

# Joy for the Bored

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're going to read together from John chapter 15 verses 8 to 17 and Flynn is going to come re-force. By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing but I have called you friends for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give it to you. These things I command you so that you will love one another.

All right this Christmas season we are looking at a series called Wonderful Counselor. We looked last week at the prophecy from Isaiah chapter 9 that one day a Messiah would come, a Savior would come and his name would be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace.

[ 1 : 3 8 ] And so we're looking at places in the gospels where Jesus speaks to disciples, to Christians, and gives counseling. He comes alongside and talks to believers about their inner lives, their souls. He comes to bring the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that he has, that only he has and he comes to be our counselor. And so we just read from John chapter 15 and it's the very last moments of Jesus' life. It's called the farewell speech, the farewell discourse of Christ and he gives a whole host of instructions. It's when you know he's going to his deathbed, Jesus is going right after this to be executed and this is the very last thing he said. You know the very last thing you say before you're going to die has got to be something important.

It better be something important. And when we read Jesus' last words before he goes to die they're really important and he's giving instruction to his disciples counseling about what he wants for them. He says, I want joy for you. I came so that you might have joy.

Now last week we looked at Jesus' very explicit command, do not be anxious. This week we're thinking about boredom but there is no command here in John 15 or anywhere in the gospels or anywhere in the entire Bible. Not once is there a command that says don't be bored. There's no mention of the word boredom. The closest thing we have is a couple references and ecclesiastes to vanity, to feeling like life is meaningless or to the concept of sloth in the Old Testament which is very closely related to being bored. But the Bible deals with boredom constantly. I should say the Bible doesn't deal with boredom and the reason is because boredom is a very modern problem. But we can look at the ancient wisdom of the Bible and the wisdom of Jesus and learn how to deal with the problem of boredom that we face. There's no command here, do not be bored. But there are a lot of commands in John 15 and we just read a sample of them. Let me just summarize them. Jesus says here, glorify God, bear fruit, prove that you're a disciple, abide in my love, keep my commandments, love on another. And he says, and I want you to do all that so that you can glorify God on the one hand and have joy in your life and the other. Now these commandments deal with boredom, not explicitly but implicitly, not explicitly but because joy is the opposite of boredom. And so let's think about that together. We've got a grand purpose in life, a big meaning in life, a huge calling, abide in my love, Jesus says. That's the calling. If you're doing that, if we're doing that, we don't have time to be bored. And so let's think about it. What is boredom?

And then the two big things Jesus tells us here to fight it. Okay, so first, what's boredom? Boredom is very hard to define. That's what I learned this week. Reading about boredom and there's a lot

more literature than you would think about boredom out there. Boredom is apathy. That's one way to think about it. In the old world, there wasn't as much boredom, the pre-modern world. But in the pre-modern world, there was a word for boredom that was often used and it was called the noonday demon. Have you ever experienced the noonday demon?

[ 5 : 08 ] It's called the noonday demon. You know, from 12 p.m. to 3 30 every day, you want to do anything in life but the thing you're supposed to be doing. It's the noonday demon. It strikes. You just want to take a nap. And people have been experiencing that for all the centuries. Another way, a more philosophical way to put it is boredom is a desire for desire. It's that moment where you think, I wish I cared. I want to care, but I just don't. I'm apathetic. And so after all the reading, different sources I looked at this week, this is the definition that I came up with for what boredom is. Boredom, and I'm putting it in a more extreme way. Boredom is disgust for the now for today because of an indifference to God, to other people, and to the work God has given us today. Boredom is a disgust, a hatred for the now for the moment because of a denial of the responsibility that we've been given by God to love other people, to love Him right here, right now. Now, Dorothy Sayers, the great writer of detective novels, Lord Peter Wimsey in the 20th century, she put it like this, boredom is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.

I don't know if you've gotten to see the movie Inside Out 2. It's a great, great film, a great series. Riley is the young girl, she's the star in the film, and it's about her inner life, her soul, what's going on in her mind. And when she was a kid, and Inside Out 1, the two great emotions she was always bouncing back and forth between were joy and anger, but in Inside Out 2 she's a teenager, and now the two emotions she has most often are anxiety and ennui. Ennui is the French word for boredom. The French come up with all the best emotion names and emotion words. It's not boredom, it's ennui, you know? And in Riley's life she has ennui all of a sudden enter into her mind, and ennui, the character, is this tall French accented character who's always draped over this Freudian therapy couch, you know, laying out, and ennui is disgusted with commitment, hates every moment that Riley is called to responsibility, and ennui dispassionately stares at her phone all day on the couch. Boredom is the teenager's masterpiece, you know?

The teenager can paint boredom better as an absolute masterpiece, a work of art, you know? Effortless carelessness, they do it so well, you know, you're so effortless in how little you care, and yet it sticks with all of us throughout all of life. It carries through, you know, the eye roll, the deep sigh, the yawn, the disinterested apathy that comes upon us. So there are scholars of boredom, there are theologians who spend their careers thinking about things like sloth and boredom. I discovered that this week. And they, let me just give you a few things that they talk about. They say, one, boredom is a hatred of responsibility, the responsibility that God has given us today, this very day. It is the old, it's a more modern concept for the old word sloth, but we come to the Old Testament, we read about sloth, and we think sloth is just laziness, you know, it's couch potato mentality. And actually, sloth is more than that, boredom is more than that.

It can be that, but it can also be frenzied activity. Boredom can be expressed in relentless activity, but it's activity that's trying to avoid the main things that God has called you to do in life. Frenzied activity, relentless hustle, but to avoid the most important things in life, to get away from them. Have you ever found yourself doing, being incredibly productive, but only to avoid the one thing you really needed to do that day? You know, you, you were supposed to be studying, but you color-coded your closet. Boredom, that's boredom. Another way the theologians and scholars will talk about boredom is that it's a product of our addiction to entertainment stimulation.

[ 9 : 54 ] So we are addicted to stimulants, the most common liturgy habit we do every day is put our hands in our pockets and pull out our phones, right? And that's an addiction to entertainment stimulation.

Parents in the room, I don't know if you've ever gone through the difficult experience of throwing your child a birthday party. You know, you think God has given me this responsibility to parent my children and I, today it's my, it's my child's birthday. We come to the birthday party, I'm going to give it my all. I'm going to jump on the bounty castle. I'm going to get on the trampoline.

The loner kid that shows up at the party, I'm going to pursue that kid and bring him back into friendship with everybody else. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure my, my son, my daughter's birthday is meaningful. And the birthday party starts at 2 p.m. You give it your all.

And you look up and it's 2 o'clock. And you desperately just want to stick your hand in your pocket and pull your phone out and look at the football scores or send that meme to your friend or whatever it is that you like to do on your phone. And you know, we're addicted to stimulants. And so we replace the things God has given us to do that are most meaningful in life with other things and that's, that's a definition of boredom. The Noonday, the Noonday demon, Jesus says here that we have a calling in life to take up the joy that's been given us by Jesus.

[11:24] He says joy is a gift and when you abide in Christ, when you're united to Jesus, he gives you joy that can never be taken away and simultaneously there is a call to take up the responsibility to have joy, to take up joy, to have a bigger purpose and a bigger meaning in your life. And so joy is the opposite of boredom and it is a product of discipleship and Sam Storm's one contemporary theologian, he puts it this way, one of the most serious threats to the human spirit is boredom. Boredom is the breeding ground for wickedness. Bored people are easy targets of the flesh in the devil. Do you find that when you're bored, those are the moments where you're most tempted? It is like putting a bull's eye on your chest with a sign that says tempt me, I'm easy.

Why? Because boredom is contrary to the natural God given impulse for fascination, excitement, pleasure, wonder and exhilaration. In other words, Jesus is saying here, I've made you for joy. If you abide in me, if you're my disciple, I've given you this gift and it's joy and it means there's no time for boredom. There's just so much meaning in life. There's so much work to do to chase the gifts I've given you that you don't have any time to be bored. So let's think about that.

Two things Jesus gives us to fight boredom. First, Jesus says here, there's no time for boredom in verses 8 to 11. He says, by this my father is glorified that you bear fruit, improve to be a disciple. And he says, as God loves me, as the father loves me, I love you and I give you a command to abide in me. Bear fruit, abide in me, keep my commandments, love one another.

So he gives us this list of commands, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And if you think about those commands for just a minute, they're all encapsulated in this metaphor, abide in my love. And there he's appealing to this image of a vine. And he's saying that when the gospel gets ahold of you, you become a follower of Jesus. And he's saying that when the gospel gets ahold of you, you become a follower of Jesus. And you are now engrafted, stuck into the living tree that is the life of Jesus himself. You're united to Jesus. And from there he says, now, you don't get in to the vine. You don't attach yourself to the vine by keeping the commandments of God. You get attached to the vine. He says in verse 16, I chose you. I've appointed you.

[14:00] I've come to rescue you. But now that I've done that, now it is time to be a disciple. So you don't get in to God's grace by keeping his commandments. But once you are in God's grace, once you follow Christ, you've been attached, he says you have an enormous responsibility. And that's to take up the call in your life to grow, to change. When he says, abide in my love, what he means is it is your mission in life to change, to grow from a person who struggles to love people, into a person who loves people, to grow from a person who's impatient into patience, to grow from a person who struggles to have joy because we're so bored into a person who's full of joy and wonder all the time and struggles to be bored. He says there is a real calling in your life to change, to grow. It's the calling of a disciple. Are you walking in discipleship? Are you pursuing change in your life? Are you looking down and asking, do I have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in my life? And what do I need to work on? What do I need the wonderful counselor to come into my life and change about me? Are we pursuing it? Are we pursuing the call that Jesus gives us here to change? In other words, he's saying,

I want to take you from apathy to joy. I want to take you from purposelessness to enormous purpose in your life. So full of meaning, I've appointed you for this. So that's what Jesus does here. Now, I heard this illustration from somebody else recently. How do you get up an escalator that's going down? All of you, if you've been, and if you live in Edinburgh, you've probably been to St. James' Quarter, the mall, and you know, they have very nice escalators and lifts. I don't know if you've gotten to ride the lifts at St. James' Quarter, but they're phenomenal. And the escalators are quite nice as well. And how do you get up an escalator that's going down? You've been there. You've seen the 14-year-olds that run up the escalators that are going down. Who among us has not been that person? You know, at one time in life that wanted to sprint up the down escalator. How do you get up it? Well, the only way you can get up it is if you run, if you really push for it. If you stand still, if you stand still, you will do nothing but go down. And in the same way, if you were here last week, if you're not identifying the idols in your life and pulling up those weeds of idolatry,

they would just continue to grow and grow. The only way to grow as a disciple of Jesus is to realize you're called to grow.

Otherwise, you'll always be moving down into vice, not up into virtue, down into boredom, not up into joy and love. When Jesus says, I've got to give you my disciples, I've got to give you a command that says, actively pursue me, abide in my love, seek my face, seek to obey my commandments. Obedience is a big deal. It's a real calling. You don't get in by obedience, but boy, once you've experienced the gospel of Jesus, he says, now it's time to change. It's time to grow. It's time to become like me. Otherwise, you're going down the escalator towards purposelessness. You're going down towards boredom. And so one of the vital things to say, I think, is that that means for all of us Christians today in the room, it's the little moments of life that are so important. The little moments are the moments where we're bored. The little moments are the moments where we seek that stimulation to pull the phone out and doom scroll for 45 minutes, for 90 minutes, and you don't know where your time is going.

It's those little moments that are most vital for our change, for our character building, for becoming like Jesus more and more. I love the way Jesus puts it in this passage. He says, pray. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5 says, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, be grateful in all circumstances. In other words, he's saying in the little moments, there's no time for boredom if we're pursuing, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, be grateful in all circumstances. In other words, he's saying you've got to seek joy, reinvigorate your life with wonder in the little moments, in the moments where we're so tempted just to look at our phones all the time. He's saying, in other words, boredom is despising the weight of the small moment. It's not willing to see how important it is for our Christian growth. The scholars on boredom, they talk about how in the 19th century, boredom really came to the fore. It became a real thing in a way that you don't see as often in the pre-modern world. Then of course, in the 20th century, it got worse. Then in the 21st century, we've reached peak boredom. They talk about how pre-modern people had far more downtime than we do today. We're much busier than pre-modern people were. Pre-modern people did their work, their physical labor, but quite often they had huge moments of the day, long moments of the day where there was a lot of leisure, a lot of moments just to sit around, but they were not bored.

Instead, a pre-modern person could look up at the sun and the moon and the stars, and they would write songs about it. They would look up at the sun in a moment where they were finished with their work and write poetry and think, I can't believe I exist. We modern people, boy, we're more like Pumba. You remember what Pumba said about the sun, moon, and stars?

[19:54] You know, Timon said, Pumba, this is the Lion King if you don't know. You should know, but if you don't, the Lion King, he said, Timon said, what do you suppose those stars are? And Pumba said, I've always thought of them as big burning balls of gas millions and billions of miles away.

And now we know that they are, and we say, you know, I'm bored by that. I look up at the sun moon and the stars, I just don't care. We already figured that out. Science has already gotten there. We don't operate in the little moments with wonder. And so we like joy in our lives.

Have you ever said, look, have you ever said it maybe more practically? Like me, have you ever said, you know, if I could get my schedule, if I could take this off of my schedule, I would, I would pray more. And the truth is, no, we wouldn't, we don't. Why? Because it's not an issue of schedule. It's an addiction to entertainment simulation. It's the fact that, that we don't see the call in our lives that says, you've got such big purpose of Biden me.

Take up the responsibility to seize joy, move from impatience to patience, love people, commit. We trade the big purposes for small entertainment simulations. That's the real issue.

At the heart of boredom. So let's move on. But let me say that this could be the most important couple of sentences paragraph I think C.S. Lewis ever wrote. He writes this, good and evil both increase in our lives at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. And apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger or impatience today is the loss of a ridge, a railway, a bridgehead from which now the enemy may launch an attack that would have otherwise been impossible. Don't despise the little moments when you touch your phone every day, trade it with prayer, with wonder, with taking up joy, with thanking God that you exist. That's the call to abide in me. Lastly, the second thing Jesus gives us here. And finally,

[ 22 : 33 ] Jesus says, we don't have time for boredom in our lives as Christians because we've been offered friendship with God. Boredom in other words is a rejection of the highest joy that we've been offered, which is to be friends with the living God. So Jesus here says greater love in verse 13 has nobody than this than to lay down one's life for a friend. And then he turns and says, and today his hour had come. He was about to go to the cross and he says, today, tonight, I no longer simply call you my servants. Tonight, you are also my friends. Jesus said in that moment that the greatest thing that we can ever get in this life, the greatest purpose we can have, the biggest meaning is to be friends with God. It's the thing that's deep down in the bottom of our souls that we want so much as friendship with the living God. What is friendship? Jesus says, I don't just call you servant and we are the servants of God, but he says, because I'm going to go to the cross for you tonight, I'm going to offer you a shoulder to shoulder relationship.

And a friendship is where you stand shoulder to shoulder with somebody, walking with them in partnership, knowing them, seeking the same things. And Jesus says, I want to walk. I don't, I just, I don't just want you to bow down and worship me. I want to walk. I also want to walk shoulder to shoulder with you. He's talking here about a depth of relationship. One that is a sound, one that is scandalous, one that is hard to imagine that you friend, the incarnation, Advent means today you can be friends with the living God. That's what's on offer for you.

Now, you'll be able to fight boredom in this life by instead of turning to the stimulations that we all are addicted to constantly to say, you know, the biggest meaning I have in life is friendship with God. I want to adore God. I want to know more of Jesus. I want to seek a deep relationship. So, um, Zephaniah chapter three verse 17 in the Old Testament, God gives this prophecy about the Advent, about the coming of the Messiah. And this is what he says. The Lord your God is with you, the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you and his love. He will no longer rebuke you. He will rejoice over you with singing. In this moment when Jesus says tonight, when I go to the tomorrow, I'm about to go to the cross. And that means that I'm going to, I'm going to make a friendship with you. I'm going to offer you friendship. The, the incarnation, the Son of God, the maker of heaven and earth has become dependent. He became a little bitty baby because he wants to be close to you. He nursed, you know, the Son of God, the creator of the universe came and nursed like a, as a little baby does, he, he became so helpless, so dependent because he said, I want to be friends with you. And that means that Zephaniah three 17 when God says, don't you know that I delight over you? I take joy in you. I sing over you. What does it mean? It means that when Jesus

Christ went to the cross, he was pronouncing that he is not bored of you. You know, have you ever heard the experience to say, you're in a group of friends, maybe this has happened in St. Columbus after worship and you're talking and you realize all of a sudden kind of everybody has drifted away from listening to what you were saying. It's never happened to me. It happens to me all the time, actually. I don't know. And you realize, you know what? I am boring. The cross of Jesus Christ says, God says, I sing over you. You are never boring to me. The incarnation says, I want friendship with you so badly. God says that I will go to the greatest of lengths to enter into your darkness to make friends with you. How can we be bored? We have friendship with the living God on offer today.

[ 26 : 42 ] If you are always finding that you are bored, maybe today you need to see that there's such a grand purpose that's being offered to you in Christmas season and it is friendship with the living God. Let me close with this. I know that we all come to church and sometimes we're bored at church. There's no secret there, right? And we're sometimes bored even more broadly than the experience of the local church worship. We're bored with Jesus. We're bored with the gospel. We're bored with the Bible. We're bored with the things of God. Dorothy Sayers, she wrote so well on this. She says, the people who hanged Jesus Christ never to do them justice accused him of being boring. On the contrary, they fought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have efficiently paired the claws of the lion and Judah. We've certified him meek and mild and we've recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale priests. Sometimes I think people come here on a Sunday.

Maybe this is you today and you're not a Christian. You're curious. You're skeptic. You're looking and you come here and you check it out and I've heard from others before you walk away and say, you know, I enjoyed it. Thanks for having me. This is not for me. Traditional religion is not for me.

And the same issue that's at the heart of that, I think is the one we experience as Christians when we come and we say, I'm just bored with Jesus, bored with worship. What's going on there? You need a person might come here and say, I just, I'm just not sure that traditional religion is going to be able to meet my needs. Is it going to be able to give me the emotions that I'm looking for? The therapy. We come and say I'm bored as a Christian on board with worship on board with this space on board with Jesus on board with the gospel because we're coming to look for stimulants.

We're coming for all the fields. You know, you can, you can have the greatest, the greatest lyric ever written in him in world history, the most beautiful lyric, the most important weighty lyric, but we pass right by it because we didn't like the tune. We don't feel it. And feeling is important. Emotion is important. It really is. But here's, here's, here's what's underneath both those experiences. It's this. I think I didn't come to the space today to say, I am a rebel.

I'm a rebel to the living God walking against his will and woe is me. A man of unclean lips. And if it was not for God's mercy right now in this moment, I wouldn't be breathing.

[ 29 : 40 ] I come here not to first say, I need to get all the feels. I come here first to say, I'm here to bow the knee to say that this is God's world and he's gifted me. He's offered me friendship to not look for stimulants, but to look for God himself, to adore God, to see God. Truly the final thing here in verse 13 and 14, Jesus says, the son of God came. He said, I have come to lay down my life.

I've come to go to the cross for you. I've come to enter into your darkness in order to make friends with you. And he's saying that to all these guys who are about to betray him, who are about to turn their backs on him. He's saying to people who would betray him moments later, it's you that I've come to make friends with. And I will become friends with you by and through your betrayal, through you putting me on the cross. It's something like this. It's like the experience that you may have had if you go to watch an indie film. Have you ever done that? You go to the cinema to see an indie film. It's the kind of film that has a con film festival logo on the opening screen with the two leaves, you know. And you go to the indie film because you say, I'm going to be a sophisticated person. No more Avengers for me. You know, I go to all the blockbusters, but now

I'm going, I'm a city, you know, I'm in Edinburgh, this great city of learning. I'm going to go watch independent films. And you go and you watch and you try your best, you know. But you're so bored. And you're sad. And you're depressed. Because the beginning of the indie film is sad and the middle is sad and the ending is sad. And they say it's realistic and it won all the awards for that reason. But the whole time you're there, you think, I just want to be at Indiana Jones.

I just want to be watching the Avengers Endgame. You know, I just want the Lion King. Why? Why is it? Why do people, why can the, why will the masses never go to those movies? And the critics will say it's because they're derivative. And they are derivative. But why? Because there is one story at the center of all of human existence that we desperately want to be true. And that's that there is a hero, a friend, one who would come, mighty God, wonderful counselor, Prince of Peace, and enter into the darkness and stand next to you and say, you will betray me and I will rescue you anyway. We want a hero. We want somebody who would come and fight the ultimate darkness, be defeated by it, and yet rise up an ultimate victory. Every blockbuster, every great story comes back to that story. Why? Because as C.S. Lewis borrowed from Dorothy Sayers, Jesus Christ's gospel is the myth that became a fact. There's nothing boring about it. It is why every great movie centers its plot on a hero like that. Ultimate self-sacrifice, giving themselves to the darkness to win.

And when you know that, when you've taken that up, when you know that friendship with God is on offer in that story, you can take your boredom this week and pray in that moment and say, Lord Jesus, replace my deep desire to touch my phone right now with affection for you, with friendship with you. Let's pray. Father, we ask that you would teach us what it means to be your friend, and we thank you so much, Lord Jesus, that you've come and made us friends with you. And so today, forgive us for our purposelessness, our apathy, our lack of commitment, our unwillingness to take up responsibility and replace it, Lord, with joy. Do it by the power of the gospel, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.