

1

Those of you who are Facebook users may have been alarmed if you received this message:

ATTENTION : Tomorrow morning when you connect to Facebook you'll be invited to payment info.....it's official....it was even on the news. Facebook will begin to charge fees...because of charges of profile. If you copy this on your wall your icon will be blue and Facebook will be free to you....copy and paste to your wall

Guess we'd better hurry up and post that announcement.

Or maybe you got excited if you read, "Hey Facebook, As some of you may know, I'm Bill Gates. If you click that share link, I will give you \$5,000. I always deliver, I mean, I brought you Windows XP, right?"

Or you might have been concerned when you read "Fred Rogers served as a sniper during the Vietnam War and had a large number of confirmed kills and that he wore his sweaters to conceal the extensive tattoos on his arms that were acquired while serving in the military."<sup>1</sup>

All three of these stories are fake news, sometimes called urban legends that float around on the internet. None of them are genuine, for they

are filled with false information designed to intentionally mislead readers.

False stories have always been around, but with our modern technology, they spread even quicker, with good and caring people getting caught up in the mistaken hype. I imagine you've heard quite a few pieces of fake news, but sometimes it's challenging to sort out what really is genuine.

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome, he didn't have to worry about the spread of fake news online, but he did encounter wrong ideas and was concerned about what was genuine. He may have heard stories about misleading understandings of love, for he wrote to the church, "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good," or as *The Message Bible* translates this phrase: "Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it."

He then gave a list of examples of what love looks like:

Treat each other as loving family members, be patient and keep praying, take care of those in

2

need, welcome strangers to your home, bless those who mistreat you, be happy with those who are happy and sad with those who are sad, be friends with everyone—even ordinary people.

Some of those are easier to do than others, such as treating one another as family. That sounds easy enough, unless of course, you don't get along with your family.

Have you ever been sad with someone who has experienced a great loss? Or have you been happy with someone celebrating something wonderful in their life? Those seem like ways most of us could show genuine love.

How about being patient with others? Well, that may be a bit more challenging for some of us, but it's within our reach.

How about blessing those who mistreat you? Hum...that's more difficult, but at least we might offer a few genuine prayers for them.

How about caring for those in need or welcoming strangers into your home. Those are probably the most difficult ones on the list, though

we might find it easier to donate money for others to care for those in need rather than doing it ourselves.

Sometimes we feel uncomfortable with those we don't know, as I have been discovering as people discuss the growing number of homeless people in our communities. In a recent meeting about trying to create a city ordinance to discourage people from gathering in a popular place in Elkhart, some indicated that they felt unsafe when they passed by the homeless. When I have traveled past the same location, I've always found the group polite.

Some at the meeting were concerned that the homeless don't use trash cans, but upon investigation one person learned that the can was already full from other people who had used it. It's tempting to blame certain groups of people, but emptying the can more often or adding a second can might address the issue.

That is what I think Paul meant about genuine love when he wrote, "Be friendly with everyone.

3

Don't be proud and feel that you are smarter than others. Make friends with ordinary people" (CEV).

Another thing about genuine love: it isn't concerned about being first or getting what you want or winning at the expense of others, as a runner discovered in a race in 2012.

Spanish athlete Iván Fernández Anaya was competing in a cross-country race... He was running second, some distance behind race leader Abel Mutai... As they entered the finishing straight, he saw the Kenyan runner—the certain winner of the race—mistakenly pull up about 10 meters before the finish, thinking he had already crossed the line.

Fernández Anaya quickly caught up with him, but instead of exploiting Mutai's mistake to speed past and claim an unlikely victory, he stayed behind and, using gestures, guided the Kenyan to the line and let him cross first...

"I didn't deserve to win it," ... Anaya explained. "I did what I had to do. He was the rightful winner. He created a gap that I couldn't have closed if he hadn't made a mistake. As soon as I saw he was stopping, I knew I wasn't going to pass him."<sup>2</sup>

His coach commented, "It was a very good gesture of honesty... A gesture of the kind that isn't made any more."

Maybe that's what Paul meant by genuine love—not taking advantage of another's mistake.

Sometimes it's not easy to love like this, is it? Psychologist Eric Fromm suggested that love takes practice, just like learning any skill. He wrote in his book *The Art of Loving* that

The first step to take is to become aware that love is an art, just as living is an art; if we want to learn how to love we must proceed in the same way we have to proceed if we want to learn any other art, say music, painting, carpentry, or the art of medicine or engineering...

The mastery of the art must be a matter of ultimate concern; there must be nothing else in the world more important than the art. This holds true for music, for medicine, for carpentry — and for love. And, maybe, here lies the answer to the question of why people in our culture try so rarely to learn this art, in spite of their obvious failures: in spite of the deep-seated craving for love, almost everything else is considered to be more important than love: success, prestige, money, power — almost all

④

our energy is used for the learning of how to achieve these aims, and almost none to learn the art of loving.<sup>3</sup>

Maybe we could spend less time arguing about fake news and instead practice genuine love,

creating a beautiful world filled with artistic, caring encounters with everyone we meet.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://library-nd.libguides.com/fakenews/examples>

<sup>2</sup> [www.fairplayinternational.org/honesty-of-the-long-distance-runner](http://www.fairplayinternational.org/honesty-of-the-long-distance-runner)

<sup>3</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, chapter 1, “Is Love an Art?” (Harper Perennial, 2006), 2013.