

# Bored? The Gospel is The Answer

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I recently heard an academic researcher present a paper on the topic of boredom.[1]

It wasn't boring, but it wasn't what I expected either. I was surprised to hear a secular academic argue that modern boredom is largely concerned with finding meaning in a world without God. Essentially what the paper described was how decisively the philosophy of [nihilism](#) has settled into the modern outlook.

## The Problem of Modern Boredom

People have always been bored. We've all experienced the feeling of disinterest in what we're doing or not knowing what to do with ourselves. But what this paper focussed on was a deeper and more fundamental problem of boredom. Many people in our culture are disinterested in life as a whole. The meaningless of life hangs over us and we can't escape a sense of dissatisfaction with what life has to offer.

This latter kind of boredom is a recent phenomenon. It is connected with the rise of wealth and the loss of belief in God in the western world. It is striking to recognise that the sense of being fundamentally bored and dissatisfied with life is a problem experienced by prosperous, wealthy westerners. We have more career and lifestyle choices than anyone else in human history, but this has not made us content. Quite the opposite.

For bored people, time is meaningless. It stretches out before us both full and empty: full of activity and empty of meaning. All our waking moments seem to be the same, interchangeable, ordinary. We move between distracted and focussed but both are unfulfilling. 'Interesting' and 'boring' are really two sides of the same coin. Things of interest are just brief distractions from our longing for more.

Boredom is not the same as depression, though they are related. At root boredom is an intellectual problem rather than an emotional one. With our society's rejection of God, life has lost the kind of significance and meaning that former generations took for granted. There is no longer a sense that life has a meaning bigger than what we give it. Science teaches us about a universe that is completely indifferent to our existence. Without divine revelation life is a bleak and meaningless phenomenon. And yet we crave a sense of connection to meaning and purpose beyond mere physical and temporary things.

Whilst the paper identified loss of belief in God as the main reason for the problem, it ruled out religious options as worthy of consideration. The attitude was that modern people can't take such things seriously. In sum, the paper argued that Augustine was right to say of God 'Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee...', but that modern people should add '...but we know that God doesn't exist so we'll need to look elsewhere.'

## Searching for a Solution

So, if God doesn't exist what is the solution to boredom? Since the problem itself is untreatable, the paper sought to address the symptoms: 'How can we inoculate ourselves from the yawning void of boredom?' The proposed solution was that we 'cultivate mundane and fleeting pleasures' and turn the 'immanent into the transcendent'. That is, we need to treat physical, worldly pleasures as having the kind of ultimate meaning that religious people ascribe to God. Not only should we 'eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die' ([Luke 12:19](#); [1 Corinthians 15:32](#)), we need to try to convince ourselves that this is a good state of affairs.

This is a deeply pitiable solution. In order to cope with the meaningless of life we need to knowingly play psychological tricks on ourselves in order to cope. In biblical terms this is idolatry. But it's also what unbelievers accuse Christians of doing: making up comforting religious ideas as a crutch to lean on amidst the cold, hard facts of life.

## Living without Boredom

Christians know why humans have this insatiable desire for meaning and transcendence. Not only does God exist, but he is the source of meaning and purpose. He designed us to be in relationship with him. It is unsurprising that our culture's loss of knowing God has psychological consequences. There is a gaping hole in our sense of contentment and meaningfulness that nothing in this world can fill.

This should encourage us as we seek to share the gospel with our communities. Even if people are less open to considering Christian answers, they still deeply feel their need for what the gospel offers. Jesus' offer of rest is attractive as ever ([Matthew 11:28](#)).

Not only that, but in the midst of a dissatisfied culture always striving for the next distraction, Christians will and must look different. Jesus offers us ultimate answers, ultimate hope, and all that we need to live with contentment and joy. If we live that way then our bored, dissatisfied neighbours will find Christianity a very attractive option.