



# THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

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# The Promise of Prosperity

- Joshua 1:8 Have the book of this Law always on your lips: meditate on it day and night, so that you may carefully keep everything that is written in it. Then your undertakings will prosper, then you will have success.
- 1 Chronicles 4:10 Jabez called on the God of Israel. "If you truly bless me," he said, "you will extend my lands, your hand will be with me, you will keep harm away and my distress will cease." God granted him what he had asked.
- Psalm 1: 1-3 How blessed is anyone who ... delights in the law of Yahweh... Such a one is like a tree planted near streams; it bears fruit in season and its leaves never wither, and every project succeeds.

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- Psalm 34:9 Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones; those who fear him lack for nothing.
- Malachi 3:10 Bring the tithes in full to the treasury, so that there is food in my house; put me to the test now like this, says Yahweh Sabaoth, and see if I do not open the floodgates of heaven for you and pour out an abundant blessing for you.
- Jeremiah 28:11 Yes, I know what plans I have in mind for you, Yahweh declares, plans for peace, not for disaster, to give you a future and hope. When you call to me and come and pray to me, I shall listen to you.

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- Matthew 25:21 Well done good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness.
- John 10:10 I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.
- Philippians 4:19 And my God will fulfill all your needs out of the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.
- 3 John 1:2 My dear friend, I hope everything is going happily with you and that you are as well physically as you are spiritually.

# What is the Prosperity Gospel?



The Prosperity Gospel is a controversial religious belief among some Protestant Christians, who hold that financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God for them.

# What is the Prosperity Gospel?



It is a belief that faith, positive speech and donations to religious causes will increase one's material wealth.

Prosperity theology views the Bible as a contract between God and humans: if humans have faith in God, he will deliver security and prosperity.

# The Intersection of 3 Ideologies

01

New Thought

02

American belief  
in pragmatism,  
individualism,  
and upward  
mobility

03

Pentecostalism

# History of the Prosperity Gospel



**Pentecostalism** emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Emphasis on spiritual gifts

Decentralized, often with strong leaders

Parishioners are encouraged to show faith by tithing



# History of the Prosperity Gospel



Oral Roberts began teaching prosperity theology in 1947. He explained the laws of faith as a “blessing pact” in which God would return donations “sevenfold.”

# History of the Prosperity Gospel



In the 1980s, public attention was drawn to prosperity theology through the influence of prominent televangelists such as Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. Bakker's influence waned after he was implicated in a high-profile scandal.

# The Prosperity Gospel Today

Most churches in the prosperity movement are non-denominational and independent.

The most popular brand of the Prosperity Gospel is the “Word of Faith” movement.

In 2006, three of the four largest congregations in the United States were teaching prosperity theology.

The highest organizational authority figure in these churches is the pastor.

# The Prosperity Gospel Today

A 2006 poll by Time reported that 17% of Christians in America said that they identified with the movement.

A 2015 survey by YouGov asked "Do you believe that prayer can make you wealthier?" 15% of whites, 42% of blacks, and 25% of Hispanics answered "yes."

When asked "Is wealth a sign of God's favor?" 9% of whites, 34% of blacks and 24% of Hispanics said "definitely" or "probably."

By the late 2000s, churches teaching prosperity theology had significant growth in Third World countries, especially Nigeria, the Philippines and South Korea.

# Who Preaches the Prosperity Gospel?



# Joel Osteen



Born in Houston

Graduated from Humble High School in 1981

Attended Oral Roberts University in Tulsa where he studied radio and television communications but did not graduate

He does not have a degree from a divinity school.

# John Osteen



Joel is the youngest of 6 children of John Osteen and Dolores Pilgrim.

John Osteen was a former Southern Baptist pastor.

He founded Lakewood Church in the back of an old feed store on May 10, 1959.

Joel produced his father's televised sermons for 17 years.

# Joel Became Lakewood's Senior Pastor



Joel preached his first sermon on January 17, 1999

His father died 6 days later

Two weeks later Joel began preaching regularly

He was installed as the new senior pastor on October 3, 1999



# Lakewood Church

Under Joel Osteen Lakewood's attendance grew from 5,000 to 30,000.

In 2003 Lakewood Church acquired the Compaq Center, former home of the NBA Houston Rockets

Renovations included the addition of 5 stories to add more capacity.



# Lakewood Church

Lakewood is one of the largest congregations in the United States

The building has 16,800 seats

Weekly attendance is 52,000

Four English-language services

Two Spanish-language services



# Lakewood Church

## Worship Services:

Kidslife service for children

Lakewood Middle School for middle school students

Lakewood Youth for high school students

Main Services for all adults

Lakewood Young Adults for in-college and post-college young adults

## Learning:

Various classes are offered through the Compass Classes ministry, meeting before and after worship

## Television:

Broadcast on Trinity Broadcasting Network and Daystar Television Network as well as local channels

Osteen's sermons are televised in 100 countries with an estimated 7 million viewers.

# Books by Joel Osteen

Your Best Life Now (2004)

Become a Better You (2007)

Your Best Life Begins Each Morning (2008)

It's Your Time (2009)

Every Day a Friday (2011)

I Declare (2012)

Break Out (2013)

You Can, You Will (2014)

The Power of I Am (2015)

Fresh Start (2015)

Think Better, Live Better (2016)

Blessed in the Darkness (2017)

Our Best Life Together (2018)

Next Level Thinking (2018)

## Joel Osteen on 60 Minutes 10-14-07



When asked if he is a prosperity teacher, Osteen responded that if prosperity means God wants people to be blessed and healthy and have good relationships, then he considers himself a prosperity teacher, but if it is about money, he does not. He specifically stated that he never preaches about money because of the reputation of televangelists.

## Interview with *The Christian Post* 4-21-13



I get grouped into the prosperity gospel and I never think it's fair, but it's just what it is. I think prosperity, and I've said it 1,000 times, it's being healthy, it's having great children, it's having peace of mind. Money is part of it; and yes, I believe God wants us to excel... to be blessed so we can be a bigger blessing to others.

# Joel Osteen Preaching



When I see thousands of people before me, it just doesn't come out of me to say, "You guys are terrible, and you're going to hell." I'd rather say that God is a God of mercy. You've got to live an obedient life, but for every mistake you've made, there's mercy there, and I believe we can do better.

# Examples of Joel Osteen's Preaching

- Remove negative labels that hold you back
- You become what you believe
- You were made for more
- There are gifts inside you just waiting to be released
- You are going to accomplish more than you thought possible
- Ask big so you can lift the fallen and help the hurting
- Nothing that has happened to you has stopped God's plan



# Public Recognition



Barbara Walters selected Joel Osteen as one of her 10 Most Fascinating People of 2006.



Senator John McCain described Osteen as his favorite inspirational author.

# Public Recognition



Kanye West is attending service at Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church today, Donald Iloff Jr., a representative of the church, confirmed

<https://www.lakewoodchurch.com/livestream>

# Hurricane Harvey Response August 2017

Osteen received significant criticism for not making Lakewood Church available as an emergency shelter for those displaced by the storm. There were contradicting statements on social media about whether the church was open or closed and about flooding in the streets around the church.

A year later the City of Houston honored Lakewood for providing assistance to more than 1,150 families whose homes were damaged or destroyed by floodwaters. The church bought \$1.1 million in building materials, furniture, appliances and paid labor, and more than 2,500 church volunteers helped recovery efforts.

# Criticism of the Prosperity Gospel

- It asks us to give in order to gain material compensation from God
- It blames the poor for their poverty
- Church leaders have exorbitant lifestyles
- The self is more important than God
- There is no serious exposition of Scripture



# Questions

- Do you believe God wants what is best for us?
- Do you ask God to help you when you are suffering?
- How important is it to have faith that your prayers will be answered?
- Do you consider financial security a blessing from God?
- Why do you give money to the church?

# Questions

- Do you believe that people who don't have health insurance have most likely budgeted poorly?
- Why are the poor attracted to the prosperity gospel?
- How important is it for pastors to have a command of Biblical scripture?
- Should preachers spend more sermon time talking about sin?
- Do you consider prosperity theology to be heresy?

# Takeaways



- The Prosperity Gospel is a movement that has attracted many followers.
- Critics decry the focus of many Prosperity Gospel preachers on money.
- Joel Osteen is an example of a Prosperity Gospel preacher who focuses on God's blessings.