

# The Fine Art of Getting Along

by William MacDonald

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*William MacDonald emphasizes the importance of humility and understanding in fostering better interpersonal relationships among Christians.*

**Duration:** 47:13

**Scripture:** Proverbs 18:17, Matthew 18:15, John 21:22, Romans 12:1, Galatians 6:1, Ephesians 4:29, James 1:19

**Topics:** "Long Suffering"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of involving everyone in conversations and drawing them out from the sidelines. He uses the example of Jesus always having time for children and ministering to them. The speaker also discusses the importance of being a good listener and learning from others. He shares his frustration with people who talk about trivial matters instead of focusing on spiritual help. The sermon concludes with the reminder to keep our focus on following Jesus and not getting caught up in judging others or minding their business.

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## Transcript

Christian life is really interesting. I wouldn't miss it for anything. When I was preparing for these meetings, I had no idea that there was going to be a workshop before the evening service.

And I had even less idea that the subject of the workshop would be interpersonal relations. You know the rest of the story. I really believe the Lord laid on my heart tonight to speak on the fine art of getting along.

That's why I had such a squirmingly good time down there in the polished seat that last hour. But I choose rather to think that it was the Lord's leading and that it will be complimentary and not repetitious to what we've been over. People are like pickles.

Some are sweet and some are dill. Most of you are sweet. And if we were all like that, there would be no problem.

But some of us are dill. Just call me Dill Bill. I think that's what Will Rogers was thinking of when he said, the trouble with the world is people.

Well, you can think about that one for a while. More truth than poetry. The trouble with the world is people.

And I think that's why we're so devoted to the Brethren National Anthem. To dwell above with saints we love, that will be glory. To dwell below with saints we know, what's that last line? Yeah, that's another story.

Absolutely. At any rate, one of the most common problems in life is the difficulty of getting along with other people, isn't it? And if we could just master the fine art of getting along, life would be much more pleasant for others and for ourselves. And in this, as in everything else, I really believe the word of God is absolutely sufficient.

And I'd like to turn, first of all, to Philippians chapter two, because that's the subject of Philippians chapter two, getting along with others. And Clint has already made reference to it. I'll begin with verse one, Philippians.

Did I say Philippians chapter two? Philippians chapter two, verse one, If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. There were tensions in the assembly in Philippi. There were conflicts among the saints.

Specifically, there were conflicts between two of the sisters, but I'm not sure it stopped there. I think it was even more widespread. The Apostle Paul in this chapter says, friends, you have a problem.

You have a problem getting along with one another. I would like to give you the solution of that problem. The solution is to have the mind of Christ.

What was the mind of Christ? Think of how he allowed people to treat him. He went down, down, down. He took the low, the sacrificial place, and God has highly exalted him and given him a name about every name.

Have the mind of Jesus. Now, I've told you your problem. I've told you the solution to your problem.

Now, work out the solution of your problem with fear and trembling. I believe when we come to that verse, work out your own salvation, that has nothing to do with the salvation of the soul. That's not the context at all.

We say, well, God put salvation in and we work it out. Well, I suppose there's a sense in which that's true, but it seems to me that salvation in this verse refers to the solution of the problem that we were having, to deliverance from the problem that was driving them up the wall in Philippi. The answer, the mind of Christ.

Over the past months, I've asked a lot of folks, missionaries and to home workers and others as well, to share with me. I say to them, you know, if you were to give me some practical advice as to how to get along with others, what would you say? And I've compiled some of that. And so what we're going to go over tonight is sort of a potpourri of advice that people have given along the way.

And one of the most significant, I think of the one with which I should start is found back in Matthew chapter 18, the 18th chapter of Matthew's gospel. And I'll just read a verse or two to you. Moreover, if a verse 15, moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.

If he hears thee, thou has gained thy brother. As I was contemplating this verse today, I was thinking how easy it is to believe in the verbal inspiration of the scriptures. We would fight.

We would absolutely fight and contend for the fact that that is the very word of God. And yet when the problem comes up in life, we don't obey it. Isn't that true? We can believe in the inspiration of the scriptures and yet not obey them.

And one of the great problems in life is that when my brother offends me, when my brother does something against me, everything in my being rebels against going and facing him with it. I would rather go and tell you about it. Is that right? And that's the way the infection spreads because I'm not obedient to the word of God.

I go and tell others about it and it's like a forest fire. Takes the grace of God, doesn't it? And yet God's way is the best way. I don't mind telling you that in our work out there in California, we've had to come back and back and back to this verse where you have men, strong men, men of strong temperaments seeking to work together.

There are conflicts. The only way we've been able to handle it at all is to be willing to go and speak to the other brother about it. What has been the result of that? The result of it has been a cementing of relationships.

The result of it has been a strengthening of relationships. The result of it has been that things were better than they ever were before. God knows what he's doing.

And I'll tell you, this verse is the inspired word of God and the advice that it gives is the very best advice that could possibly be given. So I asked myself the question tonight, Bill, somebody you don't want to shake hands with? Somebody that you have something in your heart against, he's offended you? Are you willing to go to him, talk to him and get the thing made right? I really do believe that that would be one of the great... I've seen it work on the mission field overseas. I've seen it work at home and there's nothing like it.

If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. And interesting the way that's written. Between thee and him alone.

Keep it as insulated as possible at first. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. In a recent study, male adults were asked to rate themselves on their ability to get along with others.

100% put themselves in the top half of the population. Isn't that wonderful? 60% thought that they were in the top 10%. And 25% thought they were in the top 1%.

If that were true, we might as well dismiss the meeting and go home. Hmm? But of course it isn't true. And so that's why we want to take this up.

I say to somebody, give me some advice as how I can get along with others. Trouble is it came 65 years too late. Somebody says this, in dealing with others, try to think about their positive qualities rather than their negative qualities.

That's good. I have to discipline myself to do that. Because of a sinful fallen nature, it's easier for me to exercise the gift of criticism.

I think some of us feel we have a talent for criticism. I think that's one talent the Lord wouldn't mind us burying. But it's a good thing in dealing with others, trying to think of their positive qualities instead of their faults and quirks and idiosyncrasies.

And if they are believers, try to see Christ in them. Bishop Whipple of Minnesota said, for 30 years, I have tried to see the face of Christ in those who have differed from me. For 30 years, I have tried to see the face of Christ in those who have differed from me.

Instead of thinking about people's quirks and their idiosyncrasies, try to think of their potential. What a person can be is always greater than what he is. And I think it's a wonderful thing when you see the Lord Jesus taking those disciples, and they were unlearned and homespun men.

He did not demand spiritual maturity before he took them on. The Lord Jesus took those 20-year-olds, I mean in their 20s, he took them as they were and he started building on that basis. And if you don't mind me saying, from the human standpoint, many of them were very unpromising material.

As I've often said, the only wonderful thing about them or us is their connection with Calvary. And Jesus was willing to take them on that basis and work with them. He did not demand that they be spiritual giants before he would work with them.

And we can, and this has been hard for me, we can really accept people unconditionally without approving of their actions or attitudes. Can't we? I think some of us have had difficulty with that. I have had.

Dale Galloway said, many of us never learned to distinguish between approval of behavior and acceptance of the person. When I talk about accepting a person unconditionally, I'm not meaning that you have to approve of the other person's attitudes or actions. What you do is love the person as he is, despite his flaws.

It isn't human. It's supernatural. Somebody else says to me, Bill, in dealing with other people, try to make allowance for their backgrounds.

Everybody has different abilities. Everyone has different temperaments. Everyone has different emotions, different experiences, differing levels of spiritual maturity.

But you never know what people are facing. Try to make allowance for that. I often think of that when you go into a restaurant and the waitress is short with you, discourteous and all the rest.

It's so easy to be irritated with her. Maybe we wouldn't be if we knew what she was going through at home. That's why I'm so glad God is the judge.

Do you know there's no one else in the world who's qualified to be judge but God? Only he knows the full story. Only he knows the intents and thoughts of the heart. Only he knows what a person might be going through at any particular time.

So it pays really to be patient and sympathetic. I say to another person, what's the fine art of getting along with others? They say don't judge people by outward appearance. Well, Jesus said it before they said it.

Judge not according to appearance but judge righteous judgment. That's probably one of the great faults that all of us make in life, isn't it? By judging according to outward appearance. Dobson in one of his books says that beauty is the golden coin of human worth.

Not that it should be but that it is. That the good looking kid in the sixth grade gets better grades. The teacher's mind is influenced by that and it really is true.

It's not the way it should be but it's the way it often is. Somebody else says to me, don't judge people by the opinions of others. Someone says, yes, Joe is a good guy but.

The rest of my life I can't forget the but. Isn't it true? You forget the good guy and you remember the but. The but sticks in our minds and we can't think of Joe without remembering it.

Somebody else says, don't judge people by their estimate of themselves. Simon the sorcerer claimed that he was someone great. I always get a chuckle out of that in Acts 8, 9, and 10.

And the people readily accepted his claim. They said this is the great power of God. And so the advice is don't go by appearances.

Don't go by somebody else's opinion. Don't go by people's opinions of themselves. Get to know people slowly with measured pace and form your own judgment.

And it might be quite different. You might have quite a greater appreciation of them than anybody else might have. I say to somebody, what's the fine art of getting along? Somebody says to me, don't try to use people.

Don't try to manipulate people. In your contacts with people, have their good in view, not your own. But that strikes home as being reasonable and true to me.

We must not exploit people or use them to further our own in. Somebody says to me, ask God for special grace in dealing with people who are hard to get along with. That is the dill pickle variety.

And in that connection, recognize realistically that there are probably some people with whom you cannot work. Now that might sound very unspiritual, but after all, Paul and Barnabas had their differences. And why should we feel that we have to work with someone under tremendous constant strain of difficulty when we live in such a big, wide world? And there are so many places we can serve the Lord without stepping on other people's toes.

Isn't it true? So many places. Part of the problem is, I guess, that we congregate. And that's exactly what we're doing, getting on people's nerves as well as on their toes.

Paul says in Philippians chapter two that we should esteem others better than ourselves. That verse used to bother me. I think of the members of the mafia.

And I thought, well, am I to believe that they have better characters than I? And I wasn't quite willing to admit that. But it doesn't mean that, does it? To esteem others better than yourselves doesn't mean that they necessarily have a better character than you have. But it means that you're to live for others rather than for self.

Of course, that's the key word in the entire second chapter of Philippians, isn't it? Others. That key fits right through. Others, Lord, yes, others.

Let this my motto be, help me to live for others that I might live for thee. Jesus lived for others. Exhibit A. The Apostle Paul lived for others.

You have all this in chapter two. The He said, what you Philippians are doing is really the great sacrifice to God. And I would just be willing to be poured out as a drink offering on the service and sacrifice of your faith.

That's pretty good. And he meant it, too. He was sincere when he said that.

He's giving them credit for making the great offering to God. And he's saying, I'm nothing but a little drink offering poured out on top of yours. And incidentally, drink offering there means martyrdom.

That's really what it means. To be poured out as a drink offering means to give my life in sacrificial surrender to the Lord. Paul lived for others with self-effacement.

And it was all genuine, too. Timothy lived for others. Paul says in chapter two, I have no man like mine who will naturally care for your state.

Timothy. And then Epaphroditus lived for others, didn't he? Epaphroditus was sick, nigh unto death, for the work of the ministry. And he was grieving.

Why was he grieving? Because he was sick. He was grieving because they had heard he was sick. That's not very self-centered, is it? He was sorry that they had heard that he was sick.

Because he knew that they would be concerned and fretful over his condition. And so we should esteem others better than ourselves. Somebody else says to me, Bill, when you meet others, you should make it a meaningful experience in their lives.

Well, I never thought of that before. I thought it was just a matter of shaking their hands. But it came to life for me.

I have a friend, and every time you ever meet him, he gives you the impression that that's the greatest thing that's happened to him all day. And he's sincere, too. It's just become a way of life to him.

And what an uplift it gives you. You'll like to be in his company. No dead fish handshake with Paul, because that's his name.

But just a meaningful experience. He exudes warmth and enthusiasm that practically makes your day when you meet him. The fine art of getting along.

One sure way in which we can prove our interest in others is by remembering their names. Elizabeth Elliott said that the sweetest sound in any language is the sound of one's own name. Isn't that interesting? The sweetest sound in any language is the sound of one's own name.

She said, people who engage in public relations know the importance of using a person's name. Whether we call people by name at all and what name we use are deeply significant and are often a dead giveaway of our attitude toward a person. Now, what were you saying? Did I hear you say it? I can remember faces, but I can't remember names.

Is that what you were saying? I have to chuckle, because, you know, I meet people who can remember the scores of the World Series in 1975, and they can't remember people's names. What it really means is we remember what we want to remember. Isn't that true? It is true.

We remember what we want to remember, and there are ways that will help us remember people's names, and one of those ways is to write the name down. I don't do it when I'm just introduced. That would be kind of awkward.

And you can ask the person to spell the name, hoping it isn't Smith. But there are mnemonic devices that we can use, and if we really are interested in people, after all, it's people that count, isn't it? It's really people that count in life. When I tabulate my wealth, I think of my Christian brothers and sisters, the excellence of the earth, and I really mean it from my heart.

I consider myself extremely wealthy. One of the greatest offenders in interpersonal relationships is the tongue, isn't it? Wow. And James has so much to say to us about that.

Our speech should be gracious, and our speech should be tactful. Oh, the harm that has been done through words that lacked grace and lacked tact. Poor Casey was killed in a very tragic accident down at the machine shop, and Murphy was assigned to go and tell his wife.

And Murphy's knees were turning to India rubber, but he went up to the door, glad that he was, and the door opened, and Mrs. Casey was there with a wondering look on her face, and Murphy said, Are you the widow, Casey? And she said, No, I'm not. Well, he said, You are now. And so the news was broken.

We need tact, and we need grace in our speech. I say to somebody else, How can I have good relations with other people? And he says to me, Don't be slow to express appreciation to people. There's a difference between praise and flattery, isn't there? Most of us are scared to death of flattery.

Praise is commendation that is sincere and deserved. Flattery is insincere or excessive. I know a brother out on the West Coast, and just as sure as you talk to him, he's expressing some word of appreciation, and it's sincere.

It's just a way of life to him. Everybody loves him. Everybody loves to have him around.

If we are sensitive to the feelings of others, we will avoid saying blunt, sharp, cutting things. This is the world. I recently read a book about Henry Kissinger.



Romans 12 and 1. He showed an interest in kids. And I'm here in 1985 telling you about it. Why? Because I could never forget it.

It made such a deep impression on me. Wasn't that great? I think the Lord was like that. Show an interest in the children and be ministering to them.

How can I learn the fine art of getting along with it? Somebody says to me, Bill, don't be a compulsive talker. And I know just what I mean. Come up for air once in a while.

Be a good listener and you'll be surprised how much you can learn. And it's true. It really is true.

If I could just share with you one of my pet peeves. Oftentimes, let's say in a gospel meeting, let's just picture a gospel meeting. You're there at the gospel meeting and perhaps you feel the Spirit of God is really working in the soul.

And you step down the platform and people start coming towards you to talk. And some dear sister comes and she just wears your ear off talking about trivia. And there are people waiting around.

I can't understand that mentality. Can you? You'd think she'd be sensitive. You'd think she'd know that there are people there that need spiritual help.

Doesn't seem to mean a thing to her. The scripture says, where there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. Compulsive talkers do not make good company.

Next, we should avoid gossip, complaining and whining. Gossip. Oh, the harm that's done by that at home and abroad.

Complaining. I often think of dear Jim Humphrey in Chicago. Many of you knew him, I'm sure.

And you'd say that you'd beat him and just say offhand, how are you, Jim? And he'd say, it'd be a sin to complain. When I think of Jim Humphrey, I always think of that statement. It'd be a sin to complain.

Well, most of us do a lot of sinning, I'm afraid. I say to somebody else, give me some advice of the fine art of getting along with others. And he says to me, never be too proud to admit that you're wrong.

It's true. Never be too proud to admit that you're wrong. The hardest words in any language, I was wrong.

I am sorry. Please forgive me. But I'll tell you, it's the foundation of good personal relationships.

And we may be saying more about that tomorrow night. The other side of that picture is if somebody comes to you and apologizes to you, what are you going to say? Well, I learned this from Kari Ten Boom. I learned a lot from that dear woman of God.

And she says this, when somebody comes and apologizes to you, don't shrug it off. Don't say, oh, well, forget it, there was nothing. That's exactly what they don't want to hear.

They want to hear you say, I appreciate your coming to me and I forgive you. They want forgiveness to be administered in no uncertain terms. Really sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Isn't that what you would want? If you had gone through this tremendous exercise of soul, if God had been barbecuing you to go and make confession to somebody, and then you go and they just wave it off as if it was nothing, and you know it was, you know it was something.

You wouldn't have agonized over it were it something. And then they just act as if there's nothing to it. No.

Say, I'm glad you came to me. I appreciate it. I forgive you.

Give them a big hug. Good personal relationships. People shun the wiseacre or the know-it-all.

They feel more comfortable when people admit that their knowledge is limited and that they may be wrong. Somebody else says to me, Bill, go out of your way to meet strangers. And I think this is very important in our chapels, isn't it, in our local assemblies.

Go out of your way to meet strangers. Most of us have to discipline ourselves to do this. Brother Haggerty was saying, he comes from a Scottish and Irish background.

There's only one thing worse than that, Brother Haggerty. That's when you're Scottish in New England. And you know, in New England, the land of the Boston, the land of the fish and the cod, where the Lowells speak only to cabbots and the cabbots speak only to God.

I don't think the cabbots speak to God anymore. And it's hard. It's been hard to go up.

I remember when I left New England, the hardest thing for me to do was go up to a stranger and say, my name is Bill McDonald, what's yours? Because what was going through my mind is, he's thinking, who cares what your name is? That's what I was thinking. And I tell you, it took tons of self-discipline to get to the place where I could do that. But I tell you, it's nice when you go into a place and you're a stranger and people come up and befriend you.

I'll never forget years ago going to the Guelph Bible Conference grounds. I wasn't going as a speaker, just going as a visitor one day. And there was a couple there assigned to be the host and the hostess for that day.

And they came up and they greeted me. They gave me the most royal welcome. I never forgot it.

It was so good. So good. Go out of your way to meet strangers.

Be ready to introduce ourselves. Then ask questions that evidence a genuine interest. Wasn't that lovely how Jesus went and talked to the woman at the well? Give me to drink.

Ah, that was so gracious. Could have acted differently if he were like ourselves. Somebody else says to me, Bill, in your encounter with others, don't be hypersensitive.

In the work of the Lord, you've got to have the skin of a rhinoceros. And I think that's really true. Some people register hurt and resentment at the slightest provocation, don't they? Don't do it.

A Christian should learn to be tough-minded. Not tough. You don't want to be tough.

Tough-minded. A mind that can cope. A mind that's resilient.

The poet said, I've asked the Lord to take from me the super sensitivity that robs the soul of joy and peace and causes fellowship to cease. Ask the Lord to take that from you. You're super sensitive.

If you're ever asked to serve on a board, whether directors, trustees, elders, deacons, or anything else, you should determine to abide by certain guidelines in advance. On matters of fundamental importance,

there has to be absolute unanimity. This could be on doctrinal matters, or it could be in matters of righteousness, matters of principle.

You will not compromise on those things. But most of the issues today are not fundamental issues. Most of the issues today are peripheral.

And if I were going to serve on a board like that, I must have the attitude, I will stand by the fundamentals, but on secondary matters, I will abide by the consensus of the group. That will bring a lot of peace to a situation. I am willing to compromise on non-essentials.

I am not going to be like the Scottish Presbyterian elder who said, there'll be nay unanimous decisions as long as I'm an elder. That's what he said, and he lived it. The word compromise has a bad connotation for most of us, but it's only bad when it's used in subjects of major importance.

Anyone who has to have his own way in everything, who thinks that his judgment is infallible, should never agree to serve on a board or a committee. That man can wreck a work of God, and he can wreck a local assembly. That's what we don't want to do.

I often think of 1 Corinthians 3, 16 and 17, where Paul, speaking of the local assembly as the temple of God, says, if any man wrecks the temple of God, God will wreck him. That verse should be more widely quoted than it is. Why do you say, what about when it comes to matters of the interpretation of Scripture? Well, I go back to what I said before.

On fundamental matters, I won't budge an inch. I hope I'd be willing to shed my blood for the great fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. But there are a lot of passages of Scripture on which great and godly men differ.

There's a verse in Galatians that has 250 different interpretations. And I can think of a few other verses where we would have 50 different interpretations in a room like this. What are we going to do? We're not going to be dogmatic.

We're not going to insist that only our view is the right view. I speak so much of H.A.I. because he had such an influence in my life. But when a quibbler would take exception to his teaching on some secondary issue, when somebody would try to involve him in a fight over some secondary issue, Dr. Ironside would say, well, brother, when we get to heaven, one of us is going to be wrong, and perhaps it will be me.

That was the end of it. The man had nothing more to say. He admitted the possibility that he might be right.

He wouldn't have said that about a fundamental issue, would he? No, no. About one of the major doctrines, he wouldn't say that. But he would on a secondary matter.

He would not defend a field of vegetables. When somebody wants to contend with us, it's good to remember Proverbs 26:20. For lack of wood, the fire goes out.

Oftentimes, it's when we keep putting fuel on the fire that the blaze starts up. If we don't add fuel to the fire, it will soon die out. In their zeal for God, young people oftentimes do great harm in the way they confront others.

They try to change others who don't want to be changed. They give advice to others who don't want advice. And I think many of us have learned that no advice is so unwelcome as unasked-for advice.

You can't help people who don't want to be helped except by prayer. Oftentimes, they form judgments. And not just young people, but we form judgments without hearing both sides of a case.

I don't think as a month goes by, but when I have an illustration of this, people forming judgments without hearing both sides of a case, you can't do it. You cannot form a righteous judgment in that day. And then we mind other people's business.

I tell you, a key verse to me that the Lord has pressed home on me so many times in Christian life and service is John 21, 22. What is that to thee? Follow thou me. When I get my eyes off the Lord and get them on some other Christian worker, and maybe I don't like the way he does things, these words come to me.

What is that to thee? Follow thou me. And in those words, follow thou me, I have a job that will take 24 hours out of every day. One final word, we should never betray a confidence.

People will be justified in avoiding us severely if we blab information that was told to us in confidence. These are some practical suggestions that have come to me from people when I face them. I'm sorry to say that...

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