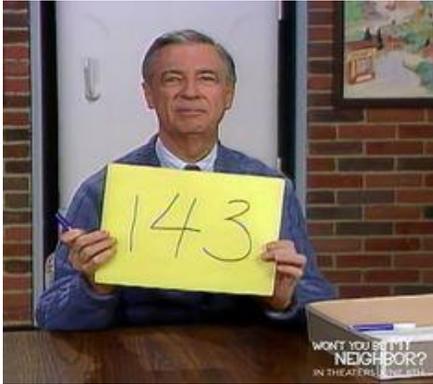


# “Good to Grow - Relationships”

September 23rd, 2018  
2 Corinthians 5:18, 19

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Wall Street United Church



**“God’s hidden message to you ...  
143  
... read on!”**

*Anyone united with Christ gets a fresh start.  
The old life is gone, and a new life is begun.  
This is the wonderful message God is giving us to tell others.*

This is the heart of the mission of our church.

Last week we looked at radical hospitality and how much Jesus loves each one of us. This week we are looking at Transforming Relationships, and next week we will talk about how we can reach out to the world. You can almost see these steps as concentric circles that get bigger and bigger.

First, we help individual people know that they are loved and valued just as they are. I remember a year or two ago that a man who had spoken at Celebrate Life a few times, returned for the morning service, and when I saw him after I apparently said to him: “You know Jesus loves you.” A few weeks later he came back again and he told me that my words really, really affected him. For the first time in his life, he knew it was true -- that Jesus really loved him. Knowing that Jesus loves you is in some ways the first step. I hope you know that God loves you. God made you and knows you, and God loves you.

The next circle involves learning how to love and be loved in community. In a way we are moving from the individual to a small group. For many of us we experienced this first in our family – we learned how to love and be loved. But families are not perfect, and we always need more than just the family. The church for Christians is a really important place. Remember I’m not talking about a building; I’m talking about a community.

You cannot be a Christian alone -- you need to be in relationship with other Christians.

It is in Christian community that you find a safe place to heal and grow so that you can go out and make a difference in the world. Some people see the church as a bit of a *club* where ‘pretty good people hang out and do pretty good things!’ But the church is more like *a cross between a hospital and a garden nursery*. The church should be a place to grow and to heal, and to be shaped enough to be transplanted and make a difference outside the church.

But if that all sounds warm and romantic and lovely -- the truth is, it isn't. Growing and healing can be messy and difficult. When Tom Burton prays or leads worship in any way, he usually wears his motorcycle vest with all sorts of great patches on it. The biggest is the one that says “Christian in Training”. He's not going to graduate from that patch – he could turn it into a tattoo, because unless he stops being a Christian altogether, he will always be a Christian in training. When we decide to follow Jesus we become followers for life – in training for life. In other words we are always growing and changing, and it is within the context of these relationships that we do that training.

This part isn't easy. The context of this part of the letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians was one of discord. They weren't getting along and so Paul writes a letter to encourage them to work on the relationships.

G.K. Chesterton said: *“The Bible tells us to love our neighbours, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people!”* We all have people in our families, in our lives, in our church who drive us crazy. In his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren coined the perfect term for such people: *EGR—Extra Grace Required*, reminding us that difficult people need more grace and more love, not less. That is not the way we normally react. I challenge you, the next time you meet one of those difficult people, to respond not the way they “deserve”, but the way God would call us to respond to them.

As Christians we are not called to be doormats, to be abused and put down by the jerks of the world, but we are called to try to see past the jerk mask that they are wearing and to see the person that God created them to be. I guarantee that there is a reason they are wearing that ugly mask. Nobody wears one of those angry masks because life has been good to them and they have been loved and appreciated and valued all their life!

Let's face it, sometimes we're the one with that mask. We are all EGR's (Extra Grace Required) for someone at some time. We all have

hurts, habits and hang-ups that occasionally make it difficult for others to get along with or even like us.

As Christians our responsibility is to think differently. As Paul said: *“From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”* He then goes on to talk about how we are called to the ministry of reconciliation – Jesus was reconciling the world to himself. And now Jesus entrusts the message of reconciliation to us.

When you choose to follow Jesus, you are called to take the tough road of forgiveness and reconciliation. It’s something we have to practice over and over. The good news is that hanging out in the church gives you lots of opportunities to practice!! Forgiveness is always possible; never easy, but possible because forgiveness only takes one person: you. *Reconciliation means to restore a good relationship.* Reconciliation involves two people. There is only one person you can control in this life and that is you—and that’s a tough enough job as it is. But if there is something we can do to help restore or change a relationship for the better; then we are called to do what we can do.

One of the great gifts that this church has is its high capacity to accept and love people who are very different. I have noticed that some people here are particularly gifted at seeing the real treasure that lies underneath a pretty rough exterior. I am truly grateful for this church and for the people in this church. Just like every person is here for a reason, every church is here for a reason, and I believe that is one of the biggest reasons why Wall Street Church is here -- I believe that God has a special call for this church to love his people.

Our tag line is *God loves ALL. So do we.* I’ve had people tell me that this is absolute “horse pucky”. Actually they used stronger language. (Maybe it was a bull they mentioned, not a horse!) Maybe it would have been more accurate to have our tag line read: *“God loves ALL. And we’re gonna give it the old college try but it sure ain’t gonna be easy!!”* We are far from perfect as individuals and as a church, but ‘So do we’ is what we are striving for. It’s God who created us to be the church and we are going to live into God’s image for us. In the same way, you need to claim and live into God’s image of you. Even if the mirror reflects back something not so attractive, don’t focus on that image, focus on who God created you to be and is calling you to be.

I heard about an 8-year-old boy who was a pretty nerdy, clumsy, chubby and shy kid. Plus, this kid also had some health issues with asthma that kept him home on many days. His name was Freddy, and Freddy was often bullied by other kids when he walked home from school. “We’re going to get you, Fat Freddy,” the other boys taunted.

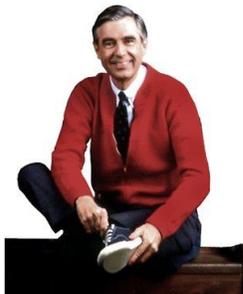
You almost certainly know Freddy. But you know him best as Fred Rogers or ‘Mr. Rogers’. Reflecting on the bullying, he said: “I used to cry to myself when I was alone, and I would cry through my fingers and make up songs on the piano.”

One time when a group of bullies were chasing him and calling him “Fat Freddy” he ran toward the home of an elderly widow in the neighbourhood. He prayed she would be home to let him in, and she was and she did. He said that greatly increased his faith in God.

The fact that this elderly widow took him in and kept him safe from the bullies was one reason the idea of being part of a neighbourhood was so important to Fred Rogers. Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister and he had a passion and a great love for all people, but for children in particular, and he made a difference.

A documentary of his life came out this summer. It didn’t come to Brockville that I’m aware of but you can rent it on Apple TV or whatever streaming program you use. If you can take a look at this trailer for the movie by following this link.

[https://youtu.be/FhwktRDG\\_aQ](https://youtu.be/FhwktRDG_aQ)



**WO'NT YOU BE MY  
NEIGHBOR?**

I watched the movie this past week. It has a 99% Tomato rating which is amazing and it was a wonderful documentary. You just come away feeling inspired and lifted up.

Fred Rogers really led an amazing life. He would wake up every day about 5:30 a.m., pray, read the Bible, sing some hymns, then go swimming to exercise. He would do this every day, then weigh himself on a scale. He weighed 143 pounds almost his entire life, and he said that that was his favourite number: 143. Do you know why? Because it takes one letter to say, “I” - four letters to say, “Love,” and - three letters to say, “You.” 143: I love you. There aren’t very many who feel loved every time they step on a scale! But Fred did and he shared that love.



In our life and as a church we are called to come closer to one another and closer to God. Here's the thing: God is relationship. Look at the trinity: God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The scripture we read says: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20). God is with us when we are together because relationship is central to God.

If you want to be closer to God you need to come closer to others. You see, other people bear the image of God and their hearts beat with the rhythm God gave them. We are called to remind people that God's heart beats inside them, and sometimes that's not easy. It's not easy because they are not perfect and we are not perfect. But it's worth it. As we connect to people and mend our relationships, we will feel God's heartbeat stronger and stronger and that love will grow for all to see.

Thanks be to God. Amen.