

# 2022.03.06 - March Gladness - Prosperity

**So What?** When we are properly aligned with God, we will experience holistic prosperity.

**Feel What?** Free

**Now What?** This week, when you feel anxious or stressed, open your hands up to God as a physical demonstration of your open heart to him.

## VISION CASTING

**The purpose of Tallgrass at The Well is to create community together by inviting everyone into the Way of Jesus.**

## INTRODUCTION

Today, we are beginning a brand new series called “March Gladness.” Over the next four weeks, we are going to be considering the effects of money and possessions on our lives and explore how Scripture teaches us how to think about such things. Like no other subject, money and possessions gives many of us a visceral reaction. And we need to pay attention to that. As we worship God and sit in his presence, we need to be aware of how we’re thinking about what we’re hearing. Any reluctance or skepticism about the subject of money in church will be evident in any racing thoughts, fidgety leg movements, or rehearsed mental arguments that you’re having with me right now.

Now, there’s not judgment here in any of that. All I mean to say is that we should pay attention to these things because they indicate to us what’s going on underneath the surface of our lives and shows us what’s going on inside. Which can show us how our money and possessions are affecting us.

We’re becoming more and more aware of just how much this is true. And the interesting thing is to look at the effects of money on our spirituality.

**Tish Harrison Warren, “Ash Wednesday Forces Us To Confront Death, But It Also Offers Hope,” The New York Times: “A fascinating 2014 study...looked at the most difficult places in America to live, based on factors such as life expectancy and income level, and then compared common internet search terms there with those**

from the easiest—and wealthiest—places to live. What they found was that those in the hardest places spend time thinking about health woes and religion. People in America's easiest places think about jogging and cameras. On a global scale, this divided reality is even clearer. A 2008 Pew study showed that 'Generally, there is a clear relationship between wealth and religiosity: In rich nations fewer people view religion as important than in poor nations.' People who live in the world's poorest nations almost unanimously said religion was important to them, while people in Western Europe and in other wealthy nations said it is less significant." ... There are myriad reasons that wealth might dampen faith. But one is that those of us who are privileged and comparatively comfortable can insulate ourselves from death, suffering and our own mortality in ways others cannot. Whether one is a churchgoer or not, when our bodies are strong, our stomachs are full, and we have high-speed internet and craft beer, questions of eternity seem less pressing."

The point, briefly, is that the wealthier we become, the less we tend to be deeply connected to God. In her article, Pastor Warren mentions Proverbs 30:

**Proverbs 30:8-9 (NIV): "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."**

**Transition:** So this isn't a new problem for us to face. It's an ancient one people have been commenting on throughout the ages: **How do I use money and not lose my faith?**

## **SOLUTION**

So, you see, the issue of money touches what is held most dearly to us. Money itself means nothing and it's not good nor evil—it's a tool for commerce. But the meaning we've attached to it that is everything. Money is meaningful to us because it represents power—the ability to live in greater abundance, buy more things, retire comfortably with means.

**Skye Jethani, *What If Jesus Was Serious?*: "Money is an alluring master precisely because it provides the feeling and illusion of divine power. With money, we can control the world and conform it to our will. It allows us to provide for our needs and desires, overcome scarcity, and manipulate those around us. Wealth can isolate us from the challenges that others face; money can create opportunities**

**for those who possess it that are unavailable to those without it. In other words, it is a very appealing alternative to trusting God.”**

Jesus intends to restore money’s neutrality to us so we can right-size it in our hearts. In this way, he can use us—and the money and possessions that he’s entrusted to us—so his kingdom can be spread fully among the nations.

**Matthew 6:19-24 (NIV): “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”**

Jesus is telling his followers that to spend all of their time earning money to either spend on all the toys and comforts they desire or hoarding it all away without ever helping anyone else is effectively allowing destruction and ruin touch their lives. To avoid this, we want to be focused on the right things and have the right perspective on possessions, money, and God.

Many well-meaning commentators on the Sermon on the Mount have tried to lower the high bar of intensity contained in its words. They say Jesus doesn’t expect us to actually live this way, but instead meant it to reveal our need for him. My main problem with this approach—to listen to Jesus’ words and not do them—is the exact opposite of how he ends his sermon by telling us the story of the man who builds his house on the sand.

This then begs the question: What if it’s possible to live this free? To be so open-hearted to God that you live open-handed before him while maintaining peace and joy?

**James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*: “Jesus is a teacher who doesn’t just inform our intellect but forms our very loves. He isn’t content to simply deposit new ideas into your mind; he is after nothing less than your wants, your loves, your longings. ... You can’t think your way into new hungers. ... Jesus’s command to follow him is a command to align our loves and longings with his—to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, to hunger and thirst after God and**

**crave a world where he is all in all—a vision encapsulated by the shorthand ‘the kingdom of God.’”**

The term “kingdom” can sometimes be abstract and ambiguous for us in 21 Century America. We live in a constitutional democracy, not under the purview of an aristocratic monarch. To make this clear and real for us, we need to ask ourselves, ***Is Jesus my supreme treasure? Does all of my value, success, and purpose find its meaning in him?*** When the answers to those questions is an unswerving, unwavering Yes then how I use all of my resources, time, energy, and attention will be properly aligned so that what is mine becomes what is his.

If our heart swells when we have more in our bank accounts, then it will wither when money is absent. Another way to put this is that if we are more at peace when the stock market is headed up and to the right than when we experience the presence of Jesus, something is askew.

**Transition:** And we can know that Jesus is inviting us to put greater trust in him and what he’s able to do than what money is able to do.

## **APPLICATION**

To get practical in how we follow Jesus with our money, I want to talk about three things we can do to. We’ll simple call this **Cultivating A Healthy Heart:**

### **1. Walk In Truth**

**3 John 1-4 (NIV): To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.**

John is writing to a personal friend facing difficult circumstances. There are false teachers trying to undermine the gospel and infiltrate the Christian community, and John connects being well with walking in accordance the to truth. We don’t prosper outside of a connection to Jesus.

**Story about avoid people who had given us a gift.** Knowing something is wrong inside is only the first step. Applying the truth of the gospel to your identity and then seeing it reflect in your relationships is the goal.

## 2. Protect Your Heart

**Proverbs 4:23 (NIV): My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.**

When we look at our world and see war, famine, disease, we know there are real, existential questions that surface. There are a myriad of problems that will steal our peace and our joy, if we allow it.

- **Is God as good as he says he is?** Can we trust the Bible when it tells us that God is perfect and he created the world with goodness and beauty?
- **Will God be good towards me?** Can we expect God to show his goodness towards us? Or is all I have to look forward to suffering, anxiety, and depression?

Protecting our hearts means coming back to center—to Jesus—and allowing him to determine our reality. This doesn't mean that we'll be spared suffering, but that he has promised to meet us in the midst of it and guide us through.

## 3. Practice Moments Of Generosity

**James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love*: “If you are what you love and if love is a virtue, then love is a habit. This means that our most fundamental orientation to the world—the longings and desires that orient us toward some version of the good life—is shaped and configured by imitation and practice. This has important implications for how we approach Christian formation and discipleship. ... We learn to love, then, not primarily by acquiring information about what we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of how we love.”**

How we live our lives day-to-day is the best indication of what we're giving our hearts to. My goal today isn't to give you some new information that promises to change your life overnight. Instead, my goal is to invite you to love Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to demonstrate that with how you think about and use your money. I want to invite you into a lifestyle of generosity that is an overflow of a healthy heart towards God.

## OBJECTIONS

Now, there are more than likely lots of skepticism or at least lots of questions that are bubbling to the surface right now. And that's ok, we're fine if you have questions as to how this works out. That's why I would invite you to not write any of this off and to join us again next week as we continue talking about living this way in God's kingdom.

**Story about friend who said money can be fun.**

## **INSPIRATION**

As a practical demonstration illustration of living open vs. closed-handed, let's close our hands as tight as we can. Now open them back up and feel the release.

**Transition:** I believe this can serve as a good illustration of how God is inviting us to live before him.

## **CONCLUSION**

**Next Step:**

- This week, when you feel anxious or stressed, open your hands up to God as a physical demonstration of your open heart to him.

**Prayer**