

# Celebrate God's Love

## 1 John 3

(All passages from ESV unless otherwise noted)

**Opening Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for celebrations. Thank You for the gifts of love and joy and peace. Thank You for the times I can share these with others. Amen.

Celebrations! We all love them — birthdays, confirmation day, weddings, a new job, retirement. A funeral is a celebration for the life on earth God gave to His child and especially for the life that He grants His children in heaven.

What's been your favorite celebration? Why? \_\_\_\_\_ **Answers will vary.**

Sometimes we forget to celebrate the everyday. Blessings, once received and celebrated, are sometimes forgotten — or no longer seen as special.

How many things to celebrate can you find in **I John 3:1–3**? \_\_\_\_\_ *<sup>1</sup>See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup>Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. **Answers: God's love, being God's child, being called God's child, hope for the future, the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ, being forgiven for now and everlasting life, sanctification***

With whom do you celebrate? Why? \_\_\_\_\_ **Answers will vary.**

Read **1 John 3:4–6**. *<sup>4</sup>Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup>You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup>No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.*

For whom would you *not* give a party? A felon? A child abuser? Your neighbor's gay child? The gossip who maligned you or others? The smelly, homeless person? The know-it-all? The man who beat your friend? The “squeaky-wheel” at work who gets the promotion you should have? The drunk who's been to AA more times than you can count? Your ex-best friend who dropped you? Who else? \_\_\_\_\_ **Answers will vary.**

With whom would you have the hardest time celebrating — or who would you not want to forgive? Why? \_\_\_\_\_ **Answers will vary.**

In **1 John 3:7–10**, what is the difference between the one who fails to do right and the one who fails to love? \_\_\_\_\_ *<sup>7</sup>Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. <sup>8</sup>Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. <sup>9</sup>No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. <sup>10</sup>By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

**None (verses 9 and 10)**

What else does God say about the differences? \_\_\_\_\_

**Romans 15:1–7** \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>1</sup> *We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. <sup>3</sup> For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” <sup>4</sup> For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup> May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. **The strong have an obligation to bear with the weak. We need to build up one another. Live in harmony and accord with Christ. Welcome one another for the glory of God.***

**Hebrews 13:1** \_\_\_\_\_ (NIV) <sup>1</sup> *Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.*

With whom did Jesus celebrate? What was the reaction of the local leaders? \* \_\_\_\_\_ **Have participants answer from memory OR, IF TIME, look up the following passages:**

**Matthew 21:28–31** <sup>28</sup> *“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today. <sup>29</sup> And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup> And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. <sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.*

**Luke 5:29–31** <sup>29</sup> *And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. <sup>30</sup> And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” <sup>31</sup> And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*

**Luke 7:31–35** <sup>3</sup> *“To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? <sup>32</sup> They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’ <sup>33</sup> For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ <sup>34</sup> The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ <sup>35</sup> Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”*

**Luke 18: 9–14 (parable of tax collector and Pharisee)** <sup>9</sup> *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

**Matthew 23: 1–11** <sup>1</sup> *Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, <sup>3</sup> so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. <sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. <sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to*

be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, <sup>6</sup> and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues <sup>7</sup> and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. <sup>8</sup> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. <sup>11</sup> The greatest among you shall be your servant.

Look at **1 John 3:11–15**. <sup>11</sup> For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. <sup>12</sup> We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. <sup>13</sup> Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Why was Cain's offering evil? \_\_\_\_\_ Is the offering of a Christian who passes judgment on the alcoholic, abuser, and gossip different from Cain's? \_\_\_\_\_ Answers will vary. Hebrews 11:4a says *4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.* Matthew 23:35 says that Abel was "righteous." Since Cain's offering was not accepted, it follows that Cain's faith was not with God, and he was considered unrighteous. From verses 11–15 we are shown that if we do not love, we are like Cain.

When is it right to judge? \_\_\_\_\_ Why don't the "unlovable" change? \_\_\_\_\_ How can you love them without agreeing with their lifestyle or point of view? \_\_\_\_\_ How do you practice "hate the sin, but love the sinner"? \_\_\_\_\_

**1 Corinthians 5:12–13** <sup>12</sup> What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? <sup>13</sup> God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you." *NIV* <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? <sup>13</sup> God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." *-ESV* We are not to judge those outside the church, but are to judge those inside the church who live and practice evil, and to remove them from the fellowship of believers.

**James 1:19–27** <sup>19</sup> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. <sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. Getting angry and telling someone to change, yelling at them, or asking why they don't change doesn't change anything and does not "produce the righteousness of God." If we hear that God is love and that love is how we show we are of God and do not practice loving others, it does not glorify God. We are then a hearer and not a doer. Sometimes we in the church forget to love the unlovable and want them to change without having to do something that will show God's love to them.

Read **1 John 3:16–18**. <sup>16</sup> *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.* <sup>17</sup> *But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?* <sup>18</sup> *Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

Compare **verse 16** with **John 3:16**. <sup>16</sup> *“For God so loved the world,<sup>[e]</sup> that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* **Thoughts will vary.**

How do you celebrate **verse 18**? **Answers will vary.** Possible answers: being mission minded; going on a mission trip; finding a mission in my neighborhood; practicing forgiveness — especially underserved forgiveness; studying the Word on the passages about love; determine to find one person each day on whom you can shower a blessing; smile at everyone you meet;

How can we celebrate when sin and sorrow visit members of our own family or body?

Check the following:

**I Peter 4:12–16** <sup>12</sup> *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* <sup>13</sup> *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* <sup>14</sup> *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory<sup>[b]</sup> and of God rests upon you.* <sup>15</sup> *But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.* <sup>16</sup> *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.* **Remember that trials will come. Rejoice that you are still loved and can love in the midst of suffering.**

**Proverbs 3:5–6** <sup>5</sup> *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.* <sup>6</sup> *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

**Jeremiah 29:11–13** <sup>11</sup> *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare<sup>[a]</sup> and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* <sup>12</sup> *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.* <sup>13</sup> *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*

**I Peter 5:6–7** <sup>6</sup> *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,* <sup>7</sup> *casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

**James 1:12–19** <sup>12</sup> *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.* <sup>13</sup> *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* <sup>14</sup> *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.* <sup>15</sup> *Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

<sup>16</sup> *Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.* <sup>17</sup> *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.* <sup>18</sup> *Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

<sup>19</sup> *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;* **Sometimes we need to be tested to grow, but we are never tempted by God. Sometimes we tempt ourselves into sin by our inaction and our failure to love. If we are His firstfruits, our first fruit should be to love. We should pray to hear the cries for help — even from those not seeming to want it — rather than be angry with them.**

We have reason to celebrate in all times and in all places. When tempted to take time to condemn rather than celebrate loving others, what should be my first course of action? \_\_\_\_\_ What other things can I do? \_\_\_\_\_ **Answers will vary.**



What more should I or shouldn't I do? \_\_\_\_\_ **Let participants answer before looking up 1 Corinthians 13. 1 Corinthians 13:1–7** *<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. <sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice at wrong-doing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

When am I a noisy gong? When do I forget my blessings? \_\_\_\_\_ **Answers will vary.**

I am a forgiven child of the King! How can I share that joy with others? \_\_\_\_\_ **Study 1 Corinthians 4:14–21 (especially verse 21):** *<sup>14</sup>I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup>For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>16</sup>I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup>That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup>Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup>But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup>For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. <sup>21</sup>What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?* **Imitate Christ. Imitate someone who is God's leader and teacher. Listen to those sent to teach us. Don't think yourself better than others. Rely on God's power. Resist the temptation to go forward with the rod, but rather go forth with a spirit of gentleness.**

Count your blessings listed in **1 John 3:19–24** *<sup>19</sup>By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; <sup>20</sup>for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup>Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; <sup>22</sup>and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup>And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup>Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.* **I am a child of Truth. I can have peace of heart, even as a sinner, because God knows me and loves me and forgives me. I can be confident to love because I am forgiven. In faith, I believe His Son, Jesus Christ, and please Him as I do what He commands. God lives in me. God's love lives in me. I have the Holy Spirit with me always.**

We Christians are mightily blessed. What are other blessings we can celebrate? See **1 Corinthians 2:10–16.** *<sup>10</sup>these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup>For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. <sup>13</sup>And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. <sup>14</sup>The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. <sup>15</sup>The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. <sup>16</sup>“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?”* **But we have the mind of Christ. Blessings: God reveals His will through His Spirit. I can talk about spiritual things with others. I can understand that those not of the Spirit do not understand as I understand. I have the mind of Christ — the mind and heart of love!**

**Philippians 2:1–11** <sup>1</sup>So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **I can leave selfishness and conceit behind. I can look at even the unlovable as God’s creature. I can reach out to others with the gifts God’s given me. I can praise my Lord, Jesus Christ, and imitate Him.**

**Closing:** Pray **Ephesians 3:14–21** and/or sing “Savior, Thy Dying Love” (TLH #403; LW #374) or “Holy Spirit, Light Divine” (LSB #496; LW #166; TLH #234). Note: latter = “Holy Ghost, with Light Divine”

**Ephesians 3:14-21** <sup>14</sup>For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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Author Sheila Lutz is the newly elected LWML Central Illinois District President and the Christian Living Editor of the *Quarterly*. Sheila has been gifted by the Lord with the ability to sing, to dance, and to write and is thankful to Him for the opportunities she has been given to use and share these gifts.