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Heart to Heart

Postcards from John, Part 8

2 John 12-13

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

John wraps up the short letter of 2 John by announcing his plans of visiting this unnamed woman and her family face to face. He used a simple and common pen and papyrus paper to encourage and exhort her to live in God's truth and to be alert to those who spread false teachings. Believers should study John's example and be stimulated to encourage others in the faith and to faithfully guard the truth given to us in the scriptures.

Discussion Points:

Though we are inundated with new means of technological social platforms to aid in communication, in the hustle and busyness of this culture, taking the time to slow down and encourage another can be difficult.

- Why is it important to pay attention to the needs of those around you, especially others in the faith?
- In what ways do you reach out to encourage others? In what ways or areas could you improve?
- Can you recount a time when you received a note, phone call, or visit that encouraged you in your faith? How did it impact you?

The Church, both corporate and local are comprised of people of all walks, stations, and seasons of life. We, together, form the body of Christ (*Romans 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12*) with Christ as the head; therefore it is important to work at keeping the body healthy and strong.

- How do you think scriptures devoted to warning about false teachers and false teachings relate to a healthy body of Christ?
- In what ways does living in the truth affect the body of Christ?
- Why would embracing the truth of Christ be inseparable from living out the love of Christ, especially with other believers in the body of Christ?

Discussion Guide Cont.

Our relationship with Christ is a lifelong journey. We are encouraged in Hebrews 12 to run the race with perseverance and to set aside every encumbrance and sin that so easily entangles, and to fix our eyes of Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. The Apostle Paul reminds believers to take heed lest you fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

- How does running the race with perseverance and the command to take heed lest you fall tie in with John's small letter of warning and encouragement in 2 John?
- Is there ever a time or circumstance in life when it is safe to let your guard down in regard to your walk with Christ? Why or why not?
- As the body of Christ runs the race set before it, what are ways that we can help the body persevere in the faith?

Gospel Connection:

The gospel is God's good news to fallen humanity that there is salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We must be alert to keep this gospel message free from false teaching and continue to encourage other believers to continue in their walk with Him.

Practical implications:

Think: Am I living out the truth of the gospel in my day to day activities, seeking to encourage others and being watchful for false teachings?

Pray: Thank God for the truth of His word, the hope of His salvation, and the blessings of being a part of the body of Christ. Ask Him to keep you alert as you walk in faith.

Do: Encourage other believers when you have the opportunity.

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2 John 12-13

I remember reading several years ago that one airline company stopped putting lettuce on their sandwiches they served on flights, and it saved them millions of dollars.

Imagine, just withholding the lettuce saved them millions of dollars. The idea must have caught on because now they withhold the entire sandwich and give you peanuts.

It is amazing how pennies can add up to real money.

One newspaper reporter did some digging into this and found out that a one cent-per-gallon increase in the price of fuel increased Delta Airlines corporate costs \$25 million a year.

Which is why they can only afford to hand out peanuts.

He also found that a one penny increase in the price of Coca Cola per case, brings the company \$45 million more per year.

A one cent increase in the hourly wage for all employees of Home Depot would amount to \$6.5 million a year.

Here's one I thought was interesting – if Krispy Kreme increased the cost of each donut by one penny, the company would increase annual profits by \$27 million dollars.¹

Much of that would come from me.

Isn't it amazing how much difference a little penny can make?

The truth is, in money and in life, something small can add up to making a major impact in someone's life.

It might be a pat on the back, or a brief phone call to someone hurting, or a visit to the hospital room of someone recovering . . . a personal letter to someone in need of correction or encouragement.

It's just a small act . . . a simple decision . . . a quick action point . . . it was something

small, but it delivered an incredibly great impact.

We arrive today at the conclusion of such a letter. In fact, it's so small, I've been referring to it as an inspired postcard.

It's written to an anonymous woman and her children, from the Apostle John . . . just a brief note, but it will make a lasting impact on her life – and a lasting impact on the church to this day.

Turn there for one last time – *Second John and now, at verse 12.*

Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink. . . . (2 John 12a).

Stop for a moment – John obviously doesn't want to end his note on the previous commands to beware of false teachers and to keep her door shut against them.

He wants to end the letter with gracious words, so he changes gears . . . in fact, the forward placement in the original language of *many things* tell us that there were a number of topics he hadn't mentioned in the letter but he wanted to discuss them with her and her family – and no doubt the believers in her church, which may very well have met in her home.

But he's got a better idea than writing a longer letter.

By the way, the word John uses here for paper (from chartes/χαρτης) refers to a common sheet of papyrus rather than the more expensive parchment, made from leather.

The papyrus plant had provided the pulp for common paper for generations. It grew in long stalks and flourished in the Mediterranean world – it literally grew like weeds everywhere.

In fact, Marsha and I were given some papyrus plants last year which we planted in our back yard and the stalks grew tall with beautiful plumage at the top; we're hoping the plants will

grow back this Spring . . . I'm optimistic because weeds grow really well in my back yard.

Well, generations before John's lifetime, they were making paper out of these papyrus reeds. The outer shell of the stalk was stripped away and the sticky inner pulp was cut into thin strips and placed side by side horizontally, with their edges overlapping. Then, another layer was placed on top, running in the opposite direction – or vertically. It was then flattened and pressed down and then left to dry in the sun.

A common piece of parchment paper was around 5 inches wide and 8 inches high. Their edges could be glued together to create a roll for longer documents.

Several scholars that I read suggested that the Apostle John more than likely reached the bottom of one piece of paper and he didn't want to start page two.

Well, we do know that John, as well as all the authors of scripture, they were moved along and directed by the Holy Spirit (*1 Peter 1:21 & 2 Timothy 3:16*); so when John came to the bottom of this papyrus sheet, he hadn't run out of space, he had actually written enough. But there's little doubt this letter was written on one sheet of paper.

I want to point out also that the word for *ink* here is equally telling. It's the word *melenos*, meaning "black" and it was the word for the cheapest ink possible. It was made from a mixture of ash and water and tree sap.

There were better grades and more expensive ink, made with combinations of minerals that provided more interesting colors and a better quality product.

And we also know that the *pen* John refers to here is a reed pen that predated John by centuries – it was a hollowed out reed which was filled with ink – and a tiny slit at the tip of the reed allowed the ink to flow as the writer scratched out a letter on his little piece of cheap papyrus paper.ⁱⁱ

I say all that to say this: here's the last living Apostle . . . the renowned author of the Gospel of John, First, Second and Third John,

the Book of Revelation . . . now an old and venerated leader in the church, and what he seems to have in his possession is the cheapest ink on the market and the most common kind of paper.

And that's what he used!

And here's the point . . . whatever you have, use. Whatever God has made available to you – use it with all your might (*Ecclesiastes 9:10*).

Whatever you have available to you – whether it's ordinary stationary and a cheap pen or a simple talent or gifting or position or perhaps broader influence and opportunity – what matters that whatever you have in your hand, you maximize it to the glory of God.

Use it!

God will never get on to you for not using something He never put in your hand; but God *will* hold you responsible to use whatever it is He gave you to offer to others.

This cheap little letter was small and inexpensive – made out of what John had available to him – which I find interesting – it was common, ordinary stuff.

But – as one author wrote – this letter shines like a bright star in the galaxy of the New Testament.ⁱⁱⁱ

John reaches the bottom of his sheet of papyrus paper and now makes an announcement.

I'm finished writing . . . in fact, the ink is still wet . . . but – notice *the last part of verse 12:*

I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy might be full (2 John 12b).

I hope to come to you – the verb John uses for *hope* lets us know that he's already made his decision but the plans aren't fully worked out yet.^{iv}

I love the fact that this old man was still making plans!

I don't know the exact arrival date; I'm not sure when I'm going to show up, but I've made the decision to come to you – notice and to *speak face to face* – stoma pros stoma – this

is a Greek idiom which would be translated, literally, mouth to mouth.

I want to speak to you, mouth to mouth.

Now when we hear that phrase mouth to mouth, we think somebody's dying and they need mouth to mouth resuscitation.

It's a Greek idiom or expression . . . our English expression to match it would be face to face, or nose to nose, or eye to eye.

Personally, the best expression that captures this idiom would be "heart to heart".

I don't just want to talk with you and your family sitting in your living room . . . with some ice tea and chocolate chip cookies if my prayers get answered . . . no, I just want to talk to you all, heart to heart.

And that kind of conversation will bring – notice – **joy to the fullest**.

In other words, being together with them and talking about subjects he had in mind, but hadn't mentioned in the letter, which no doubt could have included the great themes of the gospel and perhaps even John's personal vision of Heaven – we're not told – but we are told that this personal heart-to-heart fellowship will result in, you could expand this text to read – *in order that [y]our joy, having been filled completely full, might persist" . . . that it might linger on.*^v

You see, sometimes even a handwritten letter isn't capable of doing what personal contact can.

Now John ends his letter by sending yet another greeting – notice verse 13:

The children of your chosen sister greet you (2 John 13).

Again, we have every reason to take this text literally – John now sends greetings to her from her sister's children, nephews and nieces, whom John also knew.

It would be odd for the sister to not send her greetings, and you'll notice that the sister isn't sending greetings – only her children are . . . so if she represents a local church, then she's snubbing the local church to whom John is writing.

No, this metaphor becomes too strained . . . it's best to take this letter as written to a literal woman with literal children who is in need of a literal warning not to host literal false teachers who are planning to stay in her literal home . . . and she has a literal sister, evidently not there at the time, or perhaps not even alive at the time, but there are some literal nephews and nieces who are sending their greetings through John, back to their literal aunt.

Look over at **3rd John and verse 13:**

I had many things to write to you, but I am not willing to write them to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we will speak face to face (3 John 13-14).

Sound familiar?

John is writing a man named Gaius – and he names him at the beginning of the letter.

But here in Second John, in this personal note, he wisely leaves out this woman's name, no doubt to protect her identity given these days of growing hostility toward Christians, especially difficult days for a single mother.

Perhaps John is using discretion because she is either a widow now, or even perhaps that she's married to an unbeliever . . . and rumors could get started.

What we do know is that he's gotten word that false teachers are heading her way and since her home is known for hospitality to itinerate preachers, he wants to warn her and encourage her and her children in the faith.

Make sure they're preaching the right Jesus . . . and the right gospel.

With that we conclude our exposition of this bright star in the galaxy of the New Testament.

But before we set it aside, let me rehearse and emphasize several key principles we've learned along the way.

Let me give you seven of them . . . you didn't think I was finished?! I'll move quickly . . . we'll be finished by 1:00 o'clock.

First, this letter should teach us that:

1. The truth of God's word is intended to become a way of life.

Remember how John began – pounding away with the truth, the truth – *I love you all in the truth, I'm writing for the sake of the truth, I rejoice that you are walking in the truth.*

Christianity is a way of life.

How obvious is your Christianity to your clients . . . your classmates . . . your neighbors?

D.L. Moody used to say, the Bible should be bound in shoe leather . . . in other words, take it outdoors . . . put it into practice.

2. Exposure to truth does not guarantee the reception of truth.

John transparently speaks to the burden of this mother's heart when he writes in *verse 4* how glad he was to know that some of her children were walking in the truth – that is, they were believers. But some of her children weren't.

This was no doubt the throbbing desire of her heart – the prayer that was always on her lips . . . for all her children to be saved.

Maybe that is your prayer today, more than any other prayer.

3. Embracing the truth of Christ is never separated from demonstrating the love of Christ.

Look, we can fool ourselves and end up damaging our own testimony as well as the effectiveness of the church; John makes it clear in *verse 5* that to obey the commandments of God is to act in love toward one another.

And the command to *love one another* in *verse 5* is in the original context of the disciples . . . later, here, in the local church and even broader, toward those in the family of God.

To put it in the simplest terms possible, if there's someone in the body of Christ that you are acting toward in an unloving manner – either in front of them, or behind their back – you are not obeying the command of Christ.

You see, a church is not made better by having better climate control; or better coffee; or better programming; or better parking, or better music . . . or better sermons . . . a church is made better by better relationships.

Truth and love go hand in hand.

4. Even faithful believers are never free of spiritual danger.

John is writing a faithful, older woman . . . and telling *her* to watch out . . . steer clear of false teaching . . . be on your guard . . . you don't want to get tripped up and lose your fullest possible reward for following Christ all the way to the tape.

No matter how old you are in the Lord, you can never say, "I've got this thing down pat!" You are at that moment in the greatest peril.

Take heed while you're your standing, lest you fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Nobody has Christianity buttoned down, nailed down, mastered . . . you will never take your Bible and put it on a shelf and say, "Yea, I got that!"

John is writing to a faithful woman with a testimony of godliness and to some of her children who are known for walking in the truth . . . and he writes, be careful . . . watch out.

With that in mind . . .

5. Don't assume that everyone speaking in the name of Christ belongs to Christ.

They're coming to your home, John warns her . . . keep your eyes open, your door closed, your wallet shut and make sure you evaluate every teacher in light of this teaching – *verse 10 – if they come to you and don't bring this teaching*, don't let them get past the front porch.

As we've learned through this letter, the devil has his own agenda . . . and his own false systems . . . he has his global workers spread around the world on a passionate disciple making mission.

And using Biblical terminology and even the name of Jesus has opened more doors for the devil than any other method.

6. The older you grow in Christ, the less you need in order to experience joy.

There's an old African proverb I came across recently . . . haste, haste, but no blessing.

Haste . . . haste . . . and in our haste, and we rush past the blessings of life.

Oh listen, there was time when John was in a hurry . . . he wanted immediate results . . .

remember that village that wouldn't believe – John asked the Lord to destroy them all – I mean, they had their one and only chance . . . they missed it and it's time to move on.

He even asked the Lord on one occasion for his throne to be right next to the throne of Jesus in the coming Kingdom.

That would be so exciting . . . one for me and one for my brother James – on either side of you, Lord, in that glorious coming kingdom. Let's make it happen, Lord! That would bring me incredible joy!

Not now . . . here's what I want, John writes . . . I want to come to your home for a visit.

My joy will be filled up and lingering . . . no gimmicks . . . no glory . . . no fanfare – just your family and me, talking heart to heart.

Finally, one more principle . . . and this brings us full circle:

7. No one in the family of God is too insignificant to protect and encourage.

How encouraged this mother would have been to read – and re-read John's words of warning and care and hope.

John is the renowned Apostle . . . he's the great author who penned the great gospel account, who wrote the description of Heaven as he was shown it along with the coming future for us all . . . what are you going to do now, John?

I'm going to write a little letter . . . all I've got is cheap ink and paper, but I know a mother and her children could use a word or two of encouragement.

What a model for us. Get in touch! Send a private message . . . send an email . . . write a letter and mail it . . . there's this thing called an envelope . . . and stamps . . . there's this place

called a Post Office . . . where happy people are at work . . . I made that part up.

If you had one more day to live, who would you contact? Who would you call? Who would you visit? The real question is, what are you waiting for?

Maybe today, you've got a letter to write, or a phone call to make.

Many years ago, a middle-aged pastor and author by the name of William Stidger was reflecting on his gratitude for a teacher he had in his younger days who had sparked a love for the written word that had helped prepare him for his future vocation in ministry and writing. He realized that he'd never thanked her for the way she had touched his life. He found her contact information and sat down and wrote her a letter of thanks.

Several days later he received a reply; written in shaky scrawl, it read:

My Dear Willie, I am now an old lady in my 80's, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely and seemingly like the last leaf of fall left behind. You will be interested to know, Willie that I taught school for 50 years and, in all that time, yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it [brought joy] to my old heart as nothing has cheered me in many years.^{vi}

No one is too insignificant . . . and no act is too small . . . to demonstrate the love of Christ and reach out to protect . . . and encourage . . . and support . . . and thank . . . as we walk together in the truth of Jesus Christ.

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i "A Penny Saved," Atlanta Journal Constitution (8-22-04)

ii Comments on paper and ink adapted from: D. Edmond Hiebert, The Epistles of John (BJU Press, 1991), p. 312; Herschel H. Hobbs, The Epistles of John (Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 160; Kenneth S. Wuest, Word Studies in the Greek Text: II Peter, I, II, III John and Jude (Erdmans, 1954), p. 209; Online sources: The History of Pens; Papyrus Paper; The History of Ink, etc.

iii Hobbs, p. 160

iv Hiebert, p. 312

v Translation by Wuest, p. 209

vi Brett & Kate McKay, "The Spiritual Disciplines: Gratitude," ArtofManliness.Com (5-28-18)