FIRSTFRUITS: BREAKING THE SPIRIT OF POVERTY

Prosperity with a Purpose, Dr. Rob Covell

Introduction — The Gospel Is Good News!

Isaiah 61:1–3; Luke 4:18–19

Jesus announced that He came to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, and freedom to the oppressed.

The Gospel is transformational! Jesus did not simply come to prepare us for eternity. He came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, bringing the goodness of the Father into every dimension of human existence.

Consider the implications of Isaiah 61. The anointing of the Holy Spirit brings transformation to individuals, families, communities, and even cities.

Isaiah 61:4 declares that God's people will rebuild ancient ruins, restore devastated places, and renew ruined cities.

This is the transformational nature of the Kingdom of God!

Dr. C. Peter Wagner wrote about the Great Transfer of Wealth, describing his expectation that God would release financial resources for the advancement of His Kingdom.

However, we must understand an important distinction: Wealth is not the ultimate goal of the Christian life. The advancement of the Kingdom of God is!

2 Corinthians 8:9 — Paul reminds us that although Christ was rich, He became poor for our sake so that through His poverty we might become rich.

The context of this passage is Christian generosity. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to participate in an offering for believers experiencing financial hardship.

Therefore, the riches of God's grace should produce generosity toward others.

Key Teaching Principle:

God's blessings are not simply intended to increase our standard of living. They are intended to increase our capacity to bring His goodness into the world.

If God's heart is generous, why do so many Christians struggle with fear, scarcity, and the inability to trust Him with their finances?

I. Understanding the Spirit of Poverty

Building the Contrast - John 10:10 -The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Matthew 7:11- If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

James 1:17 - Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Jesus contrasts the destructive works of the thief with the abundant life He came to give.

A. God is a generous Father.

1. Matthew 7:11 — Our heavenly Father gives good gifts to His children.
2. James 1:17 — Every good and perfect gift comes from above.
3. Psalm 24:1 — The earth and everything in it belong to the Lord.

The character of God is generous. His goodness is demonstrated throughout creation, redemption, and the restoration of humanity.

We must reject the assumption that God is reluctant to bless His children.

However, Biblical abundance should not be confused with the promise that every Christian will become financially wealthy. Biblical prosperity is being content, not having fear of the future, and confident in the Lord's ability to lead us in every season of life.

B. What is a poverty mentality?

In the context of spiritual warfare, a poverty mentality can be understood as a pattern of thinking dominated by fear, scarcity, insecurity, and distorted beliefs about God's provision.

Consider four characteristics of the spirit of poverty:

1. Fear of lack: Constant anxiety that there will never be enough.
2. Resistance to generosity: An unwillingness to share resources because of insecurity.
3. Difficulty receiving blessings: Feeling guilty when God or others demonstrate generosity.
4. Distorted beliefs about spirituality: Assuming that financial poverty automatically produces holiness or that wealth demonstrates God's approval.

These attitudes can hinder our ability to live generously and faithfully.

We must also recognize that material poverty is often caused by economic injustice, illness, unemployment, and other circumstances beyond an individual's control. Poverty itself is not evidence of demonic activity or spiritual failure. However, these types of situations can move us away from faith into accepting these things as permanent.

C. Money does not determine our spirituality.

1 Timothy 6:10 teaches that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Notice that Paul does not condemn money itself. He warns against the disordered love of money.

Likewise, the absence of money does not automatically produce righteousness.

The issue is the condition of the human heart.

Practical Application

Ask yourself:

- Am I making financial decisions from faith and wisdom, or fear and insecurity?
- Does my relationship with money reflect trust in God's goodness?
- Have I allowed financial circumstances to define my identity? Positively of negatively?

Key Teaching Principle:

A poverty mentality is not necessarily determined by how much money we possess. It is revealed by how we think about God's goodness, provision, and generosity.

II. Breaking the Spirit of Poverty Through the Renewal of the Mind

Romans 12:2; Psalm 1:1–3; Philippians 4:11–13

A. Transformation begins with metanoia (repentance).

Romans 12:2 calls believers to experience transformation through the renewal of their minds.

The Greek word metanoia, commonly translated as repentance, involves a fundamental change of mind and direction.

Repentance is more than feeling sorry for something we have done. It involves bringing our thinking, values, and behavior into alignment with Biblical truth.

This is particularly important when considering our relationship with finances.

Many of us have inherited beliefs about money from our families, cultures, and previous experiences.

Some of these beliefs are healthy. Others may be rooted in fear, insecurity, or a misunderstanding of Scripture.

The question becomes: Are our financial decisions being shaped by the truth of God's Word or by the fears of our past?

B. Biblical prosperity begins with the condition of the soul.

3 John 2 expresses John's prayer for Gaius to experience well-being and health alongside the flourishing of his soul.

The Greek verb euodoō carries the sense of succeeding, prospering, or having things go well.

Biblical prosperity includes more than financial resources. It involves spiritual maturity, healthy relationships, wise decisions, and faithful stewardship.

Consider Psalm 1:1–3.

The righteous person is compared to a tree planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in its season.

Notice the progression:

1. The person delights in God's Word.
2. God's Word shapes their thinking.
3. Their life becomes rooted and stable.
4. They bear fruit in the appropriate season.

Prosperity is connected to spiritual formation and fruitfulness, not merely financial accumulation.

C. Renewing the mind changes our behavior.

Consider Paul's testimony in Philippians 4:11–13.

Paul learned contentment in both abundance and need.

His confidence was not determined by his financial circumstances but by the sustaining strength of Christ.

This is an essential component of Biblical prosperity.

We can trust God in seasons of abundance, and we can trust Him in seasons of financial difficulty.

Practical Application — Three Steps Toward Renewed Thinking

1. Identify unhealthy beliefs. What assumptions about money, success, and provision have influenced your decisions?
2. Replace those beliefs with Scripture. Meditate on God's goodness, faithfulness, and instructions concerning stewardship.
3. Practice new behaviors. Develop financial discipline, generosity, gratitude, and responsible planning.

Key Teaching Principle:

The renewal of the mind transforms how we think, and transformed thinking produces transformed behavior.

Transition: One of the clearest demonstrations of a transformed heart is our willingness to become generous.

III. Firstfruits: Honoring God Through Generosity

Proverbs 3:9–10; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9; Matthew 6:21

A. The Biblical principle of firstfruits

Proverbs 3:9 instructs God's people to honor Him with their wealth and the firstfruits of their produce.

Within Israel's agricultural economy, firstfruits represented the initial portion of the harvest offered to God.

The principle communicated three important truths:

1. God is the source. Everything we possess ultimately belongs to Him.
2. God deserves priority. We honor Him first rather than offering only what remains.
3. God is worthy of our trust. Giving expresses confidence in His faithfulness.

Firstfruits were an expression of worship and covenant faithfulness.

For Christians today, the principle invites us to consider whether God genuinely holds first place in our financial decisions.

B. Generosity is an expression of grace.

2 Corinthians 8:7–9

Paul encourages the Corinthians to excel in the grace of giving.

Notice that Paul connects generosity with other characteristics of Christian maturity, including faith, knowledge, and love.

Generosity is not merely a financial transaction. It is a spiritual discipline that forms the character of Christ within us.

Now consider the example of the Macedonian churches in 2 Corinthians 8:1–5.

These believers experienced severe affliction and extreme poverty, yet they demonstrated remarkable generosity.

Their giving was not motivated by financial abundance.

It flowed from their devotion to God.

This is a remarkable picture of Kingdom generosity!

Their circumstances did not determine the condition of their hearts.

C. Giving breaks the power of fear and selfishness.

Matthew 6:21 — Jesus teaches that our hearts follow our treasure.

Where we invest our resources often reveals what we value most.

Generosity challenges the assumption that our security is found exclusively in the accumulation of possessions.

It teaches us to trust God, care for others, and participate in His purposes.

However, giving is not a formula for purchasing God's blessings.

2 Corinthians 9:7 reminds us that giving should arise from a willing and cheerful heart, not compulsion.

God is not inviting us into a financial transaction. He is inviting us into a transformational relationship.

D. Firstfruits and Kingdom influence

Acts 4:32–35

The early Church demonstrated a remarkable culture of generosity.

Believers shared their resources, and distributions were made according to the needs within the community.

Their generosity became a practical demonstration of the Kingdom of God.

Consider what happens when Christians embrace this principle today.

Our generosity can support:

- The proclamation of the Gospel and the planting of churches.
- The care of widows, orphans, and vulnerable families.
- Education, leadership development, and missions.
- The restoration and transformation of communities.

This is prosperity with a purpose!

God entrusts resources to His people so that they can become participants in His redemptive mission.

Practical Application

As we consider our firstfruits offering, I want to encourage you to approach this moment prayerfully.

Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart.

Are you giving from a place of gratitude, faith, and love? Or are you giving because of fear, pressure, or the expectation of a financial return?

Our offerings should be an expression of worship and obedience.

Key Teaching Principle:

Firstfruits is not simply about what we give to God. It is about what our giving reveals concerning our relationship with Him.

IV. Living a Life of Prosperity With a Purpose

Genesis 12:2–3; 2 Corinthians 9:8–11

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

A. Blessed to become a blessing

God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 included a remarkable purpose: Abraham would be blessed so that blessing would extend to others.

This principle reveals the missional nature of God's generosity.

God's blessings are never intended to terminate with us.

They should flow through us into the lives of others.

B. Kingdom prosperity requires faithful stewardship.

Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 9:8–11 that God is able to provide sufficiency and increase the resources available for generosity.

This does not eliminate the need for wisdom, planning, and responsible financial management.

Instaed, it encourages us to recognize that our resources have a purpose beyond personal consumption.

Consider three practical commitments:

1. Steward wisely. Manage what God has entrusted to you with integrity and discipline.
2. Give generously. Develop a lifestyle that reflects God's goodness toward others.
3. Influence intentionally. Use your resources, relationships, and opportunities to advance the Kingdom of God.

Key Teaching Principle:

The measure of Kingdom prosperity is not simply what we accumulate, but how faithfully we steward what God has entrusted to us.

Conclusion — The Transformation of the Heart

Matthew 6:33

Jesus calls us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

This is the foundation of Biblical prosperity.

When we prioritize the Kingdom, our understanding of money, success, security, and generosity begins to change.

We no longer see ourselves merely as owners of possessions. We recognize ourselves as stewards of God's resources.

We no longer allow fear to determine our decisions. We learn to trust the goodness and faithfulness of our heavenly Father.

We no longer measure success exclusively by what we possess. We begin to measure our lives by our faithfulness to God's purposes.

Three concluding declarations:

1. I will not allow fear and scarcity to govern my relationship with God.
2. I will renew my mind through Biblical truth and practice faithful stewardship.
3. I will embrace generosity so that God's goodness can flow through my life into the world.

As we bring our firstfruits offerings before the Lord, may we do so with grateful hearts, renewed minds, and a commitment to advancing His Kingdom.

Final Thought:

God's prosperity is not simply about increasing what is in our hands. It is about transforming what is in our hearts so that what is in our hands can serve His Kingdom.

Scripture references for further study

Genesis 12:2–3; Psalm 1:1–3; Psalm 24:1; Proverbs 3:9–10; Isaiah 61:1–6; Matthew 6:21, 33; Matthew 7:11; Luke 4:18–19; John 10:10; Acts 4:32–35; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:7–11; Philippians 4:11–13; 1 Timothy 6:10; James 1:17; 3 John 2.