



The Building  
Community Institute

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"The  
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## AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

With the downturn in our economy, high unemployment, natural disasters, the rising crime rate and youth dropping off the K-12 Educational Corridor in record numbers-we are being asked as a nation to do more for individuals than ever before. What does this mean for a nation whose historical 'greatness' has been predicated upon her goodness?

Am I my brother's/sister's keeper?

I have heard some variation of this challenge all my life and starting at a rather early age, which is why, at first, I associated it with simply taking care of my younger brother, Claiborne. According to my folks, I was his keeper. And it was often painful to be so. However, now as an adult with 'life' under my belt, the question looms much larger and extends itself far beyond the front porch of my childhood. It's no longer about 'Claiborne.' I now know... it's about all the people who surround my life regardless of who they might be. It's about my 'selflessness' and how I view the role of my life in the midst of so many others. So today, I embrace the challenge! And I challenge you to do likewise. I can't guarantee that it will be without cost, but the returns will produce dividends far beyond our times. Investments should always be future focused.

Today, I see this challenge, as much more than having to take my brother to the movies, but as more of a committed mindset-one that can guide our actions toward others, not just within our homes but in all the arenas of life, from grade schools to the halls of congress. It's about genuine caring! If we care about others, doing for them comes naturally. And you can take 'honest caring' into any field of endeavor you choose. Granted when 'honest caring' shows up, it will challenge the process, and it should. We want to challenge our mental models-our familiar ways of doing things. Genuine 'honest caring' will make us think differently as we plan for ourselves and others. And 'Honest Caring' will not be held hostage by our money. We will be challenged to be more reflective and yes become more willing to establish new traditions. Maybe the question should be; do I care about my sister and brother? I know I do! Therefore I can't afford to leave 'keeping and caring' to someone else. Personally, I don't have that luxury, nor would I want it. I have too many memories of 'others' caring and keeping me.

There is no way I'd be at this point in my life today had it not been for unselfish people who stepped up to be their brother's keeper. I had to be a pain at times. But they were persistent. There was a cost attached to their deeds. And I am beneficiary of all their 'Keeping and Caring' acts. Their 'stepping up' did not destroy my self-reliance, but rather built my trust in others and in myself. Their 'stepping up' gave me reason to want to do likewise for others. I am absolutely sure that this is about a mindset-one I'd like to see embraced by all of us. And we need such a mindset today more than ever as our nation of diverse Americans lay their claim to brotherhood and sisterhood.

When we engage in 'Keeping and Caring' others, we strengthen ourselves as well. As we try to map out plans to move us beyond the economic challenges we face and help so many others better their lives, remember, we are not talking about strangers from a planet we don't know, but the very people whose presence add to the very air we breathe, to the life we hold dear. 'Keeping and caring' was never intended to be easy and calculable, but challenging and rewarding in ways that celebrate our shared humanity and brings joy that comes from seeing outstretched hands filled and hopeless eyes brightened because we passed along... and stopped. I know we are all busy and stretched. But I challenge you to stop and look by the side of the road. Many of our neighbors are there! I challenge you to teach, plan, govern and legislate motivated by 'Keeping and Caring.' I challenge you to be among those who bravely and proudly become their brothers/sisters keeper. This can be your legacy starting now, tomorrow and beyond.

- Clifton L. Taulbert