

## Six Streams of Christian Life and Prayer

### Study Four: Practicing the Compassionate Life – The Social Justice Tradition

Based on 'Streams of Living Water' by Richard Foster See items in bold type for a swifter study

#### Aim

To understand that we serve God by serving others, and that by helping others we too are helped.

#### You will need...

A Bible, pen and paper.

#### Starter

• **Have you ever been a stranger? Think through some of the feeling you had. Did anyone welcome you? How would you describe the experience?**

#### Prayer

Let us pray that we may see all humanity through God's eyes, and learn to act with compassion, understanding and mercy.

#### Jesus and the Compassionate Life

##### **Read [Matthew 25:31-46](#)**

Using the style of a parable, this passage describes the future judgement of the nations. Jesus gives us a mental picture of that judgement, when he, like a shepherd, will separate people into two groups: those who cared and those who did not. Both groups express surprise that they did not see Jesus in need "Lord when did we see you". Jesus reply stresses that when we serve the needy we actually serve him. The judgement standard is not that they must recognise Jesus as Lord, but that they should do the will of God by meeting the physical needs of the most needy. Beware not to fall into the trap of thinking by taking care of the needy we can restore our relationship with God – our faith, a gift from God does that. And it is that same faith which increases our responsibility to do God's will. As believers we are not free to neglect those who need our help.

• Besides the 6 groups of needy people mentioned in Matthew 25, who else fits into the 'least of these' category?

#### God and the Social Justice Tradition

God cares deeply about how we treat one another. 'Love your neighbour as yourself' Jesus describes as the commandment second only to "love the Lord your God with all your heart...". ([Mt 22:37-40](#)) Looking at the call to practice social justice through God's eyes, where all are his precious work, gives us a different perspective. God cares for our needs, understands our sinfulness and is ready to forgive and restore us. We are all precious in God's sight and he longs for us to see others as he does – priceless unique people who need love and compassion. Jesus lived such a life, yet his compassion never undermined his sense of justice, rather he blended the two together. When faced with injustice, Jesus fought against it with a holy passion. God desires that we give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and destitute.

**Through Micah he tells us how to live: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8**

• **Have you ever been treated unjustly? Have you ever seen another person being oppressed? How did you respond?**

#### Practicing the Social Justice Tradition

In the process of helping others we too are helped, but as we engage in works of compassion we must note the difference between self-righteous service that relies on human effort and seeks public reward and true service that flows out of a relationship with God whose approval is reward enough.

• Write an encouraging letter – A small task that can work miracles. Take time to write a letter that tells someone how important he or she is to you.

\* Volunteer to help an organisation that works for the poor and needy.

• Guard the reputation of another person – Although it cannot be seen, a person's reputation is valuable and you can guard it by refusing to gossip or engage in speculation.

\* Look for an injustice and work to correct it – but as a first step make sure you are not looking for a speck in a neighbour's eye ([Mt 7:3-5](#)) remember the goal is to see justice rather than revenge

• Take a stand – peacefully, prayerfully and compassionately stand up for your beliefs.