

## **Spiritual Health Check - Sermon series for Lent 2026**

**1.18<sup>th</sup> Feb (Ash Wednesday): Why do we need a Spiritual Health Check?**

**1 John 1:19-24 / Ephesians 3:14-21**

**2. 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb      How healthy is your heart? – what's your **heart** like towards God?**

**Matt 6:19-21**

**3. 15<sup>th</sup> March    Who do you think you are?- how far is your **identity** founded in Christ?**

**Psalm 103:8-18**

**4. 22<sup>nd</sup> March    What do your habits say about you? – do your **habits** lead you to love God more? **Matt 6: 1-18****

**5. 29<sup>th</sup> March (Palm Sunday)– What are you like to live with?- how healthy (how Christ-like) are your **relationships**?**

**6. 2<sup>nd</sup> / 3<sup>rd</sup> April Maundy Thursday & Good Friday - Will you keep going? How far are you following the way of the cross? (**Obedience**)**

**7. 5<sup>th</sup> April (Easter Day): Where's your joy? (**Joyful living**)**

**There will also be a Lent Journal for you to work through as individuals during this series, and the opportunity to have a one to one conversation with someone as a Spiritual “MOT.” This is not designed to pressurise or frighten anyone! It’s an opportunity to reflect in a supportive environment and to voice your thoughts out loud, which can help to make things clearer and give greater weight to any decisions you make.**

**There are optional questions for life groups for the special services** (Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday) which can be used if desired, by groups or individuals.

### **1. Introduction on Ash Wednesday: Why do we need a Spiritual Health Check?**

**Suggested Bible passages: Psalm 139:23 -24 “Search me O God..” Matthew 7:7-12**

We all go for health check-ups, and when the doctor asks, “How are you?” we are happy to tell him /her. We are glad to have the opportunity to reflect, to ask questions, to see if we can do anything to get healthier. We bring our problems and ask for help in diagnosing them. We submit to tests, a little nervous about what they might reveal, but knowing that it’s better to have any issues out in the open so that they can be treated.

But when someone asks us, “How are you doing in your Christian life?” many of us find it uncomfortable or intrusive; judgemental even. Certainly, un-British or un-Anglican! And yet, what more crucial question should we ask ourselves, and each other?

What better time than this Lent to examine the state of our hearts and ask God to bring to our attention symptoms we’ve been ignoring; so that He can gently diagnose and advise suitable remedies.

Some will be unduly worried about their spiritual life; others unduly confident. Most of us, a mix of both. But we will all benefit from a spiritual health check.

This is not about being self-centred. The more like Christ we become, the greater our witness and the more fruit we will bear for the Kingdom. Going deeper with God is always for the purpose of going wider with his love and mercy.

We commend this to you, and to ourselves as well, knowing the riches that await:

**(Ephesians 3:14-21)**

*<sup>14</sup>For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup>may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

**Optional Questions for Life Groups: Psalm 139:23-24 Matthew 7:7-12**

1. Why might a spiritual health check be a good idea once in a while? You might compare it to a medical check up or a car MOT.
2. Look at Matthew 7: 7-12 As we seek God, what is his response?
3. Read Psalm 139 together. The psalmist seems uneasy that he has displeased God in some way. What examples does he give of God's character and power? What would you say his relationship with God is like at this moment?
4. The writer of Psalm 139 wants to make things right with God. (v23-24) In this season of Lent, in what ways would you like your relationship with God to be strengthened?

Turn those verses into your own prayers for yourselves and for each other as you embark on this series with open hearts.

**2. 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb How healthy is your heart? - an examination of our **HEART** – our love for God.**

**Suggested Bible passage: Matthew 6:19-21**

We know that the heart is the most important organ in the body. It keeps working until our final moment in this life. When our heart is unhealthy, it affects every part of the body.

So it is with our spiritual “heart.” In Jesus’ day, the heart was seen to be the central core of a person: where wisdom and understanding, desire and emotions, choices and devotion originated. Therefore, spiritually speaking, if our heart towards God is cool, (Rev 2:4) and other things hold primary place there, (e.g. Matt 6: 22-24) then it affects every aspect of our lives and those around us. (Proverbs 4:23)

God wishes for us to love him, because he created us to share his world with him and enjoy relationship with him. (Isaiah 43:21) He sent his son Jesus to re-open the door for that love when sin has slammed it shut. (John 3:16) (Romans 5:8) And so we love him in return: first, because of his glorious nature; second, because he loves us so passionately (Jer 31:3) and thirdly, in gratitude and what he has done for us.

Let us come in this season with humility, honesty and bravery, asking ourselves, “How is my heart towards God these days?” Not primarily because we fear (are in awe of) him or are commanded to do so, (though these things might be true) but because we love him a little and we want to love him more. We’ve heard others talk of the glorious riches of loving God deeply (Psalm 63:1,3), and we want to go on that journey too, discovering what true health and wellbeing looks like for those who are in Christ. (Jer 17:13)

**Questions for Life Groups: Matthew 6:19-21**

1. If someone asked you tomorrow, “What is your passion in life?” what would you reply? Be honest -what would be your first response?!

2. “How is your heart towards God these days?” You might find it hard to put your answer to this question into words. What clues in our lives might help us work out an answer? Here are some ideas if you are stuck:

You could compare: – what was my heart like before? (last year/ before that disappointment/ when I became a Christian...etc.) See Psalm 77:3-6

You could ask questions:

Who do you turn to first when you are afraid or anxious?

What do you prioritise when making decisions about finances/ shopping/ saving/ giving?

What do you prioritise when planning your day, your week, your year? What do you spend your free time on?

You might think of other questions to ask yourselves. Another option is comparing ourselves to others, but I would suggest that this is rarely a useful exercise!

3. In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus compares spiritual treasure with worldly treasure.

- A) What are the disadvantages of worldly treasure? (practical and spiritual) (Note: in Jesus' day, it was much harder to store treasure safely and to protect it, without bank accounts, fridge freezers, safes and modern materials which are decay resistant.)
- B) What do you think spiritual treasure is, and why is it more precious?

4. Jesus seems to be talking about loyalties as much as about money or stuff in themselves, especially in verse 21.

In what areas of your life do you sense the greatest pressure to be loyal to wealth or “stuff” rather than to God at the moment? Has it changed for you over the years? (In William Barclay’s commentary on Matthew, he quotes Dr Johnson being shown round a nobleman’s castle, and saying to a companion, “These are the things that make it difficult to die.”)

5. Of course, wealth and “stuff” are not the only things that can make our hearts grow cold towards God. The other is sin: disobedience to God’s commandments; and rebellion: attempting to be independent from God. Read verse 22-23. What things might increase darkness within us and cause our hearts to cool towards God? What is our instinctive behaviour when we’ve sinned? (Think about what Adam and Eve did in Genesis 3:8. Or what Jesus accused the Pharisees of in Mark 7:6)

6. In this series we are inviting each other to take a long hard look at ourselves, and it may be painful, challenging, and also life-giving and transformative. Pray for one another, and commit to doing so throughout this series, that we might be protected from evil. Pray that nothing will get in the way of the work the Spirit wants to do in us, for the Father’s glory and for the sake of the kingdom.

### **3.15<sup>th</sup> March Who do you think you are?- an examination of our **IDENTITY** in Christ**

#### **Suggested Bible passage: Psalm 103:7-18**

If we see ourselves as we really are, God can deal with us as we really are. In medical terms, we might say that our sense of identity is the root of our spiritual health. Examining our sense of identity allows God to diagnose what areas of our lives still need to be given over in surrender to God, thus paving the way for effective treatment.

Lent reminds us of the fragility of our lives (we are dust, like grass that withers (Psalm 103: v14-15) but also of God's steadfast love for us. He is the perfect parent, loving us intimately (Ps 139) and extravagantly (1 John 3:1-3) despite our flaws, even while he longs for us to be free of sin: sin that he hates as it damages us and others, and from which he rescued us by sending his Son to the cross. (John 3:16)

So, our identity is of loved, accepted children, both frail but also seen by God as without blemish because of Christ's work. (Col 1:21-23) The Spirit has been set upon us as a seal, proclaiming us as God's own, and protecting us. (Romans 8: 14-17 and 32-39)

We can see ourselves with sober judgement: with humility because of our sin and weakness, but also with complete confidence through Jesus.

It is a firm foundation upon which to build our lives as we are transformed by the Spirit to become like Christ.

### **Questions for Life Groups: Psalm 103:7-18**

1. Do any of you watch the programme, "Who do you think you are?" on BBC? Why do you think many people are fascinated with finding out their family tree and having DNA tests?
2. Who are you? Each jot down as many answers to that question as you can. E.g. a man, a retired person, a parent, a musician, a Rovers supporter....etc. How far do these aspects of our identity give us security? How far do we rely on them, and what if they are taken away, for example, through divorce, bereavement, unemployment etc?
3. Did anyone start with: "A child of God?" Now write down who you are as a Christian – see how many statements you can gather between you, thinking of Scripture references where you can. (e.g. light-bearers to the world; stones in the holy temple of God's church...) What rights and responsibilities do we have as children of God?
4. The Bible demonstrates that our identity comes from God, and that unlike other forms of identifying ourselves, it's unchangeable, as God will never let us go.  
Look through Psalm 103:7-18 and find as many examples as you can of how God views his people and his creation.
5. Our identity before God can get obscured by sin and fear. What has God done to restore that relationship with us? (See Colossians 1:21-23) and (Romans 8: 14-17 and 32-39)
6. How then shall we live? Do we live as if our identity is safe, wonderful and life-giving, or do we come across as still stuck in sin, fear, shame and rebellion? Would anyone be able to tell?  
Despite and alongside any trials we may be facing, how might we live as "Easter people" so that others think, "I want some of that!"  
Be brave: why not confess to God aloud in prayer before the group any attitudes or behaviours that are no longer needed but which still cling, such as lack of self-worth or seeing God as a harsh headmaster rather than as a loving parent.  
You could listen to the song, No longer Slaves, or In Christ Alone, or look at the lyrics to see how many examples there are of our identity in Christ.

### **4. 22nd March What do your habits say about you?**

An examination of our patterns and **HABITS**: are they leading to greater or poorer spiritual health? Leading us away from God or towards him?

### **Suggested Bible passage: Matt 6: 1-18 Jesus tells us how to live and worship.**

We know that how we spend our time impacts our health and wellbeing on all levels.

So it is with our spiritual health: if our spiritual habits- our rhythm of life- is a healthy one that allows us to draw nearer to God (Col 3: 1-10) then we will become more like Jesus, who gave us the pattern of living well. We will be following the Maker's instructions, which are in the end far more effective than when we riff through life making up our own rules to suit ourselves. People in our society are now crying out for some rules and boundaries they can actually trust.

Jesus taught his followers various examples of healthy practices and habits: giving, prayer, fasting (**Matt 6: 1-18**) and in 25-34 – serenity/ faith; Paul adds worship, learning and thankfulness. (Col 3:15-17)

The resulting spiritual health will be a pleasure to the Lord; life-giving to ourselves, and a blessing to others, making a difference in the world.

No one says it's easy: we need each other to keep strong in these habits: as the early believers demonstrated. (Acts 2: 42-47) We keep coming back to God in repentance and recommitment, just as the Israelites did. The writer of the Hebrews reminds us never to give up. (Heb 12: 1-3) And we remember that it is primarily to please God and to be salt and light in the world, not about being "better Christians" for our own satisfaction. There are no brownie points on offer! We cannot earn our salvation through good works, important though they are as an expression of our faith. Infuriating for the competitive types among us, we can't even boast about them without devaluing them!

### **Questions for Life Groups: Matthew 6:1-18**

1. What bad habits do you have, that you are prepared to disclose to the group?!
2. What spiritual habits do you have? You might think of the rhythm or pattern of your day, your week, your year. Choose one and say how it helps you to live as a follower of Jesus. Note – you can think wider: as well as the classic spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading, you might consider things such as practising thankfulness and generosity. (See also Colossians 3:15-17)
3. Read Matthew 6:1-18 which covers the spiritual practices of giving, prayer and fasting. What advice does Jesus give for each area? Can you spot any common principles or themes between them? Which do you find easier/ harder?
4. In the prayer we now call The Lord's Prayer (v9-13), Jesus sets out attitudes to live by. (E.g. gratitude, looking to God to supply our needs etc.) What habits could we practise that would help us live out those attitudes?
5. How do other people help you practice good spiritual habits? What role do your church family/ Christian writers and speakers/ wise mentors and examples from your past ...play?
6. Give thanks for one another in prayer and commit to supporting one another. Discuss if there are specific ways you could do this more effectively. You might create pairs or 3's within your group so that each person has at least one critical friend to whom they can be accountable and reveal a greater degree of honesty.

**5.29<sup>th</sup> March (Palm Sunday)– What are you like to live with?**- an examination of our **RELATIONSHIPS** with others. How Christ-like are we in our dealings with others?

### **Suggested Bible passage: Eph 4:17-5:2**

We know that with our physical health, the symptoms our bodies display on the outside are a good indicator of what's going on inside. With our spiritual health, the way we relate to other people is a good indicator of what's going on inside. Persistent displays of fear, anger, hatred or pride are a reflection of how all is not well with our souls. (Matt 15:17-20)

We are to avoid attitudes and actions that lead to self-destruction (Col 3:5-9) and put on those that are fitting with being children of God- made in his image and imitators of Christ. (Col 3:10-14) The popular phrase “What Would Jesus Do?” has helped many a Christian pull back from sending a hasty email in anger or snapping at a teenager, as well as guiding us towards positive acts and words of compassion. (Matt 25:40) (Although it’s not always easy to work out how Jesus would respond to the very 21<sup>st</sup> century western problems we have created for ourselves!)

Maintaining spiritually healthy relationships across all the spheres of our lives is a big ask, but it’s crucial that we don’t allow friends and colleagues the sunny side of our disposition during the day, then dumping our pent-up frustrations later on our loved ones. Jesus warns specifically against favouring the powerful with our graciousness, while treating the powerless with contempt. (Matt 18:4-5) (John 13:14) And against only being kind to those we consider to be like us, or deserving of our love (Luke 6:35)

We will definitely fail to live healthily in all our relationships all of the time. The redeeming work of Christ and the powerful support of the Spirit enable us to confess, repent, receive forgiveness and grow towards healthier relationships and to mend broken ones.

The “Golden rule” Jesus has given us to live by (Matt 5:23-24) requires spiritual stamina and a strong motivation of love.

### **Questions for Life Groups: Ephesians 4:17-5:2**

1. J.John, the Christian writer and speaker, was describing the pressures of living well in a marriage, and how we tend to assume it’s the other person who is acting badly. He pointed out, “Are YOU fun to live with?” Ouch! As far as is appropriate, name one thing that makes you hard to live with or be friends with. (Someone else has probably pointed this out to you already!- but beware of false accusations as well as genuine truths.)

Now think in silence about some kind of relationship that has gone wrong for you. In the quiet, give it to God afresh today and ask that this session will help you to know a deeper peace and healing from it than before.

NB. If anyone is feeling upset by this soul-searching, do pause to encourage them and pray for the Spirit to comfort and guide. As the session goes on, hopefully we will all sense the Father’s loving compassion in the difficult but rich world of relationships.

2. Where do the forces that damage our relationships come from? See Ephesians 4: 17-19, also Mark 7:20-23 to help. Why do you think they are so powerful, despite our good intentions?
3. Paul writes about putting off our old selves and putting on the new. Eph 4:22-24 and v.25. What old attitudes and behaviours have we not yet surrendered to God, and how might our relationships improve if we did so?
4. We find it hard to live right. How can we allow the guiding of Scripture and the power of the Spirit to help us? What else could help?
5. How do you react when you get things wrong, or when things go wrong? How we respond to failure, disappointment and crisis will reveal the areas of our lives that still need to be surrendered to God. Do you tend to give up? Do you retaliate? Do you pretend it hasn’t happened? (Flight, fight or freeze responses.) Look for some good pieces of advice from Ephesians 4:25-5:2
6. Pray together, offering to God healing for the past, strength for the present and guidance for the future.

**6. Maundy Thursday Will you keep going? - An examination of our OBEDIENCE for the long haul.**

### **Suggested Bible passage: Matthew 26:36-46**

Fantastic fitness regimes are only useful if we keep them up. As the slogan in my gym says, “Consistency is more important than intensity: keep showing up.” The same is true for our spiritual fitness: we are in it for the long haul, on the days when we feel spiritually inspired *and* on the days when we feel dry or lost; on the days when the sun is shining *and* deep in the valley of suffering.

Our obedience to God grows out of our trust in him: the more we grow in love and trust, the more we can surrender to him. We start to see life from God’s eternal perspective. Our priorities change. What begins as a difficult realignment of our wills becomes a natural and joyful path.

The supreme and awe-inspiring sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is our model for obedient living. He went willingly to suffer for us, knowing that it was his Father’s will and that the benefit would far outweigh anything that he could experience.

### **Questions for Life Groups Matthew 26:36-46**

1. How good are you at sticking with things that are difficult? Would you describe this as a strength?
2. In Matthew 26:36-46, what trials was Jesus facing? What was his response?
3. What could help us to persevere in our faith even when it’s tough?
4. How obedient are you to God? What stops you? What helps you?
5. Why is obedience easier when you have confidence in God?
6. Pray for one another for any trials or stresses you are facing, and ask for the confidence and assurance we need to persevere in obedient living.

## **7. Easter Day: Where’s your joy? – An examination of JOYFUL LIVING**

### **Suggested Bible passage: John 16:16-24**

Joy is not merely an emotion; it is a profound state of being rooted in our relationship with God and the victory of Jesus over sin and death.

In John 16:20-22, Jesus speaks to His disciples about the sorrow they will experience when He is taken away but assures them, “You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.” This shift from grief to joy encapsulates the essence of Easter. The resurrection of Christ signals not only the defeat of death but also the promise of eternal joy and hope for all believers.

True joy is anchored in our identity as children of God, through the grace afforded to us by Christ’s sacrifice. It is not dependent on earthly circumstances but flourishes in our acknowledgment of Christ’s resurrection. Psalm 30:5 reminds us that “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.”

In the resurrection, Jesus models what it means to live a joyful life—a life marked by hope, purpose, and a profound sense of belonging to God. As we examine our spiritual health, we must question: Are we living in the fullness of that joy? Are our lives reflecting the hope of the resurrection?

### **Optional Questions for Life Groups: John 16:16-24 and Philippians 4:4-7**

1. How joyful a person are you? What brings you joy? Why?
2. What does joy look like for a Christian perspective? Have a go at giving a definition. Now look at Phil 4:4-7 to help.
3. From Phil 4:4-7, why can we rejoice, whatever the circumstances?
4. Why will the disciples’ grief turn to joy in John 16:16-24? What impact will it have?

5. In Dan's sermon he outlined 3 ways to cultivate joy: worship, sharing our faith, living in community. Which of these is bringing you the most joy at the moment and why? Who would you like to be given this gift of joy as well, so you can share in it together?