

When Faith Meets Community



3 John; 1 John 5:1-4



John's third letter gives us a glimpse into real church life. It's full of faith and friendship, tension and truth. Through Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius we see how individual choices shape the health of the whole community. Gaius models faith in action, Diotrephes shows how pride divides, and Demetrius demonstrates steady, reliable love. John finishes with a reminder that faith isn't just about words or letters but about real relationships.

As we close the 'Little Letters' series, we're reminded that John's message has been the same all along: **real faith is seen in how we love one another.**

You will need:

- Paper and pens/pencils
- Large sheets of paper and felt tips
- 'Modern-Day Diotrephes' handout



Beat

Say:

Today's Bassline is called 'When Faith Meets Community'. Before we think about the early Church, let's start with a quick challenge.

Leader's notes:

Split the group into small teams and give them a large sheet of paper and pens. They have five minutes to draw, list or describe their 'perfect church'. Once their time is up, share their ideas together. Within the context of their feedback, share and discuss the following quote:

‘Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us.’

– Charles Spurgeon

Say:

Every church is made up of real people – loving, learning and often disagreeing. John’s third letter is all about real people trying to live out faith in their community.



Ask:

In what way are you personally challenged by Charles Spurgeon’s quote?



Say:

In our last Bassline session we looked at what it means to walk in truth and love. Now, in John’s third letter, we meet someone who’s actually doing that. His name is Gaius, and John describes him as a friend who lives out the truth through his faith and actions.

Read:

¹ The elder,

To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth.

² Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, just as you are progressing spiritually. ³ It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

– (3 John 1-4)

Ask:

– Why might hearing about Gaius’s faith make John so joyful?

Say:

Throughout his letters, John has looped through the same themes again and again. He describes what walking in light and truth looks like. It’s not just believing in the right things, but living them out in everyday life.

Ask:

Read 1 John 5:1–4. How does it describe the living faith of someone like Gaius?

Read:

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

— (1 John 5:1–4)

Say:

Gaius is an example of what it means to walk in truth and love. His faith shows in the way he welcomes and supports God's people. As John's letter continues, we meet other characters whose choices tell a different story.

Read:

⁵ Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶ They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honours God. ⁷ It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸ We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

⁹ I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. ¹⁰ So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.

¹¹ Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.

¹³ I have much to write to you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. ¹⁴ I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

— (3 John 5–14)

Ask:

What three characters do we meet in this letter?

From what you have read, how would you describe each one of them?

Say:

John's short letter introduces three very real people:

Gaius, who shows faithful love and hospitality.

Diotrephes, who loves to be in charge and acts as the gatekeeper for the church.

Demetrius, whose steady life of truth earns everyone's respect.

We're going to focus on Diotrephes and bring his character into the modern-day church.

Leader's notes:

Split the group into teams and give them a 'Modern-Day Diotrephes' handout. Ask them to imagine they are creating a character profile and backstory for a new Christian film or TV series. Their job is to bring him to life in a modern-day context.

Ask the group to answer the following questions and jot down their ideas on the 'Modern-Day Diotrephes' handout. They don't need to answer all the questions, but the handout should give them plenty of opportunity to explore how a character like Diotrephes may fit into today's church.

- Who is Diotrephes today?
- What position might they hold in a modern church?
- How do others see them?
- What strengths might they have that make people trust and follow them?
- What drives them?
- What motivates them to act the way they do?
- What might they be afraid of?
- What good intentions may be hidden within their negative behaviour?
- How might their motivations be misunderstood by others?
- How do their actions affect others?
- Who gets hurt or excluded because of them?
- How does their attitude affect the wider church community?
- Is there anyone who challenges them and how do they respond?
- Which actor/actress would play Diotrephes in your film or show?

After the discussion, bring the group together and ask them to summarise the character they created and the actor/actress they chose to play the role.

Ask:

- Why do you think John calls out Diotrephes publicly?
- What can we learn from his courage to protect the truth and the church community?
- What kind of attitude helps a church community to walk in light and love?

Say:

When it comes to dramas and church politics, the early believers faced many of the same issues we face today. Within this short letter, we've met three people who represent the real mix of personalities and challenges found in every church community. Despite their differences, John's letter calls them, and us, to keep walking in light, truth and love together.



Bridge

Ask:

What is your response to Tom Wright's words about 3 John?

'There are some churches where people are too "nice" (in other words, nervous or embarrassed) to confront problems, with the result that the problems get worse and worse until people leave in disgust. John is not going to go that cowardly route. He is determined, if he can, to nip this problem in the bud.'

— Tom Wright



Sound Check

Say:

Over the last few weeks, we've explored John's 'Little Letters'. Together they show what it means to walk in truth, live in love, and build a strong community of faith.

For our Sound Check activity, we're going to look back over everything we've learned and see how it all fits together. We'll start by watching a clip that will refresh your memory and remind you of everything we've discovered in John's 'Little Letters'.

Watch:

1 John, 2 John, and 3 John: Historical Background & Why John Wrote Them (6:45)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cGSHvIQxSI

Leader's notes:

Divide the group into teams and give them each a large sheet of paper and felt-tips. The aim is to create a visual representation of everything they have learned from 1 to 3 John. They can include phrases or verses from the letters along with images or symbols that represent their ideas. They could even include practical ways to live out John's teaching in their own lives. They can get creative and express what they have learned from John's 'Little Letters'. They can then share their ideas together.

You can use the following discussion prompts to help the group to develop their ideas.

- What do John's letters teach us about what the Church is meant to be like?
- What are the dangers John warns against and how can we guard against them today?
- How do truth and love work together to keep a community strong?
- What does 'walking in the light' look like in a church family?

 Bridge**Ask:**

How would you summarise the message of 1 to 3 John in one sentence?

 Selah**Say:**

John ends his final letter not with instructions, but with friendship.

Read:

¹³ I have much to write to you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. ¹⁴ I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name.

— (3 John 13-14)

Say:

Although sharing his teaching with the church community is important to John, he longs to spend time with them. His words remind us that we aren't meant to follow Jesus on our own. We are part of God's community together.

Leader's notes:

The young people are going to spend time praying for one another. Give each person a slip of paper and ask them to write their name at the top. Pass the papers around the group. As each person receives a piece of paper, invite them to write a short prayer for that person. Return the prayers and give the group time to read what has been written. They can take these prayers home to read in the coming week.

Say:

John's last words remind us that church isn't just a place; it is a loving community. As we finish our 'Little Letters' series, may we be a community that chooses truth, love, and real connection.

Coda

Say:

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?

What is the one thing you will take away from this session about everything you have discovered in 1 to 3 John?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.





Modern-Day Diotrephe's'

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