

# BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

**Sermon Series:** Connected: My Life in the Church  
**To be used with:** Session Five: Connected in Service  
**Sermon Title Possibilities:**  
 Serving Is a Privilege, Not a Platform

**Scripture:** 3 John

**Connection To Unit Theme:** *Connected: My Life in the Church* is a six session study from the book of Ephesians, based on *I Am A Church Member* by Thom Rainer. These theme-based sermon outlines will cover the same topics as are being studied in the small groups, but with a different focal passage of Scripture. This will allow you as the pastor to reinforce what small group leaders are talking about, without “stealing their thunder.” Session 5 of *Connected* is called “Connected in Service,” and The Point is, “Serving in the church is not about what I want.”

## **Sermon Series (options):**

Church Life Is Kingdom Life

Your Kingdom Come: How Christ the King Builds His Church

Advancing His Kingdom: Why Healthy Churches Matter

If we aren’t careful, we may begin to think that finding *our* place to serve in the church means we insert *our* platform and agenda. But serving in the church isn’t about what we want or our personal preferences; it’s about mutually submitting to one another in Jesus Christ, and together seeking to fulfill God’s plan and eternal purposes. If we see ministry as revolving around us, then we have missed it. Ministry *includes* us, but it does not revolve *around* us. Participating in redemptive community (church ministry) is an *invitation* to partner with God and others, not an *inauguration* to pursue our own ideas. This message takes a glimpse of someone who lost sight of this idea. In 3 John, we see that Diotrephes was a self-appointed leader who refused to participate in the local ekklesia in the tradition of Jesus and the apostles. He refused to submit to other Christians in Jesus Christ. Let’s take the next few minutes to read and study this passage and learn why serving in the church is a *privilege* to *partner* with others in God’s redemptive work, not a right to find a *platform* for a *personal* agenda.

## **Introduction:**

H. G. Wells, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century English writer, once said, “Sailors ought never to go to church. They ought to go to hell, where it is much more comfortable.” He obviously didn’t have a high view of church based on his experience. But took it in stride turned it into a joke. Throughout modern culture, “church” has become the butt of a lot of jokes. Some of them are innocent and funny, while some of the caricatures are hurtful and unfair. If we were to be honest, though, there have been some misconceptions and ridicule that we have invited upon ourselves. You know where to take that conversation—the self-absorbed televangelist, the hateful street-corner preacher man. When we make our ministry about ourselves, we invite the ridicule. Yes, we can do better.

The book of 3 John is really a short, personal letter. We get a glimpse into a conversation between John (the disciple who walked with Jesus) and his friend Gaius. Here, John shares his opinion about a certain man, Diotrephes, in the church that is causing all sorts of trouble. Diotrephes was the first self-appointed leader to make church life all about him. He refused to participate in the tradition of Jesus and the apostles mutually submitting to other Christians in Jesus Christ. His example is the first NOT to follow. Let’s take the next few minutes to read and study this passage and learn why serving in the church is a privilege to partner with others in God’s redemptive work, not a right to find a platform for a personal agenda.

## 1. Resist The Notion That You Have To Be The Leader (v.9).

We do not know exactly who Diotrephes is, but he has obviously forgotten the example of Jesus and the apostles. At some point, this man appointed himself as the “head honcho.” John said it’s because he loved to be the leader. Sometimes this can be tricky because when we serve in the church, we may end up leading out. Diotrephes’s problem was that he put leadership above loving others. He loved the leadership role more than people.

**Application:** When choosing to serve in the church turns into “desiring to lead,” we open the door to bring along our own agenda and personal preferences. The difference can be subtle on the outside, but we know when we are being used by God to serve others and when we are using others in the name of God to serve ourselves. Those who serve in the church should avoid the potential love affair with the leadership role itself. \*Ask yourself “do I love being the leader?” \**“Is there a personal attitude that’s keeping me from submitting to others?”* \**“Am I leveraging my influence in my church to further my own agenda or God’s purposes?”*

## 2. Refuse To Judge Others Who Are Serving In The Church (v.10).

For some reason, Diotrephes began to make accusations against John and his company. Maybe Diotrephes was insecure, or jealous, or had a personality conflict, or (Fill-In-The-Blank). Regardless of the specific problem he had, it is obvious that Diotrephes was not getting his way within the local ekklesia-community. As a result, he began to slander and accuse those leading and serving in the church. This is so destructive and will destroy the unity in the church. Any slander, gossip, or accusation mimics the Enemy. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *Satan* literally means “accuser” or “advisory.” And in the New Testament, Peter describes our Advisory as a destroyer ready to devour (1 Peter 5:8), and Jesus describes Satan as a liar, the father of all lies” (John 8:44). When we accuse others who are serving in the church, not only do we impugn their motives, but we also reveal our motives. As we serve in our church, we need to keep our motives pure.

**Application:** We need to make this commitment and refuse to stand in judgment of others. *Note: This warning would serve pastor well, too, if we are constantly comparing and judging ourselves to other churches.*

## 3. Renew Your Commitment To The Entire Church Body (v.10).

Here we see that Diotrephes actually encourages those in his church to NOT help with the ministry. He wants one of two things to happen, or both: (1) that these other teachers fail in their ministry, or (2) that he does not want to lose “his following” or “his audience.” We can learn from this because we need to be about the success of others in their ministry, too. When one part of the body hurts, then the entire body hurts. When one ministry of the church suffers, then the entire church suffers. God may need ministry resources and/or personnel for a time to help equip other ministries. This means that Christ-followers will be called out to help others in their ministry endeavors.

**Application:** Sometimes those serving in the church may need to move to other areas of ministry for the overall health of the body. Ask yourself, “Do I wish that others fail so I can succeed?” “To what degree am I willing to let go of ministry resources so that another ministry can flourish?” To help all ministries in the church, schedule a church-wide ministry fair (or have a month-long emphasis) highlighting the greatest needs in each ministry.

**4. Remain Sincere In All Your Relationship (v.10).** Diotrephes became so obsessed with his own agenda that he started kicking people out of this local gathering. He wanted to do it all, and

he wanted to do it his way. He wouldn't let anyone help because he had his own agenda. But he also refused to let them help those who John sent as ministers and teachers. It is here that Diotrephes reveals his attitude towards people in the church. He saw them as a means to a greater end (which focused on him) rather than focusing his ministry on building up others and glorifying God. We may not literally put someone "out of the church," but we can cut them off relationally because they aren't following our agenda. We become small and reveal our insecurities when we treat others this way. Ministry is all about building up people—the ones who receive the ministry as well as those who are serving in that ministry.

**Application:** Ask yourself, "Do I see others in the church as a means to build up my ministry, or do I see my ministry as a means to build up others in the church?" "To what degree have I maintained healthy relationships with whom I serve?"

### **Conclusion:**

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an American social activist during the latter part of the nineteenth century. She was passionate about two things, abolishing slavery and advancing women's rights. She was educated, tenacious, culturally savvy, and principled. As an abolitionist, she actually refused to support the 14th and 15th Amendments because even though it would give protection and voting rights to African American men, all women—black and white—would still be denied those same rights. In her plight for justice and women's suffrage, Stanton was a lot of things. But one thing she was not... was a Christian. In her own words, "The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women's emancipation."

As Christians in pursuit of community, we are bound to bump into those who have the wrong impression of Christ and His church. Unfortunately, their misconception is still their reality. It may not be our reality, but it is their reality. The question that falls upon us today is, "how can we best portray the true nature of the church to those we have been called to reach?" *Serving* others in the spirit of Jesus Christ!

Most people, in general, don't have a problem with Jesus. When you ask people "who is the most influential person (or most moral) in history" *Jesus* gets top billing a lot of the time. Who are the others on the list?

- Mother Teresa – She patterned her life after Jesus
- Gandhi – Although Gandhi was not a Christian, he still patterned his life after Jesus. Actually, Gandhi said, "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."
- Billy Graham – He patterned his life after Jesus

See for the most part, people understand the loving, sacrificing, *serving* character of Jesus. Actually, they are attracted to it, and we need to pursue it in all we do in church life and ministry.