

Global
Outreach

HELPING WITHOUT HURTING



Learning why good intentions
are not enough

Global Outreach
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Introduction

The subject of poverty alleviation is one that provokes many debates, opinions and responses. There does not seem to be a 'silver bullet' solution to the myriad of poverty issues we see in the world. Even as Christians our reaction and attitudes to local and international 'needs' are often tinged with differing biblical perspectives that are further shaped by personal experiences. Added to the mix are concerns about dependency, entitlement, unhealthy cycles, 'we-can-fix-it' attitudes and the like. The problems seem too complex to overcome and we find ourselves unable to sensibly reconcile our actions and attitudes with our biblical mandate and in the end we may become cynical, feel paralyzed or overwhelmed by guilt.

Don't loose heart! This booklet is designed to help us better answer the questions we have and re-orientate our understanding and actions in the face of poverty.

For the sake of discussion and ease of use we have included portions of text from the book *When Helping Hurts* that should be read in its entirety before reading this publication. We also strongly recommend that you take time to visit www.chalmers.org. The supplementary DVD that accompanies this booklet contains some of their excellent short videos on the subject as well as a three session video series with a printable small group study guide.

Although the themes discussed in this booklet are orientated towards our Community Outreach Ministry, the issues discussed also strongly relate to similar issues that are frequently encountered in cross-cultural ministry.

Poverty & Brokenness

Quoting Pages 61- 62: WHEN HELPING HURTS

One of the major premises of this book is that until *we embrace our mutual brokenness, our work with low income people is likely to do far more harm than good*. As discussed earlier, research from around the world has found that shame—a “poverty of being”—is a major part of the brokenness that low-income people experience in their relationship with themselves. Instead of seeing themselves as being created in the image of God, low-income people often feel they are inferior to others. This can paralyze the poor from taking initiative and from seizing opportunities to improve their situation, thereby locking them into material poverty.

At the same time, the economically rich—including most of the readers of this book—also suffer from a poverty of being. In particular, development practitioner Jayakumar Christian argues that the economically rich often have “god-complexes,” a subtle and unconscious sense of superiority in which they believe that they have achieved their wealth through their own efforts and that they have been anointed to decide what is best for the low-income people, whom they view as inferior to themselves.

Few of us are conscious of having a god-complex, which is part of the problem. We are often deceived by Satan and by our sinful natures. For example, consider this: why do you want to help the poor? Really think about it. What truly motivates you? Do you really love poor people and want to serve them? Or do you have other motives? I confess to you that part of what motivates me to help the poor is my felt need to accomplish something worthwhile with my life, to be a person of significance, to feel like I have pursued a noble cause...to be a bit like God. It makes me feel good to use my training in economics to “save” poor people. And in the process, I sometimes unintentionally reduce poor people to objects that I use to fulfill my own need to accomplish something. It is a very ugly truth, and it pains me to admit it, but “when I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (Rom. 7:21).

And now we have come to a very central point: one of the biggest problems in many poverty-alleviation efforts is that their design and implementation exacerbates the poverty of being of the economically rich—their god-complexes—and the poverty of being of the economical poor—their feelings of inferiority and shame. The way that we act toward the economically poor often communicates—albeit unintentional—that we are superior and they are inferior. In the process we hurt the poor and ourselves. And here is the clincher: this dynamic is likely to be particularly strong

whenever middle-to-upper-class, North American Christians try to help the poor, given these Christians' tendency toward a Western, materialistic perspective of the nature of poverty.

This point can be illustrated with the story of Creekside Community Church, a predominantly Caucasian congregation made up of young urban professionals in the downtown area of an American city. Being in the Christmas spirit, Creekside Community Church decided to reach out to the African-American residents of a nearby housing project, which was characterized by high rates of unemployment, domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and teenage pregnancy. A number of the members of Creekside expressed some distain for the project residents, and all of the members were fearful of venturing inside. But Pastor Johnson insisted that Jesus cared for the residents of this housing project and that Christmas was the perfect time to show His compassion.

But what could they do to help? Believing that poverty is primarily a lack of material resources, the members of Creekside Community Church decided to address this poverty by buying Christmas presents for the children in the housing project. Church members went door to door, singing Christmas carols and delivering wrapped toy to the children in each apartment. Although it was awkward at first, the members of Creekside were moved by the smile on the faces and were encouraged by the warm reception of the mothers. In fact, the congregation felt so good about the joy they had brought that they decided to expand this ministry, delivering baskets of candy at Easter and turkeys at Thanksgiving.

The authors write, “One of the major premises of this book is that until *we embrace our mutual brokenness, our work with low income people is likely to do far more harm than good.*”

We are all broken in different ways; and poverty, in its different forms can affect us all. Why is it important, if we hope to help make a difference in the lives of the poor, that we understand our own poverty?

List as many types of poverty as you can below and circle any on the list that may also be apparent in your own life;

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The Roots of Poverty

Quoting Pages 73-75 WHEN HELPING HURTS

Reverend Marsh was wrong. Jesus is not just “beaming up” our soul out of the planet Earth in Star Trek fashion; rather, Jesus is bringing reconciliation to every last speck of the universe, including both our foundational relationships and the systems that emanate from them. Poverty is rooted in broken relationships, so the solution to poverty is rooted in the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection to put all things into right relationship again.

Of course, the full reconciliation of all things will not happen until the final coming of the kingdom, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Only then will every tear be wiped from our eyes (Rev. 21:4). There is real mystery concerning how much progress we can expect to see before Jesus comes again, and good people can disagree. Fortunately, what we are to do every day does not hinge on resolving this issue, for the task at hand is quite clear. The King of kings is ushering in a kingdom that will bring healing to every last speck of the cosmos. As His body, bride, and fullness, the church is to do what Jesus did: bear witness to the reality of that coming kingdom using both words and anticipatory deeds. We can then trust God to “establish the work of our hands” as He chooses (Ps. 90:17).

HOW SHOULD WE THEN ALLEVIATE?

Jesus’ work focuses on “reconciliation,” which means putting things back into right relationship again. The church must pursue reconciliation as well:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sin against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’ behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5: 18-20)

We are not the reconciler; Jesus is. However, we are His ambassadors, representing His kingdom and all that it entails to a broken world, which leads to the following definition of poverty alleviation:

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Poverty alleviation is the ministry of reconciliation: moving people closer to glorifying God by living in right relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation.

Reconciliation of relationships is the guiding compass for our poverty-alleviation efforts, profoundly shaping both the goal that we pursue and the methods we use.

The goal is not to make the materially poor all over the world into middle-to-upper-class North Americans, a group characterized by high rates of divorce, sexual addiction, substance abuse, and mental illness. Nor is the goal to make sure that the materially poor have enough money. Indeed, America's welfare system ensured that Alisa Collins and her family had more than enough money to survive, but they felt trapped. Rather, the goal is to restore people to a full expression of humanness, to being what God created us all to be, people who glorify God by living in right relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation. One of the many manifestations of these relationships being reconciled is material poverty alleviation:

MATERIAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Material poverty alleviation is working to reconcile the four foundational relationships so that people can fulfill their calling of glorifying God by working and supporting themselves and their families with the fruit of that work.

There are two key things to note in this definition. First, material poverty alleviation involves more than ensuring that people have sufficient material things; rather, it involves the much harder task of empowering people to earn sufficient material things through their own labor, for in so doing we move people closer to being what God created them to be. (Of course, we recognize that this is impossible for some people because of disability or other factors.) Second, work is an act of worship. When people seek to fulfill their callings by glorifying God in their work, praising Him for their gifts and abilities, and seeing both their efforts and its products as an offering to Him, then work is an act of worship to God. On the other hand, when work is done to glorify oneself or merely to achieve more wealth, it becomes worship of the false gods. How we work and for whom we work really matters.

Defining poverty alleviation as the reconciliation of relationships also shapes the methods our churches or ministries should use to achieve that goal. As we shall see later in this book, a reconciliation perspective has major implications for how we choose, design, implement, and evaluate our efforts. But before getting in to those specifics, the remainder of this chapter lays out some initial implications of reconciliation perspective for our methods of poverty alleviation.

Often we have the mind-set that poverty has mainly to do with material deficiency and thus the solution is to provide material help.

The authors quote, “Poverty is rooted in broken relationships, so the solution to poverty is rooted in the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection to put all things into right relationship again.”

Do you agree with the author’s definition of the solution to poverty and how it is much more than alleviating material deficiencies?

If you agree, why do you agree? If not, why don’t you agree?

Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

Quoting from Pages 101-104 WHEN HELPING HURTS

It is absolutely crucial that we determine whether relief, rehabilitation, or development is the appropriate intervention:

One of the biggest mistakes that North American churches make---by far---is in applying relief in situations in which rehabilitation or development is the appropriate intervention.

The Good Samaritan's handouts were appropriate for the person at point 1, a victim who needed material assistance to stop the bleeding and even prevent death: however the person at point 3 is not facing an emergency and handouts of material assistance to such people do not help to restore them to being the productive stewards that they were created to be. In fact, as we saw in chapter 2, applying a material solution to the person at point 3, whose underlying problem---like ours---is relational, is likely to do harm to this person and to the provider of the material assistance, exacerbating the brokenness in the four key relationships for both of them.

The remainder of this chapter uses the relief-rehabilitation-development paradigm to flesh out some principles as we seek the goal of poverty alleviation---low-income people and ourselves increasingly glorifying God through reconciling relationships with God, self, others, and the rest of creation.

Who's #1?

Many of the people coming to your church for help will state that they are in a crisis, needing emergency financial help for utility bill, rent, food, or transportation. In other words, they will state that they are at a point 1 in figure 4.1. Is relief the appropriate intervention for such a person? Maybe, but maybe not. There are several things to consider.

First, is there really a crisis at hand? If you fail to provide immediate help, will there really be serious, negative consequences? If not, then the relief is not the appropriate intervention, for there is time for the person to take actions on his own behalf.

Second, to what degree was the individual personally responsible for the crisis? Of course, compassion and understanding are in order here, especially when one remembers the systematic factors that can play a role in poverty. But it is still important to consider the person's own culpability in the situation, as allowing people

to feel some of the pain resulting from any irresponsible behavior on their part can be part of the “tough love” needed to facilitate the reconciliation of poverty alleviation. The point is not to punish the person for any mistakes or sins he has committed but to ensure that the appropriate lessons are being learned in the situation.

Third, can the person help himself? If so, then a pure handout is almost never appropriate, as it undermines the person’s capacity to be a steward of his own resource and abilities.

Fourth, to what extent has this person already been receiving relief from you or others in the past? How likely is he to be receiving such help in the future? As special as your church is, it might not be the first stop on the train! This person may be obtaining “emergency” assistance from one church or organization after another, so that your “just-this-one-time-gift” might be the tenth such gift the person has recently received.

My family experienced this situation two months ago when a young woman knocked on the door of our house asking for some food. We complied, but we later found out that she has refused help. The loving thing to do for this woman is for the entire community to withhold further relief, to explain our reason for doing so, and to offer her wide-open arms should she choose a path of walking together with us in finding long-term solutions.

While many of these rules of thumb strike an intuitive chord when working with materially poor in North America, many of us ignore these principles when working with materially poor in the Majority World. Compared to our own situation, the levels of poverty in the Majority World seem so devastating, and the people seem so helpless. In such contexts, many of us are quick to hand out money and other forms of relief assistance in ways that we would never even consider when ministering to the poor in North America.

To illustrate, consider the savings and credit association affiliated with Jehovah Jireh Church, a congregation located in a slum in Manila, the Philippines. Each of the members of this savings and credit association lives on approximately one to five dollars per day. Each member of the association deposits into the group just twenty cents per week, which the association uses to make very small, interest-bearing loans to the member. In addition, each member contributes five cents per week to the association’s emergency crisis.

From a North American perspective, these people are extremely poor. In this light, it is instructive to consider the policies that the saving and credit association developed for its emergency fund. Money from the fund is lent---not given---at a 0 percent interest rate to group members whose family members get sick. No assistance is available for people who have had the electricity or water cut off for not paying their bills. According to the group, such a situation does not constitute an emergency, since electric and water bills are regular household expenditures for which they should all be prepared. The group will not even give emergency loans for hospitalization for giving birth, because the family had nine months to prepare for the delivery of the baby. Finally, the amount of the loan from the emergency fund is limited to the amount of the savings contributions of the member getting the loan. The members of this savings and credit association are tough cookies!

Now what happens when a North American church encounters the members of Jehovah Jireh Church's saving and credit association? We often project our own ideas of what is an acceptable standard of living onto the situation and are quick to take a relief approach, doling out money in way that the local people would consider unwise and dependence-creating. And in the process, we can undermine local judgment, discipline, accountability, stewardship, savings and institutions. In fact, research has shown that the injection of outside funds into these savings and credit groups typically dooms them to collapse. The point here is not that the policies of Jehovah Jireh's savings and credit association are normative for all churches and all contexts. The point is that, in deciding if relief is the appropriate intervention, we must be careful lest we impose our own cultural assumption into contexts that we do not understand very well.

As discussed further in chapter 11, assessment tools can help you to discern the nature of a person's situation. These tools can range from an informal set of questions used in an initial conversation to a more formal and detailed written form. Such assessment tools help to identify the type of assistance that would be most beneficial and can also help to determine if the need for help is real. Furthermore, these tools can reveal the willingness of the person to address larger life issues that may have contributed to the present situation.

In particular, it is helpful for your church or ministry to have a set of benevolence policies in place to guide decision making when working with materially poor people. These policies should flow from your mission and vision and be consistent with a biblical perspective on the nature of poverty and its alleviation.

Who is #1? It is likely that you know many people in this category, for the reality is that only a small percentage of the poor in your community or around the world require relief. These would include the severely disabled; some of the elderly; very young, orphaned children; the mentally ill homeless population; and victims of a natural disaster. People in these categories are often unable to do anything to help themselves and need the handout of relief. However, for most people, the bleeding has stopped, and they are not destitute. Acting as though they are destitute does more harm than good, both to them and to ourselves. This does not mean that we should do nothing to help those who are not destitute. It just means that rehabilitation or development---not relief---is the appropriate way of helping such people. This help could very well include providing them with financial assistance, but such assistance would be conditional upon and supportive of their being productive. Chapters 8 and 9 provide examples of interventions that do this by complementing people's work and thrift with additional resources.

Why is it important to try to determine what category a person is in before attempting to help?

What harm is done whenever treating a rehab or development need, with a relief response?

Negative Models: Provider – Recipient dynamics

Read the paragraph below and respond to the questions.

The authors write on Page 106,

“Once a month the members of our church graciously bought food, prepared a meal, served it to the shelter residents, and cleaned up afterward. We did everything short of spoon-feeding the men, never asking them to lift a finger in the entire process. A more developmental approach would have sought greater participation of these men in their own rehabilitation, asking them to exercise stewardship as part of the process of beginning to reconcile their key relationships. We could have involved the men in every step along the way, from planning the meal, to shopping for the food, to helping with serving and cleaning up. We could have done supper with the men, working and eating side by side, rather than giving supper to the men, engaging in a provider-recipient dynamic that likely confirmed our sense of superiority and their sense of inferiority.”

In your opinion could we have created a provider-recipient dynamic within our society, our churches and our families?

Consider the different ministries described in the COC Volunteers Orientation Manual and list practical ways that you think may better get our guests involved in a ‘rehabilitation/restorative’ process – help them to help themselves and help others?

- Field Trips
- Preparing and Serving Dinner
- Resource and Referral
- Children’s Ministry
- Outreach Visitation and Events
- Brown Bag
- Worship...Preaching...Bible Studies

Processes & Relationships

“... consider the familiar case of the person who comes to your church asking for help with paying an electricity bill. On the surface, it appears that this person’s problem is ...a lack of material resources, and many churches respond by giving this person enough money to pay the electric bill. But what if this person’s fundamental problem is not having the self-discipline to keep a stable job? Simply giving this person money is treating the symptoms rather than the underlying disease and will enable him to continue with his lack of self-discipline. In this case, the gift of the money does more harm than good, and it would be better not to do anything at all than to give this handout. Really!! Instead, a better – and far more costly – solution would be for your church to develop a relationship with this person, a relationship that says, “We are here to walk with you and help you use your gifts and abilities to avoid being in this situation in the future. Let us into your life and let us work with you to determine the reason why you are in this predicament.”” (p53)

Summary

Everyone has a story. Everyone has a history that brings them to where they are and influences the direction they are heading. When someone comes to us, they are on a path that is going somewhere! Sometimes the destination is clear and sometimes the path doubles back on itself.

Often the situation in which people find themselves is the consequence of other influences/attitudes that shaped their decisions.

Before we respond to a person’s apparent need (e.g. pay a utility bill, help with rent) it is important that we learn someone’s story first – learn the cause and effect of their situation.

We can hurt people by responding to their need without first gaining a deeper understanding of their situation.

Benevolence

The authors write (quoting Pages 227, 219-200):

“The point of benevolence policies is to engage the person in a guided conversation that helps both them and you to better understand their life situation, to consider what could be done to improve that situation, to gauge their readiness to move forward, and to explore the role of your church or ministry in that process. If a life-changing crisis is not at play and the person is unwilling to engage in constructing an action plan, then they, not you, are refusing help” ... “And if they do so, the proper response on our part should be to pray for them, to remain open to their return, and to make the offer to truly help them again in the future. But to give them material assistance when they do not need it is not the loving thing to do, and we are called to – truly – love our neighbors.”

Does the above principle reflect how you typically respond to a person in a non-life-threatening crisis who is requesting benevolence? (Yes/no/maybe)

What kinds of structures/resources do we need to have in place to facilitate a process of healthy rehabilitation?

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Summary

“If a life-changing crisis is not at play and the person is unwilling to engage in constructing an action plan, then they, not you, are refusing help”

Does this statement help and how does it square up to our theology?



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