

Transcript* - Abundant Life and the Prosperity Gospel – Jay Gjurjevich – 8/11/2025

That wolf is like the stuff of nightmares, Yeah, maybe that's the point. I think that's really the point. Good to see you here this morning. Good morning, everybody. Morning. I just want to take a moment and say, thank you to our worship team this morning. Stacy and the team for leading us have done such a great job.

I promise I didn't say that because she said a nice thing about the sermon. It's not like we text each other beforehand and say, hey, you say something nice about me, and I'll say something nice about you. It's just it's organic. We call it spirit led, whatever. But, just appreciating each other is a good thing, right? So today we are going to continue, though our series, called distorted that we started last week and as Pastor John got us started with a great message last week, we talked about a couple things that I want to rehash for you this morning.

First of all, we are going to be at the end of this series on the last Sunday of this month. This is a quick series. And so it'll just last this month. But on the last Sunday of this month, we're going to do a Q&A team teaching time, where both Pastor John and I will be up here answering your questions throughout the series.

And so we recognize the fact that because it's a short series, we're not going to get a chance to address everything that you might want to hear. And so if there's anything that we leave out and you'd like to hear more about it or anything that you'd like us to expand on or just questions that you have, you can email us throughout the series anytime.

This month, and we're going to take those questions. We're going to answer as many of them as we can. On that last Sunday, the last Sunday of the series. Also, secondly, I want to just review a little bit about why we're doing this series. I hope that as we're talking about these issues of false teachers and false teaching, that you understand that we're not doing this just to be kind of mean and judgmental towards certain people, or even just to say like, we're right and they're wrong.

We're doing this because we're commanded in Scripture that when we see false teaching or encounter false teaching, to confront it and to expose it. In fact, as Pastor John read from acts chapter 20 last week, I want to read those verses again. But this is the Apostle Paul talking to the elders at the church of Ephesus. And as he, as he, as he's talking to them and kind of instructing them on how to lead the church, the elders, the pastors there, this is one of the things that he says to them about their responsibility, especially as pastors in the church.

Acts 20 verse 28 says this pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fears wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves.

That's from within the church will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. I want you to notice a few things that Paul says here that are really important for this series. The first thing he says is that there will be false teachers. There will be men who will come in as wolves into the flock.

Now that image is used on purpose, right? Because when wolves come into a flock of sheep, they're not coming in to just like, hang out and be friends. They're not coming in to braid the wool on the sheep. Right. They're coming in for one purpose. There is a predator prey relationship there. They're coming in for one purpose, to destroy and to devour the flock, every last one of them.

And Paul says the weapon or the way that they use this, the way that they attack is through their twisted teachings, their false teaching. And Paul then says, what's at stake? Why is this so important? Because what's at stake is nothing less than the church of God, whom he purchased with his own blood. So there's no doubt in Paul's words here for the urgent and important need to oppose false teaching in every way, given the damage that it does, and given what it does to something that Jesus loves so much his church, his people.

And so maybe you see why it's not optional for us to address false teaching. It's a command and a calling for the church. And that's especially true for us as pastors. Ephesians 5:11 says, take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. And that's part of what we're doing as we expose the false teaching that we're going to be talking about throughout this series.

Now, even as I say that, I want to make it clear that I don't believe that everyone who teaches or believes an aspect of false teaching that we may be hitting on through this series is necessarily evil, or that they're maybe not even Christian in those ways. Right? That's not for me to judge. That's ultimately for God to judge.

What we're talking about specifically is the doctrine and how the doctrine is false and how the doctrine is evil. And some people don't fully realize that what they believe is false. That's why we need a series like this. Some people don't even believe it and don't even realize that what they teach is false sometimes. And that's part of what this is all about.

But with that in mind, we're going to be talking today about the false teaching that's known as the prosperity gospel. And in case you haven't heard the term before, prosper theology is a term that goes by a few different names today. Most notable is the word of Faith. Movement. Under that same umbrella is often called the Health and Wealth Gospel, or or sometimes name it and claim it.

Theology has a broader kind of picture, whatever it might be called, the idea behind it is the same across the board, and it's this. It's a doctrine that teaches that God, God wills the financial prosperity and physical well-being of his people and that faith positive speech, and donations to select ministries can increase one's material wealth and health. That's a definition by Joe Carter, who's an author and pastor.

Now, let me ask you this question. As we're talking about prosperity, does God want you to prosper as as his child, as a believer? Yeah. God does want you to prosper. We see that in Scripture. Okay, second question. What does it mean for you to prosper? For example, does God will the financial prosperity and physical health for all of those who are faithful?

As you're thinking about that, let me ask you to imagine a scenario. Julie is a 35 year old married mother of three young kids. She's a faithful believer. She is a volunteer leader in the children's ministry at her church, a faithful church attender and a faithful giver. And she's actively involved in her small group Bible study as well.

About six months ago, Julie started feeling sick and fatigued to such a degree that she ended up in the hospital after a doctor's ran some tests, they realized that Julie had been the. The Julie had a form of aggressive cancer that was now in an advanced stage inside her body. She immediately began treatment and, along with many of her church friends and family, began praying day and night that God would heal her.

Dave is 58 years old. He's a married empty nester who is a few years away from retirement, and during one of his annual physicals, his doctor recommended that he get scanned for cancer. The scans showed that he had an advanced form of an aggressive cancer, the same kind of cancer that Julie had. Now David was, and Dave was not a religious man.

He didn't go to church. He was not a Christian, but he knew that his neighbor went to church. So he asked his neighbor to pray for him. And whenever Dave remembered, he kind of prayed for himself as well, even though he didn't really believe that there's a God now. Julie and Dave both received the best treatment available for their cancer, but sadly, cancer eventually took Julie's life.

However, Dave survived and went into remission. Now, this is a hypothetical scenario, but we all know situations like this happen all the time. Namely, when a faithful person prays and God doesn't heal them while another person gets healed. And this realization and the realization of this brings it all kinds of questions, right? If God wants someone to prosper and God is in control and he's sovereign, how does one person survive and another person doesn't?

And how is it that the younger mother, who's a faithful Christian, who served and gave and prayed, why is it she who's that who dies? And the man who wasn't a Christian and didn't go to church and didn't believe in a God in the first place, is the one who survives? Well, some might say that God didn't want them to prosper or God wasn't really in control.

But hopefully we know that neither one of those things is true. So what's the answer? Well, the answer to that is the crux of what we're going to be talking about today. Specifically, this question how does the abundant life that Jesus promised us inform our understanding of what it means for us to prosper from God's perspective, and according to the definition that we looked at earlier, the prosperity gospel

defines that abundance for God's people as primarily financial prosperity and physical well-being.

Health and wealth now is a necessary part of this teaching as a bit of a simple formula for how you get health and wealth. It is through faith. It is through maybe prayer or positive speech, and it's especially through certain donations to certain teachers and certain ministries that you might see on TV. Now we're going to explore the contrast of the prosperity gospel with what Jesus actually said about abundant life a little bit later.

But before we do, I think it's important really, with all kinds of false teaching, to talk about where this teaching has come from and how it's developed over time, because the nature of false teaching, the nature of false teachers is that they add layers to things, and they mask their teaching in such a way that it might seem true on the outside.

But as you dig deeper and get to the core of where it all came from, you realize where the false teaching lies. And that's true about the prosperity gospel as well. Now let's start with its source. Then. Prosperity theology as we know it today originally came from a perspective known as New Thought, which was a form of New Age mysticism that believe that people have the ability to think or to speak something into existence.

If you know a little bit about prosperity gospel, you can see that already happening. But this was obviously a worldly belief. It came from New Age mysticism, but the belief was then married with a Christian flavor, so that it was given kind of spiritual and Christian terms. And as a center. Jesus was the tool or the instrument through which now you can have all the things that you want.

So now you pray and speak things into existence through Jesus, who is the one who gives it to you. Now, the last layer of this, this is an American theology was born in America. And so in the terms of what we see it today, this last level of Americana was added to it, which is American consumerism and American materialism.

So that what you see today is about material holism, so that specifically preachers and teachers and leaders in this movement make money for themselves based upon selling people the false notion that God wants you to be wealthy, just like I am materially wealthy. And what ends up happening is essentially a Ponzi scheme. In the end, at least from my perspective.

Now, there are many examples of teachers that promote this type of theology. Some might come to mind, but probably the most well known and most well established prosperity gospel preacher is also one of the most well known preachers throughout the world in general. His name is Benny Hinn. I'm going to talk about Benny Hinn just as an example of this theology, because he embodies really all of this theology and all of this kind of ministry where some just kind of have pieces of this.

But his approach, along with those like him, is to frequently identify the things that people care about the most, their loved ones being lost their own health when they are sick, providing, of course, for their families and material needs, especially when they're poor and they're struggling financially. And he tells them, this is how you get all those things that you really want.

And how do they do it? Well, it's by listening to what Benny has to say. If you listen to what I say because God has told me, then you will get everything that you want, which typically ends with them giving him money. Now, if you watch some of his healing services, which you can actually see on YouTube, you might see the service that I saw where he told a young boy who came on stage, who was blind, that this boy would be healed of his blindness in front of his mom, who was on stage with him for a thousand people who were in the arena, thousands of people who might have been watching on TV,

he tells this boy that you are going to be healed. God told me, you're going to be healed of this blindness within two hours. Now for this young man, for this young boy, two hours came and went and he was still blind. But at this point it didn't matter to Benny, because he was well off the stage and Benny was on his way to his private jet so that he could go to the next location.

Time and time again, Benny Hinn proclaims that people are healed of things like cancer from the stage, only to find out that that healing was never genuine in the first place. One lady in particular, who had cancer was brought to one of these healing services, told by Benny Hinn that she was healed and she believed him to such a degree that she reject a medical treatment for her cancer, and even days before her death, that she continued to decline in her health because of cancer.

Days before her death, she still believed that God was going to heal her because Benny Hinn told her that was going to happen and she ended up dying of cancer. Now, look, if you examine Benny Hinn ministry and ministries like this, you'll find that these are not isolated incidents or rare occurrences. They are actually very typical occurrences, again, not only in his ministry but in many others.

Paul warns in Scripture specifically against this when he says that false teachers will deceive and gain followers based upon false signs and wonders. So according to this, how do you recognize false teachers through false signs and wonders of which, if you take a closer look at his ministry, you see that a lot of these miracles are fabricated or manipulated, and one of those who is the most critical of Benny Hinn today and prosperity theology in general, is a local pastor by the name of Costi Costin.

He pastors a church actually out here in Chandler. And yes, Costigan is related to Benny Hinn. He's actually Benny Hinn nephew, and he grew up working in Benny Hinn ministry as a young child and throughout his young adulthood. And so he has a unique perspective into what happens behind the scenes. And he'll tell all kinds of stories about how this is manipulated and how these fake miracles are manipulated for audiences.

And he and today, he frequently speaks out against Uncle Benny's ministry. In one recent article, he describes growing up in that lifestyle. He said growing up in the Hinn family empire was like belonging to

some kind of hybrid of the royal family and the Mafia. Our lifestyle was lavish, our loyalty was enforced, and our version of the gospel was big business.

Though Jesus Christ was still a part of our gospel, he was more of a magic genie than in the King of Kings, rubbing him the right way by giving him money, by giving money and having enough faith would unlock your spiritual inheritance. God's goal was not his glory in the end, but it was about our gain. His grace was not to set us free from sin, but to make us rich.

The abundant life he offered wasn't eternal. It was earthly. It was now. And we lived the prosperity gospel. He goes on to describe some of the ways that he lived. Just being a part of that ministry, multi-million multimillion dollar private jets that he would often fly on that were owned by the ministry. He talks about a time when he was in Dubai, and they stayed in rooms that cost \$25,000 a night to stay in of course, mansions all over the world and some of the most expensive places in the planet, all funded from donations from people, many of whom probably don't even make \$25,000 a year.

And here are these men spending \$25,000 a night to stay in a hotel. It's a special kind of evil. And this kind of evil is what Paul says to expose victimizing people who are sick by promising healing that never comes, and victimizing people who give their money because of miracles that they have seen. They're doing it in the name of Jesus, and they're taking from people and ruining lives.

Because so many of those people who are giving their money are people who are in desperate financial straits, and they're giving their last dollar to Benny Hinn ministry and ministries like them because they believe in their desperate situation, that that's the last hope that they have. And at the same time, they get sucked in as prosperity gospel preachers know that in just the way that a predator knows how to devour its prey.

Theologian David Jones says this in light of Scripture. The prosperity gospel is fundamentally flawed. At bottom, it's a false gospel because of its faulty view of the relationship between God and man. Simply put, if the prosperity gospel is true, grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant, and man is the measure of all things. Whether they're talking about the Abrahamic Covenant, the atonement, giving faith, or prayer, prosperity teachers turn the relationship between God and man into a quid pro quo transaction.

In short, what the prosperity gospel does is many of the worst things possible. Look, all sin is sin in the end, but at the same time, some sin is worse because of the consequences that it has. And this, these consequences are the kind that destroy people's lives. And yet, at the same time, this teaching is only growing in influence among American churchgoers.

In a 2023 study from LifeWay Research, they found that more than half 52% of American Protestant church goers say that their church teaches that God will bless them if they give more money to their church and their charities. Hopefully you haven't heard that here. That's not why we applaud during offering. By the way, 1 in 4 24% strongly agree with this teaching.

And today, three and four church of churchgoers, 76% believe that God wants them to prosper financially and 45% believe that they have to do something in order for him to in order for them to receive material blessings from God. But our focus in this series is to equip you with a framework to be able to confront and expose and defend yourself against all kinds of different false teachings.

But this is important not just for us as individuals, but for the person sitting next to you, for the other people in this room, for the other people who are part of this body. Because as we see whether it's element, whether it's elements of the prosperity gospel or any of these other false teachings that we're talking about through this series, there are elements that creep in, even if they're not full blown into all of our lives and into the body of the church.

And it's only growing. And so let's review our framework for responding to false teaching. As Pastor John introduced to us last week, there are three points to this. The first one is being established in Scripture. The second one is to examine the fruit, and the third one is to stay grounded. Let's talk about what it means to be established in Scripture.

Ephesians chapter four verse 13 through 15 says this until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes, rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up into every way into him who is the head into Christ.

Notice the focus on this as Paul is describing this right? It's about being solid. I almost get the picture of, especially with the wind blowing up like a solid tree being planted. Kind of like Psalm chapter one being planted firmly in the truth. As Pastor John said last week, we need to know our Bibles so that when the winds of doctrine come and the cunning of fit of false teachers come against us, we have the ability to stand in the midst of that because we are rooted in the truth.

We know what we believe. We can discern truth from error even as it's dressed up as something else. So let's do some establishing in Scripture in reference to the prosperity gospel. Again, the prosperity gospel is defined by the central belief that God wants every person to be financially wealthy and physically healthy, and that we have a role to play in that.

And that's basically our level of faith. In other words, the more faith you have, the more wealth you'll get, the more healthy you'll be. And on the flip side, the less faith you'll have if you are poor. And if you're not healthy, it's because you lack faith. That's what the prosperity gospel says. What does Scripture say? Well, several weeks ago we talked about a scene from Matthew chapter eight, which tells us about a time when a religious man approached Jesus and asked him if he could follow him.

Now, as we mentioned, this man had seen Jesus growing in popularity, and so he assumed, and I think in some ways, that Jesus was also very rich. And so he's basically trying to attach his wagon to this rising star. And he asked Jesus if he can follow a rabbi, what it would take to follow you. And do you remember Jesus response?

He sees right through this man's initiative. He sees right through this man's motive. And he says to him, The Son of Man does not have a place to even lay his head and look. Yes, that was a description of Jesus life. He was not materially wealthy, but it was also a description even more so. I think of Jesus mindset not only when I lay my head in this world, but I don't lay my hope in this world.

I don't lay my identity in this world. I don't lay my purpose in this world. I don't lay my joy in this world. And that's what my kingdom looks like. Let me ask you a question. If Jesus wanted to be rich on earth, could he have been materially wealthy? Yeah, I mean hello. He walked on water, he healed people.

He's God in the flesh. He rose from the dead. Getting a few extra shekels in his account would not have been a problem for him. But he chose not to walk around as a wealthy man because his kingdom was not about that. I mean, he could have walked around to all these people who were poor and suffering under the oppression of the Roman government and said, come to my kingdom.

It's the kingdom of wealth. You'll be rich beyond your wildest dreams if you just follow me. But he chose not to do that because that was not his kingdom. That was not his kingdom message. That was not the gospel. How about the Apostle Paul? Another place in Scripture. In second Corinthians chapter 12, the apostle Paul talks about a personal story from his own life that seems to be about a physical issue or a physical ailment that he's struggling with.

He calls it a thorn in the flesh. And he says that he has prayed and fasted, that God would take away this thorn in the flesh over and over and over again. He says, God finally responds to him. By the way, it's I think it's a good point to say, like, we should pray when we are sick. We should pray for health.

We should pray for others when they're sick. It's not a good thing to be sick. Don't get me wrong. And I believe in miracles. I believe God still does that. We should pray for those things to happen. But hopefully you see the distinction between this. But Paul's praying for health. He's praying that God would remove this. And you may remember, if you know the passage, what God says to him.

Finally, God says to him, I'm not taking away that physical thing, that thorn in the flesh, because my grace is sufficient for you and in your weakness. I want my grace to be seen. I want my glory to be seen in your weakness. And so I'm not going to bring you healing in that way. Now let's take a step back and examine this according to the prosperity gospel.

If we take it at face value, Jesus and Paul would not have been counted as faithful. Because Jesus is not wealthy, Paul is not healthy. And in fact, their faithfulness led them both. Their faithfulness to God's plan led them both to their death, because they followed what God had in store for them, which in many ways is the antithesis of the prosperity gospel.

And it's not like Jesus and Paul were anomalies of the Christian life. Jesus said, no servant is greater than his master. What does that mean? That means that if we are going to follow Jesus, we're not going to be immune from this kind of stuff either. Doesn't mean it's going to happen in every situation, but we're not immune from it because we're not greater than our master.

And then Paul points to the fact that suffering is normal in the Christian life, and we should expect it. And in suffering, we actually share in the fellowship of Christ. Places like Romans chapter five. In Romans chapter eight. Look, neither man taught or lived a prosperity gospel in between the Gospels, the four Gospels and Paul's letters. That's about 75% of the New Testament.

The remaining 25% of the New Testament is not about prosperity gospel either. It's almost as if when Jesus talked about the abundant life that he came to give us. This promise of abundant life is not a promise of wealth and material things in this world, and healthy bodies that seem to go on forever. And that's because it wasn't.

And being established in Scripture shows us that the prosperity gospel is the twisting of of Jesus words to fit a human scheme and a human agenda born from greed and pride and vanity, from those who teach it, from being established in Scripture. Let's move to the next piece in the framework. Examine the fruit. Listen to John. I was in the first John chapter four, verse one.

John says, beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. For many false prophets have gone into the world. The message renders that same verse this way. I like the way that this reads, my dear friends, do not believe everything you hear. Carefully weigh and examine what people tell you. Not everyone who talks about God comes from God.

There are a lot of lying preachers loose in the world. It's a comforting thought, right? What a lying preachers loose in the world. Finally, he talks about in Romans 16 the fruit of what false teaching produces. I appeal to you, brothers, in verse 17, to watch out for those who caused divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught, avoid them, for such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

I want you to see that for a minute. Paul says a few things happen, and as a result of the fruit of this false teaching is that it causes divisions and it opposes it. It establishes obstacles to people understanding the truth of the gospel. And then he says, my people do this because of their own appetites to satisfy their own appetites.

And what and what kinds of appetites are those? Well, maybe the appetite for wealth, the appetite of greed, the appetite for notoriety, the appetite for status, and on and on and on. All the things that this world offers us. And as a result, it deceives the hearts of the naive. You can add to the naive, I think those who are desperate, those who are in desperate situations because they're financially poor or they're sick.

Again, this teaching and those teachers pray on those kinds of situations. And maybe you're thinking at this point, what does it matter if I believe a little bit of the prosperity gospel, practically speaking, right, maybe I'm not supposed to be like Jesus or Paul. Maybe I believe that God really wants me to be as rich and healthy as my faith allows me to be.

What's the harm in all that? Well, that leads me to what I believe is the most dangerous part of the prosperity gospel, because this is the part that damages our souls. This is the part that causes people to be lost and to trust in the wrong God and the wrong Savior. And it has eternal implications. We covered this.

We maybe talked about this a little earlier, but it turns God into this kind of pro quo relationship where ultimately turns God into an idol. And idolatry is the worship of other things in the place of God. The sin of idolatry. You may know this in Scripture is repeatedly and forcefully condemned by God throughout Scripture because of what it does to our relationship.

In our view of God, and because of what it does to our hearts. Idolatry in our hearts affects every aspect of our lives, and that's especially true when we use God as an idol for our own use. That's especially dangerous to our souls. And I believe that's exactly what the prosperity gospel, in the end, does to our relationship with God.

As the Jones quote said earlier, it's a quid pro quo relationship, which means if I make you happy or if I do something for you, you have to do something you're obligated to do something for me and make me happy. And that's the actually the approach and the foundation of ancient idolatry in the ancient world. You know, the reason we have pagan idols and pagan gods in the ancient world is because the ancients, they looked at their world and they thought to themselves, well, there's all kinds of things that are out of control that we would like to control the weather, the harvest life, all these kinds of things.

And so they started creating gods, these false gods that would be the gods of these areas that they wanted to control. So for instance, you had like the god of the harvest, who would guarantee that the harvest would come in, that you'd have enough food to feed your community or your village or your family? You had the God of war, who, if we just made him happy, would give us victory in battle.

He had the God of the goddess of fertility, who would make sure that you had plenty of healthy children in your family and on and on. Hundreds of gods created for all kinds of different aspects of life that you would just make that God happy, that God would give you what you wanted in whatever area that they were assigned to.

Today's prosperity gospel doesn't believe in ancient gods per se. It's really much simpler than that. They've honed down to one god and made that God a catch all idol. Essentially, you heard him say that Jesus was a part of our gospel, but only in a way in which he was not the sovereign King of kings. He was the one who we would rub in the right way, and he would give us exactly what we wanted.

It's like the one stop shopping idol, the Amazon, if you will, of idolatry. Which is ironic because this is an American consumeristic phenomenon, just like Amazon is. But I want you to hear what God says about idols and their danger and their effect in Psalm 115 says this in verse four, their idols are of silver and gold. The work of human hands, right?

Idols in the ancient world were created as statues, literally made by human hands out of silver and gold, and they were often made to look like human beings. So the psalmist is going to describe what they look like. They have mouths, but they do not speak. They have eyes, but they do not see. They have ears, but they do not hear.

They have noses but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel feet, but do not walk, and they do not make a sound out of their throat. In other words, they look like they're alive. On the outside they look like human beings, but in reality, those things are not real. They have no life to them. The psalmist says what they look like.

They have life on the outside, but in reality they have no life to them at all. And then verse eight is the fruit of this those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them. In other words, those who create idols, those who in our context for what we're describing today, those who teach false teaching, are like them.

It has the appearance of life on the outside, but inside, as you dig deeper, you find out it has no life at all. The same thing happens to those who believe them and trust in them. And look, this is how the prosperity gospel turns people away from the true gospel. It turns God not into the sovereign creator of the universe who loves you by his grace, but it turns God into the one who is weak and obligated to give you what you want, which makes you the sovereign one in place of the sovereign God.

Also, as Costi Hen said in his quote from earlier, the prosperity gospel presents Jesus not as the Savior who saves you from your sin, but as the Savior who saves you from the sin of poverty in this world. So that when Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world, the prosperity gospel routes us further in the kingdom of this world, instead of the kingdom of Jesus.

The final piece of this framework is resisting false teaching by staying grounded. Second Timothy, verse four or chapter four, verse three says this for the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and they'll turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

As for you, always be sober minded, endure suffering, and do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry. Now, look, we've talked about all these issues with the prosperity gospel and all the damage that it does. But the question is, why do so many people believe in it? Why does it have a growing foothold in the American church?

Why is it growing in influence, even though we know you've probably seen some of these prosperity gospel preachers in the news headlines from time to time, there's all kinds of scandals associated with their ministry. Why do they continue to grow and have influence? Why? Even though you may know all this, we may know all this. It's still might be a temptation for us to believe at least some aspects of something like this.

Teaching. Well, the answer is in what we just read from what Paul wrote to Timothy, he says that having itching ears, we will accumulate for ourselves teachers to suit our own passions. Having itching ears means we want to listen to those people who tell us what we want to hear. In short, the prosperity gospel flourishes because we want it to be true in some level.

We want to hear that we can be wealthy and healthy if we just believe the right thing. And even though this comes off as wacky, sometimes it's okay. It's a little bit wacky, but we want to believe it on some level. And look, I want to tell you that this teaching is not just a little wacky on the edges.

It's a very teaching that poisons your soul. Look at what Paul tells Timothy to do instead. Be sober minded. That's not about drugs and alcohol, per se. It's about resisting these intoxicating promises of false teaching. Why does false teaching flourish? Because at its core, it's got something there that causes us to want it to be true. It has a way of intoxicating our minds and our souls and Paul says instead, Timothy, you be sober minded, you be established in the truth, and you stay grounded in the midst of these intoxicating teachings that come among you.

And what I love about what Paul's doing is a form is actually the message. He's writing this letter to Timothy because he's left Timothy in the church at Ephesus, and he's pastoring there, and he's writing Timothy, who has been established already in Scripture, and he's encouraging him to stay grounded in Scripture and to stay grounded in truth and in the Kingdom and in the gospel.

He says, finish your ministry, fulfill your calling. And this is essentially what Paul does with, I think all of the letters in the New Testament, these churches have already been established in Scripture. But he writes to them to keep them grounded in Scripture. And that's what we need today as the church, to encourage one another with the truth.

This is why we do things like this, to encourage you in the truth, and to surround each other with accountability and encouragement to such a degree that not only are we established in Scripture, but we stay grounded together as a community grounded in Scripture. And as we close today, that's what I want you to know. I want you to know again why we are going through this series.

We're addressing these things again, not just because we want to be mean and judgmental. People, but it's because we love you. And just like Paul loved the churches that he wrote to, we don't want you to settle for the twisted and powerless teaching of things like the prosperity gospel, of which Paul said in a different context is not really a gospel at all.

Let's pray. Lord, we as we come to you this morning, we're mindful of the fact that, Your gospel is truly good news and that it gives us everything we need. Lord, we get so shortsighted. We confess, we get so shortsighted, and we settle for so much less than what you want to give us. Let's be clear, Lord, this is not about settling for less and rejecting the prosperity gospel.

This is about rejecting the smaller things so that we can receive the greater thing that you give to us in Christ, which is your inheritance, which is your presence, which is your life. And, Lord, we pray that in those aspects that we may be dead and looking like lively, looking lively on the outside, but on the inside the life is not really there.

Kind of like these idols made by human hands. Lord, would you show us what true life looks like? The good news is not that Jesus just came to save us from our material poverty, but that he came to save us from our spiritual poverty, that he came to give us a hope and a future that's not grounded in the things that will pass away and the things that fade and the things that that rust and dissolve and fly away in the wind.

But the things that will last forever. We pray these things in Jesus name, Amen.

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