

# Editorial: ‘Look for the helpers’; be the helper

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Even though he died more than a decade ago, one of the great teachers of all time still provides instruction for dealing with the terror and violence that bombard our world.



Marv Knox

Fred Rogers, host of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” from 1968 to 2001, [made an appearance on CBS Television last Sunday morning](#), offering reassurance in the wake of the terrorist attack that shook Manchester, England, and rocked the world.

He surfaced through the memory of Anthony Breznican, a senior writer for Entertainment Weekly, who recounted how the American icon helped him when he was long past the target age for the legendary children’s television program.

## **Hard time; healing visit**

Breznican endured a hard time in college and one day walked past a TV playing an episode of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.” He stopped to watch and felt comforted by the warmth, familiarity and simple-yet-profound life lessons Rogers offered.

A few days later, Breznican stepped onto an elevator and found himself standing next to Rogers. Reading the young man's body language and expression, Rogers asked, "Did you used to be one of my neighbors?" and Breznican said he did. Then Breznican went on to describe his much-more-recent encounter with Rogers' neighborhood.

Rogers asked Breznican, "Would you like to tell me what was upsetting you?" And when the elevator stopped, they got off and talked. Rogers' empathy set Breznican on a new course.

"I felt like his trolley car: I fell off the track. He put me back on, and that was all I needed," he explained.

Breznican and CBS correspondent Steve Hartman connected the dots—from "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," to Fred Rogers' concern for a struggling college student, to a world reeling with grief amidst reverberations from the latest terror attack.

### **"Look for the helpers"**

They cited one of Rogers' most famous quotes: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me: 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"

Breznican recalled finding a neighbor on an elevator, who helped him. Over video of rescue workers and grieving mourners, Hartman talked about people who reached out with protection and comfort to victims of the Manchester bombing.

"Look for the helpers. ..." It's great advice, particularly when you're shell-shocked and scared. "You will always find people who are helping." That's a reassuring promise, especially when you feel alone.

Rogers' mother's words of wisdom echo divine wisdom cited by many

Christians since Henry Blackaby and Claude King wrote *Experiencing God* decades ago: “God is always at work around you” and “God invites you to become involved with him in his work.”

The overlapping truth of Rogers’ quote and *Experiencing God*’s insight is the recognition of those places where God is at work in the world, and that work is clear to see through the lives of God’s people who are helping others.

### **“People who are helping”**

We see “people who are helping” when Texas Baptist Men disaster relievers show up in the wake of floods and tornadoes. We see people helping when counselors walk the halls of schools after shootings. We see them helping when chaplains walk alongside people beaten down by the world’s stress. We see them when pastors show up in hospital emergency rooms. We see them when Christians, Jews, Muslims and others meet to pray for their community. We see them when strangers on a train stand up to a xenophobic bully.

But we also see “people who are helping” less dramatically. We see people helping when they show up with a casserole after a miscarriage. We see them when they mow the lawn of an elderly neighbor. We see them when they take a struggling friend out for coffee or sit down to talk to a lonely coworker. We see them when they provide respite for a weary caregiver or babysit for free to give strapped parents a break. We see them practically wherever we look.

The motivations for “people who are helping” are compassion, kindness, empathy and Christian love. They’re qualities and values desperately needed today. They particularly stand out, because they contrast with selfishness, greed and a willingness to label and malign others.

### **Catalyst for restoration**

We all know we live in a polarized society. The spreading, divisive forces of politics, class, race and ethnicity are fragmenting our culture in ways and to degrees we haven't seen for several decades. This is scary, even more for thoughtful observers than for small children.

Still, if we stand up and become "the people who are helping," perhaps we can provide the catalyst for restoration. That sounds naïve, doesn't it? In this age of raw-knuckle politics, kind folks seem to get mowed down.

But love—sacrificial love, love that demands the greater good, love that places other above self—isn't just our strongest weapon in a world of hate. It's our only weapon.

Mrs. Rogers told her son the truth. Today, we should take her advice a step further. Sure, look for the helpers. And be the helper, too.

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