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UNIT 1

MORE THAN  
MEETS THE **EYE**

**OPEN**

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

- What are the first five words or phrases that come to your mind when you think of poverty?
  
- If you had to describe the purpose of this short-term trip in one sentence, what would it be?

- What are your personal goals for this trip? Two years from now, what are two things in your life and actions that you would like to be different as a result of going on this trip?

### MISSION ACCOMPLISHED?

Aubrey sat in the back row of the fifteen-passenger van, awkwardly curled up with her legs on top of her backpack. The rest of the team was sleeping, heads leaning against windows and piles of pillows. Aubrey, though, was staring into the distance, exhausted but unable to sleep. She kept thinking of Michelle, a ten-year-old girl from Chicago she had befriended over the past six days. Images of her adorable grin played on repeat in her mind. Each morning, Aubrey and her fellow team members worked on houses in Michelle's neighborhood, and then ran VBS classes in the afternoon. Last night, Aubrey had to say goodbye. She tearfully gave Michelle a box of candy and school supplies. *It kills me to leave, but I know we both understand Jesus better because I was faithful to come here, sacrificing my time and resources to love her,* Aubrey thought as the van pulled into a filling station.

At first glance, it seems like Aubrey and her team successfully acted on their biblical command to love and serve people who are poor. After all, houses were freshly painted, and the neighborhood children had bracelets representing the gospel story the team had shared. But if Aubrey could spend months, or years, in that neighborhood, she would realize that alleviating poverty isn't that straightforward—her team may have recognized the symptoms of poverty, but there was actually something more happening beneath the surface.

**WATCH**

*Close your books and watch this week's video via the QR code or link below.*



[www.helpingwithouthurting.org/stm-videos](http://www.helpingwithouthurting.org/stm-videos)

*Follow the prompts to set up an account or sign back in, utilizing the access code below to view the videos:*

Code: COL120

**DISCUSS****Initial Reflections**

1. What are two or three ideas that struck you in the video? What questions do you have after seeing the video?

**MAKING IT COUNT**

Consider the following numbers and statistics:

- **2–3 million people:** 2010 estimate of how many people from the United States go on short-term mission trips (STMs) internationally each year<sup>1</sup>
- **20–25 percent:** The likelihood of any given church member going on an international STM sometime in their lifetime as of 2009<sup>2</sup>
- **\$1,370–\$1,450 per person:** Range of average cost for an international STM<sup>3</sup>

- **\$1.6 billion:** A conservative estimate of international STM spending per year—that's \$1,600,000,000<sup>4</sup>
- **4 million people:** number of the world's extreme poor whose *yearly* income would equal the \$1.6 billion spent on international STMs in one year<sup>5</sup>
- **\$3,000–\$6,000 per year:** the range of *yearly* salary for a community-level relief and development worker in the Majority World—an STM of fifteen people at \$1,400 per person would spend \$21,000, an amount that could support three to seven staff members for a year

1. Out of the above numbers, what statistics surprise you the most? Why?

These numbers paint a sobering picture. Simply put, we spend a massive amount of money on short-term trips—money that could be used to support people working and ministering in their own communities, people who are already familiar with the context and culture of the community. These people could be used by God to evangelize, disciple, and combat poverty over the long haul.

2. Given this reality, how do you justify using God's money to go on this trip?

So why go? As we will see throughout these lessons, the purpose of a trip isn't primarily about what you will do or what impact you will have in two weeks. It's about what you can learn, in deep and meaningful ways, and how that learning can translate into long-term engagement in the world of missions and poverty alleviation.

**REDEFINING POVERTY**

How we define poverty will heavily influence how we respond to and attempt to alleviate that poverty. Take a moment to review the table below of commonly cited causes and responses to poverty:

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

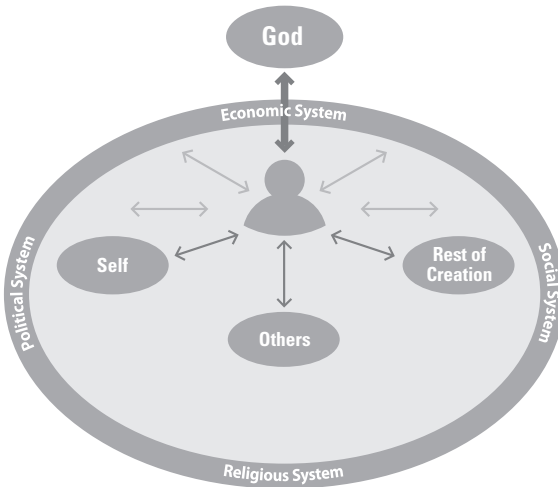
1. Look back at your answers to the preliminary questions. Do your answers about poverty tend to emphasize one particular category above?

2. Which line(s) of the table above do you think short-term trips most frequently try to address, and how do they typically do it? Why do you think this is the case?

### COMPLEXITY COUNTS

Because God is inherently relational and made humans in His image, humans are wired for relationship, too. 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.

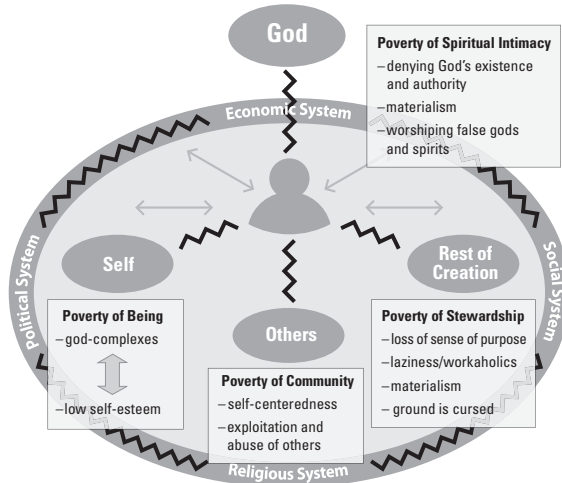
#### THE FOUR FOUNDATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS



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

From this framework, poverty isn't only about a lack of material things. While that is an important element of poverty, there are many other crucial factors at work. As a result, poverty—and poverty alleviation—is complex.

## 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>6</sup>

Remember: because the fall impacted *everything*, both individual people and systems are broken. The brokenness in the four relationships means social, political, economic, and religious systems are marred by



sin. Thus, poverty alleviation also involves transforming those systems. Sometimes people blame choices made by the materially poor for their poverty, arguing that anyone could escape poverty if they wanted to do so. While sinful individual choices can contribute to poverty, poverty is also the result of circumstances outside the control of the materially poor. For example, consider the prevalence of poverty in many US cities. Many neighborhoods bear the marks of centuries of racial discrimination and damaging economic, social, and political policies. What happens when society crams historically oppressed, undereducated, unemployed, and relatively young human beings into high-rise buildings, provides them with inferior education, healthcare, and employment systems, and then establishes financial disincentives for work? Is it really that surprising that we see out-of-wedlock pregnancies, broken families, violent crimes, and drug trafficking? Yes, those choices are still wrong. But they have a context. Both broken systems and broken individual choices contribute to poverty.

Part of the learning process of a short-term trip entails recalibrating our hearts and minds, moving away from easy—but incomplete and unbiblical—assumptions about the materially poor. Learning about and acknowledging the complexity of poverty, particularly in the community you will be visiting, is an essential part of long-term engagement in missions and poverty alleviation.

1. When you interact with the materially poor, do you tend to see their poverty more as a result of their personal actions or circumstances beyond their control?

- Would your answer to this question be different for the materially poor in your own community versus a community abroad? Why or why not?

2. Look back at how you described the purpose of your trip in the preliminary questions. Did part of your stated purpose involve poverty alleviation?

- If so, given the ideas on poverty and poverty alleviation in this unit, how might you need to adjust your expectations?

3. Given the complexity of poverty and poverty alleviation, how can you specifically commit to make this trip one part of a long-term process of learning and engagement in God's work, rather than a one-

time spiritual or emotional experience? Take a moment to discuss what these commitments and goals might look like for your group.

## TAKEAWAYS

- Keep your eyes open for the ways poverty is influenced by broken relationships with God, self, others, and the rest of creation.
- Remember that poverty alleviation is not just a matter of providing people with material things. It is a process of reconciling the four foundational relationships. You are not participating in a short-term trip in order to directly alleviate poverty.
- View your trip as one piece of a long-term process of learning about, engaging with, and supporting God's work of missions and poverty alleviation.

## CLOSE

Poverty is the result of broken relationships, and 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.

But that process doesn't happen in the space of a few days or weeks. If we are spending hundreds or thousands of dollars on a trip, we need a different set of goals, namely entering into a long-term, intentional process of learning about and engaging with what God is doing in our own country and around the globe—and supporting the people who *can* alleviate poverty in their own communities. It doesn't seem as tidy as digging wells, repairing houses, or running sports camps, but as we will see in the next few units, it can foster deeper change in both the receiving community and our own lives.

## PRAY

“Every human being, regardless of income level, is made in the image of God, meaning that we are wired for relationship: with God, with ourselves, with others, and with the rest of creation. When we experience these four relationships in the way that God designed them, we experience humanness the way that He intended. This is the ‘good life’ that we are all seeking. Unfortunately, the fall has broken these four relationships for all people. For some, this brokenness manifests itself in material poverty.”

Spend time this week praying that God would open your eyes to the complexity of poverty—and the magnitude of His reconciling power as He is making all things new. Pray that He would prepare your heart to see and support the work of your brothers and sisters who are already serving as ambassadors of reconciliation in their communities. And pray for humility as you consider what engaging with that work around the world and in your own community would look like.

# NOTES