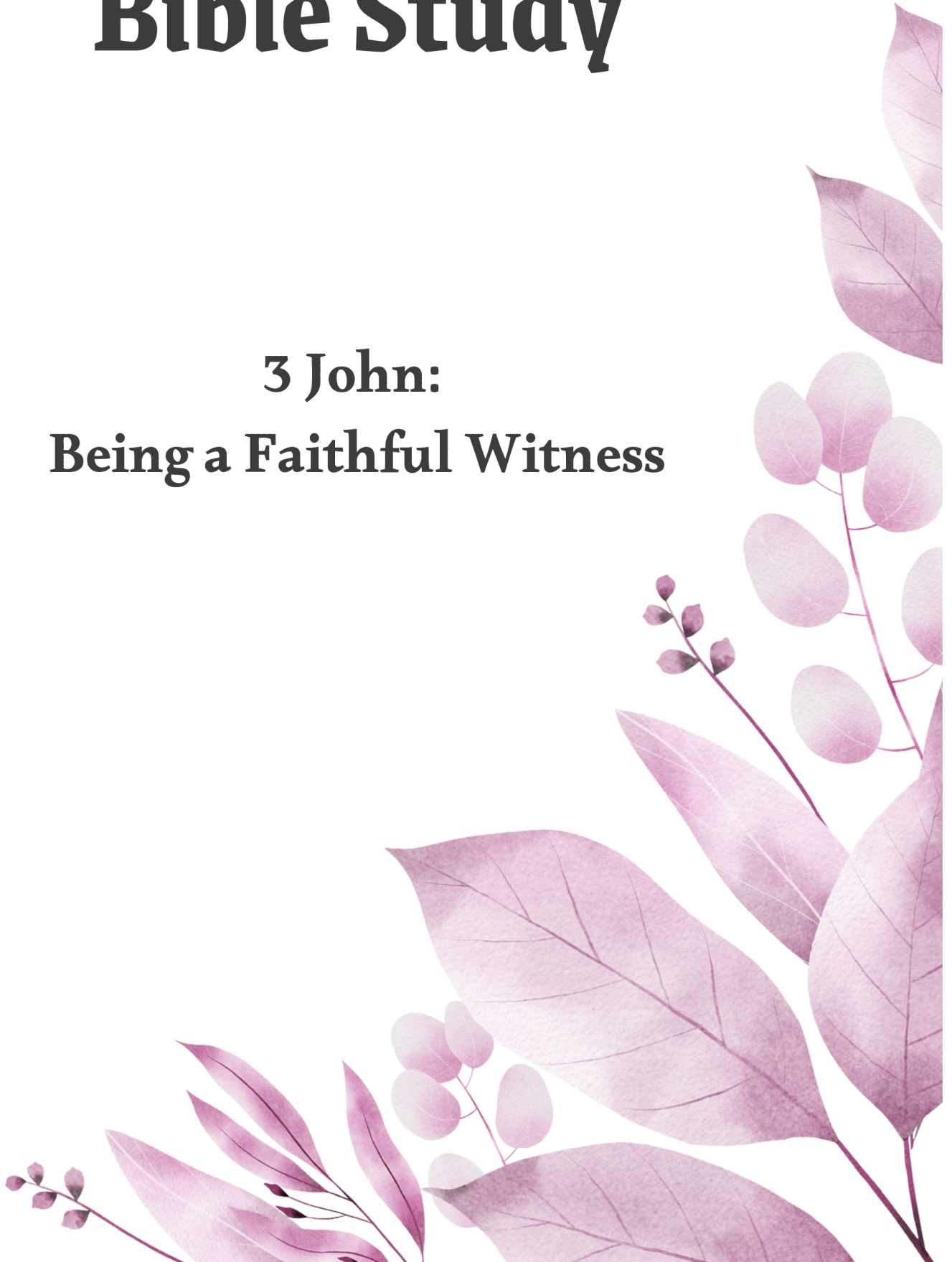


Bible Study

3 John: Being a Faithful Witness



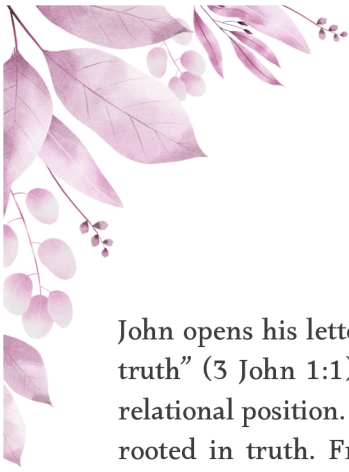
The book of 3 John may be one of the shortest writings in the New Testament, yet its message carries weight far beyond its size. Written by the apostle John in his later years, this brief letter offers a window into the heart of a seasoned spiritual leader who cared deeply about truth, character, and the health of the local church. In just a few verses, we are introduced to faithfulness, integrity, hospitality, pride, and courage. These are not abstract theological themes; they are lived realities within a community of believers navigating real tensions. This letter reminds us that spiritual maturity is revealed not only in doctrine but in conduct.

At its core, 3 John is about being a faithful witness. It is about walking in truth in a way that others can see, measure, and testify to. John commends Gaius for his faithfulness and hospitality, warns against the destructive pride of Diotrophes, and affirms the good reputation of Demetrius. In doing so, he shows us that the Christian life leaves evidence. Our choices, attitudes, and treatment of others either confirm the gospel we profess or contradict it. Faithfulness is not loud, but it is visible. It is steady, relational, and rooted in truth.

This letter also highlights the importance of spiritual leadership and accountability. John does not hesitate to confront harmful behavior. He understands that unchecked pride and a desire for control can fracture fellowship and hinder the spread of truth. At the same time, he models encouragement and affirmation. He lifts up those who are walking well and urges continued perseverance. The balance between correction and encouragement reflects the heart of a shepherd who loves both truth and people.

For mature believers, 3 John challenges complacency. It presses us to examine whether our lives align with the truth we claim to know. For newer believers, it offers clarity about what authentic Christian living looks like in practical terms. It is not complicated. It is not mystical. It is grounded in love, truth, hospitality, humility, and courage. These are timeless markers of a faithful witness in every generation.

As we walk through this study, we will see that being a faithful witness is not about platform or prominence. It is about consistency. It is about quietly supporting the work of the gospel, resisting pride, honoring those who labor in truth, and choosing integrity when it costs us something. The brevity of 3 John forces us to slow down and pay attention. In a few verses, we are given a powerful call to live in such a way that the truth of Christ is both believed in our hearts and confirmed through our lives.



Lesson 1: Walking in Truth as a Way of Life

John opens his letter with warmth and affection, writing, “The elder to Gaius the beloved, whom I love in truth” (3 John 1:1). This is not a casual greeting. John identifies himself not by title of authority but by relational position. He is an elder, a spiritual father. His love for Gaius is not sentimental or superficial; it is rooted in truth. From the very first verse, we see that truth is not merely doctrinal accuracy but the foundation of authentic Christian relationship. Christian love is not detached from truth, and truth is not cold or impersonal. The two are woven together in the life of the believer.

He continues, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be healthy, even as your soul prospers” (3 John 1:2). This statement reveals John’s priorities. He recognizes that Gaius is already thriving spiritually. The prosperity of the soul is the anchor. Physical health and outward success are secondary. For John, the inner life defines the whole person. A faithful witness begins with a healthy soul. When truth governs the heart, it inevitably shapes character, speech, and action. Spiritual vitality becomes the source from which all other blessings flow.

John then expresses deep joy because “I have no greater joy than this, to hear about my children walking in truth” (3 John 1:4). Notice the language of walking. Truth is not simply believed; it is lived. Walking implies direction, rhythm, and endurance. It suggests daily movement aligned with conviction. John does not rejoice merely that Gaius understands truth intellectually. He rejoices that Gaius walks in it consistently. Mature faith is measured not by isolated moments of zeal but by sustained obedience over time. A faithful witness is steady.

This concept echoes the broader testimony of Scripture. James writes, “But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves” (James 1:22). Truth demands embodiment. Knowledge without practice produces self-deception. The early church was built not on spectators but on participants who allowed truth to govern their behavior. When truth shapes daily decisions, it becomes visible to others. The gospel gains credibility when it is demonstrated through lived integrity.

Walking in truth, then, is not a private exercise. It is public evidence. It influences how we treat others, how we respond under pressure, and how we handle responsibility. Gaius was known for this kind of life. Others testified about it. That is the heart of faithful witness. The question is not only whether we know truth but whether we walk in it when it is inconvenient, unseen, or costly. The consistency of our walk either confirms or undermines the message we profess.

Scripture References

- 3 John 1:1-4
- James 1:22

Reflection Questions

Where in my daily life is there a gap between what I believe and how I behave?

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What practices help strengthen the prosperity of my soul so that my outward life reflects truth?

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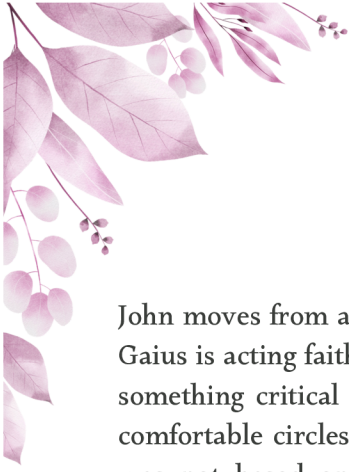
If someone observed my walk for a week, what evidence would they see that I am living in truth?

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Lesson 2: Faithfulness in Serving Others

John moves from affirmation of Gaius's inner life to commendation of his outward conduct. He writes that Gaius is acting faithfully in whatever he accomplishes for the brothers and even for strangers. This reveals something critical about Christian witness. Faithfulness is not selective. It does not operate only within comfortable circles. Gaius served believers he knew and traveling ministers he did not know. His loyalty was not based on familiarity but on shared truth. True faithfulness extends beyond preference and convenience.

He emphasizes that these brothers testified to Gaius's love before the church. His service was visible, and it was remembered. Hospitality in the early church was not a small gesture. Traveling teachers depended entirely on the generosity of local believers. Opening one's home meant opening one's resources, time, and safety. Gaius did not serve privately in isolation. His love strengthened the broader body of Christ. Faithfulness often looks ordinary, but its impact reaches farther than we see.

John goes further and says that Gaius would do well to send them forward in a manner worthy of God. That phrase raises the standard. Hospitality is not merely social kindness. It is ministry done in a way that reflects God's character. The way we treat fellow believers and gospel workers should mirror the generosity of the One we represent. Serving others becomes an extension of worship. A faithful witness recognizes that every act of support for the gospel is service rendered to God Himself.

John explains why this support matters. These workers went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Their mission was Christ-centered and sacrificial. They did not seek financial backing from unbelievers in order to avoid compromising the message. Therefore, the responsibility fell on believers to support them. Faithfulness includes partnering with the work of truth. Even if we are not the ones preaching publicly, we participate when we provide resources, encouragement, and protection for those who do.

This principle reaches beyond the first-century church. Paul writes that "the one who is taught in the word should share all good things with him who teaches" (Galatians 6:6). The body of Christ functions through mutual support. Faithful witnesses understand that advancing the gospel requires both proclamation and provision. Gaius may not have held a public platform, but his quiet generosity strengthened the mission of Christ. That is not secondary service. That is frontline faithfulness.

Scripture References

- 3 John 5-7
- Galatians 6:6

Reflection Questions

How am I actively supporting those who labor in teaching and advancing the gospel?

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Do I serve only within my comfort zone, or am I willing to extend hospitality beyond familiarity?

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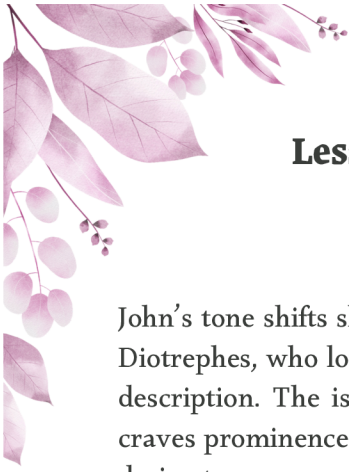
In what practical way can I strengthen the work of Christ this week through generosity or encouragement?

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Lesson 3: The Danger of Pride and the Love of Preeminence

John's tone shifts sharply as he introduces Diotrephes. He writes, "I wrote something to the assembly, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, doesn't accept what we say" (3 John 1:9). This is a sobering description. The issue is not simple disagreement. It is a heart posture. Diotrephes loves to be first. He craves prominence. The phrase exposes motivation. At its core, pride is not merely self-confidence. It is the desire to secure position, recognition, or control in a way that displaces rightful authority. In this case, Diotrephes rejects apostolic instruction because it threatens his status.

John continues, explaining that Diotrephes speaks malicious words against them and refuses to welcome the brothers. Even more, he stops those who desire to do so and puts them out of the assembly (3 John 1:10). Pride rarely remains internal. It manifests in speech and action. Malicious talk attempts to undermine credibility. Refusing hospitality isolates others. Excluding those who disagree consolidates control. What began as love of preeminence now produces division. When personal ambition overrides devotion to truth, the church suffers.

This passage forces us to confront an uncomfortable reality. Leadership without humility becomes destructive. Diotrephes was likely in a position of influence. Yet influence without submission to truth leads to abuse of authority. Pride blinds a person to correction. It resists accountability. It creates environments where loyalty to a personality replaces loyalty to Christ. John does not ignore this behavior. He promises to address it if he comes. Faithful witness includes the courage to confront harmful pride for the sake of the body.

Scripture consistently warns against this posture. James writes, "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast and don't lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic" (James 3:14-15). Selfish ambition masquerades as strength, but it is rooted in insecurity and unbelief. It elevates self at the expense of unity. Diotrephes embodies this warning. His desire to be first contradicts the humility of Christ.

The lesson here is not merely historical. It is personal. The love of preeminence can surface quietly in any believer. It can appear as the need to control, to win every disagreement, or to secure recognition. Faithful witnesses resist this temptation. They choose humility over prominence, service over status, and submission to truth over personal advancement. The kingdom of God does not advance through self-promotion. It advances through surrendered hearts.

Scripture References

- 3 John 1:9-10
- James 3:14-15

Reflection Questions

In what situations am I tempted to seek recognition or control rather than simply serve?

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How do I respond when correction or authority challenges my preferences?

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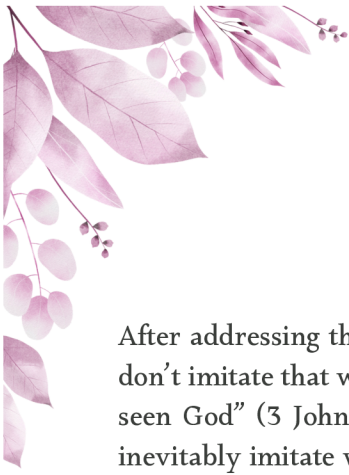
What practices cultivate humility in my leadership, relationships, and daily interactions?

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Lesson 4: Imitating What Is Good

After addressing the destructive example of Diotrephes, John gives a clear and direct command: “Beloved, don’t imitate that which is evil, but that which is good. He who does good is of God. He who does evil hasn’t seen God” (3 John 1:11). This is not vague advice. It is a decisive call. John understands that believers inevitably imitate what they admire. Influence spreads through example. Therefore, he urges discernment. Do not copy arrogance. Do not mirror pride. Do not normalize behavior that contradicts the character of Christ. Instead, deliberately align yourself with what reflects God’s nature.

This verse confronts the idea that belief alone defines spiritual identity. John ties doing good to being “of God.” He is not teaching salvation by works. He is revealing evidence. A transformed heart produces visible fruit. Conduct reveals allegiance. To claim knowledge of God while consistently practicing evil exposes spiritual blindness. This echoes John’s earlier writings that true fellowship with God results in walking in the light. Faithful witness is not perfection, but it is directional. It moves toward goodness because it flows from God.

John then presents a positive example: “Demetrius has the testimony of all, and of the truth itself. Yes, we also testify, and you know that our testimony is true” (3 John 1:12). Here we see the contrast. Where Diotrephes sought recognition through control, Demetrius earned affirmation through character. His life aligned with truth so clearly that others testified on his behalf. Even truth itself bore witness. This means his conduct was consistent with the gospel message. A faithful witness does not demand validation. It comes naturally through integrity.

The principle of imitation runs throughout Scripture. Paul writes, “Be imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Spiritual growth involves choosing models wisely. Every believer is both an imitator and an example. We learn from those ahead of us, and others observe us. The question is not whether we influence. The question is what kind of influence we exert. Faithful witnesses understand that their lives quietly shape the faith of others.

John’s command is simple but searching. Imitate what is good. Choose examples that reflect Christ. Resist the subtle pull of charisma without character. Elevate substance over visibility. In a culture that often rewards bold personalities, 3 John directs our attention to proven integrity. A faithful witness builds a reputation rooted in truth, humility, and goodness that can withstand examination.

Scripture References

- 3 John 1:11-12
- 1 Corinthians 11:1

Reflection Questions

Who am I currently imitating, and does their life reflect the character of Christ?

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Would others see my conduct as evidence that I truly belong to God?

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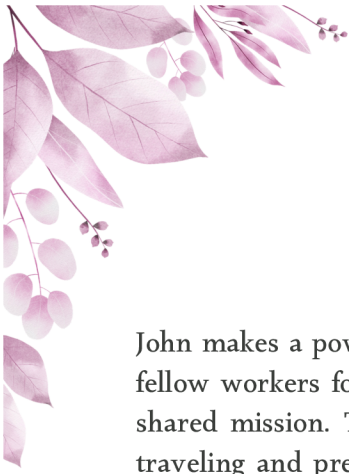
What specific area of my life needs to more clearly reflect goodness rooted in truth?

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Lesson 5: Partnering with the Truth

John makes a powerful statement when he says, “We therefore ought to receive such, that we may be fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 1:8). This verse shifts the focus from individual faithfulness to shared mission. The Christian life was never meant to be lived in isolation. Gaius was not the one traveling and preaching publicly, yet John tells him that by supporting those who do, he becomes a fellow worker. The phrase is intentional. It means partnership, participation, shared labor. When we support those who carry the gospel forward, we are not spectators. We are participants in the work of truth.

This partnership was necessary because the missionaries John references “went out for the sake of the Name” (3 John 1:7). They were not motivated by reputation or financial gain. They went out because of Christ. “The Name” in the early church was a reverent way of referring to Jesus Himself. Their mission was anchored in His authority and character. Supporting them was not about personal preference or personality alignment. It was about loyalty to Christ and commitment to the spread of His truth.

John also notes that these workers accepted nothing from the Gentiles (3 John 1:7). This protected the integrity of the gospel. They did not want the message confused with financial dependence on those who did not yet believe. As a result, the responsibility rested on believers. Faithful witnesses understand that advancing the gospel requires sacrifice. Whether through resources, hospitality, prayer, or encouragement, partnership always costs something. Yet that cost is an investment in eternal work.

The New Testament reinforces this principle of shared reward. Jesus said, “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward” (Matthew 10:41). Supporting those sent by God connects us to their labor and its fruit. The kingdom operates through cooperation. Not everyone stands on a platform, but everyone can strengthen the mission. The faithful witness recognizes that quiet support behind the scenes carries eternal weight.

This lesson calls us to evaluate our posture toward the work of truth. Are we merely consumers of teaching, or are we contributors to the mission? Gaius’s faithfulness did not revolve around visibility. It revolved around willingness. He opened his home, extended resources, and strengthened the hands of those proclaiming Christ. In doing so, he became a fellow worker. The same invitation stands before us. Partnership with truth is not optional for mature believers. It is part of our calling.

Scripture References

- 3 John 1:7-8
- Matthew 10:41

Reflection Questions

In what ways am I actively partnering with the work of the gospel rather than simply benefiting from it?

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What sacrifice might God be calling me to make in order to support those laboring for His Name?

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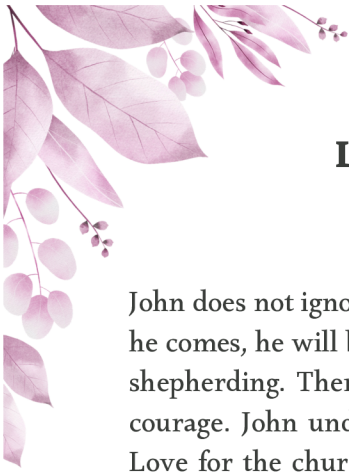
Do I see myself as a fellow worker in the truth, and how does that perspective change my daily choices?

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Lesson 6: Courage to Confront for the Sake of the Church

John does not ignore the disruption caused by Diotrephes. He writes with clarity and resolve, saying that if he comes, he will bring attention to what Diotrephes is doing (3 John 1:10). This is not vindictiveness. It is shepherding. There are moments when faithful witness requires more than quiet consistency. It requires courage. John understands that unchecked pride and harmful behavior can fracture the body of Christ. Love for the church demands that error be addressed. Silence in the face of destructive influence is not humility. It is negligence.

The behavior John describes is serious. Diotrephes speaks malicious words, refuses to receive the brothers, and even puts out of the assembly those who want to extend hospitality (3 John 1:10). This is spiritual gatekeeping rooted in personal control. It disrupts fellowship and stifles generosity. John does not treat this as a minor personality conflict. He names it clearly. Faithful leaders must be willing to identify harmful patterns and call them out for the sake of the body's health. Accountability protects unity.

Yet John's response is measured. He does not retaliate publicly in the letter. He indicates that he will address the matter in person. This shows discernment. Correction is most effective when handled directly and responsibly. Confrontation, when rooted in love and truth, is restorative rather than explosive. It seeks clarity and resolution, not humiliation. Mature believers understand that guarding the church sometimes involves difficult conversations.

Scripture affirms this responsibility. Paul instructs Timothy, "Preach the word. Be urgent in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all patience and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). Notice the balance. Reproof and rebuke are necessary, but they must be coupled with patience and instruction. The goal is not domination but restoration. Faithful witness requires both gentleness and firmness. When truth is at stake, courage is an expression of love.

Lesson 6 reminds us that unity is not preserved by ignoring conflict but by addressing it wisely. There are times when being a faithful witness means stepping into discomfort to protect the integrity of the church. John models leadership that values truth over popularity. He refuses to allow pride to dictate the direction of the assembly. The health of Christ's body is worth the courage it takes to confront what undermines it.

Scripture References

- 3 John 1:9-10
- 2 Timothy 4:2

Reflection Questions

How do I typically respond when I witness harmful behavior within the body of Christ?

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Do I avoid difficult conversations out of fear, or do I approach them with wisdom and love?

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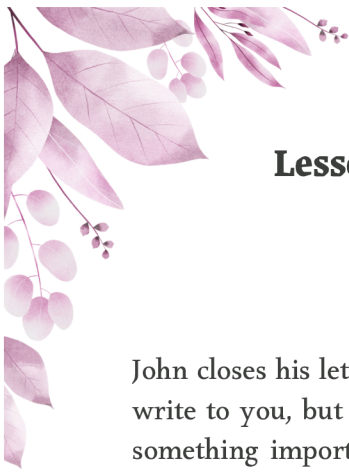
What would it look like to balance courage and patience in my leadership or relationships?

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Lesson 7: Finishing with Integrity and Face-to-Face Fellowship

John closes his letter with a tone that reflects both urgency and restraint. He writes, “I had many things to write to you, but I am unwilling to write to you with ink and pen” (3 John 1:13). This statement reveals something important about spiritual maturity. Not every matter should be handled at a distance. John understands that written words have limits. While truth must be spoken, relationship deserves presence. Faithful witness is not confined to documents and declarations. It flourishes in personal engagement.

He continues, “But I hope to see you soon, and we will speak face to face” (3 John 1:14). The phrase face to face signals more than conversation. It communicates fellowship, accountability, and shared joy. Christianity is relational at its core. Doctrine matters deeply, but so does embodied fellowship. John longs for the kind of connection that strengthens unity and deepens trust. A faithful witness does not isolate himself behind authority or correspondence. He pursues real, living fellowship.

John also closes with a blessing: “Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name” (3 John 1:14). The word peace here is not casual politeness. It is a declaration of spiritual wholeness. In a letter that has addressed pride, division, and courage, John ends with peace. This shows his heart. Correction and confrontation were never the final goal. Restoration and harmony are. Faithful witness always aims toward peace rooted in truth.

The importance of personal fellowship is echoed throughout Scripture. The writer of Hebrews urges believers not to neglect assembling together but to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24–25). Isolation weakens resolve. Presence strengthens it. The Christian life was never designed to be sustained in solitude. We need real conversations, shared prayers, and visible expressions of unity. John’s desire to speak face to face reminds us that faithfulness thrives in community.

Lesson 7 leaves us with a picture of maturity that is steady and relational. John has affirmed faithfulness, exposed pride, encouraged goodness, and promised accountability. Now he closes with hope and peace. That is strength. A faithful witness does not merely defend truth. He cultivates fellowship. He values people enough to show up. Integrity is proven not only in confrontation but also in connection. To finish well means leaving behind peace, clarity, and strengthened relationships wherever we serve.

Scripture References

- 3 John 1:13-14
- Hebrews 10:24-25

Reflection Questions

Do I prioritize face-to-face fellowship, or have I allowed distance and convenience to replace real connection?

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How can I pursue peace in my relationships without compromising truth?

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What steps can I take to strengthen unity within the body of Christ this week?

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The book of 3 John may be brief, but it leaves us with a lasting imprint of what faithful witness truly looks like. It is not built on size, visibility, or influence. It is built on consistency. Gaius models a life where inner truth produces outward faithfulness. Demetrius reflects integrity that speaks for itself. Even the warning about Diotrephes reminds us that character matters more than position. This letter strips away illusion and brings us back to the essentials of authentic Christian living.

Faithful witness begins in the soul. A prospering inner life fuels steady obedience. When truth governs the heart, it shapes our love, our hospitality, our humility, and our courage. 3 John makes it clear that belief is not enough. Truth must be walked out. It must become visible in how we treat others and how we support the work of Christ. The gospel gains credibility when it is embodied through lives aligned with it.

This letter also reminds us that the church is relational. Fellowship, accountability, encouragement, and even confrontation are part of spiritual health. John affirms, corrects, and longs for face-to-face connection. That balance reveals mature leadership. Faithfulness does not ignore conflict, nor does it live in it. It moves toward peace rooted in truth. The goal is always restoration and unity that reflect the character of Christ.

For mature believers, 3 John calls us to examine our motivations. Do we serve for recognition or for the Name? Do we resist correction when it threatens our position? Are we partnering actively in the truth, or passively consuming it? The questions are searching because the stakes are eternal. Our lives leave evidence. Others testify to what they see. Faithful witness is not self-declared. It is observed and confirmed over time.

As we close this study, the message is both simple and strong. Walk in truth. Support the work of Christ. Imitate what is good. Reject pride. Pursue fellowship. These are not complicated commands, but they require steady commitment. The beauty of 3 John is that it reminds us that quiet, consistent faithfulness matters deeply in the kingdom of God. A life aligned with truth becomes a testimony that strengthens the church and honors the Name we carry.

