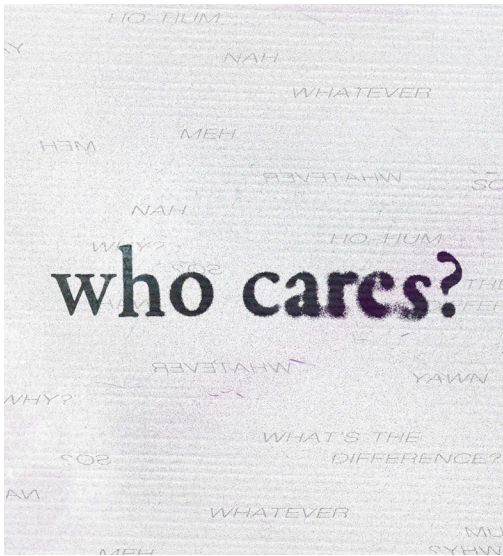




# Sermon Growth Guide

**September 15, 2024**  
**Who Cares**



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**Who Cares? - “Meh”**

**Proverbs 26:14-16**

**Key Verse:** Proverbs 26:13 “A sluggard says, ‘There’s a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the street.’”

**Big Idea:** Finding Gospel Hope in a time of apathy.

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## Foundations

The term “meh” reflects a verbal shrug; a sign of indifference that many people are familiar with, and perhaps even use themselves. Our new series, Who Cares, aims to explore this contemporary slang term and its implications. At its core, “meh” embodies a sense of apathy. Consider the sluggard from Proverbs, who remains in bed like a door on its hinges, showing no inclination to rise. This state of bed-rotting exemplifies the essence of apathy.

Today’s culture is rife with apathy and loneliness, often stemming from our inclination towards instant gratification rather than engaging in the challenging work of personal growth and spiritual development. Are we opting for convenience over what fosters true goodness and flourishing? Have we become apathetic in our faith?

While some may equate the opposite of love with hate, a more fitting contrast is apathy—a profound lack of caring. Apathy impedes our ability to form deep connections with God and others. Jesus, as quoted in Matthew, commands, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Mark and Luke expand this to include “with all your strength” and emphasize loving your neighbor as yourself. This kind of intense love stands in stark opposition to apathy.

## Understanding God’s Word

Read together Proverbs 26:4-16

Note that each proverb consists of two concise lines that convey a specific truth. Try rewriting one of these Proverbs in a contemporary context. According to Hassell Bullock in his commentary on the poetic books, Proverbs addresses both God’s sovereignty and human responsibility, aiming to create an orderly universe. Discuss how this might be evident in two or three of the Proverbs.

## Applying God’s Word

Are there “lions roaming” in your mind—unreal fears that prevent you from experiencing the joy God has for you? Are Satan’s lies blocking you from feeling the Lord’s love? Read 2 Timothy 1:7 together.

## Witnessing God’s Word

We have numerous opportunities to serve our community and fulfill our calling to be a beacon of Light and Life. Perhaps now is the time to explore a new area of service or invite a co-worker or book club member for coffee. It could also be a moment to create something meaningful and share it with a friend.

Do you know the word, “meh”? It is fairly new to the English language. It sounds Yiddish, but the way we use it seems to have emerged from an episode of *The Simpsons*. Meh. Not so good. Not so bad. Just middling. I’m not upset; I’m not enthralled; I’m just, you know, kind of, meh. Today kicks off our fall series, *Who Cares?* Yes, the title of the series and the titles of each of the messages are meant as jokes. We are not called to be “who cares” people. This is a series about overcoming apathy, about learning to care when we have lost the ability to care, about finding zeal for what matters most when it feels like the fire has gone out. Too often we look like this guy in the Proverbs. I wondered if that passage was a description of my Sunday afternoons! Turns out it was written a while ago. Pastors crash on Sunday afternoons. A friend told me Dr. John Stevens, the Pastor who led this church for 37 years and really got us where we are, he remembers John saying, “A Sunday afternoon without a nap is a real bust.” Amen! A nap can be a virtue, but don’t get stuck in Meh.

Christianity Today’s Book of the Year for 2023 was Professor Uche Anizor’s, “Overcoming Apathy: Gospel Hope for Those Who Struggle to Care.” This is a great book. Anizor admits that his study of apathy came from his own struggle. He sees this tendency in himself, the tendency to believe important things but not feel their weight or act on them as they deserve. He grew up watching a lot of *Seinfeld*, the show about nothing. The writers of *Seinfeld* had a rule, “no hugging; no learning.” The show creates a universe where insignificant things get attention (the location of a shirt button or waiting at a bakery for a marbled rye) but significant things like marriage, sickness, death, they don’t matter. It’s about indifference. It’s not cool to care. It’s actually a kind of soft nihilism. Sorry. I watch it too! It’s funny. But we should know what we are absorbing. It’s not for kids. It’s not the truth.

Obviously, the trend is bigger than a TV show. That’s just an illustration. But for Anizor, he says, “Indifference was the name of the game... I knew, in my head, that there were important things to care about. However, I couldn’t bring myself to care deeply enough about them or move toward them. I don’t believe I’m alone in this. I think that many of us experience this disconnect between head, heart, and hands. We know what is good, right and life-giving, but cannot seem to lift a finger to do anything about it. We know that a bit of quiet reflection would do us some good, but we hit ‘Play’ on that fourth consecutive episode of whatever show we’re into. We’re aware that spending some time in worship with other believers might inspire us, but we’d rather sleep in (especially after our previous night’s Netflix marathon). I am calling this the curse of apathy, and many of us have been stricken by it. We live in a culture plagued by apathy. For too many of us, life feels like a show about nothing. It feels unworthy of our serious attention. We are citizens of a *Seinfeldian* society, where only inconsequential things matter.” (Anizor, *Overcoming Apathy*) Life goes sort of grey, sort of meh.

I want to say very quickly, there is a difference between apathy and depression. Depression, and there are greater experts at this than me, is deeper. It could be medical or physical or psychological leaving someone with a lack of ability to rise up and take on the day’s demands. Apathy is not lack of ability, but lack of drive, lack of resolve, lack of follow through. It’s not so much “I can’t move,” but “Why should I? What’s the point?” We don’t want to approach this general malaise and give the sense that we are telling you who are fighting mental health issues to just pluck up or get over it. We all need help. For this series, we have partnered with our Counseling Coalition and they are ready to respond. If you or someone you know needs help, please call Caring Ministries. Or you may be moving through a season of grief—that

who cares?

will weigh you down for a while. We want to walk with you in that too. Join a Greif Workshop or just call and let us walk with you. Depression and grief are real things, but I want to talk about this trend, this cultural malaise, this apathy, that seems to be pulling the wind out of all our sails.

It's not new, this phenomenon. The Proverbs, stretching back three thousand years or so, are actually full of thoughts about this challenge. Proverbs, if you are new to it, is a collection of sayings. It's hard to preach a section of Proverbs because it is a list of fairly independent thoughts, but there are themes and sections where an issue is raised. I read verses 4-12 to set the stage. Wisdom about the fool. I've noticed that the NIV sometimes uses plural pronouns "they/them" to include women in good characteristics, but when it comes to the fool, they just stuck with "he/him"! Probably accurate. Most of these explain themselves. Be careful who you hire or entrust with leadership or ask to represent you, it can turn out like an arrow fired randomly, like disabled legs, like drinking poison. The sling one might be a mystery. "Like tying a stone in a sling is the giving of honor to a fool." (Proverbs 26:8) Imagine a slingshot. Not the kind with rubber bands (like Parker Samelson got hit with last week at the picnic [PICTURE]), but like David used on Goliath, leather strips with a pocket in the center. If you tie the rock to the pocket, it won't fall out. That's good, but it will swing back and hit you in the face! That's bad! Maybe you have experienced that in your leadership.

The first two verses demonstrate something important about Proverbs. "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes." (Proverbs 26:4-5) Which is it? Proverbs are wisdom literature. Sometimes the answer is not a code or a policy, a standardized procedure. Wisdom is

about the application of knowledge, doing the right thing at the right time in the right way. There is a need to apply knowledge to a situation. Both of these are true. It can be understood this way. The first one is saying, don't stoop to a fool's level. Take the high road. The second, though, says you can't just let misinformation pile up out there. A lie will travel halfway around the world before the truth gets its shoes on; but the truth better shoe up and get out there or the lie will prevail. Wisdom finds the right course, but in the end, the worst thing of all is selfish pride: "Do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them." (Proverbs 26:12) Uncorrectable. Uncoachable.

The main portion for today is this bit about the sluggard. "My Sunday Afternoon," by Tim McConnell. "A sluggard says, 'There's a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!'" (Proverbs 26:13) No there's not. There's no lion. It's just an excuse to stay in bed. Or is it fear, debilitating anxiety? "What are the symptoms of anxiety?" is Google-searched over 256,000 times per month in the US. Again, there are levels here. A person may be crippled with anxiety, and that person needs to reach out to invite professional intervention and help. But there is also a fear that keeps us all demotivated. Is fear dampening your devotion to the Lord? Is fear keeping you from starting a conversation with a friend about Jesus? Or following up with that opportunity to become a Young Life leader or Youth Min volunteer? See, if Satan can't make you dead, if he can't have your soul, he sure wants to make you useless. He sure wants to sap your strength. We are not ignorant of his schemes. Once you belong to Jesus, he can't have your life, but he can try to make you feckless. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment." (2 Timothy 1:7)

There is a temptation to succumb to apathy. The great "so what?" This is the

who cares?

danger of apathy. In the old days they called it sloth, laziness. I think it was Charlie Brown who said, “My get up and go just got up and went.” I often think of this as a modern problem. In ancient times, you had to keep moving to survive. You had to go get food, go get water. Now we have couches and televisions and phones and all the conveniences. The latest trend in self-care is called “bed rotting.” Bed rotting is staying in bed all day or through the weekend. Have food delivered. Binge-watch shows over and over. The articles I saw when someone turned me on to this were all positive. Great idea! Self Magazine headline: “Actually, ‘Bed Rotting’ Can Be a Very Legit Form of Self-Care.” Are you recovering from surgery? No, maybe you are exhausted and need to take a day to rest up, but there is danger here. Inertia builds on itself. The longer you sit still the longer you will sit still; the more you avoid hard things the less resilience you will have to make it through hard things. When you stop moving, you stop moving. There is danger in giving in to apathy.

It’s not just a product of our times. This proverb is 3,000 years old. “As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed. A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.” (Proverbs 26:14-15) Comedian Nate Bargatze talks about watching football on a Sunday afternoon. “I’m so lazy,” he said. He got up to get a drink during a kickoff. The kick was returned 100 yards for a touchdown. He missed it. Nate said, “The guy ran 100 yards before I could get three to maybe four yards. That guy also had eleven people really trying not to let him run 100 yards. I had... I didn’t even have an ottoman in my way. It was wide open.” Inertia builds on itself. The sluggard has given in, given up. Laziness sets in, sloth takes over. Soon it is hard to imagine finding the strength to carry on—but carry on we must. Life is a gift and a responsibility. Still, did you see it? Still, even worse is

selfish pride. “A sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven people who answer discreetly.” (Proverbs 26:16) Even worse than bed rot is the pride that won’t take correction.

Who Cares? Overcoming apathy. It is a real thing. It is a force, a sickness, a trap, and a temptation. Apathy is a danger. Next week we will talk more about the appeal of apathy. There are things we like about the “who cares” attitude. But when you give into it, life starts losing color. Things just start going grey. I’m not upset; I’m not enthralled. I’m not mad and I’m not happy. I’m just, you know, kind of...meh.

Jesus knows our weakness. In the Garden of Gethsemane He asked His friends to stay up and pray for Him, to keep watch through the night. They fell asleep. “Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?’ he asked Peter. ‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’” (Matthew 26:40-41) Jesus went and prayed again, preparing to give His life away. “When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.” (Matthew 26:43) Third time. Same thing. It’s hard to stay awake. It’s hard to keep alert. Jesus knows our weakness. He took for us the deepest sleep, the heaviest sleep, when He died for us. Jesus lay under the heaviest blanket of inertia there is, dead and silent in the tomb. On the third day, He rose again. He knows what it is to be overcome, exhausted, trapped under a weight of apathy, and by His power, He calls us to rise and follow Him into the life that is truly life.

who cares?