

# These Friends Are Forever

## Postcards from John, Part 14

*3 John 13-15*

### **Discussion Guide**

#### **Main Idea:**

God through the Holy Spirit moved the Apostle John to write inspired words to his friends at this local church. God has used these words to move and transform lives in that generation, as well as the generations that have followed, including our own. John has shown in his short third epistle how much he had invested in and cared for these fellow believers. Their lives of faithful living were very important to him. We, too, can and should follow John's example and make an effort to care about the needs and spiritual wellbeing of the friends that God has brought into our lives.

#### **Discussion Points:**

God has chosen to reveal His will not only through the person of Jesus Christ but also through historical written language.

- How does the simple act of John writing a letter show that he had a personal investment in the people he was writing to?
- In what ways do modern conveniences today make it both easier and yet get in the way of writing personal notes to others?
- Why does it touch us so deeply when we receive a personal note from someone? In what ways are you making efforts to touch others in this way?

John uses the truths of God to influence those around him. He desires close personal conversation in order to bring wise influence into a church that is being swayed by the deceitfulness of Diotrephes.

- In what situations in your local church or amongst your believing friends are you / have you been willing to invest personal time and conversations for the sake of those relationships?
- How does your relationship with others potentially influence them toward spiritual growth?
- What does the Bible command believers to do in relationship with others?

## **Discussion Guide Cont.**

John used the opportunities God gave him to comfort and encourage his friends in a church that was being ripped apart through the divisions caused by Diotrephes.

- Why is it important to remind others of the peace and comfort they have through Christ?
- How does remembering God's gift of peace help you to navigate life on a day to day basis?
- Why would receiving a greeting from friends in another church encourage those in Diotrephes' church? How would this type of greeting encourage your church?

### **Gospel Connection:**

Jesus Christ is our perfect example of how to live in relationship with others. Jesus put others' needs above His own, even to the point of death on the cross. Because of that sacrifice, believers are now in relationship with God the Father and are instructed to share that relationship with others.

### **Practical implications:**

**Think:** Are there any ways that I can be more faithful in my friendships, especially with fellow believers?

**Pray:** Thank God that He called me into relationship with Himself! Ask God to open my eyes to ways that I may better encourage and influence my friends' spiritual wellbeing.

**Do:** Open myself to opportunities to show personal care and support to my believing friends.

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### *3 John 13-15*

Have you ever thought about the fact that no one has ever been forced to own a Bible? There are scores of people throughout church history who've been forced to give it up, but never have they been forced to purchase it, translate it, study it, or even read it.

And to this day, nobody is forcing anybody to buy one.

When Mao Tse-tung, China's communist leader for decades, published his little book of quotations in 1966, every home in China was immediately required to own a copy. There wasn't any vote on the matter. In fact, to refuse to own it, or even to disregard it or say something negative about it, was an automatic death sentence. It was this coercion which accounted for the distribution of hundreds of millions of copies.

Loyal citizens were expected to not only own it, but display it prominently – they would never want to be viewed as disloyal citizens. They quoted from it and even displayed quotes or photographs of it in their places of business, to prove their devotion.

In the Muslim world today, more than 80 countries send contestants annually to a huge competition, to determine who has the entire Qur'an memorized and the ability to recall any and all of its 6,200 verses on the spot. The judges start a verse and see who can finish it; and quote the verses before it and after it. It's like a Bible drill, without anybody having a copy of the Bible.

And the one who can demonstrate their mastery of the Qur'an receives the top prize of \$60,000 dollars along with immediate national celebrity status.

I don't know of anybody who has ever reached celebrity status for quoting the Bible. You might earn a badge in AWANA, and feel pretty cool about your vest having all those

gemstones made out of genuine plastic – fortunately they don't know the difference; but that's a far cry from \$60,000 dollars.

But in spite of the fact that there is coercion and pressure to own some other book, without any government pressure or coercion, the Bible continues to reach around the world. I think it is ironic and that even in China today, distribution of the Bible is superseding Mao's book of quotations.

I recently had the privilege of addressing the Gideons International . . . they have spear headed the distribution of Bibles in over 100 languages – since their beginning in 1899 they have given away 1.2 billion Bibles.

And nobody's making them. Nobody's coercing them. Nobody's coercing you either . . . you read it and study it and memorize it and love it because you love the Divine Author who guided prophets and apostles to write it, and He guides you as you apply it.

For the believer, the Bible is a treasure. We agree with the Psalmist that it is right and true; it revives and restores the soul; it gives wisdom and guidance for life and brings genuine joy to the life and heart of the believer (Psalm 19).

Which is why the Bible is truth you love and it is truth you want to give away. You really can't keep it to yourself.

And in the meantime, you really can't get enough of it.

Now, I doubt that John the Apostle would have ever imagined that the Gideon's alone would one day give away 1.2 billion copies of his postcards.

I mean they were just little postcards.

Second John – just 13 verses long – we studied together, was a brief note written to a godly woman about her family; Third John was written to a godly man about his church.<sup>i</sup>

But they were much more than postcards. They were letters, inspired by the Holy Spirit who moved John to write what was in his heart and on his mind all the while guiding him.

Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:21, *men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*. So here's John being moved, compelled, guided by the Holy Spirit to write truth from God that will have the power to transform hearts and lives in any culture and in any country and in any generation.

Now even though John is being guided by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is allowing John's personality and vocabulary and passion and heart to frame these lines. John isn't a robot. His hand isn't moving strangely by itself. John isn't in a trance.

This is God's Spirit moving through the engaged mind and heart and life of John the Apostle.

And for people who love the wisdom of God like you do, it's always a little discouraging to come to the end of one of these letters.

Which is where we are now, in our final study of Third John.

So turn back there one last time to Third John.

If you were with us in our last study, last Lord's Day, John recommended that the church imitate the example of Demetrius – and rightly so.

As we work through these closing lines in Third John, let me point out why John the Apostle is worthy of imitation.

Three reasons. First of all, because of his:

**1. Personal investment in people**

... in the lives of other people ... notice:

*I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink* (3 John 13).

This construction informs us that when John sat down to write, this wasn't necessarily going to be a short postcard.

He had a number of things to write about when he first started this letter.<sup>ii</sup>

But now he's decided not to write any more . . . and for the Bible student, you're a little let down.

We'd like more. I don't know about you, but I'd like to know what those *many thing were that he had planned on writing to them*.

We don't know . . . but what we do know is that God's Spirit was guiding John to land the plane.

Now, given the information and context of both Second and Third John, they were more than likely written to the members of the same church.

In fact, if you glance across the page at the way John closes Second John, he writes,

*Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink* . . . (2 John 12a).

Now notice third John 13 –

*I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink* (3 John 13).

The only substantive difference is that John mentions paper and ink in Second John and a *pen* and ink in Third John. And there's no hidden meaning in that distinction; John isn't boycotting pencils in favor of pens.

If anything, it points to the same authorship.

But what's easy to miss here is the fact that John took the time to write something . . . and that wasn't as convenient as it is today.

For us it's easy: emails are great . . . texts are quick . . . selfies can be irritating . . . but who writes notes and letters?

If we don't have time to write people today, with all the modern conveniences we have, how'd John have time?

Think about the fact that John didn't have a drawer full of ballpoint pens. He had to more than likely sharpen a stalk and mix some ingredients to make ink.

This is the only time this word for *pen* appears in the New Testament and it's the word for the reed plant – from which pens were made. You could literally translate this, "I'm not willing to write you with reed and ink."

These pens were hollowed out reeds into which they poured the ink – covered the top of the reed with wax or gum so the ink wouldn't spill back out and then they made a little slit-cut into the end of the reed to allow the ink to flow out.

The word for ink here is *melanos* which refers to a mixture of water and powdered charcoal and tree resin.<sup>iii</sup>

And I say all of that to tell you that writing wasn't easy. It was a time consuming investment in the lives of people.

And you also can tell from John's opening line that he had thought about this church and its members and he had a number of things on his heart which he wasn't going to write about after all, but this means they were on his mind and his heart about them.

John is a model for us to follow in taking the time for personal investment in people.

Secondly, there is this element of:

## 2. Personal influence in people

Notice he writes in *verse 14*:

***But I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face*** (3 John 14).

Speaking *face to face* is literally, in the Greek text, mouth to mouth (*stoma pros stoma*), which conjures up in the English mind some kind of medical emergency at the swimming pool where somebody needs mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

This is simply a way of referring to close personal conversation – and John intends to bring his wise and strong influence to bear in a church that has been hijacked by Diotrephes.

- More than likely, Second John would have arrived at this godly woman's house and circulated to the other believers fairly quickly;
- then soon afterward, Third John arrives – this time to one of the godly church members named Gaius where John announces that he's coming to the church – without specifying a date –
- only to be followed up a few days later by John's appearance –

- all of it wisely planned and timed by John so that the congregation is notified –
- but Diotrephes doesn't have enough time to stir up his followers and marshal his forces.<sup>iv</sup>

What John does tell them here is that he plans to come to them *shortly*.

That word translated *shortly* is Mark's favorite word in his Gospel of Mark – (εὐθεως) – and it's usually translated, *immediately*.<sup>v</sup>

The church is in danger . . . it's under the wrong influence of a defiant, proud, arrogant church leader . . . and I'm coming so fast, John writes, that the word immediately suits me – you might as set a plate at the table and pull up a chair for me at supper.

- **John makes a personal investment in people;**
- **He desires to have a godly personal influence in people;**

And thirdly, John has a:

## 3. Personal interest in people

This isn't redundant here. You see, it's possible to want to influence people you aren't really interested in! The world of commerce does it with every advertisement. They want to influence you, but they really don't care about you.

John doesn't want to show up here at this church just because he has a free weekend and he wants an audience . . . he's not looking for a pulpit where he can hold a conference or preach for a week or two.

He's interested in *them*.

Two ways this shows up in the text.

First,

a. John offers comfort to them.

Notice the first phrase in *verse 15*.

***Peace be to you*** (3 John 15a).

This original construction lacks the verb – which translators include unfortunately in this case. And in this case, John isn't expressing a wish, but an exclamation.<sup>vi</sup>

In other words, John is reminding them of the greatest comfort they could have – in a messed up world and even in a messed up

church – John isn't wishing they had peace, he's telling them, they've got it!

In the Old Testament Greek translation, this was the same phrase delivered by Joseph to his brothers when they appeared before him in Egypt. He every right to take their lives, but instead offered them forgiveness and peace (Genesis 43:23).

What gives this word the greatest depth of meaning is the fact that this was the first word the Lord delivered to His disciples following His resurrection. He had every right to discard them and start over; He had every reason to give them a tongue lashing they would never forget. Instead, his first word to them was this word, John had heard with his own ears. Eirene. Peace to you.

Peter uses the same word when he declares to the believer the foundation of our peace – he writes in the last line of his letter, Peace to all of you who are in Christ (1 Peter 5:14).

Here's a world without peace. Here's a church without peace.

John speaks to them the comfort of Christ by reminding them that peace is a gift from God to those who believe.

Secondly, John not only offers comfort to them,

b. John offers consideration to them.

Notice the last phrase of *verse 15*; ***The friends greet you. Greet the friends by name*** (3 John 15b).

The fact that John uses the term for friend twice in this closing word emphasizes their loving relationship with one another.

Remember, he's writing to a church that is being ripped apart and friendships are being lost as the church divided and fragmented under Diotrephes.

John is reminding them with this term who they still are! They aren't just supposed to be brothers and sisters in Christ – you can be a brother and sister in Christ with someone you can't stand; but you can't be a loving friend.

The word for friends is philoi. Philia – philos – all Greek terms in this word family

carried the idea of personal, caring, considerate love.

We use the term today – Philadelphia – the city of brotherly love. Some of you are from Philadelphia and you know from personal experience that it's an affectionate, loving city.

Making friends isn't automatically easy. It requires self-sacrifice. The world has clients who become their friends, but usually not unless they are clients.

Friendships are hard to make.

Jay Kesler, a pastor and former president of Youth for Christ wrote with dry humor when he wrote, "One of my goals in life is to have eight men who are at least willing to carry one of my handles." Pallbearers.<sup>vii</sup>

It's as if John is closing this postcard asking that Gaius remind people who haven't spoken to each other since the divisions occurred and excommunications occurred under the tyrannical rule of Diotrephes.

Diotrephes was destroying friendships, John wanted to restore friendships.

And here's the best way to start – go tell them their friends in Ephesus – John's home church – send their greetings. And then, Gaius, on my behalf, go and greet everyone in your assembly, battered and bruised and confused and hurt as they are – go and greet each of them by name.

Talk to each one of them personally as you would talk to a friend – and use their name when you do.

Someone wrote that your name is the sweetest and most important sound in any language to you – it represents who you are . . . it's uniquely you.

So, you can imagine if you'd been in this church on the following Sunday – here's Gaius, much to the infuriation and irritation of Diotrephes, going around and greeting each brother or sister on John's behalf and his church's behalf. "Hey, Bill, John told me to give you his greeting and tell you all the friends in his church are thinking about you." Hey Susie, John sends you his personal greetings and wants to remind you that he's grateful he's one

of your friends.” Hey Mary, John is going to arrive soon but wanted to send ahead the love and concern he has and his church has for your spiritual well-being.”

Me? Yea, you.<sup>viii</sup>

Can you imagine the good will, as Gaius treated them like Jesus treats us – only John records the fact that Jesus, as our Good

Shepherd, calls all of His sheep by name (**John 10:3**).

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 05/19/2019 by Stephen Davey.

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<sup>i</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Alert (David C Cook, 1984), p. 152

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 346

<sup>iii</sup> Hiebert, p. 347

Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1987), p. 801

<sup>iv</sup> Adapted from Gary W. Derickson, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John (Lexham Press, 2014), p. 704

<sup>v</sup> Rienecker & Rogers, p. 802

<sup>vi</sup> Hiebert, p. 148

<sup>vii</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, Tale of the Tardy Oxcart (Word Publishing, 1998), p. 220

<sup>viii</sup> Adapted from David L. Allen, 1-3 John: Fellowship in God's Family (Crossway, 2013), p. 275