

THREE MEN AND A BABY

3 JOHN 1-14

For the last twelve weeks we've been studying [The Letters of John](#). We've tackled [1 John](#), and [2 John](#)...

And this morning we come to [3 John](#) - *another one chapter book - just fourteen verses*. I'm sure you're still enjoying the hilarious opening to our study of 2 John. I started with a top ten list - "[The Top Ten Shortest Books](#)."

Well, for the last two weeks all the cards and letters and tweets have been demanding more of the same. Apparently, "*the shortest books*" list was a big hit.

So today, I'm back with the sequel. I've got "[Another Top Ten List Of The Shortest Books Ever Written](#)."

#10, "[Career Opportunities For Liberal Arts Majors](#)." Not a lot of employers are looking for History degrees.

#9, "[Healthy Fast Food](#)." This would be a very short book, since there is no such thing as healthy fast food.

#8, "[Atlanta Streets That Never Have Any Traffic](#)." There is not much ink on any of those pages.

#7, "[The Las Vegas Guide To Long Marriages](#)." It doesn't take a long time to thumb through this book.

#6, "[The EPA Cookbook - Spotted Owl Recipes](#)." This topic also makes for a very skinny volume.

#5, "[The Justin Bieber Guide To Field Dressing A Deer](#)" I don't figure a spoiled rich kid like the Biebs has gutted the entrails of too many deer in his lifetime.

#4, “Out Of My Price Range By Bill Gates” What a shame when there’s nothing you can’t afford.

#3, “Facebook’s Guide To Data Security” If you’ve been watching the nightly news lately, obviously the Facebook folks haven’t been running a very tight ship.

#2, “Anger Management By Nick Saban.” Ole cool as a cucumber Nick doesn’t have a lot of pointers to offer.

And the #1 shortest book, “White House Employees With Job Security.” Now that’s a very, very short list.

Well, this morning we’re studying another short volume - the fourteen verses of John’s third letter.

3 John is the shortest book in the Bible.

And the names of four men appear in this book: **John the Elder, Gaius, Demetrius**, and a man who is held in a not so flattering light. A villain named **Diotrephes**.

This is why I’ve entitled our study after a movie from the 1980s, “**Three Men And A Baby**.” **John, Gaius**, and **Demetrius** are the men, while **Diotrephes** is the baby.

Let’s read the letter, and then we’ll study it verse by verse, **The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.**

Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a

manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.

I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.

3 John begins, “**The Elder...**” When John wrote these letters he was no longer the younger of the apostles, he was now Christianity's elder statesman.

John had outlived his contemporaries. You could say he was the only surviving member of *the original band*.

He was a man who'd been with Jesus! He was an eyewitness. He'd seen it all. He was now in Ephesus overseeing the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

John was a man with street cred. He'd earned his bona fides. His enemies had tried to boil him in oil to get him to recant his faith - but he refused, and God delivered him. Now when the Apostle John walks into a room people take notice. When he speaks they listen.

Everywhere he goes folks yearn to hear from him.

John is not just "*an elder*," he is "**The Elder.**" He loves the Church, and he uses his clout for the good of God's people. He warns, teaches, exhorts, and encourages.

You're blessed if there's a person in your life you look to as "*The Elder.*" We all need the ear of *a wise person - someone we trust - who's been with Jesus.*

John writes, "**The Elder, to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth...**" 2 John was written to the elect lady. Now 3 John is addressed to a man named "**Gaius.**"

There are actually three Gaius(s) mentioned in the NT... Acts 19 speaks of Gaius the Macedonian, one of Paul's travel companions... in Acts 20 there's a Gaius from Derbe, who lived in Galatia... then Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 1 speak of a Gaius who lived in Corinth who hosted Paul when he was in town...

This Gaius to whom John writes this letter could be either of the three, or a different man altogether...

Whoever Gaius was, John loved him in truth!

The Greek name, "**Gaius**" means "**on Earth**" - and the message John sends to Gaius could indeed apply to anyone who presently lives on the fallen planet.

3 John is a letter from *the Elder to the earthlings.*

And John greets **Gaius** in verse 2, “**Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.**” This was a common greeting in John’s day. He prays that **Gaius** is healthy and thriving in every area of his life - both *physically and spiritually*.

Yet here’s a verse that over the years has been misinterpreted, and because of an erroneous understanding, has led thousands of Christians into serious error. What John intended as a simple greeting has been taken by **prosperity gospel** proponents as a promise of perfect health and wealth for all Christians.

Kenneth Copeland, Oral Roberts, even Joel Osteen have been chief culprits of this erroneous teaching.

Roberts said when he first came across 3 John 2, he said to his wife, “**Evelyn, now this means we’re suppose to prosper.**” As if this verse were a guarantee.

Oral claimed his whole Christian experience, from then on, grew out of this understanding of 3 John 2.

Yet the problem with their interpretation is that the rest of the NT betrays such a simplistic understanding.

Throughout the Bible - *as well as what we know from Christian experience* - there are countless examples of devout believers in Jesus who’ve *prospered spiritually while lacking financially and suffering physically*.

Hebrews 11 is full of folks who were imprisoned, scourged, tortured, mocked, and made destitute - yet gained God’s approval through their overcoming faith.

Surely, God likes to give good gifts to His children. At times He gives us a measure of good health and more-than-adequate wealth, but He doesn't guarantee every Christian an unbroken stream of material blessing.

Christians, like non-Christians, can be laid off and challenged to pay their bills. Believers and unbelievers alike live in the same germ-infested world, and grow ill.

Being a Christian and *abounding spiritually* doesn't immunize you from poverty and disease.

To take what John meant as a good-intentioned greeting - a simple wish for health and happiness - as a iron-clad promise is shoddy biblical interpretation.

It's reading more into the text than was intended by the author. Renown Greek scholar, Gordon Fee, refutes the prosperity gospel's take on 3 John 2.

He writes, "To extend John's wish for Gaius to refer to financial and material prosperity for all Christians of all times is totally foreign to the text. John neither intended that, nor could Gaius have so understood it. Thus it cannot be the '*plain meaning*' of the text."

One of the first rules of hermeneutics - *that is, biblical interpretation* - is to look at a verse in its historical, and cultural, and literary context. It's a true statement, "A text without a context ends up a pretext."

Rather than some kind of doctrinal pronouncement John is sending Gaius a common greeting in verse 2.

Gordon Fee refers to the opening of 3 John as “the standard form of greeting in a personal letter of antiquity.” When John wrote, “*I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers*” - it was simply a hopeful and happy greeting.

John gets to the body of his letter in verse 3, “*For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth.*”

Gaius was a man known for walking in truth. He’d earned a reputation. Integrity was his middle name.

Gaius lived his life in light of the truth. I’m sure he loved people, but he also loved the truth - and wanted *what he did* to correspond with the *truth he knew*.

Earl Weaver was the long time manager for the Baltimore Orioles. Earl once threw a temper tantrum in the dugout. He knocked over several coolers and threw whatever equipment he could get his hands on.

On the team that year was a born again Christian named “*Pat Kelly*.” After Weaver pitched his fit, Pat spoke up, “*Coach, I hope you learn to walk with the Lord.*” The old coach wasn’t too receptive. He snapped back, “*I hope you learn to walk with the bases loaded.*”

But Pat Kelly was right. Being a Christian is about *walking with the Lord* - not just *talking about the Lord*.

Throughout the Bible the Christian life is referred to as **a walk**. We’re to *walk in love* - *walk by faith* - *walk in the Spirit* -

walk as children of light. Our life with Christ is not a **run** - nor is it a **crawl** - John calls it a **walk**...

When you run you lose focus...

When you crawl you lack focus...

But when you're taking a walk the focus is on the One you're with. Walking denotes a consistent, steady, forward progression. It's step by step. There's a gentle leading. The time spent is refreshing and rejuvenating.

Is your life characterized as *walking with the Lord*?

Well, if it is, you'll also **"walk in the truth!"** You can't walk with the Lord without walking in His truth!

This means you're trusting in, and leaning on, and applying the truths of God's Word to your everyday life. *You're not walking with the Lord - if you're living a lie.*

Gaius was a man known to **"walk in the truth!"**

And John says in verse 4, **"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."** Here is where I can relate. As a pastor I have **no greater joy** than to watch the believers under my care progressing in their walk with Jesus. *Your spiritual growth is my reward.*

When you stand strong against temptation - or when you endure a stormy season with your faith intact - or when you go out of your way to befriend someone in need - or when you get involved in ministry... I rejoice!

If you want to send **a little joy** your pastor's way; don't send him flowers or candy - just **"walk in truth."**

Do the right thing under difficult or stressful circumstances - *that's what makes my heart rejoice!*

Verse 5, “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church.” *Gaius* had developed a name not only of walking in truth, but of showing love to both the brethren and to strangers.

And this is the reputation this church has earned.

As some of you know I travel a good bit these days to other churches, and Calvary CSM has gotten quite a reputation. The way you’ve hosted the pastors and their leaders at our annual conferences is impressive.

I have people thank me. They tell me your love, and your eagerness to serve, and your sacrificial spirit are an example to their church. I feel like John, “*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*”

This is the greatest compliment that a pastor can receive - *not that his teaching is interesting, or that his jokes are funny, or that you’re learning a lot* - but that sitting under his ministry is causing you **to love more.**

John says in verse 6, “*If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.*” I’ll never forget the first time our church studied this verse. We started Calvary CSM in 1980 teaching in the book of Luke.

And we kept going chapter by chapter. By late 1982 we’d studied through the NT and had reached 3 John.

It was our very first Wednesday night journey through the Bible. FYI, now in 2018 we're on our fifth.

At the time, we were occupying a building - an old warehouse - *on a temporary basis*. The owner wasn't even charging us rent. He told me to get him a liability policy, and we could meet there until we found something else. Well, the weeks dragged on into to months. There were few alternatives on the horizon.

That's when I read 3 John 6, "*they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.*"

In other words, God doesn't want His people mooching off the world. He wants us carrying our own weight - paying our bills. As John puts it, He wants us traveling through life "*in a manner worthy of God.*"

I was convicted. In occupying the warehouse without paying rent I felt like we were "*taking from Gentiles.*"

We were drawing *worldly support* for a *spiritual venture*. I felt it was the responsibility of God's people to pay their own freight, so that next week I started sending the landlord an unsolicited check for our rent.

And understand, before we sent that first check he didn't want to rent us the building. That's why we were temporary. He wanted more rent than we could afford.

But after a couple months of us sending the money, he called me and asked if we wanted to sign a lease.

I believed it was God blessing on our obedience.

We all learned an important lesson through that experience - the church doesn't need to apply for neighborhood grants, or dip into the community chest.

God wants to fund *His work* through *His people*.

He reserves for you and me - and for all believers in Jesus - the joys of giving and supporting His work!

Which leads to verse 8, “We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.” Here's a beautiful principle - when you give money, or time, or support, or prayers to a missionary, or a pastor, or a church you're investing in that ministry.

You're partnering in that particular work, and thus you're sharing in the spiritual rewards of their labors.

If you buy stock in a corporation you're making an investment that you hope will yield a dividend. If the company does well; then you do well. *And the same is true with your offering.* You're making an investment.

The spiritual accomplishments of Calvary CSM get credited to you. You share in what I do, and in what the staff does, and in what the school does, and in what our missionaries do, and in what we all do together. As a result you play a part, and get a reward, for ministries in places where you'll never personally participated.

In verse 9 John shifts gears from commendation to warning... “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.” *What church?* We don't know. *And who was Diotrephes?* Again, in one sense, we don't know.

But in another sense I've met him - and you've met him. Sadly, there's a *Diotrephes* in most every church.

I read once where the average American eats 68 hot dogs every year. Now that's a lot of hot dogs... Well, Diotrephes didn't eat hot dogs - *he was a hot dog!*

Here was a man who loved the limelight. He always wanted to be the center of attention. He loved being the star. He wanted all eyes on him. It's like what was said of Teddy Roosevelt, "He wanted to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral."

Just this week I was on the phone with a fellow pastor, when the thought hit me, "Wow, pastors sure do like to talk about themselves." I hope he wasn't on the other end of the line thinking the same thing about me.

It reminds me of a comment Woodrow Wilson once said of an proud associate, "He was the only man I have ever known who could strut while sitting down."

Well, Diotrephes could strut!

He liked to exalt himself and take control. Diotrephes learned early on how to manipulate, and intimidate, and dominate. And when he came into the church he brought along this attitude. *Diotrephes was a dictator.*

Here was the self-appointed church sheriff.

He thought nothing should go on in his town, *even in Jesus' name* without his approval. And it was his desire for "*the preeminence*" that made Diotrephes jealous. He was threatened by the ministry of other believers.

This is why Diotrephes refused to receive John.

Verse 10 tells us he made vicious slurs to discredit John the Elder. Diotrephes was insecure. He *put down John to build himself up*. He was acting like a big baby.

In a sense, Diotrephes was the gang leader, and he didn't want the Elder John infringing on his turf.

Bible expositor, AT Robertson, once wrote an article for a Southern Baptist magazine. He described what could've been a modern day description of the conduct of this man, Diotrephes - *but without naming him*.

In the weeks following the release of the article, twenty-five Baptist church leaders across the state wrote letters to the editor canceling their subscriptions to the magazine. They all claimed Robertson had been pointing his finger at them... *incriminating themselves*.

In truth, *they* had been Diotrephes.

Its sad, but Diotrephes still plagues the church.

When one man sets himself up as dictator, and tells God's people - often even God - what can and can't be done - the work of the Spirit is grieved and quenched.

Rather than a channel for blessing, he becomes a bottleneck. Jesus said in Matthew 20, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant... Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave..."

Christian leaders are to be *servants* not *sergeants*, *disciples* not *dictators*. It's been said the challenge of a leader is to "lead and not drive, inspire and not dominate, cause respect and not fear, win support and not opposition." There's only one Master - only one Boss for the believer - and His name is "*Jesus Christ!*"

John says in verse 10, "Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words." Diotrephes slandered *The Elder*.

John was a loving leader. He would've rejoiced to see Diotrephes "*walk in truth*," but instead he told lies, *even lied about John*. Rather than respect John's obvious God-given authority he tried to discredit him.

"And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church." And what he did to John, Diotrephes did to others. He opposed anyone else in the church who tried to challenge his authority.

For this Diotrephes it was *his way* or *the highway*.

Here was a *so-called elder* who refused to allow for a dissenting opinion. He made no room for people who disagreed. Diotrephes was a cult-leader in the making.

And notice what John said about Diotrephes at the beginning of verse 10 - *when John comes, he'll put him in his place!* Don't you wish you could've been present for that encounter? Sparks flew! John put his foot down. *The Elder* is put *the elitist* in his place!

And this is what has to be done with a Diotrephes.

Sometimes church feuds and potential takeovers have to be combated with a face-to-face showdown.

It's not fun. No godly person relishes a fight. But like it or not, not every church squabble gets settled peacefully. Pastors can't be afraid of a confrontation.

Verse 11 is good wisdom, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God."

Instead of a Diotrephes, John encourages us to be a Demetrius. Verse 12, "Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true."

Nothing is said of Demetrius other than he was a good example. He had "a good testimony from all..."

Nobody had a bad word to say about Demetrius.

If we contrast Demetrius with Diotrephes, implied is that Demetrius was a humble, gracious, servant-leader.

Rather than seek the limelight, he was willing to work backstage... rather than make demands, he built consensus... rather than exercise control, he relied on influence... rather than demand, he reasoned...

It was a credit to have the respect of someone like the Elder John, *but everyone respected Demetrius...*

It reminds me of a story told by the dean of Christian musicians, Bill Gaither. In his book, "I Almost Missed The Sunset" Bill talks about the early years of his marriage. He

and his wife, Gloria, were teaching school in his hometown in Indiana. The newlyweds wanted to buy a piece of land and build a house.

Bill noticed some grazing land south of town that was owned by a 92 year-old retired banker named Mr. Yule.

The man owned a lot of land, and the rumor was he wasn't selling. He used the excuse that he'd promised the land to the farmers so they could graze their cattle.

Well, one day Bill and Gloria went to see Mr. Yule. Bill introduced himself and asked about the property.

Mr. Yule peered at them over the top of his bifocals. He said, *"Not selling, the farmers need it for grazing."*

Bill replied, *"Well, that's what I've heard, but we teach school in the area and we hope to settle here. We thought you might be interested in helping us out."*

The old man answered him, *"What did you say your name was?"* "Bill... Bill Gaither." *"Hmmm. Any relation to Grover Gaither?"* "Yes Sir, he was my granddad."

Bill writes, *"Mr. Yule put down his paper and took off his glasses. 'Interesting. Grover Gaither was the best worker I ever had on my farm. Full day's work for a day's pay. So honest. What did you say you wanted?'"*

Well, to make a long story short, the Gaithers bought the 15 acres, at a price much less than they expected.

In his story Bill fast-forwards three decades.

He and his son, Benjy, are now taking a stroll on that same beautiful, Indiana pasture-land, when Bill says to his boy,

“Benjy, you’ve had this wonderful place to grow up through nothing that you’ve done, but because of the good name of a great-granddad you never met.”

Oh, the value of a Demetrius-like reputation.

Proverbs 22:1 tells us, “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” Diotrefes wanted to be noted, and he was. His name lives in infamy... Demetrius was just happy to “*walk in the truth,*” and his reputation has now succeeded him for the last two-thousand years.

Verse 13, “I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face.”

This is not just a problem with pen and ink, but also keyboard and smartphone. Emails and texts leave much to be desired when it comes to communication.

How often have you been misunderstood via email?

Face-to-face is always the safest means of messaging. And this was The Elder John’s desire. He would travel to Gaius, and speak to him personally.

John concludes, “Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name.” John has been reflecting on the love of Jesus. And remember what was said of *Jesus, the Good Shepherd*, “the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” When John tells them to greet his friends by name, he’s exemplifying the love of Jesus.

Realize, Jesus loves us personally, and intimately, and specifically. He knows you. He understands your peculiarities. He recognizes what makes you tick.

You've heard the statement, "I love humanity. I just can't stand people." *That's not Jesus!* He cares for us as individuals. He doesn't mind getting involved with you and I personally. It's been said, "Jesus loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love!"

Let's walk with God and walk in truth... Let's receive each other in love, and take nothing from the Gentiles... Let's be a Demetrius not a Diotrephes...

And let's love in truth and build a good reputation...