

How to Properly Hold the Rope

Postcards from John, Part 10

3 John 5-7

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Every church member is an ambassador for Christ and His Name, whether in full-time ministry or by supporting those who minister. We are to act faithfully toward the gospel and the gospel worker. The church is to faithfully ‘hold the rope’ for those who serve the Lord through prayer, hospitality, giving, and going.

Discussion Points:

God desires for believers to be faithful servants. Whatever God gives believers to do, they are to do it faithfully.

- Is your local church known as faithful or loyal to the gospel and to those who spread it? Is the corporate church as a whole? Why or why not?
- What are some ways that you ‘hold the rope’ for those in the church who are in full-time ministry?
- Would others claim you have a reputation of being loving (agape) of others over conveniences and comfort?

Romans 12:13 instructs believers to contribute to the needs of the saints and to practice hospitality. The Apostle John commends Gaius for his practice of hospitality in the short letter of 3 John. Hospitality is a practical way for Christians to show love for one another.

- First Peter 4:8-9 commands that believers practice hospitality ungrudgingly. In what ways do you practice hospitality ungrudgingly?
- How does practicing hospitality relate to God?
- What gives hospitality eternal value? What should our motivation be?

Discussion Guide Cont.

The Bible makes it clear that believers are to be generous with our pastors, leaders and global staff because of the Name – the name of Jesus.

- Why is it important to discern which Jesus is the true Jesus in light of the scriptures?
- How does or should serving under the Name compel the church to be generous and loyal to those serving?
- Why does God value the Name of Jesus? Why should we?

Gospel Connection:

The ultimate act of faithful and loyal sacrifice for others is found in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ's life in order to offer salvation for sinners. The Name of Jesus carries the full weight of the character and person of Christ and is inseparably linked to the gospel.

Practical implications:

Think: Are there any ways that I can be more faithful and loyal to gospel workers?

Pray: Praise the Name and all that it represents in my life! Ask God to open my eyes to ways that I may better live a life for the sake of the gospel.

Do: Open myself to opportunities to support and be hospitable to workers of the gospel.

How to Properly Hold the Rope

Postcards from John, Part 10

3 John 5-7

William Carey – the man referred to today as the Father of Modern Missions – served Christ for more than 40 years in the land of India where he preached, planted churches, built schools – in fact, he started schools for the poor where they were taught, among other subjects, accounting – so that they could have the ability to land paying jobs. He founded the first degree awarding university in all of India in the late 1700's.

But no doubt, his most lasting legacy was that he tirelessly translated the scriptures into numerous languages for the people throughout that country.

I have read and underlined much of William Carey's classic biography, penned by his great-grandson who vividly retold the work of God in his great-grandfather's heart; this humble shoe-maker who became passionate about the gospel. As a young man, he had a map of the world hung above his work bench and as he repaired shoes he thought of and prayed for the unreached millions around the globe.

In spite of facing a firestorm of criticism from his denomination for wanting to leave England to win the lost in India, Carey pressed on.

He providentially became close friends with four godly men who promised to support him.

Carey often referred to descending into the gold mine of India and that idea caught on with them and they developed their own little expression called the rope-holding pledge. Carey said, "I will go down into the mine, if you will hold the rope."

Before he departed from England and descended into India where he would give his life, one of his four supporters remembered, "William Carey took an oath from each of us, as

it were, at the mouth of the pit, that while we lived, we should never let go of the rope."¹

I'm glad to report to you that all four men kept their word to the day they died . . . they never let go of the rope.

You know, it's easy to focus on the amazing accomplishments of William Carey – and rightly so – and to write his biographies – and I have read several of them; it's unfortunately too easy to overlook these four men – and the sacrifices they made as they held the rope.

Their biographies have never been written . . . on earth. But their biographies have been recorded . . . in heaven.

The lives of Fuller and Pearce and Ryland and Sutcliff are unknown to us . . . they are not unknown to Christ. And I will tell you – they were not unknown to William Carey.

They held the rope as he climbed down.

The Apostle John happens to be writing a letter to a rope-holder named Gaius. And in case you miss it, he is going to inform us that every one of us have a part to play . . . praying, sending, giving, going . . . all of us play a critical role in hanging on to the rope.

Turn with me in your New Testament to an inspired lesson on how to properly hold the rope . . . we call it, Third John.

The rope holder is a man named Gaius – and Gaius has quite a reputation for caring for traveling preachers and evangelists and ambassadors of the gospel – for the William Carey's of the first century.

We arrive at **verse 5. Beloved** – you could render it – ***My dearest friend – you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send***

them on their way in a manner worthy of God (3 John 5 & 6).

First of all, let me point out that Gaius is being commended here by the Apostle John for having a faithful reputation.

John writes, “Gaius, you are acting *faithfully* – or loyally – to the gospel and the gospel worker.”ⁱⁱ

In simple terms, Gaius is loyal to the gospel to the point of self-sacrifice – he has effectively opened his home and his barn and his spare bedroom and his checkbook – his life – to these traveling ambassadors of Christ.

Who are these brothers? John calls them *the brethren* here in *verse 5* – couple that with *verse 8* where John tells the church to support *such men*.

John is using language that distinguishes a certain type – a category of men known for the fact that they have gone – on the road – so to speak, to spread the gospel.ⁱⁱⁱ

Every church member is an ambassador for Christ – but this was a league of men who had taken it on the road. And as we’ve already discussed, The Holiday Inn wasn’t around in the first century.

If you were traveling on one of the paved Roman roads, you might encounter one of the post-houses, they were called – built at 50 mile intervals – which served as hotels.

Several authors I researched wrote that these post-houses were notoriously unsafe; thieves were waiting; government spies were listening; accommodations were dirty, the food was poor, the rooms were flea infested, and the price for staying one night was exorbitant. Even Plato once wrote where he compared – and I quote – Innkeepers are pirates who hold their guests for ransom until they are allowed to escape.^{iv}

Doesn’t sound like the kind of place you want to check in for the night; which is why people didn’t usually travel without some kind of referral or recommendation to some distant family member or friend for accommodations – and the Christians did the same.

In fact, this letter served to recommend Demetrius to the hospitality of Gaius – we’ll get to him later.

So, can you imagine Gaius . . . your doorbell rings one night and there stands a stranger you’ve never met before carrying a note in his hand alleging John the Apostle knows him and asking you to take his friend in for the night . . . or for a few days?^v

How’s that for an inconvenience? Thanks a lot, John. How long are they going to stay? Who knows?

To quote Benjamin Franklin on the subject of hospitality – he wrote, evidently from experience, that after three days fish and house-guests begin to stink . . . sometimes it doesn’t take three days.^{vi}

So here’s the point – Gaius is more faithful at taking care of others than in taking care of the conveniences and the comfortable patterns in his own life.

Let me point out one more thing about Gaius. He not only has a reputation for being faithful; he also has a reputation for being loving.

Notice *verse 6* again where John points out – *they have testified to your love*. Isn’t it interesting that John didn’t call it hospitality – though it was. He didn’t refer to cooking and cleaning and conversing and feeding and giving and supporting and housing them – John just called it love.

And that’s because all the cooking and cleaning and conversing and caring and giving were demonstrations of, and rooted in, love – agape – which is the word John uses here – it’s the word used throughout the New Testament to describe the love of God.

And evidently it made it into the testimony meeting. These guests *testified in the church* – literally, *in church* – that is, in a church meeting of the assembly.^{vii}

Evidently, word has already traveled back to Ephesus where John is living, and the entire church has heard about the hospitality of Gaius.^{viii}

Obviously, God wanted Gaius to rub off on the rest of us.

And now John urges Gaius to keep on doing the same – notice the latter part of *verse 6*:

You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God (3 John 6b).

You're doing well, Gaius . . . keep it up.

The word used here for *well* – *you do well* is a word often translated good, or beautiful.

We use that word beautiful in the same way today that John is using it here.

That basketball coach yells, "That was a beautiful shot." You thank someone when they've done something gracious by saying, "That was a beautiful thing you did."

John is saying "Gaius, that was a beautiful thing you did for those servants of the Lord . . . you're doing well . . . you're doing beautifully keep it up."

And notice the standard for our support of those whose lives are given to the gospel – John writes in *verse 6* – ***You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. . . send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.***

You could understand John to be writing that we're to take care of global staff and church workers and gospel representatives in a way that God would consider worthy.

In other words, God is watching how we take care of His servants.

But you can also understand this original construction to mean we are to treat them in the same way God should be treated; ***Gaius take care of them like you would take care of God.***

Imagine if Jesus showed up at your house. Would you put Him in the back room or the best room? Would you feed him leftovers or start working on something fresh?

John says, "Treat them like you would treat God." Do you give Him leftovers? Are you going to give God pocket change?

And how does God demonstrate His love and grace toward us? Paul writes, ***He lavishes***

His grace on us (Ephesians 1:8). ***He lavishes His grace on us!***

Can you imagine a church using the word ***lavish*** as their standard for taking care of global workers? Can the church be criticized for being over the top and generous?

I remember many years of traveling with my missionary parents on what we used to call deputation – meeting with donors and making contact with supporting churches. On one occasion, when I was home for college break, I traveled with my Dad to a church where he was to preach that Sunday morning.

We got up early Sunday morning to make the drive – it was just an hour or so away from our home. My dad preached and then stood around for a while greeting the people afterward. Evidently we weren't going over to anyone's home for lunch – which was fine with me – but I can still remember walking out to the car and asking him, "So where do you want to go eat for lunch . . . where are we going to eat?"

I was 19 – if it was a good day, I ate six or seven times. My Dad hesitated and then said, "I think we can make it home for lunch." And I said, "Don't you have any money?" He said, "No." I said, "But didn't this church give you something for traveling here to preach? Gas money? Lunch money?" And he just smiled and said, "We can make it home."

Not exactly lavish treatment.

I can remember as a missionary kid every Christmas receiving from one church a box of goodies – some candy, a toothbrush, a pair of socks, some bubble gum – they were great gifts. But it always arrived in a rinsed out half-gallon milk carton wrapped in plain brown paper. A milk carton they'd cleaned out and then used. Really! As I got older, I couldn't help but think . . . well, I'm not going to tell you what I thought. But couldn't they afford a regular box and a little Christmas paper?

The other side of the story is the fact that my parents were faithfully supported by many . . . and I had it much better than many . . . I never suffered.

But I have been in the homes of missionaries overseas and have heard their stories of being sent boxes from their supporting churches filled with used tea bags.

How do you handle that kind of indignity . . . that kind of perverse frugality?

Is that treating them in a manner worthy of God? Would you ever think of sitting down in the living room with Jesus and saying to Him, “Let’s enjoy a cup of hot tea . . . here let me use the tea bag first and then you can have it.” I doubt it.

Listen, have we forgotten who these people are? You want to know why we want to treat servants of Christ who’ve given their lives to the gospel as beautifully as we possibly can?

And let me commend our mobilization team by the way – for their kind and gracious care of our global staff; and let me commend you as well, beloved – and I’m not just flattering you – and I’m not going to completely let you off the hook – but let me tell you that this assembly has a reputation for graciousness and generosity among pastors and leader and global staff who’ve been here with us.

But let’s not stop . . . we can do more . . . we can be more lavish – we can be more generous . . . why?

John gives us two reasons why – first:

1. Because of the Name they serve.

Notice the beginning of *verse 7*:

But they went out for the sake of the Name.

The absolute use of *Name* here is also found in the Book of Acts where we’re told that the Apostles were ***ordered not to speak in this name*** (Acts 5:28).^{ix}

Later they were told again – in *verse 40*, ***not to speak in the name of Jesus***. But Luke records that after [the Apostles] were flogged by the religious leaders, ***they went out rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for the name*** – a reference to the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

When you see this reference to the Name – it is an expression that represents everything

about His nature, His attributes, His deity, his gospel and His glory.

That’s why *His name is the name above every name* (Philippians 2:9) – because His name represents everything about who His is – and He is above all that is.

In fact, the Apostles preached that:

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we you must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The gospel and the name of Jesus are exclusively, absolutely, entirely, inseparably linked together.

One of the things you’re hearing more and more these days is that all religions are basically worshipping the same God, they’re just using different names.

The God of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism . . . many gods or one God – they’re all pointing to the same God and whatever God happens to be up there, He’s going to be accommodating and let everybody in.

The world of the Apostle John was basically saying the same thing. The Greeks and the Romans had their separate pantheons of gods and goddesses. But as the Greek and Roman worlds merged, they effectively said, “no sweat” – you Greeks call your chief god, Zeus and we Romans call him Jupiter; but it’s the same god – just a different name.

But when the Apostle Paul showed up he didn’t say, “You Greeks call him Zeus and you Romans call him Jupiter, but we Christians call him Jesus . . . so there’s problem, they’re all one and the same!”^x

Not hardly . . . in fact, what Paul did say was, ***turn from these vain things*** – these vain objects of worship – ***and turn to the living God*** (Acts 14:15).

To the supporters of those giving their lives to the gospel ministry – you are holding the ropes for those who are descending into the dark regions of unbelief bearing witness to the light of the gospel of THE NAME – and ***those***

who believe, John writes in his Gospel, *will have life in His name* (John 20:31).

Here's why we hold the rope:

They are worthy of our lavish support because of the Name they serve.

Secondly, they are worthy of our generous and loyal support:

2. Because of the life they've sacrificed.

Notice *verse 7* again:

But they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles.

The term *Gentiles* simply refers to those who do not believe the gospel – they are unbelievers.

To apply this biblical principle broadly to the church today, the church doesn't ask the world to fund her mission. The church doesn't write unbelievers asking for money. We don't raise our mission's budget by doing bazaars and bake sales; we don't sell stuff to our neighborhood hoping they'll buy our stuff so we can send teams to the mission field.

That cheapens the gospel; worse yet, that distorts our mission and we end up selling to people we should be reaching; that turns everything upside down.

And to narrow the context to the people John is referring to, notice, these traveling preachers and evangelists and church planters and pastors and translators and full time Christian workers didn't raise their support from unbelievers either.

God has designed the church to fund the mission of the church and to support those who represent the church as vocational servants of the church – that's the pattern.

But that gives us, the church, the responsibility to step up. The William Carey's of the world still need someone to hold the rope!

These people have left their homes, their sources of income; they've entered a ministry of faith – it's not about money – in fact, they've walked away from, in many cases, making a lot of money.

- I think of a doctor who sold a thriving practice in order to attend Shepherds

seminary and now lives on the edge of income as a church planter.

- I think of a building contractor who sold his company so he could attend Shepherds seminary and now lives in a hut with a dirt floor.

And can I tell you – these choice servants of the Lord are hoping and praying that believers and churches will follow the counsel of the Apostle John . . . and the counsel of the Apostle Paul who wrote to the Corinthians what should be the pattern for the church. He writes,

For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not simply concerned about oxen is He? No – Paul answers his own question – ***For our sake it was written . . . here's how it works – for if we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?*** (1 Corinthians 9:9-11).

In other words, this is how it's supposed to work . . . and both Paul and now John emphasize this relationship – they have given their lives to a spiritual ministry of the word; and now they, who invest in us spiritually should receive from us materially.

This is the cycle of beneficial, gracious, self-sacrificing giving; if someone sacrifices to give you spiritual things, you sacrifice to give them material things.

And what is the standard of our material generosity? Give to them like you would give to God Himself.

So here's the question for us today – are you holding any rope in your hands? Do you feel the strain at times? The burden . . . the mission . . . has it strengthened your muscles of your faith as you've supported others?

Are you holding the rope of this church ministry – is it really yours? Are you led as God enables you to hold the rope financially for some individual or ministry that has touched your life spiritually?

I pray that when we all reach the end of our lives, we'll all have some rope burns in our hands – some callouses – for the sake of His

gospel and His glorious name . . . which is
above every name.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 03/24/2019 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2019 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

-
- i Adapted from S. Pearce Carey, William Carey (The Wakeman Trust, 1923; reprint, 2008), p. 108
- ii D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 329
- iii Robert W. Yarbrough, Baker Exegetical Commentary: 1-3 John (Baker Academic, 2008), p. 374
- iv Clinton E. Arnold, ed; Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 4 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 225;
William Barclay, The Letters of John and Jude (Westminster, 1976), p. 149; John D. Hannah, 1, 2, 3 John: Redemption's Certainty (Christian Focus, 2016), p. 235
- v Karen H. Jobes, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1, 2 & 3 John (Zondervan, 2014), p. 307
- vi David Walls & Max Anders, Holman New Testament Commentary: I & II Peter, I, II, III John, Jude (Holman, 1999), p. 248
- vii Hiebert, p. 330
- viii Adapted from Gary W. Derickson, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary: 1, 2 & 3 John (Lexham Press, 2014), p. 673
- ix Yarborough, p. 372
- x Adapted from Jobes, p. 274