



## Poverty

Prepared by Trudy Johnson

**WARNING:** Learning about the poverty conditions in which many of the world's women live is disturbing. It will be difficult to investigate this travesty without gaining a desire to seek to influence a change in the situation and involve oneself in meeting needs.

### How to use this Study Guide

- Read over the entire guide before you meet with your Global Women (GW) community and determine which parts you will want to use when you gather. Ask different ones to present the various parts of the guide in creative ways. In prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to guide your preparation and to open the hearts and minds of those who gather to ways they can personally respond to the needs mentioned.
- When you gather as a community, begin with prayer and then ask some opening discussion questions to help focus thoughts on the topic; use the suggested scripture; investigate the topic using the materials presented below; determine ways your GW community can address/meet the needs mentioned on both a local and global scale; consider further ways your GW community can influence decision-makers about these needs.

### Suggested Scriptures

*However, there should be no poor among you, for the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, God will richly bless you . . .* Deuteronomy 15:4

*The poor you will always have with you.*

Matthew 26:11. Mark 14:7

### Overview of the Issue

**W**hen many of us refer to the issue of poverty we are thinking about material poverty. Our perception of what it is to be poor may lead us to define poverty as the lack of money; food; clean water; safe, affordable housing; and access to health care. In fact, each of these is a symptom of poverty. Poverty is the root cause of many other social issues including hunger, disease, death, and war. Investigating poverty needs to be more than learning about what it is and what causes it. Truly investigating this social issue includes understanding our role in poverty alleviation.

## Worldview

More than one billion people in the world live on less than one dollar a day. Another 2.7 billion struggle to survive on less than the equivalent of two U.S. dollars a day. Poverty in the developing world, however, goes far beyond income. It means having to walk more than one mile everyday simply to collect water and firewood; it means suffering from diseases that were eradicated from rich countries decades ago. Every year 17 million die from completely preventable causes like malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia. That number includes 11 million children, most under the age of five.<sup>1</sup>

Poverty is a topic most people try to avoid. Global Women recognizes that concerned persons cannot allow themselves to be complacent about poverty. As painful as it is to learn about the conditions women are forced to live in, we *must*! Once we know the truth we will be moved to involve ourselves in alleviating poverty in our communities, our country and around the world.

The World Bank has established these definitions of poverty:

Extreme (or absolute) poverty: Living in extreme poverty (less than \$1 a day) means not being able to afford the most basic necessities to ensure survival. Eight million people a year die from absolute poverty.

Moderate poverty: Moderate poverty, defined as earning about \$1 to \$2 a day, enables households to just barely meet their basic needs, but they still must forgo several of the things—education, health care—that many of us take for granted. The smallest misfortune (health issue, job loss, etc.) threatens survival.

Relative poverty: Lastly, relative poverty means that a household has an income below the national average.

*More than 8 million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive.*

When investigating poverty one cannot ignore statistics. Yet keep in mind, poverty is not just a numbers game. Poverty is about millions of people enduring unimaginable obstacles that keep them from realizing their most basic human rights. While living in poverty people cannot achieve their individual potential. As you read these statistics, strive to see numbers and percentages with the human face that is behind them<sup>2</sup>:

- Nearly 3 billion people—half of the world's population—are considered poor.
- 20 percent of the world's population consumes 86 percent of the world's goods while 80 percent of humanity gets just the 14 percent that remains.
- Even in the richest country in the world, the United States, the poorest are women caring for children.
- According to the United Nations, about 25,000 people die every day of hunger or hunger-related causes yet there is enough food in the world for everyone.
- Every year, 6 million children die from malnutrition before their 5th birthday.
- Over 11 million children die each year from preventable causes like malaria, diarrhea and pneumonia.
- More than 800 million go hungry each day.
- Over 850 million people in the world are undernourished, which is more than three times the entire United States population.
- More than 40 percent of the world's population (2.6 billion people) do not have basic sanitation, and more than one billion people still use unsafe sources of drinking water.

<sup>1</sup> “Fast Facts: The Faces of Poverty.” [www.unmillenniumproject.org](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org)

<sup>2</sup> Source: [www.netaid.org](http://www.netaid.org)



*Women earn only 10 percent of the world's income, yet they work two out of every three of the world's labor hours.*

The United Nations Millennium Project has identified these devastating effects of poverty on women. They demonstrate the scope of this global issue:

- Above 80 percent of farmers in Africa are women.
- More than 40 percent of women in Africa do not have access to basic education.
- If a girl is educated for six years or more, as an adult, her prenatal care, postnatal care, and childbirth survival rates will dramatically and consistently improve.
- Educated mothers immunize their children 50 percent more often than mothers who are not educated.
- AIDS spreads twice as quickly among uneducated girls than among girls that have even some schooling.
- The children of women with five years of primary school education have a survival rate 40 percent higher than children of women with no education.

Statistics which seek to capture the impact of poverty are continually changing. Despite that truth, looking at numbers helps shape a sharp picture of this global issue. Sad, but true, there is no shortage of statistics. Grasping the truth behind the numbers can be numbing and depressing. Doing something about poverty is what Jesus expects of us.

There are a number of viable responses to poverty. They include education about poverty, microfinance, international aid, convincing richer nations they will benefit from poverty reduction, studying and responding to actual needs of a poor country, improving wages, adequate healthcare, cessation of war, and reforming welfare systems. The United Kingdom's World Poverty Web site ([www.world-poverty.org](http://www.world-poverty.org)) is an excellent source of information on potential solutions to this global issue. They suggest the priorities for the poorest countries are:

- Improving supplies of clean water, to reduce time spent gathering often foul water and reduce illness caused by foul water supplies.
- Improving the supply of accessible, affordable health care information and services, to reduce the vulnerability to disease of children and the elderly especially.
- Improving the training and equipment of farmers in poor countries related to agriculture and natural resource management, to help increase crop yields and conserve the environment.

## One Global Women Response

Pastors in Central Asia commonly serve without an income from their small congregations. After her husband graduated from a theological college, "G" (identified by only an initial to help protect her identity) and her family moved to a small Uzbekistan town where they serve an underground house church. The economy is very poor and unemployment is high. "G" and her husband prayed for a way to provide for their family that includes five children.

With assistance from Global Women, "G" purchased five sewing machines and other needed equipment and supplies to begin a sewing business. Operating out of her home, the business has grown and now employs other women. Income from the business provides for the family's basic needs. "G" says: *I do not know what our family would have done without Global Women. We are able to support our family and others. You have given us hope.* The legitimate sewing business also allows church members a cover to gather in the home and a safer environment for members to come to pray and meet with "G" or her husband.

## Let's Talk About Poverty

When you consider poverty statistics, what emotions do you feel?

What do you think it would be like to live in poverty? How do you think someone from poverty would respond to living with you and/or your family?

Dr. Helene Gayle, president and CEO of CARE USA said this about fighting extreme poverty: *To tackle poverty at its roots, our most vital investments should be in women. The backbone of many communities, they represent an untapped resource. Their efforts as farmers, wage earners, and caregivers can assure the well-being of families and the success of future generations. Given tools, education, and opportunities, they will transform many lives.*<sup>3</sup> How do you respond to this statement?

The international community has agreed upon a framework, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), for reducing poverty in half by 2015. Can you name the eight goals? What do you know about them? What progress has been made toward achieving the goals?

How might you use your time, talent, and treasure (money and possessions) if you thought of them as responsibilities? What influences how you spend them now?

## Ideas for Involvement

Participate in actions like those listed on [www.netaid.org](http://www.netaid.org) (for example: End Global Poverty: Educate Girls, Fight World Hunger or Speak Up to Stop AIDS).

Take a trip to an impoverished area and teach women about gardening and preserving what they grow.

Plan and conduct observances of recognized days such as World Food Day or End Hunger Day (October 16) and World AIDS Day (December 1).

Incorporate a Better World Club into your Global Women Group. Ideas and resources are available online at [BetterWorldClubs.com](http://BetterWorldClubs.com).

Print a letter directly from Poverty.com's Web site (<http://poverty.com/printletter.html>) and mail to government officials in support of an increase in international aid.

Incorporate a Better World Club into your Global Women Group. Ideas and resources are available online at [BetterWorldClubs.com](http://BetterWorldClubs.com).

You can also become an advocate for women in poverty by keeping their plight in front of others; write your senators, congressman, and world leaders urging them to support actions that will help alleviate poverty. As you conduct your investigation you will find citizen action groups you can join that have a goal you can embrace.

Commit to pray for the needs of the poor. Pray by country. Or use a print or online news source to pray for current situations affecting the poorer parts of our world.

Read and act! Shannon Daley-Harris, Jeffrey Keenan and Karen Speerstra. *Our Day to End Poverty: 24 Ways You Can Make a Difference*. San Francisco, California: Barrett-Koehler Publishers. 2007.

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<sup>3</sup> "Fight Extreme Poverty," *Reader's Digest*, January 2009, page 109.



## Matters of Prayer

God, our creator and sustainer, open my eyes that I may see my sisters as You see them. Open my ears that I may hear their cries for mercy, justice, and hope. Open my heart to love even the least of these. Open my mind to the possibilities of relief from the oppression of poverty. Open my hands to give relief. Open my arms to embrace one in need of encouragement. Open my lips to speak of my commitment to advocate for change in the world. Open my life to be easy-to-read book of Your love and plans for all humankind. Amen.

## Investigate More About It

### Books

*The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World Out of Poverty* by Peter Greer. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan. 2009. Find a discussion guide, book recommendations, and resources on line at [www.thepoorwillbeglad.com](http://www.thepoorwillbeglad.com).

Dr. Ruby K. Payne and Bill Ehlig, *What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty*. Order online at [www.ahaprocess.com/store/Books.html](http://www.ahaprocess.com/store/Books.html) or call 1.800.424.9484. This title and others by Dr. Ruby Payne are also available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M. *There Shall Be No Poor Among You: Poverty in the Bible*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press. 2004.

Judith M. Dean, Julie Schaffner and Stephen L.S. Smith, editors. *Attacking Poverty in the Developing World: Christian Practitioners and Academics in Collaboration*. Federal Way, Washington: World Vision Press. 2005.

*When Helping Hurts* by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers. 2009. A study guide, Webinars, and other materials are available on [www.chalmers.org/when-helping-hurts](http://www.chalmers.org/when-helping-hurts).

HOPE International's *Perspectives on Global Poverty*. Available on their Web site at [www.hopeinternational.org](http://www.hopeinternational.org) or by calling 1-717-464-3220. This provides insight into microfinance as a response to global poverty through the formation of solidarity groups.

*Walking with the Poor* by Bryant L. Myers. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books. 1999.

### Web Sites

[www.poverty.com](http://www.poverty.com)

[www.globalissues.org](http://www.globalissues.org)

[www.world-poverty.org](http://www.world-poverty.org)

[www.poverty.worldconcern.org](http://www.poverty.worldconcern.org)

[www.endpoverty2015.org](http://www.endpoverty2015.org)

[www.theendofpoverty.com](http://www.theendofpoverty.com)

Conduct your own searches and see what other resources you can investigate!

## About the Author of this Discussion Guide



Trudy Johnson is living out her life's call to minister to persons in poverty, particularly women, through Global Women where she serves as the Director of Development. A native of Miami, Florida, Trudy was educated at Mercer University and Southern Seminary. She served the former Home Mission Board for 13 years as a missionary in the inner city of Detroit and in Phoenix. She served on the staff of WMU, SBC, for 17 years where she was the director of Christian Women's Job Corps. She has administered a holistic training program in

Birmingham that equipped economically disadvantaged persons for entry-level healthcare positions. Trudy is active in Crosscreek Baptist Church. An avid photographer, she enjoys writing, being at the beach, and spending time with her family.