Your Spiritual Health Check

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[0:00] The reading is Titus chapter 2, verse 1 to 5. So hear the word of God as it is in Titus chapter 2.

! In love and in endurance.
Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.
Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the word of God.
If you have a serious bacterial infection, I don't know if anybody here has a serious bacterial infection right now, but maybe you shouldn't be at church. Maybe you should be in the hospital.
[1:12] But if you have such a bacterial infection, one of the most effective ways to treat it is with a drug called amoxicillin. You may have heard of it. Amoxicillin is a very successful drug.

It has a high rate of success and a very predictable treatment timeline. So, if you've got this infection and you take amoxicillin, within 48 hours, the fever breaks, the pain begins to subside. Within three to five days, there is a visible reduction in inflammation and then by seven to ten days, there is typically a full restoration of all tissue function. And these are signs that doctors can know when they see, they know the drug has worked.
They know the drug has gone in and taken hold and been effective. Well, the same happens with God's truth.
When it goes into our lives, when it actually goes in and starts to really take hold in someone's life, there will be signs.
[2:20] There will be predictable changes of life and character that show that this has been effective, that it's actually gone in and it's actually taken hold.

God's truth that He has preserved for thousands of years throughout history to hear, for us to hear today. When it goes in, there will be signs.
And that is why Paul, as he's writing this letter to the minister Titus, whose job it is to take this truth of God to the island of Crete, tells him what he tells him in chapter 2, verse 1.
Have a look at it in your Bibles. He says to Titus, You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine.
That's a very important verse to understand. You must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. In other words, Paul is telling Titus he must not just teach people sound doctrine.
[3:22] Right? He must also teach them what is appropriate to sound doctrine. In other words, he must tell them the kind of character that God's truth creates, creates if it's really gone into someone.

And that's what he goes on in the next few verses to list. And we're going to look at the first half of it this morning. And I think this is essential for us to know today, because it is still just as true, it's essential for us to know if we want to be sure in our lives that the truth of God has actually gone in and really taken hold.
Because you could be coming to church for years and years and years, that doesn't mean the truth has gone in and taken hold. And so this is a way we can tell in our lives whether God's truth is actually working in us.
And so, as we read this, we realize that the type of life that the truth of God creates when it goes in is you could sum it up, really, with the word healthy.
It's a healthy life. And we know this because of the vocabulary Paul actually uses to describe it. So, he uses a special word which is translated in the NIV, sound.

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[4:47] So, it's there in verse 1, have a look what is appropriate to sound doctrine. And in verse 2, then, he describes a sound life, sound faith, love, and endurance.

And so, this word sound, it actually, it's a very important original word. The New Testament is written in Greek. And I don't normally tell you the Greek because normally ministers do that to show off that they've actually done the work you paid them for in the week.
But I want to tell you this word because it's actually really important. The word, the underlying Greek word, is the word hugaino, which is where we get the word hygiene from. Hygiene is that direct transliteration of that Greek word that Paul uses here to describe this life and this truth.
Hygiene. The definition of the word hygiene, according to the World Health Organization, is actions and conditions required to establish and safeguard well-being and prevent disease.
That is what, according to the WHO, that is what hygiene is. Actions and conditions required to establish and safeguard well-being and prevent disease.
[6:01] Now, if you think about it, look at that definition. If you think about it, that is actually exactly what God's truth does for us spiritually. God's truth is spiritually hygienic.

It cleans things up. It establishes and safeguards eternal life. If you think about it, when we take this in and obey it, what it does is it cleans up inside and it puts in us eternal life that will take us to the new creation and will change our lives now.
It establishes life in us, ultimate well-being, and as we continue to take it in, it preserves that life. It keeps us healthy and keeps us moving towards eternity. And it also, as we take this word in, it prevents disease. It prevents the disease of the world and sin that is so prevalent everywhere taking hold inside us.
This, this here, God's truth given to us and preserved miraculously over thousands of years is the ultimate cure to the ultimate disease we all have inside us.
[7:22] that will kill us if not for God's cure. And that is why we need to take it very seriously. We need to take this, God's truth, very seriously in our lives because of the disease we have.

If we didn't have that disease in us, you know what? Let's go home. But we do. I know I do. As we said in our confession, there is no health in us, in our own nature.
And that's why we need to take this deadly seriously in our lives. If you got cancer, and I know some of you have battled through cancer, or know loved ones who have battled through cancer, cancer, some of them have overcome it, some of them have succumbed to it.
Cancer is a terrible disease. The moment you hear the word cancer, it creates fear, and rightly so. It is something we fear to go into the doctor's office and hear your test results come back and you have stage three, melanoma, whatever it is.
For cancer, the treatment is often chemotherapy, and sometimes that's successful. And chemotherapy, I don't know if you maybe have experienced it, but you have to go through a number of sessions of chemo, and you often see pictures of those people sitting in those lounge chairs with stuff stuck inside them.
[9:00] They're undergoing chemotherapy. They're very vital sessions. You have to go through this. And it's not nice. Your hair falls out. It's horrible. But it's absolutely essential to kill that disease that is inside you.

Now, if you had to go through chemotherapy, you would not miss a chemotherapy session because your kid had sports that day or because you didn't feel like going.
You were just too tired. I've never heard of a cancer patient who makes such stupid excuses for missing a chemotherapy session because they know how important it is. And so why do we do that when God's cure is being administered every Sunday morning for our deadly disease?
Why do we do that? Why do we come up with excuses that miss the treatment sessions we desperately need and miss the medicine that is essential to fight the much more serious disease each one of us have inside us that would otherwise send us to hell?
Why do we think we can miss that? This truth needs to keep going into our lives and it needs to take hold in our lives to do its work.
[10:20] Because if it doesn't, if that doesn't happen, if, you know, we just come to church when we feel like it and when we're sitting in church we don't really listen to God's Word, we're chatting as the reading is happening or we're just distracted when the sermon is being delivered and we don't take it seriously in our lives and then we go home and it's the same as last week and the next week's the same and nothing changes.

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You know what we're doing? We're creating a church of hypocrites if that happens. Hypocrites. Actors, Jesus calls them.
People who come to church and they look like Christians on the outside but there's nothing happening on the inside. They say they follow God but in private they're actually no different, no different at all to the world.
You wouldn't in private be able to tell them apart to a person in the world. The language is the same. Their priorities are just the same as the world. There's no difference. Their behavior is dictated by the world and the flesh.
And Jesus speaks against people who are just acting, who are not being true to themselves or anyone else.
[11:51] And when you get that, when you get people who don't let God's word go in and change them but they look like Christians on the outside, what does that do to God's truth? Do you think?

What does that do to this gospel truth that is so essential for us? Well, Paul tells us, look at verse 5. He tells us what happens when people just pretend and when it doesn't change people.
2 verse 5, right at the end, he says, these things need to be done so that no one will malign the word of God. That's what happens, you see. When people call themselves Christians but they live just the same as the world, it maligns the word of God.
Okay? And this is why. Because when that happens, people, other people, outside people, non-Christians, see those people and they see them saying they're Christians and they talk about church and they wear crosses, maybe, and they post verses on their social media.
and the world sees that and they label that person a Christian, that's a Christian there. But then they also see them in private and they see that, oh, this person's no different to anyone else in the world.
[13:10] And so what they do is they write off the truth of the gospel and they don't even give it a fair hearing themselves. So their salvation is being endangered. Do you see what happens?

Do you see the danger of hypocrisy not only to the person but to the people around them because the people around them then will lose the chance of giving a fair hearing to God's word because they think it's empty.
And so, I want to appeal to you this morning if you're here this morning or you're listening to this and if you are only a Christian on the outside but inside, if you're honest with yourself, there is absolutely no evidence of God's truth working and taking hold.
You and your desires are no different to the world around you. If that is you, I love the fact that you're here but I want to appeal to you please stop pretending.
Please stop faking. Please be true to who you are because it only harms God's truth and it prevents others from hearing it and from finding it.
[14:22] But, actually, even better, repent of your worldly living that will only lead you to eternal death and begin to let this truth, this health actually change you to be on the inside what you claim to be on the outside.

because if you know there is still just deep unhealthiness in your soul, I want to tell you there is powerful medicine, powerful, 100% effective medicine here that God, our Creator and our loving Father has graciously given us and it works and I can tell you it works.
I've seen it work time and time again. and that can heal you. This truth can heal you and really change you if you let it.
But you have to let it. It doesn't happen automatically. Did you know that? If you just come to church and you listen and you go home, this is not going to change you.
You need to do something with it. It doesn't change you automatically and we see that in this passage. You've got to not just listen to the doctrines, you've got to start doing what is appropriate to the sound doctrine.
[16:00] You've got to choose to live the life that this truth unlocks and makes possible. The world is not able to live this new life. They don't know how and they couldn't do it even if they wanted to if they don't have God's power and God's truth inside them to give them the power to live this new life.

Those of us who do now must choose to live that new life that this truth makes possible and that is described in these verses. And so as we go through them from verse two onwards, I want to encourage you to use today's sermon as an opportunity.
Make use of it. Maybe you don't want to be here for whatever reason. I don't know why you're here then but maybe someone dragged you to church. But I mean you're not doing anything else right

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now so you may as well use this time for something useful and what I suggest to all of you is to use what I'm about to say now as your own personal spiritual health check.
You know sometimes doctors will give you a list of things to check in your life to see whether you're healthy. Well this is a spiritual health check that we're about to go through.
And so note firstly as you were listening hopefully earlier from verse two this list of attributes characteristics of the healthy life that the truth makes possible.
[17:27] Paul actually categorizes them in different categories based on age and gender. And so there's different marks of the healthy life that Paul specifies for different groups.

He starts with older men and then he goes to older women and then he goes to younger women and then he goes to younger men. It's like when doctors you go to the doctor and they ask you they won't always ask you the same questions depending on whether you're male or female or old or young.
they'll ask you different questions to check your health depending on your age group and gender. You know then he's not going to ask a middle-aged man who comes in so when last did you feel period pains?
You know there's certain things that are appropriate for certain groups. But it's not, now understand this, it's not that the healthy characteristics of one group aren't also valid for the others here.
So it's not that they're mutually exclusive. All of these if you read them are valid for all people. But I think what Paul is doing is he's rather listing the most obvious changes for each of these groups that God's word brings about that each group would normally tend towards if it wasn't this way.
[18:49] You know what I mean? So I think he's focusing in on things that each of these groups normally tend towards and then he's saying these are the main changes you'll notice if God's truth is going in.

So for example, let me tell you what I'm talking about. From verse 2 he says for the older men, he says when the truth takes hold, what it will lead to is temperance, respectability, and self-control. You see that? Temperate, worthy of respect, self-control for older men. Now if you think about it, those words, those characters are the opposite of what old men tend to.
Okay? What do old men tend to be like as they grow older? What was that? Grumpy. Thank you. There's a reason why you have that phrase, the grumpy old man.
Okay? Irritable, grumpy, and not caring too much about the people around them. You know, they've grown older than caring what people think, but in a bad way.
[19:54] And they're just grumpy and irritable. You know the type. But you see, the spiritually healthy old man is the opposite. He's temperate, he's respectable, he's self-controlled.

Also, the spiritually healthy older men are growing in faith. Rather than growing in cynicism, which normally happens, they're growing in love.
for the people around them, rather than growing in a deepening animosity for the people around them. And, look at that last word in verse 2.
Older men are growing in endurance. Endurance that they need for the deep trials of growing old. growing old. old is the final trial. And, older people will face that and they need endurance when others become more irritable and more depressed when those trials come.
[21:09] Next, for older women, the evidence of the truth taking hold is this. Verse 3, likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine.

Slanderers, not to be slanderers. This is what Paul focuses in on for the older women. I wonder why. It's so common, isn't it?
And it's not just older women, it's younger women, and it's not just women, it's men, but it's so common, isn't it? It's so common in the world to slander, to speak badly of other people to other people.
It's almost, you're out there, it's like the air that we breathe, it's so common in the workplace, in the school, at the lunch break, whatever, wherever we are, there's inevitably there will be out in the world some kind of slander going on about someone else because it makes me feel better to slander someone, that's just, it's selfish.
it's so common. Did you hear about so-and-so? You know? Did you hear about what happened to him or what happened to her? Or the Christian, you know, there's a Christian version of slander?

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[22:27] Oh, you must pray for so-and-so because did you hear about what happened? God hates slander.

Can I tell you that? Over and over again in the Bible, God tells us he hates that when we do that. And as I say, it's not that men don't, but I think it is a particular struggle, and so does Paul, for women who are more socially active and more socially wired.
But God's truth changes women to not be slanderers. God's truth changes people to be able in a social situation where they hear someone in their circle talking about someone else who's not there, to say, to be bold enough to say, let's not talk about that person because they're not here with us and it's not fair.
When last did you say that? When you were in that situation? But that's what God's truth allows you to do. It's not popular to say that. It's not like everyone in the circle is going to go, oh you're so wise and right.
No, they'll probably look at you skiff, but you know what it is? It's a sign that God's health is in you when you say that. Look at the next one, the next characteristic.
[23:52] They're not addicted to much wine. Now why is that a problem for women? I know many men who can be described like that.

This is not just a woman's problem. And it's not just wine, by the way. It's whiskey, it's gin, it's vodka, it's smoking, the list goes on.
Wine was just the most common addiction then. So why does Paul put that in the woman category? Well, I'll tell you why. It's contextual. Back then, women worked from home. They worked all of their time at home.
They were very industrious. Homes weren't just a place of rest. They were a place of industry. And women worked at home. And so the men went out. But the women were normally at home. And so that meant they had ready access to the household's food and wine.
And guess what? Comfort eating was just as much of a thing then as it is now. And comfort drinking, you know what I mean? Just indulging in something because you can and it's there and it'll make you feel better, not because you need it.
[24:57] Addicted to something subtly that is readily available. That's I think what Paul is talking about here. Whether it's wine or whether it's food or whether it's doom scrolling.

You know what I mean? Doom scrolling. Have you heard of doom scrolling? My phone's back there. But it's sitting on your phone and just you know just sorry for those listening on the recording I'm mimicking someone on their phone doom scrolling.
But it's just you know what it is? It creates little hormones in us that reward us because we want to see what's coming next. It's the same psychology as the one-armed bandits in the casino.
You just need one more pull. You just need it's an addiction. And there's a whole lot of these little subtle addictions that give us comfort.
But you know how Paul describes this example that he uses here. The original word he uses is slavery. It's being a slave to something because you end up serving this thing rather than serving God.
[26:11] But you know what God's truth does? You know why it is so powerful? It breaks us out of the slaveries in our lives. It breaks us out of these daily addictions that aren't good for us.

Which we wouldn't break out of otherwise. And now when older women are transformed in these ways that Paul lists, then they are able to do there at the end of verse 3, they are able to teach what is good.
You see that? So once they are transformed, they can teach others what is good. They can train healthy living to the younger woman in the Christian community.
Verse 4, then they can urge the younger woman. And then he goes on to describe what the younger women do. But before we look at that, I just want to reiterate, it's from these verses that we know that we need healthy women's ministries in churches as well.
Women's ministry in a church and women's pastors as well, which we have a number of in our denomination. We can't afford a full-time women's pastor here yet, but if you've listened to Alan's presentation, maybe we can in the future.
[27:20] But women's ministry is key because it creates opportunities for the exact relationships Paul is talking about here, where the older women who have walked through these struggles and trials and they've learned stuff can then help the younger women along.

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And the same for men, helping the men. But then Paul goes on to instruct what the younger women, what health in their life will look like.
So have a look from verse 4. They, the older women, can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children. In other words, they can teach them and train them how to have good marriages and how to have good parenting, which guess what?
You're not going to learn from the internet unless you go to good Christian sites that actually have good information. But you're not going to learn it naturally.
You don't naturally know how to have a good marriage. I promise you. I can tell my experience in counseling.
[28:30] It's not something that we know. We need help. We need training. You don't naturally know how to parent your children well. We need help. We need training from those who have experience in it. Verse 5, younger women are to be self-controlled and pure.

Self-controlled and pure. This is especially important for young people who are so easily led by passions to things that are not good, to things that are not going to help them ultimately.
And they need training to have self-discipline. They need training from God, their creator, to learn how to say no to the wrong things through God's people who have been there before and felt those things before.
And then also he goes on and he says young women need help in how to run the home and the family. Again, they're not going to get that from YouTube or the modern family sitcom.
But they're going to learn that from mature Christian women who will teach them things that the world won't teach them like verse 5 to be subject to their husbands.
[29:49] Ooh, that doesn't sound good. We don't like that. That's, you know, submission is given such a bad rap. Even that word makes us feel uncomfortable. But biblical submission is not what the world thinks it is.

What it is is a dance. The headship that God has given to the husband and the submission of the wife, it's a beautiful dance. And any of you who have seen it work in a Christian home will see the beauty of it.
Where there is a leader and there is a follower. And it's only when each of them are doing their particular roles that they're able to make something beautiful. That is biblical submission.
If you need to know more about that, if you're still struggling with that, we did a whole series of God's design for the family where we cover it in detail. It's on our Connect app. You can listen to those sermons.
But this is the only way families work well and work as God designed. But it's only when the older woman can teach the younger woman that they will then learn those things because guess what?
[30:56] They're not going to learn it anywhere else. then the next passage as we go on from verse 6 onwards is instructions for younger men.

And sorry to say but I'm not going to cover that this morning because I actually want to give it a good time and so that's what we're going to pick up from next week and we're going to look at Paul's instructions for younger men.
But before we close today I just want to challenge you to meditate on these verses take note of them as our prayer book says read mark learn and inwardly digest them go back to them and see them as a spiritual health check.
Titus chapter 2 the first half of it look at that as your own personalized spiritual health check and ask how do you match up and use it regularly in your life and ask how do I match up?
Are you seeing signs in your life that God's truth has really taken hold? Ask yourself I want you to do that right now just sit and think think am I seeing can I point out signs in my life like this that there is health that I'm getting healthier ask yourself I want to tell you this morning because we're a product of the reformation because we're reformed if you don't see those signs right now if you can't point out any signs in your life that show you spiritual health that does not necessarily mean you're not saved the Catholics would say it does the Catholic church would teach that you're only saved once you do these things that is not true and we can thank the reformers for clarifying that God's saving grace and love comes first before we've done anything before we respond to it and that saving grace that we receive already trains us to do these things we see that in the next few verses that we're going to cover in a few weeks but just go down to verse 11 look at what it reserved love and favor for sinners who've done nothing to get it the grace of

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[33:26] God has appeared that offers salvation to all people verse 12 it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions the grace of God comes first and that is why Titus must now instruct these Christians to now start doing these things and so just because you don't see you can't point out if it's the case that you can't point out any signs of spiritual health it doesn't mean that you haven't received God's love and grace but it does mean that you now need to choose to do these things if you're not yet doing them you may still be saved you may still be headed for eternal life but if you are!

for eternal life you must choose to take on these characters and habits they must now be worked on they must be worked on by those who claim to believe in Christ so that we can actually start living the healthy lives the healthy good lives that the truth of God has opened up for us and made possible for us lives that are fit for the amazing world to come let us pray that that would be true of us oh lord you are gracious to us your grace has appeared to offer salvation to us for our ultimate disease that we carry in us thank you lord for your grace and may it train us to live healthy lives help us lord to take your word inside and to allow it to do its work train us in godliness lord show us the beauty of godliness in our lives and fix our eyes on the beautiful amazing world to come and help us to prepare to go there in jesus name amen

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