

Good News About Injustice: A Witness of Courage in a Hurting World (updated 10th anniversary edition) by Gary A. Haugen, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical by Shane Claiborne, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance by Bob Buford, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.

Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church by N. T. Wright, New York: HarperOne, 2008.

Stewards in the Kingdom: A Theology of Life in All Its Fullness by R. Scott Rodin, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage in a Flat World by Bob Roberts Jr., Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, New York: Borzoi Books, 2009.

Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness by Tracy Kidder, New York: Random House, 2009.

Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan by Greg Mortenson, New York: Viking Adult, 2009.

Under the Overpass: A Journey of Faith on the Streets of America by Mike Yankoski, Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 2005.

Voices of the Poor—Can Anyone Hear Us? by Deepa Narayan, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Take Your Best Shot: Do Something Bigger Than Yourself by Austin Gutwein with Todd Hillard, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009.

Warrior Princess: Fighting for Life with Courage and Hope by Princess Kasune Zulu, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

MOVIES

Hotel Rwanda (MGM/United Artists, 2004), *Blood Diamond* (Warner Brothers, 2006), *Slumdog Millionaire* (Fox Searchlight Pictures/Warner Brothers, 2008), *Invisible Children* (Invisible Children, Inc., 2003), *Amazing Grace* (Samuel Goldwyn Films, 2006), *The Constant Gardener* (Focus Features, 2005), *City of God* (Miramax, 2002), *Beyond Belief* (Principle Pictures, 2006), *Lost Boys of Sudan* (Actual Films/Principle Pictures, 2004), *The Kite Runner* (Dreamworks, 2007).

STUDY GUIDE

As you read this book, you may have thought to yourself, *What can I do to make a difference?* This study guide is designed to help you delve more deeply into the ideas behind *The Hole in Our Gospel*, to discover more about your own heart, and to reflect on actions *you* can take to help alleviate poverty and injustice in the world. As you begin to study, you may find it useful to keep a journal in which to make notes, write out ideas stimulated by the book, and to record your prayers. You can use this guide for personal reflection or group study as you read, study, reflect, and prayerfully consider the question: What does God expect of *me*?

In addition to this study guide, additional resources are available to help you go even deeper on your journey. Visit www.theholeinourgospel.com, where you will find a free, downloadable, and expanded version of this study. Additional resources are available at this site as well. Or, to bring the message of *The Hole in Our Gospel* to your church or small group with a breakaway campaign, *The Gospel Quest* is a six-week, small-group curriculum that will help transform your church, instilling congregants with compassionate hearts for the poor. The church launch kit includes:

- a copy of the book *The Hole in Our Gospel*
- 5 six-week study guides
- a six-week study DVD
- 5 six-week personal action journals
- six-weeks' worth of sermon outlines and PowerPoint presentations
- 6 weekend service promo video bumpers
- a quick-start guide
- a 2' x 5' vertical banner and free banner stand
- sample outreach tools

Launch kits, bulk quantities, and additional campaign materials are available at www.thegospelquest.com or by calling 1-800-946-5983. A free sample curriculum kit is available to church leaders (shipping and handling not included).

PROLOGUE AND PART 1

THE HOLE IN MY GOSPEL—AND MAYBE YOURS

1. Rich Stearns says that until he went to Rakai, Uganda, he lived in a bubble, insulated from anything too raw or upsetting (prologue, pages 7–8). Can you identify with this? If so, what factors do you think contribute to the existence of your bubble?
2. Do you agree that poverty and suffering in the world have been—and are—drowned out by “choruses of praise music in hundreds of thousands of churches across our country” (prologue, page 11)? Why or why not? What is your church doing to help the poor? How can you help it do more? Brainstorm ideas (and create an action list) with other members of your church.
3. What is the “bingo card” gospel (chapter 1, pages 16–20), and what’s wrong with it? Do you agree that the gospel requires more of us than just believing the right things? Might there be “holes” in your own interpretation of the gospel? Brainstorm with friends about what those areas might possibly be in your lives or, perhaps, in the life of your church.
4. Thinking of Jim Wallis’s experiment with his Bible (chapter 1, pages 23–24), are there passages in the Bible that you would prefer to overlook or ignore? What are they, and why do you want to ignore them?
5. Rich described his journey through unemployment and the lessons he learned from those times (chapter 2, pages 28–29). We’ve all faced hard times. How have such times in your life broken you? How did those times change you?
6. The story of the rich young ruler goes deeper than money alone (chapter 3, pages 36–38). What are you blessed with that you might be withholding from God? Your time or talent? Other things? Discuss this question and ways to break through any reluctance to give all to the Lord.
7. Rich writes that “Sometimes, in fact often, God’s blessings often come through our sufferings . . .” (chapter 3, page 42). As Christians, we are often quick to praise God when good things happen, but what about when bad things happen? What Scriptures can you find that speak to this?

Take action: Most of us have a list of conditions we present to God before surrendering completely to Him (chapter 3, pages 38–39). On a sheet of paper, make a list of things that might prevent you from serving God unconditionally right now.

Pray: Are you struggling to be completely open to God’s will for your life? Pray that you will become open to Him, and that you will be increasingly sensitive to hearing His voice and understanding His call on your life.

PART 2

THE HOLE GETS DEEPER

1. In the seventh century BC, God criticized the Israelites’ attempts to get back into His good graces through prayers and religious ceremonies (chapter 4, pages 54–55). Think about the priorities of your church and compare them with the focus of the Israelites. How would your church stand up to Isaiah’s criticisms?
2. Think about your experience of working with the poor and marginalized in your community—or anyone you have helped through a tough time. Have there been moments when you, like Mother Teresa, saw “Christ, in his most distressing disguise” (chapter 4, page 60)? Describe that situation and what it’s teaching you upon reflection. Pray that God will show you what He requires of you, and that you will have an open heart as He shows you His will throughout this book.
3. Is it possible to love God and not love your neighbor (chapter 5, pages 65–67)? Why are the two commandments so inextricably connected?
4. What are the ways in which you and your church have taken on the “mission of God” by showing your love to your neighbors (chapter 5, page 69)? Which is more important: telling people about Christ or demonstrating His love through acts of kindness, compassion, and justice? Why do you believe this? Are there times when we should do one but not the other?
5. Do you see a connection between Rich’s difficult childhood and his

later resistance to believing in Christ (chapter 6, pages 74–76)? What was it? In what ways do your childhood experiences and relationship with your parents affect your openness to or resistance to God?

6. People like Rich need intellectually rigorous books to help them move from agnosticism to faith (chapter 6, pages 80–82). Why might people like him be offended to be told that you—or others—were praying for them? What are better ways to share your faith?
7. Do you believe it's true that every follower of Christ was made for a purpose (chapter 7, page 92)? Even you? Explain why or why not. What would you say God's purpose for your life is? What are you currently doing to live out that purpose? What could you begin to do this week to move in that direction?

Take action: Discerning our unique calling is not always a simple undertaking. Rich mentions seven things we must do in order to hear God's still, small voice (chapter 7, page 93). What are they? What would you add to the list? Which are you currently doing—and which could you begin this week?

Pray: Walk through your neighborhood, praying for each household and thinking of ways you could most effectively show love to your neighbors. Peruse an atlas or globe, and pray for your global neighbors in need and consider what you can do to help them.

PART 3

A HOLE IN THE WORLD

1. Due to the repeated images of poverty and adversity bombarding us through the media, have you experienced “compassion fatigue” (chapter 8, pages 107–110)? Think back on the most recent global disasters you've witnessed in the news. Did you and/or your church respond to them with urgency? If not, why not? What can you do to avoid becoming detached and indifferent toward these images of suffering?

2. Even the president of World Vision confesses that he struggles to mourn over dying children on another continent as he would his own (chapter 9, page 109). Is this tendency something that we can overcome? What can you do to maintain a feeling of urgency for the plight of children in far-off lands?
3. Does the story of Rich's encounter with the child in India (chapter 9, pages 111–113) bring to mind any personal encounter you've had with someone in need? What was it, and how did you respond? How do you wish you had responded?
4. What could you do now to make your financial contributions more personal (chapter 9, page 113)? What are some ways that you and your family could have some regular contact with those in need? List the first three steps you could take to make it happen.
5. What were your first associations with the words *poor* and *poverty* (chapter 10, pages 115–120)? What prejudices were you brought up with about people who are poor? Which stereotypes about people who are poor do you still find lingering in the back of your mind?
6. In 2 Corinthians 8:13–15, Paul urges the Corinthian church to help the Jerusalem church so that there would be more equality between them (chapter 10, pages 122–123). What steps might your church—and you personally—take to strive toward greater equality with the poorest of the poor?
7. In which of these programs (or similar programs) do you and your church participate?
 - Take short-term mission trips
 - Support shelters for the homeless
 - Budget to give regularly to local charities
 - Budget to give regularly to international relief organizations
 - Help run or serve in a food kitchen
 - Spend time every week in a charity program
 - Sponsor a child (or children) through World Vision or another organization
 - Partner with a church in a poor area or developing country
 - Work with at-risk young people
 - Other (please list)

How would you rate the long-term effectiveness of each of these

efforts? How might you refocus your efforts, based on what you've read in chapter 11?

8. Rodrick of Zambia said, "God has been good to us, and with His continued blessings, I hope to build a school" (chapter 11, page 130). With this sense of giving back, in light of God's blessings in your life, how would you end this sentence? *God has been good to me, and with His continued blessings, I hope to . . .*
9. What have you seen in the news in the past few years about what the U.S. government is spending to combat AIDS in Africa? If you don't remember, look it up on the Internet. How much have we designated for this cause? Do you think this is an appropriate amount, too much, or too little? On what do you base your opinion? Consult chapter 12 for more background on how hunger, illness, dirty water, and preventable diseases impact people who are poor.
10. By this point in the book you may be feeling overwhelmed by the challenges facing the poor. If we believe the two statements that (1) every one of the challenges has a solution, and (2) every one of us can make a difference (chapter 13, page 151), what more do you think concerned Christians should be doing? What changes could you make in your life?
11. Until now, what has been your belief about the power of prayer as a weapon against the pain of the world?
 - Prayer is the most important weapon.
 - We could pray, but what is really needed is our money.
 - Prayer is an equally important weapon to be used alongside the work of churches, relief organizations and government aid.

Explain or discuss this with friends.

12. Consider repeating Renée Stearns' experiment of going without water for a day. Put a sticky note on every faucet and water related appliance saying "not available to 1 billion people." At the end of the day write down your feelings and emotions.

Take action: Reflect on the times when you have been the answer to someone's prayers. Make a list beginning with *I am an answer to someone's prayer every time I . . .*

Pray the prayer of World Vision's founder, Bob Pierce: "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God." In addition, pray for people caught in the web of poverty and consider how you might influence your church to take action to meet the needs of the poor.

PART 4

A HOLE IN THE CHURCH

1. Rich says that the American church in his parable was oblivious to the suffering of the church in Africa, because it was preoccupied with its own programs (chapter 15, page 177). List the programs, according to priority, that you think your church is preoccupied with. (You might start by looking at your church bulletin.) What changes do you feel should be made to their relative priorities?
2. Would you describe your church more as a "spiritual cocoon," where Christians retreat from a hostile world, or a "transformation station," whose primary objective is to change the world (chapter 15, page 179)? Why? How is that manifested? What could you as an individual or study group do to help lead your church to have an outward vision to become salt and light in the world?
3. Do a little research about your church's missions commitments. Find out how much your church gives to missions programs (that focus on the poor) every year. Then ask what percent of its total budget that number is. Do you think this percentage is high enough (chapter 16, page 185)? What would be required to add one or more percentage points to that total for missions?
4. Does your church support or partner with another church or churches in a developing nation (chapter 16, page 189)? If so, what can you do to learn more about it and increase your members' involvement with that church? If not, what can you do to begin such a program in your church?
5. What was your reaction to the results of the Barna Group survey results on the willingness of Christians to help people affected by AIDS

(chapter 17, pages 195–196)? What other “justice blind spots” might the church have today that future generations will see clearly?

6. In the “faith vs. works” debate (chapter 17, pages 198–202), where have you and your church traditionally stood? What were your reasons? Does Rich’s perspective on this make sense to you? Why or why not? If you are in a church that associates social action with liberal theology, how would you now define social action in a way that is consistent with your theology?
7. If “money is power, and power competes with God for supremacy in our lives” (chapter 19, page 212), which or who is winning that competition in your life? In what kinds of situations do you feel that power struggle most keenly, and how have you handled it?
8. Read Malachi 3:8–12 again (chapter 19, page 214). Have you experienced God pouring out blessings on you as a result of your giving your money to Him and His Church? In what ways? What dangers lie in leaning too heavily on this passage as a motivation to give?
9. Read Rich’s “Letter to the Church in America” (chapter 20, pages 213–225) and underline the sentences that you think you and your church especially need to heed.
10. List some things your church is known to be *against* (chapter 21, pages 228–229). In another column list the things your church is known to be *for*. Which list is longer?
11. Read Mark 1:40–45 (chapter 22, page 239). Since the Church is the living body of Christ, re-read the passage, replacing all references to Jesus with “my church.” What insight did this reading bring to you?

Take action: If it’s true that “it’s not our money—it all comes from God; we are not entitled to it but entrusted with it; and God expects us to use it in the interest of His kingdom,” then what can you do to move from your current attitude toward your money to this scriptural view (chapter 18, page 207)? Make a list of three or four steps you could take toward that goal and implement them.

Pray: In your prayer time, ask God to show you what “great omissions” He sees in your life (chapter 16). Make a note of His answers in your journal.

PART 5

REPAIRING THE HOLE

1. To repair the hole in our own gospel requires an “intentional decision. It doesn’t just happen” (chapter 23, page 244). What changes could you decide to make in your life in order to become a change agent for Christ?
2. “This gospel we embrace and this Jesus we follow are dangerous” (chapter 23, page 246). What is dangerous about Jesus and the gospel? What frightens you about this danger? What exhilarates you?
3. Do you agree that God’s image and identity are defaced by the continued existence of poverty and injustice in the world (chapter 24, page 255)? Why or why not?
4. Identify one or several “impossible dreams” you or your church could accomplish for the poor in your community and the world—one stone at a time (chapter 24, page 256). Are you a leader with Nehemiah’s organizational skills? If so, begin now to write out action plans that could lead to the dream—one step at a time.
5. “We are God’s Plan A . . . and He doesn’t have a Plan B” (chapter 25, page 277). What does this mean in relation to what you, your small group, or your church might commit to do as a result of this study? If you don’t do it, who will?

Take action: In your journal or on a whiteboard, summarize what you and/or your small group or church have decided to do to bring the whole gospel to your community and world as a result of this book and study. Then go to www.theholeinourgospel.com and share your ideas, actions and results as an encouragement to others who are on the journey with you.

Pray: Ask God to bless and use your gifts of time, talents, and treasures to bring hope and justice to a world in need.