

God Wants You To Prosper - September 1986

Today it's controversial to prosper. With famine stalking Africa and poverty all around us, surely it must be wrong? Some Christians deliberately choose poverty, convinced that this is God's will for them. Others feel guilty and embarrassed when they come into large sums of money. 'After all they reason, 'the Bible says something about money being the root of all evil' Or does it? The scripture they refer to actually says: 'The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6:10), a very different thing. The truth is that God wants you to prosper in all areas of life and that includes materially. When John said: 'I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers' (3 John 2 NASB), he wasn't simply saying a nice prayer. His heart was reaching out for what God had covenanted with his people.

All of Life

God wants us to prosper mentally, emotionally and spiritually. He wants us to succeed in our relationships with other people and in our marriages and families. He also wants us to prosper materially. Often it is those who have prospered in this way who are in the best position to help the poor and needy. I haven't met a poor man who wanted to be poor nor a rich man who, when his wealth was threatened, jumped up and down praising God. There's no blessing in poverty. God sees poverty as a tragedy, not a virtue. Proverbs 10:15 describes it as 'the ruin of the poor'. So often it leads to the sin of covetousness. It isn't a means for God to draw you closer to him; it's a destroyer and an aggressor, pulling you down before your enemies. Any preaching that extols virtue in poverty is contrary to Scripture. If you have chosen poverty as your way of life, you are denying what God wants to give you.

Under the old covenant God promised 'abundant prosperity' to those who obeyed him (Deuteronomy 28:11). If it was the will of God for men and women to prosper then, how much more under the new covenant, which is described in Hebrews as a 'better covenant' (7:22) based on 'better promises' (8:6).

What comes to your mind when the word 'prosperity' is mentioned? Do you think of luxury homes and cars, huge yachts, extravagant food and drink and an obscenely spendthrift lifestyle? The kind of prosperity God has promised is not like this. James Moffatt gives us a fine definition: 'God is able to bless you with ample means, so that you may always have quite enough for any emergency of your own and ample besides for any kind act to others' (2 Corinthians 9:8). After God created the earth, he made mankind as a means of crowning his creation. The man and woman woke, fresh from the hand of God, into a world of provision and plenty. God said, in effect 'It's all yours' (Genesis 1:28). There was far more provision than they would ever need; they were instantly prosperous! Sadly, many Christians associate prosperity and success with the way of the world. On the other hand, God's Word says that both are available to his children: 'Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess'

(Deuteronomy 5:33). It may come as a surprise to learn that Jesus spent more time speaking about material possessions than about any other subject. Depending on your attitude to them, possessions can be either a too/or a trap. As a too/they can be a means of bringing much good in our world, as the recent Live Aid, Band Aid and Sports Aid projects have proved for famine-stricken African countries. They can also help us in our task of carrying the good news of the gospel to the world. They only become a trap when they begin to possess us, turning our God-given desire for prosperity into a greedy, consuming possessiveness (see 1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Jesus prospered

Most people don't think of Jesus as prosperous. After all, he said he had nowhere to lay his head (Luke 9:58). That was mainly because of his mobile ministry. He was constantly moving across his nation, but undoubtedly hundreds of homes were open to him. Jesus prospered because his faith gave him immediate access to whatever he needed whenever he needed it - whether it was to pay taxes (Matthew 17:24-27), feed a hungry crowd (John 6:1-13) or support at least 12 men and families full-time in ministry (Luke 9:1-2) and later enlarge that team by 72 (Luke 10:1-2). He was received among the poor, not because he was in a similar state, but because he had the answers to their poverty. Although frequently without cash, Jesus unashamedly wore some of the best clothes that money could buy. Roman soldiers at the cross gambled to see who would get his seamless coat (John 19:23-24). His obedience, faith and right heart attitude allowed him to receive and enjoy such possessions. The apostle Paul was able to say: 'I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty' (Philippians 4:11-12). He had discovered the secret of living in prosperity without being embarrassed about it.

Christians aren't usually embarrassed by need, but if they start prospering they suddenly start getting worried! They've learnt to be content in abasement, not abundance. They don't want people to see their better car or larger house because those others might think they're somehow unspiritual. Such Christians haven't learned to be content in God's goodness. Jesus didn't hide his prosperity, despite the needs around him. He enjoyed the goodness of his Father without embarrassment.

God's Plan for You

No one was ever as rich as Jesus. Everything in heaven and earth was his, and yet he chose to lay it aside. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus became poor so that we might be rich. Does that refer to money and possessions? Yes, it does! In the same passage Paul talks about the 'rich generosity' of the Macedonian churches (vi -3). Here people gave out of poverty. Poverty and prosperity aren't issues of cash in the pocket but of obedience and faith in the heart. Prosperity is having access at all times to resources greater than your need for whatever you need. God wants you to prosper so that you can prosper others. This is your faith access' card to God's resources so that at all times you receive your covenant inheritance.

1. Believe that God wants you to prosper

Settle the issue in your mind. Cast off years of thinking 'poverty'. Believe that God will bless and prosper you 'in all things', including money (3 John 2). 'Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do' (Deuteronomy 29:9).

2. Acknowledge God as the source of your finance

In this man-centred world, we can easily slip from seeing God as the source of our income to focusing instead on the bank manager, the employer or the job. God wants us to get things right. 'Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth' (Deuteronomy 8:18).

3. Keep your priorities clear

Don't seek prosperity for its own sake. Keep the focus of your life clear, and your material needs will always be met. 'Seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well' (Matthew 6:33). Food and clothing, cars and houses, must never assume priority over spiritual issues and righteousness of the heart.

4. Keep your attitude to money right

There is little point in chasing after riches. They will always elude you. 'Do not weary yourself to gain wealth. Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies towards the heavens' (Proverbs 23:4-5 NASB).

5. Honour God with tithes and offerings

The moment we have some money, our minds are filled with ideas of how to use it. What should be our priority? 'Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine' (Proverbs 3:9-10). God spoke sternly to Israel about the way she was robbing God and herself by withholding tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8-12).

6. Develop a giving lifestyle

Life is made up of givers and takers, winners and losers. Givers are always winners. 'Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (Luke 6:38). The world gives out of guilt; God wants our giving to be motivated instead by love. But what about the hard times? Even then, we can learn to be givers. Jesus took five loaves and two fish - the lunch pack given by a child - and thousands of people were fed. Prosperity is not a self-centred thing. We mustn't treat material possessions as ends in themselves but learn to share them with others (see 1 John 3:16-18).

7. Live in reality, not fantasy

The man who daydreams of wealth but doesn't work will stay poor. 'He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty' (Proverbs 28:19; see also 2 Thessalonians

3:10). You can't put the bread of fantasy in your children's mouths. You can't go out each day in the extravagant designer clothes of Dallas or Dynasty. You have to come out of fantasy and live in reality.

8. Plan to prosper

The man who succeeds and prospers is the man who plans. Jesus didn't tell us not to plan for tomorrow. He just told us not to worry about the future (Matthew 6:34). Planning is essential; failing to plan is planning to fail. 'The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty' (Proverbs 21:5). If you're considering setting out to prosper in business, for instance, make sure you make proper plans. Seek professional advice from those qualified in your particular line of business. Then, when you've made your plans, work them through carefully, not making hasty decisions which you will later regret.

9. But what if...?

If you've failed and got yourself into financial problems because of your own foolishness, does that mean you will have to put up with poverty for the rest of your life? No! God says: 'I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me. . . they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide' (Jeremiah 33:8-9). Even if your poverty is the consequence of your own folly, God will forgive you. He wants to bless you. As you turn to him, he will cleanse and restore you until your prosperity causes you, too, to tremble in his presence!