



I'm not really a spa kinda guy but this year was our 10th wedding anniversary and Bex said she'd like to go to a spa. So, I arranged for Bex to have some kind of hot stone massage thing, while I listened to Test Match Special and went for a swim in the pool. Spas often have incense burning, gentle music and everything is white. There are magazines telling us that everything we do in life is bad for us. They pride themselves in holistic care. They are broad indeed, but holistic they are not. They miss one crucial area our spiritual health. That is one

area that tea tree and ginseng won't help. So, I want to introduce you to 'St John's Hotel and Spa'. In the reading John expresses great joy for believers' physical blessing and their spiritual vitality. It is understood that John is the last remaining disciple. The other eleven had either died or been killed'. So, John has seen and suffered a great deal over many years. At St John's Hotel & Spa, he won't stop at a kale smoothie and a back massage and call it holistic. His care extends to our spiritual health too. In fact, his care is so earnest and so genuine, it will leave us wondering, 'do we really love one another as we ought?'

This letter to a dear friend, Gaius, is a message of love, love, love and obey. John is modelling the love he calls us to because he understood the truth that Christ has loved us and united us to himself, so we are freed to love his people and that love becomes visible in the way we rejoice in their good, care for their needs, and sacrifice for the advancement of the gospel. So let me take you to St John's Hotel & Spa to see his holistic love and care in three different ways: • Care for relational blessing (v1) • Desire for physical blessing (v2) • Joy in spiritual blessing (v3-4) John is living the love that he preached and, if we've managed to evade it over the last several months of looking at the letters of John, let us see it in action today.

Care for relational blessing (v 1) It is generally agreed that the letter we call 1 John was written to a group of churches. The letter we call 2 John was written to one specific church, and the letter of 3 John to one specific person and is very similar to the letter of 2 John. Commentators generally agree that Gaius was part of the church that the second letter was addressed to. What we can be certain about, is that this letter of 3 John was to a specific person called Gaius whom John knew and clearly loved. Gaius was facing a difficult situation from within the church. John wrote to encourage him to continue welcoming and supporting those who are proclaiming the true gospel. We don't know who Gaius was. There are two Gaiuses mentioned in the New Testament but it was a common Roman name. John calls him 'dear friend' four times in this short letter. This love was deepened by the unity that they both shared in the gospel. They were brothers in Christ. Gaius was someone John "love[d] in the truth," (v 1) They were not just brothers by new birth, but brothers in care for one another. I've heard it said, 'You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family' and in the same way, 'friends are the family that you can choose.' Often, we can feel we can't choose our brothers and sisters in Christ, but the fact that we are united in Christ says that we are crucially united by something infinitely more valuable than anything else.

What makes us good friends? Maybe you share the same interests, sense of humour, outlook on life. Over time you share memories of joyful experiences. But greater than all those is the blood of Jesus that unites us. This is significant. It means that we must invest in our Christian friendships, take time to know them, to work with them to move to a place of genuinely loving them. This will be costly in time, sometimes in money and sometimes in social coupons, but we can do this when we understand the gospel. Our brothers and sisters don't give us the affirmation, the security and significance that only Christ can give us. We have already been loved by God in Christ. Therefore, we are free to spend ourselves loving one another. It means that we care for the relationship enough to speak to them where we might have an issue and we do so with the hope of restoring relational peace. We don't sit in a place of tolerating we work towards love. It takes time, sometimes more time with some than with others, especially where there has been great hurt, but we must be moving in that direction. That is what it means to "love in the truth." We don't do this to make ourselves

lovable to God. We do it because, in Christ, we already are loved by God. The Christian isn't trying to earn a family. Christ has given him one. We aren't trying to prove ourselves worthy of love; we've received love we could never deserve. And so, we can spend ourselves loving people who sometimes frustrate us, disappoint us and hurt us. John is expressing his care for relationships, for relational blessing in St John's Hotel & Spa.

St John's Hotel & Spa is Desire for Physical Blessing (v2) "Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." (v2) What a simple prayer! No supplicational gymnastics that we feel we must do, at least when we're praying publicly. We feel we ought to be praying for mightier things. Yes, we ought to be praying many different things for different people, but here, in this moment, John takes time to write what he prays for Gaius and it is wonderfully simple. One of the elders in my previous church prayed over Ophelia as a new-born. He prayed that she would know Jesus and be happy. It genuinely took me back a bit. I should've been delighted that he prayed that my daughter would be happy. But in my head I was thinking, perhaps he'll pray that she'll be a missionary, taking the gospel around the world. That she would delight in Jesus above all things from an early age and share the gospel with her nursery mates. But no, 'may she know Jesus and may she be happy'. Or as John wrote, may you "enjoy good health" and may all "go well with you."

The false teachers of this day were saying that the physical world was evil. The outworking of this teaching was that Jesus could not have come as a real person, in real 'evil' physicality. And if He did, then he couldn't have been God. 1 John challenges that teaching. Here he continues to live by his teaching, against the false teachers of the day, by praying prayers for physical blessing for Gaius. John shows us that it is good and Christian to care about one another's bodies and circumstances. We don't need to become so "spiritual" that we stop caring whether our brother is ill, whether our sister is struggling financially, whether someone's marriage is hurting, or whether someone's body is failing. We can bring those ordinary physical needs to our Father. Jesus cared for people spiritually and physically. He restored sight to blind eyes, both physically and spiritually. He made clean those who were unclean, both physically and spiritually. Jesus came in flesh to redeem souls and flesh. That which God has put together, the physical and spiritual, let no man put asunder. Christ has loved us with an infinitely greater love than we deserve; therefore, because we are secure in him, we can joyfully pour ourselves out in love for his people. John wasn't too spiritual and too holy to recognise the blessing of "good health" and of days "going well". However, when we make physical things more important, like houses and health, they become too valuable to us. And seeing a believer being blessed with them can make us jealous. Let us repent of this. View these things in the right way and let us rejoice with our brothers and sisters. Pray that the Lord will enable them to enjoy their blessings, good health and that all may go well with them.

Joy in spiritual blessing (v3-4) "It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." Gaius' faithfulness to the truth was something that got back to John. Faithfulness is not sexy. It doesn't make magazine covers or headline news. It doesn't sell. Not only did John reference Gaius's "faithfulness to the truth," but that he is "continuing to walk in it." Faithfulness is not just faithful theology, it is faithful doxology. Not just faithful doctrine, but faithful devotion. His walk matched up to his talk. Loving was desiring physical blessing and rejoicing in their spiritual blessing. John says that he has "no greater joy than to hear that his children are walking in the truth." (v4) What gives you the most joy? At St John's Hotel and Spa, there is truly holistic care. But the most important area of care is spiritual care.

Let us pray bold and mighty prayers because you betcha that John did. You don't say what John says in verse 4 without praying big and bold prayers. St John's Hotel and Spa is truly holistic. But the gospel promises something far greater than temporal flourishing. One day we will put on new bodies that won't decay and go wrong, that won't need physio, and deep tissue massages. Bodies that won't ache and creak, sin-free, pain-free, joy-full bodies, of which the resurrected Jesus was first-fruits. The physical and spiritual wholeness that John cares about in this passage will one day be complete in Christ. Lord hasten the day!