

The Books of 1, 2, and 3 John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: Hospitality and Faithfulness

3 John 1-8

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This warm personal letter teaches the dignity and importance of faithful support for gospel work, and the teacher should draw out its quiet but weighty doctrine of partnership in the truth. Gaius, by his hospitality toward traveling workers, becomes a fellow worker for the truth. The teacher should show that the advance of the gospel depends not only on those who go and preach but on ordinary believers who host, give, and support, and that such faithfulness is significant in God's eyes, not a lesser contribution. The passage also affirms the integrity of gospel workers who go out for the sake of the Name, and the church's corresponding duty to support them.

A second emphasis is the priority of the soul's health. John's prayer that Gaius would prosper as his soul prospers quietly reorders our values, placing the flourishing of the inner life above outward circumstances. The teacher should also lift up John's declaration that he has no greater joy than to hear his children walk in the truth, reinforcing the study's recurring theme that walking in the truth, not merely professing it, is the mark of genuine faith and the deepest joy of those who shepherd others.

Formationally, this lesson aims to dignify ordinary faithfulness and hospitality, and to stir students to invest in the souls of others and in the support of gospel work. It should challenge the common assumption that significant kingdom work belongs only to professionals, and call every believer to become, like Gaius, a faithful fellow worker for the truth in the ordinary place where God has set them. The teacher should also press the searching question of the soul's health beneath the surface of outward circumstances.

Question 1

Student Question:

John writes, "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" (v. 2). What does this teach about the priority of the soul's health over outward circumstances, and how does it reorder the way we often pray and think about prosperity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John's prayer is striking for its standard of measure. He prays that Gaius's outward life, his circumstances and health, would go as well as his soul is already going. The soul's flourishing is

the assumed baseline, and outward prosperity is measured against it. This quietly establishes the priority of the inner life over the outer.

Contrast this with how we usually think and pray. We tend to assume outward prosperity is the real goal and treat the soul as secondary, praying chiefly for health, success, and ease. John reverses the order: the truly important prosperity is the soul's, and outward well-being is good but lesser.

Note that John is not despising the body or material life; he genuinely prays for Gaius's health and circumstances. The point is not that the outward does not matter but that it must not outrank the soul. A flourishing soul in hard circumstances is far richer than outward success with a withered soul.

Apply it to our values and prayers. Encourage students to let this prayer reorder their priorities, to care for the soul first and most, and to pray for one another's spiritual flourishing, not merely their comfort. The health of the soul is the prosperity that lasts and that gives meaning to all the rest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priority of the soul's health over outward circumstances (v. 2)
- The reordering of our typical values that prize outward prosperity
- The goodness of bodily and material life held in proper, secondary place
- Prayer for one another's spiritual flourishing, not merely comfort

Discussion Prompts

- How does John's prayer reverse the usual order of our priorities?
- Why does the soul's prosperity matter more than outward success?
- How might this reshape what you pray for yourself and others?

Question 2

Student Question:

John can pray for Gaius's outward life to match his flourishing soul. If God answered that prayer for you, would your circumstances rise or fall to meet your soul, and what is that revealing about where you have invested your attention?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question makes John's prayer pointed and personal. For Gaius the prayer was a blessing, because his soul was thriving; if his outward life rose to match it, that would be wonderful. The probing question is whether the same prayer would bless or expose us.

Help students sit honestly with the comparison. For many, if outward life merely matched the state of the soul, it would be a downgrade, because we have invested far more attention in our circumstances, careers, bodies, and comforts than in our inner life with God. The question gently surfaces that imbalance.

Avoid heaping on guilt; the aim is honest awareness leading to reinvestment. The state of the soul reflects where our attention and care have gone. A neglected soul is usually the result of years of attention spent elsewhere, not of a single failure.

Apply it toward reinvestment. Encourage students to consider what it would look like to tend the soul as carefully as they tend their outward life, through Scripture, prayer, worship, fellowship, and obedience. The goal is a soul so cared for that John's prayer would be, for us as for Gaius, a glad blessing rather than a sobering exposure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The state of the soul as a reflection of where our attention has gone
- Honest self-examination of inner versus outer investment
- The neglected soul as the fruit of misplaced attention over time
- Reinvestment in the means of grace to tend the soul

Discussion Prompts

- Would your circumstances rise or fall to meet your soul? Be honest.
- Where has the bulk of your attention and care actually gone?
- What would it look like to tend your soul as carefully as your outward life?

Question 3

Student Question:

John says he has "no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (v. 4). What does this teach about what should bring God's people the deepest joy, and why does walking in the truth, more than any other report, gladden a faithful heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John names his greatest joy without qualification: to hear that his children are walking in the truth. Not their worldly success, not their comfort, not even their mere profession of faith, but their actual walking in the truth. This reveals the deepest joy of a faithful, shepherding heart.

Explain why this gladdens such a heart above all. Those who love others for Christ's sake come to care most about what matters most, the eternal welfare and faithfulness of those they love. To see them genuinely walking with God touches the deepest affection and answers the deepest prayers of a faithful heart.

Note the echo of the second letter and the recurring theme of the study. Again it is walking in the truth, not merely believing or professing it, that brings joy. John consistently treats a lived, obedient faith as the real thing. The report that thrills him is of conduct conformed to the truth, of feet on the path.

Apply it to our affections. Ask students what reports about those they love bring them the greatest joy. Often we rejoice most in others' achievements or happiness, while their walk with God matters less to us than it should. John calls us to let the faithfulness of those we love become our greatest joy, as it is God's.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Walking in the truth as the deepest joy of a faithful heart (v. 4)
- The shepherding heart that cares most about others' eternal welfare
- Lived, obedient faith, not mere profession, as the report that gladdens
- The reordering of our affections toward others' faithfulness

Discussion Prompts

- Why does walking in the truth bring deeper joy than any other report?
- What reports about your loved ones currently bring you the most joy?
- How can others' faithfulness become your greatest joy?

Question 4

Student Question:

John's greatest joy was the faithfulness of those he had taught. Whose walking in the truth would bring you the deepest joy, and are you investing in anyone's faith the way John invested in his children?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns John's joy into a call. His joy in his children's faithfulness presupposes that he had invested in them; they were his children in the faith because he had labored for their souls. Joy in others' faithfulness grows from investment in others' faith.

Invite students to name those whose walk with Christ they long to see flourish, children, grandchildren, friends, those they have taught or mentored. Naming them stirs both affection and responsibility.

Then press the second half honestly. Are we actually investing in anyone's faith? Many wish for others to walk in the truth but pour little into helping them do so. John prayed, taught, wrote, and visited. Spiritual fruit in others usually follows real investment in them.

Apply it concretely. Encourage students to take up, or renew, intentional investment in someone's faith: praying for them, teaching, encouraging, discipling, modeling the walk. The joy John knew is available to those willing to invest as he did. We reap the joy of others' faithfulness where we have sown into their souls.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joy in others' faithfulness flowing from investment in their faith
- Spiritual parenthood and discipleship as a calling for believers
- The gap between wishing for others' faith and laboring for it
- Intentional investment (prayer, teaching, encouragement, modeling) as the path to fruit

Discussion Prompts

- Whose walking in the truth would bring you the deepest joy?
- Are you actually investing in anyone's faith, or only wishing for it?
- In whom could you begin to invest more intentionally?

Question 5

Student Question:

John commends Gaius because "you do a faithful work in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are" (v. 5). What does it teach that Gaius extended hospitality and care to fellow believers he did not even know, and what does this reveal about the bond Christians share?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John praises Gaius for caring faithfully even for brothers who were strangers to him. These were traveling workers he had not previously met, yet he received and helped them as family. This reveals a bond among Christians that runs deeper than prior acquaintance.

Explain the ground of that bond. Believers are united not merely by friendship or shared interests but by their common Father, common Lord, and common life in Christ. A fellow believer, even one never met before, is truly family. Gaius treated strangers as brothers because, in Christ, that is exactly what they were.

Note how this stretches our love beyond our natural circles. It is one thing to care for friends we know and like; it is another to extend genuine care to fellow believers who are strangers, simply because they belong to Christ. This is a distinctly Christian love, rooted in our shared union with the Lord.

Apply it to our practice. The bond of Christ should make us ready to receive and help believers we do not yet know, visitors, newcomers, workers passing through, members of the wider

church. Encourage students to see fellow Christians, even strangers, as family worthy of real care, and to act on that bond as Gaius did.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Care for fellow believers who are strangers (v. 5)
- The bond of Christians grounded in a common Father, Lord, and life in Christ
- Christian love stretching beyond natural circles of acquaintance
- Fellow believers, even strangers, as true family worthy of care

Discussion Prompts

- Why could Gaius treat strangers as brothers?
- What is the basis of the bond Christians share?
- How ready are you to care for believers you do not yet know?

Question 6

Student Question:

John praises a hospitality that reached even to strangers. How open is your home, your table, and your life to fellow believers, including those you do not yet know well, and what holds you back from greater hospitality?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the virtue of hospitality, which the New Testament commands repeatedly (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9) and which Gaius modeled. Hospitality is not entertaining to impress but opening our homes, tables, and lives to others, including those we do not know well.

Help students assess their actual practice honestly. Many of us keep our homes and lives closed, reserved for family and close friends. Hospitality has become rare, and believers can be present in the same congregation for years without ever opening their lives to one another.

Name the common obstacles. Busyness, the desire for privacy, fear that our home or cooking is not impressive enough, simple inertia. Much of what holds us back is the modern assumption that hospitality must be elaborate, when in truth it is mainly a matter of opening the door and sharing what we have.

Apply it with a concrete step. Encourage students to identify one obstacle and one act of hospitality they could offer, inviting a newcomer to a meal, opening their home to a small group, welcoming someone they do not yet know. The aim is to recover an ordinary, unpretentious openness of home and life, as Gaius showed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hospitality as a repeated New Testament command (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9)
- Hospitality as opening home and life, not entertaining to impress
- Common obstacles: busyness, privacy, fear of inadequacy, inertia
- Recovery of ordinary, unpretentious hospitality

Discussion Prompts

- How open are your home, table, and life to other believers?
- What most holds you back from greater hospitality?
- What is one concrete act of hospitality you could offer soon?

Question 7

Student Question:

John says these workers “have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles” (v. 7). What does this teach about the motive and integrity of gospel work, and about the responsibility of believers to support those who labor for the Name?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John describes the traveling workers’ motive and integrity: they went out for the sake of the Name, the name of Jesus, and accepted nothing from the Gentiles, that is, from those outside the faith to whom they ministered. Their service was for Christ’s honor, not for personal gain, and they refused support that might compromise their witness.

Draw out the lesson about motive. Gospel work is to be done for the sake of the Name, for the honor of Christ and the good of souls, not for money, status, or self-promotion. This sets a standard for all who labor in ministry: the motive must be Christ, not personal advantage.

Draw out the lesson about integrity. By not taking support from those they evangelized, the workers kept their ministry free from the suspicion of being a money-making venture. Their integrity protected the credibility of the gospel. This guards against the abuse of ministry for gain, which has always discredited the faith in the eyes of watchers.

Then draw out the responsibility this places on believers. Precisely because these workers would not take from outsiders, the responsibility to support them fell on fellow Christians like Gaius. Those who labor for the Name deserve the support of God’s people. Encourage students to see the support of faithful gospel workers as a real Christian duty and privilege, not an optional charity.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gospel work done for the sake of the Name, not personal gain (v. 7)
- Integrity in ministry that guards the credibility of the gospel

- The danger of using ministry for money or status
- The responsibility of believers to support those who labor for the Name

Discussion Prompts

- What should be the motive of all gospel work?
- Why does integrity in ministry matter for the credibility of the gospel?
- What is your responsibility toward those who labor for the Name?

Question 8

Student Question:

John commends Gaius for sending the workers on “in a manner worthy of God” (v. 6). Where in your life are you tempted to do good things in a half-hearted or minimal way, rather than in a manner worthy of the God you serve?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John commends not merely that Gaius helped the workers but that he sent them on in a manner worthy of God, generously, honorably, befitting the God in whose name they served. The standard for Christian service is not the minimum that gets by but what is worthy of God.

Help students feel the force of that standard. We are prone to do good things in a half-hearted, minimal way, giving leftovers rather than firstfruits, offering grudging or token help, doing just enough to say we did something. John points to a higher measure: service rendered as to God Himself.

Connect this to the broader biblical principle. Whatever we do, we are to do heartily, as for the Lord (Colossians 3:23), offering our best because of the worth of the One we serve. The quality of our service reflects our estimate of God. Minimal service betrays a small view of Him; generous, wholehearted service honors His greatness.

Apply it concretely. Ask students where they tend toward the half-hearted and minimal, in giving, in serving, in hospitality, in work done for the Lord. Encourage them to choose one area and lift it to a manner worthy of God, offering their best rather than their leftovers, for His sake.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Service rendered in a manner worthy of God, not the bare minimum (v. 6)
- Doing all heartily as for the Lord (Colossians 3:23)
- The quality of our service as a reflection of our estimate of God
- Generous, wholehearted service that honors God’s worth

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to do good things half-heartedly or minimally?
- How does the quality of our service reflect our view of God?
- What is one area you could lift to a manner worthy of God?

Question 9

Student Question:

John concludes that by supporting these workers, “we may be fellow workers for the truth” (v. 8). How does this passage teach that ordinary believers share in the advance of the gospel through faithful support, and why is this partnership in the truth so significant in God’s eyes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and the teacher should draw out the dignity John gives to faithful support. By receiving and helping these workers, Gaius and his fellow believers become fellow workers for the truth. They may never preach or travel, yet through their support they share genuinely in the very mission of the gospel.

Explain the principle of partnership. In God’s economy, the advance of the gospel is a shared work. Those who go and those who give, those who preach and those who host, are partners in one mission, and the contribution of each is real. John does not treat support as a lesser, second-class contribution; he calls the supporters fellow workers for the truth, sharing in the same labor and the same reward.

Show why this is so significant in God’s eyes. God sees the hidden faithfulness behind the public ministry. The one who opens a home, funds a worker, prays for a missionary, or quietly enables the gospel to go forward is, in heaven’s accounting, a participant in everything that ministry accomplishes. Jesus taught the same: whoever receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shares the prophet’s reward (Matthew 10:40–42). The cup of cold water given for His sake is not forgotten.

Correct the common assumption that real kingdom work belongs only to professionals. Many believers feel their ordinary lives contribute little to the gospel, that significance belongs to preachers and missionaries. This passage flatly denies that. The kingdom advances through a vast network of unseen fellow workers whose faithful support makes the visible ministry possible. None of it is small in God’s sight.

Apply it to dignify ordinary faithfulness. Encourage students to see their giving, hosting, praying, and supporting as genuine partnership in the truth, not as marginal help but as real participation in the mission of Christ. The God who keeps account of every cup of water given for His sake counts them, like Gaius, as fellow workers for the truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Supporters of gospel work as fellow workers for the truth (v. 8)
- The advance of the gospel as a shared work of goers and givers alike
- Support as real participation, not a second-class contribution
- Heaven's accounting of hidden faithfulness (Matthew 10:40–42)
- Against the assumption that significant kingdom work belongs only to professionals

Discussion Prompts

- How do ordinary believers share in the advance of the gospel?
- Why does God count supporters as fellow workers for the truth?
- Where might you be underestimating your own partnership in the gospel?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this passage, from a flourishing soul, to faithful hospitality, to partnership in the truth. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you, through this passage, into a faithful fellow worker for the truth in the ordinary place where He has put you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the letter's themes into a personal step. Trace the movement: a soul that flourishes, a life that overflows in faithful hospitality even to strangers, service rendered in a manner worthy of God, and so a believer who becomes a fellow worker for the truth. The passage dignifies ordinary, hidden faithfulness as real partnership in the gospel.

Press for one specific way Jesus is forming them. For one it may be tending a neglected soul. For another it may be opening their home in hospitality, supporting a gospel worker, or investing in someone's faith. For another it may be lifting some service from the minimal to a manner worthy of God.

Frame this around the ordinary place where God has put them. Most students are not traveling preachers, and this letter assures them that they need not be to share in the mission. The kingdom advances through faithful people in ordinary places, hosting, giving, praying, investing, serving well.

Close by dignifying that ordinary faithfulness. Encourage students to leave seeing themselves, like Gaius, as fellow workers for the truth, and to take one concrete step of faithful partnership in the gospel, confident that the God who counts every cup of cold water sees and remembers their labor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integration of soul health, hospitality, and partnership in the truth
- Ordinary, hidden faithfulness as real participation in the gospel

- The dignity of faithful service in the ordinary place God has placed us
- Assurance that God sees and remembers such labor

Discussion Prompts

- Which is Christ forming in you: your soul, your hospitality, or your partnership in the gospel?
- What is the ordinary place where God has put you to be a fellow worker for the truth?
- What single step of faithful partnership will you take this week?