

# Impossible Dreams

## A Deep Hole

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This morning we continue with our messages entitled “Impossible Dreams.” I hope you are reading The Hole in Our Gospel. Each week my message will reflect on one part of the book. Today we are looking at part two through chapter 7. Next week we will look at part three through chapter 14. In part two, Rich helps us to recognize some of the deep holes—the things missing in our gospel of blessing and comfort. He calls us to join with Jesus in the things that matter to him. When Jesus began his ministry he announced the things that matter to him.

Luke 4:14-21

<sup>14</sup>Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. <sup>15</sup>He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

<sup>16</sup>He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup>The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because 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.

<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

<sup>20</sup>Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, <sup>21</sup>and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

What is your purpose in life? Can you state it in a few words? As a result of helping Margaret with her women’s retreats called “Soul Purpose,” I can state my purpose in one sentence. My purpose is to embrace, inspire and release hope in myself and others. If you would like to spend some time focusing on God’s purpose for your life (and you are a woman), then I encourage to contact Margaret about “The Soul Purpose Experience.”

At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus defined his purpose in a few words. He spent 40 days focusing on what God wanted him to do with his life. Listen again to his list:

- To preach good news to the poor
- To proclaim freedom for the prisoners
- To proclaim recovery of sight for the blind
- To release the oppressed
- To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

Jesus could have focused on a lot of things. But he chose to focus his life on the things that mattered to God. In three short years, he changed the course of human history forever.

Each of us wants to experience a life of significance. We want to make a difference. We do not want to live mundane, superficial lives. During this series of messages, I'm asking all of us to ask the question: Am I busy about the things that matter to God? I want us to awaken the impossible dreams that God has placed in each of our hearts to have an impact on the world.

Millard Fuller was a millionaire at age 29, but his health and marriage paid the price. He began to ask what God wanted him to do with his life. God gave him an impossible dream of eliminating poverty housing in the world. He founded Habitat for Humanity in 1976. We have joined with him in his dream. We are building our 6<sup>th</sup> house for Habitat for Humanity—one of over 300,000 houses built worldwide providing housing for 1.5 million persons. Let's listen to some of the folks from our church who were involved in the process of building this house last week.

**VIDEO: Habitat for Humanity House**

Bertha's dream was to have a house in which to raise her family—a place where her kids would have their own room and a yard to play in. Many of you helped to make that dream come true by donating your time and money. Together we lifted one more family out of poverty housing. That is the way God's dreams happen—one person at a time.

God has a purpose, a dream for each of us. Richard Stearns, the author of The Hole in Our Gospel shares his journey in the discovery of God's purpose for his life. I appreciate his honesty about what a struggle that was for him. If he were one of those guys who said "yes" to God immediately, we could not relate to him. But I think we can all relate to his struggle with God.

First of all he was a reluctant believer. His father was an alcoholic who lost his job and his marriage. Rich was raised by a single mom. He determined at the age of ten he would have to take care of himself. He worked hard. With scholarships and loans he managed to graduate from Cornell University in four years. He did it without help from anyone. He was proving that you could pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. Listen to his words: "My personal religion of self-reliance resonated well with social Darwinism—survival of the fittest. The strong prevail! I was succeeding because I was tough, smart, and independent. And I had done it, as Frank Sinatra once crooned, 'my way'."

It took a lot to overcome his skepticism about the Christian faith. God used several people to keep sharing God's love with him, until one day he admitted that there was a deep hole in his life that only God could fill. He became an exemplary Christian businessman, husband and father. He did what he thought was expected: a daily devotional time, generous giving, participation in worship and small groups,

and he taught Sunday school. God blessed him with a successful career which enabled him to live in luxury. Then God began to reveal that he expected more. He received several calls about becoming the President of World Vision—an international ministry to the poor. He had no experience in missions. He felt they had the wrong guy. It was also a struggle to consider giving up the luxurious life style he experiences as CEO of Lennox Corporation and the salary that came with it. He spent months arguing with God. This job would disrupt his comfortable and secure life.

During an interview with the board, he was asked: “Rich, if you are selected for this job, you will have to travel to some of the worst places in the world. You will be exposed to heartbreaking things: children living in garbage dumps, women who have lost their children to disease, people on their deathbeds with AIDS. Are you comfortable with that?” Rich replied: “Comfortable? I am so uncomfortable with that, I can’t even express it! I’m terrified!”

Many of us are in the same place as we begin to talk about Impossible Dreams. We don’t want to leave our comfort zones. I struggle with that. I just turned 60. I could easily choose to coast into retirement. I could focus on safe things like completing our building projects, starting some new worship services, and strengthening some of our ministries. Maybe even ride a horse occasionally. This summer God began to open my eyes that he had so much more that he wanted us to do as a church. I argued with him: “Some people won’t like this. Some people will push against this. Isn’t it enough that I preach on tithing? Do I really have to focus on expanding our outreach to the poor?” Open your eyes. The book, The Hole in Our Gospel, came in the mail. I read it. I struggled. I began to hear the news that the

food bank in Lubbock is experiencing 25% more people coming for food than last year.

I finally said: “OK, God. But you are going to have to make this happen. I can’t do it.” God said: “That is just the place I want you to be. You are absolutely right. You cannot do this.” Here we are. I’m scared. I don’t know what this will mean for me personally or our church. But I’m also excited. When we are willing to take a risk and focus our lives on the things that matter to God, we begin to experience a life of greater adventure and deeper meaning. Jesus is calling us to join with him in meeting the needs of the poor and the oppressed—those who are struggling for survival in our community and our world.

As we each begin to focus on what God expects us, I want us to be clear on one thing. This is not about earning our way into heaven by doing good works. Our salvation is a free gift from God. Upon the cross, Jesus did everything necessary to provide for our forgiveness and a place in heaven. In order to be saved we trust in Christ and Christ alone as our Savior. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:8,9

“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.”

The Bible makes it clear that we are not saved by our works. It is not what we do for God that saves us. Rather it is what God has done for us in Jesus Christ alone. Some make the mistake of believing that it is faith plus our works that saves us. Paul addressed this false teaching in his letter to the Galatians. False teachers in Galatia were teaching that faith in Christ alone was not enough to save us. We must

also obey the law in addition to believing in Christ if we want to be saved. Faith plus works will save you—not faith in Christ alone. Paul wrote:

“Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Galatians 3:3)

We need to be careful not to slip into the idea that we must do good works in order to be saved. Some will say: “If works don’t save me, then I will just not get involved in all this poverty stuff!” It is not that simple. In Matthew 25, Jesus made it clear that he expects us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick and visit those in prison. James, the brother of Jesus, put it to us very directly:

“Faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26)

“I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18)

What is James saying? He makes it clear that faith is expressed through works. Faith without works is merely intellectual assent to the fact that Jesus saved us on the cross. Intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel alone will not save you. James says: “Even the demons believe in God,” (James 2:19) but they are certainly not saved! To be saved means to trust in Jesus as our Savior. It means that we experience God’s love and out of gratitude for that experience we desire to live our lives for God. Jesus said: “If you love me, obey me.” We express our experience of faith and love through our works. Faith and works are two sides of a coin. They cannot be separated.

Our works are an overflow of our experience of God’s love and his blessings. Our works are done by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us; not by mere human effort. Our problem is that we have become a reservoir of God’s blessings. We receive his love and blessing and hold on to them. God intends for us to be rivers of blessing, not reservoirs. Some people will take this as an out clause!! “I will just wait

until I feel love welling up inside me for the poor. Then when it overflows, I'll do something." The problem is we have stopped up the flow of the spirit. In order to release the flow, we have to step out and do something. We have to begin to make ourselves available to God and say "God use me." We have to open our eyes and take a step out of our comfort zone that will require us to trust God. If I am comfortable, I can be sure that I am not living a life of obedience to Jesus!!

The recruiter for World Vision asked Rich Stearns a question that changed his life. "Are you willing to be open to God's will for your life?" Rich wrestled with that question and left a lucrative job taking a 75% cut in pay. He left a life of affluence and luxury he enjoyed for 25 years. He would say, the last ten years of his life with World Vision have been the most exciting and significant years of his life. How about you? Are you willing to be open to God's will for your life?