



# FOCUS ON FAITH

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## WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

I find it interesting how new vocabulary and jargon either enter our lives or depart them so quickly. Catch-phrases that were popular in my formative years are unheard of today. In just the same manner other forms of cultural expression such as fashion as well as the way we do things, are here today and gone tomorrow. Looking back watching those old videos, I can't believe how footballers like George Best or Kevin Keegan got away with those short shorts or the hairstyles in their heydays.

'Social capital' is a current buzz-word yet it has its roots in much earlier times. But perhaps I should explain what social capital is all about first of all. It's relatively easy to understand that the availability of physical resources has a direct impact on the way we live. If we have monetary resources then we can buy things – the only questions we need to ask are how much money do we have and what the cost of the item is. But even then if we don't have the money there is still a possibility we can get what we want on credit.

**Faith in God is the starting point for the development of social capital in our communities**

In a manufacturing or industrial environment the economists talk about natural resources such as fossil fuels or other energy provision plus people resources, plant and machinery and how these can be combine with monetary capital in order to supply or create a market for the goods and services an organisation produces.

Social capital on the other hand refers to connections between individuals that enhance society. It's about putting something back into our communities through reciprocating and working alongside others in a mutual attitude of respect and trust. Mutual understanding, shared values and behaviours bind human networks and communities together and make co-operation possible. According to the World Bank, social capital is the glue that holds communities together.

And it's the connections that are important. Many of us are honest, trustworthy and people of integrity yet we probably get frustrated and disillusioned when those qualities are not reciprocated and people take advantage of us.

Concern has been expressed by some that society values are being eroded; that we are more tolerant of others but we trust them less – no doubt because of the fear of being 'ripped off' or of having been a victim of such an experience in the past. Here in the UK we have seen a downturn in political participation as well as reduced involvement in voluntary activities such as

Neighbourhood Watch and School PTAs, 'respect zones' have had to be set up and family life is under pressure from numerous sources.

The term 'social capital' was coined around a century ago and whilst the Bible – written of course much earlier – doesn't use it as such, it certainly has a lot to say about the concepts that the theory embraces.

Jesus said that we were to love one another and He demonstrated that in the most tangible way both in His life and His death. The Apostle Paul talked about respecting those in authority and of submitting to one another and honouring others. The Apostle Peter was concerned that we should live our lives in the right way caring for other people, being trustworthy, living in harmony and not retaliating when we are hurt – physically or emotionally. The Psalms and the Book of Proverbs contain numerous pleas and good advice about how we need others and the benefits that getting along with each other brings.

I believe faith in God is the starting point for the development of social capital in our communities. To some it may sound old fashioned but if we all treated each other with respect wouldn't that make our lives more enjoyable? After all it was Jesus who said that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. That seems like a very good formula to me.

Often there is a natural tendency to ask '*What's in it for me?*' But perhaps we should be looking at the ways in which we can contribute in a greater way to our communities.

Why?

Because as we do good to others, as we co-operate and build real trust, others will also reciprocate – an ever increasing cycle of mutual benefit for us all to enjoy.

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