



# Sermon Growth Guide

**November 23, 2025**

**The Truth Prevails**

**3 John 1:9-14**

**Key Verse:** “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.”  
3 John 1:11

**Big Idea:** Who we imitate reveals who we trust—and we hold to the truth because we trust the Truth to prevail.

## Foundations

In 2nd and 3rd John, we are encouraged to stay strong and faithful in difficult times. That includes when the truth is being undermined. And isn't this the society we live in today? Since 2016, we've been told we are living in the “post-truth” era. But how is that possible if we believe the Way, the Truth, and the Life is alive in Jesus Christ (John 14:6)?

Here, John writes to Gaius, promising to come in person to confront the lies and damaging actions of a leader who claimed to be “walking in the truth.” John also commends another follower whose life actually aligns with what he professes.

John lived to teach and proclaim the Truth we know in Christ. He says, “imitate what is good,” and he speaks up when a member of the Body is being disruptive. John doesn't retaliate or give into the sin of pride. He knows and trusts the Truth will prevail, not because he is faithful, but because God is.

As Martin Luther once wrote, “The devil's mess is always loud, but God's truth has a louder voice.”

## Understanding God's Word

John introduces us to two very different men: Diotrephes and Demetrius. These two men stand side by side as a warning and an example: one whose self-exalting behavior harms the community, and one whose faithful life strengthens it. We also see how John and Gaius are called to react by imitating what is good and speaking the truth in love. This passage reminds all believers that our ability to walk in what is true is our testimony.

## Applying God's Word

How would you describe Diotrephes? What specific things does he do?

Now look at the key verse (v. 11) and consider how one person's actions can affect how we treat both people and God's Word. How have you seen sin take hold and cause you to behave in a manner that needed (or needs) to be called out by a brother or sister?

## Witnessing God's Word

In 1st John, we are instructed to love not only in words and speech, but in action and in truth (1 John 3:18) How will your actions demonstrate the love of Christ this week and into the Holiday season? How will you speak up for truth, and in truth to those you love?

In 2017, British journalist and political commentator Matthew d'Ancona published a pivotal book titled *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back*. In it, he warned that Western society had entered a cultural moment where facts were losing influence, trust in institutions was collapsing, and emotion and identity were beginning to outweigh evidence across the entire landscape of modern life. D'Ancona argued that this “post-truth era” didn’t emerge overnight. His book pointed out how things like relativism, the explosion of social media, and growing suspicion toward authorities had taken their toll, undermining trust in shared facts and destabilizing the exercise of public discourse. His writing argued why reclaiming truth was essential for a healthy society. And here we are, almost a decade later, navigating a world where truth feels flexible, even disposable.

When we open Third John, we discover this isn’t new. Diotrephes was living his own version of post-truth, and he wasn’t just hurting individuals, he was harming the Body of Christ. You’ll see how John chooses to confront this as he calls the church back to a life grounded in truth and faithfulness. This passage also forces us to ask a few crucial questions: How are we “post-truth” if the Truth lives? How can the world drift so far from reality when we believe His Word still speaks? And, what is the result of our actions that aren’t in line with the Truth we know? Today’s text stands against the lies our culture continues to spin as we hear the apostle John reminding us that truth still matters and truth prevails because the Truth is alive.

Over the past month, we’ve been walking through two of John’s letters seeking the encouragement they provide about staying FAITHFUL and staying strong, especially in light of the shifting values and the myriad of ways people are searching for truth today. Pastor Greg reminded us that Truth endures – because truth is not found in our feelings or our feeds; it’s embodied in Jesus. We heard from Pastor Mateen who preached about staying ever-vigilant against the lies of the enemy and our call to continually lift up the truth of our Savior. Last Sunday, Pastor Tim motivated us to consider our friends and friendships. We all need deep, faithful, truth-walking friendships; but perhaps more importantly, we must be willing to faithfully walk with friends who do not know Christ so that they can open their hearts to the One who calls us friend. Knowing this Friend, Jesus as the truth—and believing that Truth is a person—is what John

lived to teach and preach. For it was in the book of John that Jesus self-identifies himself, answering doubts with words of comfort, stating, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

In today’s passage, John continues his teaching by introducing two very different men: Diotrephes, who rejects truth, and Demetrius, whose life testifies to the truth. John writes this letter to remind believers that the health of the church and the spread of the Good News depends on our ability to walk in what is true. Verses 9 and 10 say, “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will not welcome us. So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church.” (3 John 1:9-10). What I admire here is that John isn’t trying to sugar-coat anything. He’s not hinting that things might get awkward. He’s not tiptoeing around the issues. John is stating that when he comes, he’s going to confront the person who is causing conflict. Some of you just tensed up a bit. Let me just say the words again. Confrontation. Conflict.

Statistics show that avoiding conflict is costly, and Christians are great at it. In an article on Mission Central, the author writes that the church doesn’t deal well with conflict because we confuse “being nice” with “loving each other.” Other experts say we avoid conflict because it is costly to our emotions and our relationships when it isn’t done in a healthy way. And many of us haven’t been taught how to engage in conflict well at home, in the workplace, or in our faith communities. Pete Scazzero, co-founder of the ministry Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, has found that in many churches and Christian lives, we confuse peace with the absence of tension or disagreement. But true peace is not the same as no conflict. In fact, for Scazzero, avoiding conflict or “spiritualizing” it away often leads to deeper dysfunction, which he calls this “false peace.” He writes, “Jesus shows us that healthy Christians do not avoid conflict. His life was filled with it! He was in regular conflict with the religious leaders, the crowds, the disciples—even his own family. Out of a desire to bring true peace, Jesus disrupted the false peace all around him. He refused to ‘spiritualize away’ conflict avoidance.” (Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*) Jesus confronted issues in the service of peace, and John got to see that firsthand.

This is precisely why John wrote to Gaius and

promised to come in person to confront the lies and damaging actions of this leader, Diotrephes, who claimed to be “walking in the truth” while living in direct contradiction to the reality of who Jesus is. In addition, Diotrephes was challenging John’s apostolic authority, undermining his role in the church, and maliciously portraying him as a dangerous rival. But why? How did it come to this? John Stott writes, “Self-love vitiates all relationships. Diotrephes slandered John, cold-shouldered the missionaries and excommunicated the loyal believers—all because he loved himself and wanted to have the preeminence. Personal vanity still lies at the root of most dissensions in every local church today.” (Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*) The evidence would show us it was most likely a mixture of pride, fear, ambition, and arrogance that drove the actions of Diotrephes. But in truth, what this really comes down to is sin. John wasn’t going to let sin win. He decided to fight against these words and actions, stand up for the truth with the truth.

John is calling us to do the same thing. We must ask what lies at the root of dissent within the church, our church, today? Here at First Pres, we spent the last few years honestly examining how we had reached a place of unhealth, distrust, and unresolved tension. In fact, when I was interviewing for my staff position here, Tim, Dave, and the hiring team were very transparent. They also didn’t sugar-coat things, which I respected. I became aware of some of the history; I was questioned about how I handle different types of situations; and I also had the opportunity to share my own experiences, especially what I have learned from working in the church. Throughout the process, I sensed a call – part of which was being a part of moving forward, healing, and acknowledging places where we as a congregation needed to not just do the hard work of reconciliation, but also seek the Lord as we move into this next chapter of life together. In this season, we faced hard truths; we named what was broken. Just this past Wednesday we came together to lament. And by God’s grace, we have begun to make real strides toward becoming a healthier, more faithful church together. You know, we are not the first church to face such problems—and we are not alone in them. Sin has been at the root of conflict in the church for centuries. Look at the passage – now we may not literally be turning away missionaries the way Diotrephes did, but we must still ask: Is distrust leading us to gossip? Is doubt causing us to withdraw instead of engage? Is pride preventing

us from listening, confessing, and forgiving?

Or, do we have our eyes fixed on Jesus? Doing the hard work of examining issues is important to being healthier, but it isn’t a practice to get caught up in. When a church is too focused on the internal squabbles, complaints and drama, people’s lives get left in the wake. Paul also wrote letters about this to the early church, and pastors write about it today. One pastor and author writes, “When we let peripheral issues rise to the place of prominence then we have displaced the gospel. Instead of embracing the humility to be of the same mind (Phil. 2:2-4) they desire to put themselves first. Instead of applying the gospel to every situation they selectively apply it how they want to. We have to see that when it comes to mission these secondary squabbles are a real problem. It is like a nail in the tire of mission; it deflates the gospel and slows down its progress.” (Erik Raymond, *How Church Squabbles Hinder Gospel Work*, The Gospel Coalition)

Look at the damage that was done to the itinerant preachers because of one man’s influence. Diotrophes is just one example in our faith history – an example of how one person can stir up disunity and distrust. And what happens as a result? These actions and words hinder others from hearing the Good News and experiencing the gift of Christian community. As a church, we want to be the hands and feet of Christ. Look at what our missions ministry has been through in the past 7 years: staff turnover, redefinitions of goals, partnership additions and leadership changes. But members of our congregation have not let the disruptions be a disruption to feeding the hungry, sheltering the unhoused, educating and training pastors, hosting our friends or praying with our partners. This year, we have had some hard conversations even within the Missions Engagement team. It has not been an easy season, but let me tell you, there is deep sense of camaraderie, respect for one another, and not one ounce of pride on that team – which has allowed us to participate in the beautiful ways God is moving here in our city and through the work of the Global Church. We have exciting things in store, especially for our youth, which we will be sharing about in a few weeks. All of this has been possible because of faithful followers seeking the Lord in His Word and in prayer -- and because of the Lord’s faithfulness to us!

The Lord is so faithful in His Word – in the guidance given to us in Scripture. Just like the clear instructions John gives to his friend, Gaius

here. This is our key verse for the week, so I invite you to read this with me: “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.” (3 John 1:11) According to Scripture, what is good is what is honorable, upright, and acceptable to God. It looks like justice, mercy, and hospitality; loving your enemies, being generous, practicing forgiveness, and loving your neighbor. It also includes, as the apostle Paul instructs, speaking the truth in love.

Paul writes, “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” (Ephesians 4:14-15) For Paul, truth and love must stay together—truth keeps us grounded, and love keeps us from using truth as a weapon. Which can be tempting and is often our first response. Our sinful nature pushes us toward pride, defensiveness, or even retaliation. But the way of Christ calls us to set aside those impulses and imitate what is good, faithful, and true. Truth does not need our forcefulness to prevail because truth has its own vindicating power.

That is why John says imitate what is good, which is another way of saying imitate WHO is good. Commentator Glenn Barker explains: “... is the nature of God’s revelation that truth, love, and righteousness have been modeled first in Jesus Christ and then by those who are faithful to his commandments. In Christ these same attributes have become available to all who love God and desire to obey his commands. To show them forth in our lives proves that we are ‘from God.’ All goodness proceeds from him; our perseverance in goodness demonstrates that in Jesus Christ we have seen God.” (Glenn W. Barker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*: 1, 2, & 3 John) John then provides an example of one who acts in this way, which is a direct contrast to the actions of Diotrephes. See verse 12: “Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true.” (3 John 1:12)

Demetrius is commended because his life aligns with what he professes. He is able to live in such a manner that completely contrasts one of his fellow brothers. How is this possible? Because

God is at work within Him. This is the promise we read in Philippians 2 where Paul writes that we are to imitate Christ and Christ’s humility. “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13)

God is at work within us, too. And that is where we find hope. Despite our sin, our past behavior, our tendency to lose focus or act in ways that are inconsistent with the call to “walk in truth,” God’s grace still moves in our hearts to make us more like Christ. Christ remains present with His people, and through that presence the fruit of the Holy Spirit is produced in our lives, ultimately pouring out love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control – all the things that the world needs to see Christ in us.

At the end of Third John, we hear the heartbeat of Christian faithfulness. John writes, “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you... Greet the friends there by name.” (3 John 1:13-15) His final words are not theological arguments, they are words of peace, relationship, and love.

But John also leaves us with a question: Do we trust the Truth enough to live by it? When lies are spoken, when motives are questioned, when influence is misused: will we retaliate? Or will we stand firm and speak truth as John did, holding fast to Christ and trusting that the truth will prevail in God’s time and in God’s will? We live in a world that is ultimately searching for the Truth, and we know that the Truth is not an idea, not a philosophy, but a living, active, forgiving Savior.

Brothers and sisters, the truth matters inside the walls of the church, but it matters even more outside them, where faith is tested every single day. Lies are loud, pride is distracting, and as Christians, our faith in a resurrected Lord is made out to be naïve and foolish.

So how do we speak truth in a “post-truth” world? In and through love, a love that imitates Christ Jesus our Lord. As John teaches in his first letter, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters....Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:16, 18)

To God be the Glory.