

Title: Stay the Course  
Text: 3 John 11-15  
Theme: The cumulative effect of a faithful life  
Series: 3 John  
Prop Stmt: The testimony of a gospel-saturated life has an enormous influence for good.

He initially seemed like he was what the church needed, but the longer he was there, the more autocratic and controlling he became. I knew this church and while I watched it from a distance, I saw that they had a Diotrephes in their midst and did not know what to do with him. Last Sunday as I preached verses 9-10, I could have given you example after example from this man and the effect he had upon that church. He led with a chainsaw and by the time he got done tearing things down, there was good reason to question if the church would survive.

If someone uses their authority to protect themselves by destroying you, you don't forget that very easily. Perhaps you have seen that at work. We've all seen this in local, state and national politics and it can happen in the home. But, the book of 3 John does not end with a warning about guys like this. It ends with a great encouragement, a great example and a sweet expectation.

Read Text:

3 John is the shortest book in the Bible. Yes, it has 15 verses, while 2 John only has 13, but 3 John has fewer words. In the original language in which it was written, there are 219. By the way, do you know the longest book in the Bible? That's easy, right? The book of Psalms because it has 150 Psalms. But, actually, the collection of the Psalms makes it the 3<sup>rd</sup> longest book behind Jeremiah and Genesis. It is so easy to overlook 3 John and if I am reading your response correctly, I think that our study in this little book has been encouraging and helpful to us. As a result of my study, I have found myself really looking forward to meeting Gaius in heaven. This is a dear brother and based on what we learned last week about Diotrephes, Gaius was likely the target of unjustified attacks, which had to sting. John was attacked by Diotrephes who was "talking wicked nonsense against" him, so I think it is safe to say that Gaius was a dear brother trying to be faithful, but found himself the target of Diotrephes accusations.

Accusations hurt. They are discouraging. Particularly when people who should know better, or who do not have all of the facts unload on you or about you. It is so easy to respond by saying, "what am I doing this for?" "Why do I subject myself to this?" If Gaius is wondering if it is worth it, then we can understand a little more of the burden that John has in writing this letter to him.

### 1. **Faithful people need encouragement.** (11)

So, a couple of weeks ago, I reviewed with you some of the revisions that the elders are recommending to our doctrinal statement. This resulted in a very good thing. I had a chance to take many of you through the doctrinal statement. I suspect that for some that it has been a long time since you did that. But you may remember that our statement about the Bible says

that “we believe that...the 66 books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God.” That means that 3 John exists ultimately because the Holy Spirit determined that it would and this book is just as inspired as any other book like Genesis, Psalms, Matthew, Romans, Ephesians and Revelation. We have this little book because the Spirit of God directed John to write it. So, one of the questions that I want you to ask the text as you read it, is “why”. Why did the Spirit of God direct the apostle John to write this personal letter to his friend and why did the Spirit of God preserve this letter and see to it that it was included in the Bible? Obviously, God determined that we needed the message of this letter. And what is clear to me from this book is that faithful people need encouragement. Gaius might be tempted to lower himself to the level of Diotrephes and, fight fire with fire. Or Gaius may be discouraged because some of the members of his church are shunning him out of fear of Diotrephes. But what if no one stands up to Diotrephes? John’s encouragement here takes on the form of a warning that is a command.

#### A. **The encouraging command (11a)**

##### a. Do not imitate evil

It sounds like the brothers who stayed with Gaius and reported to John of what a blessing he was to them. But they likely let John know that Gaius was going to pay the price for it by being denounced and attacked by Diotrephes. Gaius was now wondering if it was worth it. Once again, John calls Gaius, “beloved” and issues a command, “do not imitate evil.” Do not let evil establish the standard, or as Paul said in Romans 12.1, “do not let the world squeeze you into it’s mold.” Evil has a loud voice in the person of Diotrephes, but that does not mean that Gaius needs to listen to it or be influenced by it. The same is true for us.

I read that the average daily social media of internet users worldwide amounted to 2 hours and 25 minutes a day. I suspect that is the case for some of you, but certainly not all of you. But I want all of you, kids and parents to realize that social media is discipling you. It is attempting to form your thinking, your language, your values and your actions. And again, I think that most of you would have to admit that it is working. Your world is your phone, but one of the many changes that I have observed is how harsh and offensive people have become when communicating on-line. I have witnessed among professing believers a distinct lack of charity. We have convictions. We must. We hold them tenaciously, but not with meanness or bitterness. If you do not want to imitate evil, then do not choose to give evil a chair at the table of your life. Be careful what you expose yourself to because it will disciple you. Do not imitate evil, but...

##### b. Imitate good

Gaius, stay the course brother. Do not let Diotrephes get you off your game. When bad people are in authority, it is easy to give in to frustration as if it doesn’t matter what you do. It does matter. Imitate good. This is shorthand for mimic Jesus. He certainly lived with plenty of authority figures who used their positions to attack him and he never stooped to their level. It is

tempting to put your eyes on the failure of leaders. Every earthly leader will give you opportunities to do that. It is pretty common for the workers to talk about the managers or the owners and say things like, “Do you know what he has done now?!” “Can you believe she said that, or did that?!” But, when that is the focus of our time, and we get our eyes off of Christ, then we react to the evil around us, instead of imitating our Savior. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

A young man in our church recognized that he had a problem with sinful anger. So, he decided to do a study of the gospels so that he could study the life of Christ and how Christ responded to similar situations. That study had a wonderful influence in his life. When John says to imitate good, he is saying to conscientiously and intentionally choose to respond as Christ would. For the believer, this is not a suggestion. This is a command that reflects this truth.

### **B. The encouraging instruction (11b)**

Whoever does good is from God. Doing good is the fruit of a gospel tree. Staying the course of good even when you are being attacked or when it is not appreciated is hard. But, whoever does good is from God. Doing good is the evidence of Christ and that truth, right there, resonates with genuine believers and they press on with doing good. By saying, “whoever does evil has not seen God”, John is reminding Gaius that Diotrephes is not a believer, or is certainly not living as one. Diotrephes, while he needs to be dealt with and John plans to do that, Gaius doesn’t need to fear him. To those of you who are in a really challenging situation where you are trying to do good and your good threatens those around you, particularly those who are in leadership and they consistently try to tear you down, I want to speak to you.

I have a friend who is a pastor. When he was about 2, his dad, who was in the military was killed from an accident in a training event. At the funeral, fellow soldiers told his mom about the character of his dad. One of them gave her a picture that showed a room full of guys laughing, while his dad was off to the side with his head down. The guy explained that the rest of the guys were looking at something that was extremely immodest and while they were all laughing, this guy refused to watch. The soldier admitted that they made a lot of fun of him, but deep down they respected him more than anyone. He then assured the young widow that her husband was always faithful to her. Years later, this mom gave my friend that picture and he still has it. Beloved, never underestimate the power of a life that does good. Faithful people need encouragement. Faithful people need reminders.

### **2. Faithful people need reminders. (12)**

We all need to be reminded that there are faithful people and they are worth taking care because ultimately, the Lord is faithful to us. In verse 12, John is commending Demetrius to Gaius. Demetrius is apparently the brother who is delivering this letter from John to Gaius and John. It does not appear that Gaius knows Demetrius, but John does. John is commending him to Gaius, hoping and assuming that Gaius will host him and take him in like Gaius did with the other brothers. Of course, if Diotrephes gets wind of this, which he likely will, well, life will likely get even more challenging for Gaius. But the commendation is a really good reminder to Gaius

that there are other faithful people and they are worth taking care of. There are 3 ways that John commends Demetrius.

1) A good testimony from everyone (12a)

Everyone who knows him say the same thing. This brother has a faithful and consistent testimony. Can you think of anything better?

2) The truth commends him. (12b)

The truth refers to the gospel. John is saying that when he thinks of the gospel, he thinks of Demetrius. I do not think that there could be anything greater that could be said about your life. So, let's review what the gospel is. God, man, Christ and response.

In the beginning God created the earth to be the place where he would live with, enjoy and rule over his creation, namely his people. But we rejected his rule. We rebelled against him. Our sinful rebellion cursed this world and us and God would have been absolutely just and fair to allow us to experience his judgment without any mercy as the consequences of our rebellion. But, while God is just, he is also merciful. So, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to the earth to do for us what the first man, Adam failed to do and what we failed to do. Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life. He had no sin, which means that he would never die, except he chose to do so. He chose to die in our place and as the payment for the sins of every single person who would ever believe on him. Everyone who turns from their sin and trusts in Christ is completely forgiven, adopted into the family of God, declared righteous and given a home forever with God. This is what it means to become a follower of Christ. The gospel (good news about Jesus) changes their life because they believe it. John is saying that when he thinks about the gospel, he thinks about Demetrius because Demetrius is a life that was changed by Jesus.

Here is a question for you: When you think of the gospel, whose life do you think of? When you think of the power of the gospel to change a life who do you think of? The fact that you have a real-life testimony to the power of the gospel is a wonderful grace to you. You are tempted to believe at times that your faithfulness does not matter, but look at how the Lord has used the testimony of this person in your life. The Lord may be using your life as a testimony to others. Stay the course. By the way, would you contact that person this week that you thought of? Let them know somehow that when you think of the gospel, you think of them.

3) John commends him. (12c)

John then says, "We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true." What is behind that statement? John is telling Gaius that as a brother in Christ, you are part of a family and being in that family brings responsibilities. Yes, we face disappointments, discouragements, disagreements and in Gaius case, a terrible situation with Diotrephes that is not yet resolved. However, you are still a brother and you still have responsibility to others. So, I am sending Demetrius to you. I want you to take him in provide for him and then send him on his way. This

will be good for him, it will be good for you, it will be good for both of our churches, even though it may fire up Diotrephes, I don't care. This is the right thing to do, and I am commending him to you. Gaius is really blessed to have such a faithful friend in John who pushes him to do the right thing.

### 3. Faithful people need faithful friends. (13-15)

Can you imagine the impact of these words to Gaius? I had a lot and have a lot to say to you, but I want to do it in person. I want to do it face to face. I want to spend time with you. You matter to me. Think about this letter as a whole. Gaius has a real opportunity to be discouraged and if I am reading this correctly, he is tempted to stop doing some things that were a great benefit to so many. John does not dismiss Gaius as being needy, nor shrug it off as if the guy will be fine. John writes him a letter. John is responsive to the Holy Spirit directing him to write a letter of encouragement to a faithful brother because faithful people need faithful friends who do not take their faithfulness for granted.

Cathi and I received an email from a friend asking for some advice. We discussed it for a while and believe that we came up with some helpful responses, and, we could have written back. After all, this friend lives a ways away. But, we decided that, if there was any way we could go see this friend, it would be so much better. So, we offered and our offer was happily accepted, so we plan to go. Faithful people need faithful friends and they need those faithful friends in person. We gather in person as a church because church is not an event we observe, but a family we belong to. At the same time, some are not sure how to start meaningful conversations, so we default to the weather, sports or kids. I am going to give you an assignment at the end of the message that, if you take to heart will be very helpful to you and others in taking a big step forward in learning how to care for one another.

In verse 15, John gives a blessing, a prayer, a request for peace for Gaius. This word refers to all of the blessings that we have in Christ. John desires for Gaius to experience God's protection, provision, and presence. And then reminds him that the friends here, greet you. Your life matters Gaius! What you do matters! And oh yea, greet the friends there, every one of them. Tell them that John wanted them to know that he remembers them fondly. Gaius, you have people to take care. Diotrephes will not last, but the gospel will.

In the beginning of this sermon I told you about a church that had a Diotrephes as a pastor, who ran off so many good people and after almost completely destroying it, he left. By God's grace, there were some brothers and sisters, who in spite of it all, were like Gaius. They stayed the course. The church is not what it once was, many years ago, but by God's grace it is not what it was just a couple of years ago. The Lord has kindly given this church a pastor who puts the Word first and the people above himself. They know it. They are being fed, led and loved. It will take a while to rebuild, but I told the pastor, that it is worth it. Jesus is worth a beautiful bride. Jesus and his church are worth, staying the course.

Ask someone, "what's the best thing and worst thing that happened to them this past week."