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Tuttle's "Exactly as you are: The life and faith of Mister Rogers" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Tuttle, S. (2019). *Exactly as you are: The life and faith of Mister Rogers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 197 pp. \$23.99. ISBN 9780802876553

Focusing on Mr. Rogers' role as a minister, this biographical portrayal introduces us to who Fred Rogers was in his personal life, which influenced everything he did in his professional life. Starting in his own childhood neighborhood and family life, on through his university and musical pursuits, marriage, television journey, and ending with his death, this book reveals the intriguing character and pursuits of Mr. Rogers in the neighborhood he himself built. On *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, his focus remained on accepting people, especially children, exactly as they are, because this is how Jesus operates. Based on his faith, Mr. Rogers taught and treated people, whether on his televised program or in his earthly neighborhood, that we are all lovable, just as God's Word tells us.

Written by someone who holds a Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology, it makes sense the author would be interested in Mr. Rogers' own eight-year pursuit of a Master of Divinity from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and subsequent life of ministry. Unique to others in the market that might focus on Rogers as an icon of kindness, television performer, writer, composer, or child psychology expert, this work focuses on all the spiritual aspects of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, including the faith of Mr. Rogers himself. Ordained by the Presbyterian church to minister to children through media, he admitted his relationship with God could not be separated from who he was on the program, which he consistently prayed for and hoped God would speak through, knowing the Holy Spirit can use anything. He believed in showing the kingdom of God through stories, just as Jesus utilized parables, rather than directly communicating Christ to anyone. God's kingdom, in Rogers' view, represents a neighborhood, and we are instructed to love our neighbors. Each chapter about Mr. Rogers' life, or the people in it, is tied to the biblical story of the creation, fall, and redemption.

As a child who was lonely and bullied, he wanted other children to feel love and affirmation no matter what their circumstances were. Just as God entered the world through the incarnation in order to show how much He cares, suffering on human's behalf, Mr. Rogers wanted to work with children and their feelings so they too would feel secure and understood. He believed life was for service, and that he

could help others through it. A feeler himself, he understood people's emotions and what experiences these might represent just as the Psalms do, for example. He saw how television could be used for good when paired with the right intentions and imagination, both influences in child formation. Connecting with children meant showcasing all the ways of speaking or working that did not have to hurt or exclude others, recognizing that Evil works as an Accuser while Jesus works as an Advocate. As those who are lovable, thus capable of loving, we can also be advocates for others.

The book includes extensive endnotes, and would be a good addition for any library.

Reviewer

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