

My Beef with the Prosperity Gospel

"God wants to bless your life."

We'd agree with that, right? After all, God loves us to a degree we can't imagine. He proved His love for us through the death of His Son, Jesus. So, yes, God wants to bless our lives.

But what exactly does that mean?

Those in the circles of the prosperity gospel will be quick to respond by quoting Scripture to us:

- "Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest; then your barns will be completely filled, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Prov. 3:9-10).
- "The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, without painful toil for it" (Prov. 10:22).
- "Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way," says the Lord of Armies. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure" (Mal. 3:10).
- "Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for — believe that you have received it and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

Wow! Who needs the lottery when you've got Jesus?! God wants to bless your socks off—then bless you with more socks!

Pardon my sarcasm, but it irks me that certain preachers espouse such bad theology that doesn't take in the whole counsel of Scripture. And I am grieved for the people who are duped by their falsehood.

According to prosperity theology, all you need is faith. *You say you have faith but no prosperity is coming your way? There's an easy fix: you just need more faith.*

I've been leading my church in a study of Hebrews. The whole message of the book can be summed up in one word: endurance. In Hebrews 11, our attention is turned to Old Testament people who trusted God fully and, in their faith, endured. There's a part of this that the prosperity folks might jump on to show what happens when we have enough faith:

"And what more can I say? Time is too short for me to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the raging of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, gained strength in weakness, became mighty in battle, and put

foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead, raised to life again ..." (Heb. 11:32-35).

NOW WE'RE TALKING! GRAB ON TO YOUR FAITH, BELIEVE, AND WATCH GOD BLESS! YOU'LL CONQUER THE KINGDOM OF DESPAIR ... OBTAIN THE PROMISE OF BLESSING ... SHUT THE MOUTH OF DEBT AND POVERTY!

Before we get lost in our excitement, let's keep reading about those who lived by faith.

" ... Other people were tortured, not accepting release, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and on mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground" (vv. 35-38).

Wait, what? Destitute? Afflicted? Sawed in two? Where's the prosperity in that?

And that is my beef with the prosperity gospel. God does love us and He promises blessing, but it's a blessing that often comes with hardship.

Even more to the point: God's blessing often comes *through* the hardship. That redefines what we mean by "blessing." The blessing is something far greater than a BMW, swimming pool, or cash in the bank: a deep, rich walk with God.

Can you name anyone who developed a deep walk with God as a direct result of a fat bank account? I can't. But I can think of so many whose faith deepened and their joy increased because they learned to walk with God when facing cancer, financial hardship, or ridicule.

Peter told Christians facing persecution: "Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you" (1 Pet. 4:12-14).

This world with its version of blessing and prosperity is temporary—very temporary. But the blessing of my relationship with Christ is eternal.

And it only gets better.