

Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Johannine Epistles

Session 3, 3rd John: Notes to a Trusted Friend, Gaius,

6-min. Video Overview

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All right, let's dive into one of the shortest books in the entire Bible, 3 John. It's so easy to just flip right past it, you know. It's literally a single page.

But trust me, this is not some dry ancient text. It's a personal, really urgent letter that reads like a modern-day drama about loyalty, betrayal, and a serious leadership crisis. And that's what brings us to the big question here, one that feels like it could have been written yesterday.

How do you deal with toxic leadership? Seriously, what do you do when one person's ego threatens to tear a whole community apart? That is the drama at the heart of this letter. So the letter kicks off really simply. The author just calls himself the Elder, and he's writing to his friend, a guy named Gaius.

Right away, that tells us something huge. This isn't some big public announcement. It's an intimate, personal message.

Think of it like a really important email between a mentor and someone he trusts completely. And just like any good drama, this story is all about its characters. You've got a clear hero, a pretty nasty villain, and a solid role model.

And if we can get a handle on who these three people are, we'll basically unlock the entire message of this letter. Okay, so let's start with our protagonist, Gaius. He's the guy the letter is written to, and he's basically the poster child for what a healthy, supportive community member looks like.

In the Elder's eyes, Gaius is the real deal, a pillar of integrity. So what makes Gaius so special? Well, it's not just about what he says he believes; it's all about what he does. The letter says he walks in the truth, which means his actions and his beliefs are in sync.

He opens his home to traveling missionaries, total hospitality. He's actively supporting these folks. See, he's not just sitting on the sidelines; he's a critical part of the whole mission.

And for the Elder, there is no greater joy than seeing them. And this line right here, man, it just says it all, doesn't it? The Elder's greatest joy isn't his own power or his own status. It's seeing people like Gaius living out their faith with genuine integrity.

For him, that's the win. But of course, every story needs a conflict. And this one, well, this one has a doozy.

Let's meet Diatrephes. He is our antagonist, the guy whose actions are basically poisoning the community and trying to wreck the whole mission. And when you put them side-by-side, the contrast is just, wow, it's night and day.

You've got Gaius, the host, who welcomes people, supports the mission, and walks in truth. Then you have Diotrephes, the power seeker, who rejects people, spreads wicked nonsense, and just wants to be number one. It's the classic battle between selfless service and a destructive ego.

So what's this guy's problem? The text is brutally honest about it. He is the one who loves being first. This isn't just some minor personality flaw.

It's a total rejection of the community's leadership and its whole purpose. He's a timeless figure, really. The person who wants the spotlight of leadership, but refuses to accept any of the accountability that comes with it.

And look at the damage he's causing. It's a whole cascade of destructive behavior. He completely ignores the elders' authority.

He's spreading nasty rumors, what the letter calls wicked nonsense. He slams the door on the exact same missionaries that Gaius is welcoming, and then he takes it a step further. He actually tries to stop other people from being hospitable, and even kicks anyone who disagrees with him right out of the church.

So let's be absolutely clear here. This is not some petty disagreement. What Diatrephes is doing is like taking a wrecking ball to the whole community.

By cutting off support and sowing all this division, he is a threat to the entire mission. So you've got this toxic situation. What do you do? Well, the elder doesn't just complain about the problem.

He gives Gaius some really clear, practical advice on how to handle it. And the advice is actually pretty simple. First up, don't copy the bad behavior.

Do not sink to Diatrephes' level. Second, and this is key, actively imitate what is good. But how do you know what's good? Well, that's point number three.

You judge people by their actions, their fruits. A person's true character always comes out in what they do, not just what they say. And to make this point absolutely crystal clear, the elder brings in one more person, Demetrius.

So if Gaius is our ideal community member and Diatrephes is the toxic leader, think of Demetrius as the role model. He's the one we're supposed to imitate. The way the elder vouches for Demetrius is so powerful.

He says Demetrius has a great reputation that's basically been verified from three different directions. From everyone in the community, from the truth itself, meaning his actions line up with his words, and from the elder's own personal testimony. This guy is the real deal.

And this gets at a really important idea in this letter. A testimony isn't the story you tell about yourself; it's the reputation you've actually earned. It's what the people around you, the people who see you every day, know is true about your character.

Demetrius has an amazing testimony. Diatrophes, on the other hand, not so much. Now, as the letter starts to wrap up, the farewell seems pretty normal at first.

But hidden inside it is this powerful little nugget of wisdom that feels so relevant for us today. The elder says, "Look, I've got a lot more to say, but I'm putting down the pen and ink. Why? Because his goal is to talk face to face.

He knows that for a messy, important situation like this, there is just no substitute for a real, in-person conversation. And that brings us right back to our world, doesn't it? As one of the experts we looked at for this explainer points out, one of the biggest drivers of anxiety today is simply loneliness. And the crazy irony is that it's often made worse by the very social media platforms that promise to connect us.

And this is where the wisdom of this tiny 2000-year-old letter just hits you. The whole point of the message is to create real community, to build genuine friendships and deep, personal, face-to-face connections. In a world that feels more and more isolated, that's a powerful antidote.

So 3 John leaves us with a challenge for our modern lives. It's this ancient reminder that real community and really tough conversations, well, they just can't happen through a screen. They have to happen in person.

It kind of forces you to ask yourself: who are the friends in my life that I need to stop texting and start talking to face to face?