *evangelist*. How could these seemingly opposite realities fit together? How could one be both staunchly Calvinistic *and* passionately evangelistic?

Spurgeon showed me. In one hand, he firmly held the sovereignty of God in man's salvation. With the other hand, he extended the free offer of the gospel to all. He preached straightforward Calvinistic doctrine, then, in the same sermon, fervently urged lost sinners to call on the name of the Lord. Having expounded the truths of predestination, he then warned his listeners that if they refused Christ, their blood would be on their own hands. In sermon after sermon, this prolific preacher expounded God's sovereign grace with unmistakable precision. Yet, he did it with a genuine passion for the lost.

I concluded that this was what it must look like to be consumed with the glory of God in the salvation of His elect

and, at the same time, be filled with flaming zeal in reaching sinners with the gospel. There was no cold, clinical Calvinism here—no dead orthodoxy, no “frozen chosen” religion, no empty rehearsing of Reformed doctrine for people to take or leave as they might choose. Neither was there any shallow evangelism that portrayed God as pacing in heaven, wringing His hands, desperate for someone to accept Him. Instead, here was what the Puritans described as a fire in the pulpit, yielding both the *light* of Calvinistic truth and the *heat* of evangelistic passion.

In Spurgeon, I saw a historical example of what God was calling me to be and do. I finally understood that my Reformed theology was not a hindrance but a launching pad for evangelism. Here was the best of both worlds. I already had come to see clearly how these twin truths meet in the Bible. Now I could see how they come together in preaching.

Tragically, many pulpits today are pulled toward one of two extremes—the dead orthodoxy of Hyper-Calvinism or the shallow inconsistencies of Arminianism. In the former error, the doctrines of grace are upheld, but with little burden for the lost and no free offer of the gospel to all. In the latter error, there is soul-winning fervor, but the supreme authority of God in the salvation of men’s souls is denied. Between these polar opposites stands biblical Calvinism, claiming the high ground in both message and ministry.

In this short book, my intention is to introduce you to the

remarkable Charles Spurgeon. My hope is that his example will revolutionize your approach to gospel ministry. May you be emboldened by the gospel focus of Spurgeon, who continues to cast his broad shadow across the landscape of the evangelical church.

Furthermore, I pray that this book will help you gain a proper understanding of the full counsel of God in Scripture. My desire is that you will appreciate the tension between divine sovereignty in man's salvation and fiery passion in spreading the gospel. Only biblical Calvinism does both.

I want to thank the publishing team at Ligonier Ministries for their commitment to this Long Line of Godly Men Profiles series from church history. Greg Bailey, director of publications, has done an excellent job editing this manuscript and encouraging me along the way. Chris Larson was instrumental in envisioning this series and overseeing the beautiful graphic design of this book. I remain proud of my association with my former professor, Dr. R. C. Sproul, and Ligonier Ministries.

I further want to thank Christ Fellowship Baptist Church of Mobile, Alabama, which I serve as senior pastor. I am extremely grateful for the support of my fellow elders and the congregation, who encourage me in my extended ministry. I want to express my gratitude for my executive assistant, Kay Allen, who typed this document, and Keith Phillips, a fellow pastor at Christ Fellowship, who helped edit this manuscript.

Finally, you should know that my family remains a tower

## THE GOSPEL FOCUS OF CHARLES SPURGEON

of encouragement in my personal life and ministry. My wife, Anne, and our four children, Andrew, James, Grace Anne, and John, stand as one with me in the message and mission of this book.

# Spurgeon's Life and Legacy

*There was no voice in the Victorian pulpit as resonant, no preacher as beloved by the people, no orator as prodigious as Charles Haddon Spurgeon.<sup>1</sup>*

—HUGHES OLIPHANT OLD

Hailed as the greatest preacher of nineteenth-century England, Charles Haddon Spurgeon is arguably the pre-eminent preacher of any century. Regarded as the most widely successful expositor of modern times,<sup>2</sup> Spurgeon heads virtually every list of renowned preachers. If John Calvin was the greatest theologian of the church, Jonathan Edwards the greatest philosopher, and George Whitefield the greatest evangelist, Spurgeon surely ranks as its greatest preacher.<sup>3</sup> Never has one man stood in one pulpit, week after week, year after year, for almost four decades, and preached the gospel with



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