

# We Are All Our Brothers' Keepers

By Charles L. Chatmon

In our American society, we love excess. How else would we explain that every night we turn on our television sets and we hear about the latest celebrity break-up? An heiress's shopping spree? A corporate leader's whirlwind vacation? In our media-driven twenty-first century we have become obsessed with virtually monitoring the lives of rich people and celebrities created by social media. A study by the Kairos Center reveals 45.3 million people live in poverty in the United States, accounting for 14.5 percent of the population. We read these figures and don't lift a finger in helping these Americans, who are less fortunate. Instead, we take the position of looking down on these folks for their lower social class.

Some politicians, however, are doing their part to help. Here in Los Angeles, voters have approved Measure H which will require a one-fourth sales tax increase to support programs for the homeless. And with the passage of Measure HHH, a \$1.2 billion bond measure, they will also receive adequate lodging with 10,000 housing units. But the act of helping others in need shouldn't have to fall on elected officials alone; it's up to each and every one of us to reach out to the poor and destitute whenever possible.

It has been encouraging to see the many outpourings of love from regular citizens. Over the years, they've done what they could to help homeless victims of natural and man-made disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, as well as unfortunate tragedies caused by gun violence and so forth. This follows a long history of gestures led by the American people, not by our government. For instance, in the 1980s goodhearted residents in this country believed in the notion We Are The World, as millions provided food, time, and prayers to help out in the USA for Africa and Hands Across America projects. I witnessed an outpouring from citizens willing to do what they could as they participated in a clean-up effort during the 1992 L.A. Riots. People from all walks of life swept up debris from burned buildings and cleaned dirty sidewalks and streets, lending their assistance to those in the community who needed it. The bigger the tragedy, the more our hearts enlarge with a sense to be Good Samaritans to our brothers and sisters regardless of race or social class. Giving to the poor is not only an American thing; it is a human thing as we've seen in the past throughout the world.

Of course, the alternative is not a celebrated one to be sure, just as the rich man discovered in Luke 16: 19-31. It's one thing to live a life of luxury, but failure to help out and assist your fellow man will have a reward all its own. I don't understand what this means. Let's hope we don't wait for the next major catastrophe for our hearts to open. Let's use this as a wake-up call lest we be added to the 45 million living in poverty. I pray those of us who are able to make a living never find out but help those who are in dire need. ■



*Charles L. Chatmon is an author and teacher, who lives in Los Angeles, California. He is married to an artisan and author. He has helped coordinate community literary events and he teaches writers workshops. He can be reached via his website, [charleschatmon.com](http://charleschatmon.com).*