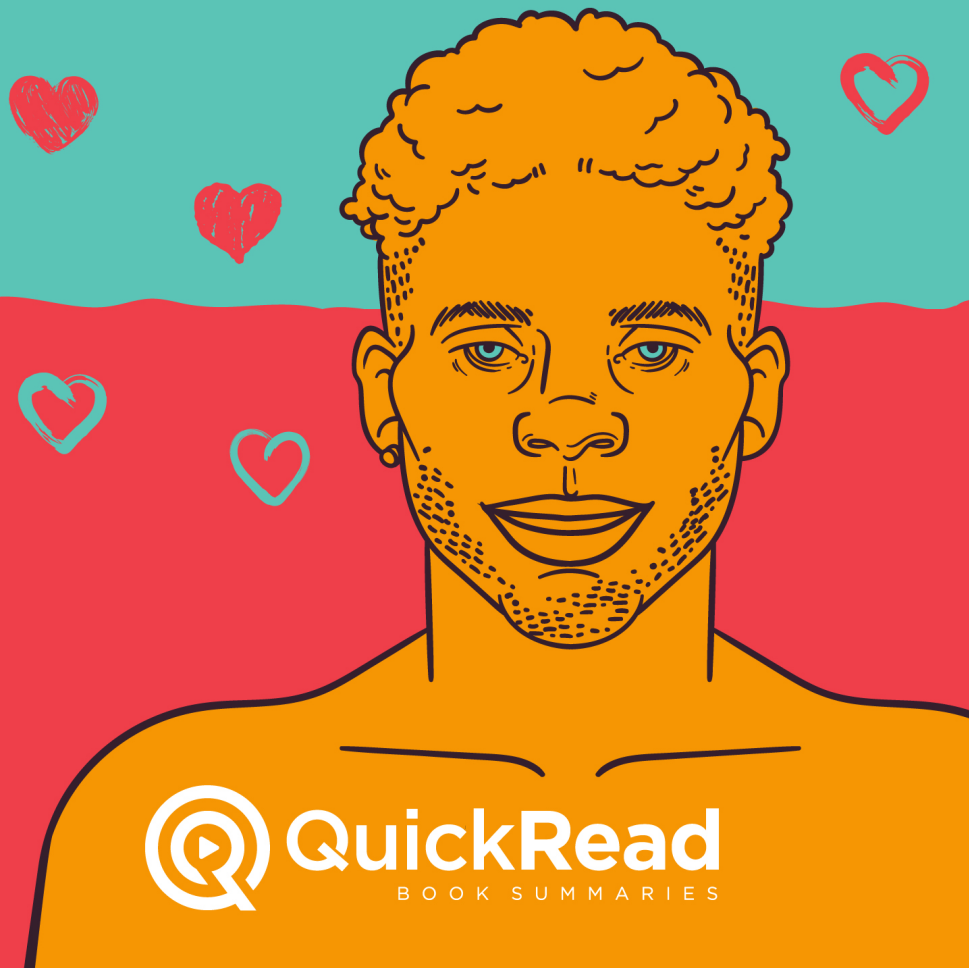


SUMMARY

*LET LOVE
HAVE THE
LAST WORD*

COMMON



Summary of “Let Love Have the Last Word” by Common

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Discover the rapper Common’s memoir.

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Introduction

What are your guiding values? What grounds you? What principle do you return to again and again? These are big questions for anyone to answer! But if you're an international music sensation, it gets a little tougher. How do you remember who you are amidst the pressures of Hollywood? What values do you hold onto? These questions are at the heart of Common's struggles and they weigh heavily on his mind. That's why he couldn't write a book about his career and his music without discussing the values that shape and guide him. So, over the course of this summary, we'll follow along with his journey and learn about the struggles he has faced and his answers to these questions.

Who is Common?

The rapper known as Common was born Lonnie Rashid Lynn Jr. on March 13, 1972, in Chicago, Illinois to Mahalia Ann Hines, a teacher, and Lonnie Lynn Sr, a basketball player. He observes that love has been at the core of his life for as long as he can remember. In fact, even his names-- Lonnie and Rashid-- were given to him because his parents wanted to incorporate both aspects of their different faiths. Because his mother was a Christian and his father is Muslim, his father wanted to give him names that would embody both of their faiths. His father told him that he did this to remind him that even though their faiths were different, they both shared the same love.

As a result, he grew up believing that love was the most important thing you could have. Whether it was love for your family, love for God, or love for your passions in life, he knew that love should be the guiding value of your life. For example, as a twelve-year-old boy, he knew he loved music so much that he wanted to devote his life to singing and writing songs. But even though he loved a great beat, he quickly understood that his passion for music was about more than just stardom or a catchy tune. In a recent interview with USA Today, he explained that he loves music because it gives you the power to convey your feelings and be heard. And he firmly believes that being able to express yourself and connect with others is one of the most powerful things in the world. "People are searching for answers," he explained to Rasha Ali of USA Today. "People are searching for positive energy and things that actually can feed their lives in a productive way. One of the most powerful things that one can do is tell their path or their story and tell the message and actually make it practical for a human being to understand and relate to."

That feeling made all the difference in the world for him. In fact, that feeling was so powerful that it enabled him to transform himself. Through the power of music and love, he went from being Rashid Jones, a kid from Chicago, to the international music sensation Common. In another

interview with USA Today, he affirmed that “part of the reason I even started rapping is because I wanted to be heard. There have been times throughout that journey, even with having records out and some success, that I was like, what do I have to say right now? What is my voice in a room where there are a lot of other voices being recognized and heard, and it doesn't seem like the world is in need of this voice right now? So what do you do at that time?”

Defining the significance of your voice is a tall order. It can be pretty tough to identify what your original message is and what you have to offer the world. But Common explains that his experience with music is also deeply spiritual for him and that this spirituality helps him to tackle those tough questions. Every morning, he gets up early to meditate, brainstorm song lyrics, and spend some time in quiet contemplation with God. He believes that these early morning moments keep him grounded and enable him to find peace through the power of God's love.

Self-Love is Important Too

Common observes that when we think about love, we typically think of love for others. And he believes that we absolutely should! In fact, many of his heroes-- which include Maya Angelou and Martin Luther King, Jr.-- dedicated their lives to heroic acts of love and service to others. But although he is deeply inspired by their examples, he also believes that it's important to strike a balance between love, self-care, and being too self-involved. That's because these things exist on a spectrum and it's easy to go too far in the wrong direction. For example, he observes that when you devote yourself to serving others, it's easy to let yourself go. You can be so busy fulfilling everybody else's needs that you forget to take care of yourself. This is unhealthy on a couple of levels!

For one thing, it means that you aren't okay and you aren't being the best version of yourself. But it also means that you're not well enough to care for others or to adequately provide them with what they need. That's why it's important that you look after yourself. Common puts this into practice in his own life every day by making time for healthy habits. For example, he works out, practices meditation, and invests in his own mental and emotional wellbeing. This nourishes his mind and body and enables him to stay creative, focused, and peaceful. But it also helps him to remember why he started and to remember what's really important.

He remarks that this is especially important because he has often lost sight of this balance in the past. For example, given the conflicting pressures of touring, recording, and performing, it is both understandable and unsurprising that the artist would often be away from home. But because he is also a father, his absence has been extremely hurtful to his daughter Omoye. Sadly, Common observes that he has often disregarded this fact or failed to think of it at all because he was so focused on his own career. He therefore points to this as an example of the detrimental effects of being too self-involved. Although he loves his daughter very much, he is aware that

he has often acted in the best interests of his career and his own desires rather than making choices that would be best for her.

However, it isn't always easy to admit when you're in the wrong. This is especially true if you're a celebrity. After all, if you're used to being idolized by thousands of fans, humility can be a struggle. But Common realized that humility was exactly what he needed. In order to acknowledge his daughter's pain and accept that he was responsible for it, he needed to be humble. He also needed to be real with himself and with her. So, he started by acknowledging that they were approaching their situation from two very different perspectives. Growing up, he had seen multitudinous examples of bad parenting. He knew how much it hurt kids when they had negative male role models or no male role models at all. In fact, he had experienced this pain firsthand. That's because his parents divorced during his early childhood. And although he kept in touch with his dad by phone, it wasn't the same as growing up with a father in your home. Even though his dad was kind and loving and they had a close relationship, they didn't even live in the same city. Their relationship was primarily built through conversations on the phone. As a result, it's not surprising that he felt as though he was a fatherless child. And the father-shaped hole in his life had a profound impact on his personal and emotional development.

Given his own experience with an absent father, it's rather surprising that he didn't connect the dots about his own absence sooner. In fact, his situation with his daughter almost exactly mirrored his relationship with his own dad! Sure, he might have been home sometimes, but because he was often away touring and performing, he was rarely in the same city as his daughter. That meant that their relationship also existed mostly through phone calls. Indeed, for all intents and purposes, he was almost completely absent from her life. But because he was successful and because he told his daughter how much he loved her, he thought he was different. Sure, he wasn't around all the time, but that was because he was providing for his family! He hadn't abandoned his family and he wasn't being selfish; he was using his talent to give his daughter a great life. That had to count for something, right?

But after listening to his daughter's side of the story, he realized that none of that mattered if he wasn't there. Even though he told her he loved her, she didn't feel very loved because he was never home. And she didn't care about the money and luxury he provided; she just wanted him to be a part of her life. By removing himself from the center of the conversation, he was able to really listen to her and understand how she felt. He was also able to accept responsibility for his actions and accept that his actions were the reason for her pain. And through the course of the conversation, he realized that even though they were approaching the issue from different perspectives, ultimately, they both wanted the same thing: acknowledgement. Everybody wants to feel heard, understood, and acknowledged, after all, and it was no different for Common and Omoye. She wanted him to acknowledge her feelings and take responsibility for his actions and he wanted her to acknowledge that he really did love her, even if he had made some mistakes. And after listening to each other and identifying their common goal, they were able to acknowledge each other and move forward in love.

This exchange taught the author a valuable lesson: loving yourself is important, but you can love yourself too much. And when your self-love becomes selfish and hurts others, that's not okay. That's why it's important to strike a healthy balance between love for yourself, love for others, and loving others in the way that they need to be loved.

Common Has Been the Victim of Abuse and Trauma

Letting love have the last word might be easy enough when it comes to negotiating difficult family conversations, but it's not so easy when it comes to battling abuse and trauma. Common has learned this firsthand through his own experience with childhood sexual abuse. Although this part of his life is very difficult to talk about, the author observes that he has spent too long repressing the memory and that he needs to get it out in the open so that he can move on and reclaim his life. This repressed memory came to the forefront of his mind while he was filming the movie *The Tale* in 2017. Because the film is about childhood sexual abuse, he spent a great deal of time mulling over a very tense and heavy topic. And when this brought up some deeply uncomfortable feelings for him, he initially assumed that it was just because child molestation is hard for anyone to think about.

But eventually, this inner struggle gave way to a realization and he confided in a fellow cast member. As the thoughts continued to press on his mind, he confessed to an actress that he thought he had been abused. As he talked about it with her, the memory suddenly came back, every detail hitting him in painful, vivid color. He had been molested by a family friend on a camping trip when he was ten years old. As he reflected on the memory, he recalled that his ten-year-old self had not been equipped to cope with his experience. He hadn't known what to say. He was gripped by shame and fear and confusion. And even though he and his mother were very close, these conflicting emotions had prevented him from confiding in his mother.

Fortunately, however, his experience on the set of *The Tale* enabled him to seek the closure he needed. He sought therapy. He talked with his mother. And as he processed his trauma and emotions, he learned that it was possible for him to break the cycle. He also decided that forgiveness was part of breaking that cycle. Although he recognizes that forgiving your abuser may not be the right step for every victim, he felt that it was the right choice for him. That's because he wanted to be free of any anger, bitterness, or hatred he harbored toward Brandon, the man who molested

him. By letting go of his feelings for Brandon, he felt that he was relinquishing toxicity from his life. This in turn enabled him to move forward in a spirit of love and forgiveness. And for Common, that's what it really means to let love have the last word.

Final Summary

As a celebrity, it's easy to get lost in the trappings of fame and material goods. But the rapper Common knows that, at the end of the day, love is all we really have. That's why he prioritizes love for his music, love for his family, love for God, and love for himself above everything else in his life. He believes that this focus on love keeps him centered and grateful. It has also helped him to let go of negative emotions and move forward in forgiveness.

However, he also acknowledges that it's important to be mindful and intentional in the way you love. Because although he loves his daughter, he hasn't always been present in her life. He has also struggled with romantic relationships. These experiences have shown him that he needs to live as though love is a verb. Love should be an action word, and if you love others, they should be able to see it in the way you treat them. No matter how much you might disagree with the people you love, and no matter how many mistakes you make, Common believes that you should always let love have the last word.



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