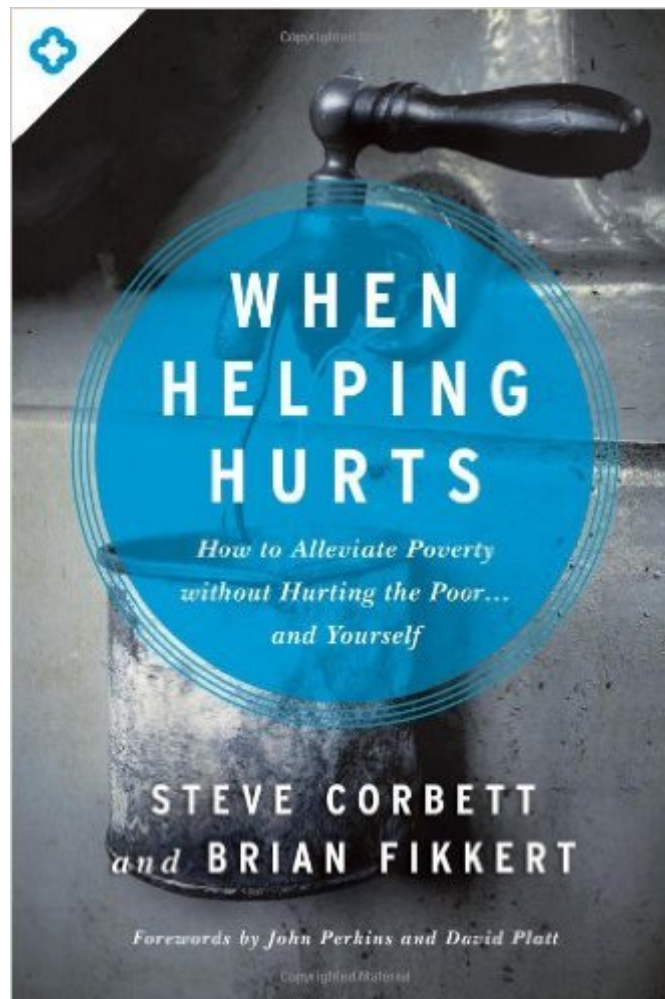


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# When Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting The Poor . . . And Yourself



## Synopsis

With more than 300,000 copies in print, *When Helping Hurts* is a paradigm-forming contemporary classic on the subject of poverty alleviation. Poverty is much more than simply a lack of material resources, and it takes much more than donations and handouts to solve it. *When Helping Hurts* shows how some alleviation efforts, failing to consider the complexities of poverty, have actually (and unintentionally) done more harm than good. But it looks ahead. It encourages us to see the dignity in everyone, to empower the materially poor, and to know that we are all uniquely needy—and that God in the gospel is reconciling all things to himself. Focusing on both North American and Majority World contexts, *When Helping Hurts* provides proven strategies for effective poverty alleviation, catalyzing the idea that sustainable change comes not from the outside in, but from the inside out.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*When Helping Hurts* is a compelling book that will be a significant help to the Church for years to come. The first chapter alone is worth the cost of the book and ought to be read by every church leader in every ministry category. This is not just a book for the missions committee (although it ought to be required for everyone involved in missions) or the Outreach Director, or the pastor. I think every Christian in America would benefit. Most evangelicals would be rattled. There are several benefits from this book. Since most people read book reviews to try and determine whether they want to buy and read the book, let me mention those benefits. It doesn't just pick on the Church or her leaders. This book is personal; it will pick on you. It was deeply convicting to me as I read it. I

realized that as many times as I have been moved by stories about the fatherless and the widow, the poor and the sick, I am not purposefully living for my life, and leading that of my family, to intersect with these members of society. I have forsaken the needy by my enslavement to convenience and stuff. My house is conveniently situated away from poverty. I hardly see the needy. And then there is my busyness. All my important tasks that keep me far away spending myself on "behalf of the hungry" (Is. 58:10) are often where I find my own significance and worth. I am convicted that although I hold to the position that all humans are created in the image of God, I don't live as such. And I realize that I do have a god-complex (although every time I read that phrase in the book, my first reaction was, "No I don't....okay, I do. I do."). The authors are not writing from lofty chairs in academia. They pen their own confessions.

This is a concise, theologically informed, ground-tested and provocative book on helping the poor - not for the faint of heart! Those who are gungho about mission and going out there to 'save the world' might have to plod patiently through this short but discomforting book without throwing our hands up halfway in despair about what exactly one can do for the poor without hurting them and ourselves. In the last decade or so, Brian Fikkert points out that there has been an explosion of 'short-term mission trips' (STMs) from churches in North America, investing tons of dollars into sending members for a two-week assignment in the developing nations. His hard-nosed critique provides a cautionary note beyond the surface hypes and reports of 'life-changing experiences' that commonly surround STM advertisements. As one who has participated in a few of such trips, I have learned much from his critique and am challenged to reflect on ways we might have unknowingly caused more harm than good in our eagerness to step in and help - that ends up encouraging dependency, deepening the sense of inferior-superior complex between the poor and the non-poor, crippling local initiatives, etc. Through all these, the advice that 'we do not do for people what they can do for themselves' serves as a poignant reminder. I am glad that his thinking while practical and economically informed ultimately derives its roots from the biblical concept of what constitutes poverty. His working definition of poverty goes beyond the common reductionistic one that is measured primarily in terms of material resources. He proposes a relational, rather than material, understanding of poverty as one that has to do with the dislocation of one's foundational relationships with God, self, others and the rest of creation.

As the pastor of a rural church in the heart of Appalachia, I am confronted with the harsh realities of material poverty on a daily basis. Generational poverty is not a pretty sight, but neither is the

attempt of many to alleviate that poverty. Most people are emotionally moved by images of poverty. Then, after the initial emotional response, the question becomes how can the materially poor best be helped? Unfortunately, most attempts at helping are futile at best and can even be destructive. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert do a very good job of addressing that question in their book, *When Helping Hurts: Alleviating Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...and Ourselves*. This book is far from a typical, tired, social gospel guilt trip. The authors begin by building a theologically sound foundation by defining the true nature and mission of Jesus, His church and the Gospel. It is only out of that correct understanding of the Gospel that truly beneficial social ministry can occur. From there, they lay out their case that much of what is done in the name of Christian charity is not beneficial. They do not shy from their belief that, "when North American Christians do attempt to alleviate poverty, the methods used often do considerable harm to both the materially poor and the materially non-poor." They further state that their concern, "is not just that these methods are wasting human, spiritual, financial, and organizational resources but that these methods are actually exacerbating the very problems they are trying to solve." The authors did not just take the opportunity of this book to rant against what they see as wrong. In addition to accurately depicting what is wrong, they do an outstanding job of pointing out a better way.

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