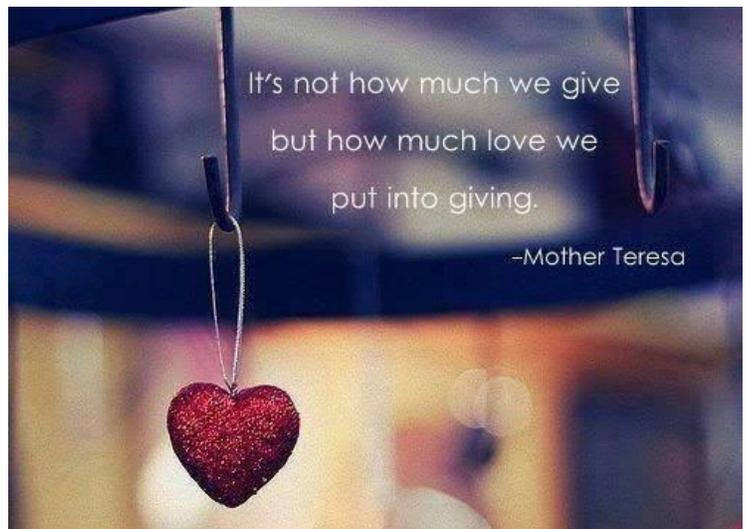


## The Secret is Simply This

One of my favorite hymns proclaims “There is No Secret what God can do. . . What (God’s) done for others (God) will do for you.” Is that true? Is there a secret to serving God? It can be difficult to believe that God will do for us what God has done for others. Look around! Thousands of people in the city where I live (San Jose, CA, USA) are homeless. Others are 1 or 2 paychecks away from homelessness. Many are forced by lack of other opportunities to live in makeshift “tent cities.” Do the people living in those “tent cities” ever ask God, “Why did you do this to me?” or “Why did you let this happen to me?”

I would be very surprised if the homeless, jobless, chronically ill, aging and others who live here in the United States of America as well as around the world will continue to suffer quietly. They lose increasing amounts of control over their lives. One major reason for their suffering is that they don’t receive a fair share of the nation’s wealth. It is being concentrated in the hands of a very small percentage of people. However, just as the people of ancient Israel cried out to God for relief from their oppressors ([Exodus 3:7-12](#)), so will those who suffer needlessly in our time cry out to God for relief.

Is there a secret? Has someone failed to disclose how and why we should relieve the suffering of people whom God loves? If no one else had spoken out against needless suffering, surely Jesus of Nazareth, God’s Son and greatest gift to all of humanity, said more than enough to make the point. Collectively, and perhaps even individually, we have little excuse for claiming that we know neither how nor why we need to love our neighbors especially when their suffering can be relieved.



There are many bad reasons that people suffer (cruelty, neglect, hatred, fear, greed, etc.). The only good reason that I can think of to endure suffering is for the good of another person. Sharing someone’s burden, whether that means buying them a week or a month’s worth of groceries, paying to fix their car, cleaning their bathroom when they are physically unable, accompanying them to the funeral home, staying with them in the Emergency Room as a loved one dies or cooking or calling friends to help cook meals or a neighbor who has three sick children is not simply being kind. It is actively loving them as people whom God loves actively.

Love, in this sense, means putting the needs of another person or group ahead of, or at least on the same level as, our own needs. Like so many other values, standards and moral limits, if we don’t develop them when we are young, we are at serious risk of causing, enduring and spreading suffering at every stage in life. Sadly, we don’t always learn in our childhood years the lessons that Robert Fulghum, the retired Unitarian-Universalist minister, tried to teach us in the books that he wrote.

I recently went looking for a copy of his first book: [All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten](#).<sup>1</sup> I enjoyed reading the book, but when I can't remember what he said, I simply reread the list of simple but profoundly important lessons listed on the back cover of that book. The first lesson may be the one that I have had the greatest difficulty accepting and making an important dimension of who I am.

It says simply, "Share everything."

How well are we doing with "sharing everything"? Some days I do well. Some days I don't. I struggle with this two-word lesson. It reminds me that what I own belongs to God—all of it! It makes me uncomfortable for the same reason. What about you? Do you sometimes resent the demands on your money, time, service and compassion?

How do we do it? What is the secret to dealing with God's claim that every created thing is God's? The answer is the same for all of us: Love our neighbors! I suspect that many of us are unsure of how to do that. It is one thing to help an older person get to their doctor's appointment or even to paint their kitchen. It is quite another to decide whether to give money or otherwise help an indigent person who approaches us in a mall, entering a grocery store or while we are walking our dog. We are face-to-face with a human being who asks us for money or a meal. How willing are we to love an unknown neighbor or one we do know whom we don't like? Even when at home, we may resent the endless mailings, robo-calls and even calls from people representing charities such as UMCOR, The Salvation Army and CARE. Are they asking too much?

I began by asking whether there is a secret to serving God. There is no secret to how to serve God. We do it by loving people as God loves us. However, it's also not a part-time position in which we serve God when it's convenient! Further, we don't get to decide who is invited into God's eternal home qualifies as a member of God's family. The secret to remembering this, and it really isn't a secret, is believing that Jesus came for every person throughout the world and throughout time.

The truth is that we are not the center of the universe—not even collectively. For each Christian, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the One we worship. One military veteran told me of a friend who was not open to believing in God. Finally, the veteran told his friend at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, "John, there is a Higher Power, and you are not it!!" From time to time people may need to remind each other of this truth.

I will write more about the mysteries or secrets of a faithful life. However, here's one "secret" that should never be a secret: God's love overcomes any sin no matter what it was or is. God loves everyone and everything that God has created. Otherwise, that person or thing would not exist!

God's love for us is unconditional. God's love is eternal. God's love is for all.

Thanks be to God!

As always, I welcome your [responses](#).

Rev. Larry LaPierre

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Fulghum, "All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" (Villard Books, New York, 1998).