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# JESUS' ECONOMY

**A BIBLICAL VIEW OF POVERTY,  
THE CURRENCY OF LOVE,  
AND A PATTERN FOR LASTING CHANGE**

**JOHN D. BARRY**



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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## **JESUS' ECONOMY:**

*A Biblical View of Poverty, the Currency of Love, and a Pattern for Lasting Change*

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**100% of author's proceeds go to the nonprofit  
Jesus' Economy, to fuel the movement of creating jobs  
and churches in the developing world.**



*Creating jobs and churches*

**[www.jesuseconomy.org](http://www.jesuseconomy.org)**

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**Jesus' Economy** is an innovative 501(c)(3) non-profit, founded in 2012. We believe that eliminating poverty in our world should happen at both the physical and spiritual level. That's why we create holistic change in every partner community by simultaneously creating jobs, planting churches, and meeting basic needs. On [JesusEconomy.org](http://JesusEconomy.org), you can shop fair trade from hundreds of artisans around the world, and give to the cause of your choice, such as church planting, empowering women, or providing clean water. 100% of your giving goes directly to your cause, every time.

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**To all who hope to make the world a better place.**

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# PROLOGUE: OPPORTUNITIES LIKE NEVER BEFORE



Jesus' economy is based on self-sacrifice. Jesus' currency is love.  
This idea changed my entire life.



In 2012, my wife, Kalene, and I founded the international nonprofit Jesus' Economy, dedicated to creating jobs and churches in the developing world. While we were studying the theory behind economic development strategies and spreading the vision to others, we felt God calling us to a deeper understanding of truly *living* the message. After years of prayer, we sold our house and nearly everything we owned, dedicating ourselves fully to spreading the gospel and alleviating poverty.

My story isn't unique. Each of us is called, in some way, to an equally radical life change: to complete mental and spiritual transformation in Christ. According to Paul the apostle, we are to "die to self" and put on our new selves in the likeness of God. (See Ephesians 4:17–31.)

This book is about living your story of self-sacrifice for the sake of the poor and hurting in the world and those yet to hear the name of Jesus. It is about renewing our lives in Christ.



All over the world, even in our own neighborhoods, there are people in need, both physically and spiritually. Jesus wants us to be a part of changing this reality. But *how* can we do that?

It was while sitting in front of theological books and the biblical text in its original languages that I gained a head-knowledge of the answers. But it was while working with the impoverished that I realized what those answers *really* meant.

The stories in this book do not come from full-time ministry. While writing this book, I had a full-time job as a chief editor and publisher for Logos Bible Software (now Faithlife Corporation), overseeing their original content publishing efforts. I was practicing ministry on the side of my day gig: as a chapel minister and treasurer for a homeless rescue shelter, as the president of a church plant, and eventually as the CEO and founder of the nonprofit Jesus' Economy. That's why I know the methods in this book are for all of us, no matter our vocation or calling. I have seen people transform lives at kitchen tables, in hospitals, on the street, in remote villages, on the Internet, in government offices, and anywhere else God has called them to be. We are missionaries wherever we are, no matter our title.

And while I certainly haven't "arrived" spiritually, following Jesus into the unknown has meant everything to me. I want you to experience the wonder and blessing of following Jesus in a similar way. I want you to experience the authentic and biblical Jesus who is deeply challenging. I want you to meet the Jesus who calls us to live as part of an entirely different economy, one based on self-sacrifice.

Jesus gave up His life so that we can be resurrected with Him. Now, He calls us to do the same: give of ourselves for the impoverished, the marginalized, and the outsider; spread His message of love, freedom from sin, and the power to live a better life.

It is through God's leading that we are able to accomplish this work.

God provides the resources we need to bring the gospel to the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the gifts He gives. This means that all of our resources, time, and energy are ultimately a gift from God—a gift to be shared with others.



I wrote this book because, as a publisher and as a minister, I saw a gap in the theology of poverty alleviation. I realized that the average

American doesn't know what the Bible *really* says about poverty—or how Jesus approached it—and furthermore doesn't know how to actually go about alleviating poverty in their own lives and in the lives of others.

If you desire to show true compassion to the impoverished—and are ready to realize the ways you are impoverished too—this book is for you. If you want to see Jesus completely revolutionize the way you approach loving Him and others, this book is for you. If you want to see every last person on the planet experience the power of the resurrected Christ in every part of their life, you're about to learn how—and it starts with you.

Faith in action is what it is all about. No matter what your cultural background or context, Jesus' economy has implications for you. While the practical advice I offer has in view my particular context of the United States and Canada, the pattern I propose is intended to be applicable globally. This global application has been confirmed by Christian leaders from nearly every continent who have graciously read this book and suggested it be utilized in their contexts.

*Join me and other Christians around the globe in learning to live Jesus' economy. Together in Christ, we can transform our world.*

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# **PART ONE**

The problem of poverty. How our world works.

And envisioning a better reality.

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# YELLOW PAPER CROWNS



In a remote village in Bihar, India, I sat in a room surrounded by children wearing yellow paper crowns. They were princes and princesses in God's kingdom, according to the missionaries who were speaking that day.

I sat in the corner and tried to imagine what these kids were thinking. How could they believe that they were *chosen* or *royalty*, that they were truly loved by God, when the rest of their world told them a different narrative?

They were going home to brick-and-mud houses with dung stuck on the wall to dry and be used for fuel. They had been abandoned by their own government—left without clean water until a partner organization of the nonprofit Jesus' Economy drilled a well for their village. Some had been orphaned by parents who were forced to go elsewhere for work. Yet here they were, hearing the name of Jesus for the very first time and fully accepting that they were created in the image of God. That God *loved* and *chose* them. (See Genesis 1:26–27; John 3:16; Ephesians 1:4–5.)

In that moment, a sense of responsibility overwhelmed me. I realized that loving these children and their families meant not just giving them *part* of the good news of Jesus, but *all of it*—full spiritual and physical renewal. I could no longer just address their physical poverty through aid and relief or just their spiritual poverty through preaching the gospel. The two are intimately connected and must work together to bring about real change.

It took me years of training—studying how Jesus looks at the world—to begin to understand how to accomplish this. It's a learning process I'm still in (and always will be). As a Christian, you never really arrive. You're

always in process, constantly learning to live by the terms of the living God. Yet, through Christ, we can accomplish everything He calls us to do.

In Bihar, there are over 101 million people who have *never* heard the name of Jesus—a practically unreached people group. But through the meeting of physical *and* spiritual needs, together as one *holistic* plan, things are changing.

I met a man in Bihar who had lived his entire life as a gang leader. An indigenous church planter had a chance encounter with him and shared about the freedom and love of Jesus. The gang leader was intrigued. His life felt so dark and empty, and local religion couldn't offer any hope for what he was feeling and experiencing. Before long, he decided to believe in Jesus. It changed his entire life. He went out into a field and buried his gun and knife. He dedicated his life to co-laboring for Jesus—working manual labor and spreading the word about Jesus whenever possible.

This story reminds me of Isaiah 2:4:

[God] shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (ESV)

This is the power and liberty of the gospel that is going forth around the world. Will you join in the movement?

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# WHAT DOES A BETTER WORLD LOOK LIKE TO YOU?



What does a better world look like to you? Truly loving people starts with prayer and discernment—learning what a better world looks like to God.

Seeing things from God’s perspective is a *process*. It is the process of imagining what isn’t yet, but should be. When the author of Hebrews describes faith, this sort of language is used: “Now faith is the assurance of *things hoped for*, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 ESV). Hope itself rests firmly on what Jesus *has* accomplished and *will accomplish* in our world. This hope, when coupled with compassion and generosity, will produce true change.

If the future actually could look different than the trajectory humanity is currently on, what would you want it to look like?

I desire to see poverty alleviated, so that people can live freely and with purpose—so that they can accomplish good for others in the world. I long for Jesus to become a major part of people’s lives, because I know the difference He has made in my life and the lives of others. I want to watch transformation in Christ. I want to see entire communities renewed.

I believe that we have the opportunities and capabilities today to make this happen. I believe that Christ has given us—all of humanity—the great gift of renewal through Him. We can roll out a strategy for community development that doesn’t change just *one part* of a person’s life, but their *whole* life. We, collectively, can overcome spiritual and physical poverty.

### ***Because...Hope Is Miraculous***

The developing world is full of people with tenacity and strength who lack the resources to make their dreams reality. They need hope and someone to empower them to realize their dreams (and to dream with them). They need to see peace brought to their communities and to experience faith that can overcome adversity.

The incredible thing about offering someone hope is that doing so also offers you hope. It makes you believe in what the person you're empowering has yet to see. It changes the way you feel about the state of that person's life and causes you to think about what hope God has in store for you. It gives you a small glimpse of God's eternal perspective—you briefly see the connections He does: how He has used you to help someone else, and how He will likely use someone else to help you.

When we give of our time, money, or resources, we have the opportunity to watch Jesus' work in the world.

I believe that Jesus—as the hope spoken of in Hebrews 11:1—has great opportunities in store for our generation. It is His work through the Spirit that the whole world is anticipating, whether we realize it or not.

### ***Because...Jesus Is Working Even Now***

It is Jesus' second coming that we wait for. But it is His work *now* that we live for. As Christians, we are convicted that Jesus was resurrected from death and is working even today. Sadly, many people wait a lifetime for the right opportunity to partner with Him.

God is presenting us with life-changing opportunities right now. If we will simply look around, we will see them. If we will pray earnestly, we will recognize how awesome God is and how much work He is doing at this very moment.

God wants to use you for great things. Today is the day you can bring hope to those in need. Today is the day you can acknowledge that hope is something all people deserve. Hope is something we can bring to others in the name of Jesus—it ignites the power to dream.

What does a better world look like to you? What will you do to make your vision for a better world a reality?

# SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL POVERTY—IT'S ALL CONNECTED



Poverty is the outward symptom of a condition that has spread in societies throughout time. It might have been inflicted on you, or you might be a perpetrator of it, but the root cause is still the same: distance from God and His plan for our world.

The further we distance ourselves from God, the more we *forget*. We forget compassion for humanity. We forget to look out for others in addition to ourselves. We forget how broken we truly are. And it all began on the day sin entered the world and our relationship with God, the source of abundance and life, was broken. (See Genesis 3.)

Our physical poverty is easiest to observe: a lack of jobs, a lack of basic needs being met, corrupt and unstable societies, violence, a lack of access to education, women being viewed as lower than men, and similar maladies.

Our spiritual poverty is equally observable yet rarely addressed outside of Christian circles. Think of the Lord's Prayer, which we often recite in church, and which is based on Matthew 6 and Luke 11. Here's a close translation to the original Greek of Matthew 6:12: "Forgive us our *debts*, as we also forgive *our debtors*." The Greek of Luke 11:4 renders the same line this way: "Forgive us *our sins*, for also we ourselves forgive anyone *indebted* to us." Now think of a few common renderings of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our *sins*, as we forgive those who have *sinned against us*," or "Forgive us our *trespasses*, as we forgive those who have *trespassed against us*." We naturally see the wrongs inside ourselves as a type of spiritual debt. It's spiritual poverty. And only Jesus can make that right.

This is why Paul says:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses..., God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

(Colossians 2:13–14 ESV)

The debt we owe, Jesus has paid. On the cross, our spiritual debt has been forgiven.

Yet, we all know that we continue to do wrong against God and other people. We all know that there are parts of us that have not been fully transformed by God. This is our ongoing spiritual poverty that still needs to change. The biblical vision is that we would be open to God working in us, allowing Him to transform us.

The realization of our own spiritual and physical poverty should give us deep compassion for those who live both without the knowledge of Jesus and without the means for sustainable survival. While we can never hope to fully solve these problems until Christ returns (see, for example, Matthew 26:11), we must dedicate ourselves to the work until He comes.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John D. Barry is a nonprofit CEO, Bible scholar, and pastor. After a career in Christian publishing and Bible software, John and his wife, Kalene, sold their house and nearly everything they owned to dedicate their lives to spreading the gospel and empowering the impoverished. They serve with Jesus' Economy, an innovative nonprofit creating jobs and churches in the developing world. John and Kalene also serve as missionaries with Resurrect Church Movement, the domestic division of Jesus' Economy, equipping U.S. churches to effectively alleviate poverty and bring people to Jesus. John is the general editor of the highly acclaimed *Faithlife Study Bible* and *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, which are used by over one million people, and the author or editor of thirty books, including the popular daily devotional *Connect the Testaments* and the multimedia *DIY Bible Study*. John formerly served as founding publisher of Lexham Press, an imprint of Faithlife Corporation / Logos Bible Software, and as the editor-in-chief of *Bible Study Magazine*, a product he launched.

In a primarily unchurched area of the U.S., John has worked extensively with the homeless, helped plant a church, and started a ministry. Internationally, John has initiated indigenous church planting efforts and the drilling of water wells, and founded an online fair trade marketplace (to empower the impoverished). He is a pastor in the Pacific Northwest and speaks internationally on engaging the Bible, poverty, and spreading the gospel.

To book John for a speaking engagement  
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