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## UNIT 1

# RECONSIDERING THE MEANING OF **POVERTY**

### **OPEN**

*Discuss these questions before beginning this week's unit.*

- What is poverty? List the first five to ten words or phrases that come to your mind when you think of poverty.
  
  - List the first five areas (e.g., of your city, community, the world) that come to mind when you think of poverty.
- 

### ***What's the Problem?***

The average North American enjoys a standard of living that has been unimaginable for most of human history. Meanwhile, 40 percent of the earth's inhabitants eke out an existence on less than two dollars per day. Indeed, the economic and social disparity between the haves and the have-nots is on the rise both within North America and between North America and much of the Majority World (Africa, Asia, and Latin America).

If you are a North American *Christian*, the reality of our society's vast wealth presents you with an enormous responsibility, for throughout the Scriptures God's people are commanded to show compassion to the poor. In fact, doing so is simply part of our job description as followers of Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:31–46). While the biblical call to care for the poor transcends time and place, passages such as 1 John 3:17 should weigh particularly heavily on the minds and hearts of North American Christians: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"

### **WATCH**

*Close your books and use the accompanying QR code to watch this week's video.*



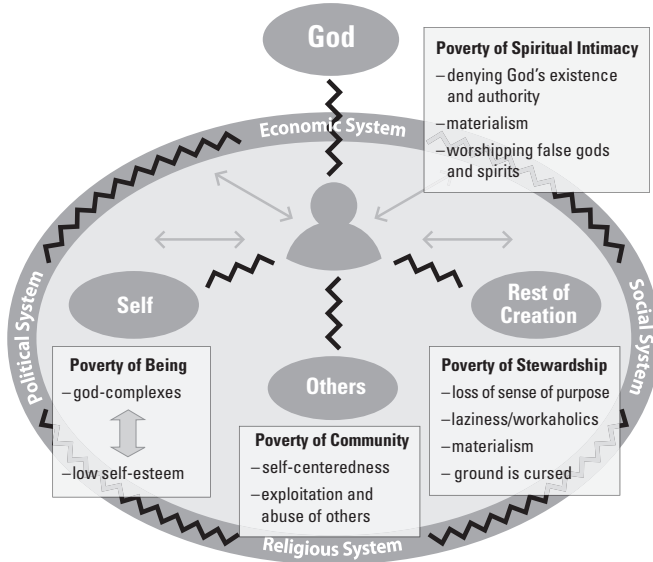
[www.helpingwithouthurting.org/smallgroup-1](http://www.helpingwithouthurting.org/smallgroup-1)

### **APPLY**

1. Did the words the materially poor used to describe poverty in the video differ from the words you listed in the preliminary questions? If so, what words and differences did you find most surprising?

2. The brokenness of the four relationships illustrated below can lead to behaviors and circumstances that contribute to poverty.

### **THE FOUR BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS**



Adapted from Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 27.

Consider the story of a friend or family member who is poor. Where do you see evidence of each of the four broken relationships in his or her life? Can you see ways that this brokenness has led to his or her poverty?

- Broken Relationship with God:
  
- Broken Relationship with Self:

- Broken Relationship with Others:
  
- Broken Relationship with the Rest of Creation:

3. How might thinking about this person's poverty in terms of these broken relationships change the way you interact with him or her? Are there new ways you could show the love and healing work of Christ to this person or family in each of the broken relationships?

**CLOSE** *(or proceed to Go Deeper if time permits)*

Poverty is the result of broken relationships. But as we will explore in the rest of this series, broken relationships can be restored by the work of Christ. He came to make all things new, breaking the hold of sin and death “far as the curse is found.” He came to show us that we can have a relationship with our Father, that we have dignity as creatures made in God’s image, that we are to love one another in nourishing community, and that we have the privilege of stewarding the rest of creation. The fall has marred what God intended for us at creation, but the work of Christ offers hope that what is broken, both inside of us and around us, will be repaired. His victory over sin and death is certain, and His healing power is our comfort and peace. Let’s walk together as we explore what God’s reconciling work in this world looks like, and how we can effectively partner with Him in ministering to people who are poor.

**PRAY**

“Human beings are fundamentally wired to experience these four relationships. It’s not all arbitrary, it’s not all up for grabs. When we experience these relationships in the way that God intended them, we experience humanness in the way God intended.”

Spend time this week praying that God would open your eyes to the beauty and potential around you, including in the lives of people who are poor. Pray that He would help you to break free of a material understanding of poverty, leading you to love and serve these people in ways that point them back to His original design for their lives.

**GO DEEPER**

*Use one or more of the following modules to further explore principles of poverty alleviation.*

**THE ROOT OF POVERTY**

(Reference *When Helping Hurts*, 52–54.)

*“At that moment, it doesn’t matter how much the doctor loves you. It doesn’t matter how compassionate the doctor is, it doesn’t matter how many good intentions the doctor has. . . . If the doctor misdiagnoses what’s wrong with you, you won’t get better, and you might get worse.”*

Look over the frequently cited causes of and responses to poverty below:

If We Believe the Primary Cause of Poverty Is . . .	Then We Will Primarily Try to . . .
<p>A Lack of Knowledge</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>Educate the Poor</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

If We Believe the Primary Cause of Poverty Is . . .	Then We Will Primarily Try to . . .
<p><b>Oppression by Powerful People</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Work for Social Justice</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>The Personal Sins of the Poor</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Evangelize and Disciple the Poor</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>A Lack of Material Resources</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Give Material Resources to the Poor</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

1. In the space within the table, write down examples of how you or your church have built ministries to address the various causes of poverty. (For example, under “A Lack of Knowledge,” you might write, “Students were dropping out of high school . . . so we started after-school tutoring programs.”)
2. Does your work seem focused on addressing one particular cause?
3. How might each of the causes of poverty listed in the table actually flow from brokenness in the four relationships? How might this



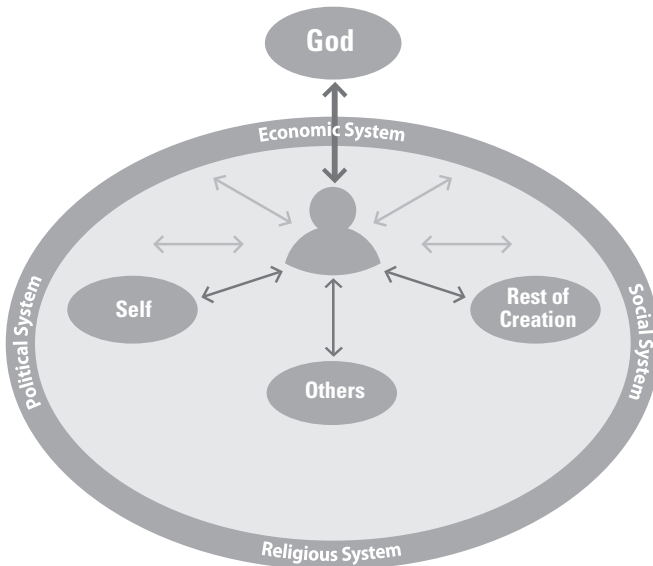
deeper diagnosis impact the ways you interact with people around you who are poor?

## **BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS AND MATERIAL POVERTY<sup>1</sup>**

(Reference *When Helping Hurts*, 54–59.)

When the four relationships are functioning properly, humans experience the fullness of life that God intended—we are being what God created us to be.

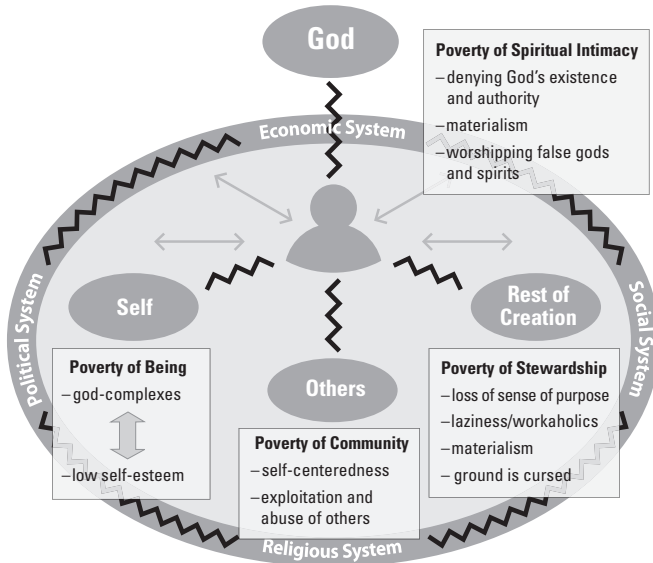
### **THE FOUR FOUNDATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**



Adapted from Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 27.

But as we discussed in the video, the fall broke these relationships.

## THE FOUR BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS



Adapted from Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 27.

From this framework, poverty isn't about a lack of material things. Instead, it is about much deeper issues:

### 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."

—**Bryant Myers**, *Walking with the Poor*<sup>2</sup>

With this definition of poverty and the four broken relationships in mind, read the following story about Mary:

Mary lives in a slum in western Kenya. As a female in a male-dominated society, Mary has been subjected to polygamy, to regular physical and verbal abuse from her husband, and to fewer years of

schooling than males. As a result, Mary lacks the confidence to look for a job.

Desperate, Mary decides to be self-employed, but needs a loan to get her business started. Unfortunately, the local loan shark exploits Mary, demanding an interest rate of 300 percent on her loan of twenty-five dollars. Having no other options, Mary borrows from the loan shark and, along with hundreds of others just like her, starts a business of selling homemade charcoal in the local market. The market is glutted with charcoal sellers, which keeps the prices very low. But it never even occurs to Mary to sell something else, because charcoal is the only resource she knows how to access. Frustrated by her entire situation, Mary goes to the traditional healer (shaman) for help. The healer tells Mary that her difficult life is a result of angry ancestral spirits that need to be appeased through buying and sacrificing a bull.

1. Where do you see each of the four broken relationships in Mary's story, and how does each specifically contribute to her material poverty?

- Broken Relationship with God:

- Broken Relationship with Self:

- Broken Relationship with Others:

- Broken Relationship with the Rest of Creation:

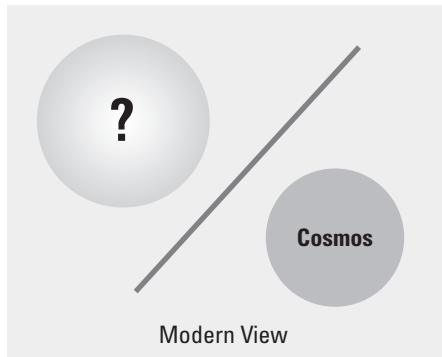
### **WORLDVIEW MATTERS<sup>3</sup>**

(Use in conjunction with *When Helping Hurts*, 87–90.)

If we are to move forward in helping without hurting, we have to fully embrace a relational view of poverty, setting aside our tendency to view poverty as primarily a material condition that can be solved primarily with material things.

We are deeply conditioned by our society’s modern worldview to view everything around us in material terms. Thus, the way that we act toward the materially poor often paints a faulty picture of the nature of God, self, others, and the rest of creation.

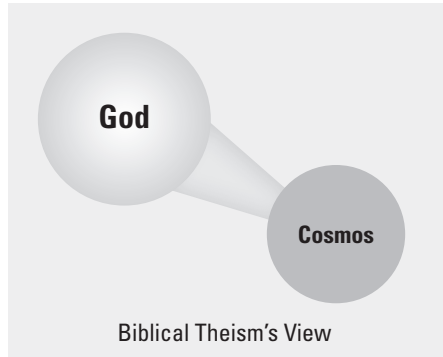
#### **THE MODERN WORLDVIEW**



Adapted from Darrow L. Miller with Stan Guthrie, *Discipling the Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures* (Seattle, WA: YWAM, 2001), figures 1.7–1.10, pp. 43–4.

The modern worldview, sometimes called “Western secularism,” holds that the spiritual realm does not even exist. The universe is fundamentally a machine with origins and operations rooted in natural processes that humans can master through their own reason.

The material definition of poverty emanates from the modern worldview’s belief that all problems—including poverty—are fundamentally material in nature and can be solved by using human reason (science and technology) to manipulate the material world in order to solve those problems or achieve these goals.

**BIBLICAL THEISM**

Adapted from Darrow L. Miller with Stan Guthrie, *Discipling the Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures* (Seattle, WA: YWAM, 2001), figures 1.7–1.10, pp. 43–4.

The worldview of biblical theism describes a God who is distinct from His creation but connected to it, a reality in which the spiritual and material realms touch each other. Indeed, Colossians 1 describes God, in the person of Jesus Christ, as the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things, including the material world. Thus, our approach to poverty alleviation should reflect this worldview, addressing the materially poor's physical and spiritual needs, not just one or the other.

1. When you get sick, what do you do?

2. Read 2 Chronicles 16:7–9 and Psalm 20:6–8. What was Asa's sin?

3. Because of the ways we have unintentionally accepted the modern worldview, we tend to rely on science and our own reason to solve our problems. We forget to call on the one who created and upholds the universe. Are you like Asa? How does your worldview need to be transformed to reflect a biblical understanding of God and creation?