



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Addressing Apathy

Help! God's Hope For The Hurting

Revelation 3:14–22

Tim Badal | August 1, 2021



In this series, we've been looking at God's solutions to our problems, struggles and the adversities in our lives. We've talked about what it means to deal with our anger, what it means to deal with our anxiety, how to deal with times of anguish or loneliness or fear. This morning we're going to look in Scripture for God's answer for what to do when we become apathetic. Webster's dictionary defines apathy as a lack of interest or enthusiasm. We can be apathetic about a lot of things. Let me share some of the things I'm apathetic about.

First, I'm apathetic about Chinese food. I know a lot of you love Chinese food. It just doesn't do much for me. It's there. It goes down just fine. I don't have any digestive issues with it. It just doesn't do much for me. There's not much enthusiasm when someone says, "Let's go get Chinese."

I'm the same way when it comes to roller coaster rides. I watch people ride roller coasters, filled with all kinds of enthusiasm and excitement. But I think, "I just paid \$70 for a day where people are going to slap me around and make me feel sick to my stomach." It does nothing for me. I usually am the one who watches the strollers and carries the coats and purses. That's my day at amusement parks.

My wife loves all this new British television—whether it's talking about the crown or some abbey in a place called Downton. It does nothing for me. I know some of you love that stuff, but I don't get excited about it one bit. Another area I do not get enthused about is American league baseball. It does nothing for me. I want to see the pitcher actually have to bat.

Now, when we talk about things that we're not enthusiastic about, it's okay when these are preferences. It's okay to disagree. That's what makes us a part of this grand mosaic God has designed. Some things we like and some things we don't. Sometimes we marry those who like the exact opposite things we like. I think God gets a good hearty laugh out of that.

But what about areas where apathy can't be a part of our lives? Some of us are apathetic about work. We go to work every day and do the bare minimum. We don't really care whether or not the company or the place where we work prospers. It doesn't take very long for our boss or supervisor, or maybe a customer, to start feeling like we don't care. Then it won't be long before that evaluation will come back showing our need to have enthusiasm in our work.

What about you students who are going back to school in less than three weeks? Yes, less than three weeks, kids. It won't take long for your teachers and parents to recognize you're not giving it your all. Your heart is not in it. That's what report cards are all about. Are you apathetic in your studying? Are you apathetic when it comes to your education? Or are you really doing the best you can?

Let's dig a little deeper. What happens when we're apathetic in our relationships, especially the really important ones? Moms and dads, are you apathetic in your parenting? Your kids will know that. What about your marriage? How many of you are going through the motions. Maybe you've been married for some amount of time and remember what you committed to. You

remember what you vowed to do, that you were going to stay committed and zealous in this love relationship. You remember those first dates and the butterflies you used to get. You remember the feelings you had on the honeymoon and all of that. Now, years into it, you find yourselves just going through the motions. You have this ho-hum attitude.

Apathy doesn't just affect us in our preferences or even in the important relationships of our earthly ministries. The greatest place where apathy comes into our lives is spiritual. For many of us, we have made a decision to follow Jesus Christ. When we started that relationship, it was red hot. We loved reading about Jesus, talking about Jesus, praying to Jesus. We were red hot in our desire to let everybody know that we were followers of Jesus Christ. We wanted to be with other people who loved to talk about, sing about and live lives about Jesus.

But somewhere along the line, after years of going through all of that, your flame began to flicker. Maybe that flame has gone out. Maybe you find yourself more apathetic this morning than you ever realized. Maybe that vitality, that vibrancy, that once characterized your relationship with Jesus Christ is somewhere in the rearview mirror. It's in the far past.

You're not the only one who has struggled with apathy. Anyone who has followed Jesus Christ for any amount of time knows moments of apathy can come. We're all tempted in that way. In fact, in Revelation 3:14-22, we see a church that was known for being apathetic. Jesus calls them lukewarm.

So what can we learn this morning to receive the help we need to not live lives of apathy? Let's get help from God's Word this morning. Turn to Revelation 3, starting in verse 14. Here's how it goes:

¹⁴“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.’

What's being introduced here is Jesus. He is taking center stage. He has a word for the people at Laodicea, so through the Holy Spirit has a word for each and every one of us this morning. Here are His words:

¹⁵“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. ¹⁹Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. ²⁰Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²²He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Spiritual apathy is a serious condition.

The first thing I want to look at regarding this subject of spiritual apathy is that it's a serious condition. These verses don't say that it's serious, so where do we get that idea? It comes through Jesus' response to their condition. He says, “I'm going to spit you out.” That's a graphic term. In other translations you might read, “I want to vomit you out.” Why would Jesus have such a visceral reaction to this lukewarmness—this apathy—that the church of Laodicea was exhibiting? Let's learn a little bit about it.

First, we're in the first three chapters of Revelation. Before we get to the part that describes the end of the world, Jesus has a word for seven churches in the first century, all of which were located in what is now modern-day Turkey, or Asia Minor. To some of the churches He gave great encouragement. “Keep doing what you're doing. Keep fighting the good fight. You're doing great.” Specifically He said this to the church in Philadelphia. They loved one another, they loved God and He commended them for this. For other churches He had no good words, only words of exhortation and admonition. “You've got to fix what's going wrong.”

He does that with the church at Laodicea. Laodicea was the southernmost of these churches. It was uniquely placed between two neighboring cities: Hierapolis and Colossae, on the Lycus River. Laodicea was very wealthy. In fact, it was known to be a gated community. The wealthy lived in Laodicea. They had all the big houses and all the great possessions. But it needed one thing: water. It didn't have its own source for water. So it received its hot water from Hierapolis. If it helps, remember that H means hot. It got its cold water from Colossae.

Now, we know about Colossae because of the Colossians. Laodicea and Colossae had a relationship that might have been similar to our relationship with the other Village Bible Church congregations. When the letter to the Colossians was read to that church,

Paul said they needed to send it on to the Laodiceans. They were sharing sermon series, if you will, and reading each other's mail so they could know how to be the best churches they could be.

Colossae also gave cold water to the Laodiceans. In fact, if you go to Laodicea today, you will see aqueducts that bring water to Laodicea. The problem was that as the waters merged, the water Laodicea got would be lukewarm. The reason that was a problem wasn't the temperature per se, but how it could be used.

How many of you were glad you got your shower water today from Hierapolis? There's something glorious about a nice warm shower. You'd be a whole lot more awake today had the water come from Colossae. How many of you on a hot day like to have a cold glass of Colossian water? You don't turn the tap to hot; you turn it to cold. The idea is that hot water has a use, cold water has a use, but lukewarm water doesn't have much use at all. In fact, the problem with lukewarm water was that it could make people sick. It wasn't cold enough to fight away the bacteria; it wasn't hot enough for the bacteria to be killed. It was somewhere in the danger zone, so this lukewarm water made people sick. Literally it would cause people to spit it out of their mouths.

What Jesus was saying to the church at Laodicea was, "You're lukewarm. You aren't useful, because of your apathy." We may not think apathy is that big of a problem, but Jesus said it made Him want to vomit them out of His mouth.

Spiritual apathy is subtly cultivated.

Not only is apathy a serious condition, but it is also subtly cultivated. By that I mean you don't go from a vibrant, healthy walk with Jesus one day, then that night you turn into an apathetic spirit. This happens over the course of time.

I'll never forget when Amanda got her cancer diagnosis. On the heels of that we were asking all kinds of questions. One of the first questions I asked in the doctor's office was, "How long has the cancer been there?" The doctor responded, "We don't know, but probably for longer than we could have detected it." That cancer was growing subtly in her body, but the symptoms didn't show up right away.

That's how apathy in our spiritual lives occurs. It's subtle. It's there and we don't even know it. So let's look at three areas you should be looking out for regarding apathy in your Christian walk.

1. Familiarity or monotony

Familiarity and monotony are two sides of the same coin. Let's talk about the Christian life. There aren't a whole lot of new things under the sun when it comes to Christianity. We have been given the charge to read the Bible. We've been given the charge to pray. We've been given the charge to assemble with one another. We've been given the charge to live certain lives. We've been given a Bible of which there are no new editions coming out. There's not a new book of the Bible that God is going to showcase on September 1st. "I've got this whole new book; be sure you buy it. We're going to want to dig into it." We've got the same Bible that Christians have had for the last 2,000 years. There's a familiarity with God's Word and as the saying goes, "Familiarity breeds contempt." We've been doing this for a long time and there's part of us that thinks it is monotonous.

As a Christ follower, for as long as I can remember, I've gone to church. I've gone to three particular churches in my life, and those churches—and to be honest, any other church I visit—all do the same things. For 45 years, I've walked into church, someone shook my hand and said, "Good morning" with a smile on their face. They handed me a bulletin, I walked into a big space where there was seating, we sat down, then we stood up and sang. Someone prayed, someone read some Scripture, then we all sat down. Then someone got up and talked for a whole lot longer than I wanted them to take, amen? Then someone would get up, say a couple closing words, maybe sing a song, then we would leave.

That gets boring after a while, unless you're all in when it comes to Jesus. You can come up with a lot of things you'd rather do than do that over and over and over again. Let's be honest, there's not a lot of new and improved things to Christianity. Unless you fall in love with Jesus. Some say, "You know what? I've been there, I've done that, and I'm out."

2. Mediocrity

The second area of apathy comes with mediocrity. You know you're starting to get lukewarm when your pursuit of Jesus becomes mediocre. When you were young in your faith, you spent a lot of time studying the Word. You had a hard time stopping your

prayer time. Now, if you say a sentence or two in prayer, you're feeling good about yourself. If you can read through half of "Our Daily Bread," you're feeling like a super saint. Any more than that is too much for you to bear.

Let's talk about small groups for a minute. Back in the day when you first started being part of a small group, when it was new and exciting, you filled out your homework. You wanted to study the Word. You wanted to share your thoughts about God's Word with the rest of your group. Then somewhere along the line, the calendar of getting together for small talk, praying as a group, opening the Word together, then eating some snacks became monotonous and familiar. So instead of digging into the Word, instead of really focusing time and attention on praying for the people in your group, you found yourself saying, "Honey, can you drive the car to small group. I've got to fill in some answers really quick, because you know I don't want to be that guy who doesn't have my paper filled out." So you hastily write some answers, illegibly, so no one can read them because you're just filling in the spaces. You're not giving your answers the excellence God requires of us if we're His followers.

Let me just be brutally honest with you. One of the great temptations I have as a pastor who has pastored and preached for 18 or 19 years is to be mediocre in my preaching, or at least my preparation. That means I don't study the Word, don't allow the Word to do its work on me, just to get through it. I'll just put some stories together, I'll make sure I give the text a cursory glance, just enough so people can't say I'm not doing my job. Why? Because there are other things I'd rather do. Whenever I sit down at my desk to work on my message, it seems like a party breaks out all around me. I want to leave and join them. But I'm reminded that God wants His people to not hear mediocre sermons, but sermons of excellence.

My prayer is to always bring that to you and what makes a sermon excellent is that it does a work on the preacher before it does a work on the people. Don't be mediocre in your response to God.

3. Lethargy

The final thing we see is lethargy. This is the idea that it takes a team of oxen to move you spiritually. I call this an "I dare you to bless me" person. You're here, you're open to change, but it's going to take a move of God to do it.

Right now, to these people, I'm not fascinating enough, not interesting enough. Some of you have already checked out. Some of you may be on your phones looking for a place to go for lunch. Some of you are doing now that because I mentioned lunch.

So it takes a lot to move you. You lack the motivation to either serve God or enjoy Him. Maybe that's where you are right now. You're indifferent to God.

Let me just do some family business here for a moment. Village Bible Church, across all our campuses, has absolutely excelled during COVID. You kept coming to church. You kept giving to the church. You stayed engaged. I can't say enough. You guys have done a phenomenal job. There are a lot of churches around here that have come to the leadership of Village Bible Church and asked, "How are you doing that? We're an empty church. Our coffers are all but empty as well. People aren't coming back to church." We'll share with them what we did and it's all by God's grace.

One area we missed it—and we're honest with people when they ask—is there is a lethargy for re-engagement in doing ministry. Let me explain what I mean by that. Before COVID, at the Sugar Grove campus alone, 75% of our people were actively engaged in a ministry outside of Sunday morning worship. That's an incredible, wonderful number. Three-quarters of our people were involved in serving the Lord. Post-COVID we went back to that 75% for a while, but now that number has dropped below 40%. We can't get people to move. We've talked with our women's and men's ministry leaders and what do we hear? We hear, "No." Why? Because we took a break and have become comfortable in that warm spot of our spiritual bed. We've told ourselves, "No, I don't have to serve and get the abundance of life from Christianity. I can hang back and be a receiver, not a giver."

Be careful. That lethargy may be the first step toward our church becoming spiritually apathetic without us even being aware of it. I'm going to step off my soap box now. But regarding familiarity, monotony, mediocrity and lethargy, are these things true about your relationship with Jesus Christ? Be careful.

Now, let's face it. At some point or another, we get bored with God. We get bored with all we're a part of. When we start having that familiarity, monotony, mediocrity and lethargy, and someone points it out to us, saying, "You're not as white hot as you used to be," the response is not what Jesus is going to tell us in our text.

He told this church to look to themselves, but we start pointing the finger at other people. "Well, if the worship team did a better job, then I might be moved in my spirit. If the preaching was halfway interesting and halfway worthwhile, then maybe I might do better. If the people in my small group, would do better..." Little do we think that it's not God or the people of God; it could be ourselves. Some of you are blaming God right now for your apathy.

For the world to be bored with God is understandable. As a follower of Jesus Christ, thank about what He does for us: He sustains us, saves us, sanctifies us, promises to prepare a place for us where we will spend all of eternity. The God Who knows us and loves us more than anyone else in this world, also created everything seen and unseen. He holds the cosmos in His hands! Knowing all this about our God, why would His followers have Him work so hard to engage us? Why is it we are so quick to become bored with the things of God?

The church of Laodicea became bored with God. What caused them to do that? To answer that question, we have to ask two questions that Jesus wanted the church at Laodicea to ask.

Where is my sufficiency found?

The first answer is in verse 17. He wanted them to ask, "Where is my sufficiency found?" Where did they find their identity? Jesus told them, "*You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.*" Remember, this was a gated community. They had everything they wanted. They were living comfortable lives.

Some of us are spiritually apathetic because we have more than we know what to do with. We are sufficient in our own money, in our own things, in our own plans; we have all we need and are identified by those things. But God says in verse 17, "You're not that. You may be comfortable, but you're corrupt. You're not clothed; you're naked. You're not prosperous; you're pitiful."

We have to ask where is our identity? Is it in Christ or is it in what we've garnered in life: the toys, possessions, things, people? Is that where we find our identity?

What satisfies me most?

God told the Laodiceans that they needed more help than they realized. In verse 18 He told them, "*I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.*" You see, they had all these distractions, all these things. They may have been good things, maybe some bad things, but they kept the people from their relationship with God.

So what's keeping you this morning from having the vibrant relationship God wants you to have? Right away you might say, "Wait a minute. Is it bad to have pursuits? Is it bad to have dreams? Is it bad to want to accomplish something?" The answer is, "No, but it should always lead you back to Jesus."

Let me give you a case study from the Olympics going on now. In the Olympics we had Sydney McLaughlin who broke the world record in the 400 hurdles and won the gold medal. Talk about the pinnacle of success from an athletic standpoint! This young lady, maybe 21 or 22 years of age, upon being asked about how great it was to win the gold medal, said this: "Records come and go. The glory of God is eternal. I no longer run for self-recognition, but to reflect His perfect will that is already set in stone. I don't deserve anything, but by grace through faith, Jesus has given me everything."

Do you see the balance of going after what you believe God has purposed you to go after and to be productive and prosperous in that, but then to tell the world what satisfies you most, what you are most identified with, is that you are a follower of Jesus Christ? What you do in your work, in your family, at school—all these are secondary. Jesus is always, always, always first and foremost. That makes gold medals something less than God.

Jesus is saying in this text, "I love you." We see that in verse 19: "*Those whom I love.*" He's not angry with us to the point where He's done with us. It's because He loves us that He reproves and disciplines us. "*So be zealous and repent.*" These two words are important: zeal and discipline. These are the two things that work against our apathy. Zeal is passion; discipline is the hard work to fulfill it. Let's say your desire is to sculpt your body and be like Adonis. You want to feel good. You want to look good. That's zeal. That's passion. The problem is that while many of us may have the zeal and passion, we lack the discipline. Amen? Discipline gets you into the workout area. Discipline makes sure you don't just look at the equipment, you actually use it.

There are a lot of things we're passionate about. Many of us are apathetic, but not because we lack passion. We can say, "I want to be a great follower of Jesus. I want to be a vibrant follower of Christ." But we're not because we lack discipline.

I saw a t-shirt this last week, but I couldn't make any sense of it. It said, "Sorry. Can't. Baseball. Bye." I thought, "That's a dumb t-shirt. What is that?" Then I began to understand that I was reading a conversation. Someone has asked the person wearing the t-shirt, "Hey, can you do this? Can you do that?" The response is, "Sorry. I can't. We have baseball." End of conversation. Listen, I love baseball, but I'm not going after it.

However, it brought to mind the question, "Is that not apathy in the Christian life?" We could change the words. "Sorry. Can't. [Fill in the blank.] Bye." What we have in our text is Jesus saying, "Hey, child of Mine, can you serve? Can you give? Can you be engaged in this relationship?" But our response is, "Sorry, Jesus. Can't. [Fill in the blank]. Goodbye."

What is that blank in your life right now? If it's keeping you from a vibrant walk with Jesus—no matter how wholesome and family-oriented it may be—it is leading down a path you don't want to go. Nothing should take the place of Jesus.

So every Christ follower, listen to me. The Christian should be wearing the t-shirt that says something different. The world says, "Hey, Tim, can you do this, that or the other thing?" And my response should be, "Sorry. Can't. Jesus. Bye." I've got to focus on Jesus. I've got to remain engaged with Jesus.

Church attendance is down. It used to be 80% of people would go to church every week. Now we're down to like 40%. Why? Because the response to Christ, the fellowship of God's people and the worship of Christ with God's people is gone. We say, "Sorry. Can't. [Fill in the blank.] We're gone."

Spiritual apathy has a specific cure.

Apathy is all around us. It's a cancer and we need help to resolve it. I'm so thankful that Jesus, in His love, says, "I want to help you." So He gives us a specific cure. It would be easy for Jesus to give us a to do list. I've been trying really hard not to give you a list? Why? Because we do really well with Day One of lists. But by Day Ten into the list, we become apathetic.

I want you to join with me in prayer, asking the Lord to give us a lifestyle, not lists. I want to give you some lifestyles, not lists of things to do. So what do we learn from the church at Laodicea? Jesus gives four prescriptions to them and to us.

Look at your life.

First, the first prescription is to look at your life. In verse 15 He says, "*I know your works...*" Do you know your works? Have you evaluated what your life is when it comes to Jesus? When was the last time you took a hard look at yourself and asked, "Lord, am I on fire for You or am I simply going through the motions? Am I just doing what my parents did? Am I just doing what my spouse does? Am I doing just what my kids do? Or am I here because I want to be here, because I want to show You my love for You?"

Let me tell you how I do this. It's four C's.

- I look at my calendar—how am I spending my time?
- I look at my checkbook. Would anyone who found my checkbook in the parking lot know that I'm a Christian by what's in the checkbook registry? Am I spending my money on the things of this world or on the things of the Lord?
- I pay attention to my conversations. Would anybody who's had a conversation with me know I'm on fire for Jesus or am I talking about everything else under the sun?
- I evaluate my commitments. What's garnering most of my thinking? What's getting the most of my bandwidth? What gets me up in the morning?

These four things should guide our constant evaluation to determine whether or not we're walking side by side, hand in hand, with our Lord and Savior.

Listen to your physician.

In verse 22 He says, "*He who has an ear*" —that's all of us—"*let him hear...*" Doctor Jesus is calling us to repent. He's calling us to change directions. He's calling us to live differently. That's going to lead to the third thing.

Let go of distractions.

What is the line on that t-shirt that applies to you? "Sorry. Can't. [Fill in the blank]," but is not Jesus. If you're saying no to Jesus and yes to something else, brothers and sisters, you need to repent of that. You need to get rid of that distraction, because it's keeping you from the abundant life Jesus wants you to have.

Lean into your relationship with Christ.

In verse 20, Jesus says, *"I stand at the door and knock..."* Now, this verse is often used to bring people into a saving relationship with Jesus, but that is a total misrepresentation of what's happening here. Jesus is talking to believers. He's standing at the believer's heart door, saying, "I want to have fellowship with you. I want to hang out with you. I want to teach you. I want to lead you. I want to guide you. I'm at the door and I'm knocking. Will you let Me in?" Are you so apathetic that Jesus is just going to stand out in the cold, waiting in the dark of your life, then when you're ready or when you need Him, maybe you'll let Him in?

Jesus is saying, "Now is the time. I want you to lean into your relationship with Me." He's not knocking on the door so He can yell at you when He gets inside. He says, "I want to dine with you. I want to be with you. I want to love on you. I want to show you how much I care for you. I want to show you how much there is in a relationship with Me. Will you let Me in?" That's the question all of us have to answer.

As the first Sunday of the month, this is the Sunday we participate in communion. What Jesus will remind us of, when we let Him in, is all He did and all He's doing for us, so that we can be His children. Jesus will remind us that He came, put on flesh and made His dwelling among us. He will remind us that He endured hardships and struggles. He will remind us that He went to the cross and died with us in mind, to save us from our sin. He will remind us that He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us, so that we might have a vibrant walk with Him. He now is preparing a place for us, so that one day He can take us to be with Him forever. When you invite Jesus in, He will remind you of all the things He has done, is doing and will do for you.

The perfect ending to a message like this is for us to be reminded of all God did. God, in Christ, was not apathetic. He gave it His all. He left it all on Calvary, so that you and I might be saved.

Now that we're saved, have we lost our first love? Is there some repenting that needs to be done? I want you to take a few minutes and do some business with your God. Ask Him, "Do I need help with apathy? Has it gone on too long and gone too far? Are there things I need to repent of?" Let's spend some time asking these questions.

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