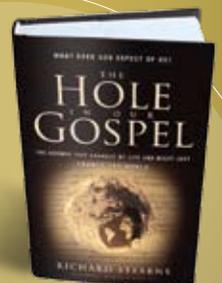




# *The* HOLE *in* OUR GOSPEL

GROUP  
STUDY  
GUIDE

Based on  
the book by  
Rich Stearns,  
president of  
WorldVision U.S.



Based on the book THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL, published in 2009 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Available at bookstores everywhere and at [www.theholeinourgospel.com](http://www.theholeinourgospel.com).

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EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: Milana McLead  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Jane Sutton-Redner  
PROJECT EDITOR: Laurie Delgatto  
AUTHOR: Brittany Peters  
COPYEDITOR: Penny Bonnar  
DESIGN: Journey Group, Inc.

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*The* HOLE *in Our*  
GOSPEL

GROUP  
STUDY  
GUIDE

# How to USE THIS STUDY

**T**he *Hole in Our Gospel Group Study Guide* includes six sessions designed for small groups as well as individuals wishing to explore the question, “What does God expect of us?” Throughout the study you will read excerpts from *The Hole in Our Gospel*, written by Richard (Rich) Stearns, the president of World Vision in the United States. Although the study guide does not require reading the book, it can serve as a helpful companion to the study.

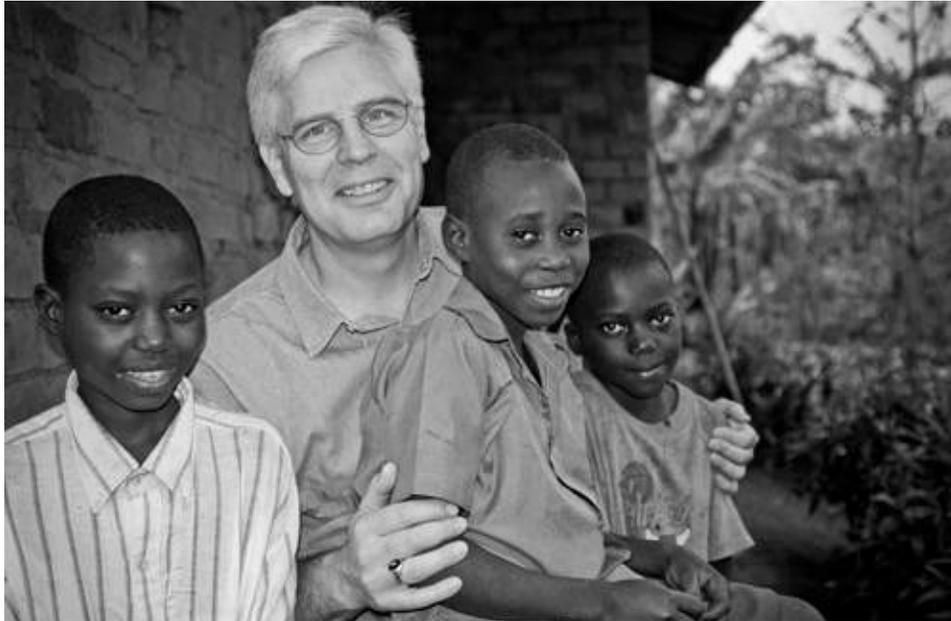
## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- a Bible
- a pen or pencil

## LEADING THIS STUDY

- If you are leading a group study, read the Scripture passages as a group, read the stories and reflections aloud, and then take some quiet time for the group to reflect on (and perhaps journal) the discussion questions.
- Lead a group discussion. You may choose to discuss all the questions or a few, while suggesting that the participants reflect on the others throughout the week.
- Conclude by discussing action steps and inviting the group members to choose a step for the upcoming week.
- End your time together in prayer.
- Remind the participants that the study also provides additional biblical passages for reading, studying, and prayer throughout the week.
- Before starting each new session, check in with the group members about their experiences during the week as they engaged in Scripture, prayer, and action.

# WEEK ONE



Rich in Uganda with Richard (center) and his brothers, who were orphaned by AIDS.

Karen Homer/World Vision 1998

## Week 1:

BASED ON

*THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL: PROLOGUE*



### FACT

Every day, more than 6,800 people are newly infected with HIV and more than 5,700 die from the disease; that equals 2.5 million new infections per year and 2 million deaths. Perhaps the most disturbing fact of all is that AIDS has now left 15 million children behind as orphans. (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 148)



### SCRIPTURE | JAMES 2:14-26

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

## WEEK ONE

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.



### RICHARD’S STORY

*Excerpt from The Hole in Our Gospel* by Rich Stearns

His name was Richard, the same as mine. I sat inside his meager thatch hut, listening to his story, told through the tears of an orphan whose parents had died of AIDS. At 13, Richard was trying to raise his two younger brothers by himself in this small shack with no running water, electricity, or even beds to sleep in. There were no adults in their lives—no one to care for them, feed them, love them, or teach them how to become men. There was no one to hug them either, or to tuck them in at night. Other than his siblings, Richard was alone, as no child should be. I try to picture my own children abandoned in this kind of deprivation, fending for themselves without parents to protect them, and I cannot.

I didn’t want to be there. I wasn’t supposed to be there, so far out of my comfort zone—not in that place where orphaned children live by themselves in their agony. There, poverty, disease, and squalor had eyes and faces that stared back, and I had to see and smell and touch the pain of the poor. That particular district, Rakai, is believed to be ground zero for the Ugandan AIDS pandemic. There, the deadly virus has stalked its victims in the dark for decades. Sweat trickled down my face as I sat awkwardly with Richard and his brothers while a film crew captured every tear—mine and theirs.

I much preferred living in my bubble, the one that, until that moment, had safely contained my life, family, and career. It kept difficult things like this out, insulating me from anything too raw or upsetting. When such things intruded, as they rarely did, a channel could be changed, a newspaper page turned, or a check written to

keep the poor at a safe distance. But not in Rakai. There, “such things” had faces and names—even my name, Richard.

Not 60 days earlier I had been CEO of Lenox, America’s finest tableware company, producing and selling luxury goods to those who could afford them. I lived with my wife and five children in a 10-bedroom house on five acres just outside of Philadelphia. I drove a Jaguar to work every day, and

*“I much preferred living  
in my bubble, the one  
that, until that moment,  
had safely contained my  
life, family, and career.”*

# WEEK ONE

my business travel took me to places such as Paris, Tokyo, London, and Florence. I flew first-class and stayed in the best hotels. I was respected in my community, attended a venerable suburban church, and sat on the board of my kids' Christian school. I was one of the good guys—you might say a “poster child” for the successful Christian life. I had never heard of Rakai, the place where my bubble would burst. But in just 60 days, God turned my life inside out, and it would never be the same ...

Two crude piles of stones just outside the door mark the graves of Richard's parents. It disturbs me that he must walk past them every day. He and his brothers must have watched first their father and then their mother die slow and horrible deaths. I wondered if the boys were the ones who fed them and bathed them in their last days. Whatever the case, Richard, a child himself, is now the head of his household.

Child-headed household, words never meant to be strung together. I tried to wrap my mind around this new phrase, one that describes not only Richard's plight but that of tens of thousands, even millions more. I'm told that there are 60,000 orphans just in Rakai, 12 million orphans due to AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. How can this be true? Awkwardly I asked Richard what he hopes to be when he grows up, a ridiculous question to ask a child who has lost his childhood. “A doctor,” he said, “so I can help people who have the disease.”

“Do you have a Bible?” I asked. He ran to the other room and returned with his treasured book with gold-gilt pages. “Can you read it?”

“I love to read the book of John, because it says that Jesus loves the children.”

This overwhelmed me, and my tears started to flow. Forgive me, Lord, forgive me. I didn't know. But I did know. I knew about poverty and suffering in the world. I was aware that children die daily from starvation and lack of clean water. I also knew about AIDS and the orphans it leaves behind, but I kept these things outside of my insulating bubble and looked the other way.

Yet this was to be the moment that would ever after define me. Rakai was what God wanted me to see. My sadness that day was replaced by repentance. Despite what the Bible had told me so clearly, I had turned a blind eye to the poor. Now my heart was filled with anger, first at myself, and then toward the world. Why wasn't Richard's story being told? The media overflowed with celebrity dramas, stock market updates, and Bill Clinton's impending impeachment hearings. But where were the headlines and magazine covers about Africa? Twelve million orphans, and no one noticed? But what sickened me most was this question: Where was the Church? Indeed, where were the followers of Jesus Christ in the midst of perhaps the greatest humanitarian crisis of our time? Surely the Church should have been caring for these “orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27). Shouldn't the pulpits across America have flamed with exhortations to rush to the front lines of compassion? Shouldn't they be flaming today? Shouldn't churches be reaching out to care for children in such desperate need? How could the great tragedy of these orphans get drowned out by choruses of praise music in hundreds of thousands of churches across our country? (pp. 7-11)

# WEEK ONE



## REFLECTIONS

“Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.”

—*Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision* (p. 9)

“We are the carriers of the gospel—the good news that was meant to change the world. Belief is not enough. Worship is not enough. Personal morality is not enough. And Christian community is not enough. God has always demanded more. When we committed ourselves to following Christ, we also committed to living our lives in such a way that a watching world would catch a glimpse of God’s character—His love, justice, and mercy—through our words, actions, and behavior. ‘We are . . . Christ’s ambassadors,’ wrote the apostle Paul, ‘as though God were making his appeal through us’ (2 Cor. 5:20). God chose us to be His representatives. He called us to go out, to proclaim the ‘good news’—to be the ‘good news’—and to change the world. Living out our faith privately was never meant to be an option.”

—*Rich Stearns* (p. 3)



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about a time or place that completely overwhelmed you and forced you to think about life differently. Share that experience.
2. Rich talks about his privileged life at home and how this “bubble” he lived in insulated him from “anything too raw or upsetting.” How do you relate to his desire to keep “the poor at a safe distance”? What fears perpetuate this desire?
3. Do you believe that faith without deeds is dead? Why or why not? How would you describe faith devoid of actions? How would you describe deeds without faith? How does your life reflect the reality that true faith is accompanied by action?
4. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God,— not by works, so that no one can boast.” How does this verse complement or contradict James 2? Some would say that this verse has been used by Christians to justify faith as simply being a state of mind or a one-time prayer. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
5. Were you surprised to learn that there are so many children orphaned by AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa? Does this fact motivate you to do something? If so, what?
6. What actions has your church or community taken to address the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world? Is there something more they should be doing? If so, what?
7. Re-read the quote by Bob Pierce. Has this ever been the cry of your heart? What would it feel like to have your heart broken by the things that break God’s heart?

# WEEK ONE

8. What do you think it means to be an ambassador for Christ? Is being an ambassador something that you do or something that you are? Explain your answer. In what ways have you been an ambassador of Christ?



## TAKE ACTION

This week, look for ways to put your faith into action. Every day there are thousands of opportunities to reflect God's love. Maybe you offer to watch your neighbor's children for the afternoon, volunteer at a local shelter, call someone you know who needs a friend, advocate for a child in need, or donate money to an organization that cares for the poor. The goal is to become transformed people whose actions are a result of faith rather than trying to prove something to God or to the world. It is normal to feel outside your comfort zone in your acts of compassion, but as you spend time with God and trust in His love, action will begin to naturally flow out of your faith.

Keep a journal of your efforts, and consider sharing your experiences with your study group or friends. You can also contribute your story on [www.theholeinourgospel.com](http://www.theholeinourgospel.com)—look for the section called “The Buzz.”



## CHALLENGE

Skip a weekly trip to the grocery store and donate the money saved to a local food bank. During that week, eat only what is left in the pantry or fridge. By the end of the week, choices are often limited and your family may get a feel for what it's like to have few food choices.



## SCRIPTURE FOR FURTHER STUDY

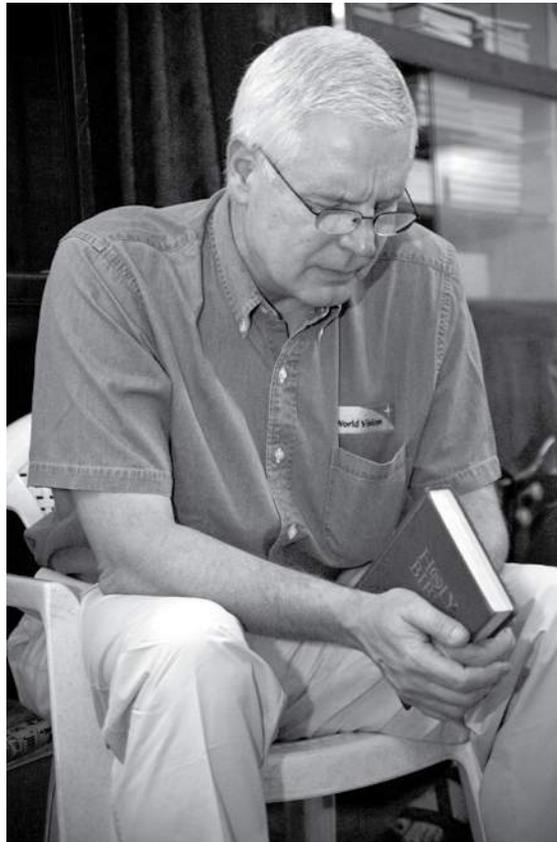
- James 1:22–27
- Job 29:11–17
- 2 Corinthians 5:16–21
- Luke 4:14–21
- 1 Chronicles 29:11–16
- Luke 12:32–34



## PRAYER

Pray for the Ugandan orphan, Richard, and all those who share his story. Ask God for wisdom and obedience in following His call to care for orphans and widows. Maybe you need to repent for turning a blind eye to the poor. Maybe you need to ask God to break your heart with the things that break His heart. This prayer of asking God to break your heart should not be taken lightly; it may take you places far beyond your comfort zone, but take heart, for Christ has gone ahead of you.

## WEEK TWO



Rich in prayer  
with World Vision  
staff in India.

Andrea Peier/World Vision 2007

## Week 2:

BASED ON

*THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL: THE HOLE IN THE WHOLE*



### FACT

Almost one in seven worldwide, 854 million people, do not have enough food to sustain them. This makes hunger/malnutrition the number one risk to health globally, greater than AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined. About 25,000 people die each day of hunger or related causes—9 million people per year. (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 135)



### SCRIPTURE | LUKE 9:18–27

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

## WEEK TWO

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”



### A COWARD FOR GOD

*Excerpt from The Hole in Our Gospel by Rich Stearns*

Let me take you back a few years to help you understand how this luxury-goods CEO ended up in the jungles of Uganda in the first place. One of the lowest points in my life was a Friday afternoon in Seattle. After a nine-month search, the WorldVision board of directors had selected me and offered me the opportunity to become WorldVision’s U.S.-based president. I had flown to Seattle with my wife and my teenage son, Andy, to meet the key leaders, learn about the challenges of the job, and decide whether I would accept the board’s invitation. I had not sought this position. In fact, I had prayed that God would send someone *else* to do it—anyone but me. Yet the board (and presumably God) had inexplicably called *me*, and this was the hour of decision.

I wish I could tell you that I accepted this call with a sense of spiritual excitement and passion to help the broken people of our world. I’d like to say that I boldly prayed, “Here I am, Lord. Send me”—that I was eager to seize the opportunity to serve. But that would be a lie.

That Friday, at the end of two days of meetings and interviews with WorldVision’s top leaders, I had sunk deeper and deeper into a spiritual and emotional funk. I had been bombarded with wrenching stories of human suffering, confronted with the considerable challenges that would face the new president, and introduced to a language full of jargon and acronyms I didn’t even understand. Surely this was a mistake. What did I know about any of this? After all, I was a guy who had spent the last 11 years selling dishes—expensive ones. There had to be someone better qualified than me.

Returning to Reneé and Andy that afternoon, I was at the end of my emotional and spiritual rope. I had run out of time, and now I had a decision to make. Would I accept the board’s invitation, leave my 23-year career behind, and move my wife and five kids across the country, or would I turn down the job and stay at Lenox? This was one of those life decisions that changes everything, and I didn’t want to make it. I was afraid. When Reneé asked how the day had gone, I said I couldn’t talk about it just yet; I needed

## WEEK TWO

to rest and be alone. I was an emotional basket case. And so, at 4 p.m., I slipped into my pajamas, crawled into bed, pulled the covers over my head, and began to weep and pray, crying out to God to “take this cup” from me. It was pretty pathetic. . .

During my “dark night of the soul”—caused by a call from WorldVision—I began reading my Bible with greater intensity. But when I came to Matthew 19 and the story of the rich young ruler, I wanted to run for the scissors and cut it out of my Bible. You remember the scene. A man variously described in three different gospel accounts as young, rich, and a ruler approached Jesus with this question: “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” (v. 16) Now, as I read this passage, I saw myself in this man. He was young and prosperous. He was likely held in esteem by his peers and his community. He seemed to exemplify the epitome of Jewish respectability. I imagined that he was successful in everything he did, that he went to temple regularly, tithed his income, observed all the holy days and feasts, and read his Torah. He had worked the whole system and had ended up at the top. That was me in spades. Everyone who knew me would have said that I was a poster boy for the successful Christian life—church every Sunday, great marriage, five attractive (and above-average) kids, a corporate CEO with a Bible on his desk, a faithful supporter of Christian causes—the whole Christian enchilada. So I could really relate to this guy’s frame of mind. I sometimes imagine that he might have actually approached Jesus that day filled with a bit of pride, asking his question and expecting a nice pat on the back, perhaps thinking Jesus would point to him in front of the crowd and say, “This, my friends, is exactly the kind of follower I am looking for.” But Jesus’ reply was rather disappointing: “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments” (v. 17).

*“Jesus had looked  
into the man’s soul  
and diagnosed the  
condition of his heart.”*

That was not what the man had wanted to hear. So, trying to pin Jesus down a bit more, he asked, “Which ones?” (v. 18)

Jesus’ reply was conventional: “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 18).

The young man now seemed more pleased. “All these I have kept,” he said (v. 20). In other words, *Check me out, Jesus. Check out my reputation. Ask my rabbi. You’ll find that I have got all these bases covered.* Now, as I see it, this is where the young man should have stopped—no harm, no foul. He should have just said thank you to Jesus, shaken His hand, and walked away. But no, he decided to push it just a little further. “What do I still lack?” (Translation: *Come on, Rabbi, this is too easy. Give me a tougher test.*)

And this is when Jesus nailed him. “One thing you lack,” he told the self-righteous young man. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21).

*Whoa, Jesus, time out! Can you imagine what must have been going through the young man’s mind just then? Be serious, Jesus. Isn’t that a tad extreme? I’ve worked pretty hard to get where I am, and I have obligations. Sell everything I have and give it away? I can’t just pick up and leave. I’ve got a wife and kids to support, workers that depend on me, and some big financial deals that are pending—I own a lot of land here. Let’s not be too radical about all of this. Aren’t You taking this a little too far? I tell You what: maybe I could just write a little bigger check to help the poor. . .*

But Jesus’ words hung in the air: “One thing you lack . . . Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor . . . Then come, follow me.” Devastating. Jesus had looked into the man’s soul and diagnosed the condition of his heart. You see, on the outside he was doing all the right things, but on the inside his heart was divided. His possessions and his position were competing with God for primacy. He had surrendered

## WEEK TWO

his outward behavior to God, but his commitment to Him was not absolute. He had not made a total surrender of self; he had not “bet the farm.” I don’t believe Jesus was saying that all of us have to sell everything we have and give it to the poor. No, Jesus was looking into the heart of this particular young man, and He saw that he had not relinquished his life unconditionally. For him, his status and stuff had become idols. Most troubling of all was the very next line in Matthew’s account. “When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth” (19:22). He couldn’t do it. At the moment of decision, he simply could not surrender everything. He turned his back on Jesus and walked away.

*Are you willing to be open to God’s will for your life?* That was the question Rob asked me, quite simply, but it cut much deeper than that. Jesus wanted everything; He always has. *You lack one thing, Rich. Sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.* Quitting my job, selling my house, and moving my family to serve at World Vision was uncomfortably equivalent to what Jesus had asked of this other rich young man.

Can you see why I wanted to run for the scissors when I read this story in the Bible? (pp.25-26, 36-38)



## MEDITATIONS

“The true gospel is a call to self-denial. It is not a call to self-fulfillment.”

—John MacArthur (p. 25)

“When my friend Jim Wallis was a seminary student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School outside of Chicago, he and some of his classmates did a little experiment. They went through all 66 books of the Bible and underlined every passage and verse that dealt with poverty, wealth, justice, and oppression. Then, one of Jim’s fellow students took a pair of scissors and physically cut every one of those verses out of the Bible. The result was a volume in tatters that barely held together. Beginning with the Mosaic books, through the books of history, the Psalms and Proverbs, and the Major and Minor Prophets, to the four Gospels, the book of Acts, the Epistles and into Revelation, so central were these themes to Scripture that the resulting Bible was in shambles. (According to *The Poverty and Justice Bible*, there are almost 2,000 verses in Scripture that deal with poverty and justice.) When Jim would speak on these issues, he would hold his ragged book in the air and proclaim, ‘Brothers and sisters, this is our American Bible; it is full of holes. Each one of us might as well take our Bibles, a pair of scissors, and begin cutting out all the Scriptures we pay no attention to, all the biblical texts that we just ignore.’ Jim’s Bible was literally full of holes.”

—Rich Stearns (pp. 23-24)



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The passage in Luke 9 tells us that in order to follow Christ, we must deny ourselves and pick up our cross daily. What are some tangible ways that you could deny yourself today, this week?
2. What does it mean to you to “pick up your cross”? What are the impediments to carrying “a cross,” personally or with the people around you?

## WEEK TWO

3. Luke 9 also says that “whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” What do you think Christ meant by this? What are some ways that you try to “save your life”?
4. How do you make daily decisions? What would happen if you tried to make decisions based on more than what’s easy or what you want: for example, comfortable vs. uncomfortable, God’s will vs. my will, for myself vs. for others?
5. Rich discusses his resistant journey in giving up his “life of luxury” as the CEO of Lenox and following God’s prompting to become the president of World Vision. Describe times in your own life when you have been resistant to God’s leading. What are some of your fears associated with following God’s lead? How might you overcome them?
6. Rich talks about the story of the rich young ruler and how he wanted to cut this passage out of his Bible. Which Scripture passages have you wished would be eliminated from the Bible? Why?
7. What areas in your own life might God point to and say, “One thing you lack”? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to God?
8. Regarding John MacArthur’s quote, how is the gospel message a call to self-denial? What are ways in which the gospel has been distorted to be all about self-fulfillment?
9. What do you think about Jim Wallis and his seminary friends cutting out every verse in the Bible having to do with poverty, wealth, justice and oppression? When reading these Scripture passages, what might you do to help yourself take them more seriously?



### TAKE ACTION

Think of one or two passages found in the Bible that you would rather skip over and leave behind. Reflect on reasons why you might be resistant to these passages and write those reasons down. Next, copy each passage onto separate note cards. Place them in areas that you will look at often (car dashboard, TV, purse, front door, bathroom mirror, dinner table). This week, be intentional in doing what you have been resisting. Maybe you need to love someone who is your enemy, or do something nice for someone who has hurt you, or let go of finances that you hold onto tightly. Do not engage in these acts to be seen or praised but only in obedience to God and to glorify His name. Write down your reflections throughout the week as you follow God’s lead.



### CHALLENGE

Next time someone asks you for spare change, cheerfully give away all the money you are carrying.

## WEEK TWO



### SCRIPTURE FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Matthew 5:3–10
- 2 Corinthians 9:13
- Galatians 1:6–7
- Mark 10:17–31
- 1 Corinthians 1:27
- Mark 4:1–20



### PRAYER

Ask God to show you the areas of your life that He wants you to surrender to Him. With palms open, imagine the things that you wish to offer up to Jesus as a form of surrender. These could be tangible or intangible: your job, vanity, family members, insecurities. Ask the Lord to place in your now-empty hands what He so much wants to give you—peace, love, joy. Listen to His voice as you begin to loosen the grip on your “stuff” and turn your attention toward Him. Imagine the symbolic act of taking up your cross now that you are appropriately equipped with what you need to follow where He leads. Confess to God any resistance you may have in surrendering your life to Him. Rest in the promise that God will be with you wherever you go.

## WEEK THREE



Michael and Joseph (front, right) at World Vision's Children of War Center in Gulu, Uganda.

Jon Warren/World Vision 2006

# Week 3:

BASED ON

*THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL: THE HOLE GETS DEEPER*



## FACT

Today there are 42 different conflicts being waged across the world. The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history, and its war casualties were three times greater than those of the previous 500 years combined. The ongoing war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has taken more than 5 million lives, with more than 45,000 people dying each month. (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 157)



## SCRIPTURE | MATTHEW 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your

## WEEK THREE

inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”



## A MOST DISTRESSING DISGUISE

*Excerpt from The Hole in Our Gospel by Rich Stearns*

We gathered together in a group of about 60—me, my wife, and my daughter Hannah, along with a few WorldVision Uganda staff and perhaps 40 children of various ages. We were waiting for them to arrive, planning to greet them with songs and celebration. We had been told they would arrive that morning.

As the metal gates creaked open, our anticipation grew—they were here. The SUV slowly pulled in, inched its way toward us, and finally came to a stop. Then the doors opened, and two teenage boys tentatively stepped out to face the crowd. I could see both fear and confusion on their faces—they clearly weren’t expecting this kind of welcome, not for two mass murderers.

I don’t think I’ve ever been to a place as spiritually dark as Gulu, in northern Uganda. Gulu is the epicenter of more than 20 years of violent atrocities committed by the so-called Lord’s Resistance Army and its leader, Joseph Kony, a monster who has declared himself to be the son of God. If Satan is alive and manifesting himself in our world, he is surely present in this cultish and brutal group whose trademark was the kidnapping of children who are subsequently forced at gunpoint to commit murder, rape, and even acts of cannibalism. During his reign of terror, it is believed that Kony has kidnapped more than 38,000 children, killing some and forcing the rest to become killers themselves by conscripting them into the LRA as child soldiers. As a part of their brutal indoctrination, the

## WEEK THREE

children are often forced to hack their own brothers or sisters to death with a machete—because bullets are too precious to waste—and then to drink the blood of those they have killed. The girls, often just 12 or 13, are gang-raped and forced to become sex slaves and “wives” to the rebel commanders. As a result of the LRA’s grisly raids over two decades, some 1.5 million people have been driven from their land and forced to live in camps for internally displaced persons in and around Gulu. It was in this unlikely backdrop that I witnessed the awesome power of the gospel that has become so tame to us in America.

For more than a decade, WorldVision’s Children of War Center has worked to rehabilitate and restore the children who are rescued or manage to escape from the LRA rebels. These are children with unimaginable spiritual, psychological, and emotional wounds, kids who are typically feared as monsters and rejected by the very communities they once came from because of what they have been forced to do. Sometimes their own parents do not want them back; their childhoods have been stolen from them and their very souls desecrated by horror after horror. Intense spiritual and emotional counseling, forgiveness and reconciliation, and even job skills training have been provided to thousands of these damaged children. The two boys entering the compound that day had also been subjected to the depredations of their own captivity by the LRA. They, too, had been forced to kill and maim.

Their eyes were hollow and vacant—eyes that had seen unspeakable things. Their souls seemed dead. I could see no life in them. *Jesus in His most distressing disguise.* They had been captured by the Ugandan army, and now they were being brought to WorldVision for help, for redemption, for healing. They had names, Michael and Joseph. Michael’s left arm was withered, the result of a gunshot wound sustained before he was fully grown, in some past firefight. The LRA warned their child soldiers that they would be murdered by their own people if they ever tried to go home. They were even told that if they were taken to the Children of War Center run by WorldVision, they would be poisoned—or worse. That is why these boys were terrified that day, stepping out of the car.

The 40 other “children of war”—damaged souls all—surrounded them and began singing and clapping joyfully. These songs of praise to God, anthems of healing and forgiveness, were more beautiful than any choir of angels. Michael and Joseph were dumbstruck at this welcome, so different from what they had expected. They began to see faces they knew, other kids who had escaped—who had, like them, also known the brutal hand of the LRA and had murdered at their command. Some spark of light began to return to their hollow eyes.

Hesitant smiles slowly turned up the corners of their mouths, as high fives and hugs were offered by this one and that. Soon, all 50 of us poured into the makeshift chapel of corrugated tin and rough wooden benches in the compound. A spontaneous worship service erupted as the songs of God’s healing forgiveness and power were sung over and over again. *Welcome home, welcome home, Michael and Joseph. You are home now.* The good news—the glorious, life-transforming gospel—washed over Michael and Joseph, and in that moment the unthinkable possibility of forgiveness broke over them like a new dawn. They *could* be forgiven, restored, made whole again. This was almost impossible to believe, the “glad tidings” so overwhelmingly good.

He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18–19)

*“Even a small match  
lit in a place of total  
darkness gives off a  
blinding light.”*

## WEEK THREE

Even a small match lit in a place of total darkness gives off a blinding light. So great had Michael and Joseph's darkness been that the light of the gospel, the whole gospel, was brilliant and blinding, shining with intensity, authority, and hope. Jesus, too, had been abducted. He, too, had been beaten and maimed. And He, like them, had faced unspeakable evil—and defeated it. Jesus had made forgiveness possible.

It was Easter week, and two days later, I was asked to preach at the chapel service at the Children of War Center, to the 40 child “soldiers” who had found the meaning of Easter in one of the darkest corners of the world. I decided to speak on the parable of the prodigal son, of the father embracing his estranged boy, forgiving every transgression unconditionally, slaying the fatted calf, celebrating the lost son being found—and restoring him to his place at home, *welcoming* him home. As I preached, I watched Michael and Joseph, now just two more faces in the choir, as they listened to the message with a new hope in their eyes and fervent praise on their lips. Prodigal sons too, they were home now, in the arms of their Father. They had experienced the good news, the *gospel*, and found in it their own redemption—just as I had. (pp. 61-63)



## MEDITATIONS

“But what we can and must do in the present, if we are obedient to the gospel, if we are following Jesus, and if we are indwelt, energized, and directed by the Spirit, is to build *for* the kingdom. This brings us back to 1 Corinthians 15:58 once more: what you do in the Lord *is not in vain*. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that’s about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that’s shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that’s about to be dug up for a building site. You are—strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God’s new world. Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one’s fellow human beings and for that matter one’s fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world—all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make. That is the logic of the mission of God.”

—*N. T. Wright* (p. 69)

“Let me take some liberties and paraphrase these verses for today’s reader: ‘For I was hungry, while you had all you needed. I was thirsty, but you drank bottled water. I was a stranger, and you wanted me deported. I needed clothes, but you needed *more* clothes. I was sick, and you pointed out the behaviors that led to my sickness. I was in prison, and you said I was getting what I deserved.’”

—*Rich Stearns* (p. 59)

## WEEK THREE



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How often do you think about those around you as though they were Christ Himself? How would this change the way you treat people?
2. What strikes you about Matthew 25:31–45? How does it challenge your view of what it means to be a Christ-follower?
3. We are told that Jesus often comes to us in disguise, even in the faces of young boys who were forced to kill and maim others. Do you believe this? Why or why not?
4. Rich talks about the intensity of the light of the gospel in such darkness. Have you ever experienced this blinding and brilliant gospel message in the midst of your own darkness or in darkness that you have witnessed? If so, share that experience.
5. Why do you think many of us are so overwhelmed by the amount of pain in the world that we are inclined to look the other way and stay in our own “bubble”? How does N.T. Wright’s quote speak to this type of attitude?
6. How might seeing the poor through God’s eyes change your view?
7. How do the things you do and the choices you make build up the kingdom of God? If you were to think of these choices as something that might be resurrected into the new creation that God is constructing, how would it give you hope and stir you to do more?
8. What did you think of Rich’s paraphrase of Matthew 25? Does this version speak to you more directly? If so, how? What part stands out to you?



### TAKE ACTION

As you interact with others this week, remember Matthew 25:31–45 and ask God to help you see the spirit of Christ in those you come across. Keep a listing or journal on how these experiences change your interactions. Are you more patient, attentive, kind, and encouraging to others? Think of someone you find difficult to love, and make a commitment to think about that person as one whom Christ dearly loves. Be intentional in praying for and loving that person. This exercise may prove to be very difficult for you, but when we learn to see Jesus in “His most distressing disguise,” we will begin to see Him in many places.

## WEEK THREE



### CHALLENGE

Look for ways to reach out to the lonely, lost, and hurting in this world. Remember that whatever you do to the “least of these,” you do for Christ.



### SCRIPTURE FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Micah 6:8
- Isaiah 58:1–11
- Luke 7:20–21
- 1 Corinthians 1:26–29
- 1 John 2:3–6
- Matthew 22:34–40



### PRAYER

Pray for the children of war; pray that they will find hope in Christ. Pray for those who care for and rehabilitate child soldiers around the world. Pray that God will give the workers strength, wisdom, and compassion as they care for these deeply wounded children. Pray that you may be able to see Christ in all those you encounter each day. Pray for renewed hope in knowing that what you do in the Lord is not in vain.

## WEEK FOUR



Beatrice (right), an entrepreneur and role model in her Zambian community.

Jon Warren/World Vision 2003

# Week 4:

BASED ON

*THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL: THE HOLE IN THE WORLD*



## FACT

In 1820 the gap between the richest and poorest countries was about four to one. In 1913, it was 11 to one, and in 1950 it was 35 to one. By 2002 ... the gap was 75 to one. (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 122)



## SCRIPTURE | 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

## WEEK FOUR

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!



### PAYING IT FORWARD

*Excerpt from The Hole in Our Gospel by Rich Stearns*

A few years ago, on a trip to Zambia, I was introduced to a man named Rodrick who was about thirty. Rodrick's story was heartbreaking. After serving in the Zambian military, he hoped to return home to his wife, Beatrice, but was instead falsely accused of plotting against the government and thrown into prison. Beatrice gave birth to their son, John, while Rodrick was imprisoned. After several years Rodrick was cleared and released, only to come home to a wife and child living in poverty. The next few years were grim as they had more children and struggled to support them. They tragically lost one child to cerebral malaria. Meanwhile, they literally had nothing—no income, no food, no health care, and no opportunities.

But Rodrick and Beatrice were hardworking and clever. The one possession they had was a small hair dryer, so they started a haircutting business to earn a few dollars. World Vision staff, impressed by their initiative, looked past Beatrice and Rodrick's poverty and saw instead their assets. They were industrious and entrepreneurial, willing to work hard. So instead of giving them food and other *things*, World Vision gave them a small loan for an idea they had. Their idea? They would buy bolts of cloth and tie-dye them in hopes of selling the cloth to women who made their families' clothing. I have to admit I was skeptical. How in the world would this couple ever sell enough cloth to make a living? I had spent a career in consumer product marketing and knew a bad idea when I saw one. This idea seemed like a loser to me in a place where there seemed to be no market at all for tie-dyed cloth. Even after they presented me with a beautiful bolt of fabric to take home to my wife, I only felt pity for them, knowing their business would likely fail.

In 2008 I returned to Zambia and had an opportunity to see Rodrick and Beatrice again. It had been four years since they started their little enterprise. I was stunned. Their tie-dye business has succeeded. With the money they saved, they paid back their loan and then started a small storefront to sell food, diapers, and other sundries. One store had turned into two, and they hired their first employee. Rodrick then was able to get connected to the electric grid, and he started a welding business. Once on the grid, Rodrick began charging car batteries overnight for a fee. (These batteries are often used for home electricity by people who can't afford to be on the grid.) Next door he built a Cel-Tel station, where those with cell phones can buy their minutes. He then built a long building out of scrap lumber and tin; filled it with benches; bought a TV, DVD player, and a satellite dish; and opened the first movie theater in his community. Not only did he show movies, but he also received all of the professional soccer matches, which the men of the community gladly paid to see. When I visited, he was showing—I kid you not—*The JESUS Film* in the middle of the day to about 10 customers.

During my visit, Rodrick took me to a concrete slab with a roof over it that he had just built. The

## WEEK FOUR

*“World Vision staff,  
impressed by their  
initiative, looked past  
Beatrice and Rodrick’s  
poverty and saw instead  
their assets.”*

next week, he said, a pool table would arrive, and the first community pool hall would open—a good thing, he explained, because it helped keep the younger men occupied and out of trouble. The young men in his community looked up to Rodrick.

In all, Rodrick and Beatrice, a couple I had pitied just four years earlier, now had 11 different businesses! When I first met them, I had seen only their deficits, not their assets—a mistake I will never make again.

I wanted to test Rodrick’s values, so I asked him a question. “Rodrick,” I said, “you are now a rich man. What are you going to do with all of your newfound wealth?” Rodrick thought for a moment, and then told me that he had been teaching a Sunday school class at his church for many of the orphans in his community. There are 41 in his class, and he has committed to visiting each one at his or her home twice a month. Then he said, “God has been good to us, and with His continued blessings I hope to build a school for the orphans. Pray that He will allow me to do this.” Rodrick was paying it forward. He rather reminded me of Jimmy Stewart in the classic Christmas movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*. His solid

example and caring spirit were changing the lives of others. In fact, the whole community seemed more alive than it had four years before. With Rodrick and Beatrice as role models, others had begun to believe that it was possible to succeed, and they were following their leaders’ example. One couple’s lives and faith were lifting and inspiring an entire community—unleashing the potential that had been there all along. (pp. 128-130)



## MEDITATIONS

“We can be the generation that no longer accepts that an accident of latitude determines whether a child lives or dies—but *will* we be that generation? Will we in the West realize our potential or will we sleep in the comfort of our affluence with apathy and indifference murmuring softly in our ears? Fifteen thousand people dying needlessly every day from AIDS, TB, and malaria. Mothers, fathers, teachers, farmers, nurses, mechanics, children. This is Africa’s crisis. That it’s not on the nightly news, that we do not treat this as an emergency—that’s *our* crisis ... History will be our judge, but what’s written is up to us. We can’t say our generation didn’t know how to do it. We can’t say our generation couldn’t afford it. And we can’t say our generation didn’t have reason to do it. It’s up to us.”

—Bono (pp. 105)

“Sometimes I would like to ask God why He allows poverty, suffering and injustice when He could do something about it.”

“Well, why don’t you ask Him?”

“Because I’m afraid He would ask me the same question.”

—Anonymous (p. 161)

“Don’t fail to do something just because you can’t do everything.”

—Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision (p. 152)

## WEEK FOUR



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After reading the passage from 2 Corinthians, what do you think God's solution is for dealing with disparity? What does "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor" mean in today's context? In what practical ways does this instill in you a sense of responsibility as a steward of God's gifts?
2. According to 2 Corinthians, what is the result of this generosity of Christians toward the poor?
3. Make a list of common stereotypes of the poor. Where did these stereotypes come from? Which ones do you share? How can Rodrick's story be used to counter some of these myths?
4. Why is it important to give people opportunities rather than just things? How different would your life look if you had not been given access to opportunities such as free public school, adequate nutrition, clean water, access to health care, and a safe place to live?
5. How would your attitude change if you approached the poor with a desire to affirm and unleash rather than with just a quick fix?
6. Rich states, "almost all poverty is fundamentally the result of a lack of options"(p.118) Do you agree with this statement? If this is the case, what are some tangible ways to help create more options?
7. Do you believe that our generation has the ability to wipe out poverty? Why or why not? Do you believe it is our responsibility? Why or why not?
8. What are you currently doing to be a part of alleviating poverty? What is your church doing? What more can you do?
9. The anonymous quote offers a question that many believers and non-believers alike ask when they hear about all the suffering in the world: "God, why don't you do something?" What if that question were asked of you? What would your response be?
10. Bob Pierce's simple statement carries a very poignant message to many who are paralyzed because there is too much to be done. Describe a time when you have done something even in the midst of an overwhelming situation.



### TAKE ACTION

Think about all the opportunities and privileges you have had over your lifetime: education, clean water, health care, job opportunities, good nutrition, vaccinations, sanitation facilities, and so forth. Write down all these opportunities/privileges on a piece of paper. Try to imagine your life without these. How different would your life look?

## WEEK FOUR



### CHALLENGE

Now that you have recognized the opportunities you have been given, explore ways that you can pay it forward. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. On one side, write “Opportunities,” and on the other side, write, “Paying It Forward.” On the opportunities side, write the things you listed earlier. The “Paying It Forward” side should relate to opportunities. For example, if you write “access to clean water,” then the “Paying It Forward” column might be something like “contribute toward building a deep well in a developing country” or “give up buying soda, coffee and other drinks and donate the money toward water and sanitation projects in the developing world.” The list of ways to pay it forward is endless. Ask others about their ideas and perform some action as a community, or just come up with your own creative ideas. This is not about giving a hand-out to someone, but about giving others the same opportunities you have been given.



### SCRIPTURE FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- Leviticus 23:22
- Amos 5:11–12, 21–24
- Isaiah 10:1–2
- Jeremiah 22:16
- Proverbs 19:17
- John 16:33



### PRAYER

Pray for a renewed spirit of generosity. Pray for the courage to be good stewards of God’s money. Tell God your fears about money and ask Him to remind you that He is bigger than your fears. Thank God for all that you have and trust Him to be your strength and your guide. Pray for a renewed sense of responsibility to care for the broken and the weak. Repent for the times you failed to care and failed to respond. Ask God for a spirit of learning as you seek to recognize, encourage, and support the talents and potential in others. Pray for a humble heart so that you may sow generously without the need for recognition.

## WEEK FIVE



Pastor John Thomas of Fish Hoek Baptist Church in South Africa with a church member.

Jon Warren/WorldVision 2008

# Week 5:

BASED ON

*THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL: THE HOLE IN THE CHURCH*



## FACT

The total income of American churchgoers is \$5.2 trillion. (That's more than \$5,000 billion.) It would take just a little over 1 percent of the income of American Christians to lift the poorest 1 billion people out of extreme poverty. Said another way, American Christians, who make up about 5 percent of the Church worldwide, control about half of global Christian wealth; a lack of money is not our problem. (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, p. 216)



## SCRIPTURE | ISAIAH 58:6-12

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
and break every yoke?”

## WEEK FIVE

Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe him,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness will go before you,  
and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.  
If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,  
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the darkness,  
and your night will become like the noonday.

The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.  
You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins  
and will raise up the age-old foundations;  
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,  
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”



### THE ‘CHURCH THAT CARES’

*Excerpt from The Hole in Our Gospel by Rich Stearns*

In 1999, Pastor John Thomas heard a shocking statistic at a local minister’s meeting. Forty-four percent of the population of Masiphumelele, a shantytown slum community of black migrants, embedded near the tiny seaside town of Fish Hoek, South Africa, were HIV-positive. This high percentage stunned Pastor Thomas, whose predominantly white church of about 315 members had little awareness of the impact of AIDS in their own backyard. [The statistic turned out to be lower, closer to 17 percent at the time. In 2008, it was 28 percent.] Just five years after the end of apartheid, relations between black and white were still strained in South Africa, a country that now had more HIV infections than any nation in the world. Thomas was provoked. *How can I face God on judgment day*, he thought, *realizing I’ve done nothing about the greatest problem that lies on our doorstep?*

The troubled pastor decided to share his heart with his church—and nothing has been the same

## WEEK FIVE

since. Fish Hoek Baptist Church is now known around town as “the church that cares.” Today, almost 10 years later, the AIDS ministry of Fish Hoek Baptist Church, known as Living Hope, has a budget of \$1.2 million a year and a full-time staff of 147. By comparison, the church’s annual budget is just \$300,000 with a staff of 10. The AIDS ministry now dwarfs the church in size and scope.

In February 2008, I visited Living Hope and found that what was perhaps most striking was the sheer breadth of their vision. Living Hope encompasses virtually every dimension of the impact of AIDS in the lives of the poor. A sister church has been established in the heart of Masiphumelele to provide a permanent and accessible spiritual presence for the community. A 20-bed clinic, Living Hope Health Care Centre, for treating the gravest cases of AIDS, has been built and staffed with a full complement of health care workers and counselors. Alongside the center is the Living Way ministry, where HIV support groups can meet and men and women can receive training in job skills so they can support themselves economically after leaving the clinic. Because the patients are receiving antiretroviral drug therapy, most of them recover and reenter their communities.

(“Charity has its place,” said one of the staff, “but it’s not sustainable.”) Across the street is a retail store that sells some of the crafts and jewelry made by the women from Living Hope.

Down the road and in the middle of the poorest part of Masiphumelele, we visited a community health clinic staffed by many Living Hope volunteers and lay counselors.

These personnel meet with community members who are about to be tested for HIV, as well as those who are receiving their test results. The clinic’s counselors are literally Christ’s hands and feet to individuals who are hearing for the first time that they are HIV-positive. After the terrifying news is given to patients, the clinic’s staff counsel and pray with them, connect them with available treatments, and help them begin living positively with the disease. There’s even a prenatal clinic that assists HIV-positive women through their pregnancies, ensuring that their babies are born HIV-free. Pumla, one of the lay counselors, told me, “Living Hope showed me, if you are Christian, you have to practice what you preach. The Word of God has changed my life.” (Pumla became a Christian through this same ministry.) Another staff member, Bongani, came to Pumla last year, pregnant and HIV-positive. She was very ill and was cared for during the pregnancy by home-based caregivers, also sent by Living Hope. Pumla counseled her through the pregnancy, and her baby was born healthy. Today, Bongani is a support-group facilitator who counsels other

women who are in the same situation she had faced.

AIDS is best fought by *prevention*, so Living Hope has trained an army of life skills educators who go into the community to work, especially with young people. This is a community rife with drug use, gangs, prostitution, rape, and alcoholism. Speaking about the plight of young people in these slums, Pastor Thomas says, “There are no dreams. It’s the poverty of the mind.” Hence, life-skills education starts in kindergarten and helps kids make wise choices.

While in Fish Hoek, we were also able to visit Fish Hoek Baptist’s homeless ministry and the relief effort they were undertaking in an area destroyed weeks earlier by a fire. The fingerprints of this church were evident everywhere we turned. They were literally transforming their culture, reaching across racial and economic barriers, and bringing hope to some of the darkest places I have ever seen.

Fish Hoek Baptist, this one small church near the bottom of the globe, has garnered the attention of the world. John Thomas has been invited to the White House to be commended for their work

“They were literally transforming their culture, reaching across racial and economic barriers, and bringing hope to some of the darkest places I have ever seen.”

## WEEK FIVE

by President Bush himself. USAID has granted his ministry its financial support, and the local state government has even asked them—a Christian church—to consider taking over the running of parts of the government health infrastructure! Why? Because this single congregation chose to not walk by “the beggar laid at their gate” but stopped, instead, to minister Christ’s love to him. There is no hole in their gospel; they are transforming their community, changing lives, showing people the love of Christ, and bringing the good news to the poor. Theirs is the *whole* gospel, and it has great power. Their audacious vision provokes the imagination of what could be if even one-tenth of our churches gave themselves away to the world, as they have. (pp. 231–234)



### MEDITATIONS

“When historians look back in 100 years, what will they write about this nation of 340,000 churches? What will they say of the Church’s response to the great challenges of our time—AIDS, poverty, hunger, terrorism, war? Will they say that these authentic Christians rose up courageously and responded to the tide of human suffering, that they rushed to the front lines to comfort the afflicted and to douse the flames of hatred? Will they write of an unprecedented outpouring of generosity to meet the urgent needs of the world’s poor? Will they speak of the moral leadership and compelling vision of our leaders? Will they write that this, the beginning of the 21st century, was the Church’s finest hour? Or will they look back and see a Church too comfortable, insulated from the pain of the rest of the world, empty of compassion, and devoid of deeds? Will they write about a people who stood by and watched while 100 million died of AIDS and 50 million children were orphaned, of Christians who lived in luxury and self-indulgence while millions died for lack of food and water? Will schoolchildren read in disgust about a Church that had the wealth to build great sanctuaries but lacked the will to build schools, hospitals, and clinics? In short, will we be remembered as the Church with a gaping hole in its gospel?”

—*Rich Stearns* (pp. 238–239)

“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.”

—*Martin Luther King Jr.* (p. 190)

“How different our standard is from Christ’s. We ask how much a man gives. He asks how much he keeps.”

—*Andrew Murray* (p. 210)



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Re-read Isaiah 58. What parts stand out? What is the fasting that God desires from us? What other things might qualify as “fasting” in your world? What are some things you can begin doing in response to this passage?

## WEEK FIVE

2. List some of the results that come from following God's commands in these passages. Read Isaiah 1:10–17. What are the consequences of not following God's commands to stand up for the oppressed and care for the widows and orphans?
3. How is Fish Hoek Baptist Church similar to the church you attend? How is it different?
4. What thought provoked Pastor John Thomas to drastically change what the church was doing in response to the AIDS crisis? Can you think of a time in which a similar thought or situation provoked you to action?
5. The budget for Fish Hoek's Living Hope ministry trumps the church's overall budget. What does this say about their priorities? How does your own church's budget compare in terms of money spent on outreach versus money spent on the facilities and staff?
6. In your own budget, how does your spending on yourself compare with what you expend for others?
7. Re-read Rich's quote and think about the implications. How might future generations be inspired by your example and desire to follow the Jesus you serve? Does this quote challenge you to live differently? If so, in what ways?
8. In reflecting on Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote, would those around you know you are a follower of Christ because of what you do or what you don't do? Explain your answer.
9. Regarding Andrew Murray's quote, when it comes to giving your resources, do you think more about how much you give or how much you keep? How would regularly thinking of your resources as God's impact your thinking about how much you keep?



### TAKE ACTION

What is your role in the Church? Where can your talents be used? God has given each of us gifts, and together we form the body of Christ. Find out about all the ministries your church is involved in, and decide which one you are going to participate in, or start one yourself.



### CHALLENGE

Make an appointment to meet with your pastor or missions minister. Discuss how the church reaches out (or should be reaching out) to those in need. Consider making a presentation to your church board or elders to advocate for more of the budget to go to missions and outreach.

## WEEK FIVE



### SCRIPTURE FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- James 1:26–27
- James 4:17
- Luke 16:19–31
- Mark 7:6–8
- Matthew 13:13–15
- Luke 6:43–44



### PRAYER:

Pray for the Church. Pray for yourself and others to recognize their gifts and ability to contribute to God's redemptive work in this world. Pray for unity in the Church. Pray for our church leaders, that they will have the courage to lead their flocks with humility. Pray that the Church might grow together with a genuine desire to see God's kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

## WEEK SIX



Austin Gutwein  
(left) at a Hoops  
of Hope event.

David Kadlubowski / Genesis Photos 2006

# Week 6:

BASED ON

*THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL: REPAIRING THE HOLE*



## FACT

As many as 5 million people die every year—one child every 15 seconds—of water-related illnesses. The lack of clean water causes millions of needless child deaths. Yet the cost to bring clean water to one person costs only *one dollar per year!* When you realize that a gift as small as a dollar can save a life, it is hard to argue that you're not wealthy enough to make a difference. (*The Hole in Our Gospel*, pp. 137 and 138)

## WEEK SIX



### SCRIPTURE | MARK 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”

Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.



### HOOPS OF HOPE

*Excerpt from The Hole in Our Gospel by Rich Stearns*

Austin Gutwein was just 9 when he learned about children in Africa who had become orphaned because of AIDS. Most adults would laugh at the idea of a 9-year-old tackling the global AIDS pandemic, but Austin believed he could do something—that he had a “talent” that God could use. Austin described his journey in this letter, found on the Hoops of Hope Web site:

*In the spring of 2004, I watched a video that showed children who had lost their parents to a disease called AIDS. After watching the video, I realized these kids weren’t any different from me except they were suffering. I felt God calling me to do something to help them. I decided to shoot free throws and on World AIDS Day, 2004, I shot 2,057 free throws to represent the 2,057 kids who would be orphaned*

## WEEK SIX

*“Time is valuable,  
and you may never  
know the long-lasting  
impact your time  
spent with another  
person may have.”*

during my day at school. People sponsored me and we were able to raise almost \$3,000. That year, the money was used by World Vision to provide hope to eight orphan children.

From that year forward, thousands of people have joined me in a basketball shoot-a-thon called Hoops of Hope. By doing something as simple as shooting free throws, Hoops of Hope participants have raised over \$500,000. The children left behind by AIDS now have access to food, clothing, shelter, a new school and finally, a medical testing facility.

Last year, our goal was to raise \$150,000 to build a medical testing lab in Sinazongwe, Zambia. This lab will enable medical staff to test parents for HIV and AIDS prior to administering medication for the disease. The medication will allow parents suffering from HIV and AIDS to prolong their life and keep their children from becoming among the 15 million children already orphaned by this disease.

Not only did Hoops of Hope participants raise enough money to fund the building of the lab, they also supplied the lab with 1,000 medical caregiver kits. This will allow those caring for HIV and AIDS infected moms and dads to have the basic supplies they need. We also were able to furnish the 2006 Johnathan Sim Legacy School.

In 2008, we would like to build a second medical lab in Tivatchiyanda, Zambia (also the site of the 2006 Johnathan Sim Legacy School), provide caregiver kits and provide bicycles for caregivers to ride. The lab combined with caregiver kits and bicycles will help to keep parents healthier and alive longer so they can provide for their children.

I hope you'll join us by participating or sponsoring a participant. It's an awesome event that will leave an impact not only on the lives of the kids we're helping, but on yours as well.

*In Him,  
Austin*

Today, Austin has thousands of kids in 200 different locations doing “Hoops of Hope” in most of the 50 states and in other countries around the world. His cumulative fund-raising is approaching \$1 million. Think of it: a million bucks—for shooting hoops! Talk about using your talents to change the world!  
(pp. 265–266)



## MEDITATIONS

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead (p. 241)

“Use what talents you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best.”

—Henry Van Dyke (p. 257)

“What are you going to do about it? That was the question that confronted Bob Pierce that day in 1948, when he was met head-on with the desperate plight of one child. And in one moment he learned

## WEEK SIX

something groundbreaking about the gospel that he so freely preached: The *whole* gospel involves more than preaching; it also means caring about the *whole person* and finding ways to meet that individual's needs. When we look around our world and see children beaten and crying, huddling in their broken-down houses, aren't we confronted with the very same question that challenged Bob Pierce? For him, it was life-changing. He wasn't a wealthy man; he was just a poor evangelist who had barely raised enough money to go to Asia in the first place. The fact that he had only five dollars in his pocket at the end tells you how little he had. But Pierce had had an encounter with God, and nothing for him was ever the same again."

—Rich Stearns (pp. 248–249)



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. You have probably heard the story of the feeding of the 5,000 many times, but reread it and look for new insights. What did Jesus say to the disciples when they panicked about how they would feed the large group of people? Imagine that Jesus is asking you the same question, "How many loaves do you have?" How would you respond if God asked how much you have to give?
2. Name one thing you have to offer others in terms of "time, treasures, and talents." How could you use these things to benefit the kingdom?
3. Be specific in thinking of a time in which you did nothing because you felt unqualified or lacked resources. Share that experience. During that period, did you focus on what you had or what you did not have? What difference might it have made if you had considered yourself worthy despite what you lack?
4. What did Austin Gutwein have to offer? Does it surprise you that a young boy could raise close to a million dollars to fight HIV and AIDS in less than five years? When Austin watched the video about AIDS, what do you imagine he was focusing on? What did you learn from reading Austin's story?
5. Do you think Margaret Mead is correct in her opinion of the power of small groups of committed citizens? Give some examples in which this is true.
6. Henry Van Dyke reminds us to use that which we already have. What talents do you possess that you have been timid to use because they may not be as "good as the other birds"?
7. Rich talks about a dilemma facing Bob Pierce (founder of WorldVision) in 1948 when a little girl was brought to him after being beat up and kicked out of her home for becoming a Christian. The woman, who had no room to take in another child, demanded, "What are you going to do about it?" He gave her the only money he had, five dollars, and promised to send more. What would you have done in that same situation? When you hear about the plight of children around the world, do you ever feel that God is asking you, "What are you going to do about it?" What is your response to this question?

## WEEK SIX



### TAKE ACTION

This week, answer the question, “How many loaves do you have?” What talents, treasure, or time do you have to offer? Take a piece of paper and write down the three T’s listed above in separate columns.

For “Talents,” make a list of any talents you possess. Talents are not limited to artistic and athletic abilities; they are simply traits that make you unique. Rich explains, “When considering our talents, we need to consider all of the above—our abilities, personalities, passions, pursuits, knowledge, experiences, and our relationships and networks. These things are all resources we possess than can be used in one way or another” (p. 264). Spiritual gifts should also be considered when thinking of talents you have to offer. Read Romans 12:6–10 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–12, and reflect on the spiritual gifts you may have.

For “Time,” think about how you spend your time each day. Time is often not considered the most valuable resource in kingdom work, but it can be a powerful thing. Taking time to listen to someone or to encourage a child can have a life-changing impact. You can affirm people’s value by spending quality time with them and letting them know that they are important. Think about all the ways you waste time each day (watching TV, strolling through malls, and so on) and write down a number of these things. Decide to take some of that time and use it doing good. Maybe you can tutor students, become an advocate for a child in the court system, or simply call someone you know who needs a friend. Time is valuable, and you may never know the long-lasting impact your time spent with another person may have.

Finally, think about the “Treasure” you possess. In times of economic uncertainty, it is unlikely you will have lots of extra money to give away. However, the truth is that if your income is \$25,000 a year, you are wealthier than 90 percent of the world’s population! If you make \$50,000 per year, you are wealthier than 99 percent of the world (p. 215)! So the question is, “How does God want you to use your wealth?” Look toward the areas that you are passionate about and find an organization, person, or cause that you want to support. Write down the name of the organization, person, or cause and contact them if you have any questions regarding financial needs and how donations are spent. Set aside a certain amount of money each month to give toward the cause you have chosen.



### CHALLENGE

Put the piece of paper on which you have written your three T’s, in a visible place so you will be reminded to give your talents, time, and treasure for building up the kingdom.

## WEEK SIX



### SCRIPTURE FOR FURTHER STUDY:

- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Luke 6:46–48
- Luke 17:21
- Nehemiah 1:3–4
- 2 Corinthians 4:7
- Matthew 13:31–32



### PRAYER:

Thank God for the journey He has taken you on through this study. Pray for the courage to use your talents, time, and treasure in service of His kingdom. Thank God for His promise to never leave you nor forsake you and let that be your strength. This may be a time in which you commit or recommit your life to Christ and surrender your will to His.



### STEPS TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

Now that you've concluded this study, here are some next steps for continuing the transformation.

- Learn more about issues affecting the poor. Go online to research world poverty and stay updated on global affairs.
- Go to [www.theholeinourgospel.com](http://www.theholeinourgospel.com) and share your experiences of participating in this study. You can also find inspiration to do more in the “Things You Can Do” section or in the blog or forum in “The Buzz.”
- Teach your children or young relatives about being compassionate global citizens. Find plenty of tools (including free materials) at World Vision Resources' Web site, [www.worldvisionresources.com](http://www.worldvisionresources.com).

## About *The Hole in Our Gospel*

What does God expect of us?

What is the Christian faith really about? Is it just about going to church, studying the Bible and avoiding the most serious sins—or does God expect more? Have we embraced the whole gospel or a gospel with a hole in it?

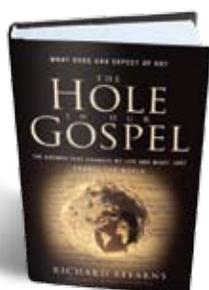
Ten years ago, Rich Stearns came face-to-face with that question as he sat in a mud hut in Rakai, Uganda, listening to the heartbreaking story of an orphaned child. Stearns' journey there took much more than a long flight to Africa. It took answering God's call on his life, a call that tore him out of his corner office at one of America's most luxurious corporations—to walk with the poorest of the poor in our world.

*The Hole in Our Gospel* is the compelling true story of a corporate CEO who set aside worldly success for something far more significant, and discovered the full power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to change his own life—and also to change the world.

As the U.S. president of WorldVision, one of the world's largest humanitarian organizations, Stearns issues a passionate call for Christians to engage in our world by actively living out their faith. He urges followers of Christ to look beyond a gospel reduced to a personal transaction for the afterlife—a gospel, he says, with a hole in it—and passionately calls for Christians not just to proclaim the good news, but to *be* the good news to a world in desperate need.

With refreshing honesty, Stearns describes his own struggle to obey God whatever the cost. And he uses his journey to demonstrate how the gospel—the “whole” gospel—was always meant to be a world-changing social revolution—a revolution that begins with us.

*Available at your favorite bookseller online, in bookstores, or at [www.theholeinourgospel.com](http://www.theholeinourgospel.com).*



## About World Vision

*World Vision* is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, World Vision serves alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people. We envision a world where each child experiences "fullness of life" as described in John 10:10. We know this can be achieved only by addressing the problems of poverty and injustice in a holistic way. World Vision is unique in bringing nearly 60 years of experience in three key areas to help children and families thrive: emergency relief, long-term development, and advocacy. We bring our skills across many areas of expertise to each community where we work, enabling us to support children's physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

For information on ways your church can be engaged in issues of global poverty, HIV and AIDS, and advocacy, contact:

World Vision Church Engagement  
P.O. Box 9716  
Federal Way, WA 98063-9716  
Church@WorldVision.org  
1-888-303-2003  
www.worldvision.org/churches

## About World Vision Resources

Ending global poverty and injustice begins with education: understanding the magnitude and causes of poverty, its impact on human dignity, and our connection to those in need around the world.

World Vision Resources is the publishing ministry of World Vision, a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to helping children, families, and their communities worldwide reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice.

World Vision Resources educates Christians about global poverty, inspires them to respond, and equips them with innovative resources to make a difference in the world.

For more information about our resources, contact:

World Vision Resources  
Mail Stop 321  
P.O. Box 9716  
Federal Way, WA 98063-9716  
1-888-511-6548  
wvresources@worldvision.org  
www.worldvisionresources.com