

## Eutychus: Acts 20

i. Once upon a time, there was a pastor who preached so long that a young man fell asleep, then fell out the window of the church, and died. It sounds like a bad joke, right?

I've usually envied people who could just fall asleep anywhere. I struggle to fall asleep sometimes - even when I'm laying down comfortable. But I most definitely struggle to fall sleep in uncomfortable places. I haven't really been one who has accidentally fallen asleep in class or in church, but I have been one who has been so bored that I wish I could fall asleep because I know it'd make an afternoon English class go faster.

-Have you ever been on of those people sitting there resting your head on your hand and then you dose off and then wham your face goes into the desk?

-Anyone brave enough to admit that you've ever fallen asleep in church?

-What about falling asleep while reading a book or watching a movie?

Sometimes it doesn't matter how interesting the movie or whatever is - you are just so tired -you can't stay awake. And sometimes you didn't know you were tired until you were so bored reading that book you'd rather be asleep.

Now I know it is kinda taboo to think about church being boring enough and/or long enough to lull people to sleep. But let's be real. I'd venture to say most of us have sat through a really boring church service or two in our lifetimes. Amongst younger people this conversation isn't taboo - it is rather common - they are usually the ones willing to admit, or perhaps eager to say that church lulls them to sleep. My mom wasn't about to entertain my argument as a kid that church was boring - and yet when I'd go to church with my grandparents my grandfather would regularly dose off and my granny would have to elbow him before he started snoring. They aren't here so I can tell that story. So lets not just say this is a young people problem.

So Let's talk about Boredom.

Technology has dramatically reshaped our capacity for boredom. A generation or two ago, boredom was a regular part of life—you stood in line, rode the bus, or waited for an appointment without instant access to a screen. Now, the moment we feel even the smallest twinge of boredom, we can fill it with a scroll, a game, or a notification. Over time, that rewires our brains, making us less tolerant of slowness and stillness. In worship, which moves at a human pace rather than an algorithm's pace, this can make it harder to stay present. And yet, a certain kind of boredom is actually good for us—especially for children. Educators and psychologists tell us that unstructured, unstimulated time is a seedbed for creativity, focus, and problem-solving. It's where our imaginations wake up and our souls have room to breathe. In faith, those quiet or repetitive moments can be where God works under the surface, even if we don't feel anything at the time.

Because no—the church is not in the entertainment business. When I used to do youth ministry, which is often hyper-focused on entertainment—the louder, the messier, the more fun, the better—the assumption was, if it's not that, youth won't come. I'll resist the temptation to get on a soapbox about the burnout that comes from constantly trying to out-fun the next thing or compete with Young Life. I'll just say this: entertainment-based ministry burns everyone out, and it's not the most faithful use of our time.

## AND

There is another kind of boredom, that's more dangerous. Churches can be very boring - and, like with Eutychus it is sometimes a matter of life and death if what we are doing is simply lulling them to sleep and causing them to fall away from communities.

This is the boredom that comes when the community has fallen out of touch with its purpose. when the gospel no longer feels connected to the grit and beauty of real life, when our practices, and our music become hollow routines. When people no longer expect God to actually do anything here.

In this space, worship stops being a place of encounter and starts feeling like a chore to be endured. People may not walk away in one dramatic moment—they simply grow numb, checking out long before they ever step out the door. It doesn't make them yawn so much as it quietly **convinces them there's nothing worth staying awake for.**

In my experience, it's not that "young people" want to be entertained every moment with high-energy concerts and activities at church. Sure, some do — but a lot are looking for something deeper: a community that's relevant, that inspires them, that ignites something in them, that helps them find purpose and meaning. And that kind of community? That is never boring.

It takes courage and humility for us to admit that the way we've been doing things could be boring - but it is so critical we ask the question - what are we doing- where do we see people (especially young people) falling sleep and falling out the window of our communities. As Eutychus points out it is literally life and death for the young people in our community if we are not the least bit concerned whether our church rhythms are so deep into a rut of boredom that people just fall asleep without knowing it.

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I must say - the few times we went to the beach when I was a kid - and my mom wanted to just sit in the chair and relax, I couldn't at all understand why she didn't want to play in the water. I found it so boring that she just wanted to sit there. Now several kids later - I understand completely why just sitting on the beach isn't boring. And also thank goodness sometimes she spent time playing in the water with me and being fascinated by the things that fascinated me.

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Because there is also the nuance of whether it's tiredness more than it is boredom that causes someone to fall asleep.

Because maybe Eutychus wasn't bored— maybe he was exhausted.

It's late. The room is warm. They've been there for hours. He's probably been working all day before this.

Sleep is like a check-engine light for our bodies and souls. When we're constantly tired, it can be a sign that we're carrying too much, moving too fast, living in a way that's not sustainable.

The indicator lights of boredom or tiredness are incredibly important and we could to spend time on each of the them in more depth... but I don't want us to miss another important part of the story of Eutychus.

Because here is the thing - Eutychus wouldn't have fallen out the window if he wouldn't have fallen asleep. BUT ALSO - if he had fallen asleep in the middle of the room he wouldn't have fallen out either. If it wasn't sitting in the window in the first place. It isn't only about the danger of falling asleep - it is also about where we fall asleep.

Now any of my students or teachers out there...Where is it you should sit in the classroom if you want to make the best grades? The front and the middle.

Now how many of you intentionally went and sat in the back row anyway? My easy classes I sat in the back because I wanted to multi task and talk. But sometimes in the harder classes it is equally as daunting to sit up front because what if you get called on? It may be more obvious that you are lost. But its true - they don't tell you where to sit for no reason - it is true that when you sit in the front you are more likely to be engaged and do well in the class.

I want you to think for a second who are the people sitting in the windows of our community on the edges.

Maybe connected at little but definitely not integrated?...or perhaps you are someone who considers yourself

more on the periphery of this community. I want you to think about WHY people sit at the edges - and I want you to say them out loud....

Why do people sit at the edges?

They are bored - this is irrelevant, doesn't make any difference/irrelevant

They are tired/over saturated with life/busy

They are afraid - of judgement, of being known, of being exposed

They don't belong - don't have commonalities

They are hurt - or angry or disagree with what is happening.

They don't know the language - when they don't understand the insider language

People sit at the edges for a variety of reasons. And so often "younger people" are a large or main category of people who are on the edges of our community - and not just OUR faith community but churches in general are seeing droves of young people fall away.

Traditionally, the church's approach has been to stay in the center and yell at the people on the margins:

"Come in! It's dangerous out there! Stay awake! Be good!"

But what if we moved the center toward them?

What if we didn't just invite the people on the edges into our rhythms, but built our rhythms with and or around *them*?

That might mean asking hard questions about what's boring, what's irrelevant, and what's just too exhausting for people to sustain. That might mean CHANGING

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"Eutychus is a passive character in this story. However, his story is not unique because Eutychus is certainly not the only young person or individual who has fallen out of the church since the time Jesus walked this earth.

And It's a tragic story, but fortunately for Eutychus, Paul ran down to the street, kneeled over his broken body, and revived the young man, bringing him back to life and back into the fold of the church."<sup>1</sup>

When people do fall from the faith community - what do we do?

do we notice, and do we go running out to be with them?

When people are falling out 1. Do we notice. 2. are we stopping our worship services and what we are doing with a sense of urgency?

Are we carrying them back into the house to feed them and celebrate their life?

Are we acknowledging how hard religion can be?

Are we changing our traditions so that people with different needs can connect to God?

May this story of Eutychus' valuable life remind us

-to pay attention to where/how we are lulling people to sleep?

-to center those on the fringes of our community

-for those intentionally on the edges - will you come in closer? Or will you help us know what might make it easier/more inviting to come in closer?

We don't long for people to stay because we need them to prop up an institution. We long for them to stay because belonging heals, because faith is sustained together, because the Body of Christ is incomplete without them, and because their lives matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Carter Florence - workingpreacher