



When Helping Hurts

Reconsidering the Meaning of Poverty



Leader Check-in

What is your definition of the word “poverty?”

Discover

Why might most North Americans define poverty as a lack of material things (food, money, housing, healthcare, etc.)?

Consider the following quote. How would you explain this concept to a teenager?

The way that we define poverty determines the solutions that we use to alleviate poverty.

What are some of the dangers associated with misdiagnosing the underlying cause(s) of poverty?

What strikes you about the way that poor people around the world describe or define poverty?

Compare **Genesis 1:26-32** to **Genesis 3:1-19**. How did the fall affect Adam and Eve’s relationships:

To God?

To themselves?

To one another?

To creation?

What does this have to do with our understanding of poverty?

Fully Own

How is your definition of poverty changing?


Read Isaiah 58:9-12. Underline the “if... then” statements in your Bible. What might happen if everyone who called themselves Christians cared for the poor as this passage outlines?

How do you typically think about the poor? How much do you interact with people who are poor?

What do you sense God is doing in your heart in response to what you have learned today?

Challenge

Ask God for an opportunity to give dignity to the poor this week. Come back next week ready to share.



When Helping Hurts

Seeing God at Work

Leader Check-in

What opportunities did God give you to give dignity this week? What did you learn?

Discover

Consider Bryant Myers' definition of poverty: *Poverty is the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all its meanings.*

Have you ever considered that there may be ways in which you are impoverished?

Compare and contrast the **poverty of the materially poor** and the **poverty of the materially rich**. How are these groups the same? How are they different?

Why is it important for the materially rich to understand both kinds of poverty?

Read John 5:1-9. How does the man at the pool demonstrate "conditioned hopelessness?" What do you notice about Jesus' treatment of the man?

Read Luke 18:9-14. How does the Pharisee exemplify the dangers of the **poverty of the materially rich**? How will this kind of attitude affect his relationships with God and others?

Fully Own

Who do you relate to more, the man at the pool in **John 5** or the Pharisee in **Luke 18**?

Reflect on your life and relationships. How have you experienced:

Poverty of spiritual intimacy?

Poverty of being?

Poverty of community?

Poverty of stewardship?

What benefits might come from contemplating our shared poverty?

Read Micah 6:6-9. What would it look like for you to walk humbly with the materially poor?

Challenge

Ask God to reveal your own poverty to you this week. Journal your thoughts and insights.

When Helping Hurts

Understanding Why Good Intentions Are Not Enough

Leader Check-in

What insights did you gain during your prayer time this week?

Discover

Have your “good intentions” ever led to bad results? Think about relationships you have, projects you’ve worked on and teams of which you have been a part.

In your own words, describe the difference between: relief, rehabilitation, and development in the context of poverty alleviation.

What form of poverty alleviation do most people need? Which is the hardest to actually do?

Read Galatians 6:1-10. Where can you identify the concepts of relief, rehabilitation and development in this passage?

What are you learning about the connections between the spiritual condition of a person and the economic condition of a person? Remember, the materially poor and materially rich both experience poverty!

Fully Own

Consider the following quote: *“Paternalism is habitually doing for people and providing for people things that they can do and provide for themselves.”*

Are you familiar with this term? Have you ever experienced paternalism before (on either side)? How can we avoid paternalism in our interactions with others?

Take another look at Galatians 6:1-10. How is he empowering the church to restore relationship? What would it look like for you to follow his advice?

Take a moment to reflect on what you’ve learned over the last few weeks. What do you think God is trying to teach you, personally?

Challenge

Make time to do the following activity this week:

1. Bring a pen or pencil and a journal to a quiet place.
2. Ask God to make you aware of people in your life who are in need of poverty alleviation (restored relationship to God and others).
3. Ask God what each person needs: relief, rehabilitation, or development?
4. Ask God to show you what he wants **you** to do about it, and then pray for each person by name.

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Joining God's Work

Leader Check-in

How is God using this Life Group experience to transform you?

Discover

Spend the first 5 or 10 minutes brainstorming as a group. What ideas about participation and partnership in poverty alleviation stand out most to your group? Generate as many ideas as possible and write them all down before moving on to the next activity.

Split into groups of 2 or 3 to read and discuss the following passages and questions. When each group has finished, come back together to share what you learned with the entire group.

Read Nehemiah 1-2. What kind(s) of poverty is Jerusalem facing? How does Nehemiah engage the people who were living in Jerusalem?

Read Nehemiah 3. What assets can you identify among the people working on the wall?

Read Nehemiah 4. How does Nehemiah empower the people to address their opposition? Where can you discern a “developmental” approach in Nehemiah’s leadership.

Read Nehemiah 6:15. Why do you think they were able to complete this task so quickly? What might have happened if Nehemiah had used **needs-based development** with the people instead of **asset-based development**?

Fully Own

What assumptions have you made about the resources of the materially poor? How is God changing your mind?

“It is often the case that simply asking people to consider their gifts is poverty alleviation.” How does this statement inspire or challenge you?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. What gifts and abilities has God given *you*? How might God want to use you to be a part of the solution to the problems in our community?

What are *your* dreams? What prevents *you* from achieving those dreams?

Challenge

Make a point to connect with someone you know who seems to be in constant crisis, or in need of support. Do what you can to help them identify their gifts and God-given abilities. Come back to group next week ready to share about your experience.

When Helping Hurts

Fostering Change

Leader Check-in

How did your conversation go this week? What did you learn?

Discover

Reflect on the major changes you have made in your life. What situations or experiences led you to make those changes?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 and Romans 2:3-4. What can these passages teach us about how God leads us to make a change? How have you experienced the principles of these passages in your own life?

Reflect on the following quote as a group:

“One of the primary features of poverty is lack of access to social networks. We underappreciate this because we have access to social networks.”

How have you benefited from access to social networks? How might your life (career, marriage, family, etc.) have been different if you were isolated from access to these networks?

What kind of access could you give to the materially poor, based on your life experience and spheres of influence?

Fully Own

How could this Life Group help to alleviate poverty with a relational (and not just material) approach?

Imagine that God has called you to support an impoverished family in your community. As a group, dialogue about the ways that God might lead you to partner with this family to help them without hurting them. Consider the following questions:

- *What kind of poverty are they experiencing? What kind of poverty do you experience?*
- *How will you help them discover their God-given gifts and abilities?*
- *How will you gauge their receptivity to change?*
- *What insights might they have to offer you about their situation?*
- *What social networks do you have access to that they might benefit from?*
- *What boundaries might you need to put in place to make sure you are stewarding your time and energy well?*

Challenge

Memorize **Isaiah 58:10** during your personal devotion time this week.

When Helping Hurts

Moving Forward

Leader Check-in

What is the most impactful thing you have learned from this study? How do you hope it will change the way that you see, think, and behave?

Discover

Have you interacted with cultures outside of America? Have you ever considered the effect that the “wealthy American outsider” stereotype has on the way people interpret your suggestions and behaviors?

Based on what you have learned over the length of this study, what role does faith play in poverty alleviation?

Write a group definition for the word “poverty.” How has your definition of poverty changed over the last several weeks?

Read Mark 10:42-45. How does this passage connect to what you now know about healthy poverty alleviation?

Fully Own

How has God been prompting you to engage the poor? Are you willing to take a less visible role in order to invest in ministries or partner with people who already have relationships with the poor?

Which Marks of Ownership at Central correspond with the principles you have learned in this study?

What practices would you like to **START** in response to what you have learned in this study?
What habits or thinking patterns would you like to **STOP** in response to what you have learned?
What practices would you like to **CONTINUE**?

Spend the last 15-20 minutes searching your Bible for as many passages about caring for the poor that you can find. Read each passage aloud once you find it. Make a list of all the verses you find.

Challenge

Consider the principles for healthy partnerships with the poor:

1. Focus on the relationship not just accomplishing something.
2. Recognize that *you need them*.
3. Everyone should have “skin in the game” or *shared control*.

How can you use these principles in everyday life to cultivate healthy relationships with the people you know?