

Gv1065 Apathy

by George Verwer

George Verwer's sermon addresses the dangers of spiritual apathy and the need for fervent faith and community support to combat it.

Duration: 26:41

Scripture: Revelation 3:14-21

Topics: "Apathy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of discouragement and relates it to the concept of spiritual apathy. He uses the analogy of salmon swimming upstream to illustrate the need for Christians to go against the tide of apathy in society. The speaker emphasizes the importance of not desiring the wrong things, as it can lead to spiritual compromise and leanness. He also highlights the negative impact of apathy on others and encourages listeners to be a blessing and share the right resources to combat apathy. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the dangers of quitting and the need to be aware of enemy tactics.

Transcript

Revelation chapter 3. I've spoken on a lot of different subjects over the years and so I'm always looking for some new subject to develop a message on or some thoughts about. And yesterday, just right out of the blue, I think I was listening to a Tozer tape. Somewhere I heard the word apathy, a word I haven't used so much, and it just triggered my prayers and my thinking.

And I realized I had never spoken on the subject of the danger of spiritual apathy. We find a lot of apathetic people in the churches. I certainly have preached quite often messages to try to stir them, but I don't think I've ever given a message on what are the dangers when people just continue in lukewarmness.

They continue to be apathetic year after year. And I just got these few thoughts, I hope they're from the Lord, and I'd like us to think about them together. Because probably one of the temptations you're going to have during your time on OM is to become apathetic.

You certainly will get it when you leave. And being in any kind of training movement or evangelistic movement does not guarantee that you will not become lukewarm and apathetic down the road. The scripture I want to read, which I have preached on many times, is Revelation chapter 3, verse 14.

Revelation chapter 3, verse 14. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear. Anoint thine eyes with salve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in him and sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, as I am also overcome, and am sat down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Let's just pray again.

Father, help us to hear what you have to say to us this morning. We need a word from you so easily we can just get caught up with the work. A lot of it is routine, and a lot of times we realize we're going against the tide, against the tide of our society, against the tide of the tendency toward spiritual apathy.

And we want to be those spiritual fish, so to speak, that can swim upstream. Help us, Lord, to not only get something for ourselves this morning, but something that we can give to others. As wherever we go, we face apathetic Christians, and we want to be a blessing.

We want to be able to give people the right book that might just turn the tide. We want to maybe pass on the right cassette tape. Guide us, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen. A few weeks ago, I was fellowshiping with Glenn Garner back from Turkey, finding it an enormous challenge to try to adjust to life in America. I had not even been asked to give his testimony or report about Turkey in his home church, one of the biggest, most alive churches in the area.

Talk about discouragement. And we were sitting along a beautiful stream in Oregon, talking and fellowshiping, and suddenly we saw these fish jumping in the water. I don't know if you've ever seen fish jump three, four feet out of the water.

If you've been born and reared in London, you probably have not had this experience. This was in Oregon, and these fish were salmon trying to go upstream. I remember being there at this very spot before and finding a lot of dead salmon.

Apparently, they try to get back to where they came from originally, and some of them don't make it, and they die after they give birth. So this time, there were, I didn't see any dead fish around, but these live ones were trying to get up a waterfall. It's one thing to, you know, swim up the river.

It's another thing for a fish to leap up a waterfall. Well, the ones we were watching didn't seem to make it, but that may have been our lack of understanding about what happens after they fall back in the water. But what a spiritual illustration that, in the Christian life, how vividly I saw this in Austria and Belgium.

It's upstream. It's against the tide. And maybe some of you, you thought that coming on OM, you were going to get with the tide, right? This is a spiritual movement, and somehow you're going to get with the tide, and even though you're just a spiritual minnow, you thought you'd get with some of these big fish, and you get with the tide, and you're going to really go places.

And you've had nothing but waterfalls since the day you came in, and you haven't got up one yet. You feel that somewhat you're just all wet. You may feel OM's all wet.

Truly, living the Christian life is going against the tide. And though I would think generally, when we're with other believers, we're with a fellowship like OM, there is terrific advantage. We are still against the tide.

Now, the day that you leave a movement like OM, and you go home, much will depend on that local home fellowship. If you get with a fellowship that understands you, and loves you, and somehow believe in what you've been doing, and they're going places, you'll probably find that's a great advantage, and will be an enormous help to you. And there's nothing wrong with that.

But many people are not finding that, for various reasons that I haven't got time to go into. And so they soon find that they become discouraged or apathetic. I've spoken about dealing with discouragement perhaps too many times, but this morning I want to share not just on the subject of apathy, but what are the dangers of continuing in spiritual apathy.

And I've only started to think this through, and some of you can even write me a note and add to these thoughts before I perhaps give it in some other meeting. I've just written down five dangers that I see if we continue in apathy, we continue in lukewarmness. And that's whether we're in OM, or whether we're somewhere else.

The first thing I've written down is that you tend to develop deadly habits. You become accustomed to apathy. I think many of the men of God that I have read about, and I've been listening to a lot of tapes by Tozer lately, have never become accustomed to apathy.

They never tolerated it. They never allowed it. I'm sure they were tempted, but they never developed the ability to be at home in apathy.

And they battled their way out of it. So the longer we continue in spiritual apathy, the greater the danger that this, how can you say it, will become a habit. I remember a message years ago by Billy Graham, and he pointed out that basically our life is a series and combination of and how I have seen this, because I've got some bad habits that I've been trying to break, and they're not breaking.

And I developed some of these habits when I was your age, younger ones here, and they are not easy to break. I even took, for example, driving lessons from the professional driving teachers, and managed to pass the test after two failures, because I had these bad driving habits, and I still have some of those habits, even though for the test I managed to get mega motivated, and for those 20 minutes drove properly. I mean after two failures, and I had a thousand people praying for me, there was some hope.

So continuing in apathy is going to develop some deadly habits which could eventually lead to the person's complete spiritual wipeout. Why some people get an apathy for a few weeks and get wiped out, and others seem to be able to live in apathy for years, and actually life is all right. Don't think that because you're away from the Lord, or you're in spiritual apathy, that everything is going to go wrong.

Actually, for a while everything might go right. Again, I remember Redpath preaching a message at Keswick, sharing how you get tempted to quit, and in the message he said, you know, if you quit, you'll probably really feel great for a while, because the pressure will be off. And when you're moving in evangelism, and you're moving in commitment, the pressure's on, and of course you'll feel great when that pressure's off, at least for a short time.

I have heard, by the way, that Alan Redpath is very ill. We certainly would like to be praying for him and his wife. Secondly, the second danger of continuing in spiritual apathy is that you open yourself up to enemy tactics.

We all know the verse, Satan is a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour. We know the verse that Satan even can come as an angel of light, and that we're not to be ignorant of his devices. And I am convinced that in my own life, even one day of apathy, which I've never had, that I know of, I've certainly had hours, and had to battle my way with every inch of spiritual fight back to the cross in repentance.

I have other sins and difficulties in my Christian life that I don't think we could be classified as apathy. But I know that if I become apathetic, I give up the fight, those other weaknesses that I have, they'll just perhaps destroy me. And we're all different in temperament.

Some people get destroyed slowly. Probably I'm the kind of temperament, that's what the book says, that one day you will see me here preaching, and the next day it'll be all over. And you'll just read about it in the paper.

If you don't think that can happen to George Berwick, you are spiritually naive, because there's been men far greater than I, that I couldn't even tie their shoelace, but they've wiped out in spiritual warfare. So I believe the safest thing, especially for characters like me, is to just not tolerate lukewarmness or apathy, and to repent quickly, and to try to find the source of the difficulty, and to not trust my emotions. My emotions would definitely lead me to the school further downstream of the lukewarm water, swimming around, but we cannot afford that.

Number three, the third danger of spiritual apathy, is that your heart gets hardened. Again, I can't speak from experience, but I can speak from counseling people, that after people are apathetic for so long, they are no longer responsive to spiritual challenges. Many, many young people are in that camp.

Many of the teenagers reared in our churches, and that's so many messages, and so many Christian camps, and so many Christian films. And as you go, and you work among them, you minister with them, you discover they have almost no hunger for God. I remember about a year or two ago, I spoke here, of why people are not hungry for God.

I remember, because I have a twinge of guilt, that Mike Wheat asked me for a copy of it, or the notes, and I'm not sure if I ever got a sentence to him, because he was convinced that this was certainly a big problem today, that people don't seem to be hungry for God. What's the, how can people even relate to somebody like A.W. Tozer? So hungry for God, naturally he's going to grow. Naturally he's going to go on, because he's hungry for God.

When you're hungry, you find food. And today, it seems that among many young people, and some older people as well, of course, there's no hunger for God. There's no appetite for spiritual things.

If you give someone a book like True Discipleship, who's not hungry for God, he's not even going to read it. And many young people don't read any spiritual books whatsoever. And I believe this is a danger for us as mature Christians, that if we harden our heart, or that if we live in apathy for a while, we become accustomed to that.

We become accustomed to a low level. We may still be in church. We may still give the occasional spiritual grunt, or sing a chorus with even a degree of life.

I mean, unconverted people come to our meetings and sing these choruses, and they enjoy it. But generally, that isn't going to carry us down the main highway of spiritual life. We're given warnings in the Word of God about hardening our hearts.

I think of also that verse in the Old Testament where it says, see, He gave them the desire of their heart. In this case, they seemingly wanted the wrong thing. And He sent leanness to His soul.

Remember that verse? What a verse. Sometimes, even as Christians, we can desire the wrong thing, and God may even allow us to eventually get that wrong thing. But with it, there's spiritual compromise.

There's spiritual leanness. Fourthly, it hurts. Apathy hurts and hinders other people.

It spreads, doesn't it? Of course, a person who is strong in spirit and strong with the Lord, as he comes across spiritual apathy, just like the fish going upstream, he manages to keep on going. But I can tell you, even strong-minded, committed people, I hope I'm, I guess I'm in that camp. I hope so, at least strong-minded people.

Others tell me so. Committed, I hope so. But even we find sometimes ourselves being overwhelmed and very discouraged, needing so much apathy.

And I can tell you, the apathy at times in Operation Mobilization by the middle of March, in some years, has been just overwhelming to me. And it's almost at times caused me just, just to give up. There is more apathy in OM than we are willing to admit.

And because we don't want to be judgmental, we often don't find it. Because we want to believe the best. We're not, you know, some kind of KGB trying to figure out who's on fire for the Lord.

There's a lot of freedom in OM. I don't think we keep track of people's quiet time. Have you been asked to give a report about your quiet time, to fill out a chart? I remember when I was a student at Moody Bible Institute, I, you know, we had to go and fill out a little thing on the wall about how many people we witnessed to, and how much evangelism.

I think they threw that out. I know there was a protest against it. Maybe they've got something in its place since then.

But we don't want to be judgmental. We don't want to, in one sense, put our nose in other people's affairs. We want to believe the best.

A recent report, according to a book I read last week, shows that the average minister in America prays 22 minutes. 22 minutes. That counts worship, prayer, intercession, you know, the whole package.

Then we wonder why the Church is seemingly a little bit lame in some situations. Yes, apathy does spread. The apathy that one person may have can be very hurtful to others.

I think of the people who are our prayer partners. I think of how some of them really do love us and pray for us, and the awesome news it will be for them if we do get knocked out of the Bible. If somehow they don't hear from us a long time, and then they meet somebody and they said, oh yeah, oh yeah, oh, he's not living for Jesus anymore.

What? I'm his prayer partner. I wondered why I haven't heard from him. That happens.

Praise the Lord, I don't think it happens too much. More often people leave Christian work, as it's called, and because of that decide not to send a prayer letter anymore. And so the people lose track, and they just figure, well, he's not in Christian work, but he must be doing all right.

I think people who are not in Christian work should pray about sending out a prayer letter. I think they need prayer just as much as those of us who are out here and supposedly in Christian work. Maybe they can only send it once a year.

It could be a Christmas letter. I get Christmas letters from people who are in sort of secular employment. They give a little news, and it helps me to pray for them.

So our apathy will spread. Our apathy will hurt others. It will hinder others, and that's the last thing in our hearts I think we want to do.

And then lastly, apathy is actually opposition to God. It's throwing aside the promises of God. It is far more of a sin than we are willing to admit, and that's why this passage in Revelation chapter 3 is one of the strongest passages in the Word of God.

Be ye hot, or be ye cold. If you are lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth. I haven't heard many of the modern preachers of our day speak on this passage.

Maybe they have found some interpretation, some study that's not valid. The old messages we get from Redpath and from Ravenhill and from other speakers at Keswick on Revelation chapter 3. I think I spoke on it perhaps once at the Keswick Convention, maybe even in one of the STL books. Apathy really is an abomination to God.

Now that's a mystery to me because God seems to tolerate an awful lot of apathy among people in His churches, and I think that is because God is so merciful. He is so loving. There are things that we do probably this day that will displease God, but His love toward us is so great because He is our Father.

And I've met many men of God whose children are astray and they're in apathy, but the Father's love, the Mother's love still reaches out to them. They're not happy about what they're doing. It's hurtful.

It may be breaking their heart, but they're still merciful. They're still loving. They're still reaching out, and that's sometimes been what God has used to bring them back.

So don't presume that because God isn't hitting you on the head that all is well. If there's apathy, if there's lukewarmness, we know there's many ways to define that. Lack of zeal, lack of love for the Lord, which would be expressed in our work, in our worship.

Lack of reality and desire to witness. Eventually, the lack of even being convicted about your sins. Once you were convicted for your lack of evangelistic zeal, now you learn to live with it.

Once you were convicted about missing your quiet time or not being involved in the prayer life of the church or the team, now you're learning to live with it. Apathy is, how should you say it, it's taking its toll in your own life, and it's a far greater sin, a far greater affront to God than I think most of us are willing to admit. Be ye hot or be ye cold.

If you're lukewarm, I will spew you out of my mouth. Yes, apathy, obviously, and I know if I took time to study this, I could come up with another five or ten points, but let's declare war against apathy. Let's not

blame it on the church, let's not blame it on OM, let's not blame it on our department head or our leader who we feel maybe doesn't understand this enough, or our wife who may be doing this, or our prayer partners that haven't written us lately, or our donors who are no longer donating, or our churches that don't seem to be praying.

We don't have any excuse, and one of the dangers of Christian work is there's always, in Christian work, someone else to blame, because there's always something going wrong. And I'll tell you, if STL and OM has been a disappointment to you, I'm very sorry. I apologize on behalf of the board of directors, I apologize on behalf of the general council or the area leaders, and that disappointment could be, in God's timing, His appointment for you to learn to swim upstream.

Because if you come here, and it's all easy, and it's all blessing, and the relationships, and the fellowships, and living together, and evangelism, just one great onslaught of spiritual flood, and then you leave here and you go home, and everything's just the reverse, it's against the tide, it's uphill, people don't understand you, they don't appreciate you, they think you're extreme, then where will you be? You'll probably be like those salmon I met, lying somewhere on the shore, spiritually dead. Let's learn to swim upstream, and if you're finding Bromley and UK and STL and ICT a little upstream, well that's no excuse for any sin on our part, and we're gonna work day and night to try to make this whole work better for His glory and for His honor. But if you find that somehow the tide is a little bit against you, a little bit of disappointment, take advantage of that, because the tide is probably going to be tougher in the future.

Let's pray again. Father, we just think of so many dear ones that we know who are in spiritual apathy, spiritually warmness, some that don't even bother to go to church, they've heard it all, or maybe they've been conned into thinking that it's not the truth. And Lord, as we see, as we've seen this morning, just some of the dangers of spiritual apathy.

We just want to run into your arms for a spiritual refill. We just want to turn away from even a square millimeter of lukewarmness that may enter our souls, maybe from other people's apathy. We want to run this race with our eyes upon you, and we want to lay aside every sin, every sin or even weight, even a weight that may be hindering us.

And Lord, as we look across this great spiritual invasion of OM across the world, we pray for revival. We pray that people will turn and be refilled with your Holy Spirit. We pray for spiritual diligence where people will deny self each day and move forward by faith, even if it's against the tide.

Lord, you know our hearts. You know our needs. You know my own situation, the increased pressure that's come since my mother's death, since buying this new ship and already having trouble with it.

And we thank you that you can meet us in the midst of the times of pressure. You can meet with us and minister to us. I just thank you for these tapes of A.W. Toza that I've been able to listen to these days, even on the road in Austria.

Just thank you that you've accepted my repentance of sin, and I just thank you for your great mercy, your great love that's so incredibly patient with us. But Lord, we don't want to, in a sense, see this love and this grace and this mercy, forgiveness, and then just throw it to one side and just go on pretending almost that it doesn't exist. Strengthen us for the work.

Meet with those leaders who are having special sessions right now. Guide us through a lot of activities, a lot of meetings this weekend, that we may speak in the power and the authority of the Holy Spirit, that we may see many more apathetic people, apathetic about world missions, apathetic about the hungry, the suffering, the dying, the wars that are going on. May many be aroused this weekend.

May many be aroused through these books we're distributing. May we go the extra mile in getting some of these books that bring revival and destroy apathy into the hands of people across this nation. But, oh Lord, we know that somehow there has to be the move of the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer, that the pages of these books may become like spiritual knives into the hearts of people.

Grant us grace to do all of this heartily, with all of our hearts, as unto you. In Jesus' name, amen.

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