

# The Internet Dad With Millions of Kids

Sue Bohlin



*A father's YouTube channel went viral during the pandemic as he kindly taught adulting skills to the fatherless. Sue Bohlin just loves this sunny spot on the internet!*

This Father's Day, millions of people worldwide will have a new dad to salute and appreciate. The "Internet Dad" is a warm, loving father-figure whose YouTube channel ["Dad How Do I?"](#) exploded during the Coronavirus quarantine.

Rob Kenney creates unfussy, easy-to-understand how-to videos on practical adulting tasks like how to change the tire on a car, how to iron a dress shirt, how to shave, and how to use tools like a stud finder, pliers and a wrench. He's a natural teacher, but what has captivated over two million subscribers in just a couple of months is his heart.

Every single video radiates *kindness*. You know, the fruit of the Spirit that seems to be in alarmingly short supply these days?



He starts his videos with a smiling, “Hi kids!” and always includes a dad joke. A perfect dad joke, even when he messes up. (“Did you hear the joke about the butter? . . . Oh, I just blew it. Did you hear the *rumor* about the butter? Well, I’m not gonna spread it . . .”) As a response to the overwhelming number of views and heartfelt comments, Rob started creating simple messages from the heart; his “Thank You” (for people’s enthusiastic response) video has had over 1.6 million views in just under a month. His description for a video titled “I Am Proud of You” reads, “The internet can’t understand what you all just did! Apparently it doesn’t have an algorithm for kindness. :0) I am proud of all of you!” He has read a children’s book with the intention to read one a month.

He’s being the dad every heart longs for.

Viewers’ comments on Rob’s videos are the most eloquent expression of the worldwide father hunger I’ve ever seen.

One repeated sentiment Rob himself has responded to, which really touched *his* heart, was the sweetly defensive “Protect this man at all costs!”

In the comments on the “I Am Proud of You” video, I was moved to tears by a long thread of “kids” from different countries responding to one poster’s heartbreaking comment: “The words any Asian child dreams of hearing their whole life.” Then “amens” from around the globe: China. India. Eastern Europe. Arabia. Indonesia. And, of course, the United States.

Such heart hunger! Such pain from absent, or distant, or abusive, fathers!

- My dad.. Actually tried to kill me when I was little... He never loved me . . . Will you be my new dad?. . . My Internet dad?
- I've always been scared that when I grow up and if I become a father I won't be able to teach my children "dad" things because no one taught me. Thank you this might change that.
- As someone who's dad left behind 6 girls and a wife, i have NEVER ever appreciated a mans help before. ☐this makes my heart hurt in a good way☐
- "You got this and I'm proud of you." I have a dad and I'm still crying
- Everytime he says hi kids i just wanna say hi dad.
- "I Love you, I'm proud of you, God bless you." All of the internet crying

(OK, I'm gonna stop pasting in comments now. I can't see for the tears.)

What delights me the most about this "Mister Rogers for Adults" is that Rob is a Christ follower. He allows Father God to love His hurting (and not-so-hurting) children through him. The millions of people who watch his videos, and especially the over 100,000 commenters, are experiencing the affection and warmth of the God who loves them more than they can imagine, and this God is using technology to reach millions of people around the world with His love—packaged in a way they can receive.

And It. Is. Glorious!

In the midst of a very hard time for us as a society, it seems that God the Father has bestowed a Father's Day gift on people they didn't know they needed.

God bless you, Internet Dad. I'm proud of you, too. And Happy Father's Day, brother.

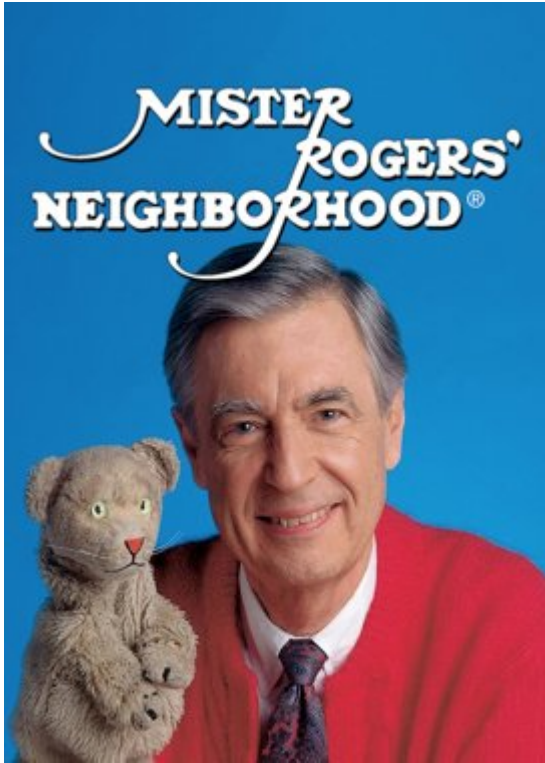
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# Mister Rogers and the Hunger for God

Sue Bohlin





“You’ve made this day a special day by just your being you. There is no person in the whole world like you, and I like you just the way you are.” —*Mister Rogers, to every person as we watched his show.*

With the news that a documentary about Fred Rogers (Public Television’s “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood”) will be released this summer, and a movie about him starring Tom Hanks will be in production soon, there has been a good bit of buzz in social media recently. I keep coming across articles about him and links to videos that often move me to grateful tears for this amazing man.

“Mister Rogers” had a heart for children that is unlike anything I’ve ever seen. His TV program ran for 33 years, from 1968 to 2001. My children grew up watching Mister Rogers, and I often sat with them, equally enthralled by his gentleness, his predictable routines (such as changing out of his jacket into a cardigan sweater and a different pair of shoes *every single show*), and his ability to speak straight to the heart of the audience. Except it wasn’t that we were part of his audience; Mister Rogers communicated in such a powerfully personal way, with such soothing, calm tranquility, that we knew he was speaking to US. Individually.

Even before I learned he was an ordained Presbyterian minister, I sensed there was something deeply spiritual about his message and the way he communicated respect, genuine caring, and encouragement to his “neighbors.” As Jonathan Merritt wrote in *The Atlantic*,

“Fred’s faith surfaced in subtle, indirect ways that most viewers might miss, but it infused all he did. He [believed](#) ‘the space between the television set and the viewer is holy ground,’ but he trusted God to do the heavy lifting. The wall of his office featured a framed [picture](#) of the Greek word for ‘grace,’ a constant reminder of his [belief](#) that he could use television ‘for the broadcasting of grace through the land.’ Before entering that office each day, Rogers would pray, “Dear God, let some word that is heard be yours.”[\[1\]](#)

I once heard a wise man say that since we are made in the image of God, everything we do and say either tells the truth about God, or it tells a lie about God. It seems to me that Fred Rogers showed millions of children what Father God is like. I am especially reminded of God’s own statement about Himself in Exodus 34:6:

The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth . . .

For decades, Mister Rogers demonstrated **compassion**: for people with different skin than his, for people with disabilities, for people going through hard times, and especially by showing unrelenting respect for children—their fears (such as haircuts and being sucked down the bathtub drain) and their pains (like divorce), and their celebrations.

**Grace** was a huge part of Mister Rogers’ worldview. He bestowed dignity and value on everyone because of his belief that all people deserve dignity and appreciation as God’s creations, made in His image. Who know how many little hearts God healed through the song “It’s You I Like”? In fact, when Joan Rivers had him as a guest on the Tonight Show, you can see grace wash over her like the

warm blessing that it was:

God is **slow to anger**, and His servant Mister Rogers showed an amazing degree of patience and self-control in his shows. He always moved and spoke slowly and deliberately, as an antidote to the barrage of “Hurry up, hurry up!” children often hear from their frazzled, impatient caregivers.

God **abounds in lovingkindness and truth**, and apparently so did Mister Rogers. One of his quotes:

“There are three ways to ultimate success:

The first way is to be kind.

The second way is to be kind.

The third way is to be kind.”

This is a great quote, but countless people report that Fred Rogers *lived* it. He was the epitome of kindness—to everyone. One journalist reported a typical scene when he walked on the streets of New York:

“. . .but every time [the show’s producer Margy Whitmer] turned around, there was Mister Rogers putting his arms around someone, or wiping the tears off someone’s cheek, or passing around the picture of someone’s child, or getting on his knees to talk to a child. Margy couldn’t stop them, and she couldn’t stop him. “Oh, Mister Rogers, thank you for my childhood.” “Oh, Mister Rogers, you’re the father I never had.” “Oh, Mister Rogers, would you please just hug me?” [{{2}}](#)

In the wake of the #metoo movement, ugly truths are emerging about certain celebrities. It’s good to be able to highlight one of the good guys, who shone his light to the glory of God as he nourished the souls of millions of children and anyone else who watched his TV show.

I think we are all hungry to know that we are loved, especially by God. I look



forward to meeting him in heaven one day. I will close with this story I found on Facebook that powerfully expresses Mister Rogers' legacy:

"A good portion of my pro-bono work is defending abused children. It's a cause close to my heart. In the course of my work I met a man who was an adult survivor. You wouldn't have known it looking at him. He was this gigantic Polynesian guy. Wild curly hair. I think of him every time I see Khal Drogo on GoT. He was counseling some of the little kids, and doing a fantastic job of it.

"I visited his home to get his opinion on something and I noticed a little toy on his desk. It was Trolley. Naturally curious, I asked him about it. This is what he told me:

"The most dangerous time for me was in the afternoon when my mother got tired and irritable. Like clockwork. Now, she liked to beat me in discreet places so my father wouldn't see the bruises. That particular day she went for the legs. Not uncommon for her. I was knocked down and couldn't get back up. Also not uncommon. She gave me one last kick, the one I had come to learn meant 'I'm done now'. Then she left me there upstairs, face in the carpet, alone. I tried to get up, but couldn't. So I dragged myself, arm over arm, to the television, climbed up the tv cabinet and turned on the TV.

"And there was Mr. Rogers. It was the end of the show and he was having a quiet, calm conversation with those hundreds of kids. In that moment, he seemed to look me in the eye when he said 'And I like you just for being you'. In that moment, it was like he was reaching across time and space to say these words to me when I needed them most.

"It was like the hand of God, if you're into that kind of thing. It hit me in the soul. I was a miserable little kid. I was sure I was a horrible person. I was sure I deserved every last moment of abuse, every blow, every bad name. I was sure I earned it, sure I didn't deserve better. I *\*knew\** all of these things ...



until that moment. If this man, who I hadn't even met, liked me just for being me, then I couldn't be all bad. Then maybe someone could love me, even if it wasn't my mom.

“It gave me hope. If that nice man liked me, then I wasn't a monster. I was worth fighting for. From that day on, his words were like a secret fortress in my heart. No matter how broken I was, no matter how much it hurt or what was done to me, I could remember his words, get back on my feet, and go on for another day.

“That's why I keep Trolley there. To remind me that, no matter how terrible things look, someone who had never met me liked me just for being me, and that makes even the worst day worth it to me. I know how stupid it sounds, but Mr. Rogers saved my life.’

“The next time I saw him, he was talking to one of my little clients. When they were done with their session, he helped her out of her chair, took both of her hands, looked her in the eyes and said: ‘And remember, I like you just for being you.’

“That, to me, is Mr. Rogers' most powerful legacy. All of the little lives he changed and made better with simple and sincere words of love and kindness.”

1. [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/mister-rogers-saint/416838/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/mister-rogers-saint/416838/)
2. [www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a27134/can-you-say-hero-esq1198/](http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a27134/can-you-say-hero-esq1198/)

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on May 1, 2018.

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# What Does Grace Look Like?

Sue Bohlin

Grace is one of those theological words that we *think* we know and understand, but many people don't really grasp because they've never seen it modeled. Grace is what Mark Driscoll calls "ill-deserved" favor; it is the display of unwarranted kindness and love.

I've been writing a radio program (the transcript of which will become a [web article](#)) for Probe Ministries on grace. So for the last few months I've been paying attention to people's stories of grace, jotting them down so I wouldn't forget (because [I leak!](#)). What a blessing it has been to record these stories in my Day-Timer, of receiving grace from God both directly, and from Him through other people.

## Personal Grace Straight From God

- The rain holds off till the second you get in the car, when a torrential downpour starts.
- Traffic lights turn or stay green, one after another, when you're running late. Especially when the timing of traffic lights doesn't usually work like that.
- You "just happen" to notice the stove burner still on when you're about to head out the door.
- You leave your car keys in the ignition, with the car still on, as you go into church—and the car is still there when you get back.
- You are rejected by the only college you wanted, scrambling to find a second

choice and not enjoying that field of study, only to be directed to a completely different academic discipline that gives you the “a-ha moment” of realizing this is what God made you for.

- Your flight to Australia is delayed by 24 hours and you arrive at your destination two hours before a conference, in just enough time to change clothes, wash your face and brush your teeth—and then God provides a full complement of energy and clarity to speak all day.
- You are so traumatized by your parents’ emotional and sexual abuse that you splinter into several different internal parts or personalities, but that splintering keeps you from going insane. As those parts integrate after years of therapy, you realize that God’s grace enabled some of them to release (forget) memories that you didn’t need to know.

### **God’s Grace Through People**

- You learn that the person in front of you has paid your toll.
- You don’t nag or react with exasperation when someone forgets something you told them, or that they already told you, because you remember you’re a fallen, faulty creature too.
- Giving people a safe place to be real, to express doubts and fears, to confess they messed up, and be met with loving acceptance without shame or condemnation.
- Not writing people off when they make a mistake.
- Lifting off the burden of needless “shoulds” and “oughts” that weigh people down. One grace-filled speaker invited people to respond in song at the end of her message, saying, “If you’d like to sing, great! Join us! If you need a rest, feel free to just listen.” She removed any pressure to perform.

And one of my all-time favorite stories of grace:

- My dear friend had always patterned herself after her mother, who purported to be the ultimate Christian wife and mother. In therapy because of how her life was falling apart, she was starting to realize what monsters her abusive parents were; horrific memories began to surface and the pieces started to fit together. One night she realized that when she got married, she had even chosen the same dishes as her mother's. Suddenly she couldn't abide the thought of keeping them in the house a moment longer. She strode into the kitchen on a mission, grabbed a plate out of the cupboard and hurled it to the floor, smashing it to pieces. Her husband heard the noise and came to see what was going on. When she explained the connection between their dishes and her mother, her husband calmly said, "Have at it. Tomorrow morning I'll take you to get new dishes." Not only did he clean up the mess when she was done, but all those broken shards damaged their kitchen floor—and he never once mentioned it.

Now that's grace.

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[blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/what\\_does\\_grace\\_look\\_like](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/what_does_grace_look_like) on February 14, 2012.

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## Civility

Kerby Anderson

*We are living in the midst of an epidemic of rudeness and desperately need civility. Kerby Anderson looks at the rise of incivility and documents its effects in society, education, and politics. He concludes by providing a biblical framework*

*for civility.*

## **The Rise of Incivility**

We seem to be living in the midst of an epidemic of rudeness. Articles in the newspaper document the number of incidents of road rage. And if you doubt that, just try to merge onto a busy freeway and see how many drivers honk their horn or try to cut you off.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg. A 1997 American Automobile Association report documents a sharp rise in the use of cars as weapons (people trying to run over other people on purpose). A Colorado funeral director complains about impatient drivers darting in and out of funeral processions. Instead of waiting for the procession to pass, they threaten life and limb while ignoring both law and tradition in their rush to get somewhere.

Rudeness seems to be at an all-time high in airports. There is the story of the man who was angry at missing a flight connection and threw his suitcase at an eight-month pregnant airline employee. Or there is the story of the woman who learned that there were no sandwiches on her flight and punched the flight attendant and pushed her to the floor. And there is the tragic story of the man who rushed the cockpit and had to be restrained. In the process of stopping him, the passengers apparently used too much force and killed him.

Cursing and vulgar language are on the increase. Character assassination and negative political advertisements are up. Meanwhile, charitable giving seems to be on the decline along with volunteerism.

No wonder so many are talking about the need for civility. George W. Bush's inaugural speech talked about "a new commitment to live out our nation's promise through civility, courage, compassion and character. America, at its best, matches a commitment to principle with a concern for civility."

Commentators are wringing their hands over our social distress. Former education secretary and virtues guru William Bennett has addressed the issue of civility. Gertrude Himmelfarb has written about *The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*. Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled*, has devoted a book to the problem, as has Yale Law professor Stephen Carter.

Newspapers are running stories asking, “Why are we so rude?” *U.S. News and World Report* talks about “The American Uncivil Wars.”<sup>{1}</sup> They conclude that “Crude, Rude and Obnoxious Behavior Has Replaced Good Manners.”

So in this article I will be addressing this very important concept of civility. In a sense, it is a second installment on a previous article I wrote on [integrity](#). If integrity is the standard we use to judge our own moral development, then civility is the standard we use to judge our moral interaction with others.

As we will see, the rules of civility are ultimately the rules of morality, which are rooted in biblical morality.

## The Moral Basis of Civility

The word *civilité* shares the same etymology with words like *civilized* and *civilization*. Quite simply, the root word means to be “a member of the household.” Just as there are certain rules that allow family members to live peacefully within a household, so there are rules of civility that allow us to live peacefully within a society. We have certain moral responsibilities to one another.

While there have been many philosophical discussions on what civility is and how it should be practiced, I believe Jesus simply expressed the goal of civility when he taught that, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). If we truly love our neighbors, then we should be governed by moral standards that express concern for others and limit our own freedom.

Perhaps that is why civility is on the decline. More and more people live for themselves and do not feel they are morally accountable to anyone (even God) for their actions or behavior. We are told to “Look Out for #1,” and not to let anyone limit our freedom to be ourselves.

Civility also acknowledges the value of another person. Politeness and manners are not merely to make social life easier. Stephen Carter, in his book on *Civility*, says that our actions and sacrifice are a

. . .[S]ignal of respect for our fellow citizens, marking them as full equals, both before the law and before God. Rules of civility are thus also rules of morality; it is morally proper to treat our fellow citizens with respect, and morally improper not to. Our crisis of civility is part of a larger crisis of morality. [\[2\]](#)

Again, this may help answer why civility is on the decline. An increasing majority in our society no longer believes in moral absolutes. These deny that absolutes of any kind exist, much less moral absolutes. So as our crisis of morality unfolds, so does barbarism and decadence. Civility is what is lost from society.

If this is so, then the rise of rudeness and incivility cannot be easily altered. Miss Manners and others have written books about how our nation can regain its civility. But if the crisis is greater than a lack of manners (and I believe that it is), its solution must be found in a greater social change than merely teaching manners or character. Ultimately, an increase in civility must flow out of a moral and religious change. Spiritual revival and reformation are the ultimate solutions to the current problem of incivility. And I believe Christians should lead the way by exemplary behavior. In essence, Christians must be the best citizens and the best examples of civility in society.

## **Civility in the Schools**

We have documented the rising incivility in our society. What is so tragic is to find that our children are mimicking the incivility of the adult world. A poll conducted



by the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that 89 percent of grade school teachers and principals reported that they “regularly” face abusive language from students.[{3}](#)

Contrast this situation with the nature of public education just a few decades ago. It is likely that when you grew up, you were instructed in manners and etiquette. The day began with the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and throughout the day you were instructed to show respect to your country and to your teachers.

Today when schools try to teach manners, parents and civil libertarians often thwart those plans. And when a school does succeed in teaching civility, the story becomes headline news; as it was when *U.S. News and World Report* opened its account on “The American Uncivil Wars” with a story of a school that was actually trying to teach manners.[{4}](#)

Consider what would have happened a few decades ago if you misbehaved at school. Your teacher or your principal would have disciplined you. And when you arrived home, your parents would have assumed you were disciplined for good reason. They probably would have punished you again. Now contrast that with today’s parents who are quick to challenge the teacher or principal and are often quick to threaten with a lawsuit.

When I was growing up there seemed to be a conspiracy of the adults against the kids. Every parent and every teacher had the same set of moral values. So if I misbehaved at Johnny’s house, I knew that Johnny’s mother had the same set of rules as my mother. If I misbehaved at school, I knew my teachers had the same set of rules as my parents.

Today that moral consensus is gone. If anything, we have a conspiracy of the kids against the adults. Most kids spend lots of time telling their parents what *other* parents let their kids do. We have sunk to the least common denominator in our morality.

To rebuild civility in our society, we need to begin with the next generation. Sadly they are not learning to respect authority. They are learning to disrespect authority and to play one set of parental values against another. And parents must begin to trust a teacher's authority. My parents trusted the teachers and the school to enforce the rules appropriately. Trust and respect are two essential ingredients in rebuilding a foundation of civility.

## **Civility in Politics**

Often when we talk about the need for civility, we focus on the political arena. Character assassination and negative political advertisements are on the increase. Many commentators lament what they call the "politics of personal destruction." And savvy candidates have tried to tap into this growing concern by calling for greater civility in our public discourse.

At the outset, we should acknowledge that politics has always been a dirty business. More than two centuries ago, the founders of this country often had harsh and critical things to say about each other during political campaigns. Yet we also have some very positive examples of civil discussions of major social ills.

According to Stephen Carter in his book *Civility*, one shining example of this is the Civil Rights Movement. "The leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) knew that the protests would be met with violence, because they were challenging a violently oppressive system. But they also knew that success would be found not through incivility, but through the display of moral courage."

Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders trained their protestors to remain civil and even loving in the face of repression. He called this the "process of purification," and it "involved both prayer and repeated reminders that the Biblical injunction to love our neighbors is not a command to love only the nice ones." It's instructive to remember that the stated purpose of the Southern

Christian Leadership Conference was “to save the soul of the nation.”

Those of us involved in social action today should be mindful of this as we fight against social ills in our society. I firmly believe that Christians should be good citizens and models of civility. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be passionate about trying to rectify social problems. And we can disagree with those who do not hold to a biblical view of morality. But we should learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We should make our case with logic and compassion. And I believe we will be more successful if we do so.

Consider the abortion debate. A majority of citizens have a great deal of ambivalence about abortion. They do not feel good about abortion on demand, but they also fear what might happen if abortion was totally banned in this country. Will we attract these millions of people by being angry, vociferous Bible-thumpers? Or will we attract them by being thoughtful, compassionate Christians who demonstrate our love for both mother and child at crisis pregnancy centers? I think the answer should be obvious, and that is the power of civility in the public arena.

## **Civility: A Biblical Framework**

At the heart of civility is the biblical command to love your neighbor as yourself. While it is relatively easy to love people who are your friends or people who are nice to you, the real test of Christian love comes when we are with strangers or with people who are not civil to you. When we find ourselves in the presence of strangers, we should treat them with dignity and respect even if they are not civil to us. Even if they are not gracious toward us, we should not repay them with incivility. Romans 12:21 says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Our duty to be civil to others should not depend on whether we like them or agree with their moral or political perspectives. They may be disagreeable, and we are

free to disagree with them, but we should do so by giving grace. Often such a gentle response can change a discussion or dialogue. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that, “A gentle answer turns away wrath.”

Civility also requires humility. A civil person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, one should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right and that he is wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.”

Civility also requires that we watch what we say. The Bible clearly warns us of the danger of the tongue (James 3:5-8). We should work to cleanse our language of harsh, critical, and condemning words. We should rid ourselves of nasty and vulgar language. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

If Christians want to reform society and return to civility, one excellent model is William Wilberforce (1759-1833). Most people know Wilberforce as the man who brought an end to the British slave trade. He served for half a century in the House of Commons. And led by his Christian faith, he tirelessly worked for the abolition of slavery. But that was only one of the “two great objects” of his life. The other, even more daunting was his attempt to transform the civil and moral climate of his times. Although he is known as an abolitionist, the other great accomplishment of his life was in the reformation of manners.

I believe he provides a positive example of how Christians should engage the world. We should do so with courage, compassion, character, and civility.

## **Notes**

1. John Marks, “The American Uncivil Wars: How Crude, Ruse and Obnoxious Behavior Has Replaced Good Manners and Why That Hurts Our Politics and

Culture," *U.S. News and World Report*, 22 April 1996, 66-72.

2. Stephen Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 11.

3. Antonia Barber, "Rough Language Plagues Schools, Educators Say," *USA Today*, 11 March 1997, 6D.

4. Marks, "The American Uncivil Wars," 66.

5. Carter, *Civility*, 28.

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