



Addressing Apathy

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I want to talk about doubt. A specific kind of doubt that I have especially noticed in my generation. Now I won't be talking about simply doubting the existence of God, even though I know that this type of doubt exists so prominently amongst people. But after spending time and having conversations with people – mates from school, mates at work, mates at uni – I am actually surprised by the number of people who believe God exists. There are heaps of people in my generation that believe God exists. This isn't the doubt that I see in my generation.

There is a different type of doubt that I see a lot of people struggling with: a belief in God but doubting His *worth*. This *doubting of God's worth in our lives* is what I want to talk about today.

A Different Sort Of Doubt

I think it's obvious when I say that, as a 20 year old, my generation has had an extremely different upbringing compared to every generation before. We are constantly being stimulated, mostly by our phones, but also by the world events that are going on around us, natural disasters, international conflict, and activist movements. There has always been so much going on in the world, but now world news can be spread in seconds. And not only that. We have it all at our fingertips. We consume so much media that we struggle when we aren't receiving immediate stimulation. People don't think anymore, we have so much useless information spilling into our brains.

I don't know exactly how it was for generations above me, but in my generation, no one goes to church. In the entire cohort of even a Christian school, almost no one goes to church, and almost no one has a personal relationship with God. And it has become easier and easier to be distracted when there are these other things – real-world events or the endless scroll on your phone. Growing up in a world of stimulation – and exponential growth in that direction – there are too many other things to do, to fill your time, to fill your brain space. And so, whether people

believe God exists or not, they just don't *care*. The church isn't stimulating. A relationship with God isn't exciting.

I found this post on Reddit of someone talking about exactly this, and I think it sums it up well. It's titled 'I just don't care about Christianity anymore.'

'During COVID, my church shut down temporarily and all sermons were streamed on YouTube. I did not watch a single sermon and the world didn't end. I enjoyed being able to wake up Sunday morning and do whatever I wanted.

I'm tired of the theological debates. Christianity is such a confusing, unorganised mess of a religion that just doesn't make any sense. How on earth can I evangelise if I can't even explain? Then you have the debates if modern Israel should exist, and it gets even more confusing.

I'm tired of dealing with other Christians. They all sound like robots who said the same things over and over and treat church like a social club.

I see no power in prayer; every time I've done it all I have gotten was radio silence. It was as if I was talking to myself.'

This person got bored and got sick of it. It's not about *not believing*. It's about not *caring*, about doubting God's *worth*. Doubting the worth of keeping the Sabbath, doubting the worth of watching for Jesus' return, doubting the worth of God's word, doubting the worth of prayer. Doubt ... because life without this doesn't seem so bad. God doesn't seem worth it.

These are the thoughts of so many people. They can easily become the thoughts we have floating around our minds. Yes, some people simply doubt the existence of God, and there are debates and proofs and evidence in amongst all that discussion. But this is the doubt that is so much harder to address: doubting that a relationship with God actually *matters*.

Apathy

How do you deal with this doubt? Because if you don't care about working on your relationship with God, why would you care about working to overcome this doubt? And we can't deal with someone else's doubt. It is impossible to hand on a personal appreciation for God, to deal with their apathetic attitude.

Unfortunately, one of the only ways for so many people to deeply understand God's worth is by learning the hard way. Life splashes them in the face with ice-cold water, and then maybe they turn to God. Sadly, it has to come to that sometimes. It's the hardness of our hearts that keeps us on the wide road. The definition of a hard heart has always had connotations of stubbornness and rigidity. But I think that, today, a hard heart is an *apathetic* one. Israel was stubborn, but today, we just don't *care*. With so much else going on, God is the last thing on our minds.

I have a mate who I have spiritual chats with all the time. He believes in God, but he doesn't do anything about it. We were talking about it one time and I was pressing just a little bit. Eventually, we derived what he was feeling as being, *'I think being a Christian is a good thing, and I know I should be, but I just want to experience the world for now, without any obligation to anyone or anything.'* He has a fear of missing out on the experiences that this life has to offer. He believes in God but he doubts God's worth. And the thing is, often these people are fully aware that this is a decision of life or death, something amazing or nothing. And still, they just can't be bothered.

And I don't know what to do about it. What can you do about it?

Now of course, just because we have overcome this doubt in the past does not mean that we are free from it. I think there are plenty of causes for an apathetic attitude toward our faith, and there are different causes for different people. For some, it could be because there are too many theological debates, and for others, it could be that there are not enough. Maybe it's because going to church is too monotonous, maybe it's because it's too inconsistent. And maybe, it is because we just can't be bothered.

I'll be the first to say that, over covid, I got lazy with my faith. I struggled to see the worth of attending the meeting online just like the person who made that Reddit post. I wasn't getting much out of it, and I was finding it easier to miss. And because I was spending less time talking about God, I spent less time thinking about Him. I drew just a little distant and, quite frankly, I enjoyed doing other things.

Integration

In the beginning of the covid era, I did a lot of camping with mates. And often it would go over the Sunday morning as well. And in the end, I hit a point where I had to think about it.

Because going camping isn't bad – camping is fun! – but it is bad if it's taking me away from what's important.

I didn't want to have to differentiate between camping with mates and my relationship with God, even though I was beginning to feel that was the decision I had to make. And so, at the start of this year, I decided to set a new way in my life, not one of *segregating* the things I like to do from my relationship with God, but *integrating* them. I decided next time I went camping and it fell over a Sunday, I was going to do a reading, regardless, and ask the boys if they wanted to join me for it.

And so, one time we woke up on a Sunday morning camping on sand islands in the middle of Lake Macquarie. The sun was warm and the remnants of our fire the night before were still smoking. I started a conversation with the boys about church and how it helps me and grounds me and also why I think it's important. They became quite interested and then I suggested that maybe we could read something from the Bible just on our phones. They were up for the idea. (The alternative was packing up our campsite, which we were trying to put off.)

We read something from Matthew and then we talked about it. The conversation started off pretty slow. It was a little bit weird at first. For some of the boys, it was the first time talking about spiritual things outside of what their parents had taken them to when they were younger. It began with pointing out some verses. Then that turned into some key messages being revealed. The questions emerged, which then evolved into discussions.

At first these boys were reluctant, but I could see that they were beginning to enjoy this new and different sort of activity. They valued the unique conversation and the thinking we were having with each other. So we sat there in our camp chairs, with our whittled sticks, our almost empty water bottles, and a little bit of sand still in our hair, remembering Jesus.

It was definitely something we were not used to. But now it's a regular thing we do, to the point where, if we are camping, I often have a mate ask me if we will be doing church in the morning, and they're excited for it. We were boys who were lazy with our faith, but since I decided to actively integrate it into my life, I have seen so many good works of God within that circle of friends. We began recognising the true worth of having God in our lives and it has completely changed the type of relationship we have with each other.

We've developed our friendship into a fellowship.

This was amazing, almost revolutionary to me. And it wasn't that I had ticked a box or reached a certain point. It wasn't even anything new. I had simply integrated my faith into my existing relationships, my existing hobbies, my every day – like not hesitating to mention that youth conference I attended to work colleagues, or not leaving out details of my weekend that seem easier' to ignore, or even just praying for my lunch in public. And, of course, this will look different for everyone, but it's something you can think about and work on right now.

The Fear of Missing Out

I was chatting with someone else recently who made the point that they didn't want the 'days of their youth' to be wasted. Later on in life, they're not going to have the time and opportunities that they have now, so they felt this urgency to experience facets of life that they didn't want to miss – things like working in a small country town, traveling the world on a budget, living in the forest, then getting a dream job, reaching financial freedom, and then the rest. Obviously, these things aren't in essence bad. They're not things you necessarily have to be avoiding.

This person and I began talking about why this desire existed in the first place. Why do we have this innate craving for experiencing all that we can. We talked about what a life constantly pursuing this would look like, and what would potentially be sacrificed to achieve this. We talked about how pursuing some of those experiences may make church life a little more difficult. Would it be harder to keep up a spiritually healthy routine? Would you be surrounded by the right people, and in some cases, would you be surrounded by people at all? And then it became a question about what experiences or endeavors hold *worth*, and what is worth *more* than something else. And if these things get in the way, how do I manage my faith while managing my fear of missing out?

We were talking about it and then there was this moment of realisation.

In the echo of Ecclesiastes, all experiences can hold worth, but what does that mean, what does that result in? The question changes from 'What are your experiences *worth*?' to 'What is worth *more* than your experiences?' And the answer to *that* question is the promise of *faith*. For it is by faith that our fear of missing out vanishes.

People get so caught up in experiencing every experience in this life. They want to do this. And achieve that. Tick that off. Because for them, when you die, that's it. Your ability to experience is over.

But we do not have to live with this fear, for we know that something incomparable and incomprehensible is coming. Let that wash away your fear. Let that melt away your apathy. Let that deal with your doubt.