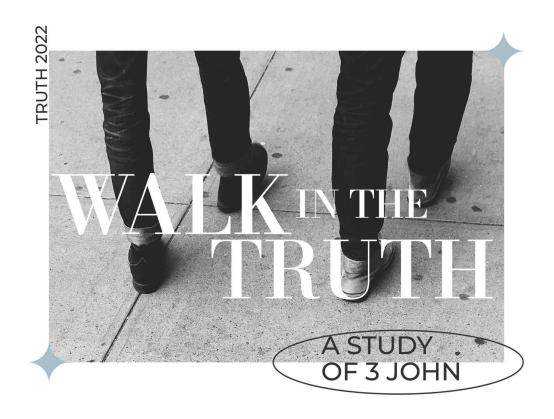


BY DR. TYLER H. SMILEY SENIOR PASTOR, LAKEWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH





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Walk in the Truth: A Study of 3 John

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Designed by Joy Willis

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT 3 JOHN

This letter from the apostle John, called 3 John, is the shortest book in the Bible. Some commentators reckon that 3 John was intended to be a cover letter to 1 John, possibly even delivered as one packet containing all three letters: 1–3 John. If this is true, then:

1 John is the primary

content of the packet,
2 John is the
introductory letter to
be read to the church
("the elect lady and her
children" — 2 John 1)
before reading 1 John,
and
3 John is personal letter
from John to his friend
and leader in the church,

Of course, it is not certain that this is how the letters were written, but it is a way that might account for the similarities between the letters and explain some of the references within them.

Gaius.

What to expect in this study

We are going to spend four weeks in 3 John. This biblical book is only 15 verses long. In the English Standard Version's translation, the text contains only 302 words. That means, if you were to divide up that reading evenly over four weeks you would read only 11 words per day. By way of comparison, the previous sentence was double that at 22 words. All of this to say, we are going to be working through 3 John *very slowly*.

In our world, accomplishing tasks sooner, working quicker, finishing earlier, and running faster are all celebrated; and there is good need of this speed and efficiency in our lives, especially when it is combined with quality. Just think about when you are in an emergency situation, or when you are trying to make it through a stack of paperwork, or when you are building something, or when you are trying to teach someone a new task, or when you're trying to rewarm a slice of pizza—6 minutes in the oven and it will taste freshly made, but 25 seconds in microwave and you get to eat it sooner. In all of these situations, faster is better. Indeed, we see the benefits that speed and efficiency have afforded to our society, and we should celebrate the hard work and good effort of communities of people. Yet, for us, and maybe especially for us living in this type of accomplishment driven society, sometimes slow is really good too. Slow may not always be celebrated, but the hope is that by going slow and taking your time you could produce outcomes that hastiness cannot produce. As you go slow, remember this: it takes just as much practice to become proficient at going slow as it does to become proficient at going fast. Some people may be naturally inclined toward tasks that require immense detail only possible through spending significant periods of time (count yourself blessed); but, many people will have to work really hard in order to go slow.

How to use this book

Each week will be divided into five parts. Since it wouldn't be right to ask you not to rush and then give you a limited timeframe for each part, you should complete these at your own pace.

Having said that, here is a framework that might help you slow down each day of the week:

MONDAY read the letter of 3 John in its entirety.

TUESDAY read the week's sermon text from 3 John and the accompanying devotional, and record personal observations of the text.

wednesday read again this week's sermon text from 3 John, and then read the complimentary verses from 1 John and 2 John. Note similarities.

THURSDAY pray through this week's sermon text.

FRIDAY read again
this week's sermon text
from 3 John, and review
the questions for small
group discussion or as an
individual devotional guide.

So, over these next four weeks let's take our time—plenty of time to read, plenty of time to think, and plenty of time to pray. There is a story about a science professor named Louis Agassiz that I first heard in my Biblical Interpretation class in seminary. The story of Professor Agassiz and the fish goes something like this: an eager new biology student arrives on campus ready to begin his studies. In his first interaction with Professor Agassiz, the teacher gives the student a fish and tells him to examine it and report back on his findings. In the first few minutes the student throws himself into examining the fish, until, after only ten minutes time, he had seen all he could see and was ready to give his report. But the professor was gone. Minutes turned to hours, and the student, still looking at the fish, continued to study it so as not to disappoint the professor. When Agassiz returned, the student gave his report, but was informed that the most critical information was missing. So, the persistent student was sent home and spent a sleepless night thinking about the fish. He returned early the next morning, and to his joy he provided the missing information. However, the professor responded, "That is good, that is good, but that is not all; go on." So, for the next three days the student examined the same fish relentlessly to the professors repeated refrain: "Look, look, look."

The valuable lesson from Professor Agassiz was that depth of knowledge comes from focused observation over a long period of time. If you want to see everything there is to see, you'll need to look more carefully and for much longer than you probably expected to do. Rarely are the most profound ideas discovered in the first few minutes of considering a new topic. Studying the Bible is the same. You will learn much anytime you come to God's word eager to hear from him. Yet, you will only learn more the longer you stare at the book and think about his words.

Can I urge you to do something for the next four weeks? Look at this letter called 3 John... really look at it. And don't stop looking at it and thinking about it until, as they say, you've squeezed out every last drop. Then, when you've gotten to that point, regrip and squeeze a little more, and by God's grace he just might show you something that you could have never seen until the last drop had fallen out.

Memory Verse:

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 4

- MONDAY Read the entire letter of 3 John
- TUESDAY Read this week's sermon text (3 John 1–3, 13–15), read the devotional, and record personal observations of the text.

DEVOTIONAL

The primary recipient of this letter was a man named Gaius. Gaius, apparently, was a common name in the first century Mediterranean world. We routinely encounter men by this name throughout the accounts of Scripture in the New Testament: there is Gaius who was baptized by Paul in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14), possibly the same or a different Gauis who hosted Paul and the local church in his home (Rom. 16:23), another Gaius whom Paul knew from Macedonia (Acts 19:29), and yet another Gaius, from Derbe (Acts 20:4). While it isn't possible to identify John's Gaius with any of these others, what we do know about him is that he was dearly loved by John, was hospitable toward the church, and supported the work of early Christian missions. The bond of friendship between this Gaius and the apostle John was, as John wrote, grounded "in truth" (v. 1).

Friendships defined by truth are a great gift. You don't have to

look far, even in the world of popular media (ex., movies, television shows, books, songs), to find a longing for friendships that are grounded in truth. That is to say, relationships that are free from lies and falsehoods and are full of complete honesty are in high demand in our world today. Such friendships are a valuable commodity. Yet, there is a type of relationship that goes

SERMON TEXT

3 John 1-3, 13-15

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. ²Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. 3For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ... 131 had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. 141 hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. 15 Peace be to vou. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

even deeper than a relationship based on truth, and that is a relationship founded on *the* truth itself. The relationship between John and Gaius is a model of friendship in the truth.

Friendships developed through the truth certainly wish for health and wellbeing for the other person; friendships in the truth obviously desire to spend more time with the other person; these deeper friendships always hope for peace and prosperity in the life of the other person; yet, friendships in the truth delight most of all when the other is "walking in the truth" (v. 3). It is not wrong to want and even pray for all of these things for a friend. John desires all of this for his beloved friend Gaius; he wants him to be in good health (v. 2); he wants to spend more time with him (vv. 13–14); and he prays for peace and prosperity toward Gaius (v. 15). However, his greatest joy in this friendship is to know that Gaius is walking in the truth. These are the friendships worth building into. These are the friendships that will not be shaken by the difficulties of life. Friendships grounded on the truth are lasting. Friends in the truth speak to each other words of both grace and truth. Friends who are friends in the truth sharpen one another "as iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17). Relationships built on the truth are bonded in the unity and love of the Holy Spirit, who is himself "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13).

As we celebrate the great blessing of friendships in the truth, we can be reminded of the gracious reality that by our faith in Jesus Christ our Lord we can be called his friend! Remember the words of Jesus: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15, emphasis added). As Jesus gives this promise, he makes it clear that the reason we can be called his friend is because of the truth that he brings us from the Father. The highest and greatest friendship that we now enjoy as Christians is that friendship we have through Jesus Christ with our God.

□ WEDNESDAY

Read again this week's sermon text (3 John 1–3, 13–15) along with these complimentary verses from 1 John and 2 John, and note similarities.

READ 1 John 1 in your Bible

READ 2 John 1–3, 12–13 below:

¹The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, 2because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: ³Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. ... 12Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete. 13The children of your elect sister greet you.





— Oecumenius, Sixth Century¹

THURSDAY Pray through this week's sermon text: 3 John 1–3, 13–15 (page 7).
\overline{FRIDAY} Take some time to read through and answer the following questions.
These questions may also be used for small group discussion.



- 1. The Apostle John wrote this letter to his friend Gaius. Why are handwritten notes often so meaningful to the recipient?
- 2. Gaius was dearly loved by John. He (Gaius) was hospitable to the church, and supported the work of early Christian missions. That's how Gaius was known within the church.
- 3. John and Gaius's friendship was defined by truth. As you reflect on your own personal friendships, what defines them?

How are you known within the church?

4. Read the following passages. Proverbs 17:17, Proverbs 27:6, 17, Ephesians 4:15, 25 and Colossians 3:9. What do they teach us about the connection between friendship and truth?

- 5. Do you have a friend with whom you can be completely honest? If not, why not? If so, describe the nature of that friendship.
- 6. John prayed for Gaius's health and wellbeing (vs. 2), as well as, Gaius's obedience to walk in the truth (vs. 3). How do you pray for your friends? How do they pray for you?
- 7. The highest and greatest friendship that we now enjoy as Christians is the friendship we have with Jesus Christ himself (John 15:15). How is your friendship with Jesus going? What would you like to do this week to improve your friendship with Him?

Memory Verse:

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 4

■ MONDAY Read the entire letter of 3 Jo	hn
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TUESDAY Read this week's sermon text (3 John 4), read the devotional, and record personal observations of the text.

SERMON TEXT

3 John 4

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

DEVOTIONAL

Last week we saw the delight that comes between true friends when each one is walking in the truth. However, the apostle John not only rejoiced to hear that his friend Gaius was walking in the truth, but he also desired that all of those to whom he ministered were walking in the truth. The phrase in 3 John 4 is identical in meaning to the phrase in 2 John 4. In 2 John 4, the apostle writes that he "rejoiced exceedingly" and in 3 John 4 he wrote that he has "no greater joy." Whether he makes it a positive statement (as in 2 John 4) or statement of negation (as in 3 John 4) John means to express the same reality—no joy matches the exceeding joy he has when he sees those he loves walking in the truth.

When the Bible speaks of "walking" it means how you live your life. This was a common use of the term going back to the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy, God's people are instructed to teach their children all that the Lord commands "when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way" (Deut. 6:7, emphasis added). In Psalm 1:1, the Psalmist describes the righteous person as one who "does not walk in the counsel of the wicked" (NIV translation). The writer of Proverbs speaks as a father to a son, and calls him to receive his instruction "So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous" (Proverbs 2:20). In each of these uses, "walking" is meant to describe a person's whole way of life. For John, walking in the truth, as opposed to not walking in the truth, is as clear of a distinction as "walking in the light" (1 John 1:7) versus "walking in the darkness" (1 John 2:11). Walking in the truth is like walking in the bright daylight—everything is shown for what it is, and the one walking is fully aware of what good paths to pursue and what dangers to avoid. Walking

in darkness, conversely, means that a person cannot see in truth—the walker is unable to determine a good path from treacherous terrain. As Charles Spurgeon described, "To walk in the truth conveys a life of integrity, holiness, faithfulness, and simplicity—the natural product of those principles of truth that the Gospel teaches and that the Spirit of God enables us to receive."²

These fatherly words of John can be put on the lips of our Heavenly Father toward his true children: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." The "Father of lights" (Jam. 1:17) delights when his children "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:10)—and he has sent to us his Son, Jesus Christ, who is "the light of the world" (John 8:12), and he has given us his Spirit to open our eyes so that we would "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16) according to the truth. It is because you are a child of God that you can walk in his ways; it is not your walking that makes you a child. It is because he has "brought you out of the darkness of sin into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9) that you can now walk in

□ WEDNESDAY

Read again this week's sermon text (3 John 4) along with these complimentary verses from 1 John and 2 John, and note similarities.

READ 1 John 2 in your Bible

READ 2 John 4 below:

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father.

the light in which you live. In Christ, "You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness" (1 Thess. 5:5). Therefore, may we walk as children of the light, always walking in the truth, and share in the joy of our Good Father.

NOTES			



"There is no greater joy than to know that those who have heard the gospel are now putting it into practice by the way in which they live."

— Bede the Venerable, Seventh Century³

THURSDAY Pray through this week's sermon text: 3 John 4 (page 11).
FRIDAY Take some time to read through and answer the following questions. These questions may also be used for small group discussion.



- 1. John had no greater joy than to hear that his children were walking in the truth. What brings you joy?
- 2. Why do you suppose it gave John joy to hear that his children were walking in the truth?
- 3. If you are a parent or a grandparent, describe the joy you have when you observe your children/grandchildren walking in the truth.

- 4. Read the following passages that speak to "walking": Ephesians 2:10, 4:1, Colossians 1:9, 10, 2:6, and 2 John 6. What do they teach us with regard to "walking"?
- 5. Because you have been called a friend of Jesus, you are now called to walk according to the truth. What biblical truth is challenging or encouraging your walk right now?
- 6. How is your "walk" right now? What would you like to do this week to improve your "walk"?

Memory Verse:

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 4

	MONDAY	Read the entire letter	of 3 John
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TUESDAY Read this week's sermon text (3 John 5-8), read the devotional, and record personal observations of the text.

DEVOTIONAL

A love for the truth always overflows into a love for other people who also love the truth. In these verses, we find some context clues about what John has been so excited to see in Gaius. Apparently, there were some early Christian missionaries who found their way into the community of Gaius's church. These Christian missionaries, as John explains, "have gone out for the sake of the name" (v. 7). Of course, the name that John means is none other than the name of Jesus Christ, and to say that they have "gone out for the sake of the name" is to say that they have left everything behind to take the gospel to a waiting world.

This phrase, "for the sake of the name," not only describes what these Christians did but also why they did it. In his own

SERMON TEXT

3 John 5-8

⁵Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷For they have gone out for the sake of the name. accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

writing, Paul also used this phrase to speak of the motivation of Christian missions. Paul writes in the letter to the Romans that his mission is from "Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith *for the sake of his name* among all the nations" (Rom. 1:4–5, emphasis added). Likewise, John recognizes this same fervor in these Christian missionaries who went out for the sake of the name and have not received any funding from non-Christians ["accepting nothing from the Gentiles" (v. 7)]. In other words, their work is entirely dedicated to Jesus and entirely supported by his church.

In the same breath, John celebrates both the missionaries for their zeal and also praises Gaius and the local church for supporting them (v. 8). As Christians, we have two options when it comes to Christian missions work: 1) go out for the sake of his name, or 2) support those who go out for the sake of his name. Many will be called to go—these brothers and sisters will often leave behind family, friends, community, and comforts to take the gospel to the nations. This call is so prevalent in Scripture that we should all ask the Lord whether he would send us out in this way. The other option is for the Lord to call us to send—that is, to support those brothers and sisters who go. This support includes nothing less than financial partnership and relational hospitality. If those who send partner with those who go in these ways, then, as John describes, that partnership makes the goer and the sender "fellow workers for the truth" (v. 8). For the ones who go, they must be careful that when they leave the senders in a physical sense, they don't also leave behind the senders in spiritual partnership. The fact that the senders are not physically present does not diminish their partnership in the work in Jesus's name. So, goers, even as you leave your fellow workers physically, don't leave them behind in the work remember to share both the joys and difficulties of your ministry. The senders are in it with you. Likewise, for those who send, it is easy to dismiss your relationship with the goers as purely transactional. But the physical distance between you and them does not diminish the significance of the

□ WEDNESDAY

Read again this week's sermon text (3 John 5-8) along with these complimentary verses from 1 John and 2 John, and note similarities.

READ 1 John 3-4 in your Bible

READ 2 John 5-6 below:

⁵And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. ⁶And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

partnership. So, senders, you are a "fellow worker" with the goer and you must send them in a manner "worthy of God" (v. 6). Remember that their work is dependent on your faithfulness to the Lord. The partnership between those who go and those who send is a fellowship for the sake of the name of Jesus and for the spread of the truth of God to all the world.

NOTES			

♦ Whoever gives practical assistance to those who have spiritual gifts becomes a coworker with those people in their spiritual work. "♦

— Gregory the Great, Sixth Century⁴

THURSDAY Pray through this week's sermon text: 3 John 5-8 (page 13).
\overline{FRIDAY} Take some time to read through and answer the following questions.
These questions may also be used for small group discussion.



1. How do you generally react to others at church who are different from you?

believers. Why do you interact with them that way?

- 2. A love for the truth always overflows into a love for other people who also love the truth. How does your response above correlate to your response to this statement?
- 5. Do you think it is important to financially support those who "have gone out for the sake of the name" (vs. 7)? Why or why not?
- 3. In v. 5 John speaks of Gaius's faithfulness. Think of a Christian you would consider faithful. Why do you consider them faithful? Would fellow Christians think of you as faithful? Why or why not?
- 6. How does financial support of Christian missionaries make us "fellow workers for the truth" (v. 8)?

- 4. Describe your interaction with complete strangers when you find out they are fellow
- 7. As a group, what do we do with what we have discussed this week?

Memory Verse:

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." 3 John 4

		M			D	A	Y	Read	the	entire	letter	of 3	John
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☐ TUESDAY Read this week's sermon text (3 John 9–12), read the devotional, and record personal observations of the text.

DEVOTIONAL

As you might expect, when there is work done in truth, there will often be opposition to it. In his letter to his friend, John names Diotrephes as one who has sway over many in the church, but is using his position for selfish gain. He writes that Diotrephes puts his own self-interest first, and does not acknowledge the apostolic authority of those who were sent by Jesus, even "talking wicked nonsense" against them (v. 10). The final straw for John was how Diotrephes treated the Christian missionaries that visited their church. John said that this false teacher, Diotrephes, "refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church" (v. 10).

At the recognition of a self-serving leader such as Diotrephes, John counterbalances his exhortation with the example of a selfless servant— Demetrius. Though we can't be certain about who Demetrius was, it is likely that he was the one delivering the letter to Gaius. Either way, Demetrius stands as a contrast to Diotrephes. Demetrius is praised by other Christians; Diotrephes praises himself. Demetrius is a witness to the truth; Diotrephes speaks wicked nonsense.

SERMON TEXT

3 John 9-12

⁹I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that. he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. "Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God ¹²Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Demetrius serves others; Diotrephes serves himself. With the two men in view, John urges his friend Gaius to "imitate good" and "do not imitate evil" (v. 11). He implores his friend to risk standing for what is good even when a person with evil motives maintains a place of authority and influence. The question, then, comes to us, will you stand for what is good? Beloved friend, imitate what is good.

John's description of doing good versus doing evil is clear, convicting, and simple. Those who do good show that they are truly "from God"; those who practice evil show that they have not "seen God" (v. 11). If you imitate evil you give witness to the fact that you have not truly seen God, because, as John writes in 1 John 1:5, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." If you have seen God, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free to do what is good.

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□ WEDNESDAY

Read again this week's sermon text (3 John 9-12) along with these complimentary verses from 1 John and 2 John, and note similarities.

READ 1 John 5 in your Bible

READ 2 John 7-11 below:

⁷For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. 8Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward. ⁹Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, "for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.



Let us be zealous for that which is good, refraining from occasions of scandal and from false brothers and those who hypocritically bear the name of our Lord.

— Polycarp of Smyrna, Seventh Century⁵

- THURSDAY Pray through this week's sermon text: 3 John 9-12 (page 16).
- FRIDAY Take some time to read through and answer the following questions. These questions may also be used for small group discussion.



- 1. Diotrephes liked to put himself first (v. 9). Discuss why some people tend to do that.
- 4. Is conflict between believers inevitable? Explain your answer.
- 2. Diotrephes apparently struggled to submit himself to the authority of John or other church leaders. Why do some believers at times find it hard to submit themselves to those in authority over them?
- 5. We're told in v. 11 to "not imitate evil but imitate good." What good are you attempting to imitate right now?

- 3. In v. 10, John appears willing to deal with the problem of Diotrephes head on should he come to see Gaius. How do you generally handle conflict?
- 6. Demetrius received a good testimony from everyone (v. 12). As we close our group time together, what good testimony of the truth would you like to share?



¹Quotation from Oecumenius in the sixth century, in Gerald Bray, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament—James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, general editor Thomas Oden, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 240.]

²Morning and Evening (Crossway, 2003), Morning reading for November 28.

³Quotation form Bede the Venerable in the seventh century, in Gerald Bray, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament—James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, general editor Thomas Oden, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 240.]

⁴Quotation from Gregory the Great in the sixth century, in Gerald Bray, ed., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament—James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, general editor Thomas Oden, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 241.]

⁵Quotation from Polycarp of Smyrna in the seventh century, in Gerald Bray, ed., Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament—James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude,

A STUDY OF 3 JOHN TRUTH

In the closing decades of the first century, the apostle John wrote a letter to his dear friend Gaius. John had been with Jesus; he had seen him crucified, buried, and resurrected; he had seen Jesus ascend into heaven; and then he had served Jesus faithfully by spreading the message of the gospel around the world. Having lived through all this, the aged apostle pens a short and intimate letter that reveals his greatest joy in life: seeing those he has ministered to walk in the truth. In this biblical book we are called to believe the truth about Jesus, and live our lives based on this truth. In a phrase, we are called to Walk in the Truth.

