**Week 11:** *John and Jude: Walk in Truth and Love*

**Hook**

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**Main Point: True followers of Jesus walk in truth and love.**

**Q: What are some sources of joy in your life?**

# A 2019 survey of 5,460 people across all 50 states sought to discover which age demographic is the most joyful. Can you guess? The results found that those over 60 averaged the highest rating compared to other ages, describing their joy as 7.2 out of 10 (compare that to those 18 to 29 who reported an average joy rating of 6.8 out of 10).

# The survey also identified the three states with the highest reported average joy levels – New Mexico, Mississippi, and South Dakota. The lowest levels of joy were found in Alaska, Wyoming, and, coming in last place, Vermont).[[1]](#endnote-1)

# Q: Why do you think the folks in the 60 and above demographic were the most joyful?

# Q: In what ways do you receive joy from the success of others?

**Transition:** Launching into 3 John, we encounter a joyful John as he reaches out to a person thriving in his faith. John tells us in today’s passage that “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 1:4).

**RECAP:** Over the last two weeks, we studied the book of 2 John, which is so short that we covered it in only two lessons:

* Part 1: “Love One Another” (vv. 1–6)
* Part 2: “Watch Out for False Teachers” (vv. 7–13)

We found that much of 2 John is repetitive of 1 John. It’s not clear whether those letters were written to the same people, but the people were going through the same thing, dealing with false teachers who were trying to lead them astray from Christ.

Over the next two weeks, we’ll look at 3 John, which is about the same length as 2 John and has similar themes, although it was written to a single individual rather than a church.

**Week 11:** *John and Jude: Walk in Truth and Love*

**Book**

**Main Point: True followers of Jesus walk in truth and love.**

**3 John 1:1–2 and 2 John 1:1–3 and 1 John 1:1–4 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** Those who know the truth love each other in truth.

**Q: How is the opening of 1 John different from 2 and 3 John?**

**Q: What does it tell us about the letters of 2 and 3 John that John opened by saying that he loved the recipients “in truth”?**

The recipients of these letters are like concentric circles getting smaller and smaller in focus. First John was written generally, as a circular letter to all the churches in the area. Second John was written to one church, though also passed along to other churches. Third John was written to an individual person in the church, but it was also passed along to others, which is how we still have the letter in the biblical canon today.

This, along with the similar style of the letters, means that 2 and 3 John were most likely written and sent together, 2 John to a church and 3 John to Gaius, a member of that church.[[2]](#endnote-2) John even said in verse 9 that he had written a letter to the church (2 John) but was also writing to Gaius individually. The two letters are very similar and use a lot of the same language:

* John rejoiced to hear that “my children are walking in truth” (2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:4).
* John loved these believers “in truth” (2 John 1:1; 3 John 1:1).
* John commanded the church to love one another (2 John 1:4–5) and commended Gaius for his love for traveling evangelists (3 John 1:6).
* John closed both letters by saying he had a lot more to say, but he wanted to do it in person, not by letter, so he would come to them soon (2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:13–14).

Both letters also deal with some of the same issues as 1 John – abiding in truth and love. First John opens more like John’s Gospel, with theological discussion, but 2 and 3 John open like letters, with a greeting to a recipient. Yet all three letters open with a focus on the truth and how it binds us together as believers:

* First John describes more theologically how the message of Jesus brings us into fellowship with Jesus and one another.
* Second John says that the truth abides in all of us who know the truth, and John said he loved the church and its people in truth.
* In 3 John, he simply said he loved the recipient of the letter in truth, pointing back to all he had said in his previous letters about being bound together in truth.

Again, the focus of these letters gets smaller and smaller based on the audience. First John is a more general theological statement; 2 John applies that theological truth to an individual church “who I love in truth”; and 3 John applies it to an individual person. We don’t know exactly who Gaius was; “Gaius” was a very common name.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Regardless, Gaius was a faithful Christian whom John trusted, who had proven to walk in both truth and love, particularly because of the hospitality he showed to some traveling evangelists John knew. Gaius was “beloved” by God and loved by John in truth (3 John 1:1). In a more succinct way, John was saying the same thing he said in 1 John, that those who walk in the truth of the Gospel have fellowship with God and one another in love.

John opened this letter with a prayer for Gaius, which was common in ancient letters, but what is unusual for biblical letters is that he prayed for Gaius to be in good health. It was common to wish someone good health in general in ancient letters, but most of the prayers in the Bible are for spiritual needs (Ephesians 3:14–21). Yet John includes prayers for both body and soul. The way the sentence is written in Greek creates a parallel of body and soul, connecting the two – “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 John 1:2).[[4]](#endnote-4)

The apostles didn’t consider the body evil as the Gnostics did. The apostles taught that our bodies will be resurrected and made perfect in the consummated kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 15). Therefore, our bodies aren’t evil, but they are imperfect and perishable because of the Fall and need to be redeemed.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Paul also showed concern for Timothy’s health in his letters (1 Timothy 5:23). The Lord’s Prayer includes prayers for physical needs – “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). James also commanded his elders to pray for those in their churches who are sick (James 5:14–16). The fact that Jesus healed diseases during His earthly ministry points us to a future kingdom of God where there will be no sickness; all physical bodies and all of creation will be made perfect. Both body and soul matter to God. God doesn’t want to destroy our flesh; He wants to redeem it.

John’s prayers for Gaius’s health show us that it’s good to pray for the physical health and other temporal needs of our friends and family.[[6]](#endnote-6) Yet, physical needs can’t be the only thing we pray for. Scripture tells us that God looks at who we really are on the inside, not just how healthy or strong we may look on the outside (1 Samuel 16:7). True “prosperity” is about storing up treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19–21).

**Q: Do we pray for the spiritual health of our friends and family and ourselves or do we tend to only focus on physical needs?**

**Q: Describe how your relationships with other believers “in truth and love” are different than your relationships with non-believing friends.**

**Q: How can you pray specifically for the spiritual needs of your friends and family? How can you know what their spiritual needs are?**

**3 John 1:3–6 and 1 John 4:7–21 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** Spiritually healthy people walk in truth and love.  
  
**Q: What does it mean to “walk in truth,” not just believe the truth?**

John had already established that he loved Gaius “in truth.” Their mutual commitment to the truth of the Gospel bound them together as the body of Christ, in fellowship with God and with each other. Now he said that Gaius was “walking” in the truth. His was an active faith, not just lip service to God. He truly lived out his faith. Looking at the verb tense and word choice of this sentence tells us two things:

* This was current, present tense – he was walking in the truth right then in his life.
* It’s also a continuous action – he was walking in the truth, not just doing a random act of kindness here and there. This was a day-in-day-out lifestyle.

Gaius not only believed in the truth of the Gospel, but he also walked in the truth, in the footsteps of Jesus. When Jesus called His disciples, He said, “Follow me.” In the first-century Jewish world, well-respected rabbis typically had a group of disciples who studied under them. These disciples not only learned their rabbi’s teachings, but they also imitated the rabbi’s lifestyle. This is what it means to be a Christian – to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. To do what He did, pray how He prayed, and love how He loved.

The Gospel shows us that our salvation is by grace through faith alone. In the biblical definition of faith, there is no space for “just believing” in Jesus to get your “ticket into heaven,” but then going and living however you want. Faith isn’t just intellectual assent to a theological idea; it’s putting your trust in Jesus as Lord of your life. You cannot separate faith from following. True faith means wanting to follow Jesus because you trust that it’s the best way to live.[[7]](#endnote-7)

The way John said Gaius had proven he was walking in truth was the way that he loved others. English theologian John Stott wrote that in John’s letters, truth is the “doctrinal test” of one’s faith and love is the “social test.” But they are interconnected and interdependent; you can’t have one without the other. In a spiritually healthy person, “there is no dichotomy between profession and practice.”[[8]](#endnote-8) Really knowing the truth will always result in loving others, because the truth isn’t just a set of theological ideas. It’s knowing the person of Jesus Christ (the Truth), who is love.[[9]](#endnote-9)

This is the same truth John had been teaching in all his letters and his Gospel. Those who know Jesus will love other people, period. It’s impossible to be in fellowship with God and not love others because God is love (1 John 4:20). If you have been born of God and know God, you will love. Gaius has shown tangible love for others, even those who were strangers to him. This was evidence that he was walking in truth.

**Q: How would you describe to an unbeliever or a small child that faith isn’t just about believing the Gospel, but about following Jesus? How would you explain that it doesn’t conflict with the doctrine of salvation by faith alone?**

**Q: Why do you think that love is God’s greatest command? How does true biblical love reflect the nature and character of God and of Christ?**

**3 John 1:7–8 and 1 Corinthians 3:3–9 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** All believers are fellow workers in the same mission.

**Q: Why did John tell Gaius we should support people who preach the name?**

John told Gaius that he did well to support the teachers who were preaching Christ. Knowing the difference between true and false teachers takes discernment, and yet John explained that it’s fairly simple. Those who preach Jesus as the way to the Father are with us; everyone else is on the team of the Enemy (1 John 2:22; 2 John 1:7–11). John commended Gaius for supporting the true teachers who came through his town, even though Gaius did not know them personally, because they went out “for the sake of the name” (Jesus) (3 John 1:5–7).

The key to knowing whether people are on our side is that they preach the Gospel of Jesus. Believers have the same mission, with the same goal – to build the Church (1 Corinthians 3:10–17). Jesus is building His Church, His kingdom on earth (Matthew 16:18), but He is using us as His body – His hands and feet – to do it. He has made us His ambassadors to the world and given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17–20). Each one of us has a different role to play in the mission; we will each lay “blocks” on the “building” of the Church. We must remember we are fellow workers, laboring together as Christ builds His Church.

This means there is no place for competition in the kingdom of God. We should all be supporting one another, working together, and building up one another (Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 12), not just in our own local church but with other churches in our city and around the world. We even have connections to Christians in the past. We are laying our blocks on top of theirs. We have a responsibility to those who came before us, those who will come after us, and those who walk beside us. We are one body with one mission, the name of Jesus.

**Q: How is God leading you personally to work with others in His mission?**

**Q: How can you support Christians in places around the world doing the work God has called them to do as Gaius supported these evangelists?**

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**Took**

**Main Point: True followers of Jesus walk in truth and love.**

In 1761, Leopold Auenbrugger wrote a medical journal translated as *New Invention*.[[10]](#endnote-10) It sought to revolutionize modern medicine by encouraging specific techniques of physical examinations. This work is the foundation of what we currently call physicals. After writing this work, Leopold recognized that his ideas weren’t catching on, but 30 years after its writing, a prominent French doctor happened to pick up the journal and recognize its brilliance. From this point on, medical thought was revolutionized as the thinking shifted, and many more doctors began to contribute to this scientific foundation of physicals.

As disciples of Jesus, we should give our spiritual lives a checkup, which is like what we do for our physical bodies. John challenges believers to walk in a way that testifies to the faithfulness of the truth. The truth is something that results in action for us. You might know what you believe, but do you believe what you know?

**Q: When was the last time you did an honest assessment of your spiritual status? What are some ways that we can keep each other accountable in this pursuit?**

**CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** Remembering that we are all on a journey of sanctification and none of us will ever become perfect until we are made perfect in heaven (Philippians 3:12–14), reflect on your own walk with Jesus right now. How spiritually healthy are you? Would someone looking at your life recognize that you are a follower of Jesus? Why or why not? What things tend to distract you or pull you away from following Jesus? What things about your life need to change for you to become more like Him? How have you compromised on the truth or lacked in love for others?

**PRAY** for God to show you any areas of your life where you are not walking in truth and love. Ask Him to search the very deepest parts of your heart and reveal any way that isn’t pleasing to Him. Ask Him to give you the willingness to be corrected and the desire to change to become more like Jesus. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you on the path and grow His fruit in you as you walk with Jesus.

**ACT:** Support. This week choose at least one way you can support someone else in his or her mission to build the kingdom. Maybe it’s financially supporting a missionary or a ministry. Maybe it’s finding a way to support one of our pastors or a volunteer leader in our church. Maybe it’s helping a friend or family member fulfill their calling. Just for this week, focus more on how you can support someone else in the body in his or her mission, not your own, and see how God uses that practice in your life.

**NEXT TIME in *1–3 John and Jude*:** Next week we’ll move on to the second half of 3 John, which focuses on the same thing we’ve talked about many times so far in this study, but in a slightly different and much more personal way.

1. https://www.forbes.com/sites/robinseatonjefferson/2019/06/25/good-news-america-survey-says-we-get-more-joyful-as-we-age/?sh=4bc5daf13497 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John Painter, *1, 2, 3 John, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol 18* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John, The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expositional Commentary* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 1991). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, vol. 2* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol 19* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1988). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol 19* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1988). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995). [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3116347/> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)