SERVING GOD GLOBALLY

Finding Your Place in International Development

Roland Hoksbergen
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Preface

Servants at Work in International Development

Working in the slums of Nairobi was the greatest thing I ever did and the best job I ever had. I loved every minute of it. It was not easy, but I consider it the greatest privilege of my life to have been there.

Christine Bodewes, human rights lawyer, after eight years working in the slums

What kind of people work in international development? What is their overall mission? What do they do day to day? How do they get to where they are? What makes them effective? How does one prepare for service in the broad field of international development?

If you read the rest of this book, you will find answers to these questions and many others that might be on your mind if you have personally felt God tugging at your heart to join him in the mission of being an ambassador of global reconciliation.

As a professor, I have learned that most people listen to good stories better than they do to carefully crafted ten-point lectures. This book has some lectures, and I hope you will read them and learn from them, but the book is also filled with stories of Christian development workers who are “out there” trying to be faithful to God’s call to care for people he loves. Maybe the stories, and even the lecture parts, of this book will inspire you and help you think more clearly about your own life of service.

Let’s begin with a few stories. I would like to tell you more about Christine, a high-profile Chicago lawyer who heard the call to global service and shortly thereafter found herself in the slums of Nairobi. Right after that comes a
story about Dirk Booy, who started as a college graduate with a global vision but no clear sense of how to put that into practice. He began his career living in a mud-and-stick home in a village in Sierra Leone and is now one of the global leaders of World Vision International. Who knows? Maybe your own vocational journey will look something like theirs.

Christine Bodewes: From Cook County to Kibera, a Lawyer’s Journey

After receiving a law degree, Christine Bodewes was an up-and-coming lawyer in one of those high-rise buildings on the Chicago skyline. Combining the twin values of professionalism and service, Christine specialized in securities litigation for a prestigious Chicago firm. She also did pro bono work for worthy causes and people in need. Christine made partner after six years, but her path changed radically when she answered what she sees as an unmistakable spiritual call to overseas service.

It started with a surprise phone call from a college friend who was now a lay missioner with Maryknoll in Cambodia. Following a brief detention by the Khmer Rouge for participating in a peaceful march to plant trees, Christine’s friend called and asked her to come. She flew to Cambodia and was introduced for the first time to mission work in a developing country. Christine became especially proud that her Roman Catholic tradition had birthed a group like Maryknoll, for even as most other humanitarian groups were abandoning the country in this time of serious need, the Maryknoll missionaries decided to stay. As Christine tells it, “This was probably my real baptism as a Catholic, because it was the first time I really understood what it meant to be a Catholic and to take an option for the poor.”

The next four weeks in Cambodia were a time of intense spiritual encounter that set her on a completely different career track than the one she had originally envisioned. She came back to Chicago, but after a year of prayer, consultation, and spiritual discernment, Christine signed on with the Maryknoll lay mission program. One year later, Christine joined a team of Kenyan lawyers in a local legal-aid clinic for slum dwellers. Many of their clients’ lives and livelihoods were seriously threatened during President Moi’s campaigns of slum burning and landgrabbing. Her colleagues were arrested, but, as a foreigner, Christine never was. She found herself working to get innocent people released from prison and building legal cases to protect them and their homes.

After four years of this “intense grassroots human rights experience,” Christine joined the pastoral team in Kibera, the largest and most densely
populated slum in Nairobi. Her assignment was to coordinate their Office of Human Rights. Christine hoped that this ministry would thrive and that one day she could leave and hand it over to Kenyan lawyers. Everyone laughed at her. “Settle down, get married, and have children,” they said, “because you’re going to be here for a very long time.” It would have been so easy to give up. Slums have that effect on people.

Christine kept at it, supported by a strong sense of calling, her abilities to love and serve, and a wonderful spiritual director. A few years later, two talented and committed women lawyers unexpectedly offered to work in the Office of Human Rights, and it was not long before the transition took place. Human rights work is extremely difficult where respect for rights is so low, but it is a central component of development work. Today the Office of Human Rights in Kibera still serves as a beacon of hope in a troubled part of the world as it provides free legal services, civic education, and advocacy for human rights.

With the human rights work in good hands, Christine studied for a PhD in African Christianity and researched how Catholic parishes can promote the rule of law, democracy, and human rights at a grassroots level in slum environments. She now works with a private foundation supporting faith-based work in Africa.

One might focus on Christine’s tangible contributions, such as helping people keep their homes through her legal work or establishing a human rights office, but Christine is more inclined to talk about love: “I learned to put love first. It is the single most important thing and the single most difficult thing to learn. Putting love over your profession and desired goals, achievements, or assumptions is to me the heart of the mission experience.”

You may not be called to East Africa or to the slums of Nairobi like Christine was, but wherever you serve, Christine stresses that it is not only “what you do but how you do it.”

Christine has a professional degree, came to development work after starting another career, worked herself out of a job, and is now doing research and support work for Christian organizations in Africa. Read now the story of a man with a general college degree who began in community development and is now a leader in World Vision International.

Dirk Booy: Learning How to Really Help

At twenty-two, just graduated and newly married, Dirk Booy boarded a plane to West Africa and began a lifelong career in development. Possessed with an inherent wanderlust and a strong desire to serve, Dirk had been talking
in his senior year with his church’s development agency, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) about working overseas. Today Dirk expresses surprise that he and Joanne, his wife, were hired, but in those days it seemed easier to land an overseas position. CRWRC was beginning an innovative program in Sierra Leone and offered them a spot on the team.

Part of CRWRC’s plan was that Dirk and Joanne would live directly in a rural village, building their own mud-and-stick home, gathering their own water, killing their own chickens, learning the local language, and generally doing everything they could to “bond” with the community. The Booys had two children while living in the village, and the family lived there for six years. When the children reached school age, Dirk and Joanne knew it was time to move out of the village, but they stayed in Africa for fourteen more years.

Looking back on his entry-level experiences, Dirk says that those six years in rural Sierra Leone were “some of the most important in my entire career. They are why I am able to do what I do now. We lived in the village, learning firsthand and face-to-face with people in the community what their problems were, what they faced on a daily basis, and what it was like to really live on a subsistence level.”

The Booys learned many lessons in those years that have inspired and guided Dirk throughout his life and career. “To be right there, living day to day, and not knowing where your food will come from and what tomorrow will bring really teaches you what life is like for many of the world’s people.”

There were many other lessons too, like how skilled one must be to survive in a subsistence economy. Along with their community, they had to learn how to survive. They got sick. They were emotionally drained and psychologically burned out. One day a village elder came to talk with them. “Why do you want to be like us?” he asked. He continued, “We want you to be like who you really are so that you can help us.” Dirk remembers this as an epiphany moment, “This was a great revelation to us, because we began at that moment to comprehend that we needed to respect the people and be part of their community but also to bring something new and helpful. We needed balance, and it was then that we gained the confidence to contribute more ideas in community meetings and let the community make their own decisions about them.”

Another huge lesson was how important it is to listen to the advice of elders or, in Western terms, to find experienced mentors who can shine some light on our path.

Over the next fifteen years, Dirk received an MA in international development, moved to Tanzania, and joined World Vision Tanzania as the national director. A major accomplishment was that World Vision raised 35 percent of its funds, or $6 million, right in Tanzania through national campaigns
and local fundraising. “We learned,” says Dirk, “that nobody is too poor to give and that a big part of community development is providing people the opportunity to express their concern for others and to help each other out.”

After two decades in Africa, the Booys moved back to Canada where Dirk took on more administrative roles for World Vision International and was then named to the position of partnership leader for global field operations. Throughout his career, Dirk has tried to serve, whether from a mud-and-stick house in Sierra Leone or from the pinnacle of the world’s largest Christian development organization. He has discovered his vocation in God’s world according to the gifts God gave him and the opportunities God put in his path. It is a path he is still walking.

Dirk now serves in a high-profile role, traveling frequently, talking with lots of people (mostly in offices); but as is true for many development workers, he longs to return to grassroots community development where he can once again bond with people and be “where the real action is, where my real heart is, and where I get the most satisfaction. Truly, there is nothing like being on the front line.”

Throughout his career, Dirk has followed the call to be a part of the restoration of God’s kingdom through development work. He also believes that God is calling each and every one of us to join him in this wonderful mission. Will you?

Dirk had a general college degree but was then fortunate enough to learn through experience and additional formal education. He served directly in the community, then in a national office, and now in an international office. He was mentored by others and is now a mentor himself. He and Joanne had to manage both family and vocational commitments. We will come back to all these points throughout the book.

Other Development Professionals You Will Meet in This Book

Christine and Dirk are just two of the many development workers you will meet in the pages ahead. As I contemplated writing a book on vocations in international development, I realized I needed to gather the experiences and the wisdom of people who are in the field because the field of development is broad and varied. Christine works with human rights and governance, and Dirk focuses especially on community development, but other development workers are involved with health, microenterprise, job creation, peacebuilding, forestry, urban planning, governance, economic policy, agriculture, access to clean water, gender relations, justice advocacy, and so much more. There
## Who Was Interviewed

The fifty-seven people listed below were interviewed during the spring and summer of 2010. Names are followed by professional affiliation at the time of the interview. Some had recently completed terms of service and were waiting to see what would come next. For those, I have identified the position they moved into. While not everyone listed here is individually referenced in the book, I can honestly say that every single interview was informative, fascinating, and influential to the overall message.

1. Milton Amayun, family health team leader for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Benin
2. Jillian Baker, project assistant for World Vision Uganda
3. Dana Bates, executive director of New Horizons Foundation Romania
4. Christine Bodewes, head of the Africa Desk for Porticus (a private foundation) in the Netherlands
5. Tim Bollinger, project comanager for Sal, Luz, Saude in Mozambique
6. Dirk Booy, partnership leader for global field operations for World Vision International in the United Kingdom
7. Duncan Boughton, associate professor for the Department of Agricultural, Food, and Resource Economics at Michigan State University
8. David Bronkema, director of development programs at Eastern University
9. Alisa Buma, program coordinator for Samaritan’s Purse in Liberia
10. Alicia Clifton, director of Health and Family Services for Jericho Road Ministries in Buffalo, NY
11. Dana DeRuiter, senior policy advisor for Global Health at USAID, Washington, DC
12. Beth Doerr, intern manager for Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (ECHO) in Fort Myers, FL
13. Dana Doll, field organizer for Micah Challenge
14. Nathan Dowling, deputy director at PROCOM in Rwanda
15. Faith Wise, global mission director for Providence Church in Westchester, PA
16. Jason Fileta, national coordinator for Micah Challenge in Portland, OR
17. Belinda Forbes, commissioned missionary to Nicaragua for the United Methodist Church
18. Karen Genzink, on staff with Future Now Enterprises in Cambodia
20. Bernard Haven, stabilization planner with Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in Afghanistan
21. Hayden Hill, director of community development initiatives for Westminster Reformed Presbyterian Church in Suffolk, VA
22. Vernon Jantzi, professor at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University
23. Mark Kaech, new media specialist for Food for the Hungry in Phoenix, AZ
24. Brenda Katerberg, disaster relief coordinator for East Africa at CRWRC in Niger
25. Charlotte Keniston, Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala
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<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Ndunge Kiiti, associate professor of intercultural studies at Houghton College</td>
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<td>27.</td>
<td>Jacqueline Klamer, writer/project coordinator for Partners Worldwide</td>
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<td>28.</td>
<td>Lora Kleinsasser, regional facilitator for Latin America for Partners Worldwide in Nicaragua</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Eunice Lee, Peace Corps volunteer in Cambodia</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Carly Miller, English teacher in Korea</td>
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<td>31.</td>
<td>Hannah Marsh, liaison specialist for USAID in Washington, DC</td>
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<td>32.</td>
<td>Greg Matney, regional facilitator for Partners Worldwide in Hyderabad, India</td>
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<td>33.</td>
<td>Ryan Musser, program associate for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in Washington, DC</td>
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<td>34.</td>
<td>Jennie Missner, owner of Venture Imports LLC in Grand Rapids, MI</td>
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<td>35.</td>
<td>Kris Ozar, program quality manager for Catholic Relief Service in Ghana</td>
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<td>36.</td>
<td>Jonathan Persenaire, owner/manager of a computer services store in Kampala, Uganda</td>
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<td>37.</td>
<td>Julie Peterson, vice president of American World Services in Washington, DC</td>
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<td>38.</td>
<td>Rachel Reed, microfinance consultant with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in Honduras</td>
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<td>40.</td>
<td>Sarah Rohrer, field organizer for Bread for the World in Dayton, OH</td>
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<td>41.</td>
<td>Emily Romero, codirector of Jubilee Centers International in Honduras</td>
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<td>42.</td>
<td>Elizabeth Rudy, World Vision US</td>
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<td>43.</td>
<td>Andrew Ryskamp, director of CRWRC, USA</td>
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<td>44.</td>
<td>Doug Seebeck, executive director of Partners Worldwide, Grand Rapids, MI</td>
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<td>45.</td>
<td>Jordan Smith, Mekong student life coordinator for Go ED in Vietnam</td>
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<td>46.</td>
<td>Mike Soderling, medical missionary in Guatemala</td>
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<td>47.</td>
<td>Carl Stauffer, assistant professor of development and justice studies at Eastern Mennonite University</td>
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<td>48.</td>
<td>Carolyn Stauffer, assistant professor in applied social sciences at Eastern Mennonite University</td>
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<td>49.</td>
<td>Brit Steiner, management and program analyst in the Office of Civilian Response at USAID in Washington, DC</td>
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<td>50.</td>
<td>Roland Vanderburg, program director for Christian Aid for Under-Assisted Societies Everywhere (CAUSE) in Canada</td>
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<td>51.</td>
<td>Rebecca Vander Meulen, community development director and HIV and AIDS coordinator for the Diocese of Niassa in Lichinga, Mozambique</td>
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<td>52.</td>
<td>Matt Van Geest, country program manager for Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo for World Vision</td>
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<td>53.</td>
<td>Nathaniel Veltman, mission coworker with the Presbyterian Church in Ethiopia</td>
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<td>54.</td>
<td>Kurt Ver Beek, director of Calvin College’s Honduras Semester Program</td>
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<td>55.</td>
<td>Alisa Yingling, MBA student at Biola University</td>
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<td>56.</td>
<td>Mary Ann Weber, human resources coordinator for MCC—Great Lakes Office</td>
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<td>57.</td>
<td>Michael Woolcock, senior social scientist with the Development Research Group at the World Bank</td>
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would be no way to get a reasonably accurate picture of what it is like to work in those fields and how people get into those fields without listening to the folks who have the experience. In addition, some work in small church-related missions, some in big secular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in large national or international institutions like the World Bank. There are even some who work in private business and intentionally engage in development work from there. You will meet people from all these arenas. Many of the interviewees have been in development work for a long time. Others are only a few years out of college and still finding their way. The wisdom of the old-timers that comes from maturity and long experience is a great asset and has much to teach us. The lived experience of the younger development workers will no doubt resonate more directly with readers who plan to enter the field in the next few years.

What unites all these diverse people under one umbrella is their commitment to be faithful to the mission God has given us in this world, so succinctly and beautifully expressed by the prophet Micah: “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8). As long as children die of hunger, girls and boys are trafficked, wars bring death and destruction, the poor are deprived of education and excluded or marginalized from society, and people cannot find work or earn enough to survive, there is much acting and loving and walking that need to be done. All the people you meet in these pages are committed to this mission.

Why I Wrote This Book and Who It Is For

To explain why I wrote this book, I must briefly tell you some of my own story. One of the values I grew up with and have always tried to live out is caring for others, especially those who seem downtrodden. Admittedly, I do not do this as well as I would wish. Someone recently asked me where I thought that value came from. My first thought was to mention my parents’ nurturing and the experiences I had when growing up, but it occurred to me instead that this is a characteristic that God implanted in us when he knew us in the womb. We are supposed to be like this. I started to realize that this value does not need to be explained. So that was my answer. “I’m normal,” I said, “nothing to explain.” I often fail to live up to this value, but I do aspire to it. What really needs to be explained are the people who lack this value. They are the ones who must answer the question of what has gone wrong.

Another manifestation of my normality is that I had little idea what I should study when I went to college. To gain some clarity on that, I took a break
after two years. In March 1976, right after a horrific earthquake in Guatemala, an elder in my church suggested I join a mission to Guatemala to help in the rebuilding. Experiencing another country, improving my beginning Spanish, and actually helping people in need were all powerful motivators, so I went. I lived in a rural town for one year and helped build one-room (plus porch) cinder-block houses. During that year I saw the desperate poverty but realized soon enough that there would be no easy answers to it. Still, I wanted to find some answers; most of all, I wanted to help. Like the young person you will meet in the introduction, I said, “Here I am, Lord. Send me.” It was obvious that I had a lot to learn, however, so I came back to the United States to study economics. If I wanted to do something about poverty, knowing about economics seemed pretty basic. At graduation I went right on for a doctorate in economic development.

In the thirty years since then, as a professor of economics and international development at Calvin College, as the director of the Latin American Studies Program for three years, as a development worker in Nicaragua for several years, and as a citizen in Christ’s kingdom the whole time, I have pondered the following two questions: What really works in helping people escape poverty and live rich and full lives? And how can (and should) wealthy people, like most of the people I live and worship with in North America, contribute to the well-being of every human being God created? These are the questions I have researched, written about, and acted upon my whole adult life.

A little over ten years ago I became the director of my college’s international development studies program, and for the last six years, students at Calvin have organized an annual conference on “Faith and International Development” that usually attracts about three to four hundred students from all over North America. Among the biggest questions on their minds are the same two that I have asked: What works? And what can we do? These are followed by two additional questions, both extensions of the latter question: What should I do? And how do I actually do this and make a career out of it?

Together with the students and some of my professor colleagues in other Christian colleges, we looked in vain for written materials that really address these questions, especially in a Christian context. There are lots of good books about Christian missions, and there are good ones too, secular and Christian, about development work (some of these are listed in chap. 9). There are also secular reference books about how to find volunteer positions, intern positions, and jobs in international development. But we could find no vocational guides for Christians whose approach to mission is holistic.

So that’s where this book came from. It is unabashedly Christian in its attempt to address the following themes:
what kind of development we are actually trying to accomplish
what the field of international development is like
what kind of people are most effective in development work
how to prepare oneself for this work in the college years
how to actually get into the field

If you have acknowledged God’s gift to you of caring for others; if you have a love for the people of other countries; if you are wondering how we can really help, what your role might be, and how to get started, then this book is for you. Listen to the wisdom and advice of fifty-eight development professionals. That’s the fifty-seven that we interviewed plus myself. In truth, there is a lot of wisdom in these pages from other fellow travelers as well. No one in this book knows it all. We are all on a journey of learning to live faithfully in God’s whole world. We invite you to join us.
Acknowledgments

This book arises from the influence of two groups of young people. One is the college-age students I have talked with in my office, over coffee, and via emails about their educational paths, the field of international development, and the realistic possibilities of carving out careers in global service. The second group is the people—not quite so young anymore—who actually entered the field of international development, learned what serving God globally is like, and then shared their stories and wisdom so that I could pass them on to the next crop of college students. To both of these large groups I owe a debt of gratitude that is impossible to detail or quantify. They will remain nameless here, but if you sat with me and talked or exchanged emails with me at some point, either as a student or as a development professional, then I extend to you my heartfelt thanks.

The precise moment when the idea for this book took root was in a meeting in Washington, DC, when college professors and NGO representatives got together to think through the dilemma of how to bridge the gap between college and professional development work. At one point, someone, I think it was Ndunge Kiti, said we needed a resource to help Christian young people know what development work is about, what the field is like—how to prepare for it and how to gain the experience necessary to get into it. Others agreed, and I started to plot how I might use my upcoming sabbatical leave to work on such a book. So thanks to all the participants in that meeting: Richard Gathro, Aleida Guzman, Chad Hayward, Mark Jorritsma, Ann Karl, Ndunge Kiti, Ray Martin, Aaron Moore, Stephanie Saenger, Abe Scheaffer, Aaron Stuvland, and Evelyn Yang. You provided the initial push.

Many others are likewise to be heartily and cheerfully thanked, including:
Acknowledgments

All the wonderful development professionals, fifty-seven in all, who consented to be interviewed and whose names and affiliations are listed in the preface. Their willingness to spend time with me, often over the phone and sometimes over tenuous Skype connections, is truly appreciated. I fear only a small portion of the wisdom they shared made it into the book, but I hope they are happy with what is here.

Three senior seminar classes at Calvin College, the first of which, in the fall of 2009, brainstormed the questions they wanted the book to address. The other two classes, fall 2010 and spring 2011, read the entire manuscript and discussed what spoke to them and what did not. One impassioned debate revolved around whether references to the Star Wars movies are still relevant to today's young people. As you will see, I left them in.

Emily Daher, my student assistant in the summer of 2010. Emily transcribed almost all of the interviews, wrote first drafts of specific sections, did much of the research for chapter 9, interviewed thirteen recent Calvin College graduates who are now working in development, and provided a trustworthy sounding board for the ideas throughout the entire book. God go with you, Emily, as you embark on your own career path in global service.

My father, Alvin Hoksbergen, who read the chapters as they first escaped my computer. He gave me all sorts of solid advice about content, tone, depth, and wording. Thanks, Dad, for all you've done to shape this book, and also to both you and Mom for shaping me as a person.

Practitioners and academic colleagues David Bronkema, Rukshan Fernando, Jacqueline Klamer, Tracy Kuperus, Russell Mask, Mwenda Ntarangwi, and Amy Patterson, all of whom read through chapters and provided vital feedback. Thanks also for writing those letters of support needed at various junctures.

The staff and partners of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee with whom I have been privileged to work over the years and who have taught me so much about effective international development work.

Calvin College, for its sabbatical program, and the good people at Baker Academic who helped push this project to completion.

Finally, my wife and friend, Lisseth, Gustavo's and Vila's second daughter, for being an encouraging presence and soulmate throughout the entire process.
Introduction

God, You, and the World Out There

“The poor you will always have with you.” “Therefore . . .”
Mark 14:7; Deuteronomy 15:11

“And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.” “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”
Isaiah 5:7; 6:8

An experienced missionary once told me “you can take all your kindheartedness and compassion and hope to change the world, but if you do not understand the world, then you can do a lot more damage than good.”
Faith Wise, global mission director of Providence Church in Westchester, PA

Hearing the Call to Global Service

In 2003 well-known evangelical pastor Rick Warren traveled to Rwanda at his wife’s urging and witnessed poverty and suffering unlike any he had ever seen before. At about the same time he was led to read the Bible with fresh eyes, noticing now the over two thousand verses that address poverty and justice for the poor. As with so many others who witness global pain and suffering up close and personal, Warren sensed God’s call during his sojourn in this faraway land. He responded by helping to set up a new organization, the PEACE Plan,
that would address multiple needs of the poor the world over. He also started preaching much more on justice and our responsibilities to people in need.

Like Warren, Christians young and old have heard God’s call, but unlike Warren, many do not have the international reputation, the wealth, or the self-confidence that allow them to think big and to set up a global organization that envisions involving a billion people. Most people are not gifted like he is either, and many are young people just getting started. Warren was already in midlife and fully established in a productive career when he happened to hear God’s call to care for the poor and responded by getting involved. But how about the people who hear this call in their youth, when their career paths have hardly begun and when they are still wide open to what God wants them to do? How can they get involved?

Picture a group of young Christians as they attend a convention like Urbana and hear a compelling speaker like Rick Warren, Rob Bell, Tony Campolo, Shane Claiborne, Gary Haugen, Ruth Padilla-DeBorst, or Ronald Sider persuade them that the world is full of pain and that God wants them to be “ambassadors of global reconciliation,” to carry God’s message of love throughout the world to children with AIDS, to women oppressed and marginalized in their own cultures, to conflict or environmental refugees who have fled their own devastated lands, to Haitians suffering a death-dealing earthquake, to garbage pickers in Guatemala, and to people the world over who suffer the dull grind of crushing poverty every day of their lives. Imagine these same young people as they join a short-term mission trip to a developing country. Events and experiences such as these often weigh heavily on the hearts and minds of young people, as they should, and many emerge with an awakened spirit, a compassionate heart, and a firm conviction that they ought to do something.

Imagine further that their response to these experiences is to announce with great conviction that they are ready to go, ready to sacrifice, ready to serve, and ready to sign up to be witnesses and messengers of God’s love to the world’s broken and suffering peoples. They have heard a call similar to what Isaiah hears in Isaiah 6. “Whom shall I send?” says the voice of the Lord, and Isaiah responds, “Here am I. Send me.” They too respond, “Here am I, Lord. Send me.”

**Striking While the Iron Is Hot**

They are inspired, committed, and ready. Now what?

One thing that often happens is that this moment slips away. This could easily happen if during such days of strong commitment these willing servants...
do not receive helpful guidance and greater clarity about how to act on their commitment. It is much easier to get fired up about carrying out a great mission like this than it is to get equipped with requisite abilities and a set of particular skills. If new recruits find no practical guidance from the leaders of their faith communities, their energy may dissipate. There are many reasons for this, and it happens to all of us. Sometimes, because we are far away from the suffering, the passing of time dulls the sharpness of the call and the emotional attachment to the people we met on the mission trip. Sometimes the guidance we get from our elders does not really convince us or seem concrete or immediate enough to do much good. We might be encouraged to give to a certain Christian organization, live simply so that others may simply live, be a good citizen, and vote correctly (as if that’s easy). Sometimes the problems just seem so big and complex that we lose heart and begin to question our own abilities. For those of us who are wealthy, another threat looms: every day we face the temptation to live a comfortable, self-centered life and just close our eyes to the world’s pain.

One reason that reassurance and guidance are so important at this point is that it will not be long before our young friends hear the message that the sort of assistance and service they have in mind actually does more harm than good, or that people from rich countries should just stay away. For example, they hear that foreigners take jobs away from nationals, are too culturally insensitive to help, or are simply too expensive. Better to send money and pay locals to do the work, or not to send money at all and simply let the people solve their own problems. One message they might come across is articulated in a speech of Austrian philosopher Monsignor Ivan Illich, “To Hell with Good Intentions,” which concludes with the following words: “I am here to entreat you to use your money, your status and your education to travel in Latin America. Come to look, come to climb our mountains, to enjoy our flowers. Come to study. But do not come to help.”

Messages like these could easily begin to lead well-motivated, compassionate, Christ-following people down a path of cynicism, despair, and withdrawal. Or their lives might simply take an inward turn, focusing on themselves and their families, careers, and local communities, but no longer on the needs of people around the world. As their lives unfold, they might periodically hear the messages and the calls, but they are no longer inspired. They may respond by giving a little money here and there, especially when a disaster strikes, and perhaps even periodically joining a short-term mission group building a school, a church, or a clinic in a developing country, but their hearts are not in it very deeply anymore, and sometimes their involvement seems more oriented to reducing their own guilt than to really helping other people.
Like the story of Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, this is how things might go. But they do not have to unfold like this. Let’s return to the young Christians when they are still on fire. Here they are enthusiastically responding to the call with a firm and sincere, “Here am I, Lord. Send me.” What do we tell them?

**Two Words of Advice**

I would like to offer two main words of advice, *affirmation* and *preparation*, both of which are vital. We all need to be affirmed in our sense of calling because it is part of how we nurture and cultivate our own identity as Christ followers, as people called to fulfill a purpose and to carry out a mission. Affirmation also gives us a sense of belonging and a place as members of a supportive community. The second, preparation, is vital because anyone wishing to embark on a mission must not only have clarity about what that mission is but also be well equipped to carry it out.

**Affirmation**

When you cheerfully respond to God’s call to global service, it is the community’s responsibility and joy to praise the Lord for your desire to be faithful and your willingness to explore how to live out a vocation of service in a global context. You should know that the desire to serve is a completely natural Christian response to God’s love for us, but it is still something we should rejoice about. That is because our society tells us over and over again, in blunt and subtle ways but with numbing repetition, to take care of number one first, that it is dog-eat-dog out there, and that the one who dies with the most toys wins. Such messages thoroughly violate who God created us to be. As bearers of his image, we are created to love God and to love and care for our neighbors, especially those who are hurting. When the Pharisees ask Jesus what the greatest commandment is, he gives a two-part answer. The first, he says, is to love God. The Pharisees expect this, but Jesus surprises them with the corollary: “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:39). Love of God and love of neighbor are tightly intertwined. You cannot do the first unless you do the second. Be assured that your desire to discover how you can help, a desire awakened by the messages and experiences that spoke to your mind and stirred your heart, is good and real and true. Read how Pope Benedict XVI puts this idea in his recent encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (*Charity in Truth*): “All people feel the interior impulse to love authentically: love and truth never abandon them completely, because these are the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person.”

Roland Hoksbergen, *Serving God Globally*  
Caring about and for the broken and hurting people in this world is completely natural, because that love and care was planted there by God himself. As the pope says, it is our vocation, what we are called to do and meant to do. If and when you are sarcastically called a “do-gooder” or a “bleeding heart,” your response should be, “Praise the Lord! Join me.”

Be affirmed too that God expects this vocation of service born of love to be carried out in the world, in real time and space. God cares about every square inch of the world he created. Yes, the world has fallen into sin and is now a broken shell of what God wanted it to be, but God’s vision for this world continues to be a grand one. Theologian N. T. Wright, in Surprised by Hope, sums it up by arguing that God’s purpose in this world is nothing less than “rescue and re-creation for the whole world, the entire cosmos.” Such a grand vision doesn’t leave much out, and it emphatically (remember those two thousand verses) puts before us the people around the world who are struggling to build better lives or even just to survive to the next day.

If you think that the combination of God’s grand vision and the fact that he planted a spirit of love and care in your own heart means that he wants you involved, you are exactly right. And he wants you involved completely. You need to know up front that God isn’t asking you to take a nine-to-five job with weekends off and vacations; this is a full-time assignment, 24–7, for your whole life. It is not something you do for a few years and then move on to something else.

Before we get ahead of ourselves, this does not mean that all of Christ’s followers are expected to join a village co-op in Zambia, though it might mean that for some. The point is that no matter what specific life situation you find yourself in, whether in a direct role working with the poor in other lands or as a small-business owner in your home community, you are still expected to be on task with the grand mission. Not everyone is called to go and live in Zambia, but some of us are. If you sense that God may be asking you to be directly involved in serving people around the world, then you need to start narrowing down how it is that God wants you to serve. Much more on that later.

All well and good, you might say, but perhaps you are plagued by some nagging doubts about the extent to which Christians should be involved in social action. We will talk more about this in chapters 2 and 3, but for the moment I want to visit the Scripture passage that opens this chapter. It is the passage in which Jesus tells his disciples that the poor will always be with us. I have often heard this passage used to explain that we really cannot expect to do much about poverty. The argument is that we will never make much progress, so it would be better to stick with evangelism and traditional mission work, focusing on the soul rather than on the body. But a closer reading of...
the passage indicates that such a conclusion was not at all what Jesus had in mind. In fact, he was quoting from a passage in the law, Deuteronomy 15:11, which in its entirety reads as follows: “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.” The emphasis here is not on the fact of poverty but instead, as in so many other passages, on loving and helping—always helping. As we all know, there are plenty of poor and needy people in our land, and God expects us to be openhanded toward them.

If you are lucky enough to have the chance, one of the finest speechmakers you will ever hear is Gary Haugen, founder and director of the International Justice Mission. It is hard not to be moved to action when Gary gets to the part of his speech when, after telling a heart-wrenching story of young children who have been brutalized and trafficked, he wonders aloud why God lets bad things like this happen and why God does not do anything about it. “Doesn’t God have a plan for dealing with such injustice?” Haugen implores. At that point, he looks his listeners straight in the eye and hits them with a striking challenge: “Well,” he says, “I would like to tell you that God does have a plan. We are the plan!”

God’s vision is a big one, and his plan is to build a team of followers to live out that vision. There is a place for you on that team. In fact, there is a “no cut” rule, so you can rest assured that there is a role for you to play.

**Preparation**

What exactly might that role be? A perfectly reasonable question to ask at this point, which leads us to the second word of advice: preparation, something anyone going into global service will need in abundance. One of the tricky parts of this piece of advice is that no one can tell you precisely what preparation you need. Certainly there are some general guidelines, but you must yourself play a big part in finding exactly what position you will play on the team. That realization might lead to a number of fairly obvious questions, such as:

I want to help, but what do I have to offer?
Are short-term missions enough, or are we talking about a longer-term commitment?
Is there a career here? Will I be able to get a job?
Do I need to develop a particular skill? If so, which one?
If I go to school, what should I study?
Will I have to live in a developing country? Am I cut out to do that?
These are all excellent, practical questions. Once you get started thinking about these, you might be led to ask some bigger-picture questions, including:

- Why are people poor, and what strategies to help actually work?
- What is God’s plan for people in this world, and what does development really mean?
- Is there any hope for change when the problems seem so big and intractable?
- Can foreigners, maybe someone like me, really help?

Note the doubts and concerns creeping in here. The first set of questions is more personal and the second more abstract and theoretical, but these are precisely the types of questions you should be asking. The very fact that you might ask such questions shows awareness of the significance of the mission and is a promising sign that you might actually make a positive contribution. Happily, there are good answers for all these questions, which we will get to as this book unfolds.

But now I must pause briefly to provide a rejoinder to messages that say it is not worth the bother and would be better if we did not get involved, such as the one from Ivan Illich above. First, though Illich is not ultimately right, we would make a serious mistake if we did not listen to him and ask what he is trying to tell us. In part, he wants us to know that people in other countries are not just sitting there waiting for us to come and fix all their problems. He wants us to know that people in other cultures have many good things about them that do not need fixing, and that we have many things in our own lives that do need fixing. He wants us to know that helping others is serious business and that helping people who speak other languages, live in other cultures, and have their own complex histories is not as easy as it might sound.

Joining in the struggle against global poverty is a high and noble calling, but there are many pitfalls. Signing up for this mission will require lots of study, lots of personal growth, and lots of practice. In the mid-1980s I wrote a short article on how North American young people could get started in their efforts to address global human suffering; one of the people I interviewed offered this bit of wisdom: “study, study, study... listen, listen, listen.” This is where we all need to begin. The road is long and hard, and the most important virtues to cultivate may be patience and humility. This is an especially important point because, for some reason, perhaps due to our wealth and education, we are often tempted to think that helping other people is easy... too easy. I am not trying to discourage anyone but to pump you up for the task ahead and...
to tell you that though the road is long, the destination is definitely worth it. As the saying goes, the view is worth the climb.

Maybe the following story will help clarify the issue. Suppose you were suffering from an acute pain in your lower abdomen and encountered at that moment a fine young Christian who deeply desires to be of service to God and to her community. Like you, she clearly loves God and her neighbor; it just happens at this moment that you are the neighbor in question. Suppose that your new acquaintance says she heard once that such pain is often associated with appendicitis and that her understanding is that you need an operation right away. Would you be surprised when she reaches into her pocket for her Swiss knife and offers to perform the operation herself, right there? Would you let her? I trust you did not have a hard time answering this question with a firm “no!” Why? For the simple reasons that this would-be helper is not a doctor, her diagnosis is not fully convincing, the conditions and equipment are clearly inadequate, and perhaps, most of all, you would almost certainly die should she operate on you. It would be much smarter to visit a doctor who had gone through medical school, been certified by the state board, done a residency under well-regarded internists and surgeons, and had access to a sterile and well-equipped clinic. As we know, training to become a physician takes time, and the road is long and hard.

Working in behalf of poor people in other countries is remarkably similar. The pain that poor people around the world suffer is very serious, often a matter of life and death. Like our knife-toting friend, there are many well-intentioned people who would like to help, which is a very good thing, but as Illich so bluntly lays out, good intentions are not enough and may cause more harm than good. In order to work on these serious problems, aspiring ambassadors of global reconciliation need to go to school, gain expertise in the discipline, develop skills in a specialized field, build cross-cultural capabilities, and practice as interns under the tutelage of experienced professionals. We expect this of our physicians; we should expect no less of development workers. People who see the problems in poor countries and rush in to help all too often do a great deal of harm, just as the young person would if she had been permitted to use her Swiss knife for an appendectomy. Unfortunately, unlike you in the appendectomy story, poor people often do not have the ability or the will to say “no!” to a rich, educated foreigner who they have been led to believe knows what is best for them.

You might remember Luke Skywalker from the early Star Wars trilogy. As much as he wanted to rush in to fight Darth Vader and the dark side right away, it was Yoda and Obi-Wan who insisted that he was not ready, that he needed desperately to go through the training. It was a long process and one
that frustrated Luke very much, but had he rushed into battle before being ready, he would have utterly failed to carry out his mission and done a great deal of harm. In the end, of course, he was successful, and it is my hope and prayer that you will be as well.

Finding Your Niche in International Development

The purpose of this book is to get you started on your way toward becoming a leader in the field that today is typically referred to as “international development.” Another popular term is “human development.” In Christian circles the terms “authentic human development” and “transformational development” have both gained increasing traction. As we will see, these terms do make a difference, but for now it is enough to say that development of people and their societies is about much more than fighting poverty. Yes, ending poverty is important, just as getting someone out of a burning house is important, but we must then face the more forward-looking issue of what kind of a world or community we want to live in. Development is thus a constructive idea, one that asks what we are to become, not one that just removes a problem. Thinking about development brings us to questions such as these: What kind of society does God want us to live in? What do we hope people will become, and what is it that we are hoping to become ourselves? How do we tell the difference between progress and regress? For example, on a national scale, is it good that everyone in Cuba has enough to eat and access to reasonably good health care? Of course it is, but is the lack of political freedom an acceptable price to pay for that? Perhaps not. Or consider another example: Does it help to teach a poor person how to fish or to farm more productively? Likely so, but what if the farmer uses his newly acquired knowledge to get rich and then starts exploiting his workers and cheating his business associates? Development is thus about a lot more than ending economic poverty. Obviously, what people have (and how much) matters, but it also matters what we do, who we are, and how we live together. Having . . . doing . . . being . . . relating. This can all get pretty complicated.

Right after World War II, which is more or less when people started getting serious about international development, the dominant view was that investments in infrastructure and business, along with specialization and trade, would kick-start the economies of poor countries. The poor would get jobs, living standards would improve, and we would all get on a path to a better world. On this view, development was mostly about having. Many people still think that. Even Christians who ought to know better get sucked into that kind of thinking with entirely too much regularity. The basic idea is that if we all have
enough, then we will use it well. We would all live long healthy lives, be at peace with each other, and generally be very happy. Well, it has not quite worked out that way, and for many years development scholars and practitioners have been studying why, rethinking their theories, and restructuring their practices. Much has been learned since then, though much remains to be learned.

One thing development professionals have learned over the past fifty years, even many of the economists, is that development is about a lot more than investment and markets. We have realized that we need the wisdom and involvement of people from many other fields of knowledge. Without going into all the interconnections inherent in what I am about to mention, we have learned that human development is about agriculture, culture, religion, identity, empowerment, gender, ethnicity, technology, health, business, politics, conflict, peacebuilding, urban planning, human rights, families, community, environmental sustainability, international relations, and much, much more. As you can see, there is a lot to learn about and many ways to serve.

We have also learned that development is about perspectives and worldviews, something patently evident (though quite overdone) in the blockbuster film _Avatar_. It is pretty obvious in this film that the human invaders and the local Navi have very different understandings of the meaning of life and of how to relate to the world around them. How we think of our world and how we act within it depend a lot on how we understand the purpose of the world and what our own goals are within that world. In other words, development is also about our beliefs and values. In fact, we cannot even talk intelligently about progress or development unless we refer to systems of beliefs and values, world and life views, or what some would simply call “faith.”

This book, as I expect is abundantly evident, arises out of my own Christian beliefs and values and my own understanding of the Christian tradition of thought and practice. It is this faith that has long told me that we must all work with tenacious perseverance to alleviate the pain and suffering of this world, to help others along the way toward becoming what God would like them to become, and to contribute to the promotion of international, transformational, authentic, human development. I hope this book will help you assess what role you might play in God’s grand mission, how to prepare for playing that role, and how to get started down the path. Our task here will be to learn about our broad vocation, understood as a grand, global, all-embracing mission, but it is also about careers in development. Many minds, hearts, and hands are needed in a lot of different fields, and I hope this book helps you think more clearly about what your own gifts and capabilities are, how those might be developed and employed to good effect in God’s kingdom, and what actual career niche you might look forward to filling.
One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. “Which road do I take?” she asked. “Where do you want to go?” was his response. “I don’t know,” Alice answered. “Then,” said the cat, “it doesn’t matter.”

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15

One thing I’ve learned is how important worldviews are. We must learn to evaluate worldviews, because they are so basic to what people do in life.

Hayden Hill, development worker in East Africa, 2007–9

**An Illustrative Case**

There are some things in development work that everyone agrees on. Children dying for lack of food is absolutely unacceptable. Young people being trafficked for sexual slavery is a terrible violation of human dignity that must be stopped. We cannot stand by when child soldiers, senses deadened by drugs and violence, are taught to torture and kill. Reckless and environmentally destructive deforestation cannot be tolerated. Christians, Muslims, liberals, and conservatives all agree on the above points. Agreement becomes much more
difficult, however, when we try to identify the causes behind the world’s pain and determine exactly what must be done to fight evil and promote the good.

Economist Jeffrey Sachs, one of today’s most prominent development thinkers, argues in *The End of Poverty* that development is a lot like health and poverty a lot like sickness. He likens development workers to doctors who diagnose problems before treating them. Sachs points out that the symptoms of illness (fever, pain, listlessness) and the symptoms of unhealthy societies (hunger, infant mortality, violence) are indications of deeper maladies that must be diagnosed accurately before being treated. This is a helpful point, but there is another issue that Sachs does not address. He seems to assume that all doctors have the same understanding of health. He does not mention how significant which school of medicine the doctor attended is in determining the approach taken for treatment (e.g., medical, osteopathic, chiropractic, homeopathic). Just like in medicine, in development too there are distinct, prominent, and competing theoretical schools where today’s development “doctors” go for training. Depending on which school development workers attend, they will understand human development in distinct ways and will treat recognized diseases quite differently. In deference to the famous Cheshire cat, if we want to know what road to take, we must know where we want to go and how we want to get there.

Consider the following story and ask yourself what the malady is, what the causes are, and what treatment would be most effective:

Chabekum Bibi was born in Bangladesh and grew up in a poor, landless, Muslim family. She did not go to school, and when she was twelve years old her parents arranged her marriage through a local matchmaker. When she discovered that her new husband already had a wife, Chabekum refused to stay with him. Her family rejected her, and for several years she lived with other relatives who then arranged her marriage to her present husband, Babul.

Babul’s family used to have some land, but they lost it when a big landowner lent them money and took the land when they couldn’t pay back the loan. Babul earned about one dollar per day as a worker on his family’s old land. This left Chabekum with enough money to cook rice only once a day. Babul talked about starting a small business to improve the family’s standard of living and to help their children attend school for at least a few years. Chabekum heard of some Hindu women who obtained loans from an NGO to start small businesses, but was afraid to join. She had no education and no access to credit. Besides, Babul would be humiliated if people learned that his wife needed to work in a shop to supplement his income.

Other families had left for the capital city of Dhaka to work in one of the new textile plants that were popping up there. Unfortunately, Chabekum had
long since given up the idea of improving her life. She was used to the gnawing feeling of hunger, and her best hope was that something good might happen to one of her children.

You would probably need more information to have complete confidence in your diagnosis, but based on what you know, what do you see as the problems, and what treatment plan would you recommend? To spur your thinking, here are four ideas.

A The basic cause is poverty, which is in turn caused by the lack of access to functioning markets. Therefore, we should encourage Chabekum and/or Babul either to start a business by joining the loan group or to migrate to Dhaka to look for jobs.

B The basic cause is that Chabekum and Babul are oppressed and powerless, so we should help them organize protest movements that can fight against injustices like Babul’s land being taken away.

C The basic cause is that foreigners come in with all their strange ideas and their NGOs and mess things up. It would be best to leave Babul and Chabekum to work things out in the context of their own culture, their own beliefs, and their own ways of life.

D The basic cause is that Babul and Chabekum are both so beaten down that they cannot participate in making choices about their own future. We should help provide education, food, and health services, as well as protect their rights, so that they can participate and decide for themselves what will make their lives better.

You probably noted right away that this question is like those on annoying college tests that seem to offer several good answers for each question, all of which you could reasonably mark down as being the best one. You might also notice that some possible good answers are missing. Why, for example, are gender issues left unmentioned when they seem to be a big part of Chabekum’s distress? How about the role of faith? Maybe they are plagued by disempowering religious beliefs. But you are left to guess which answer your professor prefers. Personally, I hate when that happens. Those tests are supposed to be “objective,” but so much depends on one’s perspective.

In this case, the question and answer are not “objective” in the least, because the “best” answer would definitely depend on your professor’s views on development. If your professor were a modernizationist, the answer would be A; if a dependency theorist, then B; if from the postdevelopment school, C; and if a proponent of the capabilities approach, then D would be the best answer.
Four Contemporary Perspectives on International Development

These are the four secular perspectives that dominate the world of development thought and practice today. Each is thoughtful and reasonable, and each is associated with distinct ways of engaging in development work. To help us understand these views and prepare the way for thinking about development in a Christian context in chapters 2 and 3, I will summarize these four perspectives by highlighting key features of their particular ways of thinking. In each case, I personify the perspective with a character whose name may help you remember the big ideas. Get ready to meet Harvey Having, Libby Liberating, Betty Being, and Charles Choosing. Each person/perspective we encounter here is complex and multifaceted, with many surprising and subtle traits, but I will resist doing a deep psychoanalysis of each one. As you are introduced, ask yourself whether you like them and whether you would like to attend the same development school where they are professors.

Modernization—Meet Harvey Having

Harvey is an optimistic, cheerful, can-do sort of fellow from the modernization school. What really motivates him is a high standard of living and the freedom to enjoy life. When you have access to goods and services, you can do the things that bring joy to your life. If you have food, then you can eat; a boat, and you can go sailing; a book, and you can read; a car, and you can travel. Services are also important. Harvey can go to school to learn a productive skill, thus giving him the potential of higher income in the future. If his income allows it, Harvey can hire others to do things he would rather not do himself, like mow his lawn or do his taxes, thus giving him more time for leisure activities. Having goods and services raises the standard of living, extends life expectancy, and generally makes life more enjoyable.

For modernizationists there is a synergistic relationship between economic well-being and individual freedom, so much so that Harvey sometimes wonders which comes first and which is more important. Harvey will debate this with his friends, but the happy conclusion is that they generally go together.

Harvey grew up in the West where he and others like him have a lot more stuff than their ancestors did. How much more is measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Harvey looks back and sees how far he and his nation have come; he thinks that if poor countries want to change for the better, they must follow in the tracks of the West. Just as Harvey and his forebears worked their way to progress, poor countries can also overcome their poverty by expanding individual freedom, becoming more productive, and generating economic growth.