

Eager to do what is good

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[0 : 00] It's great to be here with you and great to be able to look into this terrific passage from! The book of Titus. I don't know you, I don't know people here, so I don't know what you're good at, what you're bad at, what you struggle with.

But let me pose you a question. Could you spend the whole of a transatlantic flight simply waiting for it to end?

There is a new trend that's been going around on social media, particularly popular amongst young men. It has the unpleasant name of raw-dogging a flight, and it means doing absolutely nothing when you are on an airplane.

No in-flight entertainment, no movies, no music, no snacks, no drinks. And for some, no sleeping and even no water.

Or even no going to the toilet, which is pretty difficult to do on an airplane anyway. The only thing that they allow themselves to do for the whole of a flight is to look at the in-flight map that you sometimes get for particularly long flights.

[1 : 23] One person posted on social media about their personal best of a 13 and a half hour flight between China and the US, just sitting there doing absolutely nothing.

And even football star Erling Haaland has got up the challenge with just a seven-hour flight. So that's a bit of an easy one. But no sleep, no water, no food, only map.

Now, the reason why people do this, apart from because people like a challenge, is because it says it helps them focus their minds. But I read about a GP called Jill Jenkin, who spoke to the BBC, and basically said they're idiots.

The whole thing about the risk of long-haul flying is that you're at risk of dehydration. If you're not moving, you're at risk of deep vein thrombosis, which is compounded by dehydration.

And then she added, not going to the toilet, that's a bit stupid. Well, I'll leave it up to you whether you think that is a brilliant challenge or not, or in the words of GP, rather stupid.

[2 : 29] But we all have to wait for things, don't we? We all know what it's like to wait, sometimes to wait for a long time, whether that's for a bus to arrive, to wait for a job decision maybe, to wait for a flight to be over.

The question for us is, what should we do while we wait? What should we do while we wait? Do we just sit there passively, like those doing this flight challenge?

Just sit and wait, doing nothing until it is all over. Or is there a better way to use our time? Well, this passage from the book of Titus is all about waiting.

Paul tells Titus that what we are to do while we wait. Did you see that in verse 13? We are to do certain things while we wait, in verse 13 of chapter 2.

And it's a time of waiting that is sandwiched between two appearances. The word appearing that Paul uses here is a technical term from Greek theatre.

[3 : 43] And it describes a hero breaking in, into a hopeless situation, to rescue someone from danger. And that is exactly what is going on here.

But the hero who breaks in is the Lord Jesus Christ. So the first appearing is in verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Paul here, of course, is talking about the coming of Jesus. His coming to die and to rise again to bring us salvation. That's the first appearing.

The hero appears. And then the second appearing is in verse 13. The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

And so here Paul is looking ahead to the second coming of Jesus. As he comes to usher in God's kingdom in all his fullness. The hero appears yet again to bring the plans to fruition.

[4 : 43] We have those two appearances. The appearing of Jesus first and the second coming of Jesus. And in the meantime, we are to wait.

Because that's where we live, isn't it? In between these two appearances. The present age is what Paul calls it. We are in the present age between the first coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection and ascension.

And the second coming of Jesus as he brings in the kingdom in all its fullness. And so in the middle, we wait. But I want us to see that this waiting is not an idol hanging around.

However much you might relish the challenge of a 13-hour flight, just sitting there doing nothing. That is not how we are to be as Christians. As members of the kingdom of God, as followers of Jesus, we are to do something.

And God intends in this present age for us to be active. And we are to be active in doing good.

[6 : 04] We are to do good in this present age. That's in many ways the pivoting point here in the book of Titus. As Paul has been talking about what it means to lead the church, he wants people to know what they need to do in this present age.

It's not just wait passively, but to do good. And we have this wonderful summary for us of what Jesus has done in verse 14.

You see that we're told that Jesus gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own.

It's a great summary of the Christian faith. It's a great summary of what Christians believe. That Jesus gave himself for us to buy us back, to make us pure, to make us his people.

And so how are we to respond to this kindness and love of God shown to us through Jesus? Well, verse 14 tells us we are to be eager to do what is good.

[7 : 24] We are to be eager to do what is good. Back in 2010, the Daily Mail newspaper ran an article with the title, Nobody Likes a Do-Gooder.

Study confirms, it went on, selfless behavior is alienating. It pushes people away. Apparently, according to this article, being a do-gooder annoys other people in the social group, making them feel bad and raising the bar of behavior for everyone else.

And in fact, Christians often get a bit of a bad reputation for being do-gooders, right? For being the kind of people who do good and therefore make other people feel bad.

And so we might think, okay, well, I need to be seen as not being a bit of a do-gooder if I'm a Christian. If my friends and my family know that I'm a Christian, I need to avoid that.

But Paul here tells us this is exactly what we should be doing. We are to do good in this present age. That's our task between the first appearing and the second appearing, to do good.

[8 : 47] And more than that, we are to be eager to do what is good. We don't just do it out of duty, out of sort of obligation, I probably want to do good, but motivated by who Jesus is.

We are excited, even impatient, to do what is good. We are to be on the lookout for good things to do. Doing good isn't waiting.

It is something that drives us because of what Jesus has done for us. So when the late queen and her sister Margaret were children, their mother, the queen mother, would often instruct them before they went to an event.

And it wouldn't matter what event they were going to. It could be a grand regal occasion, or it could be a friend's tea party. It doesn't matter. She would instruct them, and she would say to the princesses, royal children have royal manners.

Royal children have royal manners. Because how they acted was important. Because how they acted, what they did, flowed from who they are.

[10 : 03] So too it is with us. We don't do good because we want to be liked. We do good because we are children of the king. Because royal children have royal manners.

And this isn't just about being nice. Being kind and sort of not offending anyone in this present age. It is about reflecting the character of Jesus in all we do.

Doing good is reflecting the goodness of God in the world around us. And Paul tells us we have a way to learn that.

We have a teacher in the art of doing good. And that is the gospel. So he goes on. For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. And to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age.

[11 : 10] What does it mean to do good? Well, it means being taught by the gospel what kind of people we should be. So it means saying no to certain things, to ungodliness and worldly passions.

We are to turn away from those things, the things that reject God in the way that we think and the way that we act. But as Christians, we are not just to say no to certain things.

It is a constant pressure for us at CARE to make sure that we are not just saying no to things. There are certain things that we need to say no to. And we have said no to assisted suicide legislation.

We have said no to abortion legislation. And other things like that. But we need to be also saying what we say yes to. What is the positive story?

What is the better story that the gospel gives to us? And so Paul says the gospel teaches us to say yes to certain things as well.

[12 : 11] Yes to self-control. Yes to godly lives. We are to take charge of ourselves and direct our thinking, our acting, our reacting in a way that pleases Jesus.

So waiting is not sitting idly by. We may wait between the first and second coming of Jesus. But we wait and as we wait we do good.

But there is another part of the picture that I want us to think about. Because for many of us that will be kind of relatively familiar territory.

Okay? I hope that many of us will have thought, okay, well, yeah, I shouldn't just sort of sit here doing nothing until Jesus returns. But God wants us to do good. That is great. But the second thing I want us to see from this passage is that we are to do good in the public square.

You kind of knew that was probably coming. If you invite a speaker from care, then we are going to talk about why it matters that we speak in the public square. But this is what Paul tells Titus.

[13 : 24] Part of doing good while we wait for Jesus' return is how we relate to government. So in chapter 3, this is where Paul turns.

He says, remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.

So again, Paul comes back to this theme of doing good. And he says we are to be ready. We are to be prepared to do good. And part of that includes being subject to rulers and authorities.

Now, I'm just looking around you. I probably don't see too many anarchists here. I mean, maybe one or two. I don't know you terribly well. But I'm guessing most of us, even if we're not anarchists, don't particularly like the idea of submitting to rulers and authorities.

But here, Paul is telling us that this is a good thing. This is part of what it means to be doing good. And when it works well, politics and government should help us in the task of doing good.

[14 : 40] So Daniel Webster, who was a 19th century American politician, put it this way. He said the proper function of a government is to make it easy for people to do good and difficult for them to do evil.

Good government, government that's working properly, restrains evil. That's why laws are in place. But it also makes it easier to do good.

And one of our heartbeats at care is to ensure that this is happening. That our government is a good government that both restrains evil, but also enables good.

Good by the state, but also good for us as human beings. And because we live in a democracy, we have a voice. We can shape our country's politics, which is an amazing privilege.

When governments lead in the wrong way, where they promote evil instead of restraining it, where they prevent people from doing good, well, we can speak out. We need to speak out.

[15 : 48] We need to correct them. That is part of what it means to do good. But also part of doing good while we wait is putting ourselves under the leaders of the land.

Paul tells Titus to remind the church of this, the church in Crete, where Titus is, to honor and respect those in leadership. And I'm kind of heartened by that, because if Paul tells Titus that he needs to remind the people of that, the chances are they forget, just as we do.

But those in politics and leadership do deserve our respect, even if we disagree with them. And one of the most powerful ways that we can do good in the public square is through our attitude as Christians towards those we disagree with.

I don't know if you've noticed how politics feels like it's becoming more and more divisive. Some of you may remember kind of previous eras of politics, and you may think, well, it's always been a bit like that.

But it feels like there has been more and more divisiveness, both here in the UK and in other places around the world. We've seen the rise of extreme political views.

[17 : 08] We've seen more extreme political parties come to prominence, come to acceptance. And some of those have even co-opted Christian language, Christian ideas in their rallies, trying to use the gospel to try and support extremist views.

But Christians are to do life and politics differently. That's our calling when we're called to do good. Paul tells Titus about our attitude as believers.

He says that we are to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always be gentle towards everyone. Just reflect on those words for a moment, and how they compare to the usual way in which our political discourse happens.

It's such a difference, isn't it? But as Christians, we are to act differently in the world around us. And this is one of the crucial ways we can do that. By the words that we say.

Ensuring what we say, as far as possible, is the truth. Truth-telling ought to be the cornerstone of public life, but it's not always the case, is it?

[18 : 26] Truth-telling ought to be peaceable. And Paul tells us we are to be peaceable, which is because the idea of not given to conflict, not given to personal attack.

How wonderful that would be if we could see that more and more in our public debate, more and more in the House of Commons, even. But even if our politicians, as well as others, don't act peaceably, as Christians, we should.

We should act with love more than hostility. I love these words from the writer Dostoevsky, from his book, *The Brothers Karamazov*. He said this.

He said, At some thoughts, one stands perplexed, especially at the sight of men's sins, and wonders whether one should use force or humble love.

Yeah. Do you ever think that kind of... Sometimes the world seems to be going so crazy, we could either try and force people to make sense and to do what's right, or we could use humble love.

[19 : 35] And Dostoevsky says, always decide to use humble love. If you resolve on that once for all, you may subdue the whole world.

Loving humility is marvelously strong, the strongest of all things, and there is nothing quite like it. At Care, we try to embody this in the way that we do politics.

We're not wishy-washy about the truth. We want to stand for the right things. We see that as part of what it means to do good. But people have also commended us in the way in which we go about that.

Not demonizing those who think differently to us, who have different opinions, but carefully, graciously communicating the truth without personal attack.

And this resonates with Paul's words to Titus when he says, we are to be considerate and always gentle with everyone. And in fact, what Paul basically does here is he uses two different words.

[20 : 40] They're translated differently in our English translation, but two different words for gentleness. He's basically saying, always be gentle and be gentle. Gentleness ought to be the mark of both our public and our private life.

Now, I don't know how much bump you got through the door in the local elections recently. I managed to get absolutely nothing from any political party through my door. But maybe you got some.

Maybe you got some political leaflets. And even the ones that I've had in the past, I don't think they've ever trumpeted gentleness as the reason why you should vote for a particular candidate.

What a wonderful thing that would be if a candidate said, the reason why you should vote for me is because I will be always considerate and gentle towards everyone.

And it's not difficult to see why, is it? Gentleness is hardly seen as a strong point. It's often seen as a weakness. But the American pastor Chuck Swindoll once wrote this.

[21 : 47] He said, in our rough and rugged individualism, we think of gentleness as weakness, being soft and virtually spineless. But not so.

Gentleness includes such enviable qualities as having strength under control, being calm and peaceful when surrounded by a heated atmosphere, and possessing tact and courtesy that causes others to retain their self-esteem and dignity.

Truthful, peaceful, peaceful, considerate, gentle. What a difference it would make in our public life if those were the qualities most valued.

We need to pray. We need to pray for particular issues. Things like assisted suicide, things like online safety. There are plenty of things that we should pray for, pray against.

But here are four things that we should pray for and embody as much as we are able to in our public life. Truth, peace, considerateness, gentleness.

[22 : 57] We may not be involved directly in politics ourselves. But we can do those things in the way that we speak about politics, the way that we think about politics.

Our politicians can sadly descend into name-calling and finger-pointing. But we don't have to follow their example. The grace of the gospel, the grace of the gospel, can enable us and teach us to live differently.

To do good while we wait for Jesus to return. Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for his first coming and the salvation that he brought. We thank you for his second coming and we long for that day. And as we wait, empower us by your Spirit to do good in every aspect of life.

But help us in whatever way you have given us and called us to do, to do good in the public square. In government and politics and the way that we think and speak about these issues.

[24 : 04] Help us and help our politicians to be full of truth and grace and gentleness.

For your name's sake. Amen.