



## 1: The Hole in Our Gospel | Pastor Joe Wittwer | October 18, 2009

### A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

### B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

Today, we start with sections one and two in the book *The Hole in Our Gospel* to answer the question, “What is the hole in our gospel?” Rich Stearns tells us on page 2, “The idea behind *The Hole in Our Gospel* is quite simple. It’s basically the belief that being a Christian, or follower of Jesus Christ, requires much more than just having a *personal* and transforming relationship with God. It also entails a *public* and transforming relationship with the world”. To be a Christian means we have a personal, transforming relationship with God, *and* we have a public, transforming relationship with the world. Both the personal and public are involved—God and the world. The whole gospel, the gospel without a hole in it, is a gospel that not only prepares us for heaven, but also makes a difference on earth. It is a gospel that brings us into personal relationship with God, and it equips us to engage and redeem a broken world. It is a gospel that is concerned with our lives here on earth now as well as in heaven later, with the health of people’s bodies as well as their souls. It is a gospel that gives hope for this life as well as the next. The gospel is more than personal spiritual salvation; it also includes action in this life! As Christians we need to be aware of what the Bible says about God’s heart for the poor and oppressed. We also need to be aware of the need in our world, our own abundance, and what we can and must do to help.

#### 1. We need both the message & ministry of Jesus.

In Chapter 1, Rich begins his discussion of the hole in our gospel by examining the message and ministry of Jesus. To have a whole gospel, we need both the message and ministry of Jesus. We can’t divorce one from the other. The message of Jesus and the ministry of Jesus match. Jesus didn’t say one thing and do another. [Read **Luke 4:14-21** together.] This is basically Jesus’ “mission statement.” Notice the three main components of His mission:

- Proclamation: He preached good news to the poor—the poor in spirit and the physically poor. Jesus proclaimed good news of forgiveness of sin and God’s care for the poor.
- Compassion: He promised recovery of sight for the blind and to bind up the broken-hearted. God cares about us, about our physical and emotional well-being. Jesus healed people of physical blindness; He also confronted people about their spiritual blindness. Jesus is concerned for the whole person: spiritually, physically, and emotionally.
- Justice: He came to free prisoners and to release the oppressed. This too can be taken both spiritually and physically. Spiritually, Jesus came to free those oppressed by sin and Satan. Physically, Jesus promised to bring about justice for those suffering injustice: the enslaved, the prisoners, the oppressed and the poor.

Proclamation, compassion, and justice—these are the pillars of Jesus’ ministry. In these words, Jesus announces a mission that is both spiritual and social. Each of his statements can be taken spiritually or physically. His ministry matched His message: it was both. He forgave sins, and He healed bodies. He fed people’s spirits with His teaching and fed the hungry with bread. He opened the eyes of blind men, and He opened their minds to understand the truth. The whole gospel is both spiritual and social.

#### 2. We need both personal salvation & social justice.

To have a whole gospel, we need both personal salvation and social justice. The gospel is about being forgiven and going to heaven...and so much more. It's also about redeeming and changing a broken world. Both. We can't reduce it to being just about me. In the Bible, Jesus is never called our "personal savior." He is called "the savior of the world." We can't reduce the gospel to personal salvation—it's bigger than the individual. In Chapter 4, Stearns uses three Scriptures beginning with **Micah 6:8**, "*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*" This is a beautiful verse that says what God requires of us. We must act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. We have tended to emphasize our relationship with God over showing justice and compassion to our fellow man. We need both. We need both personal salvation—a relationship with God—and we need social justice—compassion and justice for the poor and oppressed. [Read **Isaiah 58:6-10** together.] God speaks to the Israelites about their hypocrisy. This is a very challenging passage. It suggests that if we sing praise songs to God, but do nothing for the poor, our praises don't mean much to God. Our religious practices should ultimately result in a changed world. We should have a genuine concern for the poor that expresses itself regularly and tangibly in our lives. It's not that working with the poor is all we do; but it should be part of what we do.

### **3. We need both faith & works.**

A gospel that doesn't change our lives is not good news at all. If you can believe in Jesus and then go back to life as usual, nothing changes, what kind of faith is that? We need a faith that works. [Read Matthew 25:31-46 together.] This last story in Matthew 25 about the final judgment makes it sound like we'll be saved by doing good to the poor. Are we saved by good works, or by faith in Christ? Faith in Christ! But the Bible is clear that genuine faith in Christ results in good works. We are saved *by faith for* good works. This is made clear in **Ephesians 2:8-10**, "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" We are saved by faith for good works. We need both. [Read **James 2:14-19** together.] James makes it clear that faith without action is dead. Our faith, if genuine, will be expressed in works, in the kind of good deeds that bring glory to God because He is working through us.

### **C. Life Group Questions** (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. What is the hole in our gospel? In your own words, discuss what this hole is based on the book and Joe's sermon. Why is it as important to tend to people's physical needs as well as their spiritual needs?
2. Re-read **Micah 6:8**. What does God require of us? Why do you think that we tend to emphasize our personal relationship with God and do not connect the act of showing justice and compassion to others?
3. Read **Luke 9:23-26**. What does it mean to "pick up your cross"? What are some tangible ways that you could deny yourself today, this week or this year?
4. Read **Ephesians 2:8-10** and **James 2:14-19**. If we are saved by grace through faith, what role do works play in our faith? In what ways do you find yourself trying to earn salvation through works?

### **D. Personal Application** (1-3 Minutes)

- This week begin creating a plan for action, think of ways that you can live out the whole gospel globally, both in our community and around the world.
- Continue reading *The Hole in Our Gospel*— read chapters 8-14 for next Sunday.

### **E. Prayer Time** (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God for His salvation, His concern for our present and our future.
- Ask God to show you how to actively live out the gospel in your community and in your world.
- Bring other praises or requests to God that came up during the discussion.