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Pass The Windex

BY Cristina Price

I still remember how I felt when I accepted Jesus as my Savior. I was seven, crying and trembling in the pew beside my dad. The preacher had just delivered a terrifying sermon about Hell, and all I knew was, I didn't want to go there. Sensing my anguish, my dad took my hand and led me to the altar, where I knelt and asked Jesus into my heart. When I stood a few minutes later, I felt something I never had felt before—lightness, purity, and joy—all inexplicable. True, at the ripe age of seven, I had not committed any horrific sins, but that 'washed-clean' feeling lasted for days.

But...it didn't last forever. Inevitably, the emotional high ebbed away, and I faced a hard truth. The Christian life is not lived on an emotional mountaintop; often, it is lived in the valleys.

Over the past four decades, my experience has shown the Christian life to be a mix of mountain tops, valleys, desert paths, and garden walks. I often find myself trudging through a wilderness, looking back fondly to my last high point, wondering when the next will arrive. What would seven-year-old me have thought if 40-something me could have shown her this reality? What if she knew that I struggle to communicate with God on a heart level, that sometimes He feels distant, and I don't know why? And occasionally, I struggle to muster up the emotion or gumption to pray, read my Bible, attend church, extend hospitality, and love my family well.

Why is that? What has tarnished my relationship with God? Do you sometimes feel this way? (Please tell me I'm not the only one!)

What do we do when our relationship with God has become dull, unexciting, and uninspired? Is this the moment to give up the fight altogether or throw up our hands in defeat? Absolutely not.

The first step should be determining if sin has come between you and your Father. Examine your heart and be courageous enough to ask the hard questions. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me And lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23-25).” Be brutally honest with yourself and God. Confess and repent of any sin that may have wormed its way between you and Him. Ask God to restore your relationship.

At times, though, an honest self-evaluation does not reveal any unconfessed sins. We are in communion with God, but for some reason, our fellowship with Him has become lukewarm, maybe even downright cold. Like spouses who have lost the enthusiasm of their love, their relationship grows ho-hum and perfunctory. They would never dream of separating, but the

tepidness has gradually dragged their communion into ruts of apathy. Our intimacy with our Bridegroom can suffer the same fate.

What causes a once-torrid relationship to cool? Laziness, fatigue, distractions, addictions, busyness, lack of discipline or purpose, grief, or doubt. The reasons are legion. Any one of these can creep in and cause us to fall into complacency and apathy.

Is complacency a big deal? It is not, after all, listed as a “thou shalt not” in the Ten Commandments. As far as I know, no one was ever stoned to death because of apathy. But by no means does this indicate that it is harmless. Apathy can cause just as much harm as intentional sin.

In Amos 6:1-7 (ESV), God issues a warning: “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes!... Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to

the sound of the harp...who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore, they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”

Because of their apathy, the Israelites were the first to go into exile. These people were guilty of other sins, such as idol worship and neglect of prescribed sacrifices, but above all, God condemns their complacency. Feeling “... secure on the mountains of Samaria,” they stopped relying on God for their deliverance. They no longer feared or respected Him. Like a wayward spouse, they allowed the fire of their first love to cool to ashes. Content with the status quo, the Israelites saw no need to change anything...until it was too late.

The reason for the dullness that crept into your life may not be the worship of Kiyyun, the star god (Amos 5:26), but an idol of a different sort: your smartphone, tablet, social media, Netflix, online games, or chat rooms. Perhaps even gambling or pornography?

Anything that comes between us and God or distracts us from what truly matters can dull our relationship with God and result in lukewarmness and complacency—the very opposite of Jesus’ command to love the Lord with our hearts, souls, bodies, and minds (Matthew 22:37).

Do you have a war going on inside you? Our culture has a deep-rooted problem. It tells us that it’s not cool to care about things that matter, and being indifferent or laid-back is better. Social media has conditioned us to become numb to the truly remarkable and alive to the trivial. This paradox becomes increasingly challenging to live with every day. Our days become a vicious cycle of running to Facebook/Instagram/Snapchat/TikTok to escape uncomfortable feelings, where we are fed a steady diet of sensationalism, conflict, and comparison.

I don’t know about you, but I want to get off this roller coaster. But how? We can’t talk ourselves out of apathy. The key is to look hard at the root causes and commit to weeding them out. Remember that list earlier? Laziness, fatigue, distractions, addictions,

busyness, lack of discipline or purpose, grief, or doubt? The treatment for these symptoms of apathy is to cultivate practices and attitudes that counteract these inclinations. The Apostle Paul reminds his readers in Romans 13:14 and Galatians 3:27 that we are to “put on Christ” to defeat the sinful tendencies of the flesh.

Let’s look at our list of reasons for apathy:

Laziness, lack of discipline, and purpose: These go hand-in-hand with procrastination. I, for one, am an expert at putting off till tomorrow what I don’t feel like doing today. This boils down to a lack of self-discipline, which leads to delaying reading the Bible, praying, attending church, meeting with our small group, reading good books, and so on. Proverbs 6:6-11 (ESV) is unmistakably clear about what God thinks of laziness. After praising the ant for her industriousness, the writer switches gears: “How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will

come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.”

If you feel a lack of purpose is behind your apathy, perhaps a change in mindset is the cure. In Colossians 3:1-2 (NIV), Paul instructs the church to “...set your hearts on things above, where Christ is,

seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Setting our priorities straight and focus-

ing on what matters in light of eternity can help motivate us to do good work.

Fatigue: Whether we like it or not, our souls are firmly attached to our bodies until God calls us home. Consequently, the state of our bodies is constantly influencing our emotional and spiritual lives. Fatigue, hunger,



thirst, illness, arthritis, headaches, and more contribute to our overall sense of well-being. If your body is perpetually tired, your spirit will feel the consequences. Do not feel guilty about prioritizing adequate sleep and proper nutrition. Taking care of the body God gave you is part of your worship of Him and



is just good stewardship. Being more rested will also help you concentrate better when reading your Bible and

not fall asleep while praying!

Distractions, addictions, busyness: I've lumped these together because I believe they are all interconnected. Our always-on, hyper-connected society never shuts down. I remember when television channels would go off the air at midnight, forcing night owls to go to bed or

find entertainment elsewhere. Today, hundreds of cable TV channels broadcast around the clock, and streaming services give us 24/7 access to every movie and TV show. Social media lures us with titillating glimpses of other peoples' lives, email, texting, ads, pop-up notifications, games, news apps, and more, all vying for our attention. We never have any downtime to allow our minds to wander and our souls quieten. Shutting out those 'voices' takes real effort and self-discipline. If screen addiction, constant distraction, and busyness are coming between you and God, I recommend a hard reset. Memorize Hebrews 12:1-2 and make it the lock screen on your phone: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (You may be interested in reading Tony Reinke's book, *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*. He offers insight

and practical suggestions to help navigate our always-connected world.)

Grief and Doubt: This reason for apathy is often hushed up or swept under the rug. While I suffer occasionally with the other symptoms listed, grief and doubt are most often the reason for the distance between God and me. In the past two decades I have experienced some very high mountains and deep valleys. For years I fasted and prayed fervently for one single answer to one single request, only to feel as if God were ignoring me or my prayers weren't traveling past the ceiling, while others were receiving miraculous answers to their prayers. I've suffered soul-crushing grief, which caused me to beg God to tell me why He allowed such a thing to happen. Not surprisingly, I never received a direct answer. Apathy comes easily when it feels like we are praying in vain or that God is not intervening as we hoped. "Why bother praying?" we ask ourselves. "Why do I put in the effort if nothing will come of it?"

The Bible contains examples of people who prayed, asked, and waited for a very long time. I love the example Jesus gave in Luke

18:1-8 (ESV) of the persistent widow. Despite the callousness of an unbelieving judge, this woman kept pestering him with her request for justice against her adversary. "For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" Jesus goes on to say, "And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily."

Abraham and Sarah, Hannah, Job, Elizabeth, Noah, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel—every single one of these heroes of faith (Hebrews 11) had long periods during their lives when they continually cried out to God for justice, deliverance, children, or answers. The Lord did not always grant their requests. Job never got direct answers to the questions he was asking. Instead of miraculous deliverance, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel saw Israel go into exile because of their sins. Sarah had all but given up on her dream of becoming a mother. Before she finally conceived Sam-

uel, Hannah had endured years of teasing and ridicule from her husband's other wife. Under the questioning stares and criticism of a befuddled community, Noah labored for 100 years building a boat in the desert. All these heroes have one thing in common: they never allowed the unanswered questions to interfere in their relationship with God. They kept praying, asking, reaching out, and pursuing God despite their burden. Some received their answers in their lifetime. Others didn't. But they never gave up.

Looking at these examples of faith in the middle of our questioning helps to put our own burdens into perspective. Unanswered prayers can easily become a stumbling block in our relationship with God. When we focus on what He hasn't done, we lose sight of all He has done, and the latter far outnumber the former. I am certainly not belittling the suffering that unanswered prayers can cause. I know first-hand how brutal that can be. But I want to encourage all of us to not to lose sight of the big picture. We become apathetic in our relationship with God when we get stuck thinking these 70+ years on

earth are all there is. We lose sight of eternity.

C.S. Lewis discusses this lack of perspective in his essay *The Weight of Glory*. When discussing the desires of our hearts, which we tend to think are pretty important, he says, "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Our desires are too weak—you know that request you've begged God to answer? The questions you've been asking? The blessing you are craving? All are "mud pies" compared to the glory that awaits us. If we could only catch a glimpse of that glory, we would never again doubt God's goodness or plan. Remember when Moses was allowed to see God's back? (Exodus 33:17-23) From his physical appearance to his ministry, that glimpse changed Moses completely because he now had eternity in view.

What is the cure for dullness in our

relationship with God, the apathy and complacency that get in the way? **Focus on the true goal.** Let's fix our eyes, not just on the finish line, but on what lies beyond the finish line...eternity. We all want to finish well, to run our race worthy of our calling. But the finish line is not the end. It is just the beginning. If we could only glimpse eternity, our grief over unfulfilled desires and unanswered questions would vanish.

My goal is to hear the Lord say, "Well done, my good and faithful Cristina. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master." I can hardly wait to experience my Master's joy and to feel His approval of the mud pies I offer

Him. Will He one day reveal why I had to go through certain valleys? Maybe. But it doesn't matter in the end. Friends, let's stay focused on what really matters.

***About the Writer:** Born in Washington, North Carolina, Cristina Price moved to Omaha, Nebraska, with her church-planting parents when she was two years old. She still bleeds Husker Red to this day! Cristina and her husband, Matt, have been IM missionaries to France for 21 years, and they have twin 14-year-old daughters, Madeleine and Emilie. Cristina loves to read, drink tea, take walks through the woods near her home, and have deep conversations with guests around her table.*

