

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet

3 John | *Drastic Comparison of Kingdom Relationships*

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In the beginning, when God wrote this story into existence, He created relational people and put them together. And then He gave them **a mission** – *together*: to fill the world with divine image bearers (**Gen 1:28**). People – *together* – spreading the glory of God across the face of the earth. That was God’s mission for human relationships.

And as we have made our way through the Bible this past year, we have seen some really **beautiful examples** of these kingdom relationships on display:

- Aaron and Hur holding up the arms of Moses as the Israelites fought their first battle on their journey to the Promised Land.¹
- Prince Jonathan supporting David (a shepherd boy) in taking the throne because he knew that David was God’s anointed.²
- Ruth leaving her homeland behind to follow Naomi and Naomi’s God.³
- Joseph and Mary trusting God even when His plans were inconvenient and hard.⁴
- The deep friendship that Jesus had with Lazarus and his family.⁵
- The disciples who turned the world upside down with the radical message of Jesus.⁶
- Paul and his traveling companions (e.g., Timothy, Silas, Barnabas, Luke, Mark) who devoted their lives to take the Gospel of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

We have also seen plenty of examples of **devastating relationships**:

- The people who joined together to build the Tower of Babel.⁷
- David’s affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband.⁸
- The religious leaders who joined together to crucify Jesus.⁹
- The congregation in the local church in Corinth who were living for their own selfish interests.¹⁰

¹ Exod 17:8–16

² 1 Sam 20

³ Ruth 1:6–17

⁴ Matt 1:18–20

⁵ John 11:1–36

⁶ Acts 17:6

⁷ Gen 11:1–9

⁸ 2 Sam 11:1–27

⁹ Matt 12:14; 27:20.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 5:1; 6:5–8; 11:17–22

As we turn to the shortest book in the Bible, John is talking about what it looks like for Christians to invest into **relationships** that are **centered** on a **shared love for Jesus** and on a shared desire to see His glory on display in every corner of this earth.¹¹

In all three of John's letters, he focuses in on relationships – on fellowship:

- 1 John | primarily about our **fellowship with God**
 - *to know the love of God and to walk in the light of God*
- 2 John | primarily about guarding against **fellowship with false teachers**
 - *guarding ourselves from relationships that would draw us away from the truth*
- 3 John | primarily about our **fellowship with other Christians**
 - *Investing our lives into the kingdom relationships that we were created for.*

Here in this letter, John takes **three different people** whom he knows personally, and he contrasts their kingdom relationships.

1. First, we see a picture of a man in the local church who loves Jesus Christ and who is investing his life into relationships with people who are building up the kingdom of God. His name is **Gaius**.
2. Second, we see a picture of a man in the church who is living for himself and for his glory – and we see that this man is using other people as a means of building his own kingdom (in the church). His name is **Diotrephes**.
3. Lastly, John briefly introduces us to a man in the church who is well known to all the Christians in the area as a person whose relationships are built around the truth of the Gospel. His name is **Demetrius**.

So, here's the plan for this morning:

1. Pray
2. Listen to the text together.
3. Look at what we can learn about Kingdom-focused, God-glorifying friendships.
4. Thank God for one another.

¹¹ **Reflection:** as you think about your closest friendships, ask yourself WHY you are friends with these people. What caused this friendship to develop? Usually, it's because you have something in common. Same class. Same sports program. Same job. Same stage of life. Same experiences. Same hobby. Same nationality. But now how many meaningful relationships do you have that are centered on a shared love for Jesus and on a shared commitment to the mission that He gave to the church?

In this letter, John talks about what it looks like to invest your life into relationships that are built on a love for Jesus and that are fueled by a shared desire to see the Name of Jesus exalted in all the earth.

It can be so easy for Christians to forget that our days here on earth are **in a battlefield**. The Bible says that we have **an enemy** who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). This means that we are **at war** (Eph 6:10–20). And while it might be fun to have casual friendships to pass the time while we are back at camp, when the bullets start flying, I want friends who love the King more than anything, who believe in the mission with all their heart, who will faithfully stand by my side on the battlefield, and who will joyfully lay down their lives for the sake of Gospel.

That's the kind of **Kingdom Relationship** we were made for!

RECITE 3 JOHN

VS 1–4 || An encouraging greeting from John to Gaius

- “*The Elder*”
 - The apostle John. Disciple. Inner circle. Last remaining apostle.
- “*To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth*”
 - Gaius was a **common name** in the first century. There seems to be four different men in the NT who were named Gaius.¹²
 - The name Gaius means “*happy*” or “*one who rejoices*” – which is a beautiful name for a Christian.
 - And John loves this brother in Christ. John calls him “the beloved Gaius”, and the word that John uses (**ἀγαπάω**) is perhaps the deepest word that John could have used to describe his affection for Gaius.
 - The Gaius that John is writing to was known for his Christian hospitality
- “*Beloved (ἀγαπάω), I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*”
 - The first part of this prayer was a common greeting in the 1st century (and it is still common today) to wish somebody good health: “*I hope you are doing well.*”
 - But John adapts this common greeting by adding that last phrase: “*just as your soul prospers.*”
 - This is called “**wholistic care**”. Pastor John cared about **the whole person**.¹³
 - Brothers & sisters, **we are wholistic people**. This means that we have **physical** needs and **spiritual** needs and **emotional** needs and **mental** needs and **relational** needs...and true friends care about all these things – because God cares about all these things.
 - As an **example**: just a few months ago, Elizabeth and I were going through a painful experience in our family. A couple of the ladies in our church family had reached out to her, letting her know that they were praying for her. And then, they showed up at our house (at like 10 o’clock at night) with hugs and a gift basket. They were seeking to care for her in a wholistic way: spiritually, emotionally, physically, relationally... This is the mark of a true friendship.
 - Some preachers love to use this verse as a proof text for promoting a health and wealth gospel, but that’s not at all what this verse is about. This is Pastor John giving a common greeting, but then clarifying that he doesn’t just care about Gaius’s health, but also about his soul.

¹² Gaius of *Corinth* (1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:23). Gaius of *Macedonia* (Acts 19:29–41). Gaius of *Derbe* (Acts 20:4–5). Gaius, *John’s friend* (3 John).

¹³ It’s easy for pastors to get too focused on one side or the other.

- “For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you...”¹⁴
 - This “rejoicing” is another mark of a true friendship. When a person you truly care about is doing well in something, it makes your heart happy.
 - **Example:** like seeing my sister Rachel on stage with **Mark Hall** (*lead singer for Casting Crowns*) promoting the ministry of Compassion International. Ever since she was a young girl, it was her dream to work with Compassion, and it brings me joy to see her thriving in her role as a representative.¹⁵
 - What caused John’s heart to rejoice was not Gaius’s financial success or career advancement or academic achievement or any other earthly milestone. What caused John to rejoice was hearing that his beloved friend was walking in the truth.

“I have **no greater joy** than to hear that my children walk in truth.”¹⁶
 ~ 3 John 4

- My dad has quoted this verse many times in his life! 😊 For a pastor or a Sunday School teacher or a missionary or a Christian parent, there truly is no greater news (in all the world) than to hear that the people you have poured your heart and soul into are still walking in the truth.
 - **MY CHILDREN:** I want my children to be healthy. I want them to have careers that give them joy and a sense of purpose. I want them to marry women who care for them and are faithful to them. I want them to have children of their own so that they can experience the joys of being a dad. I want them to have deep friendships. I want them to be able to travel the world and experience the beautiful diversity in this world that God has created. BUT more than all of these things, when I am an old man (like John) I want to hear that my children are walking in the truth. I want that for **my children**, and I want that for **my church family**.

VS 5–8 || Gaius as a positive example of kingdom relationships

- “Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers.”
 - Itinerant preaching was common during these early years in church history. Remember, the Gospel of Jesus was still so new, and (*as we saw last week in 2 John*) there was plenty of false teaching going around. So the church would send out preachers who would go from church to church preaching the Gospel of Jesus.

¹⁴ ἐχάρην γάρ λίαν

¹⁵ **Example:** I remember the day my ACT scores arrived in the mail. I remember my mother crying for joy that her son was going to be able to go to college (*I think she had her doubts*). Her heart was “rejoicing greatly” for this milestone in my life.

¹⁶ This is particularly significant in light of the historical records which indicate that Gaius was appointed as the pastor of the church in Pergamos, which was the seat of “Satan’s throne” and where the blood of Christian martyrs stained the earth (**Rev 2:13**).

- But this kind of missionary work was **costly** (i.e., it wasn't cheap), and it was **dangerous**. The only way these preachers could continue on their missionary journey was if the church supported them financially and if people opened up their homes to them.
 - They didn't have **hotels** like we have today. They didn't have international missionary organizations covering their **health care**. They didn't have the IMB providing their yearly **salary**. They didn't have a budget for **groceries** or **clothes**.
 - These missionaries would go out "*for the sake of the Name*", and either the local churches would open up their homes and care for the needs and help them on their journey, or these missionaries wouldn't make it.

And Gaius was well known as a Christian who had opened up his home, his resources, and his life to these traveling missionaries (*whether he knew them personally or not*). The word for this is "**hospitality**". Gaius's life was totally open to God's people.

- **Example**: several months after the Heim's joined our church family, **Adam** went out of his way to show me this kind of hospitality. I remember him looking me in the eyes and saying, "*Jeremiah, my life is open to you. If you need a car, you can use mine. If you need money, my wallet is open to you.*" Now, that can be a very dangerous offer 😊, but it's a mark of a Christian who is seeking to build his relationships with an eternal kingdom perspective!

Gaius shows us what it looks like for Christians to open up their lives to one another.

If you have ever read John Bunyan's book, **The Pilgrim's Progress**, you might remember that the innkeeper's name is Gaius. I think that was probably a very intentional decision by John Bunyan to indicate the kind of Christian hospitality that we are supposed to learn from this man.

"We therefore ought to **receive** such,
that we may become **fellow workers** for the truth."
~ 3 John 8

This isn't just a pat on the back to Gaius. After praising Gaius for his hospitality, John says that all of us need to be involved in the work of this gospel ministry together.

- On November 15th this past week, the global population broke **8 billion people**.¹⁷ There are 8 billion souls on this planet right now that are going to spend an eternity either in the glorious presence of God or in hell. Their eternity depends on them hearing the message of Jesus Christ.¹⁸
- Of this 8 billion people, approximately **40% are unreached people groups**.¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

¹⁸ Rom 10:8-18

¹⁹ <https://globalfrontiermissions.org/gfm-101-missions-course/the-unreached-peoples-and-their-role-in-the-great-commission/#:~:text=What%20is%20a%20UPG%3F,the%20Gospel%20of%20Jesus%20Christ.>

Think about this for a moment, over 3 billion people live in unreached people groups with little or no access to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need missionaries. And we need churches and individuals who will serve and support these missionaries.

- There are those who “**go**”, and there are those who “**support**”; and as we work together, John says that we are “*fellow workers for the truth*”.
- **What does this look like?**
 - This past year, the church voted to increase our **missionary giving**. It is expensive to be a missionary today, and so we want to do everything we can to support the spread of the gospel by supporting those who are “going”, but that requires **financial generosity** and **sacrifice** and **faithfulness** from all of us. So, bring your financial giving before the Lord, and pray about it. Ask God to give you a heart that beats for the mission that He has given to the church. Store up your treasures in heaven by giving up your treasures for the sake of the kingdom here on earth.
 - Pray about going on a **mission trip**. Over the past year, I have had numerous missionaries ask me about having our church take a trip to serve with them on the mission field. And so, Lord-willing, I am hoping and praying that God will open the door for us to go on at least one mission trip every year. So, you could start praying for these trips now.
 - Send a **letter of encouragement** to a missionary.
 - Commit to **praying** for the work of the mission.

VS 9–11 || Diotrephes as a negative example of kingdom relationships

John spends the next few sentences giving us an example of an individual whose relational priorities are the exact opposite of Gaius. This man’s name is Diotrephes, and instead of having a heart that *serves and supports others in the name of Christ*, Diotrephes has a heart that *serves himself and sabotages others*.

We don’t know exactly who Diotrephes was.

- But we know that he had some kind of leadership role in the local church.
- We know that he abused his authority.
- And we know that he loved himself more than he loved Jesus.
- And instead of investing his life into Christ’s kingdom, Diotrephes was seeking to build his own kingdom in the local church.
 - Instead of being a servant in *the church of Christ*, he wanted to be the king in *the church of Diotrephes*.

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have **the preeminence**²⁰ among them, does not receive us.”

~ 3 John 9

We don’t see the word **preeminence** very often in the English language today, but it means “*superiority in excellence...priority of place...superiority of power or influence.*”²¹

²⁰ φιλοπρωτεύων:

²¹ Webster’s 1828 Dictionary

If you remember back to the message that we heard (*from Jon Nesvig*) on the book of Colossians, who is supposed to have preeminence in the church?

And He is the head of the body, the church,
Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
That in all things He may have the *preeminence*.

~ *Colossians 1:18*

JESUS is supposed to have first place in the church, but Diotrephes wanted first place in the church.²² The local church is supposed to be an outpost of Christ's Kingdom, but Diotrephes wanted the local church to be his kingdom. He was "in ministry" to make a name for himself. And so he felt threatened by anything or anybody that would take the spotlight off of him. So...

- Unlike Gaius, Diotrephes isn't welcoming these traveling missionaries into his home.
- Instead of supporting these missionaries on their journey in a manner worthy of God, he is rejecting them altogether.
- And...not only is he not receiving them, but he is abusing his pastoral authority by saying that nobody else in the church is allowed to support the missionaries either.
- And...instead of using his words to build up the body of Christ, John says that he is spread malicious accusations against the apostle John and the other gospel missionaries.

Diotrephes will forever be remembered as the man who worked against the gospel of Jesus because he was so caught up in building his own kingdom that he was actually scared of Jesus' kingdom.

- **Illustration:** when I was in junior high, my family visited some Christian friends while we were on vacation in Kansas. The next week, the local pastor in that town called up my parents' boss on the phone because he was absolutely furious that we had the audacity to visit people from his church without getting his permission first. Instead of seeing our Christian friendship as a blessing to the body of Christ, he saw it as a threat to his ministry.

When we have this mindset that life is about us, we tend to see people as *tools* in building our own kingdom – instead of as *beloved friends* in mission of building Christ's kingdom.

John says to Gaius, "Look, I'm going to deal with Diotrephes when I come (10), but in the meantime..."

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.

~ *3 John 11*

²² I think John was acutely perceptive to this struggle in Diotrephes because there was a time in John's life when he too wanted to have a certain preeminence in Christ's kingdom (e.g., **Mark 10:35–37** [also Matt 20:20–21]; Luke 9:46; 22:24; John 13:3–5). On the night before the cross, the Son of God was on his knees washing His disciples' feet because none of them wanted to stoop to that level. Even after all they had seen Jesus do, none of them wanted to be the servant. And so, instead of getting down on their knees to wash one another's feet, they spent their time arguing about which of them would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven...while the King of Heaven was on His knees washing their feet.

One of the ways we can examine our relationship with God is by looking at our relationship with other Christians.

Ask yourself...

- Do I love Christians?
- Do I love the church?
- Am I investing my finances into the work of the ministry?
- Am I investing my life into relationships with other believers?
 - Are you part of a small group? If not, why not?
 - Are you part of a Bible study? If not, why not?
 - Are you committed to being an active member in the local gathering of God's people? If not, why not?
 - Are you opening your home to other Christians? If not, why not?
 - Am I intentional in making time to pray with other Christians?
 - Am I giving my church family an opportunity to really get to know me?

VS 12 || Demetrius as a positive example of a Christian who was widely known for having a good testimony – because he opened his life to be known by other Christians.

VS 13–14 || Importance of face-to-face fellowship & knowing one another by name.

PRAY