

## FEBRUARY 19

---

Imagine the state of the world in which Jesus lived, where giving drink to the thirsty made his top six list of important things to do. Reconstruct in your mind the circumstances in which being able to drink the most basic life-sustaining liquid is problematic. In the arid lands of the Middle East, access to water was a matter of life and death.

Settlements were established near available water or where wells could be dug. When those traveling from place to place approached a village or an oasis, they depended on the hospitality of strangers. Dry and thirsty travelers counted on a strict code of conduct. In these circumstances, drink was given to the thirsty, not so much as an optional act of personal charity but as the fulfillment of a widely understood obligation: those who had water gave it to those in need.

It was understood across the region that no one who owned or controlled those resources should exercise stewardship over them in a way that would deprive others of life-sustaining goods. This moral obligation was imbedded in the fabric of these communities through binding customs. We're not talking about the generosity between one person who has water and another who does not. The heart of the matter was justice. It's a community that creates codes and structures in a world in which the resources required for human flourishing are denied to too many people, while others have more than they need.

Imagine creating a society in which everyone is always expected to give drink to the thirsty. Imagine social standards that called on everyone, time after time, to give of their abundance to those in need. Imagine establishing a habit of giving that reflects gratitude for what each of us has been given and developing an understanding of responsible stewardship that governs the way we live in community.

—BECCA STEVENS