

Introduction

The Choice Is Yours

This is what the LORD says: "Take your choice."

1 Chronicles 21:11, NIV

Albert Einstein once said, "I am convinced that God does not play dice." Einstein was right. God doesn't have to gamble—He knows the beginning from the end. But that's not to say He has never taken a gamble. In fact, one of the biggest gambles God took when He created humans was to give us *choice*. It was a gamble because He placed fully into our hands the choice to believe in Him or not. The choice to treat our fellow human beings with kindness or not. The choice to follow His ways or not. The choice to trust and obey Him or not.

He gave us choice because He didn't want little robots running around programmed to worship Him—He desired true fellowship with His creation, fellowship that is real, not forced.

If there are a number of different choices to make in any given situation, then that would seem to indicate that there are any number of possible outcomes, depending on the choice we make. If we are choosing blind, with no wise guidance or proven process to follow, then we diminish our chances of making the right decision. Still, we get to choose.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, an Italian Renaissance philosopher, wrote in *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, "Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the highest forms, which are divine."¹ That "power," that choice, is a gift from God. It all begins with choice, and He watches us every moment, observing every decision we make.

Because He loves us so much, God wants to assist us in making choices that will give us every possible chance to experience only the best, His best: the most peaceful, the most productive, the most positive outcomes we could possibly experience during our brief time here on Earth. For that reason, He gave us His Word, the Bible, in order to provide us with guidance, instructions, processes and commands on how to live our lives and how to deal properly with every conceivable situation we might encounter. And although He wants us to follow the ways that He has laid out for us, God never forces us to do so, even when our experiences inform us in hindsight that His ways are always best for our ultimate happiness and success. This is because He loves us so much that He wants only the best for us. "I chose you and appointed you that you

should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16).

Consequence: Companion of Choice

Choice has a constant companion: consequence. For every action, there is a reaction, a result, an outcome—a *consequence*. One of the constant challenges we face in life is that of anticipating, examining and being influenced by the consequences of our choices. Unfortunately, we can’t always see the other side of the decisions we make. God does not give us pre-flight itineraries for our journey through life, nor does divine providence always reveal what’s around the corner of the paths we choose.

Yet God makes no secret of how He wants us to choose, as He says in Deuteronomy: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life” (Deut. 30:19).

To paraphrase Robert Browning, the nineteenth-century poet and playwright, the “business” of life is making an endless series of choices.² As we move from one choice to another, the decision we make from each of those choices can dramatically impact the course of our entire life. There is no better example of this truth than how we handle our money.

For example, when handling monetary and financial matters, people often choose to go it alone, refusing to follow God’s ways, processes and commands. This is why so many people in today’s culture live paycheck to paycheck, struggling just to keep their heads above water. Because they choose not to learn to make their money truly count, they establish a pattern that they follow throughout their lives, without ever realizing that God teaches a far more peaceful and successful way to deal with their finances. His teachings bring prosperity, as He says in Proverbs 3:1-2: “My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity” (*NIV*).

In many cases, the contemporary church does not teach God’s way of dealing with finances and monetary matters in its entirety. This partial gospel has crept into other areas as well, affecting how we approach such topics as healing and deliverance. For example, we preach and teach healing, yet we say very little about how to *stay* healthy. We preach much about deliverance—conducting deliverance conferences and deliverance services, and walking people through deliverance lines—but we don’t say much about how *not* to get into bondage in the first place!

It’s the same with monetary affairs. We preach prosperity and financial success, but in most cases we preach and proclaim prosperity without discussing a *process* for achieving that prosperity. There are thousands of people naming it, claiming it and framing it—but if the truth

be told, while they may be believing it, most are not receiving it. It's not their fault. It's faulty teaching.

We might not like to admit it, but too often what is taught and preached and proclaimed is a gospel of prosperity that completely ignores the biblical process. This incomplete interpretation of Scripture can easily breed immature, gullible and lazy saints, because they are not being taught the full gospel on the topic. Many Christians don't respond to God's teachings and principles on this subject because they simply haven't been properly taught about it. Then there are those who insist on learning the hard way, even when the Person asking them to trust and follow His ways is Christ Himself.

Too many people are waiting for some kind of supernatural move of God to make them prosperous. They're waiting for wealth to fall like manna from the sky, like silver dollars from heaven—just as soon as their spiritual slot machine lines up right. However, by eliminating *process* from *prosperity*, they've got exactly two chances of getting supernaturally what they're waiting for: slim and none.

God is a God of order, not of chaos. There is an order to how He goes about His work, a process that He always follows.

A Kingdom Principle

It is of grave concern that the Church today paints an incomplete picture of the subject of handling money. Removing God's process from the picture ignores a valuable instructive parable Jesus taught on the topic of financial affairs. What Jesus taught is *God's* process, not man's, and until we not only understand the scope and importance of this teaching but also *put it into practice*, we will continually fall short of our Kingdom potential. We will place ourselves in danger of losing out on God's intended blessings for us and we will render ourselves of little use to Him for His work in the world.

Church folks tend to operate at a sophisticated level of hypocrisy when it comes to money. There are two things they'd like to get more of and hear less about on Sunday, and money is one of them. (Sex is the other.) I realize that the discussion of money might be rather emotional for some readers, but it's time for the saints to stand up and show the world whose children we are: the King who owns it all!

In this book, we will examine what it means to "do business" for Christ's kingdom, and explore the many blessings that await you when you faithfully take care of your financial affairs God's way in an effort to make your money count in today's culture. We will also discover what

happens to those who choose much less secure ways to deal with money. As you read, keep in mind that, unless indicated, these aren't merely my own thoughts on the subject. I strain to be faithful to the Word of God as we seek to incorporate into our lives God's own instructions, straight out of His Word.

It's time for believers to put *process* back into prosperity. It's time for us preachers to start teaching the *entire* gospel on the topic of money. It's time for God's children to learn God's process, rather than simply naming and claiming it without fully understanding it.

Ultimately, the choice is yours. You can cling to a partial gospel if you desire, but I guarantee the consequence won't be what you're looking for. On the other hand, if you will learn and wholeheartedly follow *God's ways*, you will achieve great results. It's that simple.

We *can* receive all of the blessings God has in store. We just have to do it His way. So join me and let's explore God's process for achieving financial security and making your money count.

Notes

1. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, first published in 1486.
2. Robert Browning (1812-1889), *The Ring and the Book*, chapter 10, "The Pope."

Chapter 1

Prosperity: Just the Facts

I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

John 10:10

Before we go any further, let's clear up one issue: Poverty vs. Prosperity. Does God want Christians to have wealth or not? Two opposing teachings emanate from church pulpits on this topic today. One narrowly equates material possessions with blessings from God, and the other teaches almost a "deification" of poverty, as if it's a holy virtue to be poor. One camp measures spirituality by the *accumulation* of material possessions, and the other measures it by the *sacrifice* of material possessions.

Are we more spiritual if we have more things or are we more spiritual if we have less? Which teaching is from God? Let's find out. God says:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper (Ps. 1:1-3).

The word "blessed" in this psalm stems from the Hebrew word *esher*, which means "blessings" (plural), indicating a plurality of intensity or magnitude. In other words, happiness is a byproduct of the choices we make, and the person who carefully considers his choices in life increases his chances for happiness.

According to Psalm 1:1-3, the happy person does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly but *chooses* instead to follow the law of the Lord. Acting only on choices that honor God is what leads to happiness and prosperity. The problem comes when people make the mistake of equating material possessions with God's blessings. While it is possible to gain material possessions and financial prosperity as a result of *not* loving and obeying and honoring God, that wealth would not stem from God blessing your actions and has far less of a chance to bring lasting happiness with it. However, there is an even worse downside in attempting to gain

prosperity outside of the ways of God: If God is not the source of your material possessions and riches, there's only one other place it could have come from! If you're gaining wealth by following the devil (intentionally or not), he will eventually extract a heavy price from you.

Blessing is manifest by divine favor, a favor that includes both material *and* spiritual blessings. The first time God ever made a pronouncement of blessings on someone was what we refer to as the "Abrahamic Covenant," which He made with Abraham when He said, "I will bless you and make your name great" (Gen. 12:2). God specifically included material blessings in the Abrahamic Covenant—a part of the covenant was the blessing of land and wealth. God says that as we walk in His ways, we will live our life under His hand of divine favor, enjoying the wealth of His material and spiritual blessings.

Biblical Prosperity: An Oxymoron?

Many people ask, "Is prosperity really God's intention for us?" *TIME* magazine posed the question more bluntly in its September 18, 2006, issue with a cover that blared, "Does God Want You to Be Rich?"

Let's break that question down from the bottom up by a process of elimination, followed by what God has to say on the topic. First and foremost, however, you must settle in your mind the definition of "God" and the question of exactly who God is. If you don't believe in the God of the Bible and if you don't believe that the Bible is true, then skip this chapter and we'll catch up with you in the next one.

If you do believe in the God of the Bible and in the inerrancy of Scripture, and you want to know what He has to say on the topic of prosperity and how it relates to Christians, then we can address the first question, which is, Does God want us to be financially destitute? The answer is no, there are no Scriptures to support that premise. However, God does not want us to *want* to be rich simply for the sake of being rich, as it says in 1 Timothy 6:9: "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition."

The second question is, Does God want us to be monetarily mediocre? Again, there are no Bible verses that support striving for mediocrity. After all, we are children and heirs of the God who owns it all, according to Galatians 4:7: "Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

The third question is, What are God's thoughts on prosperity—does He want us to prosper? Let's take that question directly to God Himself and allow Him to answer from His own Scriptures (emphasis added):

- He who trusts in the LORD *will prosper* (Prov. 28:25, *NIV*).
- Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, *that you may prosper* wherever you go (Josh. 1:7).
- Walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live *and prosper* (Deut. 5:33, *NIV*).
- Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, *that you may prosper* in all that you do (Deut. 29:9).
- Keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, *that you may prosper* in all that you do (1 Kings 2:3).
- The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, so that we might *always prosper* (Deut. 6:24, *NIV*).
- A generous man *will prosper* (Prov. 11:25, *NIV*).
- He will *prosper you* and multiply you more than your fathers (Deut. 30:5).
- Believe in the LORD your God, and you shall be established; believe His prophets, and *you shall prosper* (2 Chron. 20:20).

I could go on and on with scriptural examples, but that would be like shooting fish in a barrel. However, let's look at one final example, Proverbs 10:22: "The blessing of the LORD makes one rich."

The Hebrew for "blessing" in this verse is *berakah*, which means "abundance." The Hebrew for the word "rich" is *ashar*, which means "accumulation" or "to cause to grow rich."

Thus, the transliteration (literal translation) of Proverbs 10:22 is this: “Abundance from God is to give you accumulation to cause you to grow rich.” Does that leave any room for doubt about God’s intentions toward us with regard to the topic?

But then look at the last part of the verse: “And He adds no sorrow with it.” What an astounding little addition to God’s stated intention! When God blesses us, we not only accumulate and get rich, but also there is no worry, pain or strife in the process—He wants it to be easy and painless for us! And His only caveat is that we follow *His* ways, trust His leading, His plan, His process and His path (see Lev. 25:18-19). That’s it!

There are scores of biblical verses that give us God’s clear answer to *TIME* magazine’s blaring question, “Does God Want You to be Rich?”—an answer that perhaps *TIME* did not anticipate: If we do as the Bible instructs, if we do as God tells us, if we follow His commands, if we trust His lead . . . then *Yes, He wants us to prosper!* There is no doubt. God makes it very clear.

Distorters of His Word

Do not make the mistake of thinking that this is a prosperity message book. There are Christians who actually believe that it is God’s will that every Christian be wealthy and that we’re somehow in disobedience to God if we’re not financially well off. Those people most likely have dust on their Bibles. There are preachers who shout to their congregations, “It is not God’s desire that you suffer financial struggles!”

Well, it might not be God’s *desire* that we suffer anything, but sometimes it just might be His will that we do. Here’s why: There are times when suffering is the only way some of God’s more stubborn children will learn certain lessons. Sometimes I, as a parent, desire that my children suffer a struggle if they’re involved in ongoing sin—a struggle may be the only way to get their attention so that they’ll stop whatever behavior is causing them to not grow spiritually. What good parent never disciplined their children?

If you’ve been struggling financially and monetary hardships are a pattern in your life, maybe there are biblical processes governing money that you need to learn and put into practice. The fact is, we have a responsibility to be all that God has called us to be in the area of finances. This means that if God has given you a certain academic preparation, if He has given you a mind to think and to reason with, if He has blessed you with intellect or talents or gifts that can benefit you in being rewarded in financial ways—and yet you don’t make the effort to get up and go to

class, don't study, don't do your work—you are desecrating what God has given you. You are living beneath that which God has ordained you to live.

God has blessed you with the ability to prosper. That means that on the journey of your life, He has called you to be the man or woman He wants you to be. But if you settle for less, you are dishonoring the God who endowed you with potential for much more. There isn't anything that you cannot reasonably accomplish by doing things the way Jesus teaches. After all, it says in His Word that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

To prosper means *to succeed to the point of excellence*—to the highest level. God will bless you with everything you need on your journey to the top of the mountain, and He will help you through every valley until you arrive at the highest point of success He has ordained for you. All you have to do is put His process into play. "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (Jer. 29:11, *NIV*).

Prosperity Is a Journey

On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

1 Corinthians 16:2

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

3 John 1:2

Prosperity is an established Old Testament concept. In fact, 27 of 29 occurrences of the word "prosperity" are found in the Old Testament. The word for "prosper" in the New Testament verses above has a slightly different connotation than the Old Testament word. It indicates *wellbeing on a journey*, moving along on your journey while enjoying wellness and progressive success. The idea is that you do well on your journey through life, in all areas of your life, just as you may be well in your health.

Psalm 1 says that the person who is blessed—who is happy, who does well, who walks in the counsel of the Lord—that person shall prosper. The main Hebrew verb translated into English as "prosper" is *tsalach*, or *tsa-leach*. It means "to push forward, to break out, to come mightily, to go over, to be profitable, to cause to prosper." *Tsalach* is an action word that

signifies moving forward, going over, or breaking through. It is meant to convey that the person who is happy and prospering is the one whose life is constantly moving forward. Indeed, they are actually being *pushed* forward—there is something behind them propelling them ahead, compelling them onward.

The idea of prospering is that of a journey. When you are prospering, you are continuing to move forward on your path. To say that you are prospering does not mean that you won't get into a jam, experience challenges or encounter obstacles now and then. Occasional problems will always crop up on our path through life. But we deal with them. We prosper by whatever (or *Whomever*) is propelling us. We are able to go over whatever barrier or hurdle is in our way. We will break out!

True prosperity is simply *success God's way*. The person God prospers is the one whose path is cleared by God because she is following right behind God on His path. The word “prosperity” is related to the word “succeed,” which means that God will clear the way and lead you on your journey so that you will arrive at the place He has prepared for you. Once you grasp what true biblical prosperity is and you begin to separate biblical truth from much of this off-kilter contemporary theology on prosperity, you will gain a fresh revelation of how God wants to move through your life—and to make your journey through life *move!*

Let's take a look at a biblical example of prosperity.

Joseph: A Life Journey of Prosperity

*The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man;
and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.
And his master saw that the LORD was with him
and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand.*

Genesis 39:2–3

The Bible says that Joseph was prosperous because the Lord was with him. Joseph was the youngest of 11 brothers. He was a dreamer and an idealist. His brothers considered him a spoiled brat. Being the youngest and having been born when his father, Abraham, was past his golden years, Joseph was the favored child. His father even gave him a special, richly ornamented robe to wear (see Gen. 37:3). His 10 brothers began to grow jealous of him, so they schemed to toss him down a well and be rid of him for once and for all. In a way, their plan backfired. It also set up the entire story of redemption through the incredible history of Israel.

Joseph was sold into slavery to some merchants known as Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt and sold him as a slave to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials and the captain of Pharaoh's palace guard.

Things got better. Joseph, due to his diligence, his obedience to God and no doubt to his perpetually cheery outlook and charming persona, was soon appointed as chief of staff over Potiphar's household.

Things got worse. Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of trying to rape her. He was thrown into prison, where he languished for a few years.

Things got better. Eventually, the truth of Joseph's honest character came to light. He was put in a position to assist Pharaoh in an urgent matter, and he was appointed as one of the highest officials in all of Egypt, second in authority only to Pharaoh himself.

Joseph did not wait until he became the minister of the treasury of Egypt before he began to prosper. In fact, he was prospering every step of the way, from back when he ran Potiphar's household. *Joseph prospered.* Even when he was in jail, Joseph was prospering!

Joseph prospered because his ultimate position of leadership in Egypt was God's purpose for him. He achieved that purpose because he trusted God and followed Him every step of the way. All those steps along the way—being sold by his brothers into slavery, serving in Potiphar's house, being wrongfully locked up in jail, being released by Pharaoh who then appointed him second in command over the most powerful nation on Earth—were all steps in his prosperity journey process.

Joseph was on a journey toward the blessed responsibility of leading an entire nation in good times and in bad. Nothing he experienced and suffered and conquered was haphazard—every step of the way was ordained by God. Sometimes his path led through trying circumstances, because in order for God to get Joseph all the way to his destiny, He had to take him over some rough roads. But He brought Joseph through. And Joseph never shirked his path: He embraced it, submitted to it, sought it. Indeed, he followed God's path for his life with a positive outlook and with never a recorded complaint. Joseph was mightily blessed and prospered because of his attitude and his obedience.

Joseph is an example of prosperity because his journey to the pinnacle of responsibility over Egypt was his purpose, and everything that led him to that point was a crucial steppingstone to his prosperity, a rung on his ladder to the top. It was all part of the weave of God's pattern for the life of Joseph. Likewise, your prosperity is inextricably woven into the fabric of your life's purpose. God allows you to experience the highs and lows of life because prosperity is integrated within your purpose as you move along your journey.

The Unstudied Naysayers

Too many people don't study the Scriptures in-depth enough to realize one simple fact: The Bible *never* contradicts itself. It *is* definitive on the topic of money, prosperity, finances and income. The Christian naysayers, the detractors, who claim that a person cannot be Christian and also be prosperous or rich simply don't study their Bible closely enough.

In explaining their position, those of the poverty mind-set often point to verses such as this one, from the book of Matthew:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

People who use this passage in support of their mission to prove that God doesn't want us to be wealthy, miss one key word in the passage: *yourselves*. "Do not lay up for *yourselves* . . ." Of course we're not supposed to lay up material blessings for ourselves—the Bible clearly teaches that we're not to hoard it, but that we're to share it once we get it.

These same people also quote selections from the Old Testament to try to prove that Christians should not seek to prosper:

Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lives he blesses himself (for men will praise you when you do well for yourself), he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish (Ps. 49:16-20).

People who use these verses to prove their anti-prosperity argument also miss one simple phrase: "the glory of *his* house is increased." Of course we're not to seek the glory of *our* house, but the glory of *God's* house. Then there's the phrase in the same passage, "while he lives *he* blesses himself." Again, the Bible is clear: We are not to use our material possessions, our prosperity, merely to bless ourselves, but *to bless others*, to do *God's* work, to advance *His* Kingdom on Earth.

A passage in James is also often used against prosperity:

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days (Jas. 5:1-3).

Again, the obvious is missed right in the very verse they use to state their case. The clarification is in the verse itself: “*your* riches” (referring to a wealthy person whose mind-set is that their riches are their own). Any Christian who studies the Bible on the topic knows that riches are not ours; they’re God’s. The verse is indicating people who think that riches are their own property to do with as they please—it is *not* indicating that Christians should not have stewardship over riches.

Then, in the same passage, there’s the phrase “you have heaped up.” This refers to *hoarding for oneself*, again indicating a mind-set of possessing for one’s own benefit.

I could go on and on about these faulty teachers’ lack of study and their preaching a partial gospel on the subject, using the very Bible verses they quote in alleged support of their claim that God doesn’t want Christians to become prosperous or wealthy. Scripture is crystal clear on the subject: When we treat treasures as ours, when we start to think of material blessings as our own personal property to do with as we please, then we’ve gone off track. It’s *never* ours—it is always God’s, entrusted to us for but a season. And if we deliberately mess up, God will discipline us, just as He promises, “You rebuke and discipline men for their sin; you consume their wealth like a moth” (Ps. 39:11, *NIV*).

But Is It of God?

Anything that looks like prosperity but does not enhance your purpose is not of God! If it does not bring glory to God, if it does not illuminate your Christian walk, if it does not represent the character of Jesus Christ, then I don’t care how good it looks, how great it feels, how big it is—it is a deception and an indication that you have been walking in the counsel of the ungodly. You will become prosperous only to the degree that you are moving toward the things of God, because with God, it is not about money. Neither God nor the devil is upset when you gain material wealth. The enemy is only concerned with giving you whatever it takes to keep you away from your destiny in God, and God is only concerned that you follow His purpose for your life, that you follow His Holy Spirit, His ways, His processes.

Prosperity is contextually relevant to our purpose. In other words, we prosper in the environment of our purpose, because prosperity is part of the fulfillment of the specific call of God on our lives. Therefore, godly prosperity is deemed to be so *only* if it advances us on our journey to our destiny with God in this world. It does not matter how attractive the “stuff” looks on the side of the road, because as soon as you turn off the path and go after what you think looks good but is not from God, it pulls you away from your purpose and your destiny. Something may *look* prosperous to you, but if it is not part of your journey with God, it has distracted you from your destiny and purpose, and God says it is not from Him. And if it’s not from God, the process of elimination tells you who such distractions are from.

That brings us to the potential trip-up: If he has to, the devil will resort to trying to *bleed* you out of your purpose! He will try to distract you so that you get off the course of your prosperity journey. Many people fall for that, so Jesus has to come along and remind them: “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mark 8:36).

The devil is not concerned about your getting rich or having money. The devil wants you to miss your purpose. The devil wants you off of God’s track for your life, and that’s all he wants, because he knows something that he does not want us to ever realize: It is possible to gain the whole world *and* gain your soul as well! Just follow the precepts, the processes, the ways of God, and like Joseph you’ll prosper on Earth and enter victorious into heaven at your appointed time.

By Our Fruit

The Bible says, “by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20, *KJV*). That is, we Christians shall be known by our “fruit”—by what we do, how we treat people, how and if we help those in need. If we have no fruit, how shall they know us? If we have no ability to help, to assist, to step in during the hard times when suffering people are in need, how will we be known?

Many pastors don’t enjoy preaching about money, material blessings and prosperity, simply because they have not studied Scripture in depth enough to gain acuity on the subject. There are even preachers who blatantly discourage their flocks from thinking that God looks favorably on prosperity. But what do we do with Joseph? What do we do with King David? What do we do with Moses and Matthew and Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea and on and on and on? Does their wealth condemn them? Of course not. In fact, wealth was often an essential component to serving God and operating in their God-ordained purpose. Without money, for example, Joseph of Arimathea couldn’t have purchased the private tomb for Jesus.

Then there are the so-called ministers of prosperity who essentially say that the way to help the poor is to *encourage them not to be poor*. Encouraging someone without helping them does nothing for the poor. You help the poor by *helping* them. Platitudes don't help a needy person pay her rent, and it's much easier to help pay her rent when you have the financial means to do so. You gain the means by obeying the Word of God and by allowing His process to work in your life as you follow His purpose for you. If God wants you to be rich in order to fulfill His purpose through you, then who are you to say, "Oh, no thank you, Lord—my pastor told me wealth is wrong for us Christians. But thanks anyway"?

I don't know one single Christian who honestly believes that Jesus died the most violent death possible and then rose from the grave to glory in heaven just so that we could be "blessed" to live a life full of mediocrity and failure and poverty and financial struggle. Do we honestly think our Father in heaven prefers that for us? What kind of a father would want that for his children? It's time to snap out of that way of thinking. If you're a parent, answer this question honestly: Would you prefer that your children and grandchildren be constantly preoccupied with a struggle to make ends meet, or would you rather they not have that worry on their minds?

I have found an interesting contradiction: Some of the very same people who espouse a theology of anti-wealth and anti-possession are involved in ministries that are supported by Christian millionaires! A millionaire who funds a mission and a ministry is accountable for gaining as much money as possible and then turning around to channel those funds back into the ministry—it behooves that person to be as rich and as wealthy as God would have him be. God gave him the power to get it so that he could then give it, so that He can reestablish His covenant and pour it back into the Kingdom. All the while, God gets the glory and many people get blessed along the way. That process, as Ecclesiastes says, is a gift from God!

It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God (Eccles. 5:18-19).

Don't fall for the two extremes that have crept into the Church today. Don't believe on one hand that God's blessings are all about money, but don't believe on the other that God's blessings are never about money. God's blessings and His purpose for you are above and beyond anything that you can imagine. His blessings include spiritual richness, and they also encompass monetary wealth.

In the Joy of Joseph

God's ultimate goal for your life is that you gain all of the worldly "stuff" that He has purposed you to have *and* have your soul as well. You have a responsibility to be as rich as God would have you to be. You have a responsibility to live up to your purpose. You are accountable to be as blessed and as wealthy as your purpose in God dictates.

I have a strong desire to one day live on 10 percent of what I make and to be able to give 90 percent back into the kingdom of God on Earth. I'm not saying I'm so noble or deep or spiritual. I'm just saying that's what the Holy Spirit is urging within me.

Do you know how much I need to earn in order to be able to afford to live on 10 and give 90? Is that even possible? With God it is! I will have to break away from some distractions and nonproductive influences, but it will be worth it because I guarantee that the 10 I'll live on then will be better than the 90 I'm living on now!

What do you want for your life? Are you willing to give glory to God's name in order to receive His glory on your purpose? Whatever purpose God is calling you to, live it fully. Don't reject any of it! Embrace it joyfully, as Joseph always did. God says that the person who is happy will prosper. Once you get the *definition* of prosperity, God will give you the *directions* for prosperity.

Psalm 1:3 says that whatever the obedient person does shall prosper. Why? Because his delight is in the law of the Lord! Start living your life in the delight of God's law, and watch your life prosper!

I echo the apostle John's prayer for you: *I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers!*