

Rich Nathan
Sunday, October 30, 1994
Philippians Series
Philippians 1:9

How To Be A Good Lover

This morning I am going to be speaking out of the book of Philippians, a letter from Paul to one of the churches that he founded. For those of you who have been here, you know that the first church that the apostle Paul started on the continent of Europe was a church in Philippi, which is today in northern Greece. He was led there by supernatural guidance. The text we are going to be look at is found in Philippians 1 beginning in verse 9, “And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”

Paul is praying for the Philippian church and he says that the content of my prayer is about your love life. I am basically praying one thing for you church, that the folks in this church would be good lovers. I want your love life to improve and I want you to be the very best lovers you can possibly be. The content of Paul’s prayer concerned the Philippians ability to love.

What I want to ask you this morning, in beginning, is how is your love-life? Are you a good lover? Now you can’t pick up a popular magazine from *Readers’ Digest* to *Cosmopolitan* to *Redbook*, *Psychology Today* or *People* without having one of the major articles about how to be a better lover. They will give tips for women to be good lovers or how to work things so that you get the man in your life to become a better lover, how

to set things up, manipulate the situation so that you get the desired response of affection, so that your man will buy you something, or take you somewhere or do what you want him to do, like clean the garage.

Of course, men's magazines basically have the same manipulation in reverse. How you can be such an incredible lover that you would sweep your woman off her feet and she just melts in your arms like butter dripping down. She will do anything for you because you are such an extraordinary lover.

Now I realize that the way people talk about being good lovers mainly refers to being good in bed or being attractive sexually but I see a lot of books that go way beyond that and include in being a good lover, being a good communicator or being romantic, like *500 Ways to Say I Love You* and they have all these little tips in case you can't think of how to say "I love you."

By and large, I think that this whole quest for being a good lover is going in the right direction. It ends up giving the wrong counsel, but it is going in the right direction in that it conforms, basically, to the notion that love is a value to be sought after. The Bible teaches us that it is appropriate for us to want to be a better lover. Now, it doesn't stop with sex as the definition of being a good lover. It doesn't stop with romance as the definition of being a good lover. The Bible does teach us that it is right and healthy, in fact, that it is the thing that ought to occupy your prayer life that you and the people you know would become good lovers.

Last week I talked about prayer and I said that prayer springs out of that realization, that discovery, that here is where I am right now and up here is where I want to be, where I ought to be. Here is where we are right now as a family. We are not communicating well and we are fighting. Our kids are involved in certain things that we really don't like and we think are harmful to them and we don't have a good way of speaking to them. They don't listen to us. You watch too much television or you are spending beyond our means. We use credit cards too much; we are overweight. I need to share my faith more at work and more effectively with my friends. Here is where we are.

Now here is where I would like us to be as individuals and as a family. Here is where I think God wants us to be. Here is where we are as a church in terms of our care for the poor and the way we care about each other and our support for family life and our support for singles. Here is where we want to be.

I said that there are several things that people could do as they approach that incredible distance between where they are and where they want to be or where they are and where they think another person ought to be. One thing is that they can pretend that there is no distance, just bury their heads in sand. Deny the gap and say, I'm fine.

But the way of the Bible in dealing with this gap is to pray. Prayer fills that gap and it is in prayer that we connect our need with God's divine resource. Rather than get discouraged by seeing that you are not what you should be, rather than falling into

despair, rather than denying it, you could say, “Okay, I will make this thing a matter of prayer. You presented me with something and I didn’t know that that was true about me, but I can see that it is. In our interaction, you have confronted me and what you are saying about me is true, so I will make that a matter of prayer to fill in the gap between where I am at and where I need to be.”

Now Paul sees a gap in the Phillippian church and Paul would see the same gap in the Vineyard and in every other church in America. He says I am going to pray for you guys that the gap would be closed. Now what is the content of Paul’s prayer? Well, I would back it up by asking a more fundamental question. If you could pray for just one thing, knowing that your prayer would be the thing closest to the heart of God, if you were only allowed to pray for one thing, by way of closing a gap in your life or closing a gap in the church, closing a gap in the world, what would it be? I will give you a hint and say that it is one thing that everyone would need. Everyone has that gap and everyone would need to have the gap closed. What one thing would you pray for?

Maybe you would pray for food. Well, of course, some people are incredibly well fed. Look around you. Some of us are really well fed. We have more food in our house than we know what to do with. We have freezers out in the garage and we have pantries full of food. Maybe you would pray for clothing. Some of our closets are ready to explode on us. We have to force them closed. We even have walk-in closets now, closets that are big enough for us to do a whole aerobics routine in! Maybe you would pray for more

shoes. Look at the bottom of your closet. Certainly some people in the world need shoes, but most of us don't.

What is the one thing that everyone needs to do better at? If you prayed this prayer for every person in this room and every person on the planet, nobody could raise their hand and say, "I don't need that. The gap is closed in my life. I am already there." This prayer in Philippians 1 tells us that everyone on the planet needs to become a better lover and so what I am going to speak about today is how to be a good lover. I would suggest that ought to be the content of your prayers. If you took only two minutes in the morning to pray about one thing, it should be, "God make me a better lover. Make my children, my spouse, my friends be better lovers and make the people in the Vineyard Church better lovers." "How to be a Good Lover" is the title of today's talk. Let's pray.

Paul's prayer in Philippians 1 says, "This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more..." We are talking about how to be good lovers. The reason why the content of Paul's prayer for the Philippian church is about this issue of love is because Paul understands that love is the most valuable thing that one could have. This is something all good lovers recognize. There is nothing more valuable than love.

Flip over with me to 1 Corinthians 13. Almost all of you have heard this text even if you haven't actually read it in the Bible. You have probably heard it read in a wedding ceremony at some point. It begins this way:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing; if I give away all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

In these three verses the apostle Paul is saying that there is nothing on earth more valuable than love. What he does is he lists four things that would be of supreme value to his audience and he says love is more valuable than any of these things. He says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or clanging cymbal.” He may be referring to the controversy about speaking in tongues that was happening in the Corinthian church. They had mistaken the value of tongues and put it at the top of the list of valuable things. But when he talks about speaking in tongues and men and angels, I think the application would go beyond just the charismatic gift of tongues. He is also speaking about language and communication.

The Greeks in the ancient world said that there was one thing that distinguished men from animals and that was the ability to communicate, to speak to one another. He is saying that more valuable than the thing that separates us from the animals, our ability to communicate with others, is love.

The great guru who sits on top of the mountain where we make the trek on the top of the Himalayas or somewhere and say, “Oh great guru, explain God to me. Explain the

meaning of life to me. Explain why people suffer,” and they weave out some wonderfully wise answer, Paul says that person is nothing compared to the person who is a good lover.

Not even faith which saves us is more important than love. He says, “If I have a faith that could move mountains, but not have love, I am nothing,” because faith exists for the sake of love. Faith is the root from which love springs. The goal of faith is love. Faith is the beginning, but love is the end. In heaven, we are not going to be full of faith; we are going to be full of love. Now, we walk by faith; then we are going to walk by love. Even though much faith is important for Christianity right now, it is nothing compared to love.

Finally, even self-sacrifice, giving up our lives and all that we possess, throwing ourselves in the path of a moving car to save a child and giving up our life or a policeman who risks his life for the sake of rescuing somebody, a fireman who pulls a person out of a burning building, a hero in combat who throws his body on a hand grenade in order to save his fellow soldiers, if it is done for a reason other than love, because duty, patriotism, courage and all the incredibly great motives for sacrificial action, the person who gives up their life, even that person has not done something as valuable as a good lover. “If I give up all I possess and surrender my body to the flames, and have not love, I gain nothing.”

Paul is saying that if you take everything that is good and noble and right and worthy of praise, and you weigh it out in terms of its value compared to love – it is nothing. Good

lovers recognize the value of love. Good lovers understand that ultimately life is measured by this one standard, was I a good lover?

Let me give you a different kind of picture. You walk into a funeral home. People are crowded around. You notice that many of the people are crowded around in the funeral home are folks that you know. They are friends of yours. They are family members-your spouse, children, people you work with, parents. They are all people that you know. You walk in and around and say, my goodness these are all my friends and family, why are they at this funeral home? You press forward to the open coffin to see who it is that your friends and family have gathered for and as you walk forward and look down into the coffin, you are shocked to find that the body in that coffin is your body. Your friends and family have gathered for your funeral.

There is coming a day when you will have no more time to make anything different, to say anything else, to do anything more, when people will be gathered for your death. You will be in the box. And at that moment, folks who knew you will have an impression of your life, will form a judgment about how you lived and what you did with your years and your relationships and what will they measure you by? How would you like to be known?

Well, he had a lot of stuff in his closet.

He was an angry man.

What I remember about mom was that she was constantly dieting and she always disapproved of my relationships.

What I remember most about her was her house was always clean.

Dad worked a lot of hours. He was very smart,

They had hard bodies.

They had a big savings account.

She spent her money and her time on improving herself.

What one thing would you like to be known by? What one thing would you like God to know you by in the evaluation of your life?

Good lovers think about that funeral scene. They know that it is real, that this isn't just emotionalism and they back it up and they say, I am going to pursue the one thing that is supremely valuable in my life. I am going to ask God to make me a good lover right now. Want to put something on my grave? Say, "He loved well." "She loved us." If you can say that about someone who has died, you have said a lot.

Good lovers not only value love most, good lovers also overflow with love. Philippians 1:9 says, "And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more." This was one of Paul's favorite words: "abound." He couldn't think about the Christian life without talking about abounding, overflowing. We are to overflow with thanksgiving according to the apostle Paul. We are to overflow with praise to God. We are to

overflow in good deeds. Abound, overflow, Jesus said he came to give light and that more abundantly.

According to the Bible, the Christian life is not meant to be two ounces of water at the bottom of a cup. Looking in the reservoir and seeing that it is just about dry. The bed creek is parched and dry and cracked. There is just a little bit of water in the mud. The picture of the Christian life, according to the Bible is one of a fountain that is always overflowing. And the thing that is most important for good lovers to overflow in is love. Good lovers overflow in love. This is the difference between the Christian church, (or it ought to be the difference) and every other organization on earth.

We misunderstand what it is to flow out of us to the world all the time. Sometimes I think Christian churches think that we are to overflow with political pronouncements, and churches spend all of their time writing out political statements. I am not opposed to Christians thinking about politics any more than I am opposed to Christians thinking about science or playing baseball or anything else. Christians are going to be involved in every walk of life and I think to the extent that they are involved in everything, they ought to do their jobs and do them excellently. But the church is not distinguished from the world by our ability to speak about politics. Lots of organizations speak about politics. Senior citizen groups do. And teachers' unions do. The church is not distinguished from other organizations by the fact that we have better buildings. Generally, we don't. And we are not distinguished from the rest of the institutions around us by the fact that we can raise money better. Generally, we can't. What is

supposed to mark the Christian church is abounding love, love that goes beyond our borders, love that flows out.

That is very different from what you will get from non-Christians. I want to draw a difference here for you. Everyone on earth loves. That is part and parcel of being made in the image of God. It doesn't matter if you are a Christian. It doesn't matter if you are not a Christian. It doesn't matter if you are a total atheist. Everyone on earth loves because we are created in the image of God and God is a lover so we all love. But I believe that only the Christian can abound in love, have love that flows out towards people who are different than us, that are not part of our grouping, people who have different color of skin than us, people who have different educational levels than us, people who communicate different than us, come from different ethnic backgrounds. What I am talking about by abounding in love is that it has no limits in terms of who it attaches itself to.

Only Christian love, overflowing, abounding love, attaches itself to people regardless of who they are, where they come from, or what they have done. Nobody else, no other religion says love regardless, love in spite of, love and just keep loving. That is the unique mark of the Christian church. Love without respect of persons, or background, or deeds, or viewpoints. Do you understand that this abounding love is the thing that outside of Christianity everybody shakes their heads at and says, "This makes no sense!" Unlimited love, love regardless, makes no sense.

The great founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, in his classic book called, *Civilization and Its Discontents* argues against unlimited love, love regardless. He raises the objection saying that not all people are worthy of love. Some people are like your ex-spouse, who is going out of his way to hurt you, or deeply hurt you in the past. Some people are like your boss who regularly treats you unfairly. Some people are molesters and liars and regularly manipulate things in their own favor. There are many people who are not worthy of love that you and I have come across. What reason can you give, Christian, to say that love ought to overflow to them too?

My answer is that in fact, Christianity is quite helpless in the face of the argument that many people are unworthy of being loved. If we are pressed for a reason why we ought to love, to abound in love, why the church should grow in love toward everyone, everywhere, we would have to say there is no reason outside of love itself. Do you understand that if I could come up with a reason to justify love, that thing would be higher than love? If there is something outside of love that makes love valuable, that makes love meaningful, that makes love understandable, then that thing would have to be higher than love itself. There is nothing higher than love. Love is its own reason.

Love to everyone, everywhere, overflowing and spilling out over the top of ex-spouses and people who have abused you and people who have said mean things to you and people who judge you and bosses and friends and teachers and fathers and mothers and kids is the radically unique thing about Christianity. One of the things that we have decided to do in throwing the ball out farther for this church, in terms of living beyond

just us and people like us, is that we really want to love the least, the last, and the lost in Columbus and we want to make our love for the least absolutely practical and concrete.

You may know that we have been asking week by week on your way out to remember the poor by dropping a dollar in those plastic boxes in the back. We talked about what we wanted to do with the money and Danny came up with the idea, “How about if we bury people who cannot afford burials, especially for folks in town who have been the victims of violent crime?” We kicked it around and we came up with the idea that we wanted to do, initially, we are going to check this out and see if it works, but we want to take that money and provide decent burials for children in this city who have been victimized by crime, kids who were shot in drive-by shootings, and children who have been abused and die. Do you know that there are a lot of children in this city who die and their families don’t have enough money to do a funeral for them? There is no ability to remember them and no ability to assist the families in any way. Their bodies are just cremated and put in some potter’s field somewhere. That is not right.

The early church used to take the non-Christians who would die in the streets and provide them with burials. Well, Vineyard is going to do that in this town and we are going to start this month. We have already received money over the last month and a half to two months for the poor. What we take in we are going to give out. It is not going to end up here. We hope that we will have an opportunity, the pastors, to meet with families and to talk with them and pray with them, and express the abounding love of God.

You say, well how can I abound in love? How can I have this overflowing heart? My cup of love is like what you described before. It is an ounce at the bottom of a huge cup. I am burned out. I am tired. My love gives out.

Well, my love gives out too. There is a little bit of love in me and once I express it to somebody who is wounded or hurt, I am done. How can I be a good lover and abound in love? Especially when you have been emotionally battered, or when you are exhausted, or when you are tired?

Let me mention two things. I don't believe you can abound in love out of who you are. I don't believe you can overflow in love out of your natural goodness. We need to be refueled. To be good lovers, to overflow in love, we need to be refueled spiritually. We need to be refueled emotionally. We need to be refueled physically. You can't be a good lover if you are worn down and tired. If you are just physically drained or if you haven't been eating right, if you haven't been getting sleep, you get worn down. If you are emotionally spent, you don't have anything to give away. If you are lonely and have no friends, we need to be refueled physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Now I am not going to stand up here and tell you to have the right diet and get sleep and exercise, but you know what it takes to be physically okay and you need to do that to take care of yourself in order that you can overflow in love. And you also must take care of yourself emotionally to make sure that you have, at least, some relationships going that feed you emotionally, that support you and encourage you. And you need to be taken

care of spiritually. I don't believe that human beings have the capacity to love out of themselves. I believe we love to the extent that Jesus loves through us. We need to be filled up with Jesus. Let me read to you the words of an old hymn written by a man named Bernard of Clairveaux back in the Middle Ages. I think he expressed this business of refueling really well in the hymn, "Jesus Thou Joy of Loving Hearts." I believe this hymn came out of someone who was a good lover. He knew where the source of good loving came from.

Oh Jesus thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, thou light of men,
From fullest bliss that earth imparts
We turned unfilled to thee again

Our restless spirit years for thee,
Where o'er our changeful lot is cast.
Glad when thy gracious smile we see
Blessed when our faith can hold thee fast.

We taste thee, O thou living bread
And long to feast upon thee still.
We drink from thee the fountain head
And thirst, our souls from thee to fill.

You see, again, there is this gap in us, this inability, this incapacity to love. There is only one who can fill the gap and enable us to be good lovers and that is Jesus. So we must go to him continually and say, “Oh Lord, help me to love this person. Help me to love. Help me to be a good lover. Refuel me, God, and fill me with the love of Jesus.”

Not only do we need to be refueled, but then we need to release love. Love grows and multiplies as it is given away. There is this incredible paradox, this really odd reality in the Christian life that the more we give, the more we have. Jesus says in Luke 6, “Give and it will be given to you. A good measured, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. With the measure you use, it will be measured.” You want more love, give away what you have now and more will be added. In inconvenient situations with difficult people, give what you have.

Well, Paul goes on and says that not only does he want love to abound, but he wants it to overflow or abound in two specific qualities. He says in verse 9, “This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...” Good lovers not only value love chiefly above anything else, not only overflow with love, but good lovers are thoughtful, wise lovers. He links together love with knowledge and depth of insight.

I want to say something here. I don’t believe that you can have love without knowledge and depth of insight and I don’t believe you can have a real understanding of another person unless you love them. Now, here is the deal. We think we can see what another

person is really like, what their motives really are, how they operate and so on, even though we don't love them and that is just not true. We think we can actually bring correction to another person that we dislike because we see the way they really are. We watch their behavior and we watch the harm they are doing and we say, "I understand that other person."

What the apostle Paul is trying to say here is that you can't divorce insight and understanding of another person and love. Those two things come together. The reason why Satan can't understand who you are, he has no insight into your real personality, is because he doesn't love you. Satan knows a tremendous amount about you. Satan understands what your areas of weakness are. They have been probed from the time you were born. He understands what your temptations are. He understands what your flaws are. He understands all the mistakes that you make. They are all listed. He throws this stuff up in your face over and over again. Satan really knows a great deal about you but he has no understanding of you and no insight into you because he doesn't love you.

And when you look at another person and you think you have them figured out, but you don't love them, the only thing you have done is judged them. Without love you don't have real understanding. All you have is judgment and condemnation. The lens for true understanding of another individual is the lens of love. The reason why God knows you better than anybody else is not just because he is omniscient, because he knows everything. Love is the lens by which we see into people's hearts. It is the whole

perspective, the whole vantage point that gets off-center when we really don't love someone.

So there may be someone in this church or someone in your family or someone at work that you really dislike. And yet, you think you have them figured out. I am telling you, you don't have them figured out because you don't love them. Let me press this one home. The only thing that you are probably doing is judging them and condemning them. To have them figured out, you have to pray for a heart of love. The only time that you have a right to go to another person to bring correction to them is if you have first prayed, "God fill me with love for this person, because I won't even begin to say the right things or to approach them the right way when I don't love them. My counsel for them will be off. My way of approaching them will be off because I don't love them."

And you know, I want to apply the same business of linking love and depth of knowledge and insight to ourselves. A lot of us think that we have ourselves figured out and we really know who we are but we don't know who we are because we don't love ourselves with the love of God. The only thing we do reflect on ourselves is to bring judgment on ourselves and self-condemnation. We accuse ourselves. This principle of living, linked to insight and knowledge applies also to yourself. You don't have a true view of yourself unless you get God's view of yourself and God says things about you in love that you have never allowed yourself to say about yourself because you are looking without love. So you are looking without insight.

The same thing is true as you try to know God. No one really knows God unless they love God. Again, these things are linked together: knowledge, insight and love. You can't know God cold. You can't know God the way you would study a frog that is being cut up on a table. "I will just study that frog and open him up and dissect him. In the same way I will make God the object of study and an object of theological reflection." The only way to know God is to love him.

Now, let me take the converse of this. I don't believe you can love without having knowledge and depth of insight. Good lovers are wise and thoughtful lovers. Love is not just some naïve sentimentality, "Oh I just love and love and love without any knowledge, without any insight." You may know that the Greek word for love is *agape*. There used to be an old saying in the church, "Well that man is full of sloppy *agape*." What that means is that person loves kind of, but really they are just sentimentalists. They don't have any knowledge or any real insight regarding how to really help someone.

You see that in politics all the time don't you? You have some person who is on a crusade who is sort of a do-gooder, they are going to do good for the poor, but they really don't know the poor, they don't know anyone who is poor. They have never lived as a poor man or a poor woman, but they are going to do good for the poor. Their solutions for doing good for the poor are coming from a heart of love that is not accompanied by knowledge.

I have lived that one. When I was finishing up law school, my wife, Marlene and I moved down with a bunch of folks from this church to the south Linden neighborhood. We were going to live with the poor. We lived right off Cleveland Ave. and Hudson down in south Linden and we were going to do good for the poor, but our love was not mixed with knowledge so it wasn't real love. And we thought initially, "Well, what this neighborhood needs is a food pantry. People will eat healthy food." Back then healthy food meant things like bulgar wheat and brown rice and brown sugar. No refined sugar. No white bread. No candy. No chips—nothing. Just vegetarian. We made this food pantry down there and I remember working there. People would come in and look around at the food pantry and walk out shaking their heads saying, "I don't know anyone other than a cow that would eat that grain."

You really need to know people, to know their situation, to know their needs, to have insight into them in order to be a good lover. Boy, that is how love grows, as we grow in the knowledge and the insight of what makes this other person tick. You don't start off in marriage as being a good lover. It grows as you learn about this other person. What are their real needs? What makes them work? What are their motivations? How do they understand love? The more I know of Marlene, the more able I am to love her the way she needs to be loved. The more I know my children and I see their temperaments and their peculiarities in a way that no one else knows them. Their teachers don't know them the way I do; their Sunday School teachers here at church don't know them that way I know them; their friends don't know them the way I know them and therefore, no one

else is able to love them the way that I love them or the way Marlene loves them. Good lovers are thoughtful lovers, knowledgeable lovers, wise lovers.

Good lovers also choose what is best. “This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best.” Here I am. I want to be a good lover. I have asked the Lord, “Lord, fill me with your love. Give me insight and knowledge so that my love will be a thoughtful love, it will be a wise love, discerning love, in order that I might choose what is best.”

Good lovers choose the best course. It will not be what is easiest, what is more convenient, what is most pain avoidant.

You want to love your children. You are being pushed by them. They are nagging you. They are making demands. They are putting the press on you. They are making you feel guilty and you stop and say, “Lord, I want to be a good lover for my son or for my daughter who is whining, who is complaining, who is grouching, who I know wants to do something.” Well, to be a good lover for them, you are going to make the best choice for them so long as you understand what the best choice is. The best choice is not always the path of least resistance, just placating them, making them happy for the moment, making sure that they don’t walk away mad, grumbling under their breath, making peace temporarily.

The best choice may be to say, “No. I am not going to let you sleep over at so-and-so’s house when I don’t know their family.”

“No. You may not date this person.”

“No, you may not have the freedom to go out in this way.”

The best choice may actually cause the other person temporary hurt. What is best may cause hurt. You know a dentist causes hurt when he drills away the decay in your teeth, but that may be what is best and what is needed. And what is best and needed in your marriage may be to drill the decay away. And in your relationships, you might need to drill right into the decay. It could cause hurt. Love will never cause harm, but it may hurt.

Ultimately, what is best, is always going to be what God says in his Word, what conforms to the Bible. What is best is not my idea of what is best. I may think that the loving thing to say to you is to have you leave your spouse and get a divorce because your marriage is not working out. I am trying to be loving towards you. I am listening to you as you are expressing your pain, and I come to you and say, “Go ahead. Get a divorce.” But I have no right to say that to you. That would not be love because it would not conform to the Word of God. What is best flows out of what God says is best. People have done horribly harmful things and have said horribly harmful things in the name of love because their love didn’t contain what is best.

In the name of love, people are going around and saying, “Let’s legalize euthanasia.”

The loving thing to do is to have doctors inject people with some kind of poison and take them out of their misery, that is loving. We will turn doctors into murders because that is

what we think love is. Then you explore the Word of God and you find out that in fact God's view of what is best is totally different. God views human life as sacred and tells us to take our hands off, to not murder people.

You can't love well unless you get to know this book well because you and I don't know what is best for other people, God does. You and I don't know what people really need. We may think we are loving because we are kind hearted, or because we are sympathetic to people's pain, but unless we know this book, we are not good lovers, we are just feeding out of our own ideas. What is best will have a component in it that is holy, that is righteous, all together. That is where Paul goes; he says, "...so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless." There is an old hymn that goes:

Breathe on me, breath of God

Fill me with life anew

That I may love what

Thou doest love

And do what thou

Wouldst do.

Lord, I want to love what you love and do what you would do because that is what is best in every situation. Good lovers choose what is best and what is best is not always the indulgent things, the easy things, and it is certainly never the immoral thing, or the unholy thing.

Finally, I would say good lovers aim at eternity. “That you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.”

I have said this before in a certain way, but I don’t believe you can be a really good lover towards someone else with a short-term perspective. With a short-term perspective, I am going to try to make things really convenient in this moment, but with an eternal perspective, with a longer-term perspective—you know, I want to see you do well in five years my child, I want to see this marriage or this friendship grow not just in this moment, but over the next decade and over the next twenty years and over the next fifty years, without that long-term perspective, looking forward to the day of Christ, I don’t think you can ultimately be a really good lover.

God has a day fixed in his day-timer. The Lord has a day in his day-timer, there is a year, there is a month, there is a week, there is a day, there is an hour, and there is a moment that was written in God the Father’s day-timer from eternity past. There is a moment when Jesus Christ is going to come back and good lovers keep an eye on that moment. Good lovers know that there is a day coming in the day-timer of God when he is going to send his Son and it will all be completed at that time. That will bring the end. To be a good lover, you have to keep an eye on eternity, at least one eye out there. People who have loved best have not just lived with a view of this world as being the only thing that exists. People who have loved best are people who have an eye on

heaven. They are thinking about standing before God. They are thinking about giving a report for their actions. Good lovers know they're going to be measured by the standard of love.

“Lord I want to value what you value. I want to approve what you approve. I want to be overflowing with the thing that you count to be the best. Make me a good lover.” Amen.