

Business:

Poverty's Long-Term Solution

by Chris Page

What is poverty? Let's take a look at some statistics: About 50% of the world's population lives on less than the equivalent of \$2 a day. That represents a staggering number of over 2.8 billion people. Of these, about half live on less than \$1 a day. In addition to poverty, there are the devastating effects of disease that plague the poorest nations like Rwanda.

At the end of 2002, an estimated 42 million people around the world were living with HIV/AIDS, of which over 30 million of these people live in Sub Saharan Africa. Last year more than 3 million people died from malaria and tuberculosis combined. There is a tragic correlation between poverty, disease and unemployment. These statistics are made worse by the knowledge that the richest 20% of the world's population own approximately 80% of the world's wealth.

However, despite the one trillion US dollars given by rich countries in aid to poor countries since 1950, and debt relief on \$33 billion of loans, the share of world income of the poorest fifth of the planet's population has halved in the past 40 years. Or to put it another way, Africa is 25% poorer now than it was 20 years ago.

First of all what is poverty? A dictionary definition of poverty can be defined as having a great lack of money or resources. But what really is poverty?

Having lived in a developed nation, the UK, for 27 years, where the average wage is around \$3000 per month, and those who do not have jobs receive money from the government, it is safe to say that no-one is financially poor compared to the majority of people in Rwanda.

But in the UK a significantly higher number of people commit suicide, divorce their husbands/wives, rob each other, have children taking drugs, and are severely depressed, compared to Rwanda.

Churches up and down the UK are closing because no one goes to them anymore—in fact only about 3–4% of the whole population go to church every Sunday, and many of those do not have a personal walk with Jesus. So in many ways other than financial (e.g., morally, emotionally, socially and spiritually) the UK is much poorer than Rwanda.

So when talking about poverty, it is an enormous subject in which hundreds of books have been written. In this article, however, I'm focusing on financial poverty—why are so many people in the world poor and hungry, whilst those in rich countries throw away millions of tons of food because they've produced too much and can not sell it? And what does God think about all of this?

Darrow Miller, in his book *Discipling Nations* asks the same question. He says that except for catastrophic events such as war, drought, floods, earthquakes, etc.,

physical poverty doesn't "just happen." He says it's the logical result of the way people look at themselves and the world, the stories that they tell to make sense of their world.

Physical poverty is rooted in a mindset of poverty, a set of ideas held corporately that produce certain behaviors. These behaviors can be institutionalised into the laws and structures of society. The consequence of these behaviors and structures is poverty.

Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, has demonstrated the example of a hard-working man, standing against corruption, and planning ahead with a

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visionary attitude of what could be if we work at it with all our effort. These three behavioral qualities are new for Rwandan leaders—previous leaders of Rwanda either had the attitude regarding their country of “We are poor. We will always be poor, and there is nothing we can do about it” (which is fatalism). Or “We are poor because others made us poor. They are going to have to solve our problem. We cannot solve our problems.” The majority of Rwandans at the moment still have this attitude, especially about themselves. Some people in the west still have this attitude, but it’s the minority, not the majority.

Miller writes that these two types of thinking is rooted in man’s sin and rebellion against his Creator, who created a world of abundance and blessing. Man’s alienation from God and His principles

produces a mindset of poverty that further poisons the mind, spirit and heart. This poverty mentality enslaves people, leaving them unable to even imagine a way of escaping.

Therefore if we are ever going to see long-term solutions to world poverty, I believe it will come through starting and maintaining productive, profitable business.

Does God Want Us to Live in Poverty?

Poverty is both oppressing and enslaving. There is no doubt about that fact. Many of the people

I employ at Cards from Africa come from a rural community. All of them have neighbors or relatives who have died because of sickness—often a sickness that could have been prevented by the use of a mosquito net, or the low cost of some medicine, or a better diet, etc. Satan comes to lie, steal and destroy, but Jesus comes to bring life, and life in abundance. Being without the resources that we need to sustain life is not how God intended us to live. He created the earth with an abundance of resources for all people.

The Bible is very clear that being poor is not in itself a sin, that God has a special concern for the poor, and that being rich is not necessarily a sign of God’s spiritual favor (despite what many of the “prosperity preachers” say). Jesus warned repeatedly about the spiritual dangers of wealth. Yet God did not create poverty; man did. The problem is usually rooted in mindsets that stop and resist development. The two attitudes mentioned above come from Satan, the “father of all lies.”

Jesus quoted from Isaiah when he started his public ministry, by saying,

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

The good attitude and example of Rwanda’s President will help (and already is helping) to slowly change the nation of Rwanda. But is it just the job of politicians to do this? No! We as the church have the same responsibility. We’re called to be salt and light. Salt and light make a difference where they’re applied! Are Christians in the world making such a positive difference? Not much yet, but they can! We can help change this poverty mentality, starting with ourselves. But first we must be convinced that God is the creator of wealth, and acknowledge Him in all our efforts. As followers of Jesus, we must follow his example, and ‘preach good news to the poor, free those that are captive, heal those that are sick, and help release from oppression those that are oppressed.’

Helping to reduce poverty is a very practical demonstration of God’s love, and creating sustainable businesses, which include increased agricultural productivity, are the way forward for Rwanda to lose the shackles of poverty.

I believe one of the things God really wants is to see an emerging generation of Christians start and run businesses where they will serve God and their customer first, and will operate their businesses with attitudes of hard work (doing it unto the Lord), integrity and having faith for what could be.

As Wayne Grudem, in his book *Business for the Glory of God* says,

I believe the only long-term solution to world poverty is business. That is because businesses produce goods, and businesses produce jobs. And businesses continue producing goods year after year, and continue providing jobs and paying wages year after year. Therefore if we are ever going to see long-term solutions to world poverty, I believe it will come through starting and maintaining productive, profitable business.

I’m trusting God to raise up Christians across the world (although I’m biased towards Africa) who will run businesses that will honor Him because they are helping to release the crushing oppression of poverty.

Perhaps God has both given you gifts in the area of business, and is calling you to be a part of lifting people out of poverty by being a job-creator? Go on, be brave, ask Him if this is what He wants for you. He wants to use you to be a blessing to your country whatever you do. 🌐