

## 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?”

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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

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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

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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?

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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.



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### 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.