



**A BEAUTIFUL DAY  
IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD**

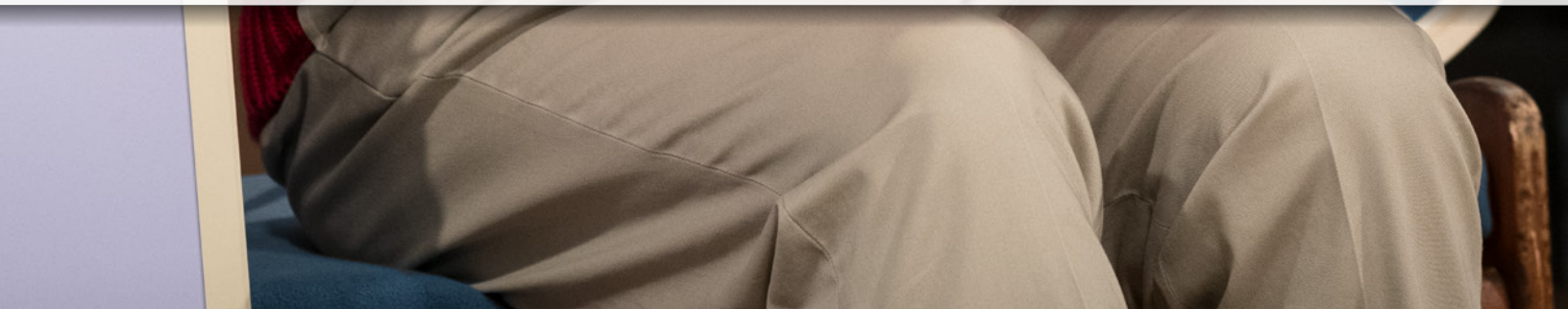
**A FAITH-BASED  
DISCUSSION COMPANION**

*Written by: Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church*



*“What a tough job to try to communicate the gift of Jesus Christ to anybody. It can’t be simply talked about, can it? Jesus himself used parables – so I guess that’s our directive: try to show the kingdom of God through stories as much as possible.”*

**- Fred Rogers**



# A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

This study guide serves as a companion to the film **A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD**. In this guide, we'll discuss key themes and elements of the film, intended to facilitate discussion and personal reflection.

## AN INTRODUCTION:

The final episodes of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* aired in 2001, so while some viewers of the film may never have watched an episode of the TV show, Mister Rogers' cultural impact remains lasting and relevant. The show and the film are built around the idea that all people deserve love, respect, and to be heard.

**A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD** is based on the true story of a real-life friendship between Fred and a cynical journalist. This film poses a powerful question we could all ask of ourselves – “What if you were friends with Mister Rogers?” How would it feel to have someone genuinely care about you to the point that you were invited to explore your past wounds, in a safe environment, so that you could experience the healing and freedom found in forgiving?

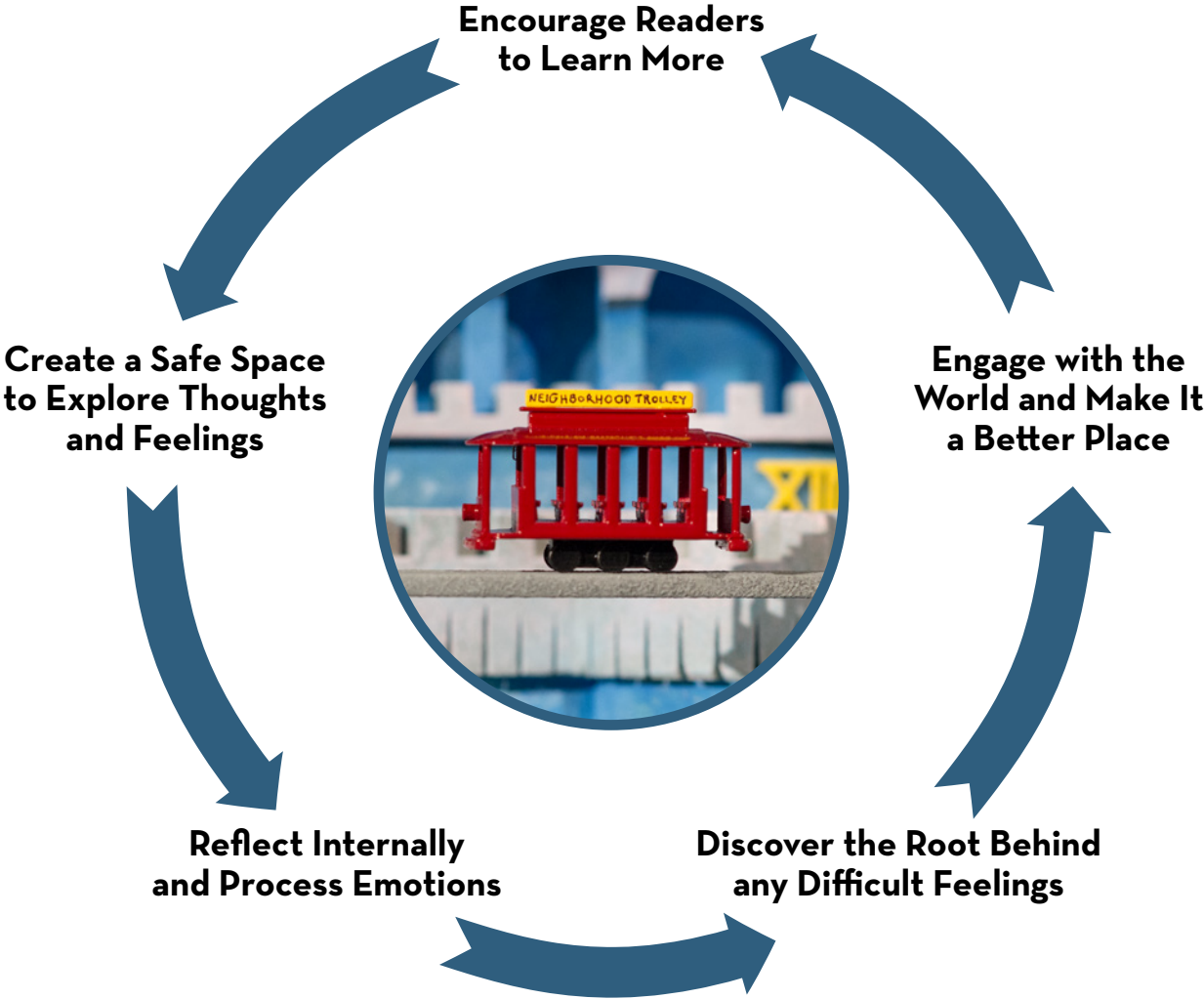
The format of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* helped make it an accessible television show. Every episode began with Mister Rogers entering his house through his door and then singing the theme song, “Won't You be my Neighbor?” He introduced the topic for the day with a short discussion, followed the trolley to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, and finally returned to reality for a reassuring talk and the closing song “It's such a Good Feeling.” The movie follows a similar pattern.

Quotes used in this guide, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the film, **A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD**.

# MISTER ROGERS' BASIC EXPLORATION FORMAT:

This guide includes both times for reflection and times for discussion.

OUR GOAL IS TO:





## 1 | FEELINGS ARE OKAY

*“There is no normal life that is free from pain ... There are many ways you can deal with pain without hurting yourself or others. You can pound a lump of clay, or swim as fast as you can, or play the lowest keys on the piano all at the same time.”*

- Mister Rogers

Have you ever considered that pain and anger are two sides of the same coin? It's almost impossible to think of how they can exist independent of one another.

Having feelings is natural, even feelings that we generally consider to be negative, like anger. It is okay to feel angry sometimes.

- Is there anything you are angry about right now?
- What was the last thing you were angry about?
- What did you do with that anger?
- Did that anger make you do something you wish you hadn't done?

At first, Lloyd Vogel avoided talking about his feelings, his pain, and his anger with Mister Rogers. He would often dodge questions by using the word “fine.” “I'm fine.” “It's fine.” We have all said that word.

Would you be willing to think about that word as an acronym?

**FINE** - Feelings Internalized, Not Expressed.

It's so instinctive to answer "fine" when asked how we are doing. Why do we do that?

- Does it keep us from sharing our pain and/or fears with others?
- Does it keep us from the fear that others don't have time or even don't want to share in the burdens of our problems?
- Does it allow us to block out of our mind feelings that we don't like such as fear, anger, confusion, sadness?
- Does it open the door to then possibly having to listen to someone else's response? Will they then feel comfortable sharing their challenges when we don't have time or interest?

Through his enduring kindness and compassion, Mister Rogers helps Lloyd understand his emotions. Many of us have felt like Lloyd: holding on to anger, unsure what to do or how to express it.

A word of encouragement: the next time someone who really cares about you asks, "How are you?" Avoid the word fine! Assume they are asking that question because they really want to know. Assume that they consider you the most important person in the world right then.

Instead, take the lessons that Lloyd learned from Mister Rogers and share your feelings honestly, thoughtfully, and respectfully. It will take some strength, and it probably will seem uncomfortable, but do it anyway. You will be amazed at the affirmation and support you receive!

### **Would you ...?**

Create your own beautiful day: What can I do to make myself, my neighbor, or my neighborhood better this week? Try one suggestion this week and report back to your group the next time you meet. Better yet, come up with your own idea!

1. Find the time to ask two people how they are. If they answer "fine," let them know that you really are interested. Invite them to tell you more.
2. If you hold anger toward someone, earnestly pray for strength and grace, then write them a note, an e-mail or a text sharing why you were angry and then that you truly forgive them. You don't even need to send it.



## 2 | PRODIGAL

*“What do you mean, ‘people like me? Broken?’” - Lloyd Vogel*

*“I’ve never met anyone like you before. I don’t believe you are broken. ... I know you are a man of conviction, a person who knows the difference between what is wrong and what is right. Try to remember the relationship with your father also helped to shape those parts. He helped you become what you are.” - Mister Rogers*

Luke 15 contains three parables: The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Prodigal Son. Because these stories are told one right after the other, many assume that the word “prodigal” also means “lost.” However, the word translated as “prodigal” (Greek: *asōtōs*) actually means something like “wastefully extravagant.” When we use the word “prodigal” we are referring to someone acting in a wastefully extravagant way.

Likewise, we often think that forgiveness means pardoning a fault or showing pity or mercy. The Greek word most often translated as “forgiveness” (*aphiēmi*) actually means something more like “to send away, to let go, to keep no longer.”

Forgiveness doesn’t mean saying that a wrong doesn’t matter. Not at all. It means that we give up the need to deal with it. We are putting the wrong in God’s hands.

Take a few minutes to read the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32).

There are two sons in the story: one who has a difficult time receiving forgiveness and one who has a hard time giving forgiveness.

- Which of the two sons do you identify with more? Why?
- Do you identify with the father figure and the practice of forgiveness found in his life? Why or why not?
- Stretch your imagination: Can you put Lloyd and his sister Lorraine in the places of the brothers? Explain.

In both the film and the parable, we see examples of conflict, reconciliation, and prodigal behavior.

Extravagant love allows for reconciliation and forgiveness, even when that love is not initially understood or well-received.

In your own life, are there things that prevent you from returning to or restoring a relationship? Are there times that you feel like you have generously offered love only to have it not be well-received?

### **Would you ...?**

Create your own beautiful day: What can I do to make myself, my neighbor, or my neighborhood better this week? Try one suggestion this week and report back to your group the next time you meet. Better yet, come up with your own idea!

1. Be extravagant to yourself this week. Find something that will bring you joy and do it! Visit a friend, call a cousin you haven't talked to in ages, or buy a candy bar and relish every single bite.
2. Be extravagant to your neighbor this week. Bless your pastor or another church staff member with a handwritten note of appreciation for a job well done.
3. Be extravagant to your neighborhood this week. Pick up trash you see on the sidewalk, bring your neighbor flowers, donate clothing or household goods to your local thrift store.



### 3 | ANYTHING MENTIONABLE IS MANAGEABLE

*“Death is something many of us are uncomfortable speaking about. But to die is to be human. And anything human is mentionable. Anything mentionable is manageable.” - Mister Rogers*

Let's take a trip into the Neighborhood of Make-Believe.

Imagine yourself, right now, in a position similar to Lloyd's. You are disconnected or in conflict with a parent or friend. You can't bring yourself to pick up the phone or reach out and begin to mend a broken relationship.

- What feelings control most of your actions?
- What is making you run away from meaningful connections with others?
- How do you justify the way you treat people?
- What prevents you from giving love to your parent? Friend? Sibling?

Now, place yourself in Jerry's shoes.

- How would you feel if someone refused your request for reconciliation?
- What does it look like to seek forgiveness from someone? What about forgiving yourself?

#### **Would you ...?**

Create your own beautiful day: What can I do to make myself, my neighbor, or my neighborhood better this week? Try one suggestion this week and report back to your group the next time you meet. Better yet, come up with your own idea!

1. Speak about the unspeakable. If something on your mind seems like too much to deal with, verbalize it. Pray out loud. Ask God for help.
2. Do you know someone who has lost a loved one? Sit and listen as they talk about the loss.
3. Pray for your neighborhood/community, asking God to bless the people, the business leaders, first responders, teachers at the local schools, etc, .

## 4 | FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

*“... Think about all the people who loved us into being. They will come to you.”*

- Mister Rogers

Forgiveness, reconciliation, pursuit, and prodigal behavior link the Prodigal Son parable and the film. Pursuit and prodigal behavior each stand alone. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two related, but different things.

Forgiveness is an internal process where a person works through the hurt by identifying the source of the pain, gains an understanding or acceptance of what happened, and releases the feelings of anger, resentment and/or fear towards that person. This can be done independently from the one who hurt you.



Reconciliation is an interpersonal process where you have conversations with the one who hurt you. Address your view on what happened, listen to how they view what happened, share the pain the experience created, actively listen for remorse, and begin to reestablish trust.

Both forgiveness and reconciliation require the presence of grace.

- What do you think about the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation? How have you experienced this in your life?
- What examples from Lloyd and Jerry's interactions could be labeled as either forgiveness or reconciliation?

Lloyd was holding grudges. He was so wrapped up in the hurt from his past that he couldn't enjoy the present. The power of forgiveness allows Lloyd to recognize his own shortcomings and reconnect with his father.

- Are you are holding on to something from your past that makes you feel angry?
- What would it take to let that thing go?
- How might your feelings and relationships be different if you were able to let it go?
- Is there anyone you need to forgive? Anyone you want to be reconciled with?
- How might you start that reconciliation?

### Would you ...?

Create your own beautiful day: What can I do to make myself, my neighbor, or my neighborhood better this week? Try one suggestion this week and report back to your group the next time you meet. Better yet, come up with your own idea!

1. Fast and pray for one day, asking God to help you mend a broken relationship with a friend or family member.
2. Pray about the relationship of two people you know who are far apart, asking God to bring forgiveness and reconciliation.
3. Watch your local news and write down any reports of people being kind to one another or forgiving one another.

## 5 | PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

*“There is no one else in the world just like you, and I like you exactly like you are.”*

- Mister Rogers

When Lloyd asks Joanne Rogers, Mister Rogers’ wife, what it’s like to be married to a saint, she rejects that terminology. “If you make him a saint, then who he is seems unattainable. He has to practice being who he is every day.”

Practice means you’re not perfect at something, but you work to improve and refine. It’s a discipline.

Many Christian traditions encourage patterns of living and spiritual practices as ways to work with God’s grace for a transformed life.

- Have you tried to follow any patterns or sets of behavior to be more Christ-like? If yes, how have those gone for you? What has made them work? What is difficult about them?
- Does your church encourage any particular practices to help your discipleship growth?
- Mister Rogers’ patterns are mentioned several times in the film, including by his wife. Are there people you talk with about your spiritual growth? About challenges that you are having or milestones you are reaching? If not, is it because you find sharing difficult?
- How could a daily pattern, or setting of intentional behaviors, help you manage and express your feelings?

Mister Rogers regularly told children that they were loved just the way they were, that they were unique and special, and that they didn’t have to wait until they were grown up to be acceptable. Even with those wonderful truths, he obviously believed we were all capable of being more than children and could grow and change and become more Christ-like.

Do you know that Christ loves you just the way you are? You are acceptable, and He longs to reconcile you unto Himself. He has already taken the first step and walked all the way to Calvary. Now it’s your turn.

## Would you ...?

Create your own beautiful day: What can I do to make myself, my neighbor, or my neighborhood better this week? Try one suggestion this week and report back to your group the next time you meet. Better yet, come up with your own idea!

1. Tell three children you care about that you love them just exactly the way they are.
2. Look for examples of people who show acceptance and kindness. Make a note of it and report back to your group.
3. As a group, choose one of the Works of Mercy (do good works, visit the sick, visit prisoners, feed the hungry, give generously, end oppression, end discrimination, and address the needs of the poor) and, for this week, practice, practice, practice it together.



# IN THEATERS THANKSGIVING

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