

Well Sent

Missions Month

3 John

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The church is often talked about as a family. And you will often hear us speak of First Free as our church family. Families are wonderful things that God blesses us with. If you are a parent you do many different things to care for your family. Parents will do almost anything to care for their children and this is a good thing. Children will also go to great lengths to care for their parents. I have seen this recently here in our church family as many of you have spent so much time and effort to care for your aging parents.

When our families move away from us we don't stop engaging with them either. We take the time to go see them on vacations and we call them to check in with them. They are still our family even though they have moved to a different location, the same is true when it comes to our church family and those we send out as missionaries. When people from our church are sent out as missionaries they still remain a part of our church family. Because of this we need to continue to care for them like family. They are working hard to accomplish cross cultural gospel ministry and it is our job as the church who sent them to send and support them well. Today, the third letter of John encourages us to send and support missionaries as we work to accomplish gospel ministry.

Before we read 3 John I want to explain the letter so that it is a little easier to follow while we read. There are four main characters in the letter and two churches. The letter is from the elder to a friend named Gaius. We believe the elder to be the apostle John. Gaius is a member of the church that John is writing to. John is writing the letter to the church based on a report that he received from traveling missionaries that Gaius cared for them when they were there. John was incredibly encouraged by Gaius' continued faith in the gospel and how he was living. John then goes on to encourage him to continue to care for missionaries as they come to the church and to send them in a manner that is worthy of God.

John then changes the topic to address a leader in the church Gaius is a part of, who is named Diotrephes. Diotrephes is refusing to accept John's authority and isn't caring for missionaries as they come to the church. In fact, he is putting people out of the church who are caring for the missionaries as they come to the church. John says that he will deal with Diotrephes when he is able to come.

John encourages Gaius to not imitate the evil of Diotrephes but to do good. Those who do good are from God. And after this John introduces Demetrius, who is probably a missionary who carried the letter to this church. John says that Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone and even from the gospel itself. John then vouches for him personally as someone who should be cared for by Gaius and sent out well in a many worthy of God.

With that in mind will you please open your Bibles to 3 John and stand for the reading of God's Word.

3 John 1-15¹

¹*The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.*

²*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. ³For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. ⁴I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*

⁵*Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, ⁶who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. ⁷For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. ⁸Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.*

⁹*I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. ¹⁰So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.*

¹¹*Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.*

¹²*Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.*

¹³*I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. ¹⁴I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.*

¹⁵*Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

This morning we are going to spend most of our time looking at 3 John. We will be looking at why we should support missionaries and how we should support them.

WHY SHOULD WE SEND AND SUPPORT MISSIONARIES?

We have spent the last two weeks answering this question. The first week we looked at the Great Commission and the call for the church to make disciples of all nations. Specifically, we looked at the priority of missions amongst unreached people groups. These are people groups who are less than 2% evangelical Christian and who have almost no chance of hearing the gospel unless a cross-cultural missionary is sent to them. Then last week we looked at the fact that the local church plays a unique and great role in sending missionaries. Acts 13 shows us that God is the one who calls people to ministry but the local church is also called to affirm and send people out to the nations.

These are very large tasks and can seem too big to even know where to start. What are we supposed to do as one church or as an individual in accomplishing this task and commission? The need is so great and it is all over the world. There never seems to never be enough time, resources, or energy to get it done either. But as I was studying 3 John this week I was greatly encouraged in this area. This book in our Bible is written by one man to another man encouraging him to continue to show hospitality and care for missionaries.

Look with me at verse 8: “Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.” When we send missionaries out we become a part of the gospel going forth.

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

The Bible calls us fellow workers for the truth. This is an absolutely essential role in missions. If there were not senders then the sent wouldn't be gone for very long. They would inevitably burn out in ministry because there was no support for the hard work they were called to do. Not all people are called by God to be missionaries and that is ok. But all people are called to be involved in sending people to the nations if they are not called to go. John Piper has said that there are only three roles in missions. There are those who are sent, those who send them, and the disobedient. We either go, send, or disobey. To not send or go is disobedient because there is an unfinished task and we've been called by God to participate.

Not only is it something we must do, but lives are in the balance. As we set apart and send missionaries to take the gospel across cultural boundaries, especially where there's a limited gospel witness² it is really important that we care for them well. Our care and support for a missionary is how we work alongside them as they do gospel ministry. But we must also remember that the goal of sending missionaries is for people from every tribe, language, and nation to believe the gospel. It is not just a task, but individuals with names, families, and eternal destinies at stake.

We all have goals in our lives and then we have tools or tasks that we use to accomplish those goals. I know that this is a terribly impersonal illustration but I think that it will help us to understand the point. For a long time, people used to heat their homes with wood. In order to do this they needed a good axe to chop down trees and split the wood into manageable size pieces to burn in their fireplace or stove. Their goal was to heat their home and the tool they used for this was an axe to have wood to burn. If they decided that their axe was too important to be used or could be damaged and so they didn't use it, then the goal of heat would be lost. But on the other hand, if they didn't take care of their axe it would break, no longer be useful, and the goal of heating the house would be lost. Tools must be used but also taken care of well in order for a task to be accomplished.

We must remember that the end goal of missions is for people to know the gospel. And the tool that God has chosen to accomplish that is the church as they send out and support missionaries. We must keep both of these in mind as we send and support missionaries. To care for missionaries also means caring about what they are working toward and who they are working with. One of the best ways to keep the goal in mind is not just praying for the missionary but praying for the people group they are trying to reach. It is often easier for me to pray for and give more time in supporting missionaries than I do in prayer for the people group they are working with to believe the gospel. The reason that I do this is because I know the missionary well and have a connection with them. But I need to remember to also pray for the people to believe because this is the end goal of missions.

I need to remember the people of Moldova, Italy, Chile, Bolivia. I need to remember the A, P, K, B, and the U peoples of Central Asia. I need to remember the H, S, F, Mountain C, and G peoples of North Africa. It may sound like I am just saying letters of the alphabet but these letters represent millions of people in need of the gospel. I want to challenge us today to remember this goal by remembering to pray for the people groups that our missions partners are serving just as much as you pray for the missionary. If you know some of our missions partners but don't know the people group they are working with you should ask them this week. From there I would suggest that you learn about this people group through the Joshua Project or Operation World.

²See Steve Beirn and George W. Murray, *Well Sent: Reimagining the Church's Missionary-Sending Process*, 53; Andy Johnson, *Missions*, 36; and Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison, *When Everything Is Missions*, 68-69

Now that we have looked at and reviewed why we send and support missionaries I want us to think about how we can do that.

HOW DO WE SEND AND SUPPORT MISSIONARIES?

There have been whole books written on how to send and support missionaries and we can't cover all of the topics. The three that we will focus on are structured in a timeline. As a church we always want to have potential missionaries being raised up, preparing to go, and being sent and supported by us.

I didn't grow up in the church and the first time I met a missionary was when I was in college. You know I had heard about these "people" who had gone to other places to talk about Jesus but I had never actually met one of them. Like they are some sort of creature to be observed rather than actually known. So, when I found out that this person was a missionary it was kind of anticlimactic but in a good way. I had this idea that missionaries were something different than what they were. I learned that they were normal people like me but with a calling from God to go to the nations. They were people who believed the gospel, had a family, and even grew up in Kansas. All of a sudden missions and missionaries came down to my level. So how do we raise up missionaries in our church. The simple answer to this is just by doing the normal things that we as a church do.

In the book *Missions* by Andy Johnson, he advises people who are preparing for missions "to be an especially faithful and fruitful member of the local church."³ Our mission at First Free is to make disciples of Jesus Christ who glorify God as the grace of the gospel grows deep in God's people and goes wide to all peoples. The marks that help us to see if this is happening is if people are growing in their love for God, others believers, and the lost. The way that we seek to accomplish these marks is by gathering together to worship, serve, and learn. When we gather we want the Bible to be faithfully preached and taught in the worship service, and nursery, preschool, elementary, student, and adult classes. We want people to know each other and be known by each other in community groups. Lastly, we want people to go and share the gospel with the lost. These are the things that church members do and I believe that when these things happen, God is equipping for and will call people to go to the nations.

Johnson goes on to say that that, "The core of missions preparation is not missions studies. It is godliness and Bible knowledge and evangelistic zeal and love for Christ's church and a passion to see Christ glorified."⁴ This is the start of missions preparation for us as a church and if you are thinking about missions I would encourage you to start by being a fully-involved member of the church.

Now that the church has done the first step of raising up potential missionaries we move to the second step of preparing them to go. The first part of our church preparing a missionary to go is to assess them and choose who to support. If you are considering missions you need to first talk with someone at the church. The church needs to know you and your life because the church is the one who will be sending you.

The assessment of a missionary and of the ministry is critically important. Third John 7 says that those who had been sent out had gone for the sake of the name of Jesus. Verse 12 describes the

³ Johnson, 46

⁴ Johnson, 47

missionary Demetrius who has brought the letter to Gaius. Demetrius has a good assessment from everyone, from the gospel, and from John. These missionaries went out to represent Jesus to people who had never heard of him before. They were ambassadors of Christ to these people. Because of this fact, missionaries need to have character and knowledge that fits with someone who has gone out for the sake of Christ being known.

The first part of assessing a potential missionary is to look at their character. The character qualities that need to be represented are very similar to the qualities of an elder and pastor in the church.⁵ Missionaries should be above reproach, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, gentle, and the list continues. If their character is not exhibiting these qualities then it is time to press pause in the process and help them grow.

The next thing for the church to assess is a person's fruitfulness in ministry.⁶ Another way to say this is to ask, "are they actually good at what they do?" A person can be faithful without exhibiting a lot of fruit but fruit from their work is evidence that they have been called by God and blessed with the gifts to do this work. The people in their church are those who are best able to see this fruit and observe the person as they do ministry. Has the person had any international missions experience? How did they do? Have they worked to engage internationals in our community? How do they do with evangelism with the people around them? The answers to these questions will reveal how fruitful a person is in missions and where they need to grow.

The final assessment is their Bible knowledge. At first this may not seem like such a big deal but when a person is going to a place where there are little or no Christians they need to have solid theology. They will be the experts in the Bible and theology where they are going and they need to feel a sense of confidence and comfort to do this. This doesn't mean that they will know everything but they should have a great foundation. First Timothy and Titus make it very clear that correct theological instruction is a must. Missionaries will encounter all sorts of idol worship, heresy, and syncretism. Because this is true they must be equipped to correct and teach the gospel and its implications well in the cultural context they are serving.

There are colleges and universities that can assist here but so much of this theological training can come from the local church. For those of you who teach children, students, and adults you are working to increase the Bible knowledge for people that God may call to be missionaries. In addition to this teaching we must ask our missions partners if they need any additional Bible knowledge and instruction before they leave, while they are gone, or when they come back on home assignment. The church is a great place for them to gain this instruction. This happened when one of our missions partners J was here last fall and he took part in the preaching workshop that was we were hosting for other pastors.

This assessment process is really important and it takes time. We cannot assess a person's character and qualifications in just a couple of in-person meetings. For the most part this takes a year or more to really know them and to be able to affirm their calling by God through prayer and observation. The assessment of a potential missionary is largely done by the missions committee at First Free. I would ask that you pray for the committee to have wisdom and grace in this process. The people on

⁵ Johnson, 43

⁶ Johnson, 44

the committee are Claire Chapman, Marilyn Yourdon, Meg McGranaghan, Keith Call, Andrew Lau, Lori Day, Kevin Miller, Dave Netherton, Amy Michaelis, Jordan Lukert, and myself.

Once a missionary has been raised up and prepared to go, it is now time to send and support them well. These are very concrete and practical items. When we do these well we are able to take part in the work that God is doing, being fellow workers for the truth. Verses 6-8 of 3 John highlight this and so does Titus 3:13. These verses say that we should send people like these on their way in a manner worthy of God and to see that they lack nothing as they go. This is a lavish picture of how a missionary should be sent out. In a manner worthy of God and lacking nothing.

The needs of a missionary are very similar to what all Christians need. The ones I am going to highlight today are financial and emotional and spiritual support. The financial support is pretty simple to explain. We should do this with abundant generosity for their needs as they take the gospel to those who don't have it. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't ask them clarifying questions about budgets if we have them, but we need to remember the abundant generosity that God has shown us. This generosity is seen most clearly in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus died for the sins of the world because of his great love for the world. It is through repentance of our sins and believing this message that we are saved and experience God's great generosity toward us. When we grasp this, we are motivated to generously give of ourselves and finances to further the mission of the church. If you have not yet experienced God's generosity through the gospel please come talk with me outside of the west exit after the service.

Emotional and spiritual support is not as straight forward but very important. As I mentioned earlier, the church is a family and as a family we need to support and care for each other. Missionaries have left their families and friends to join a small team of people among a large people group who are in great spiritual need. This causes great stress as they adjust to a new culture away from their previous support structure. Because of this it is important for us as a church to extend our care and support to them even though they are so far away. The way that we do this is through the goal of having an organized care team for each of our partners that we are their primary sending church. We do not currently have a care team for each of our primary partners, so if you are interested in doing this let me know. We want our partners to feel genuinely cared for and to know people within the church. Missionaries are much more than names in the bulletin or a line item on the church budget and we need to treat them as such.⁷ Every care team will have a different set of gifts and talents to care for their missions partner but each team will need to do the following things.

Pray for your missionaries often. This should be done both as an entire group but also as individuals. For instance, if your community group has decided to be a missionary's care team you can pray for them in response to their updates once a month as you meet together. Some of our classes have adopted missionaries as well and they pray for them when they meet on Sunday mornings.

The next thing to do is to communicate with them regularly. This can be done by responding to their updates through email. But you can also send them texts, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Marco Polo, the old-fashioned phone call, write them a hand-written note, send them a care package two times a year, and probably the best one would be to go visit them on a short-term missions trip. Also, when you are doing these things I would encourage you to tell them about your life too. If we are only responding to their information and asking them questions but we never share our life with them it

⁷ Beirn and Murray, 177

is a one-way conversation. And let me tell you nobody wants to be in a one-way conversation because they are awkward. As you communicate regularly tell them about yourself so that they can know you as you know them.

The final thing that a care team does it to provide practical care for your missionary while they are overseas, on home assignment, or in a transition period. This is where the specific gifts and talents of your care team will begin to shine. For some of you out there in the pews you really like to do taxes and you actually know how to do them. You could learn the regulations for doing a missionary's taxes and offer that to them free of charge. Let me tell you this would be a massive blessing to so many of our partners. Others of you have the gift of being good at watching kids. So, when your missionary is in town you could watch their kids for an evening while they get to go out on a date. Still others of you have the ability to let missionaries stay with you for a period of time while they are in Wichita.

One of the ways that these care teams have worked out in our church is with the 4th and 5th grade class. They are the care team for W and S who will be here next week to share in our services. They have spent time praying for W and S, learning about who they serve, reading their updates, communicating with them, and they gave money to buy some things for a care package that a group of college students from the Navigators at WSU took to them on a short-term missions trip. So 4th and 5th graders remember that W and S will be here next week and I am so glad that you care for them so well.

Some of you may be thinking that these things aren't exactly earth-shattering revelation. And that's because they aren't. These are the very normal but very powerful things that friends do for friends. This what family does for family. The missionaries that the church sends out are our friends and family and we must treat them like this. When we pray for them, talk with them, and provide practical care we will become their friend and they will be our friend. As we do this they will be near to our hearts and our love for them and the people they work with will grow. We will also have the privilege of being fellow workers with them for the sake of the gospel. It is through this work that missionaries are sent and supported which allows the nations the opportunity to know the good news of Jesus Christ.