

3 John A Ministry of Hospitality

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John commends hospitality for those who go out in the name of Christ.

Starting this morning, we're going to take a look at what stuck me as *Little Letters to Normal People*. There are three of them in the New Testament – 2 John, 3 John, and Philemon.

I'm calling them *little* because they're all short – these three “books” each have only one chapter. There is no 3rd John chapter 3 or Philemon 2.

Because they're short, they're easy to pass over. Some of you may have never even read them before. But we're going to cure that today and you can walk out of here boasting: “I read an entire book of the Bible before lunch!” Pretty encouraging, huh???

So, they're *little*, but they're also *Letters to Normal People* – 2 John is addressed to an unnamed lady, 3 John to a man named Gaius, and Philemon – well, anyone want to guess who that's addressed to? These people weren't pastors, or missionaries, or church professionals – they were normal people.

It's not that pastors or missionaries aren't normal people, but my point is: the Bible isn't just written for or to people in the pulpit or religious scholars – the Bible includes actual letters written to actual people about things going on in their actual lives.

It's what you might call practical theology. Day to day doctrine. Biblical truth that impacts our ordinary lives. And it's wedged right in there with profound chapters about the atonement of sin, the nature of Christ, and descriptions of Heaven. There's no separation. No division between the secular and the sacred – no gap between my church life and my home life. The Bible speaks about all of it.

In fact, in 3rd John we see the issues of the church and home colliding. This turns out to be a letter commending a man – note that, would you, it's addressed to a man, 2 John is addressed to a woman, but this is addressed to a man, who is showing hospitality to traveling missionaries and ministers – so brothers, stick with me – we're going to talk a lot about the house this morning, but this applies to you. Read with me:

1 The Elder,

To the beloved Gaius,

whom I love in truth:

2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

3 For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth *that is* in you, just as you walk in the truth. 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

There's a perfect verse for Father's Day, isn't it? 4 "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

So, what's going on there? Apparently John and Gaius had had some kind of a connection in the past – maybe John pastored the church Gaius attended, maybe John had led him to the Lord. And now, years have passed and the two are no longer in touch regularly, but a group of traveling missionaries has just come to John and they tell him, "we stayed with this guy Gaius who knows you and he took great care of us." And that report was super encouraging to John – to know that things were still going well with him.

Years ago I was talking with my pastor about ministry and he told me, "make sure you stay in one place long enough that you get to see the passing of time in people's lives, that you get to watch how they grow slowly over time."

Some of you know what he was talking about, don't you?

I think of those of you who serve in Children's Ministry. You have a kid in the nursery or in your class when they're three or four years old and you have some great conversations with them, some great lessons about who God is and what He is like. And then life goes by and they're up in the 1st-3rd class and you bump into them and they talk with you and you're amazed and encouraged over how they've grown.

Or some of you go out to the mission field and meet someone on your first trip, and then you come back a while later and before you even buy your tickets you're already thinking of them and wondering how they're doing.

And the more time goes by, the more you experience things like that. You get to see someone saved and then baptized, and then married, and then dedicate their firstborn. You see someone you disciplined in the faith and now they're leading a ministry or a church or raising a family. It's tremendously encouraging.

Now, it doesn't always turn out that way – sometimes people start off in a good direction and for reasons we don't fully understand they drift, or sputter and fail or spectacularly burnout or fall. Those people break our hearts. But people like Gaius, oh! good old Gaius, they bring us encouragement, and hope, and fill us with joy.

Maybe today you need to reach back out to someone who helped you along in your faith, and let them know how you're doing. Tell them you heard this verse this morning, and you

wanted to let them know it made you think of them – you want them to know, you’re still walking in the truth, and you hope that brings them joy.

Or maybe you’re the one looking on from a distance, and you see that person still walking – maybe you need to reach out to them and let them know what joy they bring you as you watch them continue to walk in the truth. And hopefully, for some, that will include a conversation with an actual parent or child – your mom or dad or son or daughter is still walking in the truth.

Well, now we turn our attention to what Gaius was actually doing that was so encouraging to John.

5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers,
6 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,* 7 *because they went forth for His name’s sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles.* 8 *We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.*

As the early church was forming, evangelists, pastors, and missionaries were travelling all over the Mediterranean world preaching the good news, carrying along information, and spreading Christian doctrine. No one had a copy of the Bible yet so these travellers often brought what the apostles were teaching to other cities. As they travelled, if it was possible, they would be put up by members of the local church whether they were just passing through for the night or staying for a while to share and teach.

John says these were men, and sometimes women, who (vs 7) ‘*went forth for His name’s sake.*’

Can I tell you, that ultimately, there is no other sustaining motivation for doing ministry in any form? Oh, God may use other things to capture your attention. You might be moved by the sight of poor starving orphans, or by widows, or people suffering from HIV or cleft palates, or by the site of a church or school being built. You might be moved by the idea of how you could serve and help, but *the only enduring motivation for ministry is the name of Jesus Christ.*

And that’s just as true in ministry here at home. You might be moved by the idea of helping the homeless at the Central Union Mission, by the idea of helping some young child learn the Bible in Children’s Ministry, you might think you’ve really got some skill with an instrument or your voice and you can serve on the worship team. But if you’re doing what you do for any reason other than the name of Christ, sooner or later you will burn out and be disappointed. Ask anyone who has been in ministry for a while and they’ll tell you it’s true.

In some ways, ministry is like marriage – you start off being infatuated, giddy, excited about it all, but eventually the dreaminess begins to wear thin and you start to see the reality, that it’s not all just what I get out of being with you, it’s how can I serve you and love you and

give myself sacrificially for you. And if it's a good, healthy, relationship between mature people, it transitions from infatuation to commitment.

The same is true with ministry – you transition from an emotional response to a steadfast resolve that God has called me to this, He has equipped me for this, and by His grace and with His strength, I will do this for His glory and the benefit of others no matter what I personally feel like I get out of it, because He is worthy.

So there were some Christians back in the first century who had made the commitment – they had experienced the call of God on their lives to go and tell others about Jesus, to serve Him and love others and they were leaving behind their homes and their jobs, maybe even their families for the sake of being a part of what God was doing. John himself, the author of this letter, had once been a fisherman, but God called him to lay down his nets and become a fisher of men.

It might a temporary call – a season of life or a single, short trip, or it may be a lifelong commitment. But people were being obedient to that call, and now they needed some help along the way – help they often found through the local churches when they were passing through.

Why didn't they just book a room you ask? Why did they need to stay with people? Well, while hotels, or inns, existed in the ancient world, they weren't the kind of place you'd like to stay. They weren't resorts or luxury hotels. They were more like what see portrayed in the movies when they show you some old inn in the Middle Ages or even a frontier hotel in the Wild West - they were sketchy, dangerous places full questionable characters. Even innkeepers were looked down on for being the kind of people who would take money for hospitality.

Instead of letting visiting Christians stay in a place like that, Gaius was opening up his home and taking people in. And John said if he did it, notice the wording here, (vs 6) [“in a manner worthy of God”](#) there was an eternal blessing in store. He says in verse 8 [We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth.](#)

Jesus told the disciples:

[Matt 10:40 “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. 42 And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.”](#)

By opening up his doors and taking in these missionaries, by doing what he was able to do, Gaius was earning a share of the eternal reward that came from their ministry.

Now, we can still make that specific application in our lives today by hosting visiting missionaries and others. I've seen the leaders of this church do it time and time again.

Pastor Matt and Peggy have had visitors with them every weekend since they moved here. Pastor Bill and Marcella have had people from the church live with them and now they're living with someone else in the church as they transition to living in Haiti. Doug and Rose seemed to run a missionary bed and breakfast – they had people staying with them all the time. Or, at least they used to, but now they're living with another couple in the church too as they prepare to go wherever God is leading them next. And that's just what's going on with leadership. Many of you are involved in similar things.

But since we're on the subject, I want to talk to you about the idea of hospitality in general, because maybe you don't know any missionaries to host. No big deal – hospitality is actually a surprisingly common topic in the Bible¹ and it's always connected to the idea of loving other Christians – we're told to love others BY opening up our homes and our hearts to them; **because** we love each other we're naturally expected to be hospitable and welcoming.

Hospitality, as a reflection of Christian love is so essential that it actually qualifies, or disqualifies you from at least two things.

1. In 1 Tim 5, Paul says that if a widow was under 60 years old and she was going to be supported by the church, she needed to meet certain qualifications, one of them was: has she lodged strangers? That is, when her husband was alive, did they show hospitality?

2. In his first letter to Timothy and his letter to Titus, Paul says being hospitable is a *requirement* for those who would serve as elders or pastors in the church.

As I shared, I think this is something your leaders are doing well. And so are many of you – I think just about the area of hospitality with children – many of you have taken in each other's kids, or other people's kids to help their parents get through a tight spot in life whether it was for a morning or an afternoon or a week or more.

Some of you have taken in roommates from through the church.

As a church, we're doing pretty well with hospitality.

But, I'd like to see us do better. We live at a crossroad. People are always coming and going. Very, very, few of us are actually from DC. Few of us have lived here for more than ten years – I haven't even been here that long.

So, with all these people coming and going, how can we intentionally reach out and minister to people? I'd love to see us put together some sort of a "welcome to the city"

¹ In Romans Paul is listing behaviors that ought to be characteristic of Christians, and he says, in 12:13 we ought to be "given to hospitality."

booklet and/or webpage. Something that pulls together all the lessons we have learned about living here and offer that up to people who are visiting whether it's for a few days or a few years. What can we tell them from what we've learned? How can we make their time in the city a little better? How can we be hospitable in what we know can be a very overwhelming place? If you're interested in doing something like that, let me or Matt know.

Here's another thought - some of you know we are contacted regularly by people moving to the city for a job or usually an internship or school - they're only going to be here a few months or a few weeks, I'm thinking especially of younger adults - and they need a room. I think it would be great if we could put together a group of people who have heart to help out people like that - to foster them for a few weeks in a sense - to show hospitality, but also to disciple them a bit - teach them what it's like to love Jesus in this city while you work for whoever you work for. We've already built a page on the church's website showing people how to find a place to stay. We've taken some steps to try and help them narrow the field - but I wonder if we could do more or better because this isn't a need that's going away.

I've even dreamed of what it would be like to have a guesthouse here. The church in Budapest has an apartment above the church that people can rent out like a hotel room for just a very basic charge.

And just to throw it out there, what about another form of hospitality: the issue of foster care or adoption? On the basis of Christian love, would you be willing to bring a child, or children, into your life, into your home and help raise them?

There are many ways we can and do show hospitality.

But there are also things that get in the way, right? Unless you're this super amazing person, and you're hosting the most appreciative and easy-going guests, having people stay with you, in your home, can involve some death to self, right?

Let's be honest: showing hospitality wars against the flesh.

We think of the expenses involved. If people are staying with you, you want to know: how long are they going to be here, and what meals are they going to be around for? Even if we're just talking about having another couple over for dinner, real food costs real money. And we're talking about extra mouths to feed.

You think of the effort involved: All the preparation and cleanup. All the laundry you'll need to do to have fresh towels and fresh bed sheets and then re-doing all the laundry when they leave and re-making the beds and cleaning things back up.

You think of the disruption involved: how is this going to impact our normal schedule, our normal routine? Will I still be able to watch the game if we have them over?

Even though we want to be kind and generous and open-hearted there is a part of all of us that says, "This is mine, this place is mine and I don't want to share." We are tempted to think that our home is OUR home and that we can use it however we want. But God comes along and says, "Actually, EVERY thing you have is Mine, and this is how I need you to use it."

Hospitality stretches us and grows us, it keeps us from being destructively introverted. It keeps our soul alive by putting our flesh and it's selfish desires to death.

Maybe that's why Peter said:

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." 9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

Ouch. That hurts, huh?

Can I give you a few tips on how to do that, a few tips for how to be hospitable – how to make it a little easier so we're not as tempted to grumble?

Number One: Forget about Pinterest, Martha Stewart, and Pottery Barn.

Not long ago someone helped me see the difference between hospitality and entertaining. When you entertain you're putting on a production for the people who are coming over – you want to have some spectacular meal with the most amazing table settings (that you made yourself) and you want people to be wowed by the color you chose to paint that wall and the way it goes so nicely with your couch. And of course, you want to look stunning, unrushed, and unhurried as the whole evening effortlessly unfolds and the kids play quietly in the corner after reading some books.

Hospitality says 'welcome into our home' – the real life, real world, day to day reality of our domestic life where the kids need to be disciplined, the meal needs some salt, and there's this stain in the carpet that we can't get out no matter what we try.

If you have the time and the ability to entertain – go for it! People love it, and I know for some people, it's fun and easy. But PLEASE don't feel like you have to be a sharpshooter with a glue gun to have people over. Just invite them in, and do life together.

And then, when they show up, try to be a blessing to them. At our house we try to pray for our guests before they come - that God would bless them, that they would enjoy their time in our home, that they would find peace and rest under our roof, and that we would all have a great time together.

And then, when we sit down to eat, we like to pray for the meal, and if it's the evening we pray for whatever country we're praying for according to Operation World, and then we pray for our guests – something short and sweet – but it's our family asking God to bless

our guests, maybe to bless their marriage if it's a couple, or making mention of their family if they're here alone.

And sometimes, you find that your guests can be a blessing to you. I know a pastor who came into town to teach at a conference and he was staying with another pastor who was hosting the conference and the visiting pastor raked all the host pastor's leaves. The pastor who was hosting told me he was blessed and shocked. Here this 'big name' conference speaker has just worked in his yard. He was a blessing to the people he stayed with.

And actually, if hospitality is done right, it always has a blessing. Whether from the guest, or God, or both. You receive a reward from God for just participating in what He is doing through the lives of others.

Well, now John turns the conversation toward a comparison of two different men

9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. 10 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.

11 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.

Diotrephes was some sort of leader in a church near Gaius, quite possibly the pastor. And for some reason, it had all gone to his head. He wanted to rule the church with an authoritative hand, controlling everything that went on. He said what would happen and what wouldn't and if you didn't like it or obey, you would be put out too. His close-heartedness was the exact opposite of what Gaius is being commended for.

John says Diotrephes is guilty of the sin that is indigenous to Washington D.C. – he loved to have preeminence. He loved to be known by his position and title and worked hard to climb higher, making sure everyone knew who he was and what he did or who he worked for.

It's kind of amusing that John would be the one to call him out on that, isn't it? I mean, the disciples themselves used to argue about which one of them was the greatest. John and his brother James had once tried to use their dear old mama to help them secure positions of preeminence with Jesus – they asked to be seated on His right and His left when He established the Kingdom of God.

Mark 10:42 But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Friends, the word minister is actually an old Latin word that means servant. We can't ever forget that. We've got to remind ourselves on a regular basis of the words of John the Baptist – He, (that is, Christ) must increase, but I must decrease. Diotrophes is good a reminder for us that when men enter the church, they're still men. We're still plagued by selfish desires even as we try to live for Christ – in the middle of serving God you're often going to be tempted to serve yourself. Watch out for that temptation and pray for God to help you resist it.

Now compare that with:

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.

Three witnesses – Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone else, from the truth, and from John. Demetrius may actually be one of the travellers who needed to be put up. Diotrophes may have questioned his credentials as part of the reason for why he wasn't welcomed, but now John is reassuring Gaius – this guy is solid – check him out for yourself.

13 I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink;
14 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.

You're going to see this kind of sentiment expressed at the end of each of the letters – it's good and it's expedient to write to you, but there's so much more I'd rather say face to face.

And of course, when they meet, John will probably need a place stay...

So there you have it, a little letter to a normal person. But in it we find some very important and very practical things, including the reminder that the only proper motivation for ministry is a belief and conviction in the name of Christ. And, that one form of 'ministry' is hospitality – opening up our homes and lives to others because of what God has done in and through us – sharing what we have received from God in an effort to bless others.

After all, we learn everything we know about hospitality from God who has invited us into His home – at great personal expense. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is what opens the front door of Heaven for us, and now, as we saw last week in Revelation, Jesus stretches out a nail-pierced hand and invites us in, calling us to 'come' to Him.

I hope that as you reflect on what you've read and heard this morning, you'll ask yourself the question – what has God done for me, and what reflection is there of that in my life? How does God want to open my heart and my home for the sake of His name and who does He want me to affect?

Let's pray.