

Walking With the Father Through 2 & 3 John

Over the years, I've found my life changing and my faith deepening as I meet with our heavenly Father in His word. This has been especially true as I've been writing these devotionals and having to live what I write.

I long for you to be able to say the same as you read through this letter.

As I've gotten to know Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John through their letters, I'm overwhelmed by how they were changed by knowing and walking with their Lord. How much they must have longed for us to know Him as they did.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:3-6, he wants us to walk as Jesus did and believed that it was absolutely possible to do so. So how did Jesus walk? That's one secret our Father shares with us.

Blessings on your time as we take another walk with the Father,

Margie Martin

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2 John

This letter and the next one show us John's love for individual believers and concern over how they were living out the truth of who Jesus is in their lives. The theology of the New Testament had already been well documented through Paul's letters, so John is now concerned with how to live out this truth.

This letter was written either around the time of 1 John or just after John returned from his banishment in A.D. 96 on the rocky island of Patmos.

Patmos is about 10 miles long by 6 miles wide and is in the mouth of the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece. At the end of the first century it housed a hard labor penal colony for the Roman Empire. John was sent there for continuing to speak about Jesus after Emperor Domitian had told him to stop.



Island of Patmos between Greece and Turkey

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2 John 1-3

“ . . . truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: grace, mercy and peace . . . ”

In my little corner of the world, I have friends facing some really tough situations: a grandma who’s just found out that her unborn grandson has tested positive for a horribly disabling disease and an older single woman who’s facing unemployment and doesn’t have a safety net. Today I woke up realizing—and feeling—some overwhelming unmet desires, and I feel like giving up. So I came to today *needing* to feel the love of God as I read and thought about today’s verse.

So what have I been reminded of today for myself and for my friends? Here is the truth that John wants us to live on:

1. We have been chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be loved by Him and to be made like His Son by what we walk through in this life.
2. We have others in our lives who look to us, depend on us, and interact with us, so that we always know that our decisions and actions affect others and make a difference—whether good or bad; we don’t live on an island.
3. We can’t—and don’t have to—live this life on our own. Jesus lives in us and through us. It’s *His* resurrection power—the power that produced a whole new quality of life out of death—that allows us to live the life that He has called us to, a life of truth and deep love rather than a superficial and shallow life.
4. We’re not on our own or left on our own. As we get older, our kids get their own lives, friends move away or die, a spouse passes away or bails on the marriage, we can’t do what we used to, and we get more isolated. But Jesus is still there—in us and working through us in our circumstances.
5. *Grace, mercy, and peace* are ours and come from the inside out through the Spirit rather than from circumstances that can change in an instant. We know and live God’s *grace*, His resources made available to us. We know His *mercy* rather than getting what we know we deserve. And we know *peace* with God because the battle is over and we’re not fighting Him and how He works. All of this happens way down deep in our souls and our spirits so we can be like Jesus while in the worst of circumstances.

Which of these truths exploded in your heart today? May we be those who know—and live—the truth!

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2 John 4-11

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring [the teaching of Christ], do not take him into your house or welcome him.”

A couple of years ago our Christmas series at church was based on John's words in his Gospel that grace and truth come through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17) The thrust of the series was that all of us lean toward grace or truth, love or standards. But Jesus perfectly balances the two, and when He's living out His life through us, we reflect Him to a hurting world. Which side of the coin do you tend to display toward those who don't know Jesus yet, those in His family, and those in your own family?

I think the woman John is writing to in this letter falls on the side of grace. She's listened to and followed John's teaching on walking in love with each other. She's had a profound influence on her children and some are walking in faith with her. She's known for her love and acceptance of others, and she has an open heart and an open home. I think she is living on her own either because she is a widow or because her husband left after she became a follower of Jesus and he didn't want her new life.

But in her love and openness, she's missing truth and standards and so lacks discernment that comes from letting truth speak into everyday living. She's allowed herself to be easily deceived, and John is concerned about her.

We'll see the results of someone who lives by truth without grace in John's third letter. Today, however, we're seeing what can happen to a man or woman who loves to love but ignores inconvenient or distasteful truth: they can lose what they've worked for rather than be fully rewarded, and they actually share in the wicked work of the deceiver. So if we're like this loving woman who lacks discernment, what should we do?

1. Acknowledge our natural bent
2. Ask Jesus to be our balance and then change us to reflect Him
3. Surround ourselves with others who have strengths that we don't
4. Men should listen to women, and women should listen to men
5. Understand the consequences of both changing and not changing
6. Choose

Perhaps you're more of a truth person (like I am) and don't feel that today's writing is for you. What I'm walking away with is that I need to be as balanced as possible so I can be a friend to someone who may need my way of thinking and reacting. What are you walking away with today?

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2 John 12-13

“The children of your chosen sister send their greetings.”

I wonder if you’ve met the family of God yet? If you haven’t, let’s talk about what it looks like.

I became a Christian while living in San Francisco, but the believers I connected with met in Palo Alto, about an hour’s drive south. The man who introduced me to this group was studying for his law boards so couldn’t take the time to help me integrate with the group, plus he knew I needed female friends, so he connected me with a woman who was spending the summer in the city. The first time I got into her car I knew, sensed, experienced a different relationship with her than I had ever known—she was a sister, a chosen sister in the family of God. No one had told me about this type of connection, but I immediately knew it to be true.

Later on that summer, my lawyer friend (yes, he passed the boards) told me that while we may choose our friends, God chooses our earthly family for us for whatever purposes He chooses. Jesus said that His mothers and brothers were those who believed in Him, not those who were part of His physical family. (Matthew 12:46:50) Just like with our natural families, however, relationships with other believers aren’t always as they should or could be, and certainly not as our Father wants them to be, but often that’s because of how we think about, talk about, and interact with them. Let’s look at what John has to say about his own experience in the family of God:

- He’s free to interact with women and children in love and purity.
- He knows and is involved with his friends’ children.
- He finds joy in these children walking in the truth.
- He isn’t afraid to “mettle” in another person’s life because Jesus is deeply involved in his life and in theirs.
- He longs to talk with other believers.
- He looks forward to the joy they’ll experience when they meet face to face.
- He’s involved with a group of people, including women, who know and care for each other.

How are your relationships with other believers—male and female? All too often we stay emotionally distant or get too close in inappropriate ways. John models the quality of relationships that Jesus lived and taught about, relationships that reflect how the Father lives and loves, relationships that we’re all to have in the family of God. How are your relationships with those in God’s family?

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3 John

John probably wrote this third letter after returning from exile in A.D. 96 since he mentions visiting believers in various cities (2 John 12, 3 John 10 and 14), ordaining elders and encouraging the believers.

More than likely he wrote other letters, but these three have been included in the New Testament because of their doctrinal importance to all believers for all time. This letter in particular is so valuable because it clearly contrasts what a life looks like when a believer walks in the light versus someone who is self-ambitious.



New Testament World

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3 John 1-8

“ . . . whom I love in the truth.”

We've heard John talk about the importance of love and truth in the way we live as believers, and in 2 John we saw what happens when someone swings too far to the love side. Tomorrow we'll look at the life of someone who swings too far to the truth side. But today we get to see what a believer—male or female—looks like when in *balance*.

- His soul is doing well—no internal battles are raging.
- Other believers talk about his faithfulness to the truth and how he continues to walk in the truth.
- He is faithful in what he is doing for others in the faith, even if they are strangers to him. In this case, John is talking about Gaius opening up his home to traveling teachers who need a place to stay while in town, an expression of hospitality.
- He treats other believers, especially strangers, in a manner worthy of God
- He works *together* with others for the truth.

This list captures the results of Gaius living the way he does, but what is the way of thinking that Gaius must have practiced day in and day out?

I think Gaius is grateful for Jesus saving him and so is committed to helping God's kingdom grow in any way he can. He chooses to live in a manner worthy of God in how he interacts with others and how he spends his money and his time. He's absolutely willing to serve behind the scenes instead of being recognized; he's not an out-front guy. He's a server rather than a speaker. He doesn't go for recognition but is recognized by God for all eternity; while the traveling preachers are nameless, he is held up by John as an example for us, and he has a close friendship with John.

Do you ever struggle with thinking that no one knows or appreciates what you do for the sake of Jesus? Or do you think you're the best thing since sliced bread because of what you do or who you are in your area of influence? Either way, what truth are you hearing today?

The real truth is that Jesus is the one to be honored, valued, and recognized. The real truth is that Jesus' approval of us is approval that lasts and is worth something rather than being here today and gone tomorrow. The real truth is that we've been called to live in a manner worthy of God.

The real truth is _____.

Walking With the Father Through 2 & 3 John

3 John 9-11

“Do not imitate what is evil but what is good.”

Have you ever thought about how much we imitate those around us? It starts when we're children imitating our parents and continues through adolescence and into adulthood. Yesterday I went clothes shopping, and everything looked the same. Occasionally a designer is creative, but soon others follow, adding their own touch or returning to styles 20 years old.

In our spiritual lives, whether as individuals or churches, we're also imitators. Even those who go against the tide often sound alike. So I guess the question isn't are we imitators? but what attitudes are we imitating? because these attitudes show up in our words, tone of voice, and behavior.

John is telling us to imitate what is good rather than what is evil and then gives us examples of both. We just looked at the positive behavior, so today we're observing Diotrephes' behavior that we're all tempted to imitate. So what was he doing?

- He loved to be first. He thought about himself long before he thought about others. He was determined that his standards and point of view were to be what others followed.
- He refused to honor John's request to the local church to welcome traveling teacher, setting himself apart without any sense of humility or accountability.
- He gossiped maliciously about others and spread unconfirmed lies about others, especially those in God-given authority (John), using malicious and destructive words.
- He refused to welcome the brothers who were traveling and teaching about Jesus and who had been sent by those who had actually walked with Jesus.
- He opposed those who wanted to welcome these brothers and put them out of the church. He was a dictator who used his position to control others. He used his God-given leader personality to overwhelm the church leadership so they were more afraid of him and what he could do than they had a healthy respect for God. Probably they ended up listening to him, regardless of what happened here on earth.

My hope is that when John talked face-to-face with Diotrephes, this brother saw what he was doing, saw how far he was from living in a manner worthy of God, and chose to change. If you see yourself in Diotrephes as I have, I pray that we own up to what we're doing and start walking in the other direction. What would this new direction look like for you?

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3 John 12-13

“ . . . you know that our testimony is true.”

One of the lessons I’ve been learning this year is that my perspective is only my perspective. It’s colored by my optimistic spirit, my tendency to work instead of play, my born-with temperament and tendencies, my training, and my experiences. My perspective is not the whole truth; it’s just my view of a situation or a person.

So when I read how John described himself, I was shocked. He knew that his testimony—what he said about something—was true and that others concurred. How could he say that? How could he know that his opinions were true?

I think it’s because his confidence, and others’ confidence in him, came from his years of knowing Jesus, following Jesus, and letting Jesus live through him. John was a redeemed man, disciple, and apostle; his life had truly been changed 180° because of knowing Jesus. Therefore, whatever he said or did had the ring of truth to it because truth was his constant companion.

I guess the question you and I have to ask and answer is, are we living redeemed lives? If insecurity or anger has been our daily companion, is either one still hanging around today? If so, then perhaps we’re not living the lives that Jesus died for us to have. No excuses, no rationalizations—we just need to be honest.

If we think that only super-Christians can live like this, John tells us about Demetrius, a brother who was “well spoken of by everyone—and even by the truth itself.” If this everyday believer could have such a good reputation and be living in agreement with truth itself, the standard is set for you and me. Either we can stay the way we’ve always been, or we can see ourselves in light of truth, humble ourselves, and take steps to change, letting the power of our risen Lord be seen in us by a hurting world.

What’s your choice going to be today?
