

Good Sense

Hip hop legend Common shares his five life rules.

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Photo courtesy of Live Nation

Speaking in the same calm, purposeful voice as his recordings, Common (born Lonnie Corant Jaman Shuka Rashid Lynn in south Chicago) exemplifies a kind of cool, conscious masculinity. It would be safe to call him a modern Renaissance man. The 47-year-old LA-based rapper, actor, writer, activist, and philanthropist is tirelessly creative and hugely successful as an artist. His work has been recognised with multiple Grammy, Emmy, and Academy awards, including winning Best Song at the 2015 Academy Awards and Golden Globes for ‘Glory’ with John Legend. Common uses his elevated position to help others, and set up the Common Ground Foundation in 2011 to empower high school students from underserved communities to become future leaders.

His own life has not been without trauma. His *New York Times* bestselling book, *Let Love Have the Last Word*, spoke of his experience of sexual assault by a family member, and you can hear references to it too in his new album, similarly titled *Let Love*. “This album is created to give people life experiences that I’ve had, and the things that I’m experiencing now, that I’ve utilised to help me to grow,” he explains. “I want this album to be something that is inspiring for others. We all go through things and experience things, but we overcome those things with love being at the forefront, and love being the last thing that we do, that’s why the title is *Let Love*. I’m just being really vulnerable and open about my experiences with the hopes that it can heal, it can inspire, it can bring people closer to themselves and to God.”

We asked Common to freestyle his five philosophies for living well.

1. Seek God

“I seek God through prayer and building a relationship with God. I read the Bible, but I’ve read chapters in the Koran and read books of Buddhism. My thing is just to seek God, find God for yourself. My mother took me to church when I was growing up, but I added onto that foundation by finding out what my relationship is with God. And when I say ‘seek God’ that means putting God first and seeking out to build a better relationship. Like the way when you work to seek out your dreams and seek out a job.”

2. Allow love to be at the top of your mind

“When I say ‘Let Love’, it just means making love or practising your life even when your emotions overcome you, and an emotion of anger or disappointment may overcome you. You have got to practise that by having different techniques and different things to help you in that moment. There are times

where I’m frustrated, I’m not happy about something, and I’ve got to do something to centre myself. Mindfulness and awareness and breathing techniques help me to love. Love is an action word and a practice word. And being able to be in a situation and listen to other individuals, listen to people that you care about, even people that you don’t know, to be able to hear them out and acknowledge them, that’s showing love.”

3. Be creative

“Creativity has been one of the greatest gifts God has given us. We are creators created by The Creator, so we have the ability to be creative, and to put creative things into the world. That creativity gives you a chance to release certain things, to connect with things within yourself and also others. Creativity gives you a chance to express things in a healthy way. Many times, I’ve dealt with hurt, and I’ve been able to express it creatively, and that has been healing in itself, and cathartic. Think about how much art has inspired us. Or just being creative in your thoughts and the way you approach things, too. That’s creativity.”

4. Operate in greatness

“In everything you do, you want to strive for excellence; you want to strive to be in greatness. You don’t just half step or do things half-assed or without passion. Even if something is not your thing, you still want to be not only prepared but delivering at the highest level. In operating in greatness you also inspire others, that’s why we call people the Greatest Of All Time. People say Muhammad Ali was the greatest; part of that is him operating in his greatness, inspiring others to be great. That’s why people are enamoured by Beyoncé because she’s operating in her greatness.”

5. Forgive others and forgive yourself. Be kind

“Forgiveness is a way to help heal yourself, and to help yourself to be happy, allowing yourself not to carry around the pain and anguish of things that could weigh you down. It could be things from the past, it could be something that you’ve experienced with somebody, and you allow that to overtake you and then it distracts you from your purpose, and what you are focused to do. So, forgiveness is beneficial for you and for the other person. Forgiving yourself is like not carrying that, not letting things that you’ve done just continue to weigh you down. Like you beat yourself up, and you’re not able to be operating in your greatness because you are continuously focusing on ‘Man, I didn’t do this and didn’t do that’. Well, part of life is making the mistakes and learning from them, and going forward. That’s what builds character.”