

Mr. Rogers Was On To Something

Luke 10:25–37

Wednesday July 21, 2021

DAY
21

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength
and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*

—Luke 10:27

“Won’t you be my neighbor?” The vast majority of Americans would be able to identify this question as a familiar line in the opening song of the children’s television show, “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood.” Fred Rogers, the show’s creator and main star wrote and sang the song. The popular show ran weekdays on PBS for a total of 31 seasons, with 912 episodes. Children from 1968 to 2001 were able to enjoy original episodes of the program. Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood remains one of the most-watched children’s television shows even today.

Rogers, a former Presbyterian minister, created the show and its various characters to speak directly to kids in early childhood about family, community, and modern life. He was not afraid to tackle issues that others avoided with children. Rogers observed that children were seeing images on the news and hearing parents talk about tough topics, and he was concerned that no one was helping them process those topics.

He took on issues like divorce, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and even suicide. He did it directly, but at the level of development and the understanding of his viewers. His approach was ground-breaking yet gentle and straightforward.

Rogers’ made being a part of a human neighborhood of friends, support, and other people, central to what he tried to communicate to kids. His own childhood had been one of isolation, bullying, and searching for a place to belong. It is no wonder that he wanted young children to find community—to understand they were not alone.

After watching a documentary or two on his life and seeing Tom Hanks’ incredible portrayal of Rogers in the 2019 movie, “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” I’ve concluded Rogers must have been drawn to the Scriptural command to love our neighbors as ourselves. He captured and communicated so much of that in the essence of what those 912 episodes represent still today. Rogers’ focus on his program and what he wanted it to accomplish in the lives of children echoed so much of what it means to love our neighbors.

Jesus confirmed what the Old Testament law emphasized about loving God with all we have and then loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. Jesus also went out of His way in telling an engaging story (the story of the Good Samaritan) to stress that we must not think too narrowly about who our neighbors are. In that story, he led a critical questioner and a crowd to conclude that even our enemies are our neighbors.

How are you at loving those around you? Do those near you at work, in your friend circle, in your extended family, or neighborhood know that you love them? Do people who don’t like you that much, cause you trouble, or irritate you know that you love them? Examine your relationships—the ones close and the ones that seem distant—and ask God to help you love the people in your life whether you feel like it or not.

Fred Rogers did a lot to help the next generation learn to love and appreciate their neighbors. He helped communicate that none of us live in isolation. We are a part of a community. He echoed so much of what it means to love your neighbor and showed that we should love and care for others just like we love and care for ourselves. God’s call on our lives to love our neighbors is a much higher calling than anything Mr. Rogers could encourage in us. Let’s hear the voice of Jesus and love others today.

When Mr. Rogers sang the question, “Won’t you be my neighbor,” he was on to something!

Today’s Prayer

Lord, help me notice my neighbors. Teach me to love them like Jesus. May they know that you care for them because I care. Use me to share your love and hope with those you planted in my neighborhood. —Amen