

**STICKING TOGETHER**  
... intelligently  
**Philippians 1:3-11 Part 1 / 2**  
**WEFC August 24, 2008**

Churches have become labeled for trumpeting high standards and delivering low results.

This is most noted when LOVE is required.

Experience has taught us the tough lesson that LOVE, as a word, is over-used, in reality under-practiced, and has become muddled in that it has been defined, redefined, and paraphrased so much so that we are not quite certain of what we are talking.

Yet, even the hardest of hearts will agree that LOVE is a great thing.

Imagine walking into this room and thinking, "No one cares about me ... no one."

A young mother was eager to hear about her little boy's first experience in Sunday School. As they drove home from church she inquired, "So what did you think about Sunday School?"

His reply, without thought, was, "I hate it!"

Disappointed, she asked, "Well why?"

"They put me in a room full of children, ALL BY MYSELF."

We as God's people cannot afford to allow people to come into contact with us and say, "I was in a room full of people, ALL BY MYSELF!"

Some of us will shy away from love, but everyone of us wants to know that we matter, that we are loved.

Loving people stretches everyone of us.

There was in a city overseas, a group of Christ-followers – a church – that were encouraged to LOVE. I suspect that they were quite like us ... and one person took them on ... writing to get them to try to LOVE a bit more.

The opening lines of this nudge are found in **Philippians 1:3-11**.

We will selectively pick up a few things and then attempt to be more detailed in the closing lines.

If we take a step back to get the flavor of these paragraphs we come to see that ...

*Key Thought:*

**As we mingle with people God must rise to the top.**

Coming through this writer's pen is the attitude that everything is God-saturated.

We get the idea that if things are going to run semi-smoothly between others and us, it is going to take more than just us. God will need to be in the mix.

Take a look at the statements made here.

**1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you.**

1:6 ... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

1:7 ... all of you share in God's grace with me

1:8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

1:11 ... to the glory and praise of God.

As we put these statements together we can conclude that ...

**As we mingle with people God must rise to the top.**

... in order for us to ...

## 1. Accurately understand and relate to people

People are not just people.

As this writer thought of the people who made up the church in Philippi, God kept popping up here, there and everywhere.

This is so because when we trust Christ, that colors every other item in our lives, without exception.

This creates a new default in us ... a new way of understanding people.

When we talk about people, we talk about them in light of Christ's supremacy in our lives.

This translates into realizing that ...

**- None of us are superior.**

The ground on which we all stand is level and no one of us has the advantage over the other, regardless of our rank, position, age, tenure or nationality.

**- We are all "grace recipients".**

It means that ...

**- God is our leader.**

... that **unless God takes note of what we did and approves it, it is not worth expending our energy for.**

*Application:*

Whatever we face with one another, we face with God in the picture.

Anytime we zero in on each other we need to be conscious that Jesus Christ needs to be brought into the picture. His influencing presence is not to be minimized.

*Transition:*

But for relationships to solidify we will need to do more than try to figure each other out. That does nothing to help in relationships.

While God knows everything about all of us, the people around us do not what is going on in our minds.

They do not know what we are thinking about them.

To make certain that we do not lose site of what God wants to occur among us, Paul went on to write ...

... **Philippians 1:8**

**God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

**As we mingle with people God must rise to the top.**

... for ...

**2. Only if we honestly let people know, do they know what God already knows**

It would seem that daily we are trying to figure each other out.

We are trying to determine whether what we did is meet with approval, ambivalence, anger ...

As I preach I am looking at you to see where you are at.

I do not know and unless you let me know, the best I can do is guess.

Besides our poor mind-reading capabilities, people are not always truthful.

Paul wanted to remove doubt in the peoples' minds. Paul knew that God knew that he loved these people.

**But now he tells them that HE, HIMSELF LOVES THEM ... simply ... clearly.**

What Paul had said was an honest statement. God could vouch for it.

This is not for show; neither is it a courtesy.

The people knew that these were not merely words, because they had been on the receiving end of this man's genuine, godly and pure love.

Telling people that we love and appreciate them, we would think, should be one of the easiest and most delightful things to do.

But for many of us, we get tongue-tied ... and we lose our voice when we need it most.

Try to recall the last time that you told a person, other than your family members, that you appreciated them, loved them (in purity) and were concerned for them.

For most of us the last time was far to long ago.

Knowing where most of us are at, we are drawn out ... to learn what love is and to express it.

*Application:*

If we are going to be a church that even sort of has it together we are going to need to actually love each other and let each other know ... so that we minimize misunderstandings and remove doubt.

That will stretch many of us.

What we are talking about here is not being nice, not just giving money, but giving our time, our attention, our hearts.

A nephew tells of his uncle Greg had cerebral palsy, and he was a quadriplegic. He was an incredible inspiration to me. He was one of those guys who had a golden attitude, and he accepted his lot in life and ministered to a whole lot of people in his own way. He was able to get around quite well with an electric wheelchair, but his speech was difficult to understand.

A few years ago he attended a handi-camp week at Country Lake Christian retreat. One of our church members, John, served as a volunteer that week, and he was assigned to my uncle Greg.

That meant that for four solid days, 24 hours a day, he did everything for my uncle Greg. John fed him every bite. He gave him every drink. He slept on a concrete floor on an air mattress beside Uncle Greg's bed. He took him to the bathroom, cleaned him up. He did everything for four days for Greg. John even got some of his friends together and took my uncle Greg out on the lake in a floatation device. He swam for the very first time in his life.

They have this tradition at camp that, on the very last day of camp, they get the servant volunteer up there next to the camper. They talk all about the camper, and they recap all the different things that they've done. Then they ask the campers one question:

"What was your favorite thing of the week?"

The campers always say the same thing—swimming.

The staff was a little concerned for Uncle Greg that they wouldn't be able to understand what he had to say because of his speech. So John got up there, with Uncle Greg in his wheelchair, and he talked all about the different things that Greg had done that week.

He said, "We've nicknamed him 'The Fish' because he loves to swim so much."

He said, "Okay, Greg. It's your turn now."

Then he turned to Greg and asked, "What was your favorite part of the entire week?"

Everybody could understand my Uncle Greg, when he raised his hand, pointed back at John, and said, "You."

John said, "Oh, there had to be something else. Was it the swimming? Was it the snack time?"

Greg raised his hand up again and simply said, "You."

Dave Stone, in his sermon "If Jesus Lived in My Neighborhood,"

God church can stand more of the reputation of "What was your favorite part of the entire week?" ... and hearing the answer being, "You."

*Transition:*

If we are uncomfortable and struggle with this love thing (not a romantic love) ...

If putting love practically to work with others makes us uneasy, the writer prays ... so that we might begin to enjoy the richness of life offered to us in Christ Jesus.

He again reminds us that ...

**As we mingle with people God rises to the top.**

This is how it works ... and work it is.

Permit me to read the prayer from the English Standard Version, one of the newest and excellent versions ...

**And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

In a few short lines of a prayer we begin to get a handle on a love that is worth pursuing because it has substance to it, makes sense, pushes us beyond the average, and leads to an amazing climax.

This is what makes “church” worthwhile.

Here we begin to see why love works, why it is important, why it is singled out.

This is what we want for WEFC ... what we want people to sense and we ourselves experience.

We want to be known as more than “an operation”; a place where “good programs” are offered; a church involved in the community.

We want to be people who know what correctly loving one another is about.

**As we mingle with people, God rises to the top.**

It’s nice to talk about love, but how do we change and become “love people”?

### **3. Pointed prayer activates love**

There is a direct link between PRAYER and LOVE.

Prayer becomes one of the most PRACTICAL STEPS that we can take for LOVE to become a greater reality among us.

Dig a bit into this excellent and informative prayer.

**It isn’t that there isn’t love, it is that there is so much more that love offers.**

Love was not absent back in Philippi, and neither is it absent here at WEFC.

There is concrete evidence of genuine, godly love in this church family, but there is plenty of room for more.

**The point is not just LOVE, but it’s super-abundance.**

**“abounding” ... MORE THAN ENOUGH, OVERFLOWING, EXTREMELY RICH**

Jesus’ death on the Cross **redefined LOVE.**

At the Cross we have Jesus stick out his neck to a skeptical and cynical world saying, “What I have just done is an act of my personal and sustained love for you.”

This is **limitless love.**

Jesus went public with His offer ... He said, "YOU" ... to convincingly show us His love was not an artifact, not a museum relic, but a contemporary, continuous and inexhaustible offer.

Our love is drawn out of Christ's love, and inexhaustible source.

Since there is more than we will ever need or will be able to use, do not skimp on loving.

Let us not be caught rationing that of which we have an endless supply.

Why would we every think of being stingy with that which pours out over the top continuously?

Love is a bottomless well that has never run dry. No matter how much love we pump out of the well the level of love is never depleted.

It keeps flowing, day and night. ... so that after decades of experiencing and giving out love, we find that at the end of our assigned days, the well of love seems to be fuller than when we started to use it.

The one thing that never makes sense to us - God's people - and our community which observes us, is when we turn off the taps on God's love.

They know it, we know it, the press knows it ... We ALL know that those taps were never meant to be shut. They are designed to carry the greatest load possible and still out-produce the demand.

The tap of God's love has more than enough.

But as you get in with this part of God's family at WEFC you may be a bit hesitant of this "love" thing.

Therefore, God, when He works with love, has wisely assigned it two chaperones ... to keep it from blowing it.

On each adventure that **God's love** takes it **never travels alone**, so that it would not get carried away by doing something that it would later regret.

### **Love's is chaperoned by the intelligentsia.**

Love is often accused of not thinking, of getting caught up in the emotion of the moment, making unrealistic promises and then having to live with the consequences of, at times, one's stupidity.

God arranged that love be accompanied by ...

- **KNOWLEDGE**

- **DISCERNMENT**

Knowledge is having the information on the players and circumstances to which our attention is directed.

For us in the family of God, our information circle is generally filled with more players than the average person. We add to our mix God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and also angels, a devil and demons.

Another piece of our information comes to us in black and white, God's superlative book – the Bible.

But knowledge is more than possessing these connections, it is being aware of them, having them stored so that when the need arises, they can be recalled and put to use.

- **KNOWLEDGE ... accessible and useable information**

Discernment is Knowledge's chaperone partner.

DISCERNMENT goes through the files that KNOWLEDGE has stored, drawing out the pertinent information and prioritizing so that a decision can be made.

Discernment is wisely choosing what information and which people will most influence us our decision.

- **DISCERNMENT ... prioritizing information prior to making a decision**

Scripturally, LOVE is anything but blind.

It has emotion, but is much more than just emotion.

It is intelligent, informed, and thoughtful, creative.

Love is not dumb or ridiculous. It is deliberate and purposeful because it is chaperoned by KNOWLEDGE and DISCERNMENT.

When Michigan residents Christine Bouwkamp and Kyle Kramer got married in the spring of 2007, they held a wedding reception that was anything but traditional. Instead of hosting a formal dinner, they held a simple reception at their church where guests were invited to help distribute food to people in need.

In the weeks leading up to their wedding, Christine and Kyle had decided they wanted to begin their marriage with an act of service to Christ. With that goal in mind, they figured out how much money they would have spent on a more extravagant reception and instead used that money to purchase five thousand pounds of food for those in need.

The week of the wedding, the couple spread the word that a truck with free food would be at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship.

Immediately after they exchanged their vows, Bouwkamp and Kramer put on aprons marked "Bride" and "Groom" and joined their wedding guests in distributing food to 100 neighborhood families.

When asked about the charitable act, the happy couple simply said they wanted to "bless God for blessing us with each other."

Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky, and Brian Lowery, managing editor, PreachingToday.com; source: Anne Cetas, "Serving Together," Our Daily Bread (June 2008)

*Transition:*

Love works intelligently.

It is clear in where it is going. It does not just settle for anything.

It is not satisfied with mediocrity, nor does it live by the "anything well do" motto.

It is put this way ...

**And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

**Love aims at being a class act ... by ...**

When LOVE is chaperoned by KNOWLEDGE and DISCERNMENT, we can know how things are going to work out in the end. In one sense, there will be no surprises.

Here is how it plays out.

... so that you may approve what is excellent ...

- **Currently making the best choice ... one that fits with the evidence**

Love needs to respond to situations now. Tomorrow is too late.

So when LOVE thoughtfully sifts through the gathered facts and prioritizes them, it does NOT look at all the evidence and say, "I know what I should do, **but I don't want to do it.**"

Rather, it gives its stamp of approval to that which is the best plan of action in keeping with all of the pertinent information ... and then DOES it.

This often means that we ...

- do **not** do what we may prefer to do
- will often go against the majority's preferred actions
- appear to be paying more than others, a ridiculous and excessive route, when simpler and more convenient ones are available
- may be rather uncomfortable in what we are doing

Since we, Christ-followers, have a different grid, a different checklist, we will often come to conclusions that are different from the majority of people around us.

But the Church is to be known for this "different" approach because we give weight to some extra data.

We need to be the place of not second chances, but 349<sup>th</sup> chance.

Love thinks ... and upon good information, moves into action ... it makes the BEST choice, even if that means presently costing more, requiring more time, appears to put us at a disadvantage.

It looks for EXCELLENCE ... not just getting the job done, but done well and with sincerity of heart.

It resists the present temptation to torpedo the evidence, the hard facts.

*Transition:*

At the same time LOVE thinks beyond today. It looks around the corner and over the hill of time to see how things will play out at the finish line.

... **be pure and blameless for the day of Christ**

- **Anticipates and prepares for inevitable inspection confidently**

We are not certain about the history of the word PURE, but it possibly comes from two words, one pointing to "the warmth and light of the sun", the other "to judge".

The idea is something like this: We can imagine ourselves doing laundry, at least some of us can ... To make sure that a good job was done, we take the piece of clothing out into the sun for an inspection, so that we have good light to see if the clothing is clean or if a stain still is on it.

Purity is critical or high-level examination in full light.

No hanky-panky; no turning a blind eye; no shortcuts.

LOVE knows that an inspection day is coming, "**the day of Christ**".

We make certain that there are no skeletons in our closet the best thing to do is keep it clean today.

LOVE works to keep our closet without embarrassment when in the brilliant light of Christ's presence, our character is examined.

Further, we work at being **blameless** – not having tripped up someone else through our contact with them.

LOVE is not a theory. It is not an abstract. It is so down to earth, yet does not become dirty.

As we LOVE we realize that we are responsible for who we are and what we do to others.

LOVE is a class act that thinks to the future, making adjustments so that it will not be embarrassed or disqualified.

There was once an old stone monastery tucked away in the middle of a picturesque forest. For many years people would make the significant detour required to seek out this monastery. The peaceful spirit of the place was healing for the soul.

In recent years however fewer and fewer people were making their way to the monastery. The monks had grown jealous and petty in their relationships with one another, and the animosity was felt by those who visited.

The Abbot of the monastery was distressed by what was happening, and poured out his heart to his good friend Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a wise old Jewish rabbi. Having heard the Abbot's tale of woe he asked if he could offer a suggestion. "Please do" responded the Abbot. "Anything you can offer."

Jeremiah said that he had received a vision, an important vision, and the vision was this: the messiah was among the ranks of the monks.

The Abbot was flabbergasted. One among his own was the Messiah! Who could it be? He knew it wasn't himself, but who? He raced back to the monastery and shared his exciting news with his fellow monks.

The monks grew silent as they looked into each other's faces. Was this one the Messiah?

From that day on the mood in the monastery changed. Joseph and Ivan started talking again, neither wanting to be guilty of slighting the Messiah.

Pierre and Naibu left behind their frosty anger and sought out each other's forgiveness. The monks began serving each other, looking out for opportunities to assist, seeking healing and forgiveness where offence had been given.

As one traveler, then another, found their way to the monastery word soon spread about the remarkable spirit of the place. People once again took the journey to the monastery and found themselves renewed and transformed.

All because those monks knew the Messiah was among them.

The cleaner our record in the end, the better. Purity, moral purity, following through with what is right, is nothing to be scoffed at.

In the end it is a winner.

*Transition:*

Just in case we may get the wrong idea of LOVE, that in living as God's Word has described up to this point, we may be missing out ... the next line puts the finishing touches on this prayer.

**... filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

Love is a class act ...

- **coming through with incredibly rich and satisfying results**

As we follow through with LOVE working in its signature way in our lives with its chaperones of KNOWLEDGE and DISCERNMENT, we find that life comes together for us.

We get in on the **“fruit of righteousness”**, the results of what happens when we listen to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as we are informed in God’s Word.

As we listen to God, God works.

He does His unique works in our lives, our neighbors ... so that people look at us and say, “That’s different! ... Why or how did you do that?”

... and we have the opportunity to tell them so that God is glorified and praised.

In 1972, a young Egyptian businessman named Farahat lost an \$11,000 watch. He was stunned when a garbage man dressed in filthy rags found it and returned it to him. Farahat asked him why he didn't just keep the watch.

The garbage man said, "My Christ told me to be honest until death."

Farahat later told a reporter: "I didn't know Christ at the time, but I told [the garbage man] that I saw Christ in him. I told [him], 'Because of what you have done and your great example, I will worship the Christ you are worshipping.'"

Farahat studied the Bible and grew in his faith. Two years later he visited the garbage man's village outside Cairo, where between 15,000 and 30,000 people were living in poverty and squalor.

There was no electricity or running water. Alcohol, drugs, and gambling were pervasive. Men, women, and children sifted through huge mountains of garbage, looking for something of value that could be sold for cash or traded for food.

Farahat found himself reflecting on the words of Jesus: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He also remembered the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:13: "We have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things."

It was soon thereafter that Farahat and his wife began ministering to people's spiritual and material needs. They preached the gospel throughout Egypt, and thousands of people turned to Christ.

In 1978, Farahat was ordained by the Coptic Orthodox Church .... Now, about 10,000 believers meet in a large cave outside the garbage village. It is the largest church of believers in the Middle East.

In May of 2005, a day of prayer was held for Muslims to turn to Christ. More than 20,000 Arab Christians gathered. The event was also broadcast on a Christian satellite TV network, where millions were watching.

All this, because one garbage man chose to humbly return a watch that would have made him the richest man in town.

Jerry DeLuca, Montreal West, Canada; source: Joel C. Rosenberg, Epicenter, Tyndale House Publishers (2006), p. 206

**... in conclusion ...**

The people at Philippi were virtually identical in character to the people at Winnipeg Evangelical Free ... or that's one way to see it.

There were disagreements, rubs, hurts, misunderstandings ... that is a part of being a Christ-follower.

But if we stop there, we are dead.

... and that is why we have these paragraphs in God's Word.

*Key Thought:*

**As we mingle with people God must rise to the top.**

*... for this to actually happen ...*

**- We are a church ... a people under God's authority and word.**

We make room for God anywhere, anytime.

He influences how we handle all situations and people.

*... for this to actually happen ... what we have said before ...*

**- Love is needed most where it is least deserved**

The reason LOVE needs chaperones is because it at times lives in a pressure cooker ... where things are falling apart.

... and when there is no good reason to keep on extending favor and another chance to those who are blowing it deliberately and don't give a care ... requires LOVE.

The little girl asked the house guest, "Do you love dollies?"

"Yes, very much," was the reply.

"Then I'll show you mine." Thereupon she present one by one a whole family of dolls.

"And now tell me, 'Which is your favorite doll?'"

The young girl hesitated for a moment and then she said, "You're quite sure you like dollies, and will you please promise not to smile if I show you my favorite?"

The guest solemnly promised and the girl hurried from the room only to return momentarily with a tattered and dilapidated old doll. Its hair had come off; its nose was broken; its cheeks were scratched; an arm and a leg were missing.

The visitor responded, "Well, well ... and why do you like this one best?"

The girl replied, "I like her most because if I didn't love her, no one else would."

The popular, the up-front people get much attention. But there are many who do not.

In the church since we are all equal ... we are to make certain that no one is left out.

It's not always fun to love those who do not deserve love, but its right.

... and that is the stretch that God asks us to get tied into.

This is where we see God dividends poured into our lives.

*... for this to actually happen ...*

**- Love is useless if people don't know that you love them.  
Let's tell them.**

This may be a tough assignment. We need to do more than just demonstrate our love; we need to tell people to their face of our pure love for them in Christ.

... the words will confirm what they already may be experiencing, but they will be the icing on the cake.