

Discipleship Training Course

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- Speech marks around entire quotes and at the beginning of new paragraphs have been omitted
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- All verse numbers, footnote numbers and symbols have been removed
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Published in electronic format by Pastor Peter Samuels, Morecambe, UK

Version 2.5, July 2026

ISBN 978-0-9956916-1-2

Chapter 21. Prosperity

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1. Introduction

1.1 Key Scriptures

*Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go out from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. **And I will bless you and make your name great. And you will be a blessing.** And I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you, and in you all of the families of the earth be blessed."*

Genesis 12:1-3 (NHEB)

After a meal, satisfied, bless God, your God, for the good land He has given you.

*Make sure you don't forget God, your God, by not keeping His commandments, His rules and regulations that I command you today. Make sure that when you eat and are satisfied, build pleasant houses and settle in, see your herds and flocks flourish and more and more money come in, watch your standard of living going up and up – **make sure you don't become so full of yourself and your things that you forget God,** your God,*

*The God who delivered you from Egyptian slavery;
the God who led you through that huge and fearsome wilderness,
those desolate, arid badlands crawling with fiery snakes and scorpions;*

*the God who gave you water gushing from hard rock;
the God who gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never heard of, in order to give you a taste of the hard life, to test you so that you would be prepared to live well in the days ahead of you.*

If you start thinking to yourselves, “I did all this. And all by myself. I’m rich. It’s all mine!” – well, think again. Remember that God, your God, gave you the strength to produce all this wealth so as to confirm the covenant that He promised to your ancestors – as it is today.

Deuteronomy 8:10-18 (MSG)

*The wicked desire what evil men have,
but **the root of the righteous produces fruit.***

Proverbs 12:12 (HCSB)

As He went out into the street, a man came running up, greeted Him with great reverence, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to get eternal life?”

Jesus said, “Why are you calling me good? No one is good, only God. You know the commandments: Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t cheat, honour your father and mother.”

He said, “Teacher, I have – from my youth – kept them all!”

*Jesus looked him hard in the eye – and loved him! He said, **“There’s one thing left: Go sell whatever you own and give it to the poor. All your wealth will then be heavenly wealth. And come follow Me.”***

The man’s face clouded over. This was the last thing he expected to hear, and he walked off with a heavy heart. He was holding on tight to a lot of things, and not about to let go.

Looking at His disciples, Jesus said, “Do you have any idea how difficult it is for people who ‘have it all’ to enter God’s kingdom?” The disciples couldn’t believe what they were hearing, but Jesus kept on: “You can’t imagine how difficult. I’d say it’s easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for the rich to get into God’s kingdom.”

That set the disciples back on their heels. “Then who has any chance at all?” they asked.

*Jesus was blunt: **“No chance at all if you think you can pull it off by yourself. Every chance in the world if you let God do it.”***

Peter tried another angle: “We left everything and followed You.”

*Jesus said, **“Mark My words, no one who sacrifices house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, land – whatever – because of Me and the Message will lose out. They’ll get it all back, but multiplied many times in homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and land – but also in troubles. And then the bonus of eternal life! This is once again the Great Reversal: Many who are first will end up last, and the last first.”***

Mark 10:17-31 (MSG)

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

3 John 2 (NKJV)

1.2 Key principles

It is clear from the Bible that we should not set our hearts on being wealthy. We should seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Jesus described the Kingdom of God as being like a pearl of great price or treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44-46). Indeed, King David once wrote,

*One thing have I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to enquire in His temple.*

Psalms 27:4 (ESVUK)

The desire for wealth is avarice which is one of the seven deadly sins. Godliness is also not a means to financial gain (1 Timothy 6:5). We cannot say that it is God's will for all of His children to be wealthy. This was certainly not the experience or desire of the Apostle Paul – see 2 Corinthians 6:10. The Lord is much more concerned about souls and so should we be.

However, becoming born again should lead us to become diligent, hard-working, reliable and faithful which can also cause us to become wealthier. Also, as quoted above, Jesus promised that those who left material possessions for the sake of the Kingdom would receive a hundredfold back in this present age but accompanied by persecutions (Mark 10:29-30). Perhaps being delivered from poverty is similar to coming out of slavery – if you can do so then it is a good thing (1 Corinthians 7:21) but whilst you are in bondage still serve the Lord (Ephesians 6:5-6).

Agur asked that he would not be too wealthy so that he forgot God and not too poor so that he was in need (Proverbs 30:7-9). Many people in the world are living in poverty, but many poor Christians are also ensnared by distorted and false teachings about prosperity because of their vulnerability. Poverty is often a curse from which people need to be delivered, but not by giving to a prosperity preacher who they are trying to emulate out of a 'lottery ticket' ambition. The curse of poverty is associated with jealousy and witchcraft and often operates at a territorial level, affecting communities, not just individuals. For an individual or a family to seek to be delivered from this curse is a good thing but it is not the whole picture. Also, false doctrines on prosperity are often just another form of witchcraft.

We need to ask ourselves whether our desire to be delivered from poverty is God-centred and is in balance with our faith and relationship with God. Would receiving what we have asked for really bring us closer to God or take us further away from Him (see James 4:3)? One recent example of a deliverance from poverty as part of a wider move of God is in Almolonga in Guatemala where there was a great repentance and turning to God, leading to the ground being delivered from a curse and supernatural harvests (Winger, 1998). This is consistent with the covenant blessings experienced by the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 28:1-6).

The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) teaches us that our gifts and abilities need to be invested and developed in order that they become prosperous. This works partly at a material level – our gifts can provide for us if we use them well. A basic principle of wealth creation is to serve others with something they value, need and appreciate. However, God is also expecting us to use our gifts for His honour and glory and we will one day need to give Him an account. Jesus taught, "*From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required*" (Luke 12:48b, AMP).

1.3 Kinds of Prosperity

There are three basic kinds of prosperity:

- **Prosperity of the spirit** – this is when we are established by God – through our relationship with Him. According to Proverbs 12:12, it is the root of the righteous that prospers. Jesus taught that the poor in spirit were blessed, because the kingdom of

heaven belonged to them. Paul taught the Ephesians that they had been blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

- **Prosperity of the soul** – our souls prosper when we are blessed, content and satisfied. John prayed that Gaius prospered in all things and was in good health, even as his souls prospered (3 John 2). We should choose to rejoice in the Lord even when we cannot see any material reason to do so (Habakkuk 3:17-18).
- **Material prosperity** – it is God who gives us the ability to produce wealth and so confirms His covenant with us (Deuteronomy 8:18).

2. Old Testament examples

2.1 Abraham

Abraham had great wealth but his wealth did not have a hold on him because God had tested him with his most treasured possession – his covenant son Isaac (see Genesis 22).

2.2 Lot

Lot became very wealthy but he also became tormented because he ended up in the wrong place (2 Peter 2:7-8). He relied upon his natural eyesight rather than the blessing and direction of God (Genesis 13:10-11) and his righteous soul was tormented by what he saw and heard (2 Peter 2:8). In the end he had to flee Sodom (Genesis 19). His daughters' fiancés both thought he was joking when he warned them (v. 14) and lost their lives. His wife turned back to look at Sodom and was turned into a pillar of salt (v. 26).

2.3 Isaac

Isaac once reaped a hundred fold from what he planted (Genesis 26:12). God was able to prosper him in a barren land.

2.4 Jacob

Jacob tried many times to obtain wealth and favour through deception but went through a long, difficult experience at the hands of his uncle Laban (Genesis 29-30) which taught him the value of hard work and depending upon God. In the end he recognised that blessing came from God (Genesis 32:26).

2.5 The Israelites

The Israelites lived in poverty and slavery in Egypt. When God delivered them He made the Egyptians favourably disposed towards them and they left with silver and gold (Exodus 12:36). They then spent forty years wandering in the wilderness as God tested their hearts so that they would learn that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God's mouth (Deuteronomy 8:2-5). In the process, some longed to return to their vegetables and slavery in Egypt (Numbers 11:4-6). After forty years of discipline they entered the Promised Land but they first had to trust and obey God in order to defeat their enemies. When Achan set his heart on unclean wealth it brought trouble on the whole community (Joshua 7). Eventually, they defeated all their enemies and the land rested but they were then in danger of forgetting God and trusting in themselves and their wealth (Judges 2:10-23).

2.6 Job

Job was a wealthy man who was highly respected in society because he cared for the poor and needy (Job 29). When he lost everything he refused to curse God (Job 2:9-10). God later restored him twice over after he prayed for his friends (Job 42:10).

2.7 Lessons from the Psalms

Psalms 1 – the man who delights in the law of the LORD is like a tree – whatever he does prospers (v. 3)

*I have seen a wicked, violent man
well-rooted like a flourishing native tree.
Then I passed by and noticed he was gone;
I searched for him, but he could not be found.*

Psalms 37:35-36 (HCSB)

Psalms 73 – do not envy the wicked – it is only when we enter the presence of God that we see things clearly (vv. 16-17)

Psalms 78 – God is able to provide a table in the midst of a wilderness (v. 19)

2.8 Lessons from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

*The hand of the diligent will rule,
But the lazy man will be put to forced labour.*

Proverbs 12:24 (NKJV)

The possessions of diligent men are prized.

Proverbs 12:27b (NHEB)

*Better is a little with righteousness
Than great income with injustice.*

Proverbs 16:8 (NASB1995)

*By wisdom a house is built,
and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled
with rare and beautiful treasures.*

Proverbs 24:3-4 (NIVUK)

The root of the righteous prospers (Proverbs 12:12).

Do not wear yourself out trying to get rich (Proverbs 23:4).

Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour – this is the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 5:19 (WEBPB)

3. New Testament examples

3.1 Jesus

Jesus prospered like a tender shoot in dry ground (Isaiah 53:2).

Jesus became poor that He might make many people rich (2 Corinthians 8:9), but this should not be interpreted primarily in terms of material wealth.

When Jesus was in need God showed Him how to provide for Himself miraculously through a coin in the mouth of a fish (Matthew 17:24-27).

There also was a group of women who followed Him and His disciples and took care of their needs (Luke 8:2-3). However, Judas was in charge of the disciples' money but was also a thief (John 12:6).

Jesus taught that the people of this world are wiser than the children of the Kingdom when it comes to handling finances (Luke 16:8), implying that we should learn from them but also pointing towards gaining true spiritual wealth.

God provided a tomb for Jesus from a wealthy man (Matthew 27:57-61).

3.2 Rich young ruler

Unlike Abraham, the rich young ruler was not able to yield his most treasured possessions to God and went away with a heavy heart (Mark 10:17-22).

3.3 Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus was convicted through a word of knowledge but then touched by the love of Jesus towards him so much so that he promised to give half of his wealth to the poor and to repay anyone he had wronged four times (Luke 19:1-10). His inner experience of the love of God transformed his attitude towards money and his relationship with God and others.

3.4 The New Testament Church

The early Church held all things in common (Acts 2:44-45). Wealth was distributed according to needs. It was provided through the sale of land (Acts 4:32-35). However, this approach was only for the season of the early Church and was not economically sustainable. Later, the Church was scattered through persecution and their model of financial provision changed.

3.5 Barnabas

Barnabas was one of the people who presented the profit from the sale of some land at the feet of the disciples (Acts 4:36-37).

He also had a generous spirit and could see the grace of God in others whose gifts and experiences were different from his own (Acts 9:27, 11:23).

3.6 Paul

Paul provided for himself by being a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Although he had the right to a material income from the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:15) and Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 2:9) when he preached to them he chose instead not to use this right but to work night and day so that he was not a burden to them because of their immature faith and so that he did not hinder the spreading of the gospel. However, he later encouraged the Thessalonians to work so that they could eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Paul also organised an aid donation to the victims of famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30). He took great pains to ensure that this money was delivered safely and that those who had made pledges honoured their commitments (2 Corinthians 8). Later, when he was being held in prison, the rulers may have thought that he would use some of this money to bribe his way out but he never did so (Acts 24:26).

4. Conclusion

We should avoid these attitudes:

- Following Biblical principles as a law or because of pride or greed (such as giving in order to get)
- The love of money, which Jesus called worshipping Mammon (Matthew 6:24); holding on to wealth like the rich young ruler instead of being rich towards God (Mark 10:17-22)
- Greed (Ephesians 5:5) and avarice – the desire to be rich
- Meanness

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- A lack of self-worth which leads us to give away things too easily when we ought to hold on to our blessings
- Lack of concern for the needs of others and closing your heart to the poor and needy – the sin of Sodom (Ezekiel 16:49)
- Idleness (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)
- Overwork (Proverbs 23:4)
- Judging people according to their material wealth and showing favouritism to the wealthy (James 2:1-13)
- Stealing from our employers or only working hard when we are being observed (Ephesians 6:5-8)
- Selfishness
- Having no sense of community or responsibility towards wealth generation for others
- Hiding our talents in the ground without investing them (Matthew 25:14-30)
- Looking to our own resources to survive in a season of lack (Ruth 1:1-5)

Instead we should cultivate these attitudes:

- Being rich towards God (Luke 12:21)
- Valuing the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33), souls (Psalm 49:7-9, Matthew 16:26, Luke 12:16-20) and the presence of God (Psalm 27:4)
- Investing in the preaching of the gospel (Mark 10:28-30)
- Hard work and diligence (Proverbs 12:24)
- Generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-15)
- Concern for the poor and needy and a having sense of responsibility towards our community (Job 29:12-17, 1 John 3:17-18)
- Contentment instead of overwork (Proverbs 23:4, 1 Timothy 6:6)
- Wisdom, knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2)
- Investing our talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
- Allowing God to rebuild us internally (Isaiah 54:11-14) so that we have a sense of self worth and can hold on to our possessions
- Following Biblical principles of giving, tithing and firstfruits, etc. by being led by the Holy Spirit and not out of bondage to religion – speaking over our giving by faith (Deuteronomy 26:12-15)
- Being willing to lay all on the altar before God (or at least, like Abraham, the thing or person in this world that we treasure the highest – Genesis 22:1-18)
- Prosperity first of the spirit (Matthew 5:3), then of the soul, then materially (3 John 2)
- Walking in righteousness and humility so that we prosper spiritually (2 Chronicles 26:5)
- Trusting God to provide in a season of lack (Habakkuk 3:17-19, Luke 12:22-34)

Reference

Winger, M. (1998) Almolonga, the miracle city. In: H. Caballeros and M. Winger, eds. *The Transforming Power of Revival*. Peniel, Chapter 17, <https://renewaljournal.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/almolonga-the-miracle-city-bymell-winger/>.