Relief, Rehabilitation, or Development?

Have you ever uttered the words, “I am hungry”? Those words, for me, mean “it is time to eat again.” My refrigerator and pantry, while not well stocked because I’ve been away, have food (ok, I don’t cook much). It may be time to eat again, but I am not starting my day without food to eat. I woke up this morning in a comfortable bed with a roof over my head, in a warm, secure location. But there are others I know who utter the words, “I am hungry,” and mean something all together different. Their most recent meal may have been days ago. What I need and what my hungry friends need may be a meal. But, there could also be something else that is needed.

When we receive word that there is desperate need for food at one of our partner food pantries just down the road. What exactly, does “desperate need” mean? Is there a desperate need because the demand has increased? Is there a desperate need because it is the end of the month and the food supply always seems strained? Is there a desperate need because they have not received expected donations? Or, is there a desperate need for a different reason? Who are the people in need of food? What is really needed? There are many ways we can help, but, what is really needed?

I began to learn that much of what we offer to the materially poor in North America is focused on relief, when the reality is rehabilitation and/or development may be a more appropriate response. It was a wake-up call. Allow me to share the definitions offered in When Helping Hurts[1]:

- **Relief** is “the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis.” In relief efforts there is a provider-receiver dynamic. The provider offers assistance to the receiver.
- **Rehabilitation** “begins as soon as the bleeding stops; it seeks to restore people and their communities to the positive elements of their pre-crisis conditions.” Here the dynamic is working with people.
- **Development** “is a process of ongoing change that moves all the people involved—both the helpers and the helped—closer to being in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation.” Here the dynamic is empowerment of both the person helping and the person being helped. It is a transformational process that guides all of us to become more of who God created us to be.

In today’s scripture, Jesus interacts with people who all want something from him. John’s followers are looking for Jesus to answer their questions; a local official wants Jesus to bring his
daughter back to life, a chronically ill woman wants to be well; and a blind man wants to see. Some take the initiative, others name their needs, and still others risk faith. Jesus responds to each of them, sometimes in ways that continue to puzzle us. After all, how do you keep a blind man quiet when he is now able to see?

There are ministries at the church I serve where relief is offered and development is needed. In the places where development is happening, like our relationship with an inner city school, I see God’s transforming love working in beautiful ways. As we open your eyes to the people around us, our task is to decide which approach is best for a given situation. And if relief is needed, how might we do so in a developmental way, allowing the gifts and assets of a community come to light?

Perhaps our best reminder is to begin with the words Jesus offers, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Matt 9:37-38).” When you ask, listen closely for Jesus’ answer. You just might be one of the laborers being sent into the harvest.

**Scripture:** Read Matthew 9:14-38.

**Serve** today by allowing your actions to reflect the love of Christ. Serve out of the call of a disciple to live by Christ’s example. Seek Christ’s guidance before acting to help someone today. Ask yourself if this is a situation where relief, rehabilitation or development is needed?

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, I look to you to help me respond in love to the people I encounter today. Guide me to live in ways that reflect your glory. Help me to be the person you would have me be. Shake me from comfort and complacency so my actions can mirror your radical, life-giving love. Amen.

**Celebrate:** Who did you witness embodying the love of Jesus Christ in their actions today? Share your celebrations on Moodle course site.

1. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...And Yourself*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 99-100

2. Originally posted at: http://sarabthomas.com/2014/03/20/day-16-relief-rehabilitation-or-development/