

# Living Social Justice - a Lifestyle Guide

A resource of the Common Good Foundation

## Introduction

Lifestyle has been defined as “a manner of living that reflects the person's values and attitudes” and “a person's pattern of living as expressed in his or her activities, interests, and opinions”. It talks about who one is as exhibited by the many choices large and small that one makes every day. Although we do not find the word lifestyle in the bible, the concept of lifestyle is certainly there. For example, in Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus gives us some lifestyle guidelines. Note especially verses 31-33:

*So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Poverty, injustice and division are in opposition to God's Kingdom and his righteousness. They are not what God intends for people whom he created to be his image bearers (ref Genesis 1:27), whom he loves so much (ref John 3:16) and for whom he desires “life to the full” (ref John 10:10). As Christ followers, we are called to be witnesses of Jesus Christ (ref Acts 1:9) and to proclaim his Kingdom in word and deed (ref Luke 9:1&2). We fulfil this call in various ways, including as we act to end poverty and injustice, and as we are people of healing and reconciliation.

In this short guide, we will consider four lifestyles that will help us to live social justice in a way that seeks to witness to our King and his Kingdom:

- A lifestyle of awareness
- A lifestyle of reconciliation
- A lifestyle of generosity
- A lifestyle of influence

## A lifestyle of awareness

Living social justice requires a lifestyle of ongoing awareness about poverty, injustice and division. Our daily rhythms need to help us to be informed and give opportunity for Holy Spirit to bring things to our attention that are happening in the world around us. Here are some ways in which we can live a lifestyle of awareness about social justice:

- **Read the bible.** As Christians, our awareness and opinions about social justice should, in the first instance, be formed by God's word. Romans 12:2 says: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will." So let's start with an awareness shaped by God's word and not by the world. In your daily bible reading, take a moment to ask Holy Spirit "What does this passage say about your heart and plans for addressing poverty, injustice and division?" You may also want to do a bible study directly related to this topic, for example:
  - Common Good's Justice Journey devotional: [http://justchurch.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Justice-Journal\\_devotional\\_A5\\_WEB.pdf](http://justchurch.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Justice-Journal_devotional_A5_WEB.pdf)
  - [http://www.sarmy.org.au/Global/SArmy/Resources/devotional/40days-justice/40DaysOnJustice\\_A5spreads.pdf](http://www.sarmy.org.au/Global/SArmy/Resources/devotional/40days-justice/40DaysOnJustice_A5spreads.pdf)
  - <https://www.cru.org/content/dam/cru/legacy/2012/02/IJM-Social-Justice-Bible-Studies-Revised.pdf> .
- **(Re)learn the history of our country.** To live social justice in South Africa requires that we understand the several centuries of injustice and racial conflict on which our country is built. Some of us who are older learnt a truncated and biased history that was designed to support the apartheid regime and we need to learn our real history as told from a different perspective. Others of us have just not been interested in history, perhaps not seeing it as relevant. But until we understand our history of injustice and division we will not understand and be able to address issues of social justice in South Africa today. Here is a website that may help: [http://www.sahistory.org.za/politics\\_and\\_society](http://www.sahistory.org.za/politics_and_society) .
- **Engage current issues.** As much as we need to understand the past, we also need to understand the present. Find a reliable source of news and spend time each day or each week being informed about social, economic and political issues. Ask God to speak his heart, hope and plans through the news that you hear. Be sure to look for good news too, not only bad news. From time to time, listen to radio news programmes. Join the debates e.g. on Cape Talk, SAFM. Understand government's role and initiatives in alleviating poverty and injustice. Government is one of the primary role players in alleviating poverty and ensuring justice for all. Do an internet search on the words 'poverty policy government South Africa' and spend some time becoming informed. Do you agree with government's policies and plans? In your situation and season, how can you support the implementation of these in any way? Are there things you object to? Why? How could you express your objection in the interests of those living in poverty?
- **Look and see, listen and hear.** Be intentional to visit diverse parts of the city or parts that you would not normally visit. These may be areas of material wealth or areas of material poverty. Ask Holy Spirit to open your eyes and ears to help you

see and hear the pain and the possibility in both contexts. Reflect on why they often feel like worlds apart, even though they can exist within very close proximity in Cape Town.

### **A lifestyle of reconciliation**

In South Africa today, many would say that our biggest need is for racial, social and economic reconciliation. As Christians, we know that the most important reconciliation is with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:17-21). We should be seeking opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ through what we say and do so that more and more people can know the joy and freedom of being reconciled to God. And so that people living in poverty and suffering injustice can see that God is a God who cares deeply about their circumstances. In addition, we see in the life of Jesus, this vertical reconciliation with God requires horizontal reconciliation with people. Jesus gave us the prayer where it says (Luke 11:4): "Forgive us our sins as we forgive everyone who sins against us". He also said (Matthew 5:23-24): "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." As Christians in South Africa, we have many Christian brothers and sisters with whom we have yet to reconcile. Here are just a few suggestions to move forward into a lifestyle of reconciliation:

- Prayerfully reflect on the causes and signs of division in our country. Invite Holy Spirit to search your heart for any roots of prejudice, unforgiveness or superiority towards a particular people group.
- Suggest that as a congregation or small group you form friendships and seek opportunities to worship together with people of a different economic and racial profile in the city.
- Share a meal, share stories, share yourself. Listen, listen, listen.
- Seek opportunities for friendship with someone different from yourself, someone outside of your normal social circle.
- As we are concerned about the physical and social conditions of those affected by poverty, and injustice, let us also be concerned about their reconciliation with the Father through Jesus.

### **A lifestyle of generosity**

Poverty, injustice and division require that we respond by generously giving our time, talents and treasures as greed is very often at the root of such issues. To break free from the grip of greed in our own lives and to be those who seek God's Kingdom and his righteousness in our city, a lifestyle of generosity is an excellent lifestyle to cultivate.

- **Give your time and talents.** Often our time – and the “right” to spend it as we please – is our most closely guarded asset. To change this, volunteer with an organisation that is working to alleviate poverty and injustice. Use your skills to help the organisation with fundraising, writing newsletters, bookkeeping, governance (join a board), IT, maintenance etc. Give of your professional skills e.g. medical, legal, and financial to help someone living in poverty or to help an organisation working with such people. Give of your everyday skills such as English literacy, driving and computer skills. Connect with your congregation's Social Justice Ministry Team and find out what opportunities exist for volunteering within Common Good initiatives and with other ministries and organisations.
- **Give your money.** Give money to the Common Good Foundation for their EEE (Education, ECD, and Employment) initiatives. You can read more about these initiatives here: <http://commongood.org.za/eee-info/> . Alternately, find a cause you would like to support and make regular monthly donations. Even small amounts given regularly are a great help to organisations working with people living in poverty. Make a bequest in your will, leaving some of your estate to be used for those living in poverty or for those who were treated unjustly during apartheid. Or even give back now, e.g. through an organisation building homes for people or through a bursary or pension fund for those who cannot afford education and who have no retirement funding. Another way of financial giving is to reduce your expenditure so that you are more available for God to move you into work that may not pay as much as your current job but will position you to work in ways that will extend his Kingdom in the city. Or you will be in a better position to give your time and talents as God leads.

### A lifestyle of influence

Extend your lifestyle beyond yourself! With Abraham, we are “blessed to be a blessing” (ref Genesis 12:2). Help others to know the joy and blessing of a lifestyle of seeking social justice. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Respond as a family.** Shape the values and lifestyles of your immediate family. Children will imitate their parents' values. When you do things to help those in poverty or suffering injustice, or to address division, create opportunities for your children to get involved with you. When giving, encourage your children to give too. When praying, involve your children. When be-friending someone, introduce your children and help them to understand some of the difficult circumstances people in poverty face. Invite children who come from different socio-economic backgrounds into your home. Expose your children to communities where poverty levels are high, possibly through a ministry that the church partners with. Help your children to understand the discipline and grace of simplicity from an

early age – that everything they have is a gift from God to steward well and that we do not need everything the world would have us buy.

- Respond as an organisation.** Shape the values of the organisation you work for. Does your organisation have a budget for giving to help people in poverty? How does the organisation involve and motivate employees to respond to poverty and injustice? Are there processes in place that enable wise giving of funds and staff skills and time? Is the organisation you are involved with increasing poverty through exploitative sourcing and low wages? Or promoting desirable products that increase the poverty of the poor or reduce the available giving of the non-poor? Is your business practice 'just' to the environment by following good environmental practices? Remember, besides our God given mandate to ensure environmental justice, it is those in poverty who are often most affected by environmental damage and climate change.
- Respond as a group of friends.** Shape the values of those in your friendship circle. Use all the above ideas to take your friends and small group on this journey too! Help your friends to see what they can contribute to combating poverty and injustice with their talents, time and treasures.

### A quiz in closing

Responding to poverty, injustice and division is not something we put on and take off. It is about a life lived in an awareness of those living in poverty and suffering injustice and in an awareness of our divided society. Take the following quiz to get you thinking about how responding to poverty and injustice needs to be personal and permeate all aspects of our lives. Mark those areas where you would like to grow over the next few months. Maybe you have some more lifestyle statements you can add?

Lifestyle statement	Yes	No	To some extent	Growth area?
I have a good understanding of the biblical command to act justice.				
I have an understanding of the causes and extent of poverty, injustice and division in South Africa.				
I seek to be informed about current issues in the country related to poverty, injustice and division.				
I speak with God and seek his thinking on these matters.				

I seek opportunities to listen to the stories of people who are different to me, especially people of other ethnic groups.				
I know what I spend my money on.				
I know how much money I have to give away.				
I pray about how I use my money and give as I feel prompted by the Holy Spirit.				
I regularly think and pray about people living in poverty and suffering injustices.				
I regularly give of my time and skills to help those living in poverty and suffering injustice.				
I look for opportunities at school / university / work / home to talk about issues relating to poverty and injustice and how we can respond.				
I am friends with someone different to me.				
I try not to use more than my share of the earth's resources.				
I am fully persuaded that responding to poverty and injustice is intrinsic to what it means to be a Christ follower.				