



Help

Garret Keizer

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In a book the San Francisco Chronicle called "unclassifiably wise" and a "masterpiece," noted Harper's essayist Garret Keizer explores the paradox that we are human only by helping others— and all too human when we try to help.

It is the primal cry, the first word in a want ad, the last word on the tool bar of a computer screen. A song by the Beatles, a prayer to the gods, the reason Uncle Sam is pointing at you. What we get by with a little of, what we could use a bit more of, what we were only trying to do when we were so grievously misunderstood. What we'll be perfectly fine without, thank you very much.

It makes us human. It can make us suffer. It can make us insufferable. It can make all the difference in the world. It can fall short.

"Help is like the swinging door of human experience: 'I can help!' we exclaim and go toddling into the sunshine; 'I was no help at all,' we mutter and go shuffling to our graves. I'm betting that the story can be happier than that . . . but I have a clearer idea now than I once did of what I'm betting against."

In his new book, *Help*, Garret Keizer raises the questions we ask everyday and in every relationship that matters to us. What does it mean to help? When does our help amount to hindrance? When are we getting less help—or more—than we actually want? When are we kidding ourselves in the name of helping (or of refusing to "enable") someone else?

Drawing from history, literature, firsthand interviews, and personal anecdotes, *Help* invites us to ponder what is at stake whenever one human being tries to assist another. From the biblical Good Samaritan to present day humanitarians, from heroic sacrifices in times of political oppression to nagging dilemmas in times of ordinary stress, Garret Keizer takes us on a journey that is at once far-ranging and never far from where we live. He reminds us that in our perpetual need for help, and in our frequent perplexities over how and when to give it, we are not alone.

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