



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

## Community Group Material:

*Bible Reading: 3 John 1:1, 9-15 NET*

From the elder, to Gaius my dear brother...<sup>9</sup> I wrote something to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not acknowledge us. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, if I come, I will call attention to the deeds he is doing — the bringing of unjustified charges against us with evil words! And not being content with that, he not only refuses to welcome the brothers himself, but hinders the people who want to do so and throws them out of the church! <sup>11</sup> Dear friend, do not imitate what is bad but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does what is bad has not seen God. <sup>12</sup> Demetrius has been testified to by all, even by the truth itself. We also testify to him, and you know that our testimony is true. <sup>13</sup> I have many things to write to you, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink. <sup>14</sup> But I hope to see you right away, and we will speak face to face. <sup>15</sup> Peace be with you. The friends here greet you. Greet the friends there by name. (3 John 1:1, 9-15 NET)

### SUMMARY:

John's final letter reveals a clash between church leaders: the Elder, representing the values of the Johannine community, and Diotrephes, the domineering leader of a satellite church. Diotrephes challenges the Elder's authority, maligns him, withholds hospitality from his envoys, and expels those who resist his strict control. His authoritarian style starkly contrasts with the Elder's servant leadership.

This conflict is more than a local dispute; 3 John stands in the New Testament canon as a prophetic protest against one-man rule within the church. It condemns Diotrephes' conduct, but more significantly, it warns of the rise of monarchical bishops — a warning that history, ultimately, did not heed. Around 100 AD, Diotrephes symbolized the emergence of ruling bishops, a pitfall relevant in today's Christianity. John's letters preserve a unique vision of an egalitarian church rooted on truth & love, resisting the allure of ambition and hierarchical dominance represented by Diotrephes. Let us heed John's prophetic warning and embrace the Elder's example.

**DISCUSSION: (Pick the questions suitable for your group)**

1. What points of complaint (offense) does the Elder have against Diotrephes & plan to raise with him?
2. What's wrong with Diotrephes' actions described in v. 10? Discuss.
3. Have you ever been involved in a church that was dominated by an individual – a "Diotrephes"? If so, what did you learn from that experience?
4. In God's sovereignty 3 John was included in our NT. So, scholars say 3 John stands as a prophetic protest against one-man rule within the church... it warns of the (future) rise of monarchical bishops.
  - a. How does 3 John function in this way?
  - b. What lessons ought evangelical churches learn from 3 John? Discuss.
5. Compare the two statements (below) by 2 "church fathers." What are the implications of each statement?
  - "Where the Spirit is, there is the Church." – Irenaeus of Lyon
  - "Where the Bishop is, there is the Church." – Ignatius of Antioch
6. Is the Elder's proposed response to Diotrephes' actions too strong? Or too weak? What should he do?
7. Is Diotrephes "abusing" some other members of his church by any of these actions? (Which?)
8. If Diotrephes is a recognized church leader, are some (all) of his actions (in v. 10) justified? (Which?)
9. It seems that Diotrephes' church (v. 9) is distinct from the Elder's church (v. 6). If this is the case, is the Elder "interfering" in the affairs of another church? Is he justified in doing so? Discuss.
10. Assuming that "the Elder" is "John," the "Beloved Disciple" of the 4th Gospel, and also the "Patriarch/elder statesman" of the Johannine network of churches, is he justified in bringing these complaints to Diotrephes? Or is the Elder "exceeding the bounds of his authority" in doing so? Discuss.
11. The study material suggests that the events described in 3 John mirror a wider pattern that was unfolding among the Christian Churches during and after John's lifetime; i.e., Church history of that era "matches" what's depicted in 3 John. Based on what we know about Church history:
  - a. Did church leaders like Diotrephes accept the Elder's complaint, repent, & remain in "John's circle"?
  - b. Faced with multiple challenges from leaders like Diotrephes, will the Johannine community survive?