THE THIRD LETTER OF JOHN

The King's Open Door

3 John, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

The King's Open Door: The Third Letter of John, Unfiltered

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Pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence in the author's own words. Inside Scripture quotations, capitalization and wording follow the 2011 NIV exactly.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

If you've read the earlier books in this series, you know the saying by now: "If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all." It's been in every book. Third John is about three people, and one of them definitely thought he knew it all. His name was Diotrephes, and he's a warning for all of us.

Third John is the shortest book in the Bible, by word count. In Greek, it's just over two hundred words, about the length of a long text message. But it's packed with real people and real drama. There's Gaius, a generous friend who opens his home to strangers. There's Diotrephes, a church leader who loves being in charge, spreads gossip, and kicks people out. And there's Demetrius, a man with a great reputation. You probably know people like all three. You might even recognize yourself.

This little letter is about hospitality, which is a fancy word for opening your door, and your life, to others. It's about supporting people who serve God. It's about what happens when someone in a group grabs for power. And it's about the kind of reputation you want to have.

It's also a letter from an old man who'd rather talk face to face than write. In a world of texts, DMs, and group chats, that might be one of its most countercultural ideas.

So read it like a personal note from a friend, and ask yourself which of these three people you're becoming. Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through 3 John in three short chapters, one for each person the letter focuses on: Gaius and walking in the truth (verses 1–8), Diotrephes (verses 9–10), and Demetrius and the farewell (verses 11–15). Each one explains what John is saying in plain language and adds background about the early church and the world of the first readers.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains why this is the shortest book in the Bible, how it pairs with 2 John, what hospitality meant in the ancient world, how traveling missionaries were supported, and who Diotrephes might have been. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the New International Version (NIV), the same translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (pronouns for God are capitalized in the author's own words out of reverence; inside Scripture quotations, capitalization follows the NIV exactly); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

Since 3 John has only one chapter, verses are cited by number alone, like verse 4 or verses 9–10. This book quotes 3 John sparingly and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Read each section of the letter first, then the chapter here. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. Like the earlier books in this series, on the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, Hebrews, James, Peter's letters, and 1 and 2 John, it's written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

Because 3 John is so short, I've divided it into three brief chapters, one for each person the letter discusses, and filled out the book with background that I hope is genuinely useful: ancient letters, hospitality, letters of recommendation, how missionaries were supported, and the relationship between 2 and 3 John. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the New International Version (NIV).

Verse 2, the elder's wish for Gaius' good health, has sometimes been used to teach that God promises wealth and health to all believers who have enough faith or give enough money. I've explained it as a standard, heartfelt greeting in ancient letters, shown that the Bible describes faithful believers who were sick or poor, and encouraged readers to see medical care as compatible with faith.

The section on Diotrephes (verses 9–10) is applied to power, gossip, and control in churches and friend groups. It includes a description of healthy and unhealthy leadership, and a clear note encouraging

teens to tell a trusted adult if any leader, in a church or anywhere else, uses their position to manipulate, control, shame, or harm them.

Other teen applications include supporting missionaries, imitating good role models, building a good reputation online and offline, and the value of face-to-face friendship in a world of screens.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will become a Gaius: generous, faithful, and quick to open the door.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE LETTER

Setting the Scene

The Shortest Book in the Bible

Third John is the shortest book in the Bible by word count. In Greek, it has about 219 words. Second John is slightly longer, about 245 words. If you counted only verses, you might think Philemon or 2 John was shorter, but verse numbers can be misleading. The original letters didn't have chapters or verses at all. Chapter divisions were added in the 1200s, usually credited to Stephen Langton, an English church leader who later became archbishop of Canterbury. Verse numbers for the New Testament were added in 1551 by a French printer named Robert Estienne, who, according to a later story, worked some of them out while traveling on horseback. That's why 3 John has fourteen verses in some Bibles, like the King James Version, and fifteen in others, like the NIV, which divides the last verse into two.

A Real Letter to a Real Friend

Of all the letters in the New Testament, 3 John is one of the most personal. It's written by one person to one person, about specific people and a specific problem. It reads like the kind of letter you'd write to a friend, with news, encouragement, a complaint about someone causing trouble, and a promise to visit soon.

The writer calls himself the elder, just as in 2 John. As in my books on 1 and 2 John, I'll call him John, though Christians have different views about whether he was John the apostle, another disciple

called John the Elder, or a leader in John's circle of churches. Whoever he was, he was a respected older leader who cared deeply about the churches in his region, probably around Ephesus, in what is now Turkey.

Who Was Gaius?

The letter is addressed to Gaius. Gaius was one of the most common names in the Roman world, something like Chris or Alex today. The New Testament mentions several men named Gaius: a traveling companion of Paul from Macedonia (Acts 19:29), a Gaius from Derbe (Acts 20:4), and a Gaius in Corinth whom Paul baptized and who hosted Paul and the whole church in his home (Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14). The Gaius of 3 John is probably a different person, living decades later in a different area. A document from the fourth century, called the Apostolic Constitutions, claims that John appointed a Gaius as a leader in the city of Pergamum, but we can't be sure that's the same man. What we do know is what John tells us: Gaius was a dear friend, he walked in the truth, and he was generous and hospitable, even to strangers.

Twin Letters

Second and 3 John are like twins. They're almost exactly the same length, short enough to fit on one sheet of papyrus. Both come from the elder. Both open by saying he loves the reader in the truth. Both rejoice that people are walking in the truth. Both end almost the same way: the elder has much more to say, but would rather not use paper or pen and ink, and hopes to come and talk face to face.

They also deal with the same issue from opposite sides: hospitality for traveling teachers. Second John warns a church not to welcome false teachers who deny that Jesus came in the flesh, because that

would mean supporting their evil work. Third John praises Gaius for welcoming true teachers, and urges him to keep supporting them, because that means working together for the truth. Put them side by side, and you get a complete picture: be careful who you welcome, but be generous to those who serve the truth. Discernment and generosity belong together.

Hospitality in the Ancient World

In the ancient world, hospitality was a sacred duty. Travelers faced real dangers: robbers, wild animals, and harsh weather. Inns were often dirty, expensive, and connected with drunkenness and prostitution. So people depended on the hospitality of strangers. The Greeks believed that Zeus himself was the protector of guests and strangers, and stories told of gods visiting humans in disguise to test their hospitality.

The Bible has its own stories like that. Abraham welcomed three strangers, ran to prepare a meal for them, and discovered that one of them was the Lord (Genesis 18:1–15). Hebrews tells believers to welcome strangers, because some people have entertained angels without knowing it (Hebrews 13:2). God commanded Israel to love foreigners living among them, because they had once been foreigners in Egypt (Leviticus 19:34). Jesus said that when we welcome a stranger, we welcome Him (Matthew 25:35, 40). Hospitality was one of the qualifications for church leaders (1 Timothy 3:2), and all believers were told to practice it (Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9).

Christians became known for their hospitality and generosity. In the fourth century, the Roman emperor Julian, who tried to revive the old pagan religion, complained that Christians supported not

only their own poor but pagan poor as well, and that this kindness was helping Christianity spread.

Supporting Missionaries

The early church spread largely through traveling missionaries, teachers, and evangelists who went from town to town. Most of them didn't have regular income. They depended on Christians along the way for food, a place to stay, and supplies for the next leg of their journey. Third John says that the missionaries Gaius welcomed set out for the Name's sake, and took nothing from pagans (verse 7). In the ancient world, many wandering philosophers and religious teachers begged for money from anyone who would listen. Christian missionaries refused to do that, so no one could accuse them of preaching for profit. Paul did the same, often working with his hands so he wouldn't be a burden (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 9:12–18). That meant Christian missionaries depended on fellow believers. Supporting them made those believers partners in the mission.

Letters of Recommendation

How did early Christians know whether a traveling teacher was legitimate? One way was through letters of recommendation. A trusted leader would write a letter introducing the traveler and vouching for them. Paul mentions such letters (2 Corinthians 3:1), and he wrote one for Phoebe, who probably carried his letter to the Romans (Romans 16:1–2). Third John may be partly a letter of recommendation for Demetrius, whom John praises highly (verse 12). Many scholars think Demetrius was carrying the letter to Gaius. John had also written a letter to the church, which Diotrephes

refused to accept (verse 9). Maybe that letter was a recommendation for the traveling teachers that Diotrephes refused to welcome.

Who Was Diotrephes?

Diotrephes is the troublemaker in this letter. His name means nourished by Zeus, which suggests he came from a pagan, possibly wealthy, Greek family, since the name was used in noble families. We don't know for sure what his role was. He may have been the host of the house church where Gaius' friends worshiped, or a leader who had taken control of a congregation. Interestingly, John doesn't accuse him of false teaching. The problem wasn't what Diotrephes believed about Jesus. It was how he behaved: he loved being in charge, refused to accept the elder's authority, spread malicious talk, refused to welcome the traveling teachers, and expelled people who did.

Scholars have offered several explanations. Some think Diotrephes was simply an ambitious man who wanted to run his church without interference from outsiders. Some see a power struggle, as churches moved from being guided by traveling apostles and elders to being led by local leaders. Others wonder whether Diotrephes was overreacting to the danger of false teachers, and decided to shut out all traveling teachers, even true ones. Whatever his reasons, John saw his behavior as a serious problem.

Why 3 John Matters

Third John is a window into real church life in the first century. It shows that the early church wasn't perfect. Some people were generous and faithful. Others were selfish and controlling. That's still true today, in churches, schools, teams, and friend groups. This little letter shows us what to imitate and what to avoid. It

encourages generosity, faithfulness, and support for people who serve God. It warns against pride, gossip, and grabbing for power. And it reminds us that the best relationships happen face to face.

The Map

Chapter 1 (verses 1–8): Gaius, a dear friend who walks in the truth and welcomes strangers.

Chapter 2 (verses 9–10): Diotrephes, the man who always had to be number one.

Chapter 3 (verses 11–15): Imitating what is good, Demetrius' good reputation, and a promise to talk face to face.

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CHAPTER 1

The Friend Who Opens the Door

3 John 1–8

Like 2 John, this letter comes from the elder. This time, though, he writes to one person: his dear friend Gaius. He loves Gaius, he says, in the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Dear Friend**

John calls Gaius dear friend four times in this short letter (verses 1, 2, 5, and 11). The Greek word is agapetos, which comes from agape, the Bible's word for self-giving love. It means beloved, someone who is deeply loved. John isn't writing a formal business letter. He's writing to someone he cares about. Do you have friendships like that, where you can be honest, encourage each other, and know you're loved? Friendships rooted in shared faith are one of God's best gifts. If you don't have one yet, pray for one, and look for someone you could be that kind of friend to.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Loving in the Truth**

As in 2 John, the elder says he loves his friend in the truth. That means his love is sincere, not fake, and it's grounded in the truth about Jesus that they share. Some friendships are based on convenience, popularity, or what you can get from someone. They fade when circumstances change. Friendships grounded in Jesus have a deeper foundation. You may not agree on everything, but you share what matters most.

Then John writes a prayer for his friend. “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.”

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Standard Greeting**

Thousands of ordinary letters from the ancient world have survived, and many of them start with a wish for the reader’s health. A typical letter might say something like, before all else, I pray that you are well. It was a bit like saying, Hope you’re doing well, at the start of an email today. John uses this common greeting, but he means it sincerely, and he adds a twist: he hopes Gaius’ body is as healthy as his soul. Gaius was doing well spiritually. John prays that the rest of his life would go just as well.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Does God Promise Health and Wealth?**

Some preachers have used 3 John 2 to teach what’s often called the prosperity gospel, the idea that God promises health and wealth to every believer who has enough faith, says the right words, or gives enough money, usually to their ministry. The King James Version says that thou mayest prosper and be in health, and some have taken the word prosper to mean get rich. But the Greek word simply means that things go well, and the verse is a friend’s prayer, not a promise to every Christian. It’s like writing, Hope you feel better soon, in a card. The Bible shows that faithful believers sometimes get sick and sometimes are poor. Paul had a thorn in the flesh that God didn’t remove (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). Timothy had frequent stomach problems (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul left his coworker Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). Epaphroditus nearly died (Philippians 2:25–27). Jesus Himself had nowhere to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). Be cautious of anyone who promises that God will make you rich or healthy if you send them money. That’s not the gospel.

BACKGROUND CHECK **God Cares About Your Body**

At the same time, don’t overcorrect. John’s prayer shows that God cares about all of you, not just your soul. Your body matters to Him. He made it, Jesus healed bodies, and He promises to raise our bodies one day. It’s good

to pray for health, for yourself and others. And caring for your body is part of honoring God: sleep, exercise, eating well, and getting medical help when you need it. Prayer and doctors aren't enemies. Luke, who wrote a Gospel and Acts, was a doctor (Colossians 4:14). If you're sick or struggling with your physical or mental health, pray, and also talk to a parent or doctor. God often works through medicine and the people who practice it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How's Your Soul?**

John's prayer contains a challenge. He hopes Gaius' health and life go as well as his soul. What if someone prayed that for you? Would it be a blessing or a curse? Many people put enormous effort into their bodies, appearance, grades, or achievements, and very little into their souls. John suggests a different priority. How's your soul doing? Are you growing closer to God, or drifting? A healthy soul isn't about looking spiritual. It's about being honest with God, staying connected to Him, and letting Him shape your heart.

John tells Gaius how happy he was when some believers arrived and told him about Gaius' faithfulness to the truth, and how he keeps living it out. There's nothing that makes him happier, he says, than hearing that his children are living by the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Good Report**

Some traveling believers had visited Gaius, and when they came back, they told John about him. Their report was so good that John was overjoyed. Think about that. When people leave your house, your table at lunch, or your youth group, what do they say about you? You're always giving a report, whether you realize it or not. People notice how you treat them, how you talk about others, and whether your faith is real. Your life is a message people read.

BACKGROUND CHECK **My Children**

John calls Gaius and others his children. He might have led them to faith, or he might simply be using an affectionate term as an elderly spiritual father. Either way, it shows how deeply he cared about them. Spiritual mentors are a

great gift. Is there an older Christian who invests in you, prays for you, and asks how you're really doing? If not, ask God to bring one into your life, and consider asking a pastor or youth leader to help you find one. And remember, someday you could be that person for someone younger.

BACKGROUND CHECK **No Greater Joy**

John says that nothing gives him greater joy than hearing that the people he's mentored are living by the truth. Not money, not success, not recognition. Just knowing that the people he loves are following Jesus. Parents, grandparents, teachers, and youth leaders who love Jesus often feel the same way. When you keep following Jesus, you give them one of the greatest gifts you can give.

Dear friend, John continues, you're being faithful in what you're doing for the believers, even though they're strangers to you. They've told the church how much you love them. Please help them on their journey in a way that pleases God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Welcoming Strangers**

Gaius didn't just welcome his friends. He welcomed strangers, traveling believers he had never met. That's what hospitality really means. The Greek word for hospitality, philoxenia, literally means love of strangers. It's easy to be nice to your friends. It's harder to open your life to someone you don't know: the new kid at school, a family that just moved to your neighborhood, a visitor at church, someone from another culture. But that's exactly what Gaius did, and John calls it faithful.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Send Them on Their Way**

The phrase John uses for sending the missionaries on their way was a technical term in the early church. It meant more than saying goodbye. It meant providing what they needed for the next part of their journey: food, money, supplies, maybe a traveling companion. Paul uses the same word when he asks churches to help him and others on their way (Romans 15:24; Titus 3:13). Older translations say to send them in a manner worthy of God.

The NIV says in a way that honors God. In other words, treat them as you would treat God Himself. That's a high standard. Jesus said that whoever welcomes His messengers welcomes Him (Matthew 10:40).

They went out for the Name's sake, John says, and they didn't accept help from pagans. So we should support people like them, so that we can be fellow workers for the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **For the Name's Sake**

What name? Jesus' name. In the Bible, a person's name stands for who they are, their character and reputation. To do something for the Name's sake, as John puts it here, is to do it for Jesus, to make Him known and honored. The early Christians often spoke of the Name this way. After the apostles were flogged for preaching about Jesus, they left rejoicing that they had been considered worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:41). These missionaries had left home, family, and security to tell people about Jesus. They weren't in it for money or fame. They were in it for Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **No Help from Pagans**

Why didn't the missionaries accept support from pagans, people who didn't follow Jesus? In the ancient world, many wandering teachers and philosophers made a living by begging from their audiences. Christian missionaries wanted to make sure that no one could accuse them of preaching for profit, or think that the gospel was for sale. They didn't want to owe anything to people who might expect them to change their message. So they depended on believers like Gaius. That made Gaius more than a host. It made him a partner.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Fellow Workers**

John says that when we support missionaries, we become fellow workers with them. That's a powerful idea. Not everyone is called to travel to another country or start a church. But everyone can be part of the mission. When you pray for missionaries, give money, write them letters, or welcome them when

they visit, you're working alongside them. Their work is your work. And when people come to faith through them, you share in that joy.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Supporting Missionaries Today**

How can a teenager support missionaries today? Ask your church if it supports any missionaries, and learn their names and where they serve. Pray for them regularly. Write them a letter or send an email or video message, letting them know you're praying. Give some of your own money, even a small amount. Help with a fundraiser. When missionaries visit your church, introduce yourself and ask them questions. Consider going on a mission trip with your church. And remember that you're a missionary too, right where you are: at school, on your team, in your neighborhood. The same Name that sent those first missionaries sends you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Opening Your Home**

Hospitality doesn't require a big house or fancy food. It's about making people feel welcome. You might not control who stays at your house, but you can still practice hospitality. Invite a friend over for dinner. Help your family welcome guests. Make a visitor feel at home at church. Save a seat at lunch for someone who looks lost. Learn the names of new students and use them. Hospitality is simply opening the door of your life a little wider.

KEY VERSE

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

3 John 4 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. What would it look like for your body and life to be as healthy as your soul? Is that a blessing or a challenge?
2. How would you respond to someone who says that God promises wealth and health to anyone with enough faith?
3. Who is a stranger in your world that you could welcome?
4. What's one practical way you could support a missionary this year?

TRY THIS *Find out the name of a missionary your church supports. Learn where they serve and what they do. Pray for them by name every day this week, and send them a short message letting them know you're praying. If your church doesn't support missionaries, ask a pastor to recommend one.*

CHAPTER 2

The Man Who Had to Be First

3 John 9–10

Then John's tone shifts. He had written to the church, he says, but there was a problem. A man named Diotrephes, who always wants to be number one, refuses to welcome us.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Loves to Be First**

The Greek word John uses for Diotrephes means loving to be first, or loving to be in charge. It appears nowhere else in the New Testament, and may be a word John made up for the occasion. Diotrephes wanted to be the most important person in the room. He wanted control. He wanted people to answer to him. That's the opposite of what Jesus taught. When James and John asked Jesus for the best seats in His kingdom, He told the disciples that whoever wants to be great must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. Jesus Himself came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life (Mark 10:35–45). John knew this lesson personally. He had once been the one asking for the top spot. Now, as an old man, he warns against the same attitude.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Desire to Be First**

Wanting to be first isn't always wrong. It's good to want to win the game, do your best in school, or lead well. The problem is when being first becomes more important than people, when you'd rather be in control than see others succeed, and when you can't stand anyone else getting attention. Ask yourself honestly: Do I get jealous when someone else gets praised? Do I need to have the last word? Do I need to be in charge of every group project? Do I

put others down to make myself look good? Everybody struggles with pride sometimes. The answer is to ask God to make you more like Jesus, who used His power to serve.

So when I come, John says, I'll point out what he's doing. He's spreading malicious nonsense about us. And that's not enough for him. He also refuses to welcome the traveling believers, stops those who want to welcome them, and throws them out of the church.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Four Things Diotrephes Did**

John lists four things Diotrephes did. First, he rejected the elder's authority, refusing to accept his letter or his messengers. Second, he spread gossip and malicious nonsense about John and his friends, trying to damage their reputation. Third, he refused to welcome the traveling missionaries. Fourth, he stopped others from welcoming them, and kicked out anyone who did. Notice how one problem led to another. His love of being first led to rejecting anyone who threatened his position. That led to gossip to undermine them, which led to cutting them off, which led to controlling everyone else. Pride rarely stays small.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Malicious Nonsense**

John says Diotrephes was spreading malicious nonsense. The word for nonsense describes talk that is empty and pointless, like babbling. It wasn't true or meaningful. But it was still dangerous. Gossip and slander don't have to be true to do damage. A rumor, a misleading screenshot, or an unkind comment can destroy someone's reputation and relationships. Diotrephes used words to protect his power and push others out. People still do that. If you hear gossip about someone, you don't have to believe it or pass it on. Ask, Is this true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? And if it's not, let it stop with you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Diotrephes in Your Friend Group**

You don't have to be in church to meet a Diotrephes. Friend groups, teams, clubs, and group chats can have them too. They're the person who has to be in control, decides who's in and who's out, spreads rumors about anyone who

challenges them, and pressures everyone else to go along. Sometimes they're called the queen bee or the alpha. They might make it clear that if you're friends with the wrong person, you'll be cut off too. That's exactly what Diotrephes did: he expelled anyone who welcomed the people he rejected. If you're in a group like that, you don't have to go along with it. You can refuse to gossip, include people who are left out, and find friends who treat others well. It takes courage. And if you recognize a little of Diotrephes in yourself, it's not too late to change.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Healthy and Unhealthy Leaders**

Third John gives us a picture of healthy and unhealthy leadership. Healthy leaders serve others, point people to Jesus, welcome accountability, admit when they're wrong, are honest and transparent, encourage others to grow and lead, and treat people with respect, even those who disagree. Unhealthy leaders love power and attention, demand loyalty to themselves, refuse accountability, spread gossip or attack critics, control who's allowed in, punish people who disagree, and make others afraid to speak up. These patterns show up in churches, youth groups, schools, sports teams, and families. Learning to recognize them can protect you, and help you become a healthy leader yourself.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Spiritual Abuse**

Sometimes leaders in churches or religious groups use their position to control, manipulate, shame, or harm people. This is sometimes called spiritual abuse. Warning signs include a leader who claims you must obey them without question, uses God or the Bible to make you feel guilty or afraid, punishes or shames people who ask questions, tells you to keep secrets from your parents or others, isolates you from friends or family, or touches you in ways that make you uncomfortable. If any leader, at church, at school, on a team, or anywhere else, makes you feel this way, it's not your fault, and you don't have to stay silent. Tell a trusted adult right away: a parent, a teacher, a school counselor, or another pastor. If the first person doesn't listen, tell someone else. Jesus cares deeply about how leaders treat the people in their care, and so should His church.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How John Responded**

Notice how John responds to Diotrephes. He doesn't gossip back. He doesn't send an angry message. He doesn't start a rival group. He says he'll come in person and bring Diotrephes' behavior into the open. That's a model for handling conflict. Jesus taught that when someone sins against you, you should first talk to them privately, then bring one or two others if they won't listen, and then involve the church if needed (Matthew 18:15–17). Problems are best dealt with directly, honestly, and in person, not through gossip, passive-aggressive posts, or revenge. And when a leader abuses their power, it shouldn't be covered up. It should be brought into the light.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Even Then**

It might be surprising that a man like Diotrephes was in the early church, apparently a leader, in a church connected to an apostle. Some people imagine the early church was perfect. It wasn't. It was full of real people with real flaws, and some of them caused real harm. That's still true. If you've been hurt by a church or a Christian leader, that's real, and it matters. But don't let one Diotrephes convince you that Jesus is like him. Jesus is the opposite. He's the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

KEY VERSE

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us.

3 John 9 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think wanting to be first is so dangerous for a leader?
2. Have you ever seen someone like Diotrephes in a friend group, team, or class? How did it affect people?
3. What are the signs of a healthy leader? Who's an example of one in your life?
4. What would you do if a leader made you uncomfortable or tried to control you?

TRY THIS *This week, look for a chance to let someone else be first. Let someone else choose, lead, get the credit, or have the last word. Notice how it feels. Then do one thing to include someone who's being left out by a group you're part of.*

CHAPTER 3

A Good Name

3 John 11–15

Dear friend, John says to Gaius, don't copy what's evil. Copy what's good. People who do good belong to God. People who do evil have never really seen God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Imitate What Is Good**

The Greek word John uses for imitate is where we get the word mimic. We all copy someone. Little kids copy their parents. Teens copy friends, celebrities, influencers, and athletes. We pick up their words, styles, attitudes, and habits, often without realizing it. John tells Gaius: don't copy Diotrephes. Copy what's good. Paul said something similar: follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Who are you copying? Are they making you more like Jesus, or less?

BACKGROUND CHECK **Role Models**

Think about the people you look up to most. What do you admire about them? Their talent, success, popularity, looks, or character? It's fine to admire people for many reasons. But be careful about copying people just because they're famous or popular. Look for role models whose lives show goodness, honesty, kindness, courage, and faith. They might not be famous at all. They might be a grandparent, a coach, a teacher, or an older friend at church. And remember, someone younger is probably watching and copying you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Doing Good Shows Who You Belong To**

John says that people who do good are from God, and people who do evil haven't seen God. That echoes a major theme of 1 John: how you live shows who you belong to. John isn't saying that doing good earns you a place with God, or that one mistake means you don't know Him. He's saying that a life changed by God will show it, and a life that keeps choosing evil reveals that someone doesn't really know Him. Diotrephes claimed to be a church leader, but his actions told a different story.

Then John recommends a man named Demetrius. Everyone speaks well of him, John says, and so does the truth itself. We speak well of him too, and you know we tell the truth.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who Was Demetrius?**

We don't know much about Demetrius. He may have been carrying this letter to Gaius, or he may have been one of the traveling missionaries who needed hospitality. John's recommendation would help Gaius know that Demetrius could be trusted, especially since Diotrephes was rejecting John's friends. Some have wondered whether he was the same Demetrius as the silversmith of Ephesus who started a riot against Paul because the gospel was hurting his business of making idols (Acts 19:23–41). That would be an amazing story of transformation, but there's no evidence for it. Demetrius was a common name.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Three Witnesses**

John gives Demetrius three recommendations. First, everyone speaks well of him. His reputation was good among all who knew him. Second, the truth itself speaks for him. His life matched the truth so well that the truth itself was his witness. Third, John and his friends vouch for him personally. In the Old Testament, a matter was established by the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). Demetrius had three. That's a solid reputation.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Your Reputation**

What do people say about you when you're not around? A good reputation is built slowly, through consistent choices over time, and it can be damaged quickly. Proverbs says a good name is more desirable than great riches (Proverbs 22:1). That doesn't mean you should care too much about what people think, or try to please everyone. Jesus was criticized by many. It means living with integrity so that people who know you can trust you. Demetrius' life matched the truth. That's the best kind of reputation: not just a good image, but a good life.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Your Digital Footprint**

Today, your reputation isn't just what people say about you. It's also what you post, comment, like, and share. Your digital footprint can follow you for years. Colleges, employers, and future friends may see it. A single post made in anger or as a joke can be screenshotted and shared forever. Before you post, ask: Would I want my grandparents, a future boss, or Jesus to see this? Does it reflect who I want to be? Would Demetrius post it? You don't have to be perfect. But you can be thoughtful. And if you've posted things you regret, it's not too late to delete them, apologize if needed, and start building a better footprint.

Finally, John says, he has a lot more to write, but he doesn't want to use pen and ink. He hopes to see Gaius soon, and then they'll talk in person.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Pen and Ink, Screens and Texts**

John had more to say, but he'd rather say it in person. In his day, writing meant pen, ink, and papyrus. In our day, it means texts, DMs, emails, and group chats. Messages are useful. They help us stay connected when we're apart. But they have limits. Tone gets lost. A short reply can sound angry. A joke can sound cruel. People say things in messages they'd never say face to face. And some conversations, like apologies, hard news, and serious disagreements, are almost always better in person, where you can see someone's face and hear their voice.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Face to Face**

Studies have found that many teens today spend more time communicating through screens than in person, and many report feeling lonely. Screens can connect us, but they can't fully replace being together. There's something about sitting across from a friend, laughing together, or seeing someone's face when they're hurting that a message can't capture. John knew that. He'd rather talk face to face. Make time for real, in-person friendships. Put your phone away when you're with people. Invite a friend to do something together instead of just texting. Show up for people in person when they're going through hard times. Some of the best things in life happen face to face.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Before You Hit Send**

Here are a few guidelines for messages. Don't send anything when you're angry; wait until you've calmed down. If a conversation is getting heated, suggest talking in person or on a call. Don't use group chats to gang up on someone or talk about people who aren't there. Remember that screenshots exist. Never send anything you'd be devastated to see shared. And if someone sends you something hurtful, threatening, or inappropriate, don't respond; tell a trusted adult.

John ends with a blessing of peace. Then he passes along hellos from the friends who are with him. Greet each of the friends there by name.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Peace**

John's last word to Gaius is peace. That's fitting, after describing the conflict with Diotrephes. Peace doesn't mean the absence of problems. Gaius still had to deal with a difficult leader. It means a deep sense of security and wholeness that comes from God, even in the middle of trouble. Jesus told His disciples, peace I leave with you; My peace I give you (John 14:27). Whatever conflicts you're facing, that peace is available to you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Friends**

John calls the believers friends, both those with him and those with Gaius. That's unusual. New Testament writers usually call fellow believers brothers and sisters. But Jesus called His disciples friends: I no longer call you servants, He said; instead, I have called you friends (John 15:15). John was there when Jesus said that. Christians aren't just members of the same organization. They're friends of Jesus, and friends of each other.

BACKGROUND CHECK **By Name**

John asks Gaius to greet each friend by name. He doesn't want a general, Hi, everyone. He wants each person to be greeted personally. Names matter. Using someone's name tells them they're seen and valued. Jesus said the Good Shepherd calls His own sheep by name (John 10:3). God knows your name. And you can show God's love by learning and using other people's names, especially people who are often overlooked: the new student, the custodian, the lunch server, the kid who sits alone. It's a small thing that makes a big difference.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Three People, Three Choices**

Third John introduces three people. Gaius was generous, faithful, and welcoming. Diotrephes was proud, controlling, and divisive. Demetrius had a good reputation that matched the truth. Every day, you're choosing which of these people you're becoming. Will you open your door to others, or close it? Will you serve, or demand to be first? Will your life match what you say you believe? The good news is that you don't have to become a Gaius or a Demetrius on your own. The same Jesus who changed a Son of Thunder into the apostle of love can change you too.

KEY VERSE

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.

3 John 11 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Who do you find yourself imitating? Are they making you more like Jesus or less?
2. What would people say about you if they were asked to describe your reputation?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of texting compared to talking face to face?
4. Which person in 3 John are you most like right now: Gaius, Diotrephes, or Demetrius?

TRY THIS *This week, choose one conversation you'd normally have by text and have it in person instead. Then make a point of learning and using the name of someone you usually overlook, like a new student, a custodian, or a cafeteria worker. Greet them by name every day this week.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Now What? The Bottom Line

You've just read 3 John, a short letter about opening the door to others. But the greatest open door of all is the one God opened for you through Jesus, so that you could be welcomed into His family.

Here's what the Bible says, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you more than you can imagine. He wants you to know Him.

> *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (NIV)**

2 We've all turned away.

We've all gone our own way instead of God's. John says that if we claim to have no sin, we're fooling ourselves. The Bible calls it sin, and it separates us from God.

> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

4 Jesus came for you.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. God didn't wait for us to love Him first.

> *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (NIV)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

6 Turn and trust.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You for loving me first. Thank You that Jesus died for me and rose again. I believe You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me and make me clean. I trust Jesus*

as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my King. Help me walk in the truth, open my door to others, and serve You instead of trying to be first. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read 3 John straight through. Then read Jude, the next letter in the New Testament, about holding on to the faith.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Open your door. Like Gaius, look for a way to welcome someone this week: a new kid, a lonely neighbor, or a visitor at church.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. John wrote down what he saw and touched so you could check it out for yourself. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if John is right, God's door is open, and you're welcome.

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2 (NIV)