



Prosperity Gospel: Will Jesus Make You Rich?

| *A look at the theology and preachers of the Word of Faith movement*

Goal for the Session

The goal of this session is for readers to understand the theology and basic teachings of the Word of Faith movement, as well as the way preachers of the movement interpret Scripture. Readers will also be invited to explore their own beliefs on the subjects of material prosperity, physical health, tithing, and stewardship.

Preparing for the Session

- If possible, print copies of some of the Word of Faith resources that are online.
- Issues of the *Word of Faith Magazine* can be accessed at <http://www.rhema.org/>. Articles by Kenneth E. Hagin exemplify the way Word of Faith preachers interpret Scripture.
- Study notes from the Web site of Creflo Dollar Ministries offer a good foundation for Word of Faith theology and teachings; these are available at <http://www.creflodollarministries.org/>. If you click Bible Study Center and then Study Notes, you will find a number of studies. Print out a few studies to have available during the session. A couple of interest may be "The Origin of Increase," which is a two-Sunday study preached on March 9 and 16, 2008, and "God's Why and Way for Prosperity," preached on February 29, 2008.
- Joyce Meyer Ministries makes issues of *Enjoying Everyday Life* magazine available online at <http://www.joycemeyer.org/OurMinistries/Magazine/>.

Session at a Glance

OPENING

- Prayer
- Introduction to study
- What we think we know

EXPLORING

- Prosperity teachings

RESPONDING

- What we like and don't like

CLOSING

- Prayer

www.joycemeyer.org/OurMinistries/Magazine/. Print out articles that reference "authority" and "partnership" and/or "prosperity." You can simply type these words into the Search field on the home page and see what comes up. Read these articles, and make notes in anticipation of questions that may be asked during the session.

- Have Bibles available as well as a copy of the Participant Handout for each person. Newsprint or a writing board should be available as well.
- Print copies of the appendixes found at the end of this Leader's Guide if you believe they may be of use to participants.



Teaching Tip

Read the Participant Handout at least once. It is probable that some participants may react strongly to what they perceive as con artists using the Bible to fool people and get rich. Yet many of these beliefs are not far off from what many mainline Christians believe. Keep stressing as needed during the session that the point is to understand the main principles of this movement and not debate every theological interpretation made.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

God, we thank you for this day and this time that you have given us. We pray that you would enable us to open our hearts and our minds as we learn more about the theology and teachings of the Word of Faith movement. Help us to understand without being judgmental. Help us to also better understand our own beliefs about money and physical health. We pray that this time will enable us to better know your will for us as we endeavor to serve you. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

2. Introduction to Study

Remind participants that we all have different theological beliefs. Some of the theology of the Word of Faith movement may be shared by the participants, while much of it may not. Some of the participants may question how people can actually believe Word of Faith theology and maintain memberships in Word of Faith churches. While these questions are legitimate, it is important to remember that Word of Faith theology encompasses more than its teachings about wealth and physical health. In Word of Faith churches, the gospel of prosperity is accompanied by messages about relationships, the Holy Spirit, personal holiness, love of God and neighbor, and faith. In addition, Word of Faith preachers cite many biblical texts to justify their theology. If hearers are not cognizant of the importance of context for biblical interpretation, they may believe that Word of Faith preaching is biblical.

3. What We Think We Know

If many participants have not read the handout, take a minute to read the "Introduction" either out loud or in silence. Quickly clarify any questions anyone may have.

Now, take a few minutes and invite people to call out names of prosperity preachers they know about, as well as basic theological beliefs of this movement they think they know. We will clarify these during the session.

Exploring (25 minutes)

4. Prosperity Teachings

Divide participants into six groups of three or more people each, if possible. Assign the six Rights of Believers found in the Participant Handout to the groups. If your class is small, you may need to assign more than one right to each group. Each group will have ten minutes to review their right(s) and prepare to summarize the right(s) using a biblical verse if possible and then say what they agree or disagree with about the right(s).

After ten minutes, have them return to the large group and share responses.

Responding (10 minutes)

5. What We Like and Don't Like

Either on two sheets of newsprint or in two columns on a board, write the headings "We Agree" and "We Don't Agree." Depending on your group, this can be a private exercise done alone or a group exercise. Ask participants to list elements of prosperity preaching that they like or agree with and things they don't like or agree with. Don't spend too much time on each, but try to list as many things as possible.



Part of the purpose of this study is to recognize the importance of good, contextual Bible study. We are all guilty of citing biblical passages out of context to prove our point. If we learn anything from prosperity preaching, it is about the danger of proof texting and taking biblical passages out of context. If you think it would help to say this to the group, please do.

Closing (5 minutes)

6. Prayer

God, we thank you for allowing each of us to participate in this session. We thank you for allowing us to

better understand the theology and teachings of the Word of Faith movement. We pray that the lessons we have learned about others help to clarify our own understanding of you and your will for us. Bless us as we go from this place to be the people you want us to be in the world. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen.**

Teaching Alternatives

- *Organize a trip to a Word of Faith church in your area.* Provide participants with the following list of questions for them to keep in mind during their visit. Meet with participants as soon after the worship service as possible to discuss the experience.
- Through your own personal observation, what are the racial/ethnic makeup, age range, and socioeconomic status of the hearers?
- What are the biblical text and topic of the message?
- Do the people sitting near you appear to be engaged in the worship and sermon?
- Did believers bring their own Bibles to worship?
- What do you enjoy most about the worship service?
- What do you enjoy least about the worship service?
- Does the preacher talk about any of the Word of Faith rights of believers?
- Is the divine economy referred to in any part of the worship service?
- How many different biblical texts does the preacher use during the sermon?
- Does the preacher consider or explain the contexts of any of the biblical passages used during the sermon?

- Do worshipers appear to be enthusiastic about the opportunity of giving tithes or offerings?
- Overall, do you enjoy the worship experience?
- *Discuss tithing and stewardship.* In his teaching about the divine economy, Oral Roberts was careful to differentiate tithing from seed-faith giving. Tithing is giving after one has been blessed by God financially (through regular income, gifts, or donations). Seed-faith giving is done before a miracle is manifested or the need has been met. For example, if someone wants God to give her a new car, she will sow seeds into a ministry while believing that God will give her the car she wants, in addition to her regular tithe. Do participants believe that tithing is biblical? Do participants believe seed-faith theology is biblical? Is tithing or seed-faith giving taught in the faith communities of the participants? What are participants taught about financial stewardship in their congregations?

For More Information

Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

E. W. Kenyon and Don Gossett, *The Power of Your Words* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1995).

E. W. Kenyon, *The Bible in Light of Our Redemption: Basic Bible Course* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1969).

Andrew Perriman, *Faith, Health and Prosperity: A Report on Word of Faith and Positive Confession Theologies by ACUTE (the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals)* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003).

Oral Roberts, *The Miracle of Seed-Faith* (Tulsa: Oral Roberts Ministries, 1970).

Appendix 1

The Rights of Believers according to Word of Faith Theology

Status as the righteousness of God: Humanity no longer has to live with a sense of spiritual inferiority or with a constant sin consciousness; rather, the believer should now live with *Son consciousness*.

Material prosperity: There is no excuse for spiritual weakness and poverty to exist among children of God. It is abnormal for believers to be in poverty and need help from the world. Believers are overcomers—supermen and superwomen whom God places in the realm of conquerors.

Authority: Believers have access to all of the authority that Christ was given on earth and in heaven. Having access to Christ's authority means that believers do not need to ask to be healed, to be made righteous, to be sanctified, to be wise, or to be redeemed. Believers need only claim their rights to these conditions in order for God to bring them to pass.

Positive confession: The words that come out of the mouths of believers can either set them free and make them powerful or snare them and render them powerless. Confessions dominate believers' inner lives, thereby causing them never to rise above their confessions.

Freedom from sickness and disease: God put all of the disease of humanity on Christ, who has settled the disease problem forever. It is abnormal for Christians to go to physicians for healing. There are no cases of sickness and disease that God does not want to heal. It is not the will of God for anyone to die of disease.

The divine economy: Whatever the believer gives freely to God becomes a seed for God to multiply back to the believer in the form of his or her needs. When the believer sows seed of any kind by giving of talent, time, love, compassion, or money, that person will receive those things in return.

Appendix 2

Scripture Frequently Used by Word of Faith Preachers

Proverbs 11:24: People who give freely grow richer. Those who do not suffer want.

Ecclesiastes 9:16: Though a man may be wise, no one will listen to him if he is poor.

Matthew 28:18–20: The Great Commission is used to remind believers that just as Jesus was given all authority in heaven and earth, they too have the same authority.

Mark 4:1–8: In the parable of the Sower, Jesus analogizes sowing and reaping a harvest to sowing and reaping the Word.

Luke 6:38: This verse is part of Jesus' sermon on the plain. Jesus tells his hearers that whatever they give will be given back to them in good measure. The amount they give is the amount they should expect to receive in return.

John 4:37: Jesus analogizes sowing and reaping to doing the work of God.

John 16:23–24: Jesus informs the disciples that in a little while he will no longer be with them. But when he is gone, the disciples can ask anything in his name, and God will give it to them.

Romans 10:9–10: Paul informs the church of what they need to do to obtain salvation. They should confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believe with their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Galatians 6:7: Paul informs the church that whatever they sow they will also reap.