

Raise your hand if you're on Instagram. Cool. Go follow us @waiteparkchurch

Raise your hand again if you've ever seen this account @preachersnsneakers

This Instagram account features preachers wearing expensive sneakers. And apparently there was a demand for it because within a few weeks it grew to over 100,000 followers.

If you've ever wanted to see a pastor in \$600 shoes or \$900 shoes or \$5000 shoes, now you can. By the way, I'm a size 10 and a half if you want to see me featured there, okay?

It creates a lot of questions for us, doesn't it?

I heard John Piper say once that his heart is a desire factory that's constantly churning out or manufacturing new desires that he in turn, needs to respond to.

I guess my point is, maybe it's not shoes that you desire but chances are you have desires and chances are some of your desires are a little disordered. It's not bad to have desires but it's bad when they become disordered.

Do you remember those old iPhone commercials from about 10 years ago that advertised the app store and they'd say – "there's an app for that."

Well, one of the things our culture does today is it takes our desires and it says, "there's a gospel for that."

I don't say that because I hate culture or I think Christians should be against culture (not at all, I think Christians need to engage with culture and challenge culture and at appropriate times, cooperate with culture) And I know we even benefit from parts of culture.

Culture tends to teach us that we need to find our own purpose. We need to decide for ourselves what makes us happy. That's our job. And so as a result, it's been culture's job for a while now (partly because of consumerism and advertising) to say: there's a gospel for that. So we start asking these questions: "What should I value?" "How am I valuable?" "Why am I valuable?" "Who Am I?" "What makes me who I am?" And even, "What can save me?"

And culture's job is to say – no matter what your answers are to those questions, there's a gospel for you.

And so part of what we're doing in this sermon series is we're examining cultural gospels and hopefully considering the good from them while at the same time, challenging them and exposing where they fall short.

So today we're talking about the cultural gospel of prosperity

Of course, Christianity has its own unique flavor of the prosperity gospel. This sort of "God wants you to be healthy and wealthy." Even though we didn't see that in Christ's life and we know we're expected to look like Christ and we didn't see that in the life of NT Christians. It's really difficult for you to read the Bible and come to the conclusion that God wants you to be healthy and wealthy.

But today we want to look at this cultural gospel of prosperity. **If you work hard** you will be wealthy and wealth will bring you happiness.

So I want to talk about how Christians are supposed to handle wealth and prosperity and our unique perspective on it but first I want you to take a look at this progression that happens when we have a disordered passion for something. And we'll call it Keith's pathway to idolatry.

See **passion** turns into **purpose** and that purpose turns into **identity** and that identity turns into **idolatry** and that idolatry turns into a **gospel**.

You know when we talk about passion, one of the things we're talking about is "**what** I value"
And when we talk about purpose, we're talking about "**How** I'm valuable."

If I value something, and I want to be valuable, then I find my purpose by relating to that valuable thing in a valuable way. Purpose.

Okay and then my identity becomes why I'm valuable – because I relate to this valuable thing in a valuable way. So not only is that thing valuable but now I'm valuable too. It forms my understanding of "**Who** I am" – Identity.

And this leads to idolatry. You see, once we find "who I am" in something, it's a short transition to, "**who** made me." Idolatry is basically: who, or what, makes me. You see this in romance a lot – "Honey, I'm nothing without you. You make me who I am." In other words, idolatry happens when we glorify something else and give it credit for our value and existence. This eventually leads to a new gospel. In other words, "**who** or what saves me." Funnily, you know where I see this the most? Dogs.

Man, I was sitting outside a restaurant with my friend Ray and I had my dog **Dostum** with me and this guy comes up to us and he pets my dog, he smiles at me, and he says, "I know man. You thought you were rescuing him. But he rescued you, right? I get it." And I'm just like.... "no, I very clearly rescued this dog who offers very little in return."

See? We make our gospel out of the thing that we're passionate for.

So your passion is – what I value

Your purpose is – how I valuable

Your identity is – "who I am"

Your idolatry is – "who/what made me."

And your gospel is – "who/what saves me."

Now let's make this a little more concrete.

So let's say your passion is – **providing**. That's what you value.

So your purpose is – to **provide**. That's how you're valuable.

Your identity is – I'm a **provider**. And I don't know who I'd be if I wasn't providing

So your idolatry is your **job**. Maybe it's you work ethic.

Because you look at your job and you go, "This opportunity made me who I am today."

And your gospel, your good news, your, "you save me" is: **prosperity** and self reliance. That's what you learn to put your hope in.

Let's pretend for a second that you're passionate about good food.
So how are you valuable? What's your purpose – your ability to taste or discern good food.
So who are you? You're a Foodie.
What made you? Maybe your idol is your taste buds. You wouldn't be who you are without them.
What's your gospel? You know I was watching worst Cooks in America the other day and there was a celebrity baker Ron Ben-Israel on and he made this comment – If everybody baked a cake, there would be world peace. His passion became his gospel. What saves us? Baking!

You know, all of these passions have multiple branches. So people with the same passion can have a plethora of options when it comes to their purpose or their idolatry or their gospels.

One more example.

Let's pretend that your passion is respect or admiration.
Your purpose becomes "to impress."
Your identity becomes, "being someone impressive."
And your Idolatry becomes recognition.

Think of what happens when every famous person, celebrity, or pop culture icon accepts a reward.
What do they say, they say, "I want to thank my fans because I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for my fans. It's because of you that I'm here today. You make me who I am. You make this possible."

So your passion becomes your purpose and your purpose becomes your identity and your identity becomes your idolatry. And this eventually will cause you to develop your gospel.

What gospel do famous people usually espouse? The gospel of self-promotion and positivity. Believe in yourself, promote yourself, don't let anyone shortchange you, and think positively about your situation and your future because the law of attraction means that if you put good things out there, good things will come back to you.... Your passion is to be admired and so your gospel becomes: Don't let anyone not admire you.

And again, you can have a passion that has multiple options for what your purpose or your identity or your idolatry will be right?

So in the passage that we read earlier, we heard: love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

And man, our culture is really good at teaching us – at an early age – to love money. Because from money, comes – being a self-made man, or woman. From money, comes, self-sufficiency. From money, comes, "I'm a contributing member of society." From money, comes, sheer, quantifiable value. You can actually google, "How much is so and so worth." You can quantify someone's value. From money comes fame, power, respect. If you have enough money, people will want to be with you, want to be like you, they will want you to like them. From money comes a lot of attractive things.

Here's the thing, money isn't evil. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. But money itself isn't evil. It's a tool. Jesus uses money in his ministry, he draws attention to people who are giving money, he talks about money often, and he encourages his followers to use money as a tool for the sake of the kingdom. Even in our passage today in verse 8, we see that Paul recognizes our basic needs for food, and

clothing. And in other places, Paul is quick to encourage Christians to work hard and to provide for themselves and others. Paul even says here in **verse 17**, that God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. We're supposed to enjoy the good things that God gives to us.

You know, we live in a time where we are spoiled in ways that kings during Jesus' time never would dreamed of and it's easy for us to take it for granted and to not enjoy all of these good things. Right? A refrigerator. A grocery store. Cars. Electricity. Air conditioning. Most of us have a quality of life – indoor plumbing. You know, you can flush your turds. That's awesome! You don't have to throw them in the street anymore.

But money undoubtedly has its limitations and its pitfalls.

Check out **verse 9 f** for a moment. "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." Whoa that escalated quickly. Right? If we started our message today and I just said: show of hands, how many here want to get rich? Probably the majority of us would've said: Yeah, I want that. Maybe we would've even been proud of that desire.

Look, when we read scripture, we're warned that wanting to be rich is a red flag. It's not a desire that we should be proud of, not a desire that we should put up with. It's not a desire that we encourage but one that we rebuke. Whoa. Okay now, we're getting into some hard teaching, right? Jesus doesn't want you to want to be rich. And at this point we need to seriously consider – are we going to compromise our faith? Or are going to work towards conforming ourselves to the image of Jesus. That's hard, right?

Paul's not the only one who warns against this desire.

Jesus tells us that some will hear the word but, listen to this: **Matthew 13:22**²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

The seed falls on good soil. It's not a hard path, it's not rocky soil, it's good soil. The person hears the word. They receive it. But what happens? The worries of this life and the – what? Deceitfulness of wealth choke the word and make it unfruitful.

Jesus says that love of money will literally kill your faith. It's too distracting. You'll remember in **another place**, Jesus says: "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.

You can't do it. It's too distracting. It's too consuming. Don't think that you can. You don't know better than Jesus does.

So Paul says this – in verse 6. **Godliness**, with contentment is great gain. If you want to keep from falling into the deceitfulness of wealth – you need two things. Godliness and contentment.

Today I want to look at one key for godliness and one key for contentment.

Here's the key for contentment – **Own** Nothing.

AW Tozer, is who this idea comes from for me. He's got this article called, The 5 Vows of Spiritual Power. If you haven't read it before, you should. I know I've mentioned it before. One of those vows is to own nothing. And in it, he talks about, not letting your possessions possess you. Anytime you hold onto something, that thing is also holding onto you. You cannot be free as long as you're holding onto something else. Right?

And everytime we do this with possessions, everytime we own something, everytime we say, "This is mine" mine to do what I will with what I have – the stuff that we're supposed to rule over, the stuff that we're supposed to steward well, the stuff that God gave to us as a gift – that stuff begins to rule us. It becomes a curse. Simply because we're attached to it.

Here's how Tozer puts it.

Now don't think that you must sell all that you have and give it to charity. No. God will let you have your car and your business, your practice and your position, whatever it may be – provided you understand that it is not yours at all, but His, and all you are doing is just working for Him... It is always necessary to remember that we are only stewards of that which is usually called a possession.

You say, how do I do that? How do I get there? Well, here's what I would do:

1. Tithe.

I know that sounds self-serving, coming from a pastor. But I don't get paid based on how much you tithe. And when I was a small group leader in college, it was a requirement for the men in our groups to tithe – so regardless of whether or not I work for a church – I've always believed in tithing.

You know, Tithing is supposed to do this for us. Tithing is supposed to be an opportunity for us to practice having an open hand. For us to get used to things coming and going from our lives. Sometimes Christians get this idea (and maybe not a lot of Christians because maybe not a lot of Christians tithe) but sometimes Christians get this idea that "Oh I gave God my 10% so I can do whatever I want with this 90%). But that's not what tithing is for. Tithing is to serve as a reminder and an acknowledgment that everything we have comes from God and still belongs to God. Tithing is a spiritual practice that regularly grounds me in the truth that I'm a steward of what God has given me and that He's trustworthy and faithful. So if you want to own nothing, one of the best things you can do, in my experience, is tithe.

2. Expand your perspective.

You know Paul points out to Timothy – "You came here with nothing, and you take nothing with you." That's one of the ways that we own nothing. Think about the fact that you used to not exist and one day, shortly, you will not exist again. And everything you amass in your lifetime – none of it will last. None of it can go with you. **Jesus says, don't store up treasures where thieves and moths and rust destroy.** But store up treasure in heaven – treasure that lasts.

Now that you expand your perspective and have an accurate worldview – you need to ask the question: now what matters? And we see how silly it is to think that money is the end game. Man, a lot of really wealthy people have gotten to the end of their lives and thought, "Why did I spend so much of my time and effort on that?" Because we all start out broke and we all end broke.

There's one more thing that we do. To own nothing.

3. **Spend** time with people in need

Paul **commands** the rich to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share. There's a Ted talk, titled, "Does **Money** make you mean." And in it, several studies are shared about how money affects how kind people are.

In one study, rich and poor members of the community were given \$10 and were told, "You can keep this for yourself or give a portion of it to a stranger. Totally anonymous. They'll never meet the stranger. The stranger will never meet them." Then they monitored, how much people gave. **Individuals** that made 25,000 sometimes under 15,000 a year gave 44% more of their money to a stranger than individuals making 150,000 to 200,000 a year.

In another study, they had a jar of **candy** that was specifically identified as being "reserved for children" and they were told they were "participating in a developmental lab nearby." They monitored how much participants took. Participants that considered themselves "rich" took twice as much as participants who felt poor.

They studied whether or not drivers of different kinds of cars would stop for a pedestrian, waiting to cross the crosswalk. Hundreds of vehicles, several days, and what they found was as the value of a car increased, the driver's tendency to break the law increased as well. **None** of the cars in their least expensive vehicle category broke the law – they all stopped for pedestrians. Close to 50% of the cars in the most expensive vehicle category broke the law.

The Ted talk researchers said the best way to restore levels of egalitarianism and empathy was to create small reminders of the benefit of cooperation, or the advantage of community, or exposing people to a brief video (just 45 seconds long) of childhood poverty to remind people of the needs of those around them. In every study, wealthy people become just as generous as those with less money.

In other words, if we want to be generous, we need to spend time with people in need. Or as Paul **says**, "do good, be rich in good deeds, be generous, and willing to share." You can't do those things if you don't spend time with people in need.

So what's one key for contentment? – Own nothing.

Here's the key for **godliness** – Find Your identity in God's love for you.

Remember Keith's pathway to idolatry? From **passion** to purpose to identity to idolatry to gospel.

And one of the things that I didn't mention was that – you can start... at any point on this spectrum and you can insert something here – into Identity and you can say, "I am a **Christian**. That is my identity." And from that, everything else will get shaped differently too. And actually a lot of psychologists will say: that's how it works, the group that you identify with, or **how you identify, shapes what you value.**" We know this too. Check this out. **1 or 2**, Which one of these guys is more likely to drink a monster energy drink (Mom or Motocross picture). **1 or 2** Which one of these guys is more likely to stop at Starbucks for a coffee (hipster vs biker). **1 or 2** Which one of these guys is more likely to listen to Taylor Swift? (College girl or construction worker). Our identity shapes what we value.

So a lot of us go, “okay... I’m a **Christian**.” And so how I’m valuable is to be **Christ**-like. And so what I value is **Christ**-likeness. And my idolatry, do I have idolatry then? I don’t know. Maybe. For some of us our idolatry might become **legalism** or moralism. And maybe our gospel is **works** righteousness.

You know let’s pretend my identity is, “I’m a **missionary**.” That’s who I am. And so how I’m valuable is that I’m on **mission**. What I value is **missions**. And my idolatry is my **effectiveness** with sharing the gospel. You go, how could that be idolatry? Well, I think that’s a byproduct. I think missions and holiness are byproducts. But they’re not God. They’re not our maker.

What if your identity was this: I am **loved**. Then, all of the sudden, when I recognize that “I am loved” my identity isn’t found within myself but it’s found within God – the only unchanging standard whose opinion is the only one that matters. So now, nothing about my identity can ever change. I’m always loved by God and I can trust my identity because God is the only one most qualified to judge and assess someone’s value, right?

What’s Paul say to Timothy?

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

He says: don’t put your hope in who you are or what you have. Don’t find your value in your stuff or in how you relate to your stuff. Put your hope in God and who He is and what you have in Him.

Find your identity in God.

Paul, in verses 15&16 describes God as **God**, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords,¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Consider our pathway now.

When this God knows all of you and all of your sin and all of your goodness and loves you – when you see yourself through His eyes, you can stop asking the question, “who Am I? (IDENTITY)

When this God is your treasure, when His kingdom is what you value, when eternity is in view, you can stop asking, “what’s valuable?” (PASSION)

When this God tells you that you were made in His image, that He’s jealous for you, that He demonstrated his own love for you while you were yet still sinners, you can stop asking the question, “How am I valuable?” (PURPOSE)

When your soul calls God Father, you don’t need to find something else to credit your existence to. You can stop asking the question, “Who made me?” (IDOLATRY))

When you realize that you were bought with the blood of Jesus, you can stop asking the question, “Who saves me?”

Godliness with contentment is great gain. If you want to be content – Make up your mind today to work towards owning nothing. To letting go. If you want to be godly – find your identity in God’s love for you.

Listen, it’s easy to say: I’m loved by God. But it’s hard for us to get our identity from that. As we near the end of our time together this morning – I want to encourage you to ask God for help in this. God help me to see me the way that you see me. God help me to find my value in what you say I’m worth and not what I think I’m worth. God help me to see myself, not through my accomplishments, not through my abilities, not through my contributions, not through my failures, not through my lack, not through my weakness, not through my thoughts and my opinions or my capabilities or my job or my bank account – No God, help me to see my worth through your eyes. The God of the universe loves me and He loves me uniquely. He doesn’t just love you because you’re part of mankind. He doesn’t just love us in general. No, he knows your name. He knit you together in your mother’s womb. He’s numbered your days. He’s numbered the hairs on your head. He knows you. He cares for you. He loves you. Will you trust him with your identity? Will you see yourselves through his eyes?