

## HOW TO BOIL

Romans 12:11

The late best-selling novelist Michael Crichton said that in past centuries people wanted to be saved or freed or educated, but the great fear of our culture is boredom.

When I was a kid I loved summer. I assumed that it was as blazing hot everywhere else in the summer as it was in Bakersfield where I grew up. I wasn't thrilled with 105 degrees but I didn't pay that much attention. I loved the long, lazy days with no school. It was great to be able to sleep as long as you wanted in the morning, to not have to sit in class all day, to have no homework hanging over you and to just be able to do whatever you wanted on any given day. It was a delicious freedom that I treasured. But almost every summer at some point we would hit that time when it seemed like many of our friends were gone on vacation, it was awfully hot and there wasn't much to do. We would have that conversation you are all familiar with. "What do you want to do?" "I don't know. What do you want to do?" And we couldn't come up with anything. There weren't enough of us to play baseball or army or hardly anything else. We'd been swimming, but after a while that got old because how many times can you play Marco Polo with just two of you? At some point inevitably someone would make the pronouncement, "I'm bored." When our kids were young we banned the "B word" (bored) from their vocabulary in the summer. We fined them if they said it.

Some of us have lives that are so hectic, so demanding, so fast paced that we dream of being bored because we have nothing to do. It sounds heavenly. But it is possible to be bored even when life is hectic. One can go through life doing what has to be done, but enjoying none of it and feeling dead inside. Life typically is mostly routine. It requires that we do a lot of the same often mundane things day after day. We brush our teeth, we do the laundry, we drive to work, we make our meals and wash the dishes, we interact mostly with the same people and in our work do many of the same tasks over and over. It is rare, if ever, that we will do something radically different, exciting or large. It is easy to get in a rut, put our head down, sort of put ourselves on autopilot and just trudge through the days. We speak of having pastimes. What a horrid concept. It suggests we need something to distract us as we endure the passing days to make it go faster. But what is it that we are waiting to have end? It is our very lives!

Do you ever find yourself feeling like you do pretty much the same things over and over? Do you ever feel a little trapped, feel like it is all you can do to keep trudging forward but you're really not much interested in what is going on? Jesus said he came

to give life to the fullest. No one would consider being bored to be “life to the fullest.” Unfortunately boredom is quite common in our culture. In an article a few years ago in *USA Today*, James Orcutt, a professor at Florida State University, called boredom “the prevalent American disease.” Columnist Walter Shapiro wrote it has become “a major societal trend.” In his book, *Journey of Desire* (p. 165), John Eldredge wrote, “I continue to be stunned by the level of deadness that most people consider normal and seem content to live with.” If we are to live the full life Jesus came to give us surely we are going to have to be the farthest thing from dead inside and bored. Life to the fullest means being totally engaged, alive, passionately living each day.

Today in our study of the downside of life, some of the hard things that we have to deal with, we will consider boredom. We are going to look at just one verse from the New Testament. We will consider its command to us, then think about how we can live it out. That verse is Romans 12:11. Paul spent the first 11 chapters of Romans explaining the gospel of grace and answering objections to it. Having made his case he begins in 12:1 to discuss how we should live in light of the good news he has explained. In verse 11 he says “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

### THE LORD WANTS US TO BOIL

All we need to do is look at the words “zeal” and “fervor” to get the message of this verse. God is *commanding* us to be passionate and alive. No person who is full of zeal will say that he or she is bored. The second word, translated “fervor,” actually meant to boil. The definitive lexicon of New Testament Greek says it means to boil or to seethe, or to have burning zeal. There is no room in this command for a Christian who is cool about his life or his Lord. There is no way a person who is obeying this command is going to approach worshiping God with a sort of “I’ll do that as long as something more important doesn’t come up.” This is a calling to be fanatical about serving God.

God tells us to be white hot in our passion. This is not a sort of option offered to some super-spiritual people who don’t have anything else going on in their lives. It is a command directed to every person who believes in Jesus. If you are a follower of Christ God wants you to be blazing in your zeal. There is no room in zeal for boredom, apathy or a going through the motions approach to your faith and life.

I can understand why the Lord has commanded this. After all, what do you want people to feel about you? Do you want them to be bored with you and go through the motions of loving you without really caring? Or do you want them to be so full of zeal

about how great they think you are that it just continually bubbles up out of them? Personally I want the latter. Well God wants the same thing from us.

In Revelation 3:16 God warned the Laodicean church that he was going to spit them out because they were lukewarm. They went through motions of faith, but with no passion. In Matthew 22:37 Jesus said the most important thing in all of life is that we love God with all our hearts. Love him with passion.

When you are aflame with zeal for something there is never going to be a moment when you are bored because you will always have this thing to think about, to rejoice about, to plan how you can live out this passion in various ways in your life. Have you ever encountered a guy who is a fanatic for fantasy football? That guy is never really bored. He is always thinking about how he can improve his team, looking for the latest statistic, trying to find that unnoticed guy that can give him an edge. He is usually way more ready to tell you all about his team than you are to hear about it. Perhaps fantasy guy needs to live in the real world and have a real life instead of a fantasy one, but at least he's not bored. At least in some sense he is alive. That's going to be true of us if we are passionate and full of zeal for our Lord. There will be no meaningless days, no mundane tasks, for in everything we can be full of life as we honor him.

#### THE LORD WANTS US TO BOIL CONTINUALLY

Note the word “never.” God wants us to be passionate every moment of every day. This is difficult for us. In his excellent commentary on Romans Dr. Douglas Moo wrote (p. 778), “The temptation to ‘lose steam’ in our lifelong responsibility to reverence God in every aspect of our lives, to become lazy and complacent in our pursuit of what is ‘good, well pleasing to God and perfect,’ is a natural one, but it must be strenuously resisted.” Losing steam is a constant reality among humans.

Paul knew human nature. We get fired up by something new. But nothing is new forever. You buy that new car and you are excited about it. You show it to your friends and explain all the terrific features of it. Three years later you may still like the car, but you don't show it to your friends. You don't talk about how much you like it. It's not old, but it's not new either. You're used to it. It's just your car. You may really like it, but it's not a big deal anymore. The fire dies down after a while no matter what the new thing is.

The classic, of course, is marriage. We've all heard it. The honeymoon is over. I've yet to do a wedding for a couple who approached the ceremony with a sort of “whatever” attitude. They don't come saying, “Yeah, we figured this would maybe be

a good thing, so we ought to do it.” The happy couple is just that, a happy couple. They can’t wait for the big day, and when it comes they are grinning from ear to ear. It is the happiest day of their lives. You see honeymoon couples and they are goo-goo eyed over each other. Whatever else may be occurring in life the biggest thing in life is they have each other. What happens to that? How many married people do you know who start their day grinning from ear to ear because they are married to the love of their lives? What so often happens to that passion, that joy, that zeal? After a while they might still love the spouse, but the marriage isn’t new, it’s just a part of their lives now and they almost take it for granted.

I’ve seen it with the church. A person first comes to the church and says, “I love this church. I love this pastor, he’s so insightful. The people here are wonderful and so friendly. This is the church I’ve been looking for. I’m so happy here.” Fast forward a few years and what do you hear? I wish the (fill in the blank) program was better. I wish the pastor was (fill in the blank...more dynamic, younger, older, funnier, deeper, wouldn’t mention sports so much, would talk about sports more, dressed better, was more casual, etc.). And I just haven’t made the kind of friends here that I wish I had. I’ve been hearing a lot about the new Church of the I-Phone down the street and have been thinking maybe I should check it out.”

It’s human nature. Hey, we’ve found Jesus! We love him! Fast forward and what happens? Somehow the passion has ebbed away. We still believe, but far from boiling, we’re barely simmering, if that. We just hope we’re not like the church at Laodicea that had assumed room temperature. This is not a new problem. The ancient church at Ephesus was faithful and had worked hard. But in Revelation 2:4 the Lord says to them, “I hold this against you: you have left your first love.”

Do you want someone to love you, but then get used to you and sort of take you for granted, be kind of bored with you and go through the motions? I sure don’t. Well God doesn’t want that either. He wants us to keep loving and serving him every day for as long as we live.

To see what this has to do with boredom let me point you again to a marriage relationship. I would like to love my wife and never be lacking in zeal for her, to always be fervent in loving her. How will that affect my life? Each new day presents me with limitless possibilities. Far from being bored I can go through the day thinking, “how can I express how much I love my wife right now?” It could be giving her an unexpected call or text message when you are apart just to tell her you love her. It could be buying her an unexpected gift. It could be telling her you are going to cook dinner while she relaxes or surprising her and taking her out to eat. In a shop in New

Orleans on Royal Street Laurie found a sign that had a message she wants to adopt as her motto. It said, "My favorite thing to make for dinner is reservations." It could be little thoughtful things like retrieving her book when she's getting ready for bed and she left it downstairs. I could go on infinitely, but do you see that every day presents boundless opportunities to love your wife in so many ways. If you are consciously living with passion for her your days will never be boring. There are so many things you can do that it will be almost overwhelming, and it will be fun!

The same is true of being full of zeal for our God. We have endless opportunities to think of creative ways to express love to him, whatever is happening in our lives. We can see chances to serve and love other people as ways to honor him. We were riding on a streetcar in New Orleans on Wednesday at the end of the day. It was very crowded. At one stop an elderly man, obviously a street person, got on. A young dad in front of us got up and offered the old homeless guy his seat. I was impressed by his effort to care about a person many would just dismiss. It hit me that I could honor the Lord by affirming that guy. So when we got off the trolley I stopped, patted him on the back and said, "That was really kind of you to offer your seat to that gentleman." He had a kind of "aw shucks it was nothing" response, but he was beaming. So many chances every day to bless our Lord. Our passion for him is in fact the thing that will produce life to the fullest, a life that we will never, ever, find boring.

## APPLICATION

You might ask why I would make a big deal about boredom. This is not a self help seminar, it's church. It's supposed to be about glorifying God. Two thoughts help here. First, God loves you and he wants what is best for you. It is not best to be bored. Second, Irenaeus, an early church leader, said, "the glory of God is man fully alive." God is glorified when we live full of passion, fully alive. If you think about it if we are bored we are essentially saying, "God has not been good to me. I don't like what he's given me."

The problem for us is that to never have our zeal wane is a rather unnatural thing. The natural thing, as we have seen, is for passion to fade and for life to become routine and lifeless. So the question is how do we live this out? What can we do to make sure we are boiling with zeal and are fully alive every day? One of the common human ways to do that is to look for the new thing that will spark interest and passion, bring some life to our routines. That could be traveling to a new place. It could be choosing to live in a new place. It could be some new adventure, perhaps a new extreme sport or a hobby. In the case of some people it might be a new love affair. Unfortunately

trying to infuse passion into our lives that way condemns us to a life of futility, for every new thing eventually becomes old. We don't get the same thrill from that new place or that new extreme sport or that new love, so we have to move on to something else new that will give us that same rush. It will never end and it will always lead to disappointment. What we need is something that can give us that passion and zeal in life no matter what is going on.

### HAVE A THEOLOGICAL VIEW OF LIFE

Psalm 118:24 is a familiar verse that packs a powerful punch. It says, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." There is some profound theology in those words. It says the Lord is in charge. The Lord has made this day. I didn't make this day. That one idea alone is life changing. I do not decide what happens in this world. Yes, to some extent I control my own choices, but that is a miniscule, nearly undetectable fraction of the things that are going to happen on this day. I didn't control who my parents are and what genes I would have. Laurie and I didn't control whether or not we would meet. We just celebrated the day we met, which was July 2. I had no influence in her happening to come to the meeting that I was at that night. What if she hadn't? What if at the last minute she had decided not to go? My life would have been impoverished to a degree I cannot put in words. God gave me a gift I could never have manufactured.

My last year in seminary they chose a few seniors to have the privilege of speaking in chapel. I was one of the ones they picked. The day I spoke in chapel a guy who was a friend of a man named Wally Norling happened to be there. Wally was the superintendent of the Southern California area for a denomination. He had just started a Bible study here North County that he hoped would be the launching point of a new church. But he had to be out of town for a few weeks and needed to find someone to teach the study for him. He mentioned this to his friend. His friend, having just heard me speak in chapel, recommended me to him. That was the first step in a chain of events that ended with me leading a ministry in this area. I controlled very little of those events. Several years prior I had brought a group down to San Diego for a retreat and while driving through north county I thought, "this looks like it would be a place I'd love to live." I didn't manufacture that, God did it. This is the day the Lord has made.

Trying to control something that you are utterly incapable of controlling is exhausting and frustrating. When you think you are the one in charge of everything and constantly try to manipulate people and circumstances to come together according to your plan, you will at some point grow weary and cynical. It will sap your vitality and you will find yourself just going through the motions. The effort at controlling

everything will destroy your soul. You end up with no passion for anything leading a truly lifeless, boring existence. Recognizing that this is the day the Lord has made is an essential step in living with enthusiasm each day. Knowing that the Lord has made this day relieves me of the need to go through the exhausting and futile exercise of trying to wrestle it all to bend to my will. I can relax and look forward all day each day saying, "What do you have next for me, Lord?"

Something else that verse tells us is that the day should be rejoiced over. Why should we rejoice in this day? First, because it is a gift. God made this day and gave it to you. He did not owe it to you. There is no place where it is written that you had to have this day. Nothing says you could not have had a brain aneurysm and died in your sleep last night or have a plane fall out of the sky, land on your house and squash you. This day, July 27, 2014 is a gift to you. It is a gift that will never be given again. This is a one-time-only offer. If you pass on this day it is gone forever. So be thankful for this day.

We've all had bad days. We've all had days that just started wrong the moment we set our feet on the floor and went downhill from there. But you need to ask yourself this question: does God make mistakes? The Bible says he sees the end from the beginning, that he has wisdom that is beyond human ability to search out, and that he is good. The Bible says he does no wrong. In other words, God doesn't make mistakes. Yes, it may feel at times like God has totally lost control of a day, or maybe a week, a month, a year or even a life. But he has not. If you want to have passion in your life, start with this premise. This day is a gift from God. He has a plan and will use this day for his good purpose, so I should rejoice today in this day. There may well be hard or even sorrowful things that happen today, but it is still a gift that I can rejoice in.

There is another thing we can take from this verse in Psalm 118. It is that we should rejoice in *this* day. It doesn't tell us to rejoice in what we hope will happen tomorrow or what did happen yesterday. It doesn't even tell us to regret yesterday or fear tomorrow. God certainly won't mind if you do rejoice in what he has done in the past, but the point is rejoice in this day today. If you want to live a life of passion do not spend your time reliving the past, either its triumphs and joys or its defeats and hurts. Do not spend your time fearing or anticipating the future. Today is the only day that you can be certain God will give you, so focus on this day. In Matthew 6:34 Jesus said, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own." He said each day will have trouble. But just focus on today. Live 100% present in the present.

**HAVE A CONSTANT PURPOSE THAT MATTERS**

There are a couple of thoughts about boredom that you and I should be very clear on. One of those is the boring is in the eye of the beholder. What is boring to one person may be compelling to another. I recall a conversation with a friend that highlighted this clearly for me. He told me that he can't stand to watch baseball because it is boring. I love baseball, but I have reached a point of maturity in life where a statement like that is not provocation for heated argument. I admit that the game moves at its own pace and that pace is too slow for many people. I get that and I'm all right with it. But with this fellow I did have a bone to pick. He is a huge fan of soccer! I realize in this world I am in the minority, but honestly, are you kidding me? Soccer? Guys kick a ball up and down a field for an hour and a half and end up with one goal being scored? That's interesting? Please excuse me while I yawn...repeatedly. Now before you soccer fans go postal on me, please remember my point. Boring, and interesting for that matter, are in the eye of the beholder. Some will find baseball boring and some will find soccer boring, just like some people have brown eyes and some people have blue. There's nothing wrong with either. Of course, football isn't boring. That's a known fact. But my point is that there is a large internal component to boring. That means that two people could conceivably go through the same circumstance and one would find it boring while the other would be fascinated.

Another important reminder is that there is a difference between boring and bored. My point here is that we all know that there are some things that are undeniably boring, and they would be boring for everyone. When I was young I briefly had a job in a carrot packing shed. This is where carrots came in from the field and are packed for delivery to stores. It meant putting carrots in those little plastic bags for hours on end. It was boring. I had more than one class in school that was boring. When I got a traffic ticket I had to go to traffic school and it was excruciatingly boring. It is quite possible that there are going to be days, weeks, months, maybe years of your life that will be boring. But just because something is boring doesn't mean you have to be bored. G. K. Chesterton said, "There are no uninteresting things, only uninterested people." It is possible to be fully alive and engaged even when your circumstances are boring. How can we be alive and passionate even on boring days?

When Toby was in high school he played baseball for several years as well as football and hockey. Typically baseball practice starts in earnest in late January or early February. The problem is that games don't start until March. That means there are weeks where all the guys do is go to practice day after day. They would field ground balls, catch fly balls, working on double plays, have batting practice where they practice hitting the baseball, run the bases. After several weeks of that Toby complained that baseball practice was boring. Finally the games began. The games were fun, intense, not boring in the least. But what did they do in the games? Field

ground balls, catch fly balls, hit the ball, turn double plays, run the bases. They did the same thing in games that they did in practice. Why wasn't it boring in the games? Now it meant something. There was a point to it all.

If you want to keep your life from being boring there needs to be a point to it. It needs to mean something. The most sure way to become bored is to spend your time doing things that are pointless and meaningless. So the crucial component in a life of passion is to have a purpose, a meaningful point to your life. It needs to be a purpose that you can pursue no matter what your circumstances. You need a purpose that applies to every moment, every task in your life, and it needs to be one that can fill you with passion even if circumstances are boring.

Our purpose should start with what Jesus said are the greatest commandments. Love God and love people. That's something you can do with passion no matter what your circumstances. You can do the same routine things, the same boring things every day, but if you pursue this purpose of loving God and loving people each day will be full of life and full of opportunity.

In other words, it is important that we stay focused on what our real purpose is. We are constantly subjected to background distractions. We need to know that when we have that droning in our ears and lose track of what our lives are really about we are going to lose passion. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul wrote, "do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize." In other words, stay focused on your goal, your purpose.

## HAVE FAITH

In 2 Corinthians 5:7 Paul wrote, "we live by faith, not by sight." We don't just count on what we can see. This is a risky way to live. If you are going to follow Christ you are going to have to live by faith, not by sight. You're not going to be able to take the safe route. You are going to have to take some risk, and there likely will be some cost that you incur with that risk. In his book, *Wild At Heart* (p. 203), John Eldredge wrote, "Most men spend the energy of their lives trying to eliminate risk, or squeezing it down to a more manageable size... If it works, if a man succeeds in securing his life against all risk, he'll wind up in a cocoon of self-protection and wonder all the while why he's suffocating."

In their book, *Up From Boredom, Down From Fear*, Bruce Leckart and L. G. Weinberger wrote, "When there are no uncertainties, no possibility of surprise, when everything is secure, boredom reigns supreme... There's no surer road to boredom than playing it safe."

The issue here is fear. That's what risk is all about. Fear of pain, fear of loss, fear of death, fear of embarrassment, fear of disappointment if I actually attempt this thing that is risky. But if there is no danger, no fear, then whatever we're doing is boring. I am thrilled that football season is not far away. I love to watch football. But what makes for an exciting game that you can't wait to see? The most exciting games are ones where your team is having a great season, is in the hunt for a championship and they face a tough opponent that could well beat them. In other words, there's a lot at stake and loss is a very real possibility. Suppose you are a rabid fan of the Oregon Ducks. Are you just chomping at the bit, eagerly awaiting their big game on August 30 against the South Dakota Coyotes? You may be mildly interested because it is the first game, but there's no drama, no excitement there. You know they'll win. The games you most anticipate are on October 11 against UCLA and November 1 against Stanford. Those are the games with the most danger! So they aren't boring. Think about your favorite movies and books. If there is no danger, no risk in the story, there is no drama, no excitement. The same is true of our lives. The risk is what brings excitement.

Risk can so easily put us into a boring rut. While we were with Carissa and Michael we went for a couple of days to Pensacola, Florida, to go to the beach. The first day it rained, but the second day it was gorgeous. It was 84 degrees and the water was the same temperature as the air. We were on this beautiful beach, but when Michael approached the water he noticed something. He saw several small jellyfish that had washed up onto the sand. He looked in the water and saw a few in the water. Carissa discovered on her phone a notice that a beach a few miles away was having a jellyfish swarm. You're not going to die from the sting of a small jellyfish, but personally I won't enjoy it either. To go in the water was to risk some pain. Michael and Carissa took the risk. Later Laurie and I did as well. And we had a blast. The water was deliciously warm and beautiful. We could have just stayed on the beach, and that would have been all right I suppose, but the trip was so much more full and enjoyable because we took the risk. By the way, no jellyfish stings for any of us.

What risk should we take? The risk of trusting God. The risk of believing that he is at work in our lives and will get us where he wants us to go no matter what happens. The risk of not continually protecting ourselves and living in fear. The risk of serving God. The risk of rejoicing. The risk of loving our spouses and children. The risk of loving others. Launch out in trust each day, believing your God loves you and serve him with all your might.

There's a scene in the movie *Never Cry Wolf* that calls out to us. The central character, Tyler, a nerdy academic who wants to study wolves, hires a bush pilot named Rosie Little to fly him to a remote valley in the wilderness. This pilot is a piece of work, a wild man. As they are flying in the middle of the wilderness suddenly to their dismay the engine dies and the plane starts going down. Little starts doing everything he can to get the engine started again as Tyler totally freaks out. While he is frantically working Little suddenly just stops and with that wild look on his face says to Tyler, "Boredom Tyler. Boredom...that's what's wrong with most people. How do you beat boredom, Tyler? Adventure, Tyler. ADVENTURE!" God calls us to take the risk of living the adventure of loving him and serving him by loving other people each and every day.