

What Does Your Life Say?

3 John 1-15

Introduction

Reputation: Have you ever wondered what people say about you when you're not in the room? "In *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom and Huckleberry Finn, both presumed dead, walk into the middle of their funeral service. The rare chance to hear the sobs of one's own mourners is, for Tom, 'the proudest moment of his life.' This may be the single recorded instance, fictional or otherwise, of this sort of thing going well."¹ In real life, this doesn't work out well. You will either hear things about yourself you wish you didn't, notice people missing who you thought would be there, or anger everyone who mourned your death (just ask the 60-year-old Brazilian man who did this very thing in 2023).

- Some conversations might be fun to listen in on, but I think for most, ignorance is a gift from God.
 - Would people say you're generous? Dependable? Godly? Or self-absorbed, clueless, and vain?
- If I asked the people who know you best to describe you in one sentence, what would they say?

Reputation: If your story was recorded in Scripture, what would it say about you? We're aware of the A-list Bible characters: Peter and Paul, David and Solomon, Abraham and Isaac. Sarah will always be remembered as the 90-year-old woman who got pregnant (and laughed about it). Laugh or cry. Thomas will always be known as a doubter (though I think he gets a bit of a bad rap). One bad week and you carry a negative nickname for the next 2,000 years.

- But what about the more obscure ones?
 - Eutychus famously tumbled out of a third-story window when he fell asleep during Paul's preaching. He was brought back to life, but it's tough for you to be remembered as the guy who fell asleep in church.²
 - Shamgar gets one verse in Judges: "killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel." Single-handedly repelled a Philistine attack with a wooden pole farmers used to guide cows.³ #baller

3 John: 3 John is the shortest book in the Bible (slightly edging out its nearly as small predecessor, 2 John).⁴ Some call these "postcard epistles" (because they fit on one ancient sheet of paper), "twin epistles" because of their themes and length. If they're twins, they're *fraternal*, not identical.⁵

¹ "The Brazilian Man Who Walked Into His Own Funeral Has Taught Us All A Vital Life Lesson," *The Guardian*. Tim Dowling. 2 February 2023.

² Acts 20:9-12

³ Judg 3:31

⁴ 219 Greek wordnonsenses

⁵ HT Akin

- Both discuss walking in love and truth, along with themes of false teachers and hospitality. But 2 John is written to an entire local church generally, while 3 John is written to a specific church leader particularly.
- 3 John *names names*: Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius.
 - Gaius: “walking in the truth” (v. 3)
 - Demetrius: “has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself” (v. 12)
 - Diotrephes: “likes to put himself first, talking wicked nonsense” and more (vv. 9-10).
- This intensely personal letter applies to every one of us because **your life says something too**.

What does your life say about the truth you claim to believe?

- (1) Are You Walking in the Truth? (vv. 1-8)
- (2) Are you hindering the truth? (vv. 9-10)
- (3) Are you imitating what is good? (vv. 11-15)

¹ The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. ² Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. ³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. ⁵ Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶ who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth. ⁹ I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So 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. ¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. ¹² Demetrius 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. ¹³ I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. ¹⁴ I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. ¹⁵ Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

1. Are You Walking in the Truth? (vv. 1-8)

A Relationship Built on Truth: ¹ The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

- The same sender of 2 John is mentioned here: the elder.⁶ This loving pastor, who cares for this church.
- A new recipient: Gaius.⁷ Gaius was an extremely common roman name. We see the name show up multiple times in the NT (and there’s no good reason to confidently

⁶ Ὁ πρεσβύτερος

⁷ Γαῖω

identify *this* Gaius with any of them).⁸ Classic epigraphic research estimates that roughly 20% of all Roman males had this name at the time (making it the second most common male given name in Roman history behind *Lucius*).⁹ It's a common name like our "John."

- But the *Gaius* John is writing to *is* special. He is beloved.¹⁰ Some form of love or beloved is used 3 times in the first 11 words:¹ The elder to the **beloved** Gaius, whom I **love** in truth. ² **Beloved**,
- As in 2 John, the basis of their relationship is truth. When he says he **loves** him in truth, John is not simply saying he loves him "truly" (though he does); he is saying their relationship is grounded in the truth of the gospel as embodied in Jesus.
 - True Christian unity can never be simply sentimental affection, but must be based on the shared truth of the nature and purposes of God.¹¹
 - We must always be careful that the unity of the local church is not simply external circumstances but spiritual unity.
- Paul describes other Christians as brothers (v. 3). Don't skip over that terminology too quickly (put him in a headlock until Mom makes me stop).
 - The point is that Christians who may otherwise be strangers are now family. **We don't choose our brothers and sisters in Christ; God does. But we are called to love them like family.**

Intercessory Blessing: ² Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.

- His prayer for his beloved Gaius is that everything would go well for him. That he would prosper both physically and spiritually.¹²
- He prays for his success.
 - True love, "selfless love always desires the best for others" (Begg).
 - Love for your Christian siblings will show up in prayers not only for their healing and deliverance but for their prosperity.
 - Are you filled with praise or jealousy when a brother or sister does well? Do you want the best for others?
- "A rising tide lifts all boats." If "we're all in this together" (🎵), then a win for one of us is a win for all of us. Your success is my success.

Reputation: ³ For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth.

- Gaius has a reputation, a testimony of not only *believing* the truth but *walking* in it.¹³ He hasn't just heard the truth or agreed with it; he's walking in it, living it out.¹⁴

⁸ Acts 19:29, 20:4; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14

⁹ Kloppenborg, "Gaius the Roman Guest." *New Testament Studies* 63 (4), 2017: 534–49.

¹⁰ τῷ ἀγαπητῷ

¹¹ I myself love in truth (ὃν ἐγὼ ἀγαπῶ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ)

¹² εὐοδοῦσθαι: lit. εὖ- (good) + -δόος (road) = to have a good journey or be led along a good road.

¹³ μαρτυρούντων

¹⁴ σὺ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ περιπατεῖς

- The truth of the gospel isn't meant to simply inform our doctrine, but to transform our lives.
- John also mentions **Demetrius**: ¹² Demetrius 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. I suspect Demetrius was the one carrying this letter to Gaius and John was recommending him.
 - **Everyone** speaks well of him, including John. His reputation precedes him.
 - What does your life say about the truth? What does the truth say about your life?
 - If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? What would the witnesses testify about you?
 - When people talk about you, do they mention the truth of Jesus? Do you have a gospel reputation or are you known for "other" things?

Goal of Discipleship: ⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

- The great joy of discipleship is not building a bigger organization or becoming more famous, but to see followers of Christ know the truth of Jesus and walk in it.
- ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20).
 - Jesus is not simply teaching us information but obedience. Discipleship is about knowing the way of Jesus and walking in it.
 - "Your heart can't love what your mind does not know," but knowledge isn't obedience (Wilkin). E.g., diet, weight loss, fitness *a la* Vanhoozer.
 - This theology we preach is a beautiful and important pointer to Jesus. It's a map that leads us to him, but it's not the trip. You still have to take the trip of following him.
 - A student of Jesus doesn't simply become a vessel for information distribution but a living example of the way of Jesus. Your life should look more and more like Christ.
 - Jesus says all, not some. Not just the easy parts, not just the commands that fit our vibe, but all of it. We're quick to obey the verses we already like or think we've mastered
 - "Judge not, lest ye be judged." The judgiest people quote that verse to me (and don't understand it). "Only God can judge." Oh, he will. I don't think you know what you're saying.
 - "Be still and know that I am God." Jesus took naps. I'm just being like Jesus!
 - What about the hard ones?
 - "Do everything without complaining or arguing." 🙄 Even when your mom asks you to clean your room.

- “Love your enemies.” Ok, now you’re meddling. If I’m stepping on toes, then your feet are in the wrong place.
- Are you living out all that Christ commanded and inviting others to do the same?
- John has great joy to see his children in the faith walking out the truth they believe.¹⁵

Hospitable Evidence: ⁵ Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶ who testified to your love before the church.

- Gaius doesn’t simply give off good Christian vibes; there is evidence of his love by the way he treats these brothers.
 - These brothers testify that when they were traveling on missionary journeys, spreading the gospel (for the sake of the name), he showed them great hospitality.
 - Whether he fed them, provided for them financially, or let them stay at his house, his kindness provided them with provision and encouragement.
 - This was true even though they were practically strangers (strangers as they are). Their unity in the truth of Jesus was enough to make them brothers in the faith. Though they are practically strangers, you are treating them with the love of a brother. They reported Gaius’ hospitality to their sending church when they returned (e.g., visits in Mali or Rwanda; I feel more connected to these “strangers” than I do to people I went to school with).
- You are doing a faithful thing when you share a meal, open your home, provide a ride, fund a missionary.

Sending: You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷ For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸ Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

- They are on a mission for God; treat them well, as they are worthy of that mission. They have gone out on behalf of the name of Christ, to proclaim the name of Christ.¹⁶
 - In the *Didache*, an early church “manual” (late 1st, early 2nd c.), it deals precisely with traveling Christians. They are to be received “as the Lord,” and believers are to help them as much as they can.¹⁷
 - The mission of God is not going to be financed and enabled by unbelievers; it has to be underwritten by fellow believers (the term “Gentiles” really means “unbelievers” here).¹⁸
- We need to keep developing a stronger **theology of sending**.
- If the mission is going to continue, then we have to do more than send our missionaries out with a pat on the back and an “atta boy.”
 - If God in his grace prospers you, physically, materially, emotionally, or in any way, it is *not* for your personal comfort or advancement.

¹⁵ 1 Cor 4:14-16, 1 Thess 2:11

¹⁶ τοῦ ὀνόματος

¹⁷ Cf. Didache 11.4–6; 12.1–5; 13.1–7

¹⁸ τῶν ἐθνικῶν

- We are blessed to be a blessing. We are obligated by God's kindness to share our blessings with others for the sake of God's great name.
- If the mission is to continue, we not only need frontline missionaries we need consistent backline support.
 - We have a Christian obligation to show hospitality toward those who walk on mission for the sake of "the name."
 - If we don't support the missionaries, then who will?
- "Would that our God would multiply both 'the sent' and 'the supporters'" (Akin).¹⁹
- Gaius is an ordinary guy, with an ordinary name, but an extraordinary testimony.
 - RH wouldn't exist without the extraordinary support of a lot of ordinary people, who give sacrificially of their time and money to enable the ministry of this church. Most of them, you'll never know or meet, but eternity will ripple with the impact of their generosity.

Gaius is a wonderful example of the kind of faithful Christian that enables the gospel to go forward. But it's possible to be a hindrance to the gospel as well. You can get in its way.

2. Are you hindering the truth? (vv. 9-10)

⁹ I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰ So 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.

Selfish Bad Guy: ⁹ I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. Apparently, this isn't the *first* time John has written to this church (and this probably isn't referring to 1 or 2 John, though it's possible). But he wrote something, and this man, Diotrephes, refused to acknowledge or submit to it.

- The **root of his opposition** is clear: he likes to put himself first.²⁰
 - His inability to humble himself means he can't acknowledge anyone else's authority. Pride shows up in his unwillingness to take correction. He's not teachable.²¹
 - I'm not talking about silly things like boasting about how far you hit a golf ball or how big the fish you caught was. A much better test of your pride is what happens inside you when somebody says, "Hey, I think you might be wrong."
 - The missionaries went out for the sake of **the Name**, but Diotrephes is living for the sake of **his name**. He can't be corrected because he has to be first.
 - We think it's important to be important, when self-promotion has no place in the kingdom of God.²²

¹⁹ Gaius is a wonderful model for the latter

²⁰ φιλοπρωτεύων

²¹ Cf. *didaktikon*

²² Christ is the only one who should have preeminence (Col 1:18).

- When we pursue our own greatness, we start seeing our co-laborers as rivals.
 - When your greatness is the goal, other believers are a threat. When God's greatness is the goal, they are friends and co-laborers.
- Pride is a cancer that will blind us to our need of God and puts us in a position we were never meant to hold.
 - Pride cultivates self-centered delusions, making you think God and everyone else exist for you, but the gospel says I exist for God and others!
 - Pride sabotages our view of God, ourselves, and others.
 - We have been told that the way to success is to believe in ourselves, promote ourselves, and make a name for ourselves; the gospel tells us to believe in Christ and humble ourselves.
 - You will never experience all God has for you if you're the center of your life.
 - Your pride will not only hinder your experience of God, but others'!

Method of Opposition: ¹⁰ So 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.

- John warns that such behavior will not go unchecked. If John shows up, he will confront this wicked behavior. **Accountability is love** (#churchdiscipline). A cowardly and unloving church allows this to continue unchecked.
- Diotrephes' cancerous pride spreads from his own heart, attacking leaders, missionaries, and the rest of the congregation, impeding their ability to obey God by showing hospitality.
 - (1) He attacks the leaders, talking wicked nonsense against them. Rather than submit, he gossips, accuses, and tries to discredit. *As if that wasn't bad enough...* (not content with that). When pride can't submit to authority, it often tries to discredit the authority instead. If I can convince myself the person correcting me is the problem, I never have to consider whether I'm wrong.
 - (2) He rejects the missionaries (he refuses to welcome the brothers). He is not concerned with spreading the gospel, but with maintaining his control.
 - (3) He stops *others* from welcoming them with hospitality (and also stops those who want to). If I can't be nice to them, then neither can you! *And finally...*
 - (4) He punishes anyone who resists him (and puts them out of the church). Diotrephes has a domineering, *with-me-or-against-me* attitude that destroys the beauty of the church. His pride not only makes *him* sinful; it *hinders* everyone around him from obeying God.

Check Yo'Self:

- Does the way I speak about Christians help or hinder truth?
- Does the way I respond to correction help or hinder truth?
- Does my need for control hinder the advance of the gospel?
- Does my influence help people follow Jesus, or make it harder?

Gaius' generosity opened doors for the gospel while Diotrophes' pride closed them.

3. Are you imitating what is good? (v. 11)

Choose You This Day: ¹¹ Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

- John has set two types of lives before us. Gaius and Demetrius have good testimonies. Diotrophes has become a cautionary tale. Now John says: Choose which one you'll imitate.
- You don't have to fix every Diotrophes you encounter. John says he'll deal with Diotrophes when he comes. Gaius has a different responsibility: **Don't become him.**
- What kind of life are you imitating?
- The way you live is evidence of whether you have truly encountered God in Christ. Diotrophes' behavior proves he doesn't actually know the God he claims to represent.
 - We become like what we behold.
 - If you've truly experienced Christ's love, it humbles you.
 - If you've truly received the generosity of Christ, it makes you generous.
 - If Christ has welcomed you, you should welcome others.

Conclusion

Walk in the Truth: As followers of Jesus, we are called not only to *know* the truth, and even to *believe* the truth, but to walk in it. Are you walking in the truth?

- (1) Do you live for his name or yours?
 - Who are you living for? Yourself or him?
- (2) Do you value his family or your tribe?
 - I have found that a shocking number of "Christians" are more supportive of unbelievers they agree with politically than believers they disagree with. Their unity is more of this world than around the gospel.²³
- (3) Do you prioritize his mission or your comfort?
 - Are the choices you make and the hospitality you show demonstrating the love of Jesus and advancing the spread of the gospel or hindering it?

²³ Lifeway found 50% of Protestant churchgoers said they prefer to attend a church where people share their political views.