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Helping without Hurting: Thinking Critically About Global Poverty Alleviation

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Learning Objectives:

In addition to thinking rigorously about effectively serving the “least of these,” students will better understand the following economic concepts after seeing them in application

- the universality of scarcity
- the ubiquity of choice
- the unavoidability of opportunity cost
- the Law of Unintended Consequences - or – the importance of weighing things “seen and unseen”

Finally, students should have a more intuitive grasp that...

- 1) As Milton Friedman said, “One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results.”
- 2) People of faith can use economics, a study of human behavior not a profession absorbed with money, and that economics as a discipline can benefit from the involvement of people of faith.

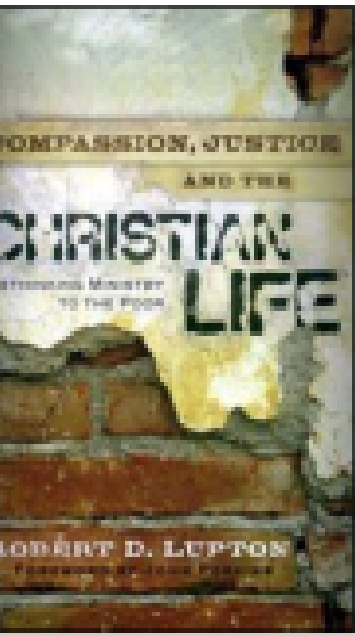
This course material is contained within a single-semester course in microeconomics at the introductory level. It is designed to require two full class periods with shorter discussions earlier in the semester and student writing assignments to follow up. What follows is both an overview of the content as well as the **in-class** and **outside-of-class** assignments and activities.

How is Faith Relevant to Economics and Vice Versa?

WRITING EXERCISE: In just one or two paragraphs, respond to any of the questions in the following prompt.

In your opinion or based on your experience, should Christians study economics? Are Christians somehow uniquely suited for such study? Is economics valuable to Christians? What is the role of economics within an institution or curriculum firmly grounded in the historic Christian faith? Is there something antithetical about economics and faith in Christ?

THINK/PAIR/SHARE



READING ASSIGNMENT: Clothes Closets and Compassion

This excerpt, a chapter from Lupton’s book, recounts an archeological find when his organization accepted responsibility for an inner-city clothing closet. He analyzes a sign, amended over time, detailing the rules for obtaining clothing. It reflects the culture of the charity over time, particularly the animosity that developed where benevolence and appreciation once existed.

RESPONSE “What do you think was the most important point or central concept communicated in the short article by Robert Lupton?”

Perhaps the deepest poverty of all is to have nothing of value to offer in exchange. Charity that fosters such poverty must be challenged.
— Robert Lupton

READINGS: Four Articles by Brian Fikkert in the “Mandate” Newsletter:

The “Helping Without Hurting” Philosophy is based on Three Key Principles

1) Development vs. Relief

Relief is appropriate in the case of a disaster (natural or manmade) that produces a temporary and urgent need. Development is aimed at reconciliation – repairing relationships - and, therefore, creating/repairing that which is required to support oneself.

“...[One] should not habitually do for somebody what they can do for themselves.”

2) Asset-Based vs. Needs-Based Assessment

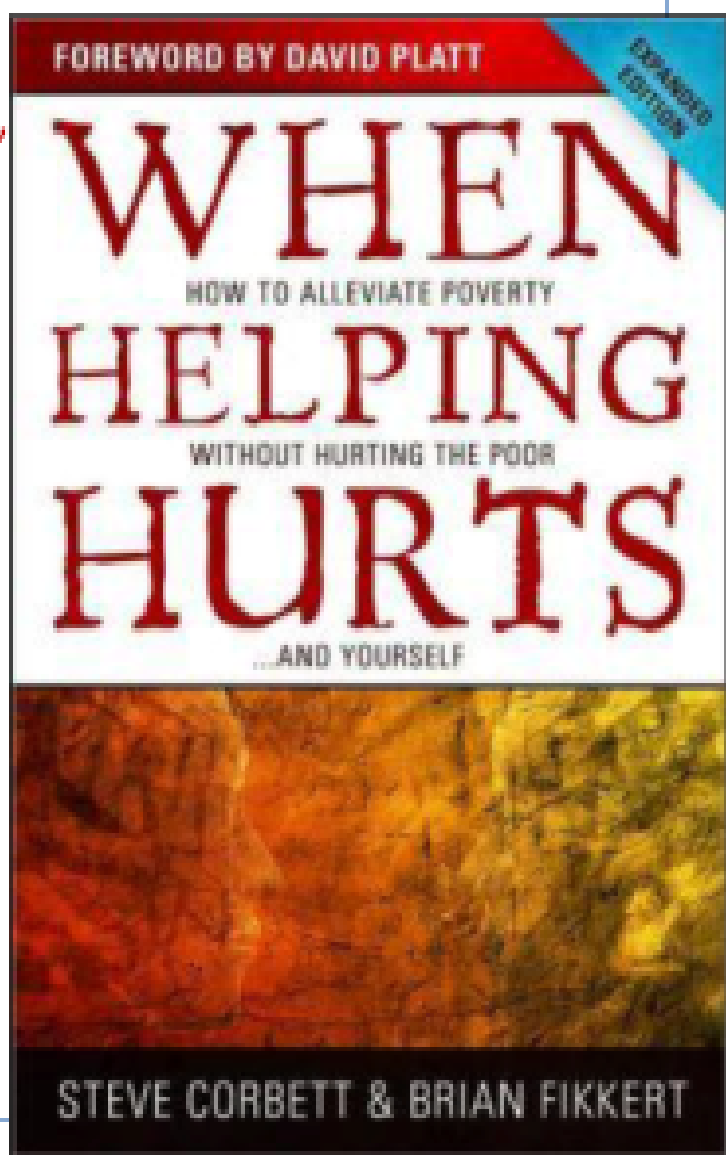
To seek out an individual or community’s need is to point out what is lacking. To recognize what is already right within someone is to assess his assets.

“...Starting a relationship with low-income people by asking – “What is wrong with you?” – initiates the ... dynamic which confirms the feelings that we are superior, that they are inferior, and that they need us to fix them.”

3) Participatory Approach vs. Blueprint Method

The blueprint method involves the nonpoor (materially speaking) coming into a situation, plan in hand. The participatory approach would involve the poor in every stage of the development effort.

“[The participatory approach] says, ‘I believe you have value, knowledge, and insights. You know things about your situation I do not know. Please share some of this with me.’”

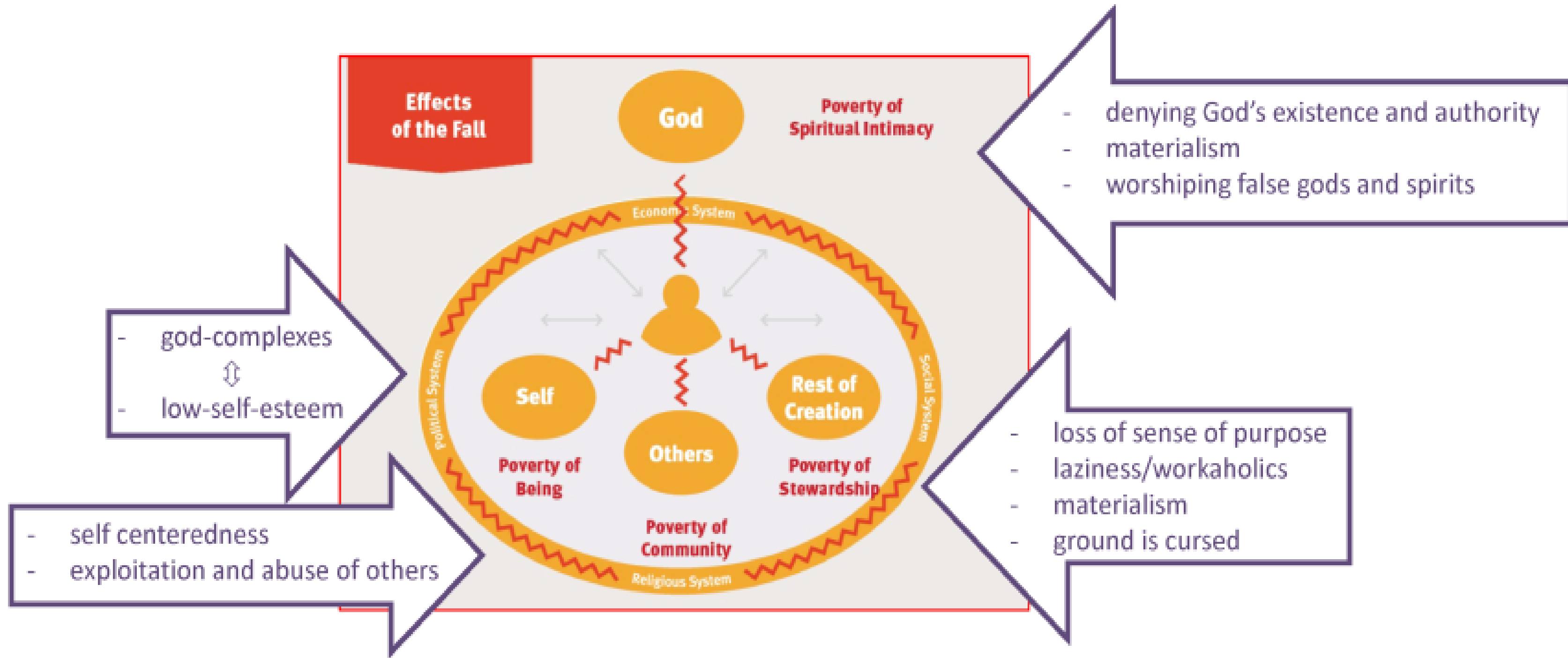


Helping without Hurting: Thinking Critically About Global Poverty Alleviation

Sarah Estelle, Department of Economics, Management and Accounting

IN CLASS DAY 1 MINI-LECTURE: Sources of Poverty

“If poverty is rooted in broken relationships, then we are all poor just in different ways.” -- Fikkert



IN CLASS DAY 1: Group Work

Relief and Development

1. What are they? How are they different?
2. What do they “look like” in practice?
3. When is relief appropriate? When is development preferred?
4. How is the theory/philosophy Fikkert puts forth related to the Hebrew law recounted in Lupton?

Needs Assessment vs. Asset-Based Assessment

1. What are they? How are they different?
2. What do they “look like” in practice?
3. What are the advantages of each approach?
4. Is the idea that asset assessment is more productive than needs assessment consistent with economic theory? diversity in the Body (á la Apostle Paul)? Robert Lupton’s view expressed in the clothes closet article? Do you see any other connections between this material and other viewpoints?

Blueprint vs. Participatory

1. What are they? How are they different? For what reasons might organizations choose a blueprint approach rather than a participatory one?
2. Why does the author prefer participation of the materially poor to less involvement of the materially poor?
3. What does participation look like, especially in terms of an entire poverty-relief effort?
4. How does the blueprint method hurt the nonpoor?

Students are asked to type their responses. They are to print or share electronically the document with each group member and print a copy to provide the professor. This material serves as a common background for the following class’s discussion.

IN CLASS DAY 2: Fishbowl

- Students are invited to **gather any reference materials** – their course readings, notes from the previous class’s group work, and anything on their laptops or in their notebooks – and join a class wide discussion on the topic of “helping without hurting.”

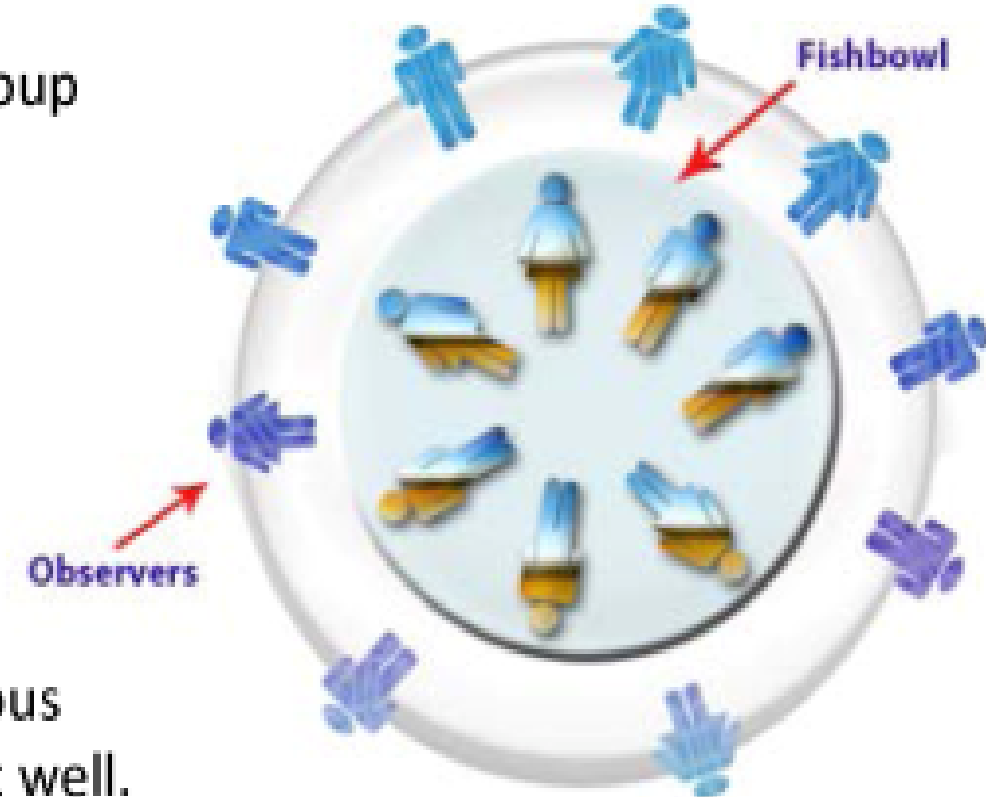
- I then **introduce the fishbowl model** to the class, explaining that a smaller portion of the class will engage in a conversation in the center of the room while the rest of us actively listen in. There will be an on-deck area for others to rotate in to the discussion.

- After entertaining questions, I **select the first group** (based on typical class participation, quality of work in previous short writings on this subject, and engagement in the group work for the previous day) to ensure that things start well.

- If the on-deck area doesn’t stay full or I can see a student has something to contribute but feels a bit nervous, I’ll walk around the outer circle and **encourage other students to join in** and head toward the on-deck area. Students also voluntarily rotate in.

- The discussion that emerges in this format differs from that during group work in that it might include skepticism of the helping without hurting philosophy, personal experience with the materially poor including previously held biases, thinking more about the theory in practice, feelings of being overwhelmed with a such big perspective shift or even feeling convicted about how one previously contributed to poverty alleviation efforts, and/or a renewed (often faith-based) solidarity with the poor.

- The bottom-line: the fishbowl method produces more talking, more conversation (responding to, questioning, supporting one another), fewer tangents, and less prodding by the professor than previous discussion techniques I have used.



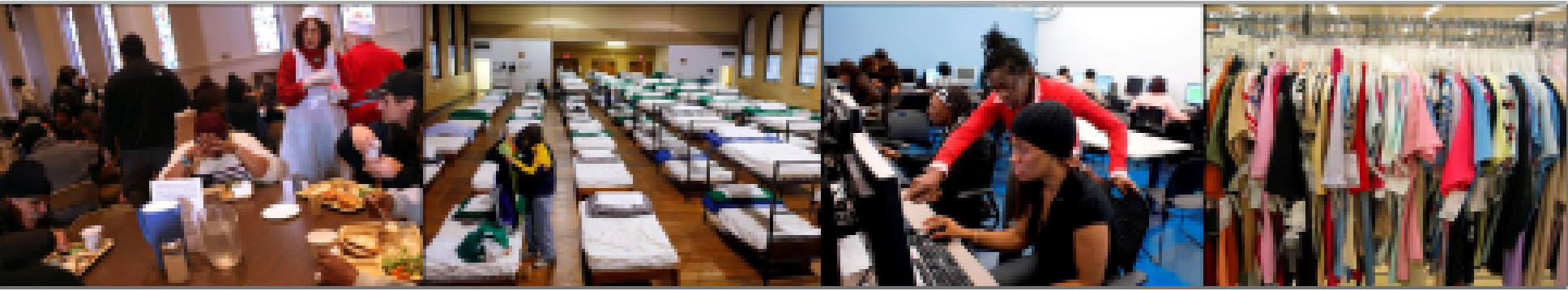
PAPER ASSIGNMENT 1

•**Identify an organization that works with the materially impoverished.** The organization may be a ministry/philanthropy at Hope College, through your church, or in your hometown. The organization might be secular or religious and may serve individuals, families, or communities in Holland, elsewhere in the US, or overseas. (If the organization/group you have identified operates multiple programs or ministries, choose just one for your paper.)

•**Imagine that you are employed as a paid consultant for this organization,** charged with assessing its ability to “help without hurting” and relaying your observations in a formal written report. In particular, the leaders of the organization want to learn from the expertise you have acquired through the teachings of the Chalmers Center.

•**Critically analyze** what you know of the program in terms of three key principles:

- development,
- asset-based assessment, and
- a participatory approach.



Challenges with Paper 1

- West Michigan Nice – I am working to reframe the assignment to make it clear that the reader/client desires the critical feedback and recognizes there is room for improvement in approaching their important goals.
- The Round Peg/Square Hole Dilemma – Some student papers struggle to demonstrate an understanding of the “Helping Without Hurting” philosophy, often blurring the distinctions between the three key principles. This may indicate
 - lack of basic comprehension of the principle – e.g., sees no difference between the concepts of development vs. relief
 - insufficient understanding – e.g., cannot recognize what participation looks like within a real-world organization
 - blindness via bias/personal belief – e.g., not believing that every individual/community has valuable assets to contribute to a process

Follow-up

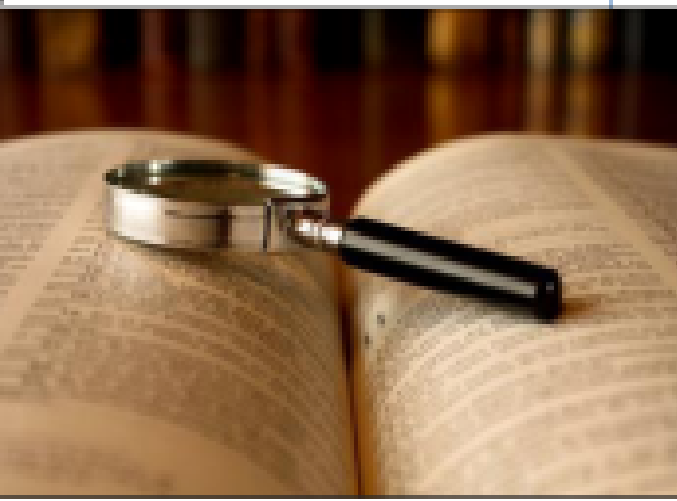
After concluding class discussions and turning in papers, students are asked to pose questions about the material that have not been answered through our collective efforts. These nagging or burning questions become one option that students may choose for a second short paper assignment. (Other options include “The Economics of Recycling” and “Economics (or Lack Thereof) in the Media.”)

PAPER ASSIGNMENT 2

Paper Option A: What do we do now?

Choose one of the following questions based on other students’ remaining questions and proceed as suggested – or – see me to discuss further exploring your own remaining question!

- “What can be done to make people more aware of the three key principles?” “How can the gap between knowledgeable economists and willing missions leaders be bridged?” – Research and describe in detail at least one training program that educates organizations and/or individuals in something like the “helping without hurting” philosophy.
- “Should the current food pantries and soup kitchens have a different role to play in helping the poor?” – Research alternative food provision programs giving examples of successful initiatives.
- “Why don’t we see Fikkert’s ideas at work in many churches today? What are ways in which churches can apply his concepts to their mission work?” “Are these principles ever really used as much as they should be?” – Research international missions efforts that exemplify the three key principles. Address the challenges this approach represents for churches compared to other methods of ministry.
- “In what ways do Fikkert’s ideas line up with the teachings of Jesus and his disciples?” – Search for biblical support for the philosophy underlying the Chalmers Center’s teachings on this topic.



For more information...

