

February 5, 2023

10. The Ties that Bind — 1 John 4:7–21; Ruth 4:13–22, NRSV

Research shows if you say a word quickly over and over for thirty seconds, it tends to lose its meaning.¹ Try it with any word. Or read 1 John 4:7–21 aloud. This passage is like a Celtic knot, turning in and around itself with repetition.

Surely, we don't want our eyes to glaze over when reading the Bible. So what's with all the love? We get a glimpse of the answer to this question in the challenges among those receiving this letter: "Anyone who hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness" (1 John 2:11).

It's easy to walk around thinking there ought to be an exception clause when it comes to loving so-and-so. After one recent conflict, I wrote in my journal, "I've done what's reasonable. I've apologized for my part." But God tells us that the answer is always self-sacrificing *agape* love. The repetition isn't meant to numb. Instead, the right answer—self-sacrificing *agape* love—is repeated to close every single loophole. That means no matter how right I am, when I'm not acting in love, I'm in the dark.

The good news is that we aren't exceptions either. God's *agape* love toward you and me has no loopholes. We see this in the very first word of 1 John 4: we are beloved. As it says later, "We love because he first loved us" (v. 19).

I'm reminded of the mystic Julian of Norwich, who pondered the meaning of her visions for 15 years until God revealed, "Love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For Love."²

Stop for three minutes and rest in God, who calls you beloved.

- Can you pray for the people you find hardest to love? Ask God if there is some way you might demonstrate love to them.

—Susan Fish
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¹. Akihiko Masuda, S. C. Hayes, C. F. Sackett, and M. P. Twohig, "Cognitive Defusion and Self-Relevant Negative Thoughts: Examining the Impact of a Ninety-Year-Old Technique." *Psychology Faculty Publications* (2004): 81.

². Cited by Kerrie Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich* (Liturgical Press, 2001): 46.



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Resources for this session

Salt & Light Videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. **Rodger Schell**, the pastor of Deep Run West Mennonite Church, in Perkasie, Pennsylvania, is the presenter for unit 3. The videos are closed-captioned, free, and available on [**MennoMedia's YouTube channel**](#).

Editor's note: The Daily Bible Readings for January and February that are used in our *Rejoice!* devotional guide have been misplaced. For example, the corresponding readings for January 15–22 are found in the January 23–29 devotionals. We apologize for this error.