

How often should one have a check-up? Well, my dentist tells me every six months. According to one medical organization, if you are 35 years of age or younger, you should have a physical check-up every five years. If you are 36-54, every two years. And if you are 55 and older, it should be an annual physical check-up. So, how often should we have a spiritual check-up? I think the answer is, oh, probably at least once a week. We should frequently examine our lives and ask this question: Is my soul healthy? Am I living as God desires? Friends, the reality is, it is very easy to stray off the path which God wants us to be on. That is why we need frequent check-ups. And if we discover there is a problem, we need to allow the Lord to graciously get us back on track.

Friends, for the past couple of months we have been exploring the book of 1 John on Sunday mornings. In many ways this letter from God, through the Apostle John, is one big spiritual check-up. As we look at our text, 1 John 3:10-18, we find another text which is part of the examination. The good news is that this test is physically painless and costs no money. The results, however, might show we need to make some changes in our lives. That might not be fun, but it is important. Let's pause and pray the Lord would use His word to bring greater health to our souls.

There are two parts to our soul check-up today, two questions we need to ask ourselves.

Number one, do you hate anyone? Specifically, do you hate anyone who is a fellow believer in Jesus? A healthy Christian loves other people. This is one of the basic commands God gives us. **3:11** *For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.* Friends, the mark of a Christian is not how we dress or what television shows we watch, but whether or not we love others. As Jesus said, in **John 13:35** (HCSB) "*By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*" Friends, some Christians are Viking fans, and some are Packer fans. Some Christians are Republicans and some are Democrats. Some Christians listen to rock music, and others like to listen to Bach music. But, there should never be a Christian who doesn't love his brothers

and sisters in Christ. There should never be a Christian who hates another believer in Jesus.

Yet, the reality is, there sometimes are. In a few congregations fist fights have broken out between different factions. Some church business meetings deteriorate into shouting matches between folks who disagree about a particular issue. Maybe you know Christians who seem to be constantly quarreling with each other. Perhaps there is someone who seems to try to make your life miserable and you are convinced he or she hates you. Now, I suspect almost all of you are thinking, "Pastor Dan I don't hate anyone. There is no one whose name I would like to see in the obituary column." That may be true. You all seem like nice people. However, whenever we find even the slightest pleasure in someone's failure, humiliation, or suffering, it really is a form of hatred. Friends, I am afraid it is very possible that someone here this morning, hates another person in this room. Whenever we become aware of hatred in our lives, red warning lights should start to flash. There is something wrong. Hatred is not of God. A sign on a New York City bus said, "*Doctors tell us that hating people can cause ulcers, heart attacks, headaches, skin rashes and asthma. It does not make the people you hate feel very good either.*" More important, hatred indicates a serious spiritual problem. Let's look at how John spells this out. In verse 12, he takes us back many years to a man named Cain, the son of Adam and Eve.

3:12 *We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.* In other words, hatred comes very easy to those who are evil. Remember, it is not just Hitler, Stalin, and Kim Jong Un who are evil people. The Bible tells us anyone who rebels against God and anyone who refuses to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, belongs to the evil one and is evil. Hatred comes naturally, and is relatively easy for those who are not Christians. That is why John says, **3:13** *Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.* Now, some of you are thinking, "Pastor Dan, I know a lot of non-Christian people, and many of them are nice, loving folks. They are not full of hate." Perhaps, but I

do think living in our society distorts our perspective. For the most part, people in our community are rewarded for acting nicely and covering up hatred. However, I fear that if we lived at another time, or in another place, such as Northern Nigeria, Israel's West Bank, or even the south side of Chicago, some of those nice people we know would not be so nice anymore.

Langdon Gilkey was a liberal theologian who called himself a Christian, but didn't really take the Bible seriously. He believed human beings were innately good, and that it was natural for people to love and help each other. He believed that until he was a Prisoner of War in Japan during World War 2. In the first month or so in the POW camp there were plenty of examples of human kindness and generosity. However, as time went on, those became more and more rare. Soon people, nice American people, were fighting over a scrap of bread. Nice people started to lie, steal, and use force to get what they wanted. People who consistently treated others well, like Eric Liddell, the missionary Scotsman who was also in that camp, were rare. Gilkey realized that under the surface there is more hatred than love in most people's hearts. (Or as Chuck Colson put it, "The hard truth is that we are really more like Adolph Hitler than we are like Jesus Christ.") though, I would prefer that was not the reality, I am pretty sure it is. Hatred, jealousy, or bitterness can easily seep into our lives.

John says, however, that true Christians, people whose lives are being transformed by Jesus Christ, are marked by love, rather than by hatred. **3:14, 15a** *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer,* (John agrees with Jesus, Matthew 5:22) that hatred is a form of murder. **3:15b** ...and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Now, don't be confused. Murderers can be forgiven. King David was guilty of murder and God forgave him. The Apostle Paul was complicit in murder and God forgave him. Remember, our salvation does not depend on what we have done, but on what God has done for us. A convicted murderer who trusts in Jesus, will be in heaven, because he has the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is what amazing grace is all about. However, a murderer who does not repent, someone who hates and doesn't repent, is a soul at risk. Repentance does not earn someone

forgiveness. Rather repentance is an indication, a sign, that someone has truly been born of God, and has experienced God's grace, and now has a God given desire to turn away from that sin.

Friend, let me ask this question: Is there someone you hate? If you have a spiritual check-up, and discover a tumor of hatred, you know you have a problem. Now, maybe you are thinking, "Pastor Dan, I don't really hate anyone, but sometimes, that seems to be the best response. For example, if a girl is molested by someone, the parents will hate that man. That is to be expected." Well, I agree that hatred is a natural response when someone hurts us or our family deeply. Yet, it is possible for a Christian to choose forgiveness over hatred. Acts 7 tells us this is what Stephen did. He asked God to forgive those who were murdering him. One of the most powerful stories I have ever heard is about a man in South Korea who following the Korean War, adopted as his son, a sixteen-year-old boy who had fought as a Communist soldier during the conflict. That teenage boy had murdered the man's own son. And oh, that Communist soldier eventually became a Christian pastor.

Friend, if we hate someone, no matter what he or she has done to us, we are not living as a Christian. We may be a Christian, but our actions are contradicting our identity. There is something wrong inside. By God's grace, we need to get rid of that hatred. And frankly, if I have no desire to do that, it might mean...it might mean I am not really a Christian. Though I go to church, and am basically a nice person, my hatred raises a question about whether or not I have been born of God, am trusting in Jesus Christ, and am indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So, friend, let me ask you this question today: Is there someone you hate? Is there someone, especially another Christian, against whom you are bitter? Is there someone in whose pain you take pleasure? And friend, if there is hatred in your heart, are you willing to deal with it? Are you willing to confess that sin? Will you ask God to enable you to forgive and love that person whom you hate? Remember, a healthy Christian does not hate. May the Lord heal us of any cancer of hatred that might be eating away at our souls.

Number two, part of our soul check-up is this question: Is your love for others genuine, or is it just words? Most of us would say, "I do not hate other Christians, I love them." Yet, saying we love people

and actually loving them can be two very different things. Some folks are very good at talking about love. For example, when Alfred Tennyson had his poems published, the printer ordered hundreds of extra “Ls” and “Vs” for the hand set printing press because Tennyson used the word “love” so often. For example, he wrote “*God gives us love, something of love He lends us, but when love is grown to ripeness, that on which it throve falls off, and love is left alone.*” I never got into Tennyson’s poetry, but he does use the word love a bit, and it is supposed to be “quaint.” In our day, the meaning of the term “love” has been diluted a bit. We tend to say things like, “I love pizza,” or “I love that dress you are wearing,” or “I would love to take a nap this afternoon.” So, I might think it would be accurate to say “I love everyone in this room, because I am as fond of you as I am of pepperoni pizza.” If I walk into a grade school classroom I might see something like this on the blackboard: “Joe + Mary = true love,” with a heart drawn around the words. However, writing “true love” on a blackboard doesn’t make it true. In fact, in grade school, someone else usually writes your name, matched with a person you don’t really like at all.

John tells us that love must be more than words. It has to involve action. **1 John 3:18** *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.* Or as the NLT puts it **3:18** *Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.* Friends, Jesus is the one who has given us the real model of what true love is. He chose to go to the cross to suffer and die in our place. “Greater love has no man than this, that he would be willing to give up his life for his friends.” We are called to follow Jesus’ example. Our love needs to result in action. John asks a very pointed question. 3:17 But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Or again the NLT **3:17** *If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person?* Friends, the Lord calls us as Christians to truly love other believers in Jesus. If that love consists only of talk, of a bunch of words, it is just really hot air and is not really love. When I look at Christians around me, in this room and in the mirror, I realize this may be a problem. We do a lot more talking about love, than we do acting in love. Or as I sometimes say, “When all is said and done, is there a lot more said than done?”

So, friends, is your love for other Christians genuine, or is it just words? If your answer is “mostly just words,” there is a problem. If you are a Christian, you are not living like it. You are forgetting a most important part of what it means to be a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ. Friends, if we are content with just loving with words, if we don’t want to change, if we cannot really love others, because we are focused only on loving ourselves, then there is a problem in our soul. It might even be an indication we are not really trusting in the Lord Jesus as our Savior. A Christian with a healthy soul loves other believers in truth and through actions. Well, that is our spiritual check-up for today. How did you do? And what if we don’t love other people as we should? Here are three specific steps we can take.

Number one, we need to make sure we are experiencing God’s love through Jesus Christ. In **1 John 4:19** we read, “*We love because He first loved us.*” This seems to refer to both our love for God and for other people. Only because we have experienced God’s love through faith in Jesus, are we able to truly love God, to love other Christians, especially those who don’t seem very lovable to us. I think many of us have tried the path where we try to muster up love for someone who we don’t really like. Yes, we can smile and act nicely toward that person, but when there are a lot of negative thoughts on the inside, that is really hypocrisy. No, it is not easy to love people we don’t like, but that is what the Lord enables us to do. The more we understand and experience His love, and recognize how this love is completely undeserved, the more our attitudes toward those we view as not so lovable will change.

For this to happen, two things are necessary. First, our faith in the Lord Jesus needs to be genuine, needs to be real. Going to church, being a nice person, avoiding certain bad behaviors or just “believing in God,” doesn’t cut it. The only way to really experience God’s love is through a relationship with Jesus Christ, experienced by grace, through faith in Jesus. It involves trusting not in ourselves or someone or something else to save us, but trusting in the Lord Jesus and in what He has accomplished for us through His life, death and resurrection. Friend, if you have never trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have never really experienced God’s love. Oh, yes, you have tasted it. There are samples of that love all around us, but it cannot be really experienced apart from Jesus Christ. If you are not

trusting in the Lord Jesus, I urge you to turn to Him today. If you are not sure what that means, make sure you talk to me or Pastor Mark after the service.

Second, we need to focus on what it means to be a recipient of great love. Scripture and experience both convince me that rather than trying harder to love others, the key is to drink more deeply from the well of God's love. The more we think about the great compassion, mercy, and forgiveness, that we experience through faith in Jesus, the more we are able to be compassionate, merciful and forgiving toward others. When we see ourselves clearly, recognizing how needy and yet how blessed we are through Jesus, when we see that, it enables us to view others, though very messed up and needy, as people who simply need to experience God's grace through faith in Jesus. That is the well from which genuine love flows. And I encourage you to make the topic of God's love for us in Jesus Christ something which you ponder often.

Number two, we need to deal with any hatred we have in our lives. Let me give you a couple of practical suggestions about how to do that.

1. Pray for the person you hate. Pray for that individual each day. Don't pray that God would strike him with a bolt of lightning, or that she would get what she deserves, or that God would straighten him out. Pray God would bless that person. Pray for good things in his or her life.
2. This is a tough one, go to the person you hate and ask him or her to forgive you for your attitude of hatred. It doesn't really matter how horribly you have been treated by that individual. It doesn't matter if the person doesn't like you. If there is bitterness in your heart, if you hate him or her, you need to ask for forgiveness. You might be bitter toward someone for something which happened last night, or for something that happened thirty years ago. Wherever there is hatred, it needs to be replaced by forgiveness and love.

Friends, bitterness and hatred take a toll on one's spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. They also can destroy a church. Folks, you know that I believe Chisholm Baptist Church is a wonderful church. However, there is probably more than one person here who holds a grudge against someone else in the congregation. Oh, you are probably too smart to ever admit you are doing that, but the bitterness is there. Friend, for your sake and for the sake of this church, get rid of that hatred. Do it this week. If you

are not sure what to do, please give me a call and we can talk about it.

Number three, we need to put our love into action. There are many good examples of people who do that. I like the story of Florence Hodges. She was a woman in Dothan, AL, who passed away a few years ago. She wanted to obey the Bible's command to visit the sick. So, as a volunteer she would spend eight hours a day, seven days a week, visiting patients who were in the ICU at the hospital in her city. She would also seek to comfort their families, and encourage the hospital staff working with them. She kept doing that until she was 93 years old.

So friend, here is an assignment. It is not really that hard. Pick one person, not your best friend, but someone who might not think you really care about him or her. Choose one person and ask God to help you figure out a way to show love to that individual in truth and with actions. It might mean calling or sending a note to encourage her, by letting her know you are praying for her this week. It might mean going to visit that person, especially if he is sick or lonely. It might involve going to that individual's home and offering to babysit or clean the house. It might involve loaning out some tools, books, toys, or even money to that person. Perhaps it will simply mean listening to her, because she needs someone with whom to talk. The assignment is to identify a way to show love to that individual and then do it.

Friends, our motivation for that action of love should be the fact that each day we are experiencing the love of the one who gave His life for us. This morning we are going to close with a song which celebrates the great love the Lord has for us. And as we think about that love, let this thought fill our minds: since God loves us so much, we also should love one another.