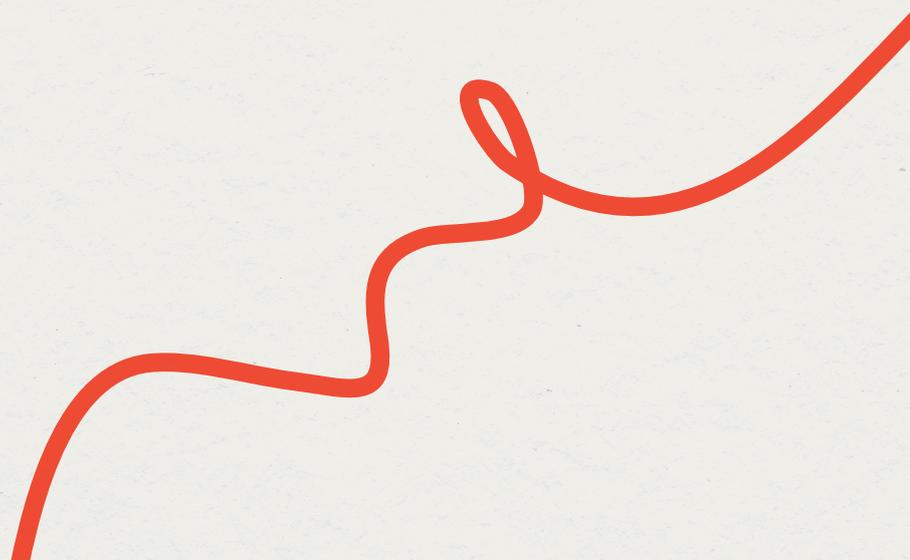


# WHEN LIFE FEELS LIKE **IT'S A LOT.**



**A Lenten journey of  
hope for families**

A six-week study guide from Spurgeons





# 'IT'S A LOT'

**These three words capture what so many parents of teenagers are feeling right now. The anxiety, the isolation, the relentless pressure of modern life – it can feel utterly overwhelming.**

This Lent, we're not asking you to give something up. Instead, we're inviting you to take something on: the posture of Christlike hope, practical compassion, and confident action.

Whether you're a parent in the thick of raising teenagers, a grandparent watching your adult children struggle, or a church member wanting to support families in crisis, this guide will equip you to make a real difference.

Over the next six weeks, we'll explore the challenges facing today's teenagers and their parents, ground ourselves in Scripture, and discover practical ways to bring hope into homes

## **The reality we're facing**

- Mental health disorders amongst teenagers have nearly doubled in recent years
- Anxiety is now commonplace rather than exceptional
- Social media creates relentless comparison and impossible standards
- Parents often feel like they're firefighting alone, without support or guidance
- Many families are one crisis away from breaking point

**But here's the truth: you are not alone, and neither are they.**

Through Spurgeons' work across the UK, we walk alongside thousands of vulnerable families every year. This Lenten journey reflects what we've learnt about turning despair into hope, isolation into community, and overwhelm into confident action.

# Week 1: Swept over by the waves

**Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life.  
(Psalm 42:7-8, NIV)**

Imagine being a parent when your 14-year-old daughter locks herself in the bathroom. You know she's been self-harming. You've tried talking. You've tried understanding. But nothing seems to reach her, and you feel utterly helpless.

Or picture being that teenager – drowning in anxiety, unable to explain why everything feels so overwhelming, watching your parents' worried faces and feeling guilty for causing them pain.

"Swept over by waves" isn't just poetic language. It's what life feels like for thousands of UK families right now.

## A word of truth

Our founder, Charles Spurgeon, understood darkness intimately. He wrote: "I find that I can only cry to the deep above me from the deep within me."

The first step isn't fixing everything. It's acknowledging the pain honestly before God and each other. The psalm doesn't skip from verse 7 to triumph – it sits in the discomfort, trusting that God's love is present even when we're underwater.

## For parents and grandparents

How do you resist the urge to fix everything immediately, and instead offer simple, steady presence?

## For reflection

When did you last feel "swept over" – either by your own struggles or by watching someone you love suffer? How did you respond?

## For those supporting families

What stops us from admitting when we're overwhelmed? How might your church become a place where people can be honest about struggling?

## This week's practice: The 40-minute gift

Teenagers don't need perfect parents. They need present ones.

This week, give the gift of 40 minutes of completely non-judgemental presence to a young person. Not all at once – spread it across the week in smaller moments. Put your phone away. Don't try to solve anything. Just listen.

If you don't have regular contact with teenagers, offer this gift to an overwhelmed parent instead – 40 minutes where they can speak freely without fear of judgement.

## Prayer focus

Lord, help me to be present rather than perfect. When I want to fix, teach me to listen. When I feel helpless, remind me that Your love is at work even in the depths. Amen.

# Week 2: The thief of comparison

**I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.  
(Psalm 139:14, NIV)**

A 15-year-old boy spends three hours choosing the right photo, editing it, writing the perfect caption. He posts it. Then he waits, checking constantly. Twenty likes in the first hour. Not enough. He watches as a friend's post gets 200 likes. The spiral begins: I'm not good enough. I'm not interesting enough. I'm not enough.

Meanwhile, his mother scrolls through posts from other families – the grade-A results, the university offers, the sporting achievements. She looks at her son, struggling with school, and feels like she's failing.

The comparison trap doesn't just catch teenagers. It catches all of us.

## A word of truth

"Fearfully and wonderfully made" means we are crafted with awe-inspiring intention. But social media teaches the opposite: that our worth is measured by external validation, by how we compare to others, by performance metrics that change by the hour. This is a lie that steals joy from both teenagers and their parents.

## For parents and grandparents

When you look at your teenager (or at yourself), do you see God's wonderful handiwork first, or do you see failures and disappointments? How might that need to change?

## For reflection

How has digital culture changed your own sense of worth or your ability to see the unique value in others?

## For those supporting families

How can your church create spaces where people are valued simply for who they are, not what they achieve?

## This week's practice: The comparison fast

Identify one online habit that fuels comparison, inadequacy or judgement. Perhaps it's scrolling Instagram first thing in the morning, or checking LinkedIn to see how everyone else's career is progressing, or following influencers who make you feel "less than."

Fast from that specific habit for 48 hours. Notice what happens. Use the time you would have spent scrolling to pray for a young person you know, or to have a real conversation with someone face-to-face.

## Prayer focus

Creator God, help me to see myself and others as You see us – wonderfully made, deeply loved, completely enough. Break the power of comparison in my life and in the lives of young people I know. Amen.

# Week 3: The courage to be real

**There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.  
(1 John 4:18, NIV)**

A mother sits in the GP surgery with her 13-year-old son. The doctor asks if everything's alright at home. She wants to cry out: "No! I'm drowning! I don't know what I'm doing! I'm terrified I'm getting it all wrong!" Instead, she smiles and says, "We're fine, thank you." Her son, who desperately needs her to model vulnerability and honesty, learns that you must always pretend to be coping.

Fear makes us hide. Fear of judgement, fear of failure, fear of admitting we're not the parents (or grandparents, or church leaders) we think we should be. But "perfect love drives out fear" – and perfect love doesn't mean perfect parenting. It means showing up authentically, admitting when we're overwhelmed, and trusting that we're all learning together.

## A word of truth

Teenagers don't need parents who have it all sorted. They need adults who can say: "This is hard, and I don't always know what to do, but I'm here and I'm not giving up on you." That kind of honesty doesn't undermine authority. It creates the safety young people need to be honest about their own struggles.

## For parents and grandparents

How can we model healthy vulnerability – showing our struggles without making our children responsible for our emotional wellbeing?

## For reflection

What fear are you carrying that prevents you from being fully present and authentic with those around you?

## For those supporting families

How does fear of saying the wrong thing stop us from reaching out to struggling parents? What would courage look like?

## This week's practice: Praise the effort

Teenagers today face crushing pressure to achieve. Exam results, university applications, social success – the stakes feel impossibly high.

This week, actively look for and praise non-academic effort in a young person's life. Notice when they:

- Try something new, even if they're not good at it
- Show kindness to a sibling or friend
- Keep going with something difficult
- Help around the house without being asked

**Be specific:** "I noticed you helped your brother with his homework today, even though you were tired. That was really thoughtful." Praise the process, not just the result. This builds resilience.

## Prayer focus

Lord, give me courage to be real. Help me to model the kind of honest faith that admits weakness and clings to Your strength. Free me from the fear of getting it wrong. Amen.

# Week 4: Boundaries that protect

**Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.\*  
(Proverbs 22:6, NIV)**

"You're ruining my life!" The bedroom door slams. The parent stands there, phone in hand, having just enforced the 10pm screen curfew. Again. It would be so much easier to give in. To avoid the conflict. To be the "cool" parent who lets their teenager do what they want. But love sometimes says no.

Today's challenge for parents is immense. Boundaries around technology, friendships, social media, and time management are exhausting to maintain. Every rule feels like a battle. And when you're depleted, surrender is tempting.

## A word of truth

Boundaries aren't punishment. They're protection. Clear, loving boundaries teach children they matter enough to be guided, that the world has structure and safety, and that self-regulation is a skill to learn. Spurgeons' work shows teenagers actually crave boundaries, even as they protest. Limits create the security in which young people grow. The key is to inform rather than simply forbid. "You can't stay out" feels arbitrary. "I need you home by 10pm because I love you and want you safe" communicates care.

## For reflection

How do you view boundaries - restrictions or loving guidance? How might that perspective need to shift?

## For those supporting families

How can your church help exhausted parents maintain boundaries despite pushback?

## For parents and grandparents

Which boundaries feel hardest? What makes them difficult? How might prayer and support help you stay consistent?

## This week's practice: The safety check-in

Choose one important boundary in your household (or one for your own wellbeing). Write down the love and safety behind it. For example:

- "9pm phone curfew exists because teenagers need proper sleep to manage anxiety and stay healthy"
- "I don't allow certain apps because they expose you to content that could harm you"
- "I say no to certain friendships because I can see they diminish your sense of worth"

Share that reasoning with your teenager (or a parent you're supporting). Help them understand the "why" behind the "what." If you're not parenting teens, use this practice to examine your own boundaries and self-care. How might you better protect your wellbeing?

## Prayer focus

Loving Father, give me wisdom to know which boundaries matter most, courage to maintain them with kindness, and patience when they're resisted. Help me to lead with love, not control. Amen.

# Week 5: Hope in the darkness

**The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.  
(Psalm 34:18, NIV)**

Your teenager hasn't left their room except for school in three days. They're barely eating, ignoring friends, and when you try to talk, they snap or shut down. Is this normal moodiness or something more serious?

For many parents, this is the question that keeps them awake. Low mood and depression among young people are frighteningly common. As parents, grandparents, or church family, we must recognise when someone is truly struggling and know that seeking professional help isn't failure, it's love.

## A word of truth

God is close to the broken-hearted. He doesn't wait until we've sorted ourselves out. He draws near in the darkness.

Charles Spurgeon, who battled depression, wrote: "If Christ is yours, then all is yours, and all shall work for your present and eternal good." Our hope isn't in fixing everything quickly, but in God's presence even through doctors, counsellors, and mental health professionals. Seeking help isn't lack of faith; it's wisdom.

## For reflection

How comfortable are you talking about mental health? What fears or stigma need addressing? For those supporting families: How can your church be a visible source of connection and practical help for families facing mental health challenges?

For parents and grandparents: Do you know the warning signs that suggest professional help is needed?

- Persistent low mood (2+ weeks)
- Loss of interest in activities
- Major changes in sleep or appetite
- Talk of self-harm or suicide
- Withdrawal from all social contact
- Inability to function at school

If you see these signs, contact your GP. It's as vital as treating a broken arm.

## This week's practice: The safety check-in

Gratitude is a powerful counterweight to anxiety and depression. It doesn't cure mental illness, but it builds resilience.

For five days, write down three things you're grateful for daily—small or significant. On day five, pray for a parent facing overwhelming challenges. Consider practical support: a meal, a break, or a simple message saying, "I'm thinking of you."

## Prayer focus

Lord, You are close to the broken-hearted. Be near to families battling depression and anxiety. Give parents wisdom to seek help and courage to ask for it. Bring hope into darkness. Amen.

# Week 6: You are not alone

**So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.  
(Isaiah 41:10, NIV)**

Nicola sits in the church car park after the service, tears streaming down her face. Inside, everyone asked, "How are you?" She smiled and said, "Fine, thanks."

But she's not fine. Her 15-year-old is self-harming. Her marriage is breaking. She feels like the worst mother in the world and utterly alone.

Except she's not. Inside that church are probably three other mothers feeling the same way. They just don't know, because everyone's pretending to be fine.

Families are drowning in isolation while surrounded by potential support.

## A word of truth

Easter's message is that resurrection follows crucifixion. New life emerges from what looked like defeat. Mistakes don't define us, redemption does.

God promises: "I will strengthen you and help you." Often, He does this through community - through the parent who says, "Me too." Through churches that create safe spaces for honesty. Through charities offering expert guidance when families don't know where to turn.

## For reflection

What have you learned during this Lenten journey? How has your understanding of family challenges shifted?

For those supporting families: How can your church become a visible source of connection and practical help?

For parents and grandparents: What support do you need but haven't asked for? Who could you reach out to?

## This week's practice: The safety check-in

After six weeks reflecting on the challenges facing families, it's time to act. (Follow the actions on the next page).

## Prayer focus

Lord Jesus, You gave everything to bring hope to the hopeless. Help me follow Your example. Show me how to support families in practical, meaningful ways. Use me to bring Your light into dark places. Amen.

# It's time to act

## Action 1: Share this resource

Pass this guide to three parents, grandparents, or church leaders. Start conversations. Break the silence around mental health and family struggle.



## Action 2: Support Spurgeons' work

For over 150 years, Spurgeons has walked alongside vulnerable children and families, providing:

- Expert support for overwhelmed parents
- Mental health services for struggling teens
- Practical guidance on modern parenting

This Lent, turn spiritual discipline into practical hope by giving at [www.spurgeons.org/itsalot](http://www.spurgeons.org/itsalot). Your gift ensures no parent faces these challenges alone.

## Action 3: Pray and act locally

Ask God: How can I support struggling families? Maybe:

- Offer babysitting so parents can rest
- Start a parent support group
- Mentor a teenager
- Advocate for better mental health provision



At Spurgeons, we believe that strong, supported families and networks are the foundation their children need. That is where you can help.

**Donate today to make a difference.**

