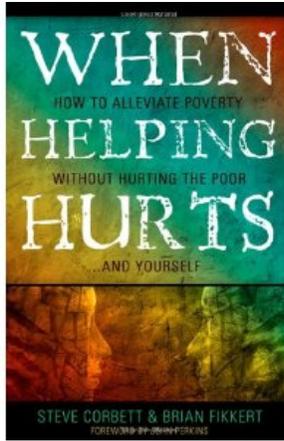


When Helping Hurts

Reviewed by Helen Nash



It takes courage to address the elephant in the room: attempts to help poor communities, whether on the other side of the world or in our own backyard, have often been ineffective. Many of our well-meaning efforts have even been harmful. In the book When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself, authors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert offer us hope in the form of sound, effective and feasible strategies that realistically examine the problem of poverty from a Christian perspective. It comes as no surprise that this paradigm shifting book is being used in churches, organizations and institutes of education around the world.

Some uncomfortable truths are revealed; some will be personal. *“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 economically poor – their feelings of inferiority and shame.”* We must avoid the “us” versus “them” mentality and recognize the brokenness in both the poor and the rich.

The strength of this book for me was the integration of biblical principles and attitudes, that *“theology matters, and the church needs to rediscover a Christ-centered, fully orbed perspective of the kingdom.”* The book lays a foundation for all poverty alleviation efforts by discussing the fundamental nature of poverty and then drawing out some initial implications. The design and implementation of any poverty alleviation strategy needs to differentiate between relief, rehabilitation and development and apply all of these concepts to economic development. At the end of each chapter there are some questions and exercises, making it appropriate for use by groups as well as individuals.

Practical complexities and challenges are addressed through solid theological principles. This offered great hope for me, to realize that *“Christ is the Creator and Sustainer of more than just the material world. His creative and sustaining hand extends to ‘all things.’”* Hence, we discover and appreciate together how God has been at work all along in poor communities, and that they are part of the good world that Christ created and is sustaining. This book illustrates restorative practices which build upon the many assets that the poor already have.

The central message of this book is that we need the person of Jesus Christ to transform not just the poor but also ourselves. It is a must read for those interested in community outreach, whether here in London, or in the developing world.