

Bored, Distracted, and Manipulated

Time + Nothing to do = Boredom.

How many times I've heard young (and not-so-young) people say "I'm bored!" And how many times I've wondered, "in a world with so many possibilities and opportunities, how can anyone be bored?"

People sometimes try to relieve their boredom by distraction. Many are "Distracted from distraction by distractions," in other words, they try to occupy their mind or do something, anything, simply to alleviate their boredom. This might mean playing computer games, getting drunk, gambling, using drugs, "sexting," looking at pornography, engaging in sexual relations, watching television shows or movies, spending endless hours on social media, surfing the net, etc.

The sad part of all this is that when people feel the need to be distracted from their "normal" life it means that they regard their lives as meaningless, of little or no value, even as an unbearable burden.

People who live distracted lives are easily manipulated. Whether it be television, movies, the internet, or the marketing/advertising industry in general (what does a commercial or an advertisement do, after all, except to tell us what we need, why we need it, and where to buy it?) people are constantly trying to manipulate us for their own benefit, often using sex, violence, greed, shame, desire, etc. as "the hook."

Schools and government manipulate us as well. How much of education, rather than imparting knowledge and wisdom to coming generations, actually consists of indoctrination? How much government activity is aimed not at serving the greater good of society as a whole, but simply at being re-elected?

Worst of all is the spiritual manipulation we see everywhere. Why is it that whenever peace and "spirituality" are portrayed in popular culture it is not with the image of a cross, but of someone in the "lotus" position? The fact that faith is excluded from public schools says implicitly "faith has no place here," but the faith which is almost universally excluded is clearly Christianity. Yoga is taught in our schools. Muslims have prayer rooms (and good for the Muslims. They ask, and they receive. We Christians don't even ask. Shame on us!). Various Hindu,

Muslim, and Jewish festivals are celebrated, but in many places it's forbidden to have a "Christmas" concert, because, well, it's Christian.

Which brings us to the crux of the matter. What is the problem?

It always comes back to each one of us personally. Boredom, like many other spiritual diseases (and yes, boredom is first and foremost a *spiritual* illness), is often the result of unhealthy self-centredness, narcissism, an unreasonable feeling of entitlement, or laziness.

So what is the solution? Christ and the Gospel. What is the greatest commandment? To love God with our whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It's "other-centredness," giving first place to God and neighbor. It's in coming to know Christ, which we do in prayer, worship, fasting, ministry to others, and reading the scriptures. It's in following the "golden rule," treating others like we'd want to be treated, and serving the needs of others (Jesus tells us that in feeding the hungry, giving shelter to the homeless, visiting the sick, we are ministering to Him). It most certainly is not in using, abusing, or manipulating other people.

Other things help as well. If we don't already do so we need to unplug ourselves from our electronic devices. We should have specific times of day or days of the week when we are "off-line" (in our day and age fasting from the internet and smart phone is probably a lot more important - and more difficult - than fasting from food!). We should never use an electronic device to read, see, or hear anything that would make us uncomfortable if Jesus were right next to us (which, by the way, He is. Always.). Nor is there any good reason to get drunk, gamble, look at pornography, have marital relations with someone you're not married to, or get high on drugs.

Boredom can be dangerous. It can lead to behaviours which become addictions, and contribute to anxiety, depression, or worse. And believe me, you don't want to be anxious, addicted, or depressed.

Your life has meaning. Eternal meaning. Know Christ, and you will know this. God has given you unique talents, gifts, intelligence, knowledge and experience. Take them, and use them unto God's glory, for the benefit and edification of your family, friends, schoolmates, parish, community, and the world around you. Do this, and your life will be full of joy and delight.

And you won't have time to be bored!

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