

# Why are we so anxious and bored? How can the Bible and the church help?

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, well, I just want to think with you tonight, today, this afternoon, about two of the most common issues that I see as a minister, as a pastor in the local church and in the churches I've been a part of, and that's anxiety and boredom.

So, anxiety is something that's really commonly talked about and treated. So, Jonathan Haidt's recent book, *The Anxious Generation*, has made anxiety and the statistical sociological analysis around it really prominent, really well known.

So, boredom is not very often talked about, so we'll get to think about these and how they relate. I think they do relate. I think they're closely intertwined, and it's quite a nuanced picture. So, what are they? Why are they? Why do we struggle with them? And how can the church help? So, that's the three things I want to look at with you.

And Steve has already talked about the complexity of questions surrounding mental health. What is a mental illness? What is a mental health struggle? And I was reading Steve's book, and one of the things he talked about was when somebody's walking through the pain of a mental health crisis, one of the questions we can ask people is, what do you think the causes may be? And he points out in his book how complex it is. So, a theological anthropology, a biblical anthropology, a way of understanding humanity tells us how complex these issues can be, right?

So, he points out biology, environment, historical circumstances, the spiritual reality and spiritual struggle, spiritual warfare even can be a possibility. And we have a very complex anthropology. Proverbs 14:30 is one of the many places in the Bible where there's a real depth of psychology, long before 20th century psychology ever developed.

[ 1 : 38 ] It says, a tranquil heart is life to the body, but envy makes the bones rot. A peaceful heart brings life even to the physical body, but envy can make your bones rot, right?

So, your soul and your body are so interconnected that you are such a psychosomatic whole, as we say, an embodied self, that these things are very complex. And so, it's nearly impossible for me to define anxiety in any final way, obviously, as Steve was just helpfully pointing out, or boredom, or even understand why in any final way.

So, case by case is so important, right? But let me break those two rules and disclaimers and try for a minute, okay? So, let's dig in. What is anxiety first? One of the ways I think we can get into this is to say, you know you're anxious when... and then answer the rest of that sentence.

You know you're anxious when... and there's a thousand answers, at least, that could be given to that. You know you're anxious when you're checking your vital signs throughout the day? You know you're anxious when you wake up and the first thoughts that come to your mind are the fret of fearfulness, right?

What am I afraid of? And just immediately latching on to that. You know you're anxious when you struggle to go anywhere except the one or two places you feel like are safe, agoraphobia, we call that.

[ 2 : 57 ] You know you're anxious when you've got heart palpitations connected with fear, stomach flutters, sometimes misdiagnosed as heart attack, right? Acid reflux.

In any quiet moment, you know you're anxious when there's threat rumination, as the psychologists talk about. Threat rumination is the natural tendency of the mind. So, if there's a quiet space, you go to thinking about threats that are coming into your life.

So, the DSM-5 that Steve mentioned says this about anxiety. Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threats.

So, when you have a real threat, right in the moment, you're afraid. And that is good fear. You need that fear. It helps you. It keeps you alive, right? So, if you are crossing George IV in a little while for lunch, and you did not wait for the green man, which you're supposed to do, right?

And the bus is coming faster than you expected. You've got exactly what the DSM-5 is talking about. Imminent, perceived, real threat. You better scoot, right? You better get across.

[ 4 : 03 ] You need that. It triggers your autonomic nervous system. Your adrenaline fires. It keeps you safe. And then it goes on to say, anxiety is anticipation of a future threat.

Anticipation of a future threat. Now, if that was all the DSM said about it, that would not be sufficient. But it does go on and give us lots of detail. But the reason for that is because that little definition, anxiety, anticipation of future threat or fear that's considering ruminating on future threat, that is a good definition for what we might call stress, worry, what we could call conventional anxiety, low-level common anxiety.

Let me give you an example. If you...it's exam season at the universities right now. Many of you will know that probably. And if you're a student and you're walking into an exam, you've got an exam the next morning, and you did not study, you did not revise, and this exam is going to determine your college, your university graduation, you're anxious.

And that makes sense. You should be. You didn't study, right? That is conventional anxiety. It's stress. There is a perceived future threat that's obvious and real, and you're not misinterpreting it. It's obvious why you're anxious. Or if you're a parent and you're putting your child, your teenager, into the car for the first time for them to head out and drive by themselves the very first time, and the whole time you are struggling with fear about their life and their limbs, right?

[ 5 : 42 ] And that is conventional anxiety. It's stress. It's worry. It makes sense. In some sense, it's righteous. You should be. There's no reason why you wouldn't be stressed or concerned. You can rest.

You can have peace. You can have joy. But there's appropriate stress, conventional anxiety in that. Anxiety beyond that, chronic anxiety, the state of fearfulness that doesn't go away.

Anxiety that extends beyond the conventional is a big spectrum, and it's something a little bit different. And that's when you anticipate future threats and misinterpret quite often exactly what they are and if they are coming, right?

You may think that they are definitely coming when, in all likelihood, you're simply playing the prophet, right? It's very well the case that it's probably not going to be the case that the way you have catastrophized is going to come to pass.

That's the difference. And so, let me give you a definition. This is my own definition, but it's construed around other people's thoughts, from other people's thoughts. Anxiety is an emotion of fear and a state of fearfulness where we use the capacity of the human imagination to construe hypothetical circumstances of loss, which then manifest in our souls and our bodies as angst and illness.

[ 7 : 04 ] Okay, so I know that's a lot. Mouthful. I'll unpack it for just a second. Chronic anxiety or anxiety that's beyond conventional anxiety is when we use the imagination.

We have the possibility of imagining the future. We use the imagination to construe various forms of hypothetical losses. We play the prophet, imagining all the losses that could be possible.

So, we call that, the psychologists call that threat rumination. And the difference in perhaps oftentimes chronic anxiety and conventional anxiety is in chronic anxiety, we tend to go in the direction of misconstruing or misinterpreting those threats and taking them at their very worst. And it snowballs and it's a cycle and it gets worse and worse over time. So, fearfulness becomes a state of being. And it's very hard to break out of. So, if you go read 20th century psychology on this, there were a lot of German thinkers involved in developing ideas around anxiety in the 20th century. And they latched on to a German term called *Geworfenheit*. All right? So, if you don't take anything else away today, just take this German word, *Geworfenheit*, just because it's fun to say.

[ 8 : 20 ] *Geworfenheit*, it's really hard to translate to English, but it means something like being thrown into it. So, it's this state of being thrown into the bent and the broken world we exist in.

And so, it doesn't translate to English, so what they often do is translate it to the word *angst* in English. And so, anxiety is this state of *angst*. And it triggers biological mechanisms, just like immediate fear, crossing the street and almost getting hit by the bus.

But your body doesn't calm down because your soul won't calm down. And so, it tends to create various types of illnesses and physical ramifications, right? And so, oftentimes, one of the very first things you know about your anxiety is sweaty palms and the stomach flutter and the acid reflux, right?

And it's because the same things are happening in different types of fear. It's just that this one won't go away. The threat ruminations will not stop. So, the existentialist philosophers building off of 20th century psychology, people like Martin Heidegger, even further back, Soren Kierkegaard, they will talk about the fact that this type of anxiety, in a meta-analysis, we might say, is a result of *gavorfenheit* or being thrown into a death condition.

In other words, to put it more simply, reading the reality that we're all going to die backwards into every moment of life. And fearing the little deaths that will take place that feel like enormous deaths to us.

[ 9 : 53 ] So, we fear the death of the loss of relationship. We fear the death of love, of being loved, of being valued. We fear the death of control. We fear the death of power, losing power in some way.

We fear the death of ultimately being known for who we really are and at the same time valued, loved, right? And these are moments of experiencing ultimate death back into the little moments of life.

And that's what they call *gavorfenheit* or anxiety. Now, put that away for a second. What is boredom? So, this is one we don't talk about as often. And I think there are three, at least, there's a spectrum of boredom as well, just like anxiety.

And I think there are at least three different forms of boredom that I've noticed. The first I would call original boredom, classic boredom, good old boredom, old-fashioned boredom.

Old-fashioned boredom is to say, I don't have anything to do right now. My day is relatively empty. I've completed my tasks. And I feel a bit taskless. So, there's a dullness in original boredom, classic boredom.

[ 10 : 59 ] One German philosopher from the 18th century named Arthur Schopenhauer, he says that all humans are doomed to vacillate between the two extremities of anxiety and boredom, back and forth.

Right? So, that's quite a negative sentence, but it actually says something very positive. And it's this, that classic boredom is a good thing. Classic boredom is when you don't have anything to do and you're not experiencing anxiety.

So, when you're experiencing chronic anxiety, you're never really bored. You never experience this type of good boredom because you're always in the moments of the quiet, immediately threat ruminating.

Right? But you know you're in good boredom when you're daydreaming. You know you're in good boredom when you don't have a lot to do on the schedule and you see the time pass and you think, I don't really know what I did today. That's good boredom. That's the kind of boredom you want.

And so, sometimes some of the psychologists I've listened to will say that when a person is daydreaming throughout their day, they're taking steps towards healing from chronic anxiety.

[ 12 : 02 ] They're experiencing good boredom. Original boredom is so good because original boredom, classic boredom, is the type of boredom that inspires creativity. Great inventors make the best things in the spaces where they're the most bored.

Right? And so, we need this kind of boredom, creative boredom, the boredom that looks for a way out, explores. One way to say it is like this. A pre-modern person got bored, old school boredom, and they looked out at the sun and the moon and the stars.

They looked out at Arthur's seat. They sat in the meadows. And what did they do? They wrote poetry. The modern person experiences the slightest tinge of boredom. And what do we do?

We take a picture of it. And we post it on Instagram to curate our identities. Right? So, old school boredom is very rare, actually, for us. And it's a thing we need to recover.

Second type of boredom to get to the worst forms. The second type of boredom is also old school. It's something people have experienced for all the centuries, and it's the boredom of apathy. And apathy, there's some patristic monks, early churchmen monks who wrote books about apathy.

[ 13 : 12 ] They called it the noonday demon. And the noonday demon is what? It's that time period from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. You know? It's the fact that whoever, you know, you get the afternoon slot, right, of speaking today.

And it's always the hard slot because of the noonday demon. Right? See, that's what they called it. And it's a type of boredom. One writer says it's a desire for desire.

It's when you think, boy, I wish I wanted anything right now. But all I want is nothing. I don't want to do anything. I don't want to be anything. I don't want to be anywhere. It's the noonday demon.

All I want is to sit around and not do my work. Right? So, when we're struggling with apathy, the Bible has a term for that sloth. The Proverbs talk about that as slothfulness or laziness.

And there's a downness of the soul in that in those moments. So, I appreciated one writer describing this type of boredom. It's quite an extreme definition, I think, but it's helpful.

[14:14] He says, boredom, apathy, is disgust for the now because of an indifference to God, to other people, and to the work God has given me today.

And so, it's a real joy killer, a disgust for the moment and the work that God has given me to do in this very moment. So, the connection begins to develop here between boredom and anxiety because in this type of boredom, it's a playground, I think, for anxiety to flourish.

This is where anxiety really can rise. So, Dorothy Sayers, the wonderful fiction writer in the 20th century, she says, This 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.

Because this is a place where there is no desire, no desire for good, no desire for anything but to do nothing and be nothing, the gap that exists in the mind in these moments often will, for a person who wrestles with anxiety, will be filled by anxiety rumination or threat rumination in these moments. In boredom, in this type of boredom, there's a loss of meaning even. And so, we can struggle with even a fear of meaninglessness in these moments. It can create anxiety.

[15:37] It's an anxiety producer in these instances. Now, I assume this being a mental health in the church conference that everybody did the pre-conference homework, which was to watch Inside Out 1 and 2, which would have been a very natural thing to do.

Inside Out 2 does this so well, shows this relationship between boredom and anxiety. So, Riley is the main character. And in Inside Out 2, she's an early teen.

And the two new emotions that Inside Out 2 gives Riley are anxiety and ennui. Ennui is the French term for boredom. And the character's name is ennui.

And he's this tall French guy who lays across a Freudian therapy couch, you know, the whole movie, looking at his phone.

And some of the reviewers describe ennui. He's disgusted with commitment, dispassionately staring at the phone all day. So, boredom, this type of boredom is a teenager's masterpiece, right?

[16:42] Teenagers are the great artists at this. It's a great work of art. But at the same time, in the movie, you see that underneath it, Riley is incredibly anxious and insecure about her identity, about who she is, about what everybody thinks about her.

She's really struggling with this chronic anxiety that's developing in her. And ennui hides it by sitting on the couch and dispassionately staring at the phone all day.

You know, the eye roll, the sigh, being annoyed with everybody, with everything they say, right?

This is how it sometimes can express itself. Now, there's a third type and final type, and I'll move on. And that's what I would call modern or contemporary boredom.

And it's different, a little bit different than both of these. Boredom, in this instance, contemporary boredom, I think it's a boredom that we've largely invented in our century, is not necessarily laziness.

It's not necessarily a do-nothingness. It's not necessarily apathy. Instead, modern boredom, contemporary boredom, is frenzied, busy activity that is always avoiding what matters most.

[17:51] So, contemporary boredom is that most of us don't often find ourselves with nothing to do. Instead, we find ourselves in frenzied busyness and not knowing exactly why we're doing what we're doing.

Right? So, the most classic example of this is that anytime there could be an opportunity for good boredom, we pull out our phone and doom scroll. Right? That's modern boredom.

It's frenzied activity. It's being filled up all the time with images and content. Right? Or we can't do anything in the house without having our AirPods in. Or we can't walk anywhere without listening to something and filling up the time with as much content as possible.

I'm just describing myself here. So, contemporary boredom is busyness that drowns out meaning. And Sam Storms, a pastor in the States, he writes about this.

He says, One of the most serious threats to the human spirit is busy boredom. Boredom is the breeding ground for wickedness. He's talking there about apathy or laziness.

[ 18 : 52 ] Bored people are easy targets of the flesh and the devil. It's like putting a bullseye on your chest with the sign, tempt me, I'm easy. Why? Because boredom is contrary, and this is what I want to latch on to, to the natural God-given impulse for fascination, excitement, pleasure, exhilaration, and wonder.

So, good boredom breeds excitement, exhilaration, wonder, curiosity, creativity. But the boredom that we wrestle with is the total opposite of that. It's frenzied activity, never allowing space for meaning, contemplation.

I'm busy, but I don't know why. So, you can even think about this with somebody who's in a job that they really struggle with, and they're going every day, week in and week out, and really struggling, and it's creating all sorts of other mental health struggles in their life.

And it's this type of contemporary boredom. I'm doing this every day, and I do not know why. I'm always busy, but I don't feel like I have meaning. All right, now, secondly, and much more briefly, Steve was very helpful telling us about the development and the rise of diagnoses and just the more commonplace, lower-level issues in mental health that we know are constantly growing and growing.

By my study, that's been happening since the 1950s in the U.K. So, not recently, but it's increased recently even more rapidly, but it has been a steady increase decade by decade in mental health issues, struggles, and diagnoses since the 1950s.

[ 20 : 23 ] Why? So, I want to broaden out a little bit and ask a few other why questions just very quickly. Is it because of the experience of public crises that we're more anxious than ever?

And so, the answer is definitely yes. We saw the graph on how COVID's influenced us in terms of mental health, right? W.H. Auden, who coined the very famous phrase, the age of anxiety, he wrote a book in 1947, won the Pulitzer Prize.

It was titled *The Age of Anxiety*, and it's an epic novella of sorts. And in it, he talks about how, really, anxiety is often increased in the ages of tumult, of disaster, right?

And we've had that, COVID-19, and things like that. But at the same time, at the same time, humans have faced far worse in different generations throughout world history and never been as anxious as we are.

So, it's a symptom, but it can't be the reason. And secondly, media and social media is another one that people will talk about quite often. So, when we think about media, one of the issues that writers will latch on to is the 24-hour news cycle.

[ 21 : 36 ] And ever since that has come into existence, our mental health struggles have gone up and up, and that's very true. And we think about what the 24-hour news cycle does to us.

We read about chemical attacks in X country, the murder rate in Y country, the drug death rate in Z country. And there's a real truth. I think this follows on from biblical logic that we are made to be limited, local people.

And so, the globalism that we experience all the time puts a weight upon our shoulders that most of us cannot bear, right? And so, we're thinking all the time about these things. One friend of mine in London, a pastor in London, Steve Hayhow, he says, because of the 24-hour news cycle, we have concern for the whole world, which produces vague concern with vague notions of justice.

And it means that we want to save the world, but we can't. We can do nothing about it. And at the same time, it creates a culture where we don't want to deal with the problems that are closest to us. Social media, obviously, a huge issue.

And social media, the rise of social media, Jonathan Haidt's recent book is so helpful. We live life through trying to compare with others for an authenticated identity. So, all of our moments are typically filtered through self-curation of identity.

[ 22 : 52 ] And so, we don't have opportunities for great boredom, for contemplation, for meditation because of social media. And it creates a purposeless existence at times, a hustle and bustle, a rat race to say, who am I?

And it's related to competing with everybody else around us through imaging. So, this is an obvious source of contemporary boredom, the type of boredom I was describing earlier. But anxiety was on

the rise long before social media ever came into existence.

And so, it certainly exacerbated the problem, but it can only be called a symptom and an exacerbation, not the real issue. And so, here, let me give you two reasons, I think, in the modern world why we are more anxious and more bored in bad ways than ever before in world history. The first is the loss of creation, as I would call it. What's the loss of creation? The loss of creation is ever since post-enlightenment secularism arose in our culture, the world is no longer creation but mere nature.

Ever since secularism arose, we don't have a maker and a destiny. We have an origin and a hypothesis as a culture. And that means that in the pre-modern world, as pre-modern people, we were people who had a creator, a maker, and a destiny, a purpose that grounded our feet throughout the whole of our lives.

[ 24 : 20 ] And now, we've lost that. We've lost creation. We simply have an origin and a hypothesis. And so, boredom. Boredom is not necessarily a lack of stuff to do, but it's frenzied activity in a state of purposelessness.

So, most people in our culture, without religion, without creation, without a maker, without a destiny, without a purpose, they don't have the ground beneath their feet. Frenzied activity all the time, but a lack of connectivity to meaning and purpose, right?

Or anxiety. Anxiety is the fear that arises most commonly in a context where I'm being told, I have to curate my own identity. My meaning is something that has to be determined by my successes or my failures.

And that's the condition for really creating an increase in anxiety struggles. Now, that leads me lastly, most importantly, and we could summarize what I think that the biggest issue may be, the meta issue, and the increase in our anxiety and boredom.

With this anxiety and modern boredom is caused, I think, by the turn to the self. Anxiety has always been with us, right? Boredom has always been with us. These mental health issues have always been with us.

[ 25 : 33 ] They're all across the Bible. But the scholars will talk about the turn to the self as a key moment that's exacerbated these problems. So, Taylor Swift, one of the scholars, she, in her 2022 NYU commencement address, she said this, It's hard going out and trying to figure out who you are.

Good news, it's totally up to you. Terrifying news, it's totally up to you. Now, Taylor, she really nailed the paralysis of being a modern person.

And the paralysis at play in modern anthropology is that we're asking the question, How do I understand the purpose of my life? And answering the question that what constitutes the good life is what I make of it.

So, this is basic existentialism. It's that we exist to make our own meaning. And this is a part of the turn inward from the Enlightenment era forward. It happened right out here on the Royal Mile. You can walk down the street and see the statues of David Hume and Adam Smith and other folks. And these are the real creators of this movement in the early days. Right? And so, we have a culture of inwardness.

[ 26 : 45 ] That who I am is dependent on what I achieve and how I display that to other people around me. Now, let me put the pieces together here. What is a meaningful life then in modernity, in the culture we live in?

It's a life of achievement, a life of success, a life of beauty, physical beauty, a life of financial security, a life of amazing Instagrammable experiences.

And that means that depends entirely on you. And if that's the case, you have maximal possibility in this culture for failure.

For not knowing who you are and for failing to ever actually achieve an identity that makes sense and helps you and helps other people see how great you are. And I think that's at the baseline of some of the struggle, the increase of our wrestling with anxiety and boredom.

Now, how can the church help finally? Steve helpfully, really helpfully brought out some of the ways that I was thinking about already. And I know he's probably going to do even more and probably far better in the next talk.

[ 27 : 47 ] But one is just to be simple and say that we need a lot of pastoral care. A lot of close, compassionate friendship.

A lot of commitment, a big commitment to being gentle guides with people. A lot of question asking and listening.

And maybe to underline it all, a commitment to the vision that this takes really, really slow change. So working your way out of chronic anxiety, working your way out of the conditions of the culture that have taught us that our identity and our meaning is coming entirely from within us.

It's something that's only fixed really by slow habits. So at the back, I've put these. These are St. Columba's Practicing the Christian Life, small habits that make a big change.

For 2025, we are producing these every year. And there are waking habits, everyday life habits, screen habits, meal habits, Sunday habits, and bedtime habits.

[ 28 : 51 ] And all of them are very simple. So there's no seven-day fasts or anything like that. But small practices like never touching your phone when you wake up in the morning before you've touched a Bible.

Or kneeling at your bedside for only two minutes when you wake up and go to bed to release the cares of the day before you sleep. Or to ask God for help in the midst of fearfulness when you wake.

Tiny little practices that, if practiced, tend to big changes over time. So Steve mentioned the second thing I was going to say, which is the big importance we have for meeting people exactly where they are and trying to understand where they are.

And help them understand, help us understand how slow of a road change can be quite often.

There's no magic pill. Healing is small lens. Small ball, as we say in the States.

He read from Psalm, he pointed Psalm 88. Psalm 39 is another passage where you've got these two Psalms that are both downers at the end. Darkness is my only friend.

[ 29 : 52 ] And I love just to build on what Steve said, what Derek Kidner says about it. He says the very presence of these prayers in Scripture is a witness to God's understanding. God knows how people speak when they are desperate.

God shows us to pray with desperation. Darkness is my only friend. And you might even be saying things to God that aren't true. But what matters most is you're saying them to God, saying them Godward.

I've always been helped by the realism of Charles Spurgeon, who's the great preacher, the great pastor of the 19th century in London. But Spurgeon struggled with depression and chronic anxiety for most of his life.

And he writes this in one sermon. And the mind can descend far lower than the body. For in it there are bottomless pits. The flesh can bear only a certain number of wounds and no more.

But the soul can bleed in 10,000 ways and die over and over and over again. And Spurgeon knew what that was like. He struggled with that throughout his whole life.

[ 30 : 53 ] And I think one of the biggest things we can do is say, I've got to walk with somebody quite often for the long haul. And seek very, very small practices and very, very small change over time.

Guide them in very gentle ways. Most importantly, and this is what I want to finish on. And this is to maybe take a step out and put a more biblical and theological hat on for just a moment as we finish.

I think the most important thing is to say that small habits with deep compassion and friendship, Christian friendship for the long time, is the thing that I've latched onto most as a pastor.

But what is the object? What is the target? What is the direction that these small habits are moving towards? And I want to end my time by saying the greatest antidote to anxiety, the greatest antidote to bad boredom, and many, many other mental health issues, is the beatific vision.

Now, you probably didn't come to a mental health talk thinking they're going to talk about the beatific vision today. Right? What is the beatific vision? The beatific vision is the reality that God made us to see Him.

[ 32 : 03 ] Right? And so, one of the most important things we can do, I think, in vocational ministry is know the object, the goal that we're seeking with people. And the big goal that we have to be seeking is the biblical model, the biblical goal that we were made to be ultimately fulfilled by seeing God.

And there's a big problem with that in the Bible. One of the passages that's really famous about this is Psalm 27. So, David prays and struggles with anxiety in Psalm 27.

And he talks about his fear. He says, if an army encamps against me, I might lose my life. Then he says in verse 10 in Psalm 27, my father and mother may even forsake me.

So, he's concerned there that even his parents would abandon him and nobody would love him. So, he's worried there and he says, one thing that I will do, one thing that I've asked for, that I could gaze upon the beauty of your face, O God, in the land of the living.

So, in the midst of this Psalm about anxiety, David's focus is to say, the only thing I know to pray today is, Lord, give me desire to long to stare at the beauty of your face in the land of the living, the land of the resurrected one day.

[ 33 : 17 ] So, he enters the temple and he prays that prayer. And three different times in that Psalm, that's what he mentions. I want to see your face. I want to see your face. I want to see your face. And in the Old Testament, we've got this big problem.

Exodus 33 is one of the many places where Moses and Israel want to see God's face. And God says, don't touch the mountain.

You touch the mountain, you're going to die. So, he said, you're made to see God's face. You're made to be in God's presence. You're made for Emmanuel, God with us. But you cannot come near to God.

The holiness of God, your sin, your struggle has separated you from his holy presence, right? But even in Psalm 27, David says, I know, the very ending of it is, I know I shall see your face in the land of the living.

And he has rest in that. And look, we know that David didn't know everything that was to come. But there must be a little bit of a moment when he says something like that, that he knows some way, somehow, about great David's greater son.

[ 34 : 21 ] He knows that somehow, some way, he will see the face of God. And the answer to David's problem, the answer to our great problems, is ultimately the incarnation in the gospel. That we shall see the face of God in the land of the living.

How? You shall look upon the face, the beauty of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So one of the most helpful things I've found with folks and for me personally, in my own struggles with some of these things, is to try to take maybe on day one, one minute, to sit in silence with some good boredom.

And think about God. And think about Jesus. And just say, Lord, I want to see your face. Change my desires. I want to want you more than I want to want anything else.

Please give me those wants. We can pray the prayer of St. Augustine, who said, I'm completely forgetting right now because I did that off the top of my head. Let me finish with this.

Sometimes when we come to these issues, we're anxious and bored, and it spirals because we forget what people who go to indie films often feel like.

[ 35 : 33 ] I don't know if you've ever gone down on Lothian Road and gone to watch any of the independent films at some of the cinemas there. But people, you say to yourself, I'm going to be a more sophisticated person.

And I'm going to put away Avengers, you know, and I'm done with that. I'm going to go watch indie films. And you go and you do it. You know, you go to the type of film that they show at the Cannes Film Festival.

And you start off and you're really trying, but you're bored at the beginning. And it's really sad. And it's sad in the middle, you know. And then it's sad at the very end.

And then you leave. And you think, boy, you tell people you went to an independent film and you really pretend like you liked it. But the whole time you're thinking, I just want Indiana Jones, you know.

I just want the Lion King. Why? Why? Why are blockbusters blockbusters? And it's because almost entirely in every blockbuster, there's an evil villain.

[ 36 : 39 ] And he's totally taken over the world. And there's the gravity of darkness and no hope. And then a hero comes, right? And the hero reverses an evil that no one thought could be reversed.

Read Lord of the Rings. And Tolkien called that the eucatastrophe. And the critics will come and say, that salvation story is so derivative. And that's why we need indie films. But the reason those are blockbusters is because we all know that that is the story that we want.

And it's the story that we're actually a part of. It's the meaning that can put the ground beneath our feet in the midst of our struggles, right? It can dismiss all purposelessness. It's the gospel. The

gospel is the ground of all great stories.

C.S. Lewis learned this from Dorothy Sayers when he said, the gospel is the myth that became a fact. It's the great story that became a fact, right?

We've got to take small, small, small habits of spirituality, healthy spirituality, and attach that to the meaning of seeing Jesus face to face. And say, Lord, every day just for 30 seconds, and then a minute, and then five, and then ten, and all other small habits, give me the desire to want you more than I want anything else in life.

[ 37 : 52 ] And I'll finish with this sentence. If what you desire most in this world can be lost, if what you want the most in this world can be lost, can be taken from you, you will always exist in a state of fearfulness.

But if what you want the most cannot be lost, if what you want the most cannot die, because he already did, and it didn't stop him, then you can exist in the state of death, in the conditions of death, in the world of loss, in hypothetical and very real losses, with a meaning and a purpose that will never leave you.

I hope that will never leave you. Because you know, I shall see the face of God in the land of the living. Let us pray. Father, we ask now that you would give us a great hope and renewed desire, desire to see Jesus.

And we know that, again, I'm so helped by what Steve said earlier, that that's not meant to be simplistic, God, but to be holistic. And so, would you take the desire to see the face of Jesus and help us see how it can fit in and help and renew the broken hearts that we all have in some way, every single day, small ways, Lord, until we see ultimately the great change, entry into the very vision itself.

And we pray that in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.