



#9 My Brother's Keeper

Letters of Love

June 3, 2018

Courage Church, Detroit,
MI

scriptures: 1 John 3:11-18,
Genesis 4, Matthew 5:21-26,
Matthew 25:31-46

What I want to propose to you this morning before we read, is that as we read this scripture, you be asking yourself:

What if we take this passage *seriously*?

I know a lot of people argue about taking the Bible *literally*... and actually, this is not really a bad place TO TAKE IT LITERALLY... but at the very least this morning... WHAT IF WE JUST TAKE THIS PASSAGE SERIOUSLY? what if we realize that this passage is telling us that there IS SOMETHING WE CAN CHANGE IN OUR OWN LIFE, and it HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MAKE THE WHOLE WORLD A BETTER PLACE?

What would that look like in your family? what example would it set for your kids? What would it change in our community? What could it do for our world?

So lets dive in:

1 John 3:11-18

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

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As always in this study through 1 John, there is *a lot* here. Its one of my favorite passages in the entire Bible, and I was more challenged than ever by it, this week.

I want us to work through this one a bit backwards.

Look first at the end of it... verse 17 and 18:

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

This is actually one of the RARE moments when, as hard as it can be to understand, I actually believe that the Old King James Version grasps what John is getting at better than our modern translations.

Look at how it puts this:

“But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.”

I imagine most of you, if you are like me, read this and after you let out that laugh of immaturity at the word bowels... you probably thought to yourself: WHAT IN THE WORLD??!!????!????!????!!!!!?

Like, if you are on OTHER end, and you are the person who someone's bowels are getting shutteth up to, I assume you would find that to be a

good thing... yes, please, NO bowels would be great. Shut those from me, now.

But this is what I believe this is saying.

“bowels” is a Greek word (*splagchnon*) that could mean intestines, as in, your inside... but it also can mean: a heart in which mercy resides.

and this concept, especially in the ancient world, was actually viewed much deeper than even that definition.

Lets try and put this into perspective for you. Have you ever been in a situation, and someone was saying something to you, and you just have this feeling... **MAYBE ITS A BAD FEELING**, like they are lying... and you don't know what it is... but you just know...

and what do you say: “I knew in my gut that something was off there...” or that instinct where you are like... “I am not supposed to get in that car right now... and you can't figure out where its coming from... and even though it probably is the Holy Spirit speaking to you, most likely you would describe it this way: I knew deep down that I was not supposed to do that...”

its talking about the core of who you are. That part of you that says “I just know that I know...”

And you can use that same core to respond *in love*... for instance, when we were living in Los Angeles, and Dawn and I were in this kind of strange season... and we didn't tell anybody this but we were in a very financially transitional time, one where we were not able to pay all of our bills but we had a light at the end of the tunnel, **IF WE COULD JUST MAKE IT A LITTLE FURTHER**. Perhaps you have had seasons like that? We had recently had a baby and had moved out of the Dream Center and into our own apartment.

And our friend Tyler stopped by our office one day, and handed us a check for \$500 dollars, which was just enough provision to get us where needed to be.

And I asked him... “why are you doing this?” because I knew, he worked for the same place we did... it wasn’t like he had a lot laying around to just give away... and what he told me was something like this:

“honestly, we have never done anything like this (as in *this big*) for anyone before... but there was something inside of me that just told me we needed to do this. And I’ve never felt anything *that strongly*, and I am NOT about to question it.”

and since then, there have been more and more stories like that in our lives, A LOT MORE... people who have helped carry us one step further toward where we were going by doing things like that.

AND I KNOW that on the OTHER SIDE of every one of those stories, was a feeling that someone felt deep deep deep down... they knew it in their gut... and that feeling was so real to them, that they sacrificed. Because for whatever reason, they knew deep down that we needed it more than they did, even though I am sure that they had plenty of other things that they could have done for themselves with that money.

The Hebrew people viewed “the bowels” as “the seat of the tenderer affections” (BLB)

I have also been on *the other end* of that feeling... and I know... its not something that you can push aside. It will haunt you until it is done because we are wired for generosity and we are wired to take care of one another.

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And that is a little flesh and blood reasoning on *why* John says that if you push aside those deep convictions, how can you possibly say the love of God abides in you?

Where on earth do you think that those convictions come from? God. God wired you that way... He created you to instinctively know you have a role in a picture bigger than you...

And if a person has what is needed to meet a need, and instead they keep that thing for themselves even though they DON'T need it... either they are IGNORING a conviction... OR THEY HAVE IGNORED THOSE CONVICTIONS FOR SO LONG THAT NOW THEY ARE SO NUMB TO THEM, THAT THEY AREN'T EVEN CONVICTED BY THAT ANYMORE.

Remember that word... *conviction*. Because I am going to turn this on its head in a minute.

If you can see someone hurting, and not feel it in your gut at all... THE LOVE OF GOD DOES NOT RESIDE IN YOU.

John gives us the example of Cain, who murdered his brother Abel. It is the first murder in history... you can find it in Genesis 4... and this threw me off a bit as I was studying it... and I asked myself:

Of all of the stories in the Bible, why does John take us here... to the story of a murder, when he is telling us to love people WITH ACTION?

He says don't be like Cain... who murdered his brother... lets look at this... look what John says in 1 John 3:12 -

“And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.”

So a tiny bit of backstory... Cain brought the Lord an offering, the first fruit of the ground, and Abel brought an offering to the Lord... the first born of his flock and of their fat portions... and for whatever reason, God accepted Abel's offering, but not Cains... and the text in Genesis records God saying this to Cain about the offering: “if you do well, will you *not* be accepted?”

So we don't know for sure if it was a quality of an offering, or the kind of offering, personally I believe that a lot of it had to do with the heart posture behind the gifts, based on what the Bible says in other places about it... and we know here that God tells Cain “if you do well, I will accept it.”

but the problem with the GIFTS is another message. What John tells us is that Cain looked at Abel, and he had an issue with what he saw. Maybe it

was jealously, maybe it was anger... maybe he thought that he was better than his brother, thus making it sting even more that God chose Abel's offering and not his...

What we do get, is here in 1 John, John tells us that Cains own deeds were evil...

but there is a very significant line that we read in Genesis, it is the last thing that is recorded of God saying to Cain, before Cain *kills* Abel.

and we talked about this a couple of weeks ago briefly, but God says something very specific to Cain WHEN CAIN is dealing with all of these emotions that he is feeling toward his brother... we already know Cain's deeds were evil... remember what John says in verse 16 "don't love in WORD or TALK... LOVE IN DEED and TRUTH" -we know that Cain's deeds we in fact that opposite of love. But what God says to Cain is this:

"sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Now remember, if something is crouching, you can't see how big it really is. That is the whole point. You crouch to *seem small*.

Let's say sin was a burglar, trying to rob your house... and they knocked on your door and rang your doorbell and then crouched... you walk over to your door and you peak your eye through that little circle window thing to make sure YOU KNOW the person on the other side, and you don't see anyone on the other side.

So...., confused, you open the door... and the moment you open the door, he pounces... he attacks you.

Its actually, in my opinion, the best description of sin that we get in the entire Bible... and the way that it works in our hearts and in our lives even today... the Devil always works overtime to make things seem like they are no big deal at all... until you open the door, and it blows up in your face.

See..... the way that Jesus talks about murder in the sermon on the mount, is he talks about it as being an issue that begins in the heart. Because you would never murder someone who you love... so it begins with something that *seems small*. It seems JUSTIFIABLE. It seems understandable that you would feel that way.

and slowly it erodes you at the core... "the BOWELS," if you will... and transforms into something very destructive...

you can't murder someone you love... which Jesus tells us the great commandment is to love you neighbor... so in your heart something has to shift AWAY from that command when viewing that person...

slowly, something has to begin to chip away at your love for another person... and after enough layers have been chipped away, love isn't even the issue anymore... soon, worth becomes the issue.

and you see another person and you think "that person is not as valuable as me" -

it was the only way that Hitler was able to accomplish what he did... he, over years and years of subtle deception, convinced A LOT OF PEOPLE that ANOTHER GROUP OF PEOPLE WERE NOT VALUABLE, AND WERE IN FACT EVIL...

and when in your heart you can view a person as having no value, that it would be perfectly fine for you to keep living, and for them to not...

THAT is what it takes to be willing to take a life.

Now, maybe there are no people who you would say that you would be fine with murdering... BUT ARE THERE PEOPLE THAT YOU DON'T VALUE?

and by that I mean, whether you confess their worth or not... DO YOU TREAT THEM LIKE THEY HAVE NO VALUE?

Because what John is getting at here, is that the simple act of passing by another human being who has a need that you could easily meet but don't... is a sign that you do not have love living in your heart.

That something in here is numb... something is going in the WRONG direction.

Maybe you don't even realize it, but over time as you have worked for whatever it is that you have... You think that you deserve to have more than enough, while they deserve to have NOT enough... IF them having would have to mean you *giving*.

and that is why I believe John takes us all the way back to the beginning, to sin crouching at the door, and it leading to MURDER... when he is trying to show us why its important that WE LOVE PEOPLE WITH ACTION.

because Satan works in subtleties -

IF HE CAN NUMB THE PEOPLE OF GOD DOWN TO A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN SEE A NEED THEY CAN MEET, AND YET THEY OPT TO NOT MEET IT,

its almost as if we have lost before we started... we haven't even gotten into morality yet... we haven't even got into the type of life that we should lead...

because if Satan can get your heart... eventually he will get all of you.

I think a lot of us are walking the opposite direction OF LOVING PEOPLE. and we barely even notice.

“Little Children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.”

Now I want you to think about this... we have talked a lot these last few weeks about the way that society has changed... the way that culture has shifted... we talked about antichrists... and about how subtly and slowly the world took an absolutely enormous cultural shift, really, right before our

eyes... and though it began subtle and it began slow... now change is happening at the most rapid pace it ever has happened in.

Christians used to be able to lean on, *at the very least*, what some would call "The Moral High Ground" - as in... if nothing else, we were at least the ones doing the "right thing"

and we were, at least to a degree, RESPECTED for remaining moral.

Now, hang with me on this thought if you can... because with the rapid shifts that have taken place, Christians have lost ground... and we certainly know that... but I wonder how much we *really* do KNOW THAT.

Not long ago, Christians, IF NOTHING ELSE, had one thing going for them that separated them from the world, and that was what we could label as "moral"

It is not like that anymore... and there are two sides to this coin that I want to talk about... the first side is the one that's going to be harder to hear. Because I believe that IN WAY MORE WAYS THAN WE HAVE TIME TO TALK ABOUT TODAY... we have brought some of it on ourselves... even if our hearts or the body that is the church has been misrepresented.

and so before I go making it sound like I am saying "poor us, look how much the world hates us..." first I want us to look at a couple areas where maybe we missed it.

But then second, I want us to understand that the world is changing so much, that even things that used to be considered MORAL... and things that ARE GOOD and are laid out clearly in the Bible and especially by Jesus... are things that are actually now considered oppressive. And more and more, the world will hate us, EVEN FOR THAT...

just for doing the right thing. Which Jesus told us would happen.

First, let's look at just a couple of examples of things that the world really thinks Christians GET WRONG... and *at least to a degree*... they might be right about.

Pew research recently did a survey on American's view of refugees coming to our country from war torn countries like Syria... not all, but a lot of cases being families fleeing for their lives. And they were researching if American's felt like we have an obligation to allow them to come into America.

Now hang with me here, don't get distracted... please catch this point.

They surveyed a variety of groups of people from different races, educational backgrounds, and they surveyed some religious and some NOT religious... and of all groups surveyed, they concluded that:

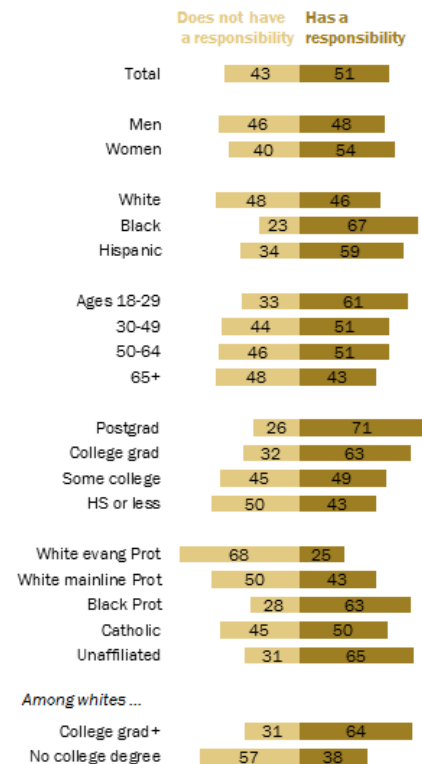
“No group agrees LESS with the idea that the United States has a responsibility to accept refugees than Christians...” in fact, for some demographics of Christians its more than 2 to 1 that say no... but get this... its *opposite* for non religious people. 2 to 1 say yes... yes we have an obligation.

Now, I can't get into all the reasons why I think that this is ridiculous... Matthew 25 in particular comes to mind when Jesus separates the sheep from the goats and reserves the harshest judgments for the people who don't take care of the poor, don't clothe the naked, and don't welcome the stranger... but thats NOT even my point. We also could excuse this by saying that its the churches job to take in strangers, not the governments... but lets be honest... WE COULD BE OKAY WITH NOT HELPING, IF THE GOVERNMENT MADE IT SO THERE WERE NO PEOPLE HERE TO HELP.

but again, not my point today.

Race, age, education differences on U.S. responsibility to accept refugees

% who say the U.S. ___ to accept refugees into the country



Notes: Don't know responses not shown. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 25-May 1, 2018.

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This is my point:

HOW IN THE WORLD IS IT THAT the non-believing world is *several times* more likely to agree with something STRAIGHT OUT OF THE MOUTH OF JESUS... THAN THE PEOPLE WHOSE ENTIRE RELIGION IS BASED ON THE LIFE, LOVE, AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS.

let that sink in.

THIS IS WHY this bothers me so much:

the number one thing that I struggle with when I read those statistics, is I think about Christians, and I think about that word from earlier...
CONVICTION.

HOW IS IT, THAT OUR FAST, off the cuff, first response when being surveyed... which OBVIOUSLY is a public record that will be made public... So when we are surveyed and asked this question..... WE KNOW WE ARE RESPONDING ON BEHALF OF THE CHURCH, which I believe means we should RESPOND ON BEHALF OF JESUS...

and our first conviction when asked about strangers... is to just broadly stroke that thing with a NO.

no.

"I *don't feel* responsible."

"I *don't think* they are my problem."

"I *don't think* they should be our countries problem."

When Cain killed Abel, God asked him this question: "Where is Abel your brother?" and this is what Cain said in response, and I feel like so many are echoing him all these thousands of years later:

"I do *not* know; am I my brothers keeper?"

and though God does not directly answer *that* question, the writer John later tells his church... yes. You are your brothers keeper. If you see someone in need, and you have what it takes to meet that need, it is your job to meet that need.

“I am NOT my Brothers Keeper” IS THE WAY OF CAIN. IGNORING NEEDS THAT YOU CAN MEET, IS THE WAY OF CAIN.

and because we are QUICK TO RESPOND so harshly toward a concept that MOST OF US BARELY UNDERSTAND, the world looks at Christians and says: wow... those people are NOT LOVING. I don't think that is true... but it is the perception, and we created it.

This is a problem. No matter where you stand on any issues at all, you have got to see that this is a problem.

The world, who used to look at Christians and AT LEAST see us as “moral” - NOW THINK that the very things that we do ARE IMMORAL.

THERE ARE ALREADY ENOUGH THINGS DETERRING people from Christianity that ARE CHRISTIAN... there ARE things we are doing RIGHT, and people are still repulsed by it.

COULD WE STRIVE TO LIVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT THESE TYPES OF THINGS CAN'T BE SAID ABOUT US???

Think about the way the non religious world views Christians right now. and I do NOT believe the church is all of the things the world is saying right now... but this is what they are saying:

They view Christians as the ones who are always quick to want war... They are viewing Christians as completely ignoring racial injustice and sometimes worse... embracing it as if it were a GOOD THING.

they view Christians as people who are insensitive and lack empathy when innocent people are killed, they are painting Christians as people who would rather talk about rights, than they would about lives... AND SOMETHING WE ARE DOING IS LEADING THEM TO DO THIS.

How is it that a religion who follows a Man that **laid down** His life, has gained a reputation for being the people who are most concerned with **preserving** theirs?

and I am NOT SAYING THAT we all do this... I think sometimes people take a sliver of what someone says, or a slice of what we believe and they make a whole cake out of it so that they can bring us down.

I DO BELIEVE that there are people who just want to hurt us.

But because of that, I think we have to work twice as hard. We can't ignore it and live in our little bubble pretending like we are the only ones that matter. We have to do everything we can to show the world that the love of Jesus is in us by the way we treat our neighbors near and far... we can do better...

because there are a lot of other issues that Jesus talks about THAT WE ARE ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF, AND WE CAN'T CHANGE THOSE.

We should only become MORE LIKE JESUS... we MUST NOT become less.

Think about it... Think about this...

Because some things, we bring on ourselves... but There are OTHER THINGS that the world THINKS that Christians GET WRONG... that I don't believe we get wrong... and we get the same types of reactions...

There are things that we do, THAT WE SHOULD DO... for instance, we teach that sex is sacred, and has *no place outside* of the covenant of marriage...

THAT *used to be* a moral high ground... we were the minority in the way that we lived... BUT there was at least a certain respect there for it. People would at least look at me when they hear that, and be like... okay... that's *different*... but okay.

You don't smoke? You don't drink? You've never even *tried* drugs? That's *different*... but okay...

It used to be easier to stand out simply by our morality.

NOW, people look at us and think: "you are teaching people *that?* Sex with ONE person? you are oppressing them, and boxing them in!!! and *what if* they aren't straight but they never got a chance to explore their sexuality to make that discovery..."

"or what if they aren't 'sexually compatible' with the person they marry... and now its too late? And you believe in marriage so much that you think that they should work on it rather than leave and find someone else who will actually make them *happy?*"

We are literally viewed as IMMORAL for the MORAL positions we take.

and I am NOT COMPLAINING!!! I am telling you to buckle up!

Because we are NOT here for ourselves... AND as hard as it may be to hear, We are NOT here for our RULES... and we are CERTAINLY NOT HERE TO HEAP OUR RULES ON PEOPLE WHO AREN'T EVEN CHRISTIANS...

We are NOT here for our four walls and our church services...

WE ARE HERE FOR THE PEOPLE WHO AREN'T HERE...

we are here for the people who are looking at us, and thinking "those people are bigots" "Those people are oppressive" "those people are crazy"

I long for a day when instead they say "THOSE PEOPLE ARE FOR ME."

and we aren't going to win them with our morality. and we aren't going to win them with our talk. There is only one thing that is going to cause us to stand out to a world so lost, and so critical of the church... and that is:

Love.

There are several historical accounts, one in AD 165 and another about 100 years later, of absolutely enormous plagues that hit several major cities... and people were dying left and right... there are descriptions recorded of just bodies on top of bodies on top of bodies of people... dead OR dying...

and it got to the point where everyone just took off... even doctors left the city... nobody even tried to help... EXCEPT FOR a rather large group of Christians...

some of them educated and able to do some good, others just Godly men and women who refused to let so many people die alone... die without prayer and a chance for God to show up... and they just started CARING for people... loving them... meeting their needs... and ministering to them.

All of the pagan people with their other gods, they took off... they left their own families, they left their own tribes... but Christians stayed and took care of not only Christians, but of pagans... and they showed them the love of Christ until they died themselves.

That was action, aligned intently, NEXT TO WORDS OF HOPE... hope, that if you come to Jesus, whether this sickness leaves you or not, you have an eternity to look forward too... and a God who loved you so much, that he went through something JUST LIKE THIS, so that you could have that home in Heaven with him.

Do you think that when those people's entire worlds fell apart, and in their darkest, dying hour EVERY PERSON THAT THEY KNEW... abandoned them... every little "god" that they worshipped did not show up...

do you think that they were speaking out against the church of Jesus Christ in that moment?

They won them WITH THEIR LOVE...

even when it cost their life.

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

Think about it... Don't sin... live morally... you may be doing well yourself... you may be in right standing with God... but in today's world, the chances are you living a life in a bubble of perfection and managing to steer away from a life of sin... ITS GOOD... but it won't stand on its own two feet... you aren't necessarily going to win anyone to Jesus by doing that.

but lay down your life for someone? bam. you win...

Because suddenly all of that morality takes on flesh and blood... and you show that the Gospel you believe, SHOWS YOU THAT THE PERSON YOU ARE DYING FOR IS WORTH DYING FOR, IF it means showing them to Jesus.

and certainly I don't think that many of us will have to physically die for another human being... but I think that as we count the cost of our commitment to Jesus, we need to ask that question:

would it be worth it to me? To lose my life for someone else to gain their soul?

Jesus says yes.

Those missionary Christians going in to the diseased cities, they said yes.

They won by losing. Just like Jesus.

Jesus wins by “losing”

Its The entire Gospel.

and it has already been done for you.

and I will close with this...

A couple of days ago I was picking my kids up from school... our car doesn't have A.C. in it and IT WAS HOT, so I was feeling pretty miserable and the kids weren't very comfortable either... and as we were driving home, we were about to turn left onto Gratiot and then jump on the highway, and I saw a man out asking people for money at the stop light, holding a sign.

I see people doing this probably 10-15 times every single day, but something about what his sign said stuck out to me. Like all the other signs I see, the first half of the message explained how he had fallen on hard times... I can't remember exactly what it said... but I know exactly what the last line said, because after reading it I thought about it for several hours.

It said: "God Blessed You."

You see, normally these types of messages end by saying "God Bless You" - which is really a slightly more spiritual way of saying "thank you." - it is saying "My desire is that you would be blessed for the generosity that you are willing to show me by giving me something to help me to eat."

But *I believe* that "God Blessed You" says something different entirely.

It says that you are blessed.

You see, to man sitting on the side of the highway in the 85 degree heat with the sun beating down on him trying to get some money to get something to eat... or to feed his kids, or to buy the drugs that he is hooked on, whatever his situation may be...

when he sees the person driving the beat up, 15 year old car with a broken A.C. - he sees someone who is blessed.

Someone who doesn't have to walk home... someone who in about two minutes will be on I-75 with the windows down, with a breeze cooling me down, while he is still baking in the sun, in his spot next to the stop light.

Its rather easy to spend your entire life thinking about what you don't have. Its the trap of the American dream, its one of Satan's greatest tricks that he

plays on your mind... because if you can convince yourself that you DON'T HAVE ENOUGH, then it becomes very easy to justify not helping others...

especially when, like I said, we pass by 10-15 people on any given day just driving to work and back, who are asking. And I know we can't give money to every single person... this is Detroit... I get that...

I know that the needs will never go away... Jesus says "the poor you will have with you always"

But what I wonder is if that consistency of which we see brokenness has allowed us to accept it as the way that it is... and caused us to believe that we don't have a responsibility in solving it.

If you were polled, and asked that same question about refugees, but maybe you were asked it about the poor... and the question was:

Do you believe you have a responsibility to take care of the poor?

Would you say yes? or would you say no?

The Bible says yes.

Do you believe you have a responsibility to take in the stranger?

The Bible says yes.

The Bible says that *we are* our brothers keeper.

Don't let yourself get to a place where you don't feel that prompting in your gut... don't close your bowels of compassion. Because once you have closed off yourself to the needs of others, it becomes very difficult to re-open that.

IT IS ALWAYS EASIER to think about yourself. And the more you do it, THE MORE YOU WILL DO IT.

But we are blessed. And trust me, I have lived in the world of the victim
OFTEN.. I've made mental lists of the things that I need that I don't have...
and I let myself live there some times...

But I am blessed.

And MORE THAN I want material things, houses, cars, money...

I want the love of God living in me.

“anyone who has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet
closes his heart against him, the love of God is not living in him.”

Thats a heavy thought. But Christ DIED FOR US.

And John says thats our example.