

# When Helping Hurts

by Steve Corbett



- American Christians are by far and away the richest people ever to walk the earth. No time in history has there ever been greater economic disparity in the world than at present time.
- In the 1820's the average person in the richest counties was only about 4 x's higher than the average income per person in the poorest countries. Then the Industrial Revolution hit causing unprecedented growth in a handful of countries, but leaving the rest behind. As a result, while the average American lives on more than \$90 per day, approximately one billion people live on less than one dollar per day and 2.6 billion – 40 percent of the world's population – live on less than two dollars per day! Major inequality!
- We think of the poor as only economically poor not spiritually poor.....without Christ we are all spiritually bankrupt!
- Who are the poor? Stop and think: If poverty is rooted in the brokenness of the foundational relationships, then who are the poor? All of us are broken due to the fall of man. "Until we embrace our mutual brokenness, our work with low-income people is likely to do far more harm than good. Humility!"

- “Often times the material poor have an even deeper walk with God and have insights and experiences that they can share with us if we would just stop talking and *listen!*”
- “At some level we American’s implicitly assume our economic superiority goes hand in hand with our spiritual superiority”
- Relief, Rehabilitation, Development (Most situations require development not relief or rehabilitation)
  - Relief = urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis.
  - Rehabilitation = begins as soon as bleeding stops and seeks to restore people; working *with* victims
  - Development = process of ongoing change that moves all the people both helpers and helped. Done not “for” the people but “with” the people. A life long process, not a two week product.
- “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.”
- “Ironically, you will also typically find that most existing Short term missions are focusing on providing relief. Why? There are at least three reasons. First, many service organizations have a material definition of poverty; hence, they believe that handouts of material things are the solution to that poverty. As a result, they often provide relief to people who really need development. Second, relief is easier to do than development. It is much simpler to drop food out of airplanes or to ladle soup out of bowls than it is to develop long-lasting, time-consuming relationships with poor people, which may be emotionally exhausting. Third, it is easier to get donor money for relief than for development. “We feed thousands of people today” sounds better to donors than “We hung out and developed relationships with a dozen people today.” Your church might decide to focus on ministering intensely over time to a few people rather than superficially and quickly to many people. Ie “Adopt Terre Glisse”
- “In short term missions remember to not do for people what they can do for themselves. Stay away from the “go-help-and-save-them” mission theme and instead use a “go-as-a-learner” message. Change the name of your short term mission trip to something like “Vision trip” or “Go-Learn-Return and Respond”. Not short term mission....learn and respond!”

*“Go-Learn-Return-Respond”*

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:27*