

SESSION TWELVE

Imitate Good

3 John

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants finish the Johannine letters with three portraits: Gaius, who opens his hands to the mission; Diotrephes, who loves the first place; and Demetrius, whose witness the truth itself confirms. They harvest every thread of the study in one panorama, and they leave commissioned: fellow workers in the truth, sent by name.

Catholic Touchstone: Cooperation in the Church's mission. "We ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers in the truth" (3 John 8): every baptized person shares the apostolic mission (CCC 863), and the study's last word is a sending.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

3 John is the shortest book in the Bible by word count, fifteen verses, and it is the most personal document in the Johannine corpus: no church addressed, just a letter from the elder to one beloved man about two others. God closed the Johannine letters with a note about hospitality, ego, and reputation in one local church, which is itself the lesson: the cosmic battle of light and darkness, waged across 1 John in the loftiest prose of the New Testament, comes down to whether actual people open their doors, grab the first place, or walk in the truth. The epic ends at parish scale on purpose.

Portrait one: Gaius. The elder loves him "in the truth" (v. 1), prays for his health and prosperity of soul (v. 2), and rejoices over the testimony of traveling brothers: Gaius walks in the truth (vv. 3-4), and his walking looks like open doors: he has rendered service to the brothers, "strangers" to him, missionaries traveling "for his sake", literally, in the Greek, *for the sake of the Name*, "accepting nothing from the heathen" (vv. 5-7). Unpack the missionary economy for your group: itinerant evangelists took no pagan funding, so the mission ran entirely on believers like Gaius who received them and "sent them on their way as befits God's service" (v. 6), the verb *propempō*, a technical term meaning to outfit and provision the next leg of the journey. Verse 8 draws the doctrine: "we ought to support such men, that we may be *fellow workers in the truth*." The supporter shares the work; the funder is a missionary at one remove. Note also verse 4, one of the tenderest lines the old apostle ever wrote and this session's memory verse: "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth."

Portrait two: Diotrephes, the anti-Gaius, sketched in two verses of controlled apostolic fury (vv. 9-10). His epitaph is one Greek word found nowhere else in the Bible: *philoprōteuōn*, "who likes to put himself first," the love of primacy. The symptoms cascade: he "does not acknowledge my authority", he refuses the last living apostle; he spreads malicious words against him; he refuses the traveling brothers; and he excommunicates those who do receive them, inverting the community's whole hospitality. Notice what Diotrephes is not accused of: no heresy is named. His disease is not doctrinal but egotistical, the first place loved, and it produces functionally the same wreckage as the deceivers of 2 John: closed doors, broken communion, a strangled mission. The group should feel the warning's proximity: the study has spent twelve weeks arming them with truth, and Diotrephes is what armed people become when the self, not the Name, takes the throne. Contrast the elder's response: "if I come, I will bring up what he is doing" (v. 10), an accountability visit, patient and personal, and Jesus' own antidote, taught on the road and repeated on the night he was betrayed: the first place belongs to the one who serves (Mark 9:35; Luke 22:26, familiar ground for anyone who has done this study's sister on the papacy).

Portrait three: Demetrius, one verse (v. 12), probably the letter's carrier, and his commendation runs the study's courtroom to its final session: "Demetrius has testimony from every one, and from the truth itself; we add our testimony, and you know my testimony is true." Three witnesses, one more time, the Deuteronomy 19:15 standard from Session Nine, now applied not to Christ's identity but to a Christian's character. The startling middle witness: "the truth itself" testifies for him, his life so aligned with the truth that reality vouches for him. That is the study's finish-line portrait: a person the truth itself would testify for.

Verse 11 is the hinge between the portraits and the letter's one moral command: "Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God." The two-families grammar of Session Five, one last time, now issued as a choice between two men the reader has just met. And the ending repeats 2 John's incarnational preference, "I hope to see you soon, and we will talk together face to face" (v. 14), with one final Johannine touch that should close the study's last reading aloud: "Greet the friends, every one of them." The Greek is *kat' onoma*, by name, the Good Shepherd's own style: "he calls his own sheep by name" (John 10:3). The Johannine letters end with names.

Then the capstone. Budget the second half of the night for harvest and Send: the threads recited as one design (Knowing, God Is, Abiding and Antichrist, plus the koinonia arc from 1:3 to "fellow workers in the truth"), the group's own testimony gathered, and the commissioning made concrete: names, commitments, dates, written down and spoken. The study's first night promised fellowship with the apostolic witnesses; its last night makes the group what Gaius was: fellow workers in the truth, sent.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Genesis 18:1-8. Abraham at the oaks of Mamre: three strangers, and the patriarch runs, bows, washes feet, and empties the larder, and the strangers turn out to carry the promise itself. Hebrews 13:2 canonizes the lesson: some have entertained angels unawares. Gaius stands in Abraham's doorway. Tonight's live discovery.

1 Kings 17:8-16. The widow of Zarephath feeds the traveling prophet from her last handful of meal, and the jar does not fail. Those who provision the mission are folded into the mission's miracle: verse 8's "fellow workers" economy, running in Elijah's day.

Numbers 12 and 16. Miriam, Aaron, and then Korah grasping at the first place against God's appointed order: the Diotrephes disease is old, and its fruit was always the same: communion broken from the inside by the love of primacy.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Benedict *Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 53*

Benedict legislated Gaius into the permanent structure of Western monasticism: let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for he himself will say, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Proper honor is to be shown to all, he writes, but most especially to those of the household of the faith and to pilgrims. Fifteen centuries of monastery doors have run on 3 John's economy: the stranger received, the mission provisioned, Christ welcomed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine *Letter 118*

Asked the way to truth, Augustine answered with the medicine for every Diotrephes: the first part is humility, the second part is humility, the third part is humility, and as often as you ask, so often will I answer. Not that there are no other precepts, he adds, but unless humility precede, accompany, and follow every good work, pride wrenches the whole from our hand. The love of the first place is the one disease that turns even truth into a weapon against communion.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II *Homily at the Inauguration of his Pontificate*

The study's sending voice: Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ! John Paul spent a pontificate insisting that every baptized person is sent, that the Church exists to evangelize, and that fear must never be allowed to close the doors Christ commands open. The group that has walked these letters for twelve weeks now stands where he pointed: doors open, Name carried, afraid of nothing.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 863 states the capstone doctrine: the whole Church is apostolic, and all her members, in different ways, share in the apostolic mission; every activity of the Body directed to the spread of the Kingdom is apostolate, which makes verse 8's "fellow workers" a job description for everyone at the table.

CCC 2044-2045 grounds the Demetrius portrait: the witness of Christian life, works done in a manner befitting the Gospel, carries a weight that draws others; by living the faith, believers cause the Church to grow.

CCC 2179 brings it all to parish scale: the parish is where the faithful are gathered, the Eucharist celebrated, and charity practiced, the elect lady and Gaius's house, on your corner, this Sunday.

THREAD WATCH

Every thread resolves tonight in the harvest. The recital at Build 7: the Knowing thread (planted night one, resolved at 5:13), the God Is thread (the double seal: light at 1:5, love at 4:8), the Abiding and Antichrist thread (2:18 to 4:3 to 2 John 7), and the koinonia arc (1:3's fellowship to 3 John 8's fellow workers). Recite them with the group, guide in hand; the visible architecture is the study's final apologetic.

The joy theme lands its last note. 1 John 1:4 ("that our joy may be complete"), 2 John 12, and now 3 John 4: "no greater joy... than to hear that my children follow the truth." The old apostle's joy is the study's inheritance: pass it forward.

The Send is the point, not the postscript. Names, commitments, and dates on paper before anyone stands, exactly as the study's sister guide does: strengthened, they strengthen; fed, they feed; and here: received into fellowship, they become fellow workers.

SESSION GOALS

1.

Read the Bible's shortest book aloud and meet its three portraits: Gaius's open hands, Diotrephes's loved first place, Demetrius's truth-confirmed witness.

2.

Unpack the missionary economy of verses 5-8 and land its doctrine: the supporter shares the work; every believer is a fellow worker in the truth (CCC 863).

3.

Name the Diotrephes disease honestly, ego wearing churchy clothes, and administer Augustine's triple medicine.

4.

Harvest all threads in one panorama and commission every participant by name, with commitments and dates in writing.

TIME NOTE

75 to 90 minutes, and guard the final twenty-five for the harvest and Send; they are the study's destination and are never cut. If time runs short, compress Build 5 and cut the Dig Deeper. The closing prayer tonight is a commissioning; stand for it.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer:

Father, twelve weeks ago we opened a letter from a man who touched your Son. Tonight we finish what he wrote and begin what he intended: fellowship become fellowship's workers. Give us Gaius's hands, guard us from Diotrephes's heart, and let the truth itself one day testify for us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

WIN · OPENING QUESTIONS

1.

You were asked to decide: of the three men in this letter, which are you currently most like, honestly? First answers, no explanations yet.

2.

Who has hosted, funded, or quietly provisioned some good work of God that you benefited from, and did they ever get thanked?

BUILD · INTO THE TEXT

1.

One reader, the entire book of 3 John, aloud and unhurried; it is the shortest book in the Bible and we will finish the Johannine letters together in ninety seconds. Then the shape: no church addressed, one beloved man, two others named. Why might God have chosen to close the apostolic letters at this scale?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Because this is the scale where everything the letters taught actually happens. 1 John waged the cosmic war of light and darkness in the loftiest prose in the New Testament; 3 John shows the same war's actual front line: one local church, one open-handed man, one ego at the door, one good reputation. The epic ends at parish scale because the epic is *lived* at parish scale.

And notice the form: a personal note, preserved for twenty centuries. Nothing in the economy of God's word is too small to be load-bearing, which means nothing in the economy of your parish is either. The stakes of tonight's three portraits are exactly the stakes of your community's next twelve months.

2.

Portrait one: Gaius. Read verses 1-8 again slowly. What exactly has Gaius been doing, for whom, and, verse 7, why could these travelers accept "nothing from the heathen"? Then the doctrine of verse 8: what does supporting such men make the supporter?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Gaius has been receiving traveling missionaries, strangers to him personally, housing them and sending them on "as befits God's service": the verb is *propempō*, a technical term for provisioning the next leg of a journey, food, funds, escort. And verse 7 explains the economy: these men set out, in the Greek, *for the sake of the Name*, and took no pagan funding, so the entire apostolic mission ran on believers with open doors and open hands. No Gaius, no mission; the gospel traveled on hospitality.

Then verse 8 draws the line that makes tonight a commissioning: "we ought to support such men, *that we may be fellow workers in the truth*." The supporter is not the mission's audience; he is its co-worker, a missionary at one remove. The Catechism universalizes it: the whole Church is apostolic and every member shares the mission (CCC 863). Every check to the missions, every meal for the youth minister, every hour given to the parish is verse 8 in motion, and the widow of Zarephath found out what happens to jars that feed prophets: they do not fail.

3.

LIVE DISCOVERY. Someone find and read Genesis 18:1-8, Abraham at the oaks of Mamre, and then Hebrews 13:2. What does Abraham do when three strangers appear at the hottest hour of the day, who did they turn out to be, and what does the New Testament do with the story?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Abraham *runs*, in the desert heat, at age ninety-nine, bows to strangers, washes feet, and turns a promised "morsel of bread" into a feast of cakes, curds, milk, and a calf. And the strangers carry the promise itself: within the scene, Sarah's son is announced. The father of faith is first shown to us as a host, and the guests were heaven's.

Hebrews canonizes the lesson for the Church: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Gaius stands in Abraham's doorway, and St. Benedict built the doorway into Western civilization: let every guest be received as Christ, for he himself will say, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Hospitality in Scripture is never mere niceness; it is how the promise travels, and the open door is where ordinary believers touch the mission of God.

4.

Verse 4 deserves its own moment, and it is tonight's memory verse: "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth." This from the man who saw the Transfiguration, the empty tomb, and the risen Lord. No greater joy than *this*? What does the old apostle know about joy that we are still learning?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

He knows that joy completes itself in the flourishing of those you have fed. The study opened with this exact claim: "we are writing this that our joy may be complete" (1 John 1:4), and here, at the end of his life, John names the completion: children walking in truth. Not memories of glory, his children's

walking. The Transfiguration was received; this joy is *transmitted*, and transmitted joy is the greater.

Every catechist, parent, sponsor, and small-group leader in the room already knows the taste of it: the moment someone you invested in takes a step you did not push. Tonight's Send is going to hand each of you children to have this joy over. The apostle is not describing a joy reserved for apostles; he is describing the joy at the far end of the commission you are about to receive.

5.

Portrait two. Read verses 9-10 and meet Diotrephes, whose epitaph is one Greek word found nowhere else in Scripture: *philoprōteuōn*, "who likes to put himself first." List his symptoms from the text. Then the crucial diagnostic: what is he *not* accused of, and why is that the most unsettling part?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The symptoms cascade from the one disease: he refuses the authority of the last living apostle; he spreads malicious words against him; he refuses the traveling brothers; and he excommunicates the members who do receive them. One man's loved first place has inverted an entire church's hospitality and broken its communion with the apostle himself.

And the unsettling diagnostic: no heresy is named. Diotrephes may have been perfectly orthodox; his disease is not doctrinal but egotistical, and it produced the same wreckage as 2 John's deceivers: closed doors, strangled mission, broken communion. Here is the warning at the exact right moment: this group has spent twelve weeks being armed with truth, and Diotrephes is what armed people become when the self, not the Name, takes the throne. Miriam, Aaron, and Korah grasped at the first place in Moses' day with the same fruit. St. Augustine wrote the only prescription: the way is first humility, second humility, third humility, because without it, pride wrenches every good work, truth included, from our hands. Note, too, the elder's response: not a counter-faction, but "if I come, I will bring up what he is doing", patient, personal, face-to-face accountability. Even Diotrephes gets a visit before a verdict.

6.

Portrait three, one verse: Demetrius (v. 12), "testimony from every one, and from the truth itself; we add our testimony." Count the witnesses and name where this study has seen that standard before. And the strange middle witness: what does it mean for "the truth itself" to testify for a person?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Three witnesses: everyone, the truth itself, and the apostolic we, the Deuteronomy 19:15 courtroom standard from Session Nine, applied one final time, now not to Christ's identity but to a Christian's character. The letters open with sworn testimony about Jesus and close with sworn testimony about an ordinary believer; the courtroom was always heading here.

And the middle witness is the portrait to die for: the truth itself testifies for Demetrius, meaning his life is so aligned with reality as God tells it that the facts vouch for him; investigate him and the truth takes his side. The Catechism calls this the witness of life, which draws others and grows the Church by itself (CCC 2044-2045). That is the study's finish line in a single verse: become the kind of person the truth itself would testify for. Demetrius likely carried this very letter; his commendation was his credentials. What would the truth, put on the stand about you, say this year?

7.

Verse 11 is the letter's central moral command, standing between the portraits: "Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God." Session Five students: whose grammar is this? And why does the whole Johannine corpus funnel into the word *imitate*?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It is the two-families grammar of 1 John 3:10, of God or not, shown by doing, issued one last time as a choice between two men the reader has just met: imitate Gaius, do not imitate Diotrephes. The abstract theology of the seed and the birth ends as the most concrete moral instruction there is: pick your model.

And *imitate* is the funnel because Christianity has always transmitted by imitation before explanation: "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Doctrine tells you what the family believes; imitation is how children actually learn to walk. Which makes tonight's closing question unavoidable: somebody is imitating *you*, a sibling, a coworker, someone in this group, and the only live question is which of tonight's portraits they are copying.

DIG DEEPER · By name

The last sentence of the Johannine letters: "Greet the friends, every one of them" (v. 15), in the Greek, *kat' onoma*, by name. No "greetings to all": each name, spoken. It is the Good Shepherd's own signature, "he calls his own sheep by name" (John 10:3), and it is how the corpus that began with the cosmic Word ("that which was from the beginning") chooses to end: with a room full of individual names. Heaven's economy never rounds people up to a crowd. The study ends the same way tonight, on purpose: commissioned, by name.

8.

The harvest. Guides open, all twelve sessions. As a group, from memory first and pages second, recite the study's architecture: the Knowing thread, the God Is seals, the Abiding and Antichrist thread, and the koinonia arc from 1:3 to tonight. Then each person: the single discovery from these twelve weeks that most changed you.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The recital: the Knowing thread, planted night one with thirty underlined verbs, resolved at 5:13, the study's own name: written that you may know. The God Is seals, guessed blind in Take-Home 1, opened at 1:5 (light) and 4:8 (love), the study's two colors. The Abiding and Antichrist thread, planted at 2:18, developed at 4:3, resolved at the word's last biblical appearance, 2 John 7: the flesh of Christ as the everlasting battle line. And the koinonia arc: fellowship *with* the apostolic witnesses (1:3) matured into fellow workers *in* the truth (3 John 8), receivers become senders.

Then the testimonies, unhurried; this is the night's real content, and the leader goes last. The design the group recites was discoverable because it was really there: one old man in Ephesus, three letters, and an

architecture that held a dozen adults for twelve weeks twenty centuries later. That is what "the word of life" does. Now it gets carried.

9.

The Send, and it is not rhetorical. Verse 8 named what you now are: fellow workers in the truth. So, concretely, on paper, before anyone stands: your Gaius commitment (one work of God you will materially support: who, what, starting when), your Demetrius aim (the one place your life and the truth most need aligning this year), and, if God is whispering it, your table (the person or group you could lead through a study like this one, everything you need is in your hands). Names. Dates. Out loud, whoever is willing. Then we pray each other out, standing.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Leaders: paper, pens, and patience. Real names, real dates, spoken by whoever will; the room's own commitments, witnessed, are the study's final ANSWER box. Some will name a missionary to fund, a parish ministry to staff, a sibling to walk with, this very guide to lead at their own table, and they can: twelve weeks ago they could not have imagined it, and now the whole architecture is in their hands and their margins.

The last word belongs to the old man in Ephesus, so give it to him twice. His final greeting: by name, every one of them, which is how this group will now be sent. And his deepest sentence, recounted by St. Jerome (Commentary on Galatians, on 6:10) from the tradition of the church at Ephesus where John spent his last years: little children, love one another; it is the Lord's commandment, and if it alone is done, it is enough. Do that, in deed and in truth, and the truth itself will testify for you. Go: fellow workers, by name.

SEND · TAKING IT WITH US

1.

Your three commitments are on paper: Gaius (support, starting when), Demetrius (the alignment the truth is asking of you), and possibly your own table. Which one costs the most, and who in this group will you ask to hold you to it?

2.

Twelve weeks with the man who touched the Word: what is the one sentence you will say about these letters to someone who never opened them, and who hears it first?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Execute the Gaius commitment within two weeks: the first check written, the first meal delivered, the first hours given. Fellow workers work; report back to the group member holding your date.

2.

Read all three letters of John in one sitting this month, one hour, start to finish, with your study guide margins open. You will be reading them as their first hearers could not: with the whole architecture visible.

3.

Keep the study's habit for life: one act of love in deed, not word, every day, and the aged apostle's sentence with it: little children, love one another; if it alone is done, it is enough.

Closing Prayer:

Father, that which was from the beginning has been heard, seen, and touched among us these twelve weeks, and our fellowship is with you and with your Son. You are light; you are love; we know that we have eternal life. Send us now as you sent Gaius's guests: for the sake of the Name, provisioned by your household, afraid of nothing. Little children still, and fellow workers now, we go to love one another, in deed and in truth. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse: "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth." (3 John 4, RSV2CE)

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every passage used in Session Twelve, in order of use. All references RSV2CE.

PASSAGE WHERE IT IS USED

Entire book, read aloud at Build 1

Genesis 18:1-8

Live discovery, Build 3: Abraham's doorway

Hebrews 13:2

Live discovery, Build 3: angels unawares

1 Kings 17:8-16

Build 2: the widow's jar and the mission's economy

Numbers 12; 16

Build 5: the first-place disease, Miriam to Korah

Deuteronomy 19:15

Build 6: three witnesses for Demetrius

1 Corinthians 11:1; John 10:3

Build 7 and Dig Deeper: imitation, and by name

1 John 1:3-4; 3:10; 5:13; 2 John 7

Build 8: the harvest recital

CCC 863; 2044-2045; 2179

Catechism Connection