

THE BIG IDEAS

Your Eulogy

In three words.

An Enraged Mister Rogers

= Fierce love in action.

A Barrellful of Songs

Your barrel overflowing?

Swimming with Fred

Followed by 143!

Making Goodness

Attractive.



The World According to Mister Rogers

Important Things to Remember

BY FRED ROGERS · HYPERION © 2003 · 208 PAGES

"He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much, who has enjoyed the trust of pure women, the respect of intelligent men, and the love of little children, who has filled his niche and accomplished his task, who has left the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul, who has never lacked appreciation of Earth's beauty or failed to express it, who has always looked for the best in others and given them the best he had, whose life was an inspiration, whose memory a benediction." - Bessie Anderson Stanley

There were always quotes like that tucked away in Fred's wallet, next to his neatly folded bills, or in the pages of his daily planner book. Perhaps he liked having words of wisdom close to him, as if he wanted—or needed—to be constantly reminded of what was important in life. The outside world may have thought his qualities of wisdom and strength came naturally to him, but those close to him knew that he was constantly striving to be the best that he could be. He was as human as the rest of us."

~ Joanne Rogers from the Foreword to *The World According to Mister Rogers*

Welcome to the second Note on Mister Rogers' wisdom.

Did you know that Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister who was given the unique charge of working with children and families through television? Yep.

Since watching the documentary [Won't You Be My Neighbor?](#), I've fallen in love with the man and his "relentless commitment to all that is best in people."

I actually read both this book and the one we covered in our last Note ([You Are Special](#)) on the same weekend. They're both quick-reading collections of some of Fred's best wisdom gems gathered from various sources and organized by different themes.

And... Both books left a very powerful impression on my consciousness—making me a better, more loving father and husband. In fact, Fred Rogers is my new go-to hero for the warmth and patience and presence with which I want to show up in those roles in my life.

As I was reading his books (and elevating my consciousness via his), I was reminded of some Joseph Campbell wisdom. A couple nuggets actually.

First, his quip from [Pathways to Bliss](#): "For myself, well, Alan Watts once asked me what spiritual practice I followed. I told him, 'I underline books.' It's all in how you approach it."

And, this little exchange with Bill Moyers from [The Power of Myth](#).

Moyers asked Campbell: "How do we know these things [how to experience bliss]?"

To which Campbell replies: "I'll tell you a way, a very nice way. Sit in a room and read—and read and read. And read the right books by the right people. **Your mind is brought onto**

"Discovering the truth about ourselves is a lifetime's work, but it's worth the effort."

~ Fred Rogers

that level, and you have a nice, mild, slow-burning rapture all the time. *This realization of life can be a constant realization in your living.*” <- Emphasis mine. Yep. That’s exactly the sensation I had.

If you’d like to soak your mind on Mister Rogers’ wonderfully wise level, I think you’ll love the book as much as I did. (Get a copy [here](#).) (And, you can learn more about the great work that the Fred Rogers Production staff continues to do in the world [here](#).)

As always, this book is packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share a handful we can apply to our lives TODAY so let’s jump straight in!

YOUR EULOGY IN THREE WORDS

“Sometimes, doing ‘the best we can’ may still fall short of what we would like to be able to do, but life isn’t perfect-on any front-and doing what we can with what we have is the most we should expect of ourselves or anyone else.”

~ Fred Rogers

“The person Fred became in his later years came out of growth and struggle. As he got older, it seemed as if the nurturing of his soul and mind became more and more important. He read with pleasure the works of friends and others he admired and respected, and he began each day with prayers for a legion of family and friends and, in general, for the peacemakers of the world. Reading the Bible was also part of his early morning routine—before he went for his daily swim. He worked hard at being the best he could be. In fact, it seems to me he worked a lot more than he played. Discipline was his very strong suit. If I were asked for three words to describe him, I think those words would be *courage, love, and discipline*—perhaps in that very order.

He worked so hard at being other-oriented (not self-centered) that he’d often express himself by using the first person plural. He’d say, ‘*We’re* doing this or that.’ It was almost always ‘*we*.’ People might sometimes have wondered who else he was including. Perhaps he was simply making an effort to ensure that his colleagues and coworkers were equally recognized and valued for the work in which they all were so invested. That would’ve been Fred’s wish. ...

When I think of the *persona* of Fred Rogers, my inclination is to put him on a very high pedestal, despite the frailties that are part of being human. Oh, did I mention what a *kind* person he was? I suppose that is part of everyone’s experience of Fred—even those who knew him for only a couple of minutes. I don’t mean to sound boastful, but he was my icon before he was anyone else’s. Being Mrs. Fred Rogers has been the most remarkable life I could have ever imagined.”

That (along with the intro quote) is from the beautiful *Foreword* by Fred’s wife, Joanne Rogers.

I read those inspiring words and thought to myself, “*Wow. What a blessing to be worthy of THAT kind of praise from the woman with whom you spent your entire life!*” (Fred and Joanne were married for 51 years!!)

Then I thought, “I want to be worthy of that.” Then I knew we’d need to make this the first Big Idea of this Note.

So... You know those “eulogy virtues” we talk about all the time?

In [The Road to Character](#), David Brooks tells us: “*Recently I’ve been thinking about the difference between the résumé virtues and the eulogy virtues. The résumé virtues are the ones you list on your résumé, the skills that you bring to the job market and that contribute to external success. The eulogy virtues are deeper. They’re the virtues that get talked about at your funeral, the ones that exist at the core of your being—whether you are kind, brave, honest or faithful; what kind of relationships you formed.*

Most of us would say that the eulogy virtues are more important than the résumé virtues, but I confess that for long stretches of my life I’ve spent more time thinking about the latter than the former. Our educational system is certainly oriented around the résumé virtues more than the eulogy ones. Public conversation is, too—the self-help tips in magazines, the nonfiction bestsellers. Most of us have clearer strategies for how to achieve career success than we do for how to develop profound character.”

"The thing I remember best about successful people I've met all through the years is their obvious delight in what they're doing . . . and it seems to have very little to do with worldly success. They just love what they're doing, and they love it in front of others."

~ Fred Rogers

Stephen Covey tells us we need to "Begin with the End" in mind. Our ULTIMATE end, of course, is how we want to be remembered when we're gone.

I've used a version of his "Eulogy Exercise" as the very (!) first exercise I used with my very (!) first coaching client nearly 20 years ago. And, we used it as the very (!) first exercise in our Optimize Coach certification program we launched earlier this year.

All of which begs a couple of questions.

1. What three virtues do you hope your loved ones use to describe YOU?
2. Are you living in integrity with them?

Remember: TODAY is (always!) the Day.

P.S. That whole discussion about how hard Fred worked to be "other-oriented" via his practice of using the first-person plural "we" reminds me of this wisdom from Brent Kessel's great book [It's Not About the Money](#).

He tells us: *"The irony is that the more self-centered we are, the less likely we are to survive. A medical study of more than three thousand individuals over seven years measured the frequency with which each person spoke the words I, me, and my, to see if there was any correlation between this self-referencing and coronary heart disease. Amazingly, they found that self-referencing was indeed related to the incidence of heart disease; in fact, it was the strongest predictor of mortality among heart attack victims."*

Plus: *"It's as though the laws of the universe bend for love. Financial laws bend. Temporal laws bend. Logistical constraints bend. By giving, we might just end up having more."*

P.P.S. Speaking of "we," let's not forget our Note on [Me to We](#).

AN ENRAGED MISTER ROGERS

"The values we care about the deepest, and the movements within society that support those values, command our love. When those things that we care about so deeply become endangered, we become enraged. And what a healthy thing that is! Without it, we would never stand up and speak out for what we believe."

Mister Rogers "enraged"?

Yep.

You want to see his fierce courage in action?

[Watch this 6 minute, 50 second video of him testifying before congress.](#)

Note: Please make sure you notice how he channeled that rage into pure love.

Notice how pure love broke through the armor of a hitherto harsh foe. (I'll be surprised if you, like the Senator in that hearing, don't get goosebumps (and/or tears) FEELING the soul force of Fred Rogers standing up and speaking out for what he believed in and dedicated his life to.)

What's fascinating for me is how similar Fred's approach is to Gandhi's. I just finished Eknath Easwaran's brilliant biography *Gandhi the Man*. (Note soon.)

One of the primary themes of that book is Gandhi's evolution/transformation in which he learned to alchemize his anger into an unstoppable "soul-force."

He did this via what he called "satyagraha."

Satyagraha is a word he coined combining two Sanskrit words. It basically means "holding onto truth" and is the foundation of his (and MLK's) "nonviolent resistance" to evil.

"There is no normal life that is free of pain. It's the very wrestling with our problems that can be the impetus for our growth."

~ Fred Rogers

So... What values do YOU care about the deepest? What movements within society support those values and command your love? Are those values endangered?

If so, let's become enraged and celebrate the power of that emotion as we alchemize that fierce love into noble action—standing up and speaking out for what we believe.

P.S. Aristotle comes to mind as well. He tells us: *"So too it is easy to get angry—anyone can do that—or to give and spend money; but to feel or act toward the right person to the right extent at the right time for the right reason in the right way—that is not easy, and it is not everyone that can do it. Hence to do these things well is a rare, laudable and fine achievement."*

P.P.S. The ancient etymology of the word "hero" comes to mind as well. Recall: The word "hero" literally means "protector." Protector of what? Of the values that command our love.

P.P.P.S. Finally, I am also reminded of wisdom from Adam Grant. In [Originals](#), he tells us: *"To channel anger productively, instead of venting about the harm that a perpetrator has done, we need to reflect on the victims who have suffered from it. ... Focusing on the victim activates what psychologists call empathetic anger—the desire to right wrongs done unto another. It turns on the go system, but it makes us thoughtful about how to best respect the victim's dignity. Research demonstrates when we're angry **at** others, we aim for retaliation or revenge. But when we're angry **for** others, we seek out justice and a better system. We don't just want to punish; we want to help."* <- Angry AT others vs. angry FOR others. What a difference, eh?

A BARRELFUL OF SONGS

"When I was in college, I went to New York to talk to a songwriter I admired very much. I took him four or five songs that I had written and I thought he'd introduce me to Tin Pan Alley and it would be the beginning of my career. After I played him my songs, he said, 'You have very nice songs. Come back when you have a barrelful.'

A barrelful of songs! That would mean hundreds of songs. I can still remember the disappointment I felt as I traveled all the way back to college. Nevertheless, that man's counsel was more inspired than I realized. It took me years to understand that. But, of course, what he knew was that if I *really* wanted to be a songwriter, I'd have to write songs, not just think about the five I *had* written. And so, after the initial disappointment, I got to work; and through the years, one by one, I *have* written a barrelful.

In fact, the barrel's overflowing now, and I can tell you, the more I wrote, the better the songs became, and the more those songs expressed what was real within me."

A barrelful of songs?!

Yes. A BARRELFUL of whatever it is you aspire to do. At least. Make it overflow. And be so busy creating that you lose track of winning/"making it."

Reminds me of some similar wisdom Joseph Campbell once gave. He tells us: *"When I taught in a boy's prep school, I used to talk to the boys who were trying to make up their minds as to what their careers were going to be. A boy would come to me and ask, 'Do you think I can do this? Do you think I can do that? Do you think I can be a writer?' 'Oh,' I would say, 'I don't know. Can you endure ten years of disappointment with nobody responding to you, or are you thinking that you are going to write a best seller the first crack? If you have the guts to stay with the thing you really want, no matter what happens, well, go ahead.'"*

Then there's Dave Ramsey and his barrelful of radio shows. In [EntreLeader](#) he tells us: *"If you can find someone who can stay on mission, on task, with focused intensity for an entire decade, I will show you someone who is world-class in their chosen area of endeavor. They are likely a national brand, or will be. In his great book Outliers, Malcolm Gladwell writes that one of the keys to unusual heights of success is spending ten thousand hours of practice at your chosen*

"The purpose of life is to listen to yourself, to your neighbor, to your world and to God and, when the time comes, to respond in as helpful a way as you can find . . . from within and without."

~ Fred Rogers

craft. The Beatles spent countless hours playing at summer festivals before you ever heard of them; Peyton Manning, widely regarded as one of the best quarterbacks to ever play football, has been known for his work ethic since he was a child. I just won my first Marconi Award, which is essentially the Academy Award for radio, and afterward counted up that I have been on the air over ten thousand hours. Remember, you work your tail off for fifteen years and you are suddenly an overnight success."

Then there's Adam Grant and his great book *Originals*. Again.

He tells us: *"It's widely assumed that there's a tradeoff between quantity and quality—if you want to do better work, you have to do less of it—but this turns out to be false. In fact, when it comes to idea generation, quantity is the most predictable path to quality. 'Original thinkers,' Stanford professor Robert Sutton notes, 'will come up with many ideas that are strange mutations, dead ends, and utter failures. The cost is worthwhile because they also generate a larger pool of ideas—especially novel ideas.'"*

Mel Robbins brilliantly riffs on parallel wisdom in her [5 Second Rule](#).

She tells us: *"Picasso created nearly 100 masterpieces in his lifetime. But what most people don't know is that he created a total of more than 50,000 works of art. Did you see that last number? 50,000. That's two pieces of art a day. Success is a numbers game. And you're not going to win it if you keep telling yourself to wait. The more often that you choose courage, the more likely you'll succeed."*

Back to you and your barrelful of whatever it is you do.

Let's get it overflowing.

Then fill another one.

SWIMMING WITH MR. ROGERS (143!)

"I like to swim, but there are some days I just don't feel much like doing it—but I do it anyway! I know it's good for me and I like to keep my promises. That's one of my disciplines. And it's a good feeling after you've tried and done something well. Inside you think, 'I've kept at this and I've really learned it—not by magic, but by my own work.'"

Another one of my favorite scenes in the documentary that I keep raving about is about how Fred liked to swim. Every day.

But they focus less on the discipline it took to swim every day (what does "feeling like it" have to do with it?!" :) and more on what he did AFTER he swam.

Do you know what he did? He stepped on a scale to weigh himself.

Do you know what the scale said? 143.

Fred had fun striving to hit that target every (!) single (!) day of his adult life.

Do you know *why* "143" was such an important number for Fred?

Well, "I" has 1 letter, "L-O-V-E" has 4 letters and "Y-O-U" has 3 letters. 1-4-3.

His ENTIRE LIFE—all the way down to his weight!!—was one big expression of "I love you."

P.S. Fred was 6 feet tall. So am I. I weigh a little more than Fred but not much. Although I'm currently in the 150's, I've been playing around with different potential combos for my weight.

Here's the current one: 149. 1 is for our "I" and 4 is for "L-O-V-E." What about the 9? Let's go with: "E-U-D-A-I-M-O-N-S."

<- I love YOU and YOUR eudaimon. Yes, I do.

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world."

~ Fred Rogers

MAKING GOODNESS ATTRACTIVE

"But how do we make goodness attractive? By doing whatever we can do to bring courage to those whose lives move near our own—by treating our 'neighbor' at least as well as we treat ourselves and allowing *that* to inform everything that we produce.

Who in your life has been such a servant to you . . . who has helped you love the good that grows within you? Let's just take ten seconds to think of some of those people who have loved us and wanted what was best for us in life—those who have encouraged us to become who we are tonight—just ten seconds of silence."

That's from a section featuring Fred's acceptance speech to the Television Hall of Fame. (You can watch it [here](#).)

It's inspiring to see Minister Fred Rogers using that context to continue to fulfill his ministry by challenging all the powerful producers and celebrities in his industry to step up their standards and use their power and fame to do one simple thing: SERVE.

One of the big themes throughout this book is the fact that our primary job is to ENCOURAGE others to discover and live from the best within themselves.

As Fred says in a different context: "As human beings, our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is, that each of us has something that no one else has—or ever will have—something inside that is unique to all time. It's our job to encourage each other to discover that uniqueness and to provide ways of developing its expression."

So... Let's take ten seconds to appreciate some of the people who have loved us and wanted what was best for us in life—those who have encouraged us to become who we are today.

And... Let's take ANOTHER ten seconds and think about the people WE will love today—those we will encourage to become who they are destined to be.

B

Brian Johnson,
Lover of Wisdom

About the Author of "The World According to Mister Rogers"

FRED ROGERS



Known as "America's Favorite Neighbor," Fred Rogers dedicated his life to serving children through public television as creator, composer, and host of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. He studied at the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Child Development and was ordained a Presbyterian minister, with the unique charge of working with children and families through television. Fred Rogers' relentless commitment to all that is best in people led to an astonishing array of honors, from induction into the Television Hall of Fame to the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives so they can actualize their potential as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + practical tools. Learn more and optimize your life at optimize.me.

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