

Beyond ‘Give to Get’
PROSPERITY PRINCIPLES FROM PROVERBS
BIBLICAL PROSPERITY
Illustrations for American Churches of the Diaspora

Prepared for Greater Chicago Sunday School Association
By Lorella Rouster, Every Child Ministries

“A Christian Mission offering the Hope of Jesus to the forgotten children of Africa”

Teaching objectives:

This day-long series of four workshops will help participants discern between Biblical prosperity and worldly greed, set godly goals for their lives, reach their goals using Biblical principles, begin to understand the whole counsel of God on prosperity, and live as better stewards of the riches entrusted to them by God.

Workshop 1

Understanding the Prosperity Proverbs

The book of Proverbs says a lot about prosperity. We will present general principles for understanding these proverbs, interpreting them, and applying them to make them our own. The group will use these principles to discuss several proverbs in small groups.

My background—why I am interested in this topic.

Wait a minute !

‘Give to Get’ is NOT all there is!

So I began a serious study of this topic.

- So I could correct and bring balance to common misteachings and misinformation.
- So I could apply every principle there is to make every resource possible available for the work God called me to do.

Many books of the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, contain teaching about prosperity. Yet Proverbs possibly contains more teaching on prosperity than any other single book of the Bible, written by the most prosperous man who ever lived—King Solomon.

Proverbs a microcosm of the Bible’s whole teaching on prosperity.

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND THE PROVERBS OF THE BIBLE?

A proverb is often stated as an application of a universal principle.

It is a description of how life generally works.

There are always exceptions.

Proverbs centers on the rules.

God honors application of the rules.

INTERPRETING PROVERBS--

A proverb is often stated as an application of a universal principle.

§**Therefore, understand the proverb.**

§**Pull out the universal principle.**

§**Meditate on all aspects of the principle.**

§**Reapply it to other specific situations.**

GROUP SIMILAR PRINCIPLES TOGETHER

for ease of memory & meditation

§**The principle of honest service**

§**The principle of trust & priorities, contentment & enjoyment**

§**The principle of generosity**

§**The principle of financial responsibility & financial freedom**

§**The principle of investment**

§**The principle of initiative & foresight**

§**The principle of diligence**

§**The principle of conservation & stewardship**

Workshop 2

Powerful Prosperity Principles 1

Certain themes or principles are repeated over and over in Proverbs, including many on prosperity. We will examine four of these principles and discuss applications.

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The principle of honest service:

How to make money, How not to make money

Make money gradually through honest work and service to others (providing not only what they want but also what is truly helpful to them). Honest work is constructive in nature.

Avoid dishonest gain, which is inherently self-destructive. Avoid self-centeredness in seeking and in using resources. Help others as well as yourself.

Build wealth gradually. Avoid get-rich quick schemes.

Proverbs 1:10-19, 10:2, 11:1, 11:24, 13:4, 13:11, 16:11, 19:1, 20:10, 17, 20:21, 23, 21:5, 22:16, 28, 28:20, 22.

Life Application Bible on Prov. 10:2: ‘Some people bring unhappiness on themselves by choosing ill-gotten treasures. For example, craving satisfaction, they may do something that destroys their chances of ever achieving happiness. God’s principles for right living bring lasting happiness because they guide us into long-term right behavior in spite of our ever-changing feelings.’

Matthew Henry on Prov. 13:11: ‘That which is won ill, will never wear well, for a curse attends it that will waste it’ (p. 863).

Examples of dishonesty:

Stealing goods and/or time and service from an employer

The principle of trust & priorities, contentment & enjoyment:

Trust God for your needs and avoid trusting in riches.

Proverbs 10:3, 10:22, 11:28, Philippians 4:19

Be thankful for what you have. Avoid greed.

Enjoy what God gives you without guilt.

Proverbs 31:14, 31:22

Proverbs 1:18-19, 7:9, 13:25, 15:1, 27, 16:8, 16, 16:19, 17:1, 31:13

Matthew Henry on Prov. 7:9: ‘Avoid emphasis on appearances, thoughts of others, keeping up with the Joneses’.

MH on Prov. 16:8: ‘A small estate, honestly come by, which a man is content with, enjoys comfortably, serves God with cheerfully and puts to a right use, is much better and more valuable than a great estate ill got and then ill kept or ill spent.’

The principle of generosity:

Share freely with others, especially with the poor.

Be generous with what you have. Make it your aim to give rather than to be given to. Reap blessing and not cursing by doing good to others. Avoid oppressive usury and extortion. Proverbs 3:27-28, 10:22, 12:24-25, 13:7, 14:31, 17:5, 13, 19:17, 21:13, 21:26, 22:2, 22:9, 22:23, 23:10-11, 28:3, 28:8, 28:27, 29:7, 29:13, 30:15-16, 31:20.

Life Application Bible on 10:22: ‘God supplies most people with the personal and financial abilities to respond to the needs of others. If we all realized how God has blessed us, and if we all

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used our resources to do God's will, hunger and poverty would be wiped out. Wealth is a blessing only if we use it in the way God intended.'

Life Application Bible on 11:24-25: 'What...do we gain by giving? Freedom from enslavement to our possessions, the joy of helping others, and God's approval.'

Life Application Bible on 12:24-25: 'The world says to hold on to as much as possible, but God blesses those who give freely of their possessions, time, and energy. When we give, God supplies us with more so that we can give more.'

The principle of financial freedom & financial responsibility:

Keep yourself debt-free. Avoid going into debt or assuming the debts of others.

Gain profit (interest) from wise use of your resources, rather than paying to use the resources of others.

Proverbs 17:18, 20:16, 22:7, 22:26-27

Keep your life free of sin. Proverbs 28:13.

Bring expenses into balance with income. Spend less than what you make.

When we spend more than we have, we are in effect throwing away what we do have.

Life Application Bible on Prov. 22:7: '...warns us never to take on a loan without carefully examining our ability to repay it. ...A loan we can't handle is enslaving. The borrower must realize that until the loan is repaid, he or she is a servant to the individual or institution that made it.'

Examples of debt problems:

Using credit cards for everyday purposes beyond ability to repay at end of month

Accruing debts due to gambling, alcohol or drug habits

Meet your responsibility to care for your parents and your family. The wife has a great part in determining the prosperity of the household.

Proverbs 14:1, 28:24, 31:11-12. 31:27.

Meet your responsibility to your workers, and creditors. Pay honest wages and pay your debts.

Proverbs 11:24

Workshop 3

Powerful Prosperity Principles 2

Certain themes or principles are repeated over and over in Proverbs, including many on prosperity. We will examine four more of these principles and discuss applications.

The principle of investment--planting the seed to multiply the seed:

The principle of sowing and reaping are built into the very way God made the world.

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Who can tell how many plants are in a seed?

Seed has very limited value until you sow it. Then, with proper care and the blessing of God's earth, water, air, and sunshine, it grows, produces fruit, and multiplies itself.

The resources God most often gives are potential resources which need human cooperation to bring them to their fruitfulness.

The principle of initiative & foresight

Work pro-actively. Be a self-starter. Think and plan ahead. Prepare for the future. See what needs to be done and do it without being told to do so. Make yourself useful in every situation. Proverbs 6:6-8, 12:24

Plan an inheritance for your children and grandchildren. Plan a reserve for future needs & emergencies. Don't spend too much of your wealth-producing resources. Proverbs 6:8, 10:4-5, 13:22, 22:3, 24:27 27:12, 30:25, 31:21

Matthew Henry on Prov. 6:8: 'We must prepare for the hereafter, and not mind the present time only, not eat all up, and lay up nothing, but in gathering time treasure up for a spending time' (p. 822).

Proverbs 24:27: Get your fields ready and plant your crops before starting a home.

Home represents comfort. Shelter in that climate was expected and highly desirable, but less necessary than food.

Principle: Do the necessary things first, the productive things first. Prioritize your work wisely. Make sure essential needs are cared for first.

Crops need time to grow. Begin projects that require time in plenty of time. Some of my projects require thinking, meditation. Begin those in time to allow for reflection.

The verse also assumes we are using the resources God has given us.

The principle of diligence:

Work hard, putting work needs ahead of comfort. Exert yourself. Work in spite of difficult circumstances. Be willing to clean up a mess created through hard work. Be honest with yourself and stop making up silly excuses in an attempt to avoid work. Be willing to do manual labor. Proverbs 6:9-11, 10:4, 11:24, 12:24, 13:4, 14:4, 23, 15:19, 16:26, 17:2, 18:9, 19:15, 20:4, 20:13, 22:13, 22:29, 26:13, 27:18b, 31:13, 31:19, 31:31.

Matthew Henry on Prov. 6:9-10: Those who put work off till later deceive themselves, for 'the more a slothful temper is indulged, the more it prevails... Thus men's great work is left undone by being put off yet a little longer... and they are cheated of all their time by being cheated of the present moments' (p. 822).

MH on Prov. 13:4: 'The slothful... desire the gains which the diligent get, but they hate the pains which the diligent take.'

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Keep working diligently until you fulfil the task assigned to you. Finish what you start.
Proverbs 10:26, 19:24, 26:15

The increase comes to those who are willing to pay the price. Proverbs 14:4
Reaching their objective is more important to them than maintaining appearances, more important than avoiding work.

The principle of conservation or stewardship:

Conserve the results of your efforts through—

Maintaining sexual purity and fidelity in marriage. Proverbs 6:30-35, 7:6-27

Being humble and refusing to get hung up on honor and human acclaim Proverbs 12:9, 13:7

Matthew Henry on Prov. 13:7: ‘The poor want to be thought rich so ‘they trade and spend as if they were rich’ (p. 862). ‘Those that thus live above what they have choose to be subject to their own pride rather than to God’s providence.’

Taking care of what God has given you. Proverbs 12:10, 24:30-31, 27:23-27

Using resources carefully so as not to squander them. Proverbs 21:20, 27:23-24

Taking care to speak productively. Proverbs 18:20-21

Seeking the company of others who have godly values. Proverbs 29:24

Examples of waste:

Throwing out leftovers instead of using them

Letting leftovers spoil in the refrigerator

Buying books but not reading them

Renting more videos than we can watch

Ordering or preparing much more food than we can use or need

Buying things we don’t need just because we like them or they’re a good buy

Investing in project that we never finish

Use what you have. Use the resources and the time God has given you constructively. Keep yourself strong and able to work.

Proverbs 6:9, 12:1, 12:27, 13:23, 27:18a, 28:19, 31:17

Matthew Henry on Prov. 6:9: ‘It is our wisdom to improve the season while that favors us, because that may be done then, which cannot be done at all, or not so well done, at another time.’

Proverbs 12:11: “He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread”

Interpretation:

Applies to farming or gardening

Goes beyond that – Proverbs presents universal principles

“His land” is the means of sustenance God has given you.

A business. A job. A ministry. A God-given idea or vision. Education to prepare for one of these. A home. A spouse.

Those who develop and work at that God-given means of support will have their needs met.

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They won't just get by – survive – make it – squeak through.
They will BE SATISFIED.

Tilling your land does not apply to frivolous pursuits.
It's not finishing a crossword puzzle or a computer game.

It is working at something that is God-given and has potential to better your life, meet your needs, and overflow to bless others.

Welcome instruction & correction, and invest in capitol that can produce more resources.
Proverbs 11:24, 13:18, 24:4, 31:14, 31:16

Workshop 4 Biblical prosperity or worldly greed?

We will discuss how to understand the difference between Biblical prosperity and worldly greed, as well as how to set God-honoring goals in personal life and ministry.

Keep the most important things the most important things. Place eternal things over temporal things.

Treasure God's commands as much as you treasure wealth. Proverbs 2:1-5
Following God's way leads to prosperity of a profound kind (Psalm 119:1-2). It's the whole point of the Beatitudes taught by Jesus. Psalm 115:14
Honor God with your possessions and honor Him by giving His work the first part.
Keep your heart and life right. Then count on your labor being blessed by God.
Set priorities and do the most important jobs first. Avoid procrastination. Whatever needs to be done, do it now while you can.
Proverbs 3:9-10, 10:16, 21:25, 22:1, 23:4, 27:1, 28:6, 28:16, 28:22, 30:8-9, Luke 9:23

The real issue and the factor that distinguishes between Biblical prosperity and worldly greed may be thought of as one of FOCUS.

That are four parties involved in the issue:

GOD, the giver or provider of resources

RESOURCES, (things, money)

ME & MY NEEDS for the use or control of those resources

OTHERS, THEIR NEEDS for the use of control of those resources

When we focus of the Resources themselves, the result is often crass materialism.

When we focus on Me and My Needs, the result can be Lascivious living, unbridled consumption, greed.

When we focus exclusively on the Needs of Others, the result can be asceticism. We can end up feeling guilty if we ourselves use or enjoy anything at all.

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Only when we focus on GOD can everything be kept in proper balance and focus. God provides abundant resources. I honor Him with them and because of them. I enjoy them, giving God thanks. I use them to bless others, to bring them the Good News, and to bring more honor to God. I am free to enjoy life. God's purposes are furthered in the earth, and at every step God is honored.

Also involved are these relationships:

- Me and others
- Me and myself
- Me and God
- Others and God

The most frequent focus is on me and my needs. Yet putting myself or my riches at the center puts a barrier between me and God, who demands my first allegiance, my heart. It can also put a barrier between me and others. Others may feel jealous of me or be angry with me. My success makes them feel like failures, so they avoid me, or they seek me, but only for my wealth and not for myself. I often end up not liking myself. Great unhappiness has very frequently resulted in the lives of the super rich. On one of my travels to Africa, I bought and read a book called 'The World's Richest Losers.' It gave short biographies of numerous super-wealthy people whose lives were filled with broken relationships, loneliness and unhappiness.

Although there is a Biblical teaching on prosperity, it is my conviction that the superficial teaching on prosperity taught in most modern circles often results in an emphasis or focus of my and my needs. It promotes the philosophy that only the best is good enough for the king's kids. There nothing God gives me is ever quite good enough. Even when my needs are well supplied, I have a tendency to become discontent, unhappy. I consume more and more resources on my growing, prideful ambition to have only the best, so I choke off God's blessings from ever reaching others.

When I focus on others (asceticism), my needs are not met, my children may turn away from God, I cannot enjoy the good gifts God has given to me, and the focus is frequently on myself and my sacrifice rather than on God.

If I begin to center on Resources, I may begin to hoard them so that they are no use to anyone, like Hetty Green, who lives in rags in an apartment without heat, afraid of losing part of her vast fortune estimated at well over \$100 million at her death. Acquisition of sufficient resources should free us from having to spend our time and energy trying to supply our own needs. A sad truth is that many wealthy people instead spend their energies and their lives in morbid fear of losing their wealth, and this is true even when their riches are so great that even with sumptuous living they cannot possibly ever exhaust them.

It doesn't make much sense to the common person, but we shouldn't be too surprised. Jesus talked about 'the deceitfulness of riches' (Matthew 13:22). In the immediate context, Jesus was telling about the seed which is the Word of God. Riches are like thorns that choke out the Word of God so that it cannot bring about fruitfulness in our lives.

When God allows us to accumulate wealth, there is a tendency to seek more. A spirit of greed begins to consume us, so that we are never happy, never content, never satisfied with what God has given us, no matter how much it may be. John D. Rockefeller, founder of Standard Oil and one of the richest men the world has ever known, is said to have been asked how much wealth would satisfy him. His answer is revealing of the human heart: 'Just a little bit more.'

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Because of this tendency to greed, sometimes my own needs are not met even when God provides vast resources, as Hetty Green's case shows. The needs of the poor and the plans of God for the evangelisation of the world are not met, God is not honored, and very often the recipients of such wealth end up living empty, unfulfilling, desperately lonely and broken lives.

Campus Crusade has been criticized for the simplicity of its evangelistic literature, especially 'The Four Spiritual Laws' and 'The Wonderful Spirit-Filled Life.' Yet the drawings in these booklets express a profound truth: Only God makes an adequate and satisfying center for life. Only He can integrate all the other elements for our happiness.

Even then, balance does not come without seeking out, understanding and applying the whole counsel of God on the subject. This is something at which we must work constantly. As the Scripture tell us, 'Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life' (Proverbs 4:23). Making God the center of our focus is something we choose once and renew daily and even constantly, in every decision of life.

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