

# Welcome to the Family

Message for Sunday, January 13, 2019  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** Matthew 22:39; Philippians 2:3;  
Hebrews 13:1-2

## Children's Message:

**Philippians 2:3-4, New Living Translation:**  
Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.

Imagine you're a newcomer at St. Paul's. You see people chatting happily with their friends, and you feel kind of left out.

*Show a hard boiled egg and the bottle.* This is the newcomer, and this is the church. You feel like you don't fit in.

*Light a couple of matches and drop them in the bottle.* We need to create some warmth in the congregation.

*While the matches are burning, place egg on top of opening. Shortly after flame goes out, egg will drop into bottle!* Good! We've welcomed someone into our community.

One of the purposes of the church is to help us grow in our faith, and we do that while we're together in worship. But Christians aren't meant to stay bottled up inside the church building. Jesus wants to send us out into the world to love and serve others.

*Turn the bottle upside down and blow into it; the air pressure will push the egg back out!*

So if you see someone new in church, give them a warm welcome. And look for ways to love and serve others.

## Message "Welcome to the Family"

The force of gravity has amazing power. Here's an example. Canadian astronaut David Saint-Jacques went into space back in December. Together with the other astronauts, plus all the supplies they were taking, the shipment was about 7,000 kilograms. But to get that weight into orbit required forty times that weight in rocket fuel: 280,000 kilograms.

The physical force of gravity pulls everything to the center of the earth. In order to break free from earth-centered life, enormous amounts of energy have to push the rocket away from the center.

There is also a *psychological force* of gravity that constantly pulls our thoughts and feelings and behaviours inward toward the center of our own lives. The most natural thing in the world is to ignore others, especially strangers who aren't part of our personal world.

But God bluntly says to us, "Stop that! Build a launching pad. Fill up your engines with rocket fuel. And blast out of your self-oriented routine. Stop ignoring others. Reach out to them with the love of Jesus Christ." We see this over and over in the Bible.

**Matthew 22:39, Good News Bible:**  
[Jesus said] "The second most important commandment is like it: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' "

**Philippians 2:3-4, New Living Translation:**  
Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. And look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.

**Hebrews 13:1-2, Today's English Version:**  
Keep on loving one another as Christians. Remember to welcome strangers in your homes. There were some who did that and welcomed angels without knowing it.

I emphasize the word "remember" because it's so easy to forget about others who are not part of the family.

Hey! — we can talk until we're blue in the face about what a friendly, caring church we have; but it's the friendly, caring *actions* that make it true.

That's why I smile when I see a new face come in the door of the church, and several people greet that person warmly, introduce themselves, tell them where the bathrooms are, and so on. And then after worship, the newcomers are not left alone as strangers, but still more people come over to inquire how they are, and invite them downstairs for a snack.

I'm also glad to see a team from St. Paul's go to the Towers Retirement home every Tuesday afternoon to bring joy and fun. It's the highlight of the week for the people who live there.

And I'm glad when the AOTS group sells Christmas trees and serves the pancake breakfast (in two weeks!). All the money they raise goes to send kids to camp; they don't keep a penny for themselves.

Let me tell you a story about how these little, caring actions can make a big difference in people's lives.

In his book, *Conspiracy of Kindness*, Steve Sjogren tells the story of Joe Delaney and his eight-year-old son, Jared. As they were pitching a baseball in the backyard, Jared asked his dad, "Dad, is there a God?"

Joe responded, "I'm not really qualified to answer that question, son. I only went to church a time or two when I was a kid." After a few more tosses of the ball, Jared ran into the house. When he came out, he had a balloon from the circus and an index card.

"What are you doing?" Joe asked. "I'm writing a letter to God." In his elementary handwriting, the boy penned, "Dear God, if you are real and if you are there, send people who know you to Dad and me." He attached the card to the balloon and released it.

Two days later, while Joe and Jared were shopping at the mall, they pulled into a car wash sponsored by a local church. Joe rolled down his window and asked, "How much." "It's free," he was told. "We just want to show God's love in a practical way." Joe asked, "Are you guys Christian?" "Yeah, we're Christians." "Are you the kind of Christians who believe in God?" "Yes, we're that kind of Christians." Joe smiled and said, "I guess you're the answer to one of the strangest prayers God has ever received."

God used a local church's car wash, not only to answer a little boy's unusual prayer, but also eventually lead a whole family to faith in Christ.

An act of selfless love, unsolicited kindness, undeserved help whether it is a car wash, an apple pie, or a few dollars in a time of need is all God needs to get some people's attention.

So many churches are not reaching people like Joe and Jared because they are more concerned about themselves than the community.

They have relaxed, and let the pull of gravity keep them focussed on themselves. They are self-centered rather than people-centered.

Here's another example of what I mean. This happened in a church in Portland, Oregon, where Rebecca Pippert worshipped. She wrote about it in her book *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World*.

Becky was doing Christian outreach work with students at the university in Portland, Oregon. She got to know one fellow named Bill. Bill was brilliant, and was always pondering the why's and how's of life. His hair was always mussed, and in the entire time she knew him, she never once saw him wear a pair of shoes. Rain, sleet or snow, Bill was always barefoot. While he was attending university, Bill became a Christian.

Across the street from the university was a old, large, established (i.e. wealthy) church. They had worked to maintain beauty and dignity in its worship service. The people loved the great hymns of the faith that flowed from the pipe organ. People still believed that "Sunday dress" meant "Sunday best." Parents and children polished their shoes, and wore handsome suits and dresses to church. This was a strong tradition in that church.

A few years earlier the church had decided that they wanted to "reach out" to the students who went to the university. They weren't sure how, but they just wanted them to feel welcome.

One day Bill decided to worship there. The service had already started 10 minutes earlier, and they were singing a hymn when he walked in. He was wearing blue jeans, a t-shirt and of course no shoes. The ushers who greeted him looked a bit uncomfortable, but no one said anything.

Bill began walking down the aisle looking for a seat. The church was quite crowded that Sunday, and he got all the way to the front without finding any place to sit. Would he go and stand at the back? By now everyone was watching him, holding their breath to see what would happen.

Bill had his own solution. He sat cross legged in the aisle between the two front pews — perfectly natural among students, but unheard of in this church. The tension in the air became so thick you could slice it.

At the rear of the church, the gray-haired head usher named Oakley was watching the whole spectacle. From the time he was young, he had been taught to dress for church in the clothes he would wear to see Jesus. So he had on a blue three-piece suit and an elegant silk tie. A gold watch chain gleamed from his vest.

Oakley — his name was appropriate. He was old and strong like the oak tree. In previous years he had chaired the church board, and his reputation was solid. People said, “Oakley’s quiet, but he’s wise.” If anyone could handle this distraction gracefully, he could.

Head usher Oakley began walking down the aisle, leaning on his cane. It seemed to take forever. The church became utterly silent. All eyes were focussed on him. You could not hear anyone breathe.

When he finally stood next to where Bill was sitting, Oakley dropped his cane on the carpet, and carefully lowered himself to the floor, sitting beside Bill. He reached out his hand and said, “My name’s Oakley. Welcome to our church.”

We want to make sure when we have guests here, we make them feel welcome. At a wedding reception, the parents often stand up and say to their new daughter-in-law or son-in-law, “Welcome to the family.” That’s what we want to happen here. People feel that they have a new home, a new family, where they are welcome.

Here’s one more thought: We have some new people coming to church in the last while. Some came because they grew up here, and it’s like coming back home. Some came as a result of being part of a wedding ceremony with me. A number came because someone invited them. I want to ask some questions of the people who did the inviting. Arlene Pollick, Barb Jones, Tim Pomfret: will you come up here, please?

How many hours out of your week did you have to spend on doing this? *5 minutes.*

How much did this cost you? *Nothing.*

Did you hurt your back doing this, or pull a muscle? *No.*

Do you mean it was that easy to invite someone to church? *Yes!*

### Next Steps:

- Pray: ask God to help you overcome your fears.
- Imagine you’re the stranger in a new place. How does it feel? What do you wish someone would do or say?
- Break free of gravity! Step outside your comfort zone, and talk with people you don’t know. (Hint: not just newcomers.)
- Invite someone to come to church with you.