



# **Social Justice, Not Social Gospel: The Role of Missions in Addressing Poverty**

**Uptown Church  
“The Missional Life” Sunday School**

*February 27, 2011*

# Agenda

- **Introduction**
- **Video**
- **Case exercise and discussion**
- **Outline of Social Justice missions**
  - **Poverty defined**
  - **Biblical foundations**
  - **Dimensions of poverty**
  - **Categories of mission**
  - **Contemporary issues and models**
- **Revisiting the case exercise**
- **Wrap-up**

# Review of Goals

- **Goals of this Sunday School Series**
  - Equip every person in attendance with a broad global “missiology” to help him/her...
    - Become more informed about global missions
    - Pray more effectively
    - Become more knowledgeable stewards of their financial and other resources
    - Develop a personal or family “vision” for global missions
    - Understand historical and contemporary missions issues
    - Provide clarification / external calling for individuals considering a missions call
- **Goals for today's wrap-up session**
  - Integrate what you have learned (biblical basis, reaching the unreached, contextualization, short-term trips, reaching postmoderns, relational evangelism, etc.)
  - Gain exposure to issues and trends related to mercy missions
  - Apply what you have learned about “missions” to a particular situation

# Exercise #1

- In your own words, define:

**“Poverty”**

- In your own words, define:

**“Success in relieving poverty”**

Keep these handy – will share them shortly



## **Video: Kibera Slum**

*Video footage taken and compiled in January 2011  
during 10-day trip to Kenya  
(<http://www.peopleofkibera.com/other/kibera>)*

# Summary of Kibera Facts

- **Population** 700,000 to 1,000,000
- **Distance from Nairobi** 7 km
- **Population growth** 6,000 in 1965 → 11-12% annual growth for 40 years
- **HIV / AIDS incidence rate** >15%
- **Number of AIDS orphans** Over 50,000
- **Physical size** 630 acres (Central Park, NY)
- **Number of tribes** Over 40 (all Kenyan tribes)
- **Earning < \$1 per day** 60% of population
- **Youth unemployment** 80%
- **Adult unemployment** 50-60%
- **Portion of people renting** 93%
- **Average home** 9 feet by 9 feet, mud walls, tin roof, charcoal stove
- **Latrine access** 1 per 400-500 people
- **Basic needs issues** Limited access to water, electricity, and health care
- **Prominent diseases** Typhoid, malaria, dysentery, cholera, worms, diarrhea
  
- **Other observations**  
Widespread prosperity gospel + pentecostalism  
Proliferation of small businesses (kiosks everywhere!)  
Distrust and cynicism after 2008 post-election violence  
Significant food price volatility due to famine / drought

# Exercise #2

- **With a partner (or two) design a new Christian-based ministry to target Kibera or a similar poverty-stricken area**
- **Select at least one key area of focus (general health, poverty, sexual health, education, food / water, sanitation, environment, etc.)**
- **Clearly identify your target group(s)**
- **Answer the following questions:**
  - **What is the purpose of your ministry?**
  - **What specific activities will it do? i.e., what needs will it address?**
  - **How will these activities be implemented?**
  - **How will the ministry be resourced by personnel?**
  - **How will the ministry be funded?**
  - **What will the leadership structure be?**

**Ten minutes only: we will revisit them at the end**

# Case Exercise: Sharing

- **Two volunteers to share their ideas (1-2 minutes each)**
  - **What is the purpose of your ministry?**
  - **What specific activities will it do? i.e., what needs will it address?**
  - **How will these activities be implemented?**
  - **How will the ministry be resourced by personnel?**
  - **How will the ministry be funded?**
  - **What will the leadership structure be?**
  
- **Will return to these at the end of the class – each group will evaluate its own ministry idea constructively**

# Defining Poverty

## *Who are We Trying to Reach?*

### What constitutes poverty?

- **How do we (non-poor) view it?**
  - Lack of material things (money, food, water)
  - Lack of education
  - Repressive social structures
  - Poor health and lack of access
- **What were some of your definitions of poverty?**
- **How do the poor view it?<sup>(1)</sup>**
  - Shame, humiliation
  - Inferiority, lack of self worth
  - Depression, social isolation
  - Powerlessness, hopelessness

### Why does it matter?

- **Impacts how we view the poor**
  - Spiritual vs. physical issues
  - Underlying sin
  - Understanding of the true need(s)
  - Individual vs. corporate
- **Impacts how we approach a solution**

<u>If we think the root is...</u>	<u>We will...</u>
- Knowledge gap	Educate
- Oppression	Liberate
- Personal sin	Evangelize
- Lack of resources	Supply
- **The risk:** treating symptoms versus root cause...or treating the wrong thing entirely

**One definition:** Poverty is the brokenness of fundamental relationships between the individual or community and (a) God, (b) self, (c) others, and (d) creation such that people are unable to fulfill their callings of glorifying God by working and supporting their families through their endeavors

(1) Based on surveys summarized in *When Helping Hurts*

# Examples of Poverty for Uptown

- Homeless men in Charlotte
- Single mothers in Biddleville
- Orphans in Manipur, India
- AIDS victims in South Africa
- Muslim wage laborers in London
- Uneducated children in North Africa
- Migrant workers in Mexico
- Immigrant workers in Charlotte
- Poor African families in Uganda
- Unemployed Muslims in North Africa
- Unemployed minorities in Charlotte

- Numerous issues at play:

**Money**

**Health**

**Lack of housing**

**Religion**

**Language barriers**

**Ethnicity**

**Schooling**

**Marriage**

**Power structures**

**What, then is the gospel imperative to reach the poor?**

# Biblical Foundations for Addressing Poverty

## *A Brief Survey focusing on the Old Testament*

- **Basis of personhood: Gen 1:26-27, 2:15**
  - Image of God (*imago dei*) → Imitation of God (*imitatio dei*)
  - Man is created with dignity
  - Man is created to worship & serve the Lord, chiefly through work / family
  - Man is to “imitate” him whose image he bears in stewarding the earth
  - *Implications: (a) poverty attacks both the imago and imitatio dei, and (b) we are called to imitate God in respecting the dignity of fellow man*
- **God's compassion for the poor: Ps 12:5**
  - God is the refuge for the poor and oppressed → he will defend them
- **The call to care for one another: Lev 19:9-10,15,18 and Lev 25:35**
  - Example of numerous passages in the OT where God commanded his people to care for the poor, oppressed, etc.
  - *Implication: God consecrated his people to build a community of “wholeness” to reflect his transcendent goodness in the world*
- **The consequence for failing the poor: Isa 58:1-3,5-10**
  - A large part of God's covenant curse upon Judah stemmed from their failure in living out their religion, not just religious sin itself
  - *Implication: failure to administer justice goes hand-in-hand with empty worship*

# The Dimensions of Poverty

## *Deeper Dive on the Comprehensive Nature of Poverty*

### Root issues: poverty of relationships

- **God**: Poverty of spiritual intimacy with God
  - Denying God, materialism, idolatry
- **Self**: Poverty of being
  - Shame, identity, sin patterns, pride
- **Others**: Poverty of community
  - Selfishness, exploitation, abuse
- **Creation**: Poverty of stewardship
  - Lack of work ethic, unwise use of money, poverty cycle, lack of resources

### Systemic issues

Economic system

Political system

Social system

Religious system

**What are some ways in which Christian missions respond to this complex set of issues?**

# Mercy / Social Justice Missions

## *Categories of Engagement*

### Types of mission efforts

### Specific examples?

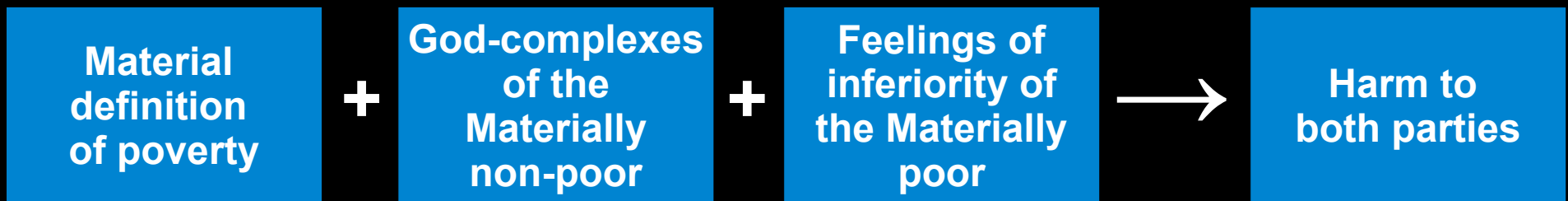
- **Poverty relief**: job creation, humanitarian agencies, job counseling
- **Disaster relief**: infrastructure, shelter, food, water, disease control
- **Infrastructure**: well-drilling, home construction, latrines, sanitation, etc.
- **Education**: schools, farming training, community presentations, business training, reproductive health / awareness
- **Medical**: immunizations, dentistry, pediatrics, pharmacy, optometry, surgery
- **Microfinance**: small business capital
- **Others**: transportation, logistics, counseling...?

Think about on your own: in what ways do these ministries address the root issues of poverty?

# Contemporary Problem #1

## *Flawed Spiritual Approach to Poverty → Doing Harm*

- “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).”




- Let's interact with this postulation:
  - In what ways do Western Christians manifest a “god-complex” in mission work?
  - In what ways do we risk exacerbating the feelings of inferiority and lack of dignity in the target audience in our mission work?
  - How can this volatile combination actually do more harm than good?

# Contemporary Problem #2

## *Using the Same Strategy for Everything*

- **Scenario 1:** earthquake devastates Haiti; hundreds of thousands of poor Haitians lack food, shelter, and water. Disease rampant.
- **Scenario 2:** rural African community has been stuck in a cycle of poverty for generations; stable leaders but lack of material resources and education

*How should the response to these situations differ?*

- **Understanding the poverty relief continuum:**
    - **Relief**
      - Stopping the bleeding → very direct influence of outsiders (money, leadership, planning, execution)
      -
    - **Rehabilitation**
      - Restoring communities to full health → working side-by-side with the poor in addressing issues of poverty
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    - **Development**
      - Ongoing partnership for sustained change → facilitating and empowering the poor to take full ownership of their own development
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# Contemporary Problem #3

## *The “Poison” of Paternalism*

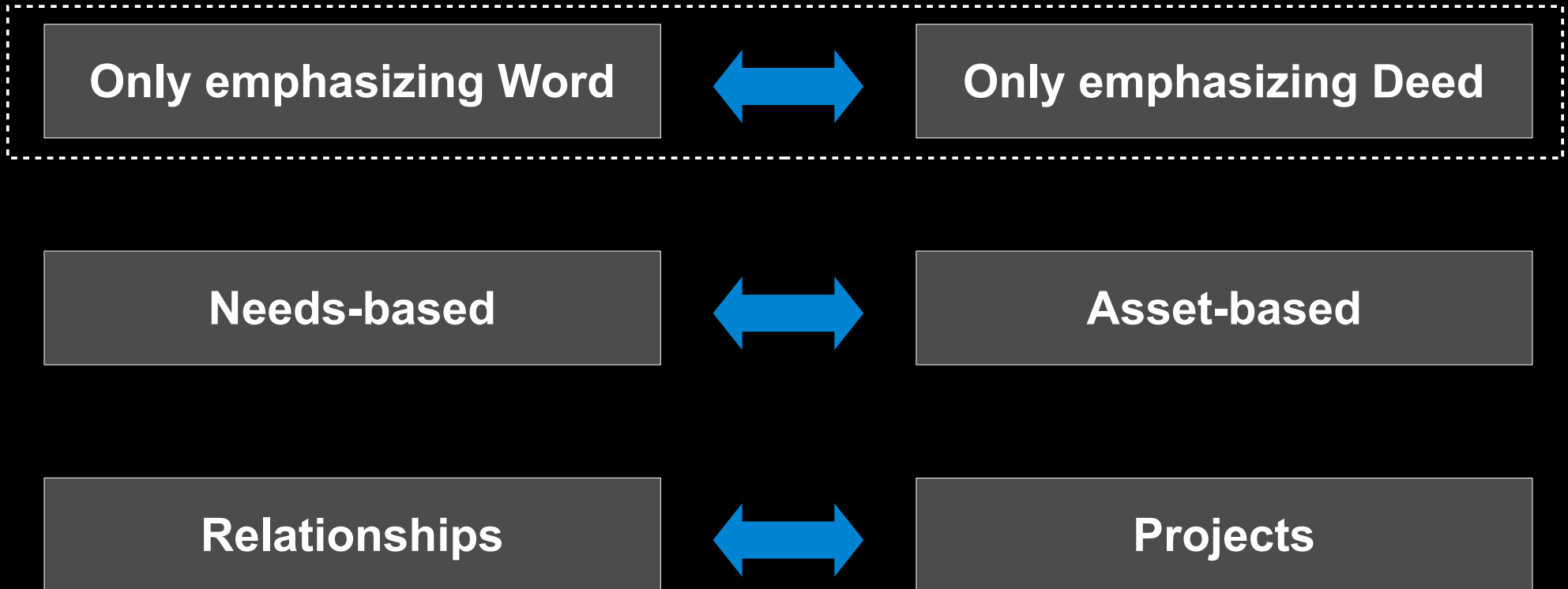
- **What is Paternalism?**

**Paternalism: doing things for [poor] people that they can do for themselves**

- **Why is Paternalism sinful and damaging?**
  - **Theologically**
  - **Practically**
- **Where do we see Paternalism in our mercy missions?**
- **How do we avoid it?**

# Contemporary Problem #4

## *Navigating the Tensions*



# Responses within Mission Strategy

## *Some Examples*

- **Community Development**

- Local people set their own agenda and mobilize to carry it out
- Multiple levels of involvement of outsiders (missionaries)
  - Compliance (engage with locals, but missionaries execute)
  - Cooperation (locals + missionaries determine priorities and execute)
  - Consultation (outsiders provide facilitation and direction but planning and execution carried out by locals)
  - Community initiated and led (no involvement of outsiders)
- “Participation is not just a means to an end but an end in itself”
- Goal is sustainable development that holistically addresses poverty

- **Microfinance**

- Savings and credit services to the poor
  - Often consisting of small business loans with short terms and relatively higher interest rates (but more generous terms)
- Source of capital is a big consideration: should it be community-sourced (group savings) or provided by outsiders?
- Large presence in the developing world – but is it gospel-centric?

- **Church-centric missions**

- Rooting poverty alleviation efforts within the context of the local church

# Revisiting Our Case Exercises

- **Based on our discussions, think about areas in which you'd revise your approach to building a new ministry in Kibera**
  - Balancing Word and Deed?
  - Avoiding Paternalism?
  - Engaging with the community?
  - Improving your approach to the whole person?
  - Symptoms vs. root causes?
  - People vs. projects?
  - Sustainability?
  - Over- or under- emphasis on addressing systemic issues?
- **Volunteers to share your self-evaluation?**

# What Defines Successful Mercy Missions?

- **Gospel is preached**
- **Dignity of the poor is maintained**
  - **But sin issues are also addressed (personal, group, systemic)**
- **End goal: restoration of relationships along all dimensions...**
  - **God**
  - **Self**
  - **Community**
  - **Creation**
- **...So that the person can fulfill the creation mandate to work and provide for his family to the glory of God**