



Sermon Growth Guide

November 16, 2025

Faithful Friends

3 John 1:1-8

Key Verse: 3 John 1:5 “Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you.”

Big Idea: Faithfulness to the truth includes loving hospitality.

Foundations

“What is truth?” Pilate asks Jesus. (John 18:38) This is just as difficult a question today as it was when Rome occupied Israel. Fundamentally, truth is not just a set of beliefs, but a person. Jesus is the truth. (John 14:6) Faithfulness to the truth, then, is ultimately faithfulness to Jesus.

As we have learned in our sermon series, faithfulness to Jesus includes obedience to his command to love one another, just as God has loved us in Christ. (John 13:34) In this passage, John, (“the Elder”) is commending his friend Gaius for showing his faithfulness through loving hospitality. Some traveling missionaries, who were probably concerned to protect the Gospel message by not receiving support from unbelievers (see 1 Corinthians 9), were in need of help. Even though they were strangers, Gaius supported them by giving them food and a place to stay. In this way, Gaius joined in their work for the truth.

In our church, we are familiar with supporting missions financially and with volunteering in missions both here and abroad. But the hospitality of the ancient world was much more personal. It’s good to recognize that our culture is very different from the one John and Gaius were part of. Nevertheless, this is a good opportunity to think what Christ-centered hospitality should look like in our lives. Whatever we do, faithfulness to the truth means that love should be at the center.

Understanding God’s Word

Read 3 John 1:1-8 together.

The opening verses are the formal greeting of the letter. How does John express his love and concern for Gaius?

When you hear the word, “hospitality,” what do you think it means? What images or situations come to mind? How is this the same or different from the hospitality John is commending?

Applying God’s Word

What is your experience with hospitality, both in receiving or giving it?

We understand that our time and place is different from that of Gaius. What kind of hospitality might show faithfulness to the love of Jesus today? What kind of wisdom do we need to practice hospitality well?

How can we grow in hospitality as a church? How can you grow as a small group, or as an individual in this area?

Witnessing God’s Word

In the book *I Once Was Lost*, Don Everts and Doug Schaupp say that most people’s first step toward Jesus is simply learning to trust someone who is a Christian. Can hospitality to our neighbors be part of that first step? What are some ways you can reach out to those around you through hospitality?

Faithfulness is not flashy. Nobody gets too excited. It isn't click-bait. I was talking to someone here who is part of Pathfinders, one of our Sunday classes. She and her husband hit the fifty-year mark and she went to tell the class, which celebrates these things. She thought they would be impressed! There was applause, but afterward couples came up to her: "Good start, honey. We're at 58." "Oh, we just hit 60." "Yeah, talk to me when you hit 65." Fifty years of faithful marriage is just a good start in that crew! But I didn't notice any TV news crews outside the class. I didn't see any stories to click on in my news apps. Only a lot of stories about bad-behaving royalty in England or celebrities getting divorced, with lots of promise of salacious details. That's more fun than faithfulness.

You might not even notice these little letters in the back of the Bible. Pastor Mateen said last week he had never preached on 2 John. We joke that the New Testament feels like reading someone else's letters in the mail; this is more like a solid text message. We might run right by these little notes without a thought, but here they are. Holy Scripture. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, transmitted through the ages under the watchful eye of the Holy Spirit in the faithful community, received this morning by those who have the Spirit as the very living and active Word of God. There is something to learn. Faithfulness is not flashy, but it is fruitful. It is one of the fruit of the Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Here is a letter to a friend. We don't get too many letters to named individuals. "The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth." (3 John 1:1) "The Elder,"

the Presbyter. That's where we get that word. This is John the Apostle, Jesus' close disciple. He's probably writing from exile on the island of Patmos, and, in truth, he is probably elder, maybe 85 or 90 by now. "To Gaius." We are reading between the lines a little, but that's the way with someone else's mail; we have to learn what we can. Gaius is a Roman name. There are only a few Gaius's in the Bible, and they are all converts. They all came to know Christ, were saved and baptized. Maybe John led him to the Lord. John calls this Gaius, who is still back in at the church in Ephesus, his "dear friend." The word here is *agapetos*. *Agape*. You may have heard that word before. It's the highest form of love. It is love that seeks the well-being of the beloved, even at personal sacrifice. It is a building, giving, love—the love that God demonstrates for us in Jesus. This is a dear, faithful friend. From the old guy, to my beloved, faithful friend.

"Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well." (3 John 1:2) John knows Gaius. So well, that John knows (did you see it) that his soul is getting along well. His soul. He knows his soul! Do you know anyone that well? And this is what friendship does, it wishes well for the other. John says, I hope everything in your life is going as well as your spiritual life. I pray that your spiritual health leads to whole-life health, because that doesn't always happen. Sometimes you are great with God, but your whole life is hard, and everything is against you. John, a faithful friend, is not shy to say "I really pray that you prosper in all things. Work—I hope it's working; I hope you are succeeding and prospering. Family, Marriage, Kids. I'm praying that all that lines up well. Your physical body. I pray for your good health in the body." That's a faithful friend. Not just spiritual, all of it. Whole life concern.

“It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it.” (3 John 1:3) John was moved with great joy in his exile to hear that his friend Gaius was staying steady and true in the Lord. He wasn’t worried about his salvation. His salvation was secured. But John felt joy because he heard that Gaius was walking in the truth, walking in the light, so grounded in the truth of the Gospel that he was ordering his steps in truth. Why? Why does that matter to John? Because every step into falsehood is a step into pain and leads others into error. That’s why. John isn’t worried that his friend will lose his salvation. He knows Gaius is a child of God. The question is the walk.

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” (3 John 1:4) This is the same John who wrote about being born again from above by faith in Jesus. The same John who wrote, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12) He knows what salvation is. Believing in Jesus, putting your faith in Jesus, means being born again into the family of God as a child and an heir. That’s final. No disobedience down the line will suddenly mean this man is not a child of God, saved, included, redeemed, an heir to the Kingdom of God. Imagine if you kicked your kid out of the family every time they made a mistake or turned the wrong direction! Bad grade? Skipped school? Speeding ticket? Sorry, kiddo. You are out of the family! No. That’s not how it works. Gaius is in the family of God, John knows. But, if he didn’t walk in the truth, John would be sad. Why? It would mean pain and confusion, error and distraction, a sidelined life missing out on the glory and joy of the things of God. That would be sad. But John is not sad. John feels great

joy. Gaius is walking with Jesus. The practical matter at hand is the welcoming of fellow missionaries, fellow laborers in the Lord. Gaius stood up for these guys when others wanted to exclude them, spreading lies and false accusations about them. John takes joy to know that Gaius’s faith is producing faithfulness, that his relationship with Christ is guiding his decisions, that what he believes—which is right and true—is leading him to act in ways that are right and true. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” (3 John 1:4) That’s true of parents, isn’t it? John wasn’t Gaius’s father. Maybe John led him to the Lord or disciplined him for a time. The joy he feels is the product of true faith leading to true action in a guy John invested in. Do you have anyone like that? Someone who you invested in faithfully? Or someone who has invested in you? Be grateful for faithful friends.

And that’s what I want to talk about. Friends. What do we learn from this window into an early church friendship? Well, friends know each other. These guys knew each other...well. Friends share similar convictions; they were of the same mind. Friends spend time together. They obviously had spent a lot of time together at some point to build such trust. John is trusting Gaius with a sensitive issue here. That means they have stuck it out through ups and downs. For any relationship to last, friends go through patterns of, as they say, “rupture and repair,” as some of my good friends have been talking about lately. And there is a lot of affection between friends. Agapetos is strong language. So, friends: (1) care about one another’s well-being. (2) Stick together through thick and thin. Maybe the relationship goes through a hard season. Maybe it breaks for a minute. Then the repaired relationship is stronger, deeper than at first. (3) Friends

share convictions and also challenge one another. (4) Friendship gives us joy. But lastly, (5) faithful friends are not only those friends that stick around; they are those friends who help you stick to Jesus. Friends who will help you walk in truth in a deceived and deceptive world, these are friends indeed.

Do you have friends like that? They are rare. There is a rising friendship deficit in our culture. Maybe you have felt it. With each generation people report that they have fewer trusted friends, fewer people they trust to share their deepest problems, fewer numbers to call in the dead of night believing they would drop everything and come your way. Pastor Bryan Lorritts wrote a book last year called *Enduring Friendship*. In a culture quick to cancel one another, how do we keep friendships of value over time? There are times when friendships are tested, times when they must be renegotiated, times when honesty and openness mean resetting rules of engagement, but we do well to resist the cancel culture of our times. Lorritts says most friendships come and go naturally with seasons of life, but one can hope to have two or three lifelong friendships, deep friendships with hearts knit together. John and Gaius were like this.

So, give thanks for faithful friends. As we turn our attention to Thanksgiving, this is a good time to reach out and send a note just to say, "Thank you for our friendship. It means a lot to me." Even more, give thanks for faithful friends who help you stay faithful to Jesus. What a gift that is, friends who will help you walk in truth. Maybe you have a friend, but you don't share a life in Christ. As you give thanks for them, as you appreciate them, why not take this year to invite them along toward Jesus? I have been praying and preparing to lead us through Christmas, and the Lord has put this on my heart:

are we ready to be as effective as we can be at reaching this city for Christ? What if this were the last Christmas? What if Jesus came back on January 1st? I'm not saying it's going to happen. I think we have until 2032... Just kidding. Some say that, but I don't know or pretend to know. If this were the last Christmas you have a chance to share Jesus with your friend, with your family, how would you play this next month? Would you open your table to them? Have them to your home and start a spiritual conversation? Would you follow up on a prayer request? Invite them to church or Christmas Joy or Christmas Eve? There are a lot of great methods of evangelism out there. We love Alpha Course! But no method is so effective as this: be a good friend and share your faith.

Give thanks for faithful friendships. Give thanks for faithful friendships that share faith in Jesus. Finally, give thanks for one friend who stands closer to you than a brother. John, see, John remembers a night in Jerusalem. He remembers it like it was yesterday. Jesus gathered them all up for a Last Supper, washed their feet, washed his feet, and then he said, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) You are my friends. And he said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13)