
 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