

**Get a Grip**  
***On Apathy***  
**November 15, 2020**

Wow, that is one depressing song isn't it?

In any case, good morning everyone. I'm glad you're with us whether you're onsite or online.

And the reason we put that song right before the message is that the emotion that I'm going to talk about today is very much related to a feeling of depression. We're going to talk about *apathy* – when you just don't care anymore.

Now, I don't know about you, but I have felt that way more than a few times over the past six months or so which is part of the reason why we're doing this series, *Get a Grip*: taking control of your emotions so they don't take control of you.

And by the way, I think I need to clarify something about that.

When I say "taking control of your emotions" I don't mean stuffing them down. I don't mean trying to shove them off in a corner somewhere ...

... because, as you've probably noticed, stuffed emotions don't stay stuffed. They always come out in some way at some time and usually in a way that is destructive to us and to others around us.

By getting a grip I mean consciously recognizing what you're feeling and then consciously choosing to direct those emotions in a healthy direction.

Give you an example:

- Restore ... not in offices for three months ... emotion was panic ... driven by panic ... in the end, it turned out that we really didn't need to do that >
- Yesterday, statement about covid 19 ... panic, it's Sunday what will we do?!!!

Anyway, I hope that's clear. By "getting a grip," we're not talking about stuffing or pretending or ignoring emotions. We're talking about recognizing and redirecting.

Of course, when you talk about *apathy*, that's a bit of an oxymoron because, by definition, when you're apathetic ...

- You don't care enough
- ... to recognize or redirect
- ... the feeling of apathy that you're feeling!

It's kind of like an endless feedback loop that amplifies with each iteration, which is why apathy is so dangerous.

In fact, as we'll see, apathy is probably the most dangerous of all emotions – even more dangerous than anger or fear which we talked about at the beginning of this series.

## About Apathy

There are three things you need to understand about apathy before we can really get into it.

First of all, apathy typically doesn't "just happen."

### **1. Most of the time it's a progression down the line from *fatigue* (which we talked about last week).**

Remember, fatigue is when you start saying to yourself and maybe even to others ...

- "I'm not sure how much more of this I can take. I'm just sick of this."
- "I'm not sure I can keep going. I just don't have the energy anymore."
- "I'm not sure it's worth the struggle and the pain. I'm not sure it matters that I keep on trying."

Apathy takes those thoughts to a conclusion and says ...

- I'm *not* taking any more of this. I'm done."
- "I'm *not* going to try and keep going. It's not *worth* the energy."
- It's not worth the struggle and the pain. It doesn't really matter."

### **2. When you're apathetic, you've mentally and emotionally given up and/or given in.**

And your despondency then leads to not caring.

That said, there *are* some things in life that are not worth the energy and don't really matter and we should be done with them. In fact, the sooner the better!

But I'm talking about things that, in our non-fatigued and non-stressed state, we know *do* matter and we know *are* worth it. Things like ...

- Taking care of ourselves physically: eating right, getting enough exercise and sleep
- Being involved with others
- Working on our relationships
- Dealing with conflict
- Investing time with our kids
- Cleaning the house
- Giving your best at work or at school
- Volunteering

If we're Christians ...

- Spending time with alone with God in prayer and Bible reading
- Going to church (whether online or in person)
- Reaching out to people around us who don't know Jesus like we do

And the list could go on and on.

But don't get the wrong impression.

### **3. Apathy doesn't always manifest as inactivity or laziness.**

Just because you're apathetic doesn't mean you're a slug.

An apathetic person can be very busy and hurried in searching for some sort of distraction with which

to fill the emptiness.

For instance ...

- We spend hours on social media yet we have a pile of books unread.
- We keep meaning to go outside or workout, but we don't because we're too busy watching Netflix.

So, question ...

- How apathetic are you these days?
- How often are you saying and acting like "I don't care" or "it doesn't matter" about things that *do* matter and about which you *do* care?"

And I don't ask that to make you feel guilty because almost everyone is feeling it at some level these days.

Recent studies on the effects of COVID-19 have discovered that many people are suffering from at least some form of mental health issues of which apathy is one (along with depression, anorexia, psychosis, and agitation).<sup>i</sup>

Then, on top of that, there is the growing apathy that almost everyone is feeling about coronavirus itself.<sup>ii</sup> We thought this would be over by now, or, at least, we were given hope by the slowing of the spread during the summer months.

But with the rapid increase in the rate of cases and hospitalizations in recent days, there's a growing sense of "this thing is never going to end. What's the use? Might as well stop trying."

## **Solution Side**

Of course, the purpose of this message isn't to overly fixate on the problem. The purpose is to get a grip on our apathy and control it so that it doesn't control us.

So how do we do that?

### **1. Admit there is a problem.**

And it might look different for you than it does for me.

For me, apathy is manifesting in not caring about what I eat. I've gained six pounds in the past two months.

I feel it physically and I don't *like* how it feels but, I just don't care right now. It's such a weird dynamic. And I know it's wrong.

This is exactly the kind of thing the Apostle Paul was talking about ...

**... when he wrote ...**

*I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. Romans 7:15 (NIV)*

Maybe you have the same manifestation of apathy as I do.

Or maybe you've become apathetic and uncaring about your marriage or your job. Maybe, if you're a Christian, you've become apathetic about your relationship with God.

Regardless of what it looks like and how it manifests, if we're going to get on the solution side, we have to admit we have a problem.

But we have to go beyond that. If we're going to get on the solution side, we also have to ...

## **2. Understand the true nature and danger of apathy.**

We've gotten so accustomed to apathy being a regular part of our lives and our culture that we trivialize it. We don't take it seriously which is ironic – we're apathetic about apathy.

**It kind of reminds me of this T-shirt. Maybe you've seen it.**



For those who are listening and can't see the picture, it says "Apathy is the world's fastest growing disease. But who cares?"

You can actually buy that on Amazon. But who cares?

But regardless of what we might think, apathy isn't trivial or even funny.

It's actually a very dangerous spiritual condition. Let me show you why.

The Apostle Paul – the guy who was the most responsible for the spread of Christianity to the western world and the reason you and I are part of this service today ...

The Apostle Paul in one of his letters, was trying to help followers of Jesus understand what it meant to be a follower of Jesus – how He was making their lives better and making them better at life.

And one point he was describing the difference between their new lives and their former life ...

**And he wrote this:**

*I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. Ephesians 4:17 (NIV)*

In other words, people who live without God think a certain way and live a certain way, but if you're a Christian, that's not for you. You're not to follow their pattern or example.

**And here's why:**

*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Ephesians 4:18 (NIV)*

And that's a pretty challenging train of thought to follow but if you put the thoughts in reverse order, it's more understandable.

Paul is saying that because their hearts are hard, they are ignorant of God and separated from God which is why they display a lack of moral understanding.

But how did they get that way? How did their hearts get hardened ... which lead to ignorance and separation from God?

**Check out what Paul says:**

*Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed. Ephesians 4:19 (NIV)*

Now, here's what's really interesting about that. The phrase that gets translated "lost all sensitivity" is actually just one word in the original Greek language.

It's *apalgeó* which means to cease to feel pain or grief – either your own or someone else's.

It's the point you reach when you say, "I've had enough. I can't take anymore. And I don't care anymore" which is why it can also be translated as *apathy*.

**... which is exactly how the Amplified translation renders this verse.**

*In their spiritual apathy (apalgeo) they have become callous and past feeling and reckless ... Ephesians 4:18 (AMP)*

In other words, because they don't care and they don't feel anything anymore ... because they are *apathetic*, Paul says, they are reckless with their lives and the lives of others.

Because of *apalgeo*, people give themselves over to all kinds of self-destructive indulgences.

And this is why apathy was originally included the list known as the "seven deadly sins."

**The way the list reads now is pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth.**

But *sloth* – which we think of as simply being lazy and unproductive ...

**... used to be *apathy* or, literally, *acedia* ...**

... which is an old Latin word which means apathy, particularly apathy towards God.

And that's unfortunate because apathy or *acedia* has a much deeper meaning than sloth.

Sloth is only one potential outcome of apathy because when you become apathetic – when you stop caring about your health or your job or your marriage or the world around you – you can also become reckless and prone to fall into all sorts of destructive activities.

Probably the best illustration of *that* outcome of apathy I've ever heard of is actually described in a song. I'm sure many of you have heard it.

The first verse sets the whole thing up:

I'm easy come, easy go,  
Little high, little low,  
Any way the wind blows  
Doesn't really matter to me.

And then it's ...

Mama, just killed a man  
Put a gun against his head  
Pulled my trigger, now he's dead  
Mama, life had just begun  
But now I've gone and thrown it all away

Followed by a very creative and entertaining musical story of how he is captured and tried and condemned to die.

**And then the concluding thought which sums it all up:**

Anyone can see,  
Nothing really matters to me.

There ya go. *Bohemian Rhapsody* in a sermon.

Should have had the band do that song.

Anyway, that's what apathy can do left unchecked.

Furthermore, and more importantly, when you and I give in to apathy, we risk becoming hard-hearted towards God.

"No, Rick, that's not true. I might not care about what's going on in the world, but I still love God. I still worship God. I'm still moved by being in God's presence."

Maybe so.

**But John the Apostle would question that.**

*If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?*

*1 John 4:20 (NLT)*

If we don't care about people and the things of this life – if we've become apathetic and hard-hearted towards them, we're foolish to think that attitude and that emotion won't also affect our relationship with God.

And we've talked about this so many times because Jesus talked about it so often. What's happens horizontally affects what happens vertically.



But let me take it one more step.

The great Catholic author, Dorothy Sayers once wrote:

*"Apathy is the sin that believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing and remains alive only because there is nothing it would die for."*

*We have known it far too well for many years. The only thing perhaps that we have not known about it is that it is a mortal sin.<sup>iii</sup>*

... meaning that it puts your soul in grave eternal danger.

Now, why is that?

It's not because apathy is such a bad and terrible sin that you and I deserve hell for it, so we'd better stop being apathetic!

No.

The reason apathy puts people in grave eternal danger is that apathy – when it controls us – keeps us from even *caring* about sin or hell. It keeps us from even thinking about God.

And so we recklessly ignore the salvation God offers to us in Jesus. We just go on our own way thinking, "who needs that. I'll worry about that another day" while we indulge ourselves in our latest distraction.

But another day might not come ... which is why Paul once wrote:

*Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6:2  
(NLT)*

Now, is the day to say "yes" to Jesus. Now, while you're listening and tuned in and not distracted. Now is the time to admit you have a much bigger problem than just apathy. You're a sinner in so many ways.

And you need Jesus. And you should turn to him and ask Him to be your savior, knowing that he will say "yes."

-----

So, the solution side of apathy ...

- First, admit you have a problem (and if you can't see it, I'm sure others around you can help you with that).
- Second, understand the true nature and danger of remaining apathetic towards what and who matters ...

The third thing is to ...

### **3. Change your focus.**

Stop looking at, thinking about, and ruminating over your immediate circumstances or your painful past.

Or at least, put them in context.

And what I mean by that – and I should say that I'm really speaking to Christians – to people who believe in and follow Jesus ... although, if you're not a Christian, you're certainly welcome to put it into practice, too.

But if you're a Christian your focus needs to change from your immediate circumstances or your painful past because, remember, apathy is downstream from fatigue. So you can't be overly focused on those things that have been hard or worn you out.

"So, what am I supposed to focus on instead, Rick? I suppose the answer is *God*, right?"

Yes, but it's more specific than that.

### **Writing to another group of believers, Paul says ...**

*Since you have been raised with Christ ...*

Since God made you alive spiritually when you believed in Jesus ...

*... set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*  
*Colossians 3:1 (NIV)*

We talked about that reality last week, how Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb of John's revelation (check

out last week's message if you missed it) ...

... how, after his resurrection, Jesus ascended to Heaven, and opened the scroll that started the beginning of the end – which is the fulfillment of God's promise to renew, restore and regenerate everything, including you and me and this whole sinful world.

**Paul says ...**

*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*                      *Colossians*  
*3:2 (NIV)*

Focus on the realities of what God has done, is doing and will do because of Jesus and not so much on what has happened to you or is happening to you.

**And here's why:**

*For you died, and your life – your REAL life – is now hidden with Christ in God.*  
*Colossians 3:3 (NIV)*

**And ...**

*When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*                      *Colossians 3:4 (NIV)*

What an amazing promise for those who believe in Jesus!

The life that you're experiencing right now is temporary. It's not going to last forever.

*That* life, your real life that's being held and hidden in Heaven for you right now, *is*. It's eternal. And you will experience that when Jesus returns.

And when that happens, all of these things that drive you from fatigue to apathy will seem to be "light and momentary afflictions" as Paul puts it elsewhere.

Friends, here's the deal: so much of your life and mine is controlled by what we think.

This is why seeing the big picture is so critical. This is why so much of the New Testament is about the big picture of eternity as opposed to the short-term of the here and now.

"But what about emotions, Rick? I thought they were controlling us?"

Only if you let them. Your emotions can be directed and managed by your rational thoughts.

That doesn't mean you won't feel them, but it means you will know how to speak truth to them.

- This is why it is so important – if you're a Christian – to be regularly showing up in person or online for church.
- It's why it's important for you to read the scripture – in particular, the New Testament – for yourself.

If you're going to focus on "things above" you need to know what those things are.

And you need to be reminded of them *regularly* and encouraged *regularly* to intentionally set your heart and mind in their direction.

Now, one other thing needs to be said about this because sometimes Christians think, "This is so great. And I am so looking forward to living that life in glory when Jesus returns" ...

... and they focus so much on *that* that they just sort of bide their time in *this* day. They're just "standing by" ... waiting ... looking forward to that blessed day ...

... which is good. Paul and Jesus both says we're supposed to look forward to His return.

But in the meantime ...

- But we're not *supposed* to be just biding time.
- We're not *supposed* to be standing by and waiting.
- We're not *supposed* to be ... what's the word? *apathetic* ... as if this life doesn't matter because it does and greatly.

In fact, to not know that and understand that would be intentionally choosing not to pay attention to what Jesus and the Apostles taught again and again.

And we could spend an hour on this if we had the time but, since we're kind of tuned into Paul today ...

**... here's how he once expressed it.**

*Let us not become weary in doing good ...*

Let's not think "grrrr, I'm so sick of this. It's not going to matter anyway because this life is not my real life."

Let's not become fatigued and jaded and then apathetic ...

*... for at the proper time ...*

... when God decides – and it might be in this life or the next ...

*... at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

*Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good ...  
Galatians 6:9-10 (NIV)*

If we're not apathetic about this life ... if we try to do good in this life in ways that bring glory to God and blessing to other people ... that's coming back to us, Paul says ...

... which is why part of changing your focus is to understand that what this life does to you isn't going to last, what you do in this life will.

Let me say that again: what this life does to you isn't going to last, but what you do in this life will.

-----

Ok, one more thing on the solution side. And this is so important.

In fact, you can try to incorporate the other three things on this list into your life but without this one, they won't stay nailed down.

If you want to control apathy instead of being controlled by it ... you must ...

#### **4. Root your life in the "reckless love" God has for you.**

Remember how we read that apathy – not caring about ourselves or anyone else or anything else – can lead us to be reckless?

Turns out that *love* can also do the same thing ... which is the point of what is probably Jesus' most famous teaching.

You know how it goes ...

*A man had two sons. One day, the younger of the two told his father, "I want my inheritance now before you die."*

The father gave it to him, he went off and, in his apathy – his not caring – he squandered everything in wild and reckless living.

Reality set in and he decided his best option was to come back home and beg for mercy from his father who, if he was like most Jewish fathers of that day, wouldn't even speak to him.

"I don't have a son," he would have said. "You're dead to me."

But that's not what happened.

Instead, to the shock of everyone, the father opened his arms, hugged and kissed his wayward son, and threw a huge party to celebrate his return.

Now, because most of us have heard this story many times, we think, "awwww, isn't that special? Someone should make that into a Hallmark Christmas movie."

... which I think they have. About 10 times.

Anyway, because we know the story so well, it's easy to overlook the scandalous and maybe even unwise nature of this father's response. So, let's change the scenario just a bit.<sup>iv</sup>

What if the father was a friend of yours whose son's drug habit had resulted in thousands of dollars in rehab bills, draining most of his parent's retirement savings?

Then, after dragging the family through years of pain and indebtedness, the son leaves rehab early, breaks into their house, steals his mother's jewelry, and disappears for two years. No one knows where he is. He's just gone.

Then one afternoon you get a call from your buddy and he begs you to come over that night for a party. *His son just showed up in the driveway* and he wants to celebrate the boy's return.

You'd be shocked, wouldn't you?

And you'd certainly have a few questions!

- You would want to know what had happened.

- You would want to know if the boy was sorry.
- You would want to know if he was back for good.
- You would want to know if he had really changed.

You would probably be tempted to suggest that your friend wait for a few weeks. "It feels too early for a party, don't you think?"

You might not say it out loud, but you'd probably be thinking *your friend is being reckless because of his affections for his wayward son.*

... which is exactly the point Jesus was making to the Pharisees; to the maintainers of the religious institution of His day.

He's saying to them "you guys think you're doing God's will by keeping your distance from sinners so you can remain pure and holy. But your thinking is upside-down because *you do not understand the nature of God*, so let me explain it to you:

- "The God you worship is like a crazy Jewish father who rewards his pork-eating son with a steak.
- "The God you worship is like a vulnerable mother or father who is willing to become a laughingstock to the community if it means getting their child back.
- "Your God is like an irrational parent who, instead of punishing a son who brings disgrace, elevates him to the high position of most-honored-guest.
- "Your God is like a foolish parent who asks no questions, even when they've been treated terribly.
- "Your God is a Heavenly Father who recklessly runs to, embraces and kisses the 'unclean' and 'sinful' for no other reason than *He loves them.*

Jesus' story is intended to *shock* the religious establishment: first, with the terrible and dishonorable behavior of a son who wishes his father dead but then, with the unmerited, unconditional, and unreasonable favor and wild acceptance he receives *just for showing up again.*

And the point is this: as bad of a sinner as you think this son was ... as unclean and unholy as you think tax collectors and other notorious sinners are, the love God the Father has for them is even greater.

And God – who of all beings has the right to say “I just don’t care anymore. I’m out” did not and does not say that. Instead, he stays in the game with us because of His love for us.

When you understand that and root yourself in it, it will begin to overflow from you to the people around you.

And it will be impossible for you to be apathetic; for you not to care about them and for you not to love them as God has loved you.

We talk about this so often, and I know I sound like a broken record, but it is a fundamental non-negotiable principle of the Christian faith.

You can only give away what you have already received and are receiving.

## **Conclusion**

So, if you want to control apathy instead of being controlled by it ... you must ...

- First, admit you have a problem (and if you can’t see it, I’m sure others around you can help you with that).
- Second, understand the true nature and danger of remaining apathetic towards what and who matters ...
- Third, change your focus. Stop being sucked down by your current circumstances or your painful past.
- Finally, root your life in the “reckless love” God has for you.

Endnotes



---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.qeios.com/read/4FLLU0>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/2020/06/09/another\\_viewpoint\\_newest\\_covid19\\_threat\\_apathy/](http://www.greenfieldreporter.com/2020/06/09/another_viewpoint_newest_covid19_threat_apathy/)

<sup>iii</sup> Quoted at <https://stream.org/the-sin-of-acedia-spiritual-apathy-in-the-age-of-aquarius/>

<sup>iv</sup> This scenario is from Andy Stanley, *The Grace of God* (p. 214). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.