

A Healthy Soul

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[0 : 00] All right, this month in the evening services, we are working through the second and third letters of John. So we looked at first John a while ago, and we've come back to finish up John's series of letters.

Derek's looked at second John the past two Sundays, and tonight we'll look at the whole of third John. It's only about 300 words, so we can look at all of it, I think, in one go.

The apostle John here is very old. He's very probably the last living apostle. This is probably in the 90s of the first century, and in all three letters of John, he's trying to pass the faith on to the next generation.

So John knows he's about to die, and he's concerned that the next generation of the church would have the message that he had received from Jesus. And so you see that over and over again throughout the letters, everything that he had seen and heard, all the eyewitness accounts, he wants to convey that to the next generation.

And so here he's doing that to just one man. So he writes this letter, you see right there in verse one, just a one person, Gaius. And what's the letter, why does he do it, what's it about?

[1 : 12] And I think you could get a pretty good sense of the main idea in verse two. You gotta read it a little bit carefully because you won't see the main idea at first.

But he says, I pray that all may go well with you, and that you may be in good health as it goes well with your soul. So he says, I know that it is well with your soul.

And I pray that your body would be as healthy as your soul is. So that's the prayer he's saying, I hope that your physical body would match the health of your heart, your soul.

Now immediately John takes something that we think of health, how we think of health, and he flips it upside down. When we think of health, we talk about health.

The primary thing we mean when we say health is the physical body, how are they healthy? Is this person healthy? And John here says, my prayer for you is only that your body could keep up with your soul, not the other way around.

[2 : 14] So he says, I want your, he's saying, I know Gaius, how healthy your heart is, your soul, that you've got amazing spiritual health, and maybe your body can match that.

And Paul does the same thing, he says it, and 1 Timothy 4, he says, physical training is of some value. That means you can go to the gym and know that Paul told you that's good.

Physical training is of some value, Paul says. But godliness is of value, spiritual health in other words, is of value in every way for this life and the next. So Paul says the same thing, he says, I do hope your body is healthy, but spiritual health is much more important.

So he flips the way we think about it normally on its head, and so he writes this letter to talk to Gaius about Gaius' own spiritual health, and to say, Gaius, you're incredibly spiritually healthy.

And that means that in modern terms, if we were to put it in modern language, we would say something like, John is saying here that spiritual health is actually fundamental, it's a key to the possibility of happiness, that it's incredibly difficult to flourish in life and to be happy and content without fundamentally focusing on spiritual health, even above physical health.

[3 : 34] And so we learn here in this little letter, 300 words about spiritual health, and he doesn't tell us a lot about it. I think John mainly just gives us one single mark of spiritual health.

So let me do that. Let's look at one mark of spiritual health, and we can ask, do you have it? Do you have spiritual health in your life? Well, here's one mark. There's more marks than just this.

There's more signs, but this is one of them that he gives us. So let's look at one mark of spiritual health, it's opposite, and then one tiny little extra, okay?

So first, the mark of spiritual health. All right, Gaius, verse one, who is this man? And the truth is we don't know. There are four times in the New Testament that the name Gaius shows up.

Paul interacts with three of them, but it's very clear that at least two of those three are different people from different cities. And so it's very likely that we have at least four different Gaiuses mentioned in the New Testament, at least three, maybe four.

[4 : 41] Here, this one doesn't seem to be connected to the Gaiuses. The Gaiuses, yeah, that works, the Gaiuses. That we see in the other parts of the New Testament. And that means that this man is not known, he's not a global leader in the movement of the gospel.

It doesn't, we don't even know, it's not even clear here that he's a pastor or he's a leader in the local church that he's in. Not at all, he very well may be an ordinary member of a local church wherever John is writing to.

We don't have any details. We know nothing really about this man. And that's really important. This man is unknown. And John's writing the letter first to say something like, I've met Gaius in a previous ministry and I loved him then and I love him now because I keep hearing about his ministry, his service.

You see it there, verse two, he says to Gaius, beloved, I pray for you. So in the Greek text, it says loved one, I pray for you. My loved one.

And then he says it again in verse five, my loved one, Gaius, I pray for you. Now, that means one of the simple things that John's doing here is he's showing us that it is no problem for a Christian man to say to a Christian man, I love you.

[5 : 59] Can you imagine that? We should try it sometime. That's what John says multiple times throughout the letter, to a Christian man, to a Christian man, I love you. And one of the reasons he loves him is because he loves him but another one of the reasons is because of Gaius's spiritual health on display through the things that he does.

And so here's the mark, the one mark that John points out. What does spiritual health look like visibly? One thing is this, it's in verses five to eight. He says it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for the brothers, strangers as they are.

Now, it's a little cloudy there but what he's talking about is Gaius's hospitality. So this letter is really written that every Christian in the rest of the world history, all the way to the coming of Jesus would hear about Gaius's hospitality.

So he's saying I love you Gaius because you have unbelievable hospitality and that's a mark of your spiritual health. And to get exactly what he means, you've got to know a little bit about the context.

So let me do the context in two stages. One a little more ancient and one right here and probably in the 90s what it would have been like. All the way back into the Old Testament, the time of what we call the ancient Near East, travel was very, very difficult.

[7 : 19] So people did not travel very much, they didn't move. There were no Americans living in Scotland in the ancient world. You couldn't do that and travel was impossible.

And when you do travel, there are very few hotels. So very few ends, hotels anywhere to go to. So the possibility of travel depended entirely on one thing and that was hospitality to strangers.

So the way it would work, there was a hospitality code in the ancient world and it was basically that a stranger comes to the gate of a city, cities are typically walled, villages, they're walled.

You come to the gate and outside the gate, there's probably a well. You stay at the well hoping that the elders of the city or somebody else would come and basically interview you and give you the right to pass through the gate and to stay with someone in the city.

And so a lot of times people when they traveled would actually bring letters of recommendation and say, you know, at the village 10 miles away, I'm known, I'm liked, I haven't committed any big crimes, you know, you can let me stay here, but nobody would ever stay more than one, maybe two nights, that was very typical.

[8 : 30] Now, if you invited somebody to stay, a stranger, the practice was that you would wash their feet, you would have their feet washed if you had servants and you would feed them generously and then you would send them on their way with something.

Now, this was the norm and quite often people did not receive that. So it was up to the city, up to the elders, up to the people at the gate, whether they were going to give that.

Now, Christianity comes, the God of the Bible comes, and the Exodus story takes the entire hospitality code and raises it up to 10, turns it up to 11.

And the way that that happens is that God in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, all of these books comes to the Israelites and says, you were strangers in a strange land.

You know, you were in Egypt and nobody showed you hospitality. You were in Egypt and nobody loved you. You were in Egypt and nobody invited you to their table. So I came for you. I came to bring you to my home and to sit you down at my table.

[9 : 39] And so God says, here's the logic of hospitality. Love strangers, love the people that come into your city because I loved you when you were unloved by everybody else.

And so it goes like this, Exodus 23. You shall not oppress a stranger for you know the soul of the stranger, for you were a stranger in the land of Egypt.

Or Leviticus 19, the stranger who resides with you shall be to you as a citizen. You shall love him as yourself because you were a stranger in the land of Egypt.

And so the New Testament word for hospitality is philoxenia, which means the love of a stranger.

And it comes straight to us from the hospitality code in the Old Testament.

Philoxenia, philos means love to love and xenia where we get sometimes we'll say xenophobia, the fear of a stranger, philoxenia, the love of a stranger. That's the New Testament word for hospitality.

[10 : 35] That's the word that gets translated directly in our English text as hospitality. And so it's God says, I loved you when you were a stranger, so show hospitality. Now, the specific context, right here in this letter, 80s, 90s, we're somewhere around there in the first century.

The church has been around for 60 years and churches are getting planted everywhere. Paul goes on a missionary journey back in the 40s for two years and he plants countless numbers of churches.

And what starts to happen is the church planting booms all across what we call Europe today and East as well. Apostles go, they plant a church and then they pick someone in that church and says, all right, now you're the pastor, you're the elder, you're the deacon, and none of these people ever went to Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

And that means that most of the people in the local churches had no training. And so Paul might stick around for a month, but then he might get run out of the city. John might stick around for a month and he might get booted out.

Or he might get beaten and put in jail. And so you've got these churches all over the place. They don't have anybody that has been trained or helped by apostles directly to understand how Jesus appears in the whole of Testament, for example.

[11 : 52] And so what that gave rise to was itinerant leadership. So what we see all across the New Testament and hence is that by the late first century, people are traveling around to help these churches.

And they're coming and saying, let me come and stay with you for three months and I'll help you, I'll help your elders get on their feet. I'll help the people read the Bible and understand the Old Testament, et cetera. So this is what's happening.

Imagine tonight you go home and somebody knocks on your door, nine, 10 p.m. and they're filthy and they say, my name's Barnabas.

And I'm here to support the work of the way, the movement of Jesus. And I need a place to stay.

Can I stay with you? And I plan to be here for three months.

And what are you gonna say? You're gonna say, stranger danger, right? I have no idea who you are. You're coming and you're knocking on my door late at night. You're filthy. You're not gonna be open to it, right?

[12 : 54] Now, it's a different time and a different place and hospitality doesn't work the same everywhere. But John is writing this letter saying, every person who came and knocked on guys' door, he said, come in, I've got dinner ready for you.

Here's your tea, here's your coffee. Verse six, here's how John puts it. He says, you will do well to send these brothers on their journey in a manner worthy of God.

You know what he's saying there? He's saying, what's sending somebody on their way? In a manner worthy, he's saying, send them with good supplies. Don't give them scraps, give them good food, give them a backpack, send them on their way when they finally leave your church with good supplies and good materials.

And he's saying, guys did this every single time people came to his door, he was hospitable. That means that this letter is saying to us very simply that one of the marks of spiritual health is hospitality.

And hospitality in this letter is specifically loving Christians from other places. If we were to make it as specific as possible to third John.

[13 : 58] But really it's broader than that, of course, you know, it's opening your life to people and it's opening your life to Christian friends, Christian strangers, but also to people outside the church as well.

Let's get super practical, how can you do it today? Let me just say three things very fast that you can do. One, you can invite people. First, invite, hospitality means inviting people into your personal space.

Your home in particular, but not just your home. So here's a way to think about it. Take somebody out to coffee because you want to listen to them, to their story and understand how you might can walk alongside them in their spiritual life.

Take your colleague, identify colleagues that you might could take out to lunch and say, I wanna pay for this. I wanna take you out to lunch, I wanna pay for it, I wanna get to know you more. Invite your neighbors, the people in the flats around you, into your home, into your front garden, into your back garden, all the way into your dining table.

Because you're asking the question, who needs to be reached out to today because they're lonely? Who needs to, a coffee because they're anxious and they're depressed? Who in the flats around me needs a bacon roll and an evening of laughter because they don't have any hope left?

[15 : 16] And simple, the first thing is just hospitality is asking people into your space, whether that space is over the table at the cafe or all the way into your dining room.

The second thing is inviting people not only into your physical space, into your table space, but also into your spiritual spaces. And so that means that the real hope of hospitality is not just feeding people's material needs, but actually caring for their souls.

That's the ultimate goal. And so true health, we see in this letter, what is true health? True health is spiritual health, not physical health. And so real hospitality is about spiritual health, not just physical. And so that could mean simply this, hospitality includes inviting people to church, inviting people into spiritual spaces like a small group, a prayer meeting, a group where you put Christian friends and non-Christian friends together to share spaces.

Matt Steven Chan, I think that's his first name, Chan, he writes, he talks in his book about evangelism, about mixing your universes. Hospitality should mix Christians and non-Christians together.

[16 : 24] And that's probably what Gaius was doing all the way back here in the first century. Third, finally, invite people into your personal space and invite people into your spiritual space.

And lastly, look for those people who are especially in need, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and reach out to them first and above all. No fine dining, no silver, peanut butter and jam, bacon rolls, and an open life.

And that's it, that's Christian hospitality. Now, one recent book a few years ago about hospitality, the gospel comes with a house key. This is how the author defines it. Hospitality is a movement of the heart towards others that seeks to make strangers into neighbors and neighbors into the family of God, to move people from stranger to neighbor to the family of God.

It's a call upon the Christian life, it's one of the marks. It can be done in lots of ways, it has to be done in wisdom, but it is a calling that we have. Now, the opposite, secondly, briefly.

The opposite of spiritual health in this little letter, the opposite of hospitality is deotrophies. So we see that this is a compare and contrast letter. The first half is about Gaius, and then it gets to verse nine, and then he starts talking to deotrophies.

[17 : 43] So you see in verse nine, deotrophies is the opposite. It says, I've written something to the church, John writes verse nine, but deotrophies likes to put himself first. He doesn't even acknowledge the authority of the apostles.

So, deotrophies is the opposite, because he says he puts himself first, he rejects authority, he won't work with others, and he doesn't ultimately care about the church at large, he just cares about his local presence.

And so just a couple details here. It says that deotrophies refuses any authority from outside his own person. So deotrophies is a church leader.

So we don't know that Gaius is a church leader, but deotrophies definitely is, probably the minister wherever Gaius lives, maybe in the church that Gaius is a part of. So he's saying that there's this guy, Gaius, who's just a humble, hospitable servant in the local church, and may his name be known forever in the word of God for his service.

Deotrophies is the minister. He's the leader, and he's the exact opposite. And he refuses authority. He's the kind of guy that if he was building a church website for his local church, it would have something on the homepage like we are the true church of Scotland.

[18 : 58] Dot, dot, dot, everyone else is wrong. Something to that effect. This is the kind of man deotrophies is. And it says secondly that in verse 10, he speaks wicked nonsense about the apostles and others.

So he's a religious gossip. And then right after that it says he refuses to welcome any of the strangers. So if strangers come into the city, he actually goes around and kicks them out and says we don't need your leadership, we don't need your advice, we've got it covered.

And that means ultimately that we're getting a picture here that deotrophies is self-interested because he's interested in platforming himself. So this is the opposite of hospitality according to this letter.

The opposite of hospitality is a self-interest that seeks to platform or to market oneself in the midst of the religious context. That's deotrophies. He's insular and he wants to protect his brand.

You know, his problem would be something like this. If revival, if God chose to bring revival to Edinburgh and revival broke out at the Baptist church down the road, would we be okay with it?

[20 : 03] And deotrophies would not be. He would not want to go and support what's going on wherever God might be doing it. He's not interested in the church. He's interested in the market of the church, which is to platform his own self.

Hospitality in other words is giving without need for any reciprocation, any public honor to be known at all. It's covenantal in that way.

It's covenant love. Deotrophies instead treats every interaction like the market. Every interaction is to get something back in order to raise his personal platform.

Now, it has never been easier in all of church history to be like deotrophies than 2023. And it's never been harder to be like Gaius than 2023.

And let me address this by taking the log out of my own eye instead of the stick out of all of the rest of our eyes. It's never been harder to be a minister that lives more like Gaius than deotrophies in 2023.

[21 : 08] So let me talk about ministry for just a second. Because of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment came in the 18th century right here. It began largely here in Edinburgh, on these streets right out here.

And the Enlightenment shifted our perspective from communal service to individualism. And in individualism, we care more about our individual rights than the community.

We care more about identity development and platforming than about the institutions that we were made to support. And so in an individualist context, institutions become platforms for personal performances instead of part of the mission.

And what that means is that it's incredibly tempting in 2023 in an individualist context for ministry to become a platform to create a market out of the church where individuals seek to raise their own profiles.

That's incredibly tempting. It comes to us in any form, not just ministry. Social media makes it much worse, but we all know that this is the reality. And that means that it's never been more difficult to be like Gaius.

[22 : 20] And it's never been easier to be like deotrophies. Hospitality is covenant love that doesn't want to be known that's selfless, that's not self-interested. And platforming is taking a market interest in the church itself in order to raise up our personal public acknowledgement.

Now that means, and let's move to the close, that means when we look at Gaius, what we're being told here is we have a call in our lives to first a Catholic hospitality, Catholic small sea, meaning part of what this letter is simply about is that we've got to really care about what God is doing in all the churches where he's sending people, people traveling from all over the world.

You might say you would say that, right? But he's saying whatever God might be doing, wherever, wherever he might be sending people, the mission of the church globally across the city in the Baptist and Lutherans and Presbyterians and whatever it may be, we've got to care about. That's Catholic hospitality that we actually care about everything God might be doing in the church. That's how Gaius was. But the second thing and more personal is then we have a call here to personal hospitality, which is a mark of spiritual health. And here at St. Columbus, we have that built right into our vision statement that we long by the Holy Spirit's help to be hospitable people, to Christians, to non-Christians. It's covenant love, it's not market interest.

[23 : 43] Now let's bring this to a close. How do you get this? How do you become like Gaius? And you become like Gaius when you experience covenant love.

You know, hospitality is just expressing covenant love and you become like that only when you've experienced covenant love. Back in the Exodus story, remember, what did God say? You were strangers, you were strangers to me, you were alienated, you were wanderers, and I came for you. I came to bring you to my table and to eat, eat bread and drink wine with you. That's what God said. He said, I came to be hospitable to you. Eden was our home with God.

And when we rejected God, we became wanderers, we became exiles, we became strangers. And the whole Bible is about God saying, I've come to lay a table for you, even when you didn't want it. That's covenant love. That God came to be hospitable to people who rejected his hospitality. And one of the great moments of this, it's very subtle.

[24 : 48] That I love from the Old Testament is in First Kings, First Kings 18. Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal. They're on top of Mount Carmel. There are 950 prophets of Baal.

They have a great battle over who the true God is. Whatever God is real, whether Baal or the God of the Bible will bring fire down upon the sacrifice on this mountain.

And of course, the God of the Bible comes and brings the fire down, burns up the bull, and the prophets of Baal are proven wrong. But at the very end, there's Ahab.

He's the king. Ahab is the king who brought all the wicked idolatry into Israel. He is the one who raised up all the prophets of Baal. He's the one who caused all this mess. He's the one who should be ultimately judged.

And do you know what verse 41 says of First Kings 18? God turns to Ahab and says, now that the sacrifice has been burned, will you come up the mountain and eat and drink for the rain is coming?

[25 : 50] Now what that means is that God says to the most wicked man in all the world at that time, now that the sacrifice has paid the price, I want you Ahab to come up and meet me on the mountain and let's eat bread together.

You see what he's offering? He's offering hospitality to Ahab. The most wicked man of the Old Testament perhaps. And then you come to the New Testament in Luke seven. And there's this woman that the text says, she was the woman of the city.

That's idiomatic for she was a prostitute. And she comes to a table that Jesus is sitting at with Pharisees and disciples together.

And this is a public space. She anoints his feet with oil. She pours oil over his head. She kisses his feet. She washes his feet.

She kisses his feet. She weeps and her tears pour to clean his feet. She's completely lost in the world without hope.

[26 : 55] And no one loves her. And the Pharisees turn and say, do you know that this woman is a sinner? And Peter says, do you know that this woman is a sinner?

You see the disciples and the Pharisees, both say you cannot eat with her. Jesus, you can't break bread with her. You can't dine with her. She's a sinner. She's a prostitute.

You know what this means for you? And what does Jesus say? He says, when I came to this house, no one washed my feet. But she did. Remember the hospitality code?

Whenever a stranger comes into a home, the host should wash the feet. And he says, none of you washed my feet. But this woman did. And that's because only she understood that God, Jesus Christ, came into the world to be hospitable to strangers that didn't deserve it.

She knows that, they don't. And so she wants to show hospitality to Jesus Christ, the God who came to eat with her.

[27 : 59] The Pharisees didn't get it. The disciples didn't get it, but the prostitute did. How do you become hospitable? By seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world because he ultimately wants to have table fellowship with you.

God the Son became human. Jesus Christ became homeless because he wanted to have table fellowship with you. Jesus Christ became the ultimate wanderer because he wants to eat with you. Jesus Christ became exiled to the uttermost. On the cross, he was exiled, he became the ultimate stranger to God the Father himself, because he wants to break bread and drink wine with you. How do you become hospitable? It's when you've experienced that covenant love. Only when you've experienced covenant love can you give it. And you experience it by seeing what Jesus has done for you.

You open your personal home and your spiritual home because Jesus did. That's the reason. Now, I said the mark of spiritual health, hospitality, the opposite deotrophies and one little extra bit at the end.

[29 : 06] Here's the little extra bit at the end and we'll close with this. John gives us one more tiny, big mark of spiritual health. And here it is in verse four and we'll only take two minutes on it.

And he says in verse four, he says, I have no greater joy. Maybe this is why he writes the letter. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. He writes the letter because he wants all of us to know how well Gaius was doing walking in the truth and that this is a mark of spiritual health, hospitality.

Gaius had it by the grace of Jesus. But John says, you know, I write this letter too because I don't find it any more joy in life. This is the biggest joy I get than to see the people that I've ministered to in the past, hearing years later that they are walking in the faith and growing and growing and being hospitable people.

He calls Gaius here his child. Now, does it give you joy? Here's a mark of spiritual health. Do you take joy in seeing the children walking in the faith?

Maybe for you, that's biological children. You long for your biological children to walk in the faith. Maybe for you, that's covenantal children. Maybe for you, that's children and John's sense that these are people that you've loved on, you've ministered to, you've shown hospitality to, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, and you hear a story of what they're doing now, walking in the faith, somewhere else on the other side of the world.

[30 : 36] And John says, nothing makes me happier than that to hear these stories. You know, it's as if John is saying, you know, I don't care, can we say this?

I don't care if my son, my daughter, my sons and daughters, and you could say that to me, and all of us could say that to each other. I don't care if my biological children or covenant children are digging ditches the rest of their life.

You know, I don't care if they're doing the most menial, unimportant job in all the world. I could care less if they're walking in the truth, if they're hospitable people because of Jesus Christ.

And John says that that's what makes me most happy in all the world. Is that you? Can you say that? Hospitality and the joy of seeing other people walk in truth is birthed in hospitality received. And so when you know that Jesus Christ was on the cross and it was you that was his joy as he died, it was you that gave them the endurance to suffer because he wanted to be hospitable to you, that can make you a hospitable person.

[31 : 52] Let's pray together. Lord, we pray, Father, that we would see Christ's hospitality to us tonight, the love of Jesus for us, and that that would make us into people renewed in this call to love strangers.

And so we know, Lord, that we're called to love Christians and Christian strangers, Christian friends, and non-Christians, people that are human beings, love human beings, that's what you call us to.

So help us to look for those in need around us, help us to be moved in our hearts, to really desire to open our spaces, our spiritual spaces, our physical spaces to people in our lives.

So give us Philoxenia, love of stranger, hospitality, and give us joy in hearing the stories of those who have walked in the truth since we've first met them.

And so we pray, Lord, that you would work these truths deep into our heart tonight. We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen.