



10 Gifts

From the Faith & Prosperity Gospel

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel message hits some very high notes and you can learn things from them that are hard to find anywhere else. Here I focus on the ten most significant positive contributions that the movement makes to global Christianity. I am thankful for these gifts and I am sure you will be too.



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If you come as an outsider and are familiar with the critiques of the movement, you might think that the Faith & Prosperity Gospel is a heresy that is corrupting the very essence of the Christian faith. To hear me say that they have gifts for the body of Christ would then sound absolutely outrageous. I can understand that. But even though there are some reasons why the movement is heavily criticized—and I speak to those things in length as well—it is imperative that we do not overreact and throw out the baby with the bathwater. The Faith & Prosperity Gospel is much more complex than stereotypical critiques often give it credit for.



If you come from inside the movement you might think—like I did—that the Faith & Prosperity Gospel is God’s latest and greatest revelation, the pure embodiment of the apostolic church from the book of Acts. To say that the movement *only* offers ten gifts would then feel like a degradation and lack of appreciation. Regardless of the perspective you come from, I trust that looking at these gifts will bring some fresh food for thought. Let’s begin to unpack them.

1. Expectant Faith

A characteristic of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel—whether the old school or the updated versions—is its positive tone and expectancy. The faith is upbeat, joyful and hopeful:

“Something good is about to happen!”

“The best is yet to come!”

“A miracle is coming your way!”

Prosperity preaching is filled with personal stories of interventions by God in the most difficult situations with miraculous healings and economic provision.

Something happens in the atmosphere when you gather a group of Christians who have this kind of expectation; God honors it by showing up in unusual ways. In my experience I have found that the communities who evidence some of the greatest



testimonies of miraculous answers to prayer are within the Faith & Prosperity Gospel camp.

In a world filled with negativity, fear, and worry, the tone and message of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel offer hope and a positive outlook on life. The world of faith is limitless; “the miracle is there for you, just stretch out by faith and grab it.” The message is clear: all things are possible for him or her who believes (Mark 9:23). When editing this section I realized that I had written “impossible” instead of “possible” (i.e., all things are impossible for him or her who believes). This mistake reminded me of being in a church where the kids cited memory verses on Sunday morning in front of the congregation. One little girl had memorized Luke 1:37—“For with God nothing will be impossible”—but happened to mix up the words like I did. It was hard not to grin when hearing her say in a sweet voice that “with God nothing will be possible”. Apart from a good laugh it is a healthy reminder of the great difference in meaning small changes can make (she just forgot “im” before possible).

you better keep up with Him. Seldom will you hear preachers say so much of what God says as within the Faith & Prosperity Gospel. “God showed me;” “The Holy Spirit told me;” “I got a revelation from Scripture”. There are visions of Jesus and angels, stories of spiritual warfare and raising the dead, prophetic words, praying in tongues, and direct revelations from God about the real meaning of certain Bible passages. God doesn’t just speak to the preacher; God speaks to everyone. Prosperity faith is a supernatural faith, open and expecting of God’s miraculous interventions in everyday life for every believer.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for its positive, expectant supernaturally focused faith.

2. Practical faith

The tone and message of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel offer hope and a positive outlook on life.

For many, the positive and expectant faith of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel is a welcome antidote to the sometimes pessimistic and at times outright skeptic tone in messages from other Christian groups who sometimes expect little and receive even less.

You know that you have entered a Faith & Prosperity church when literally everyone you meet are smiling, talking about how good God is and how the coming days will be the best ever—just wait and you’ll see. The glass is truly half-full in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel mindset.

This hopeful and positive attitude is carried not just by the people but communicated in the interior design, in the worship music, in the announcements, in the advertisements. It is a contagious (not in a pandemic-way, but in a good way) energetic positivity.

This hopeful and expectant faith directly connects with its emphasis on God’s supernatural workings. God is alive and at work in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel. Theirs is a worldview where God is on the move and

The expectation that faith brings God’s power at work in everyday life is a positive characteristic of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel and its message is carried by personal testimony. The preacher’s personal experience and the experience of others make up a core part of every message. The stories relate to how God intervenes in various issues and problems of life.

This expectation is translated into practical teachings, where steps and how-tos are shared on everything from how to handle unpaid bills, the common cold to how to win a golf tournament or score straight A’s on your college exams. Many who have grown up without a father or mother find strong leadership and admirable role models in Faith & Prosperity preachers as they offer practical guidance in a personal and parental way.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel prides itself on cutting to the heart of things, to tell you like it is in a straightforward style and will always find some kind of practical application as believers are offered practical and applicable steps taken from biblical texts.

For example, the rate of practical applicability of many teachings are as high as you can get. Sermons usually end with an invitation to act on the message, whether by sowing money (I know of a Faith & Prosperity Gospel church that had five offerings in one service alone!), speaking a positive confession, or enacting your prayer. My wife was instructed to write on the sole of her shoes “the devil is under my feet”. I have, together with thousands of others, literally stood on my Bible and said: “God, I’m standing on your promises”.

You cannot hold prosperity faith in your heart alone; it will affect every area of your life. Those who have watched from the outside as their friends and family members became part of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel will testify to how literally everything about them begins to change; they will start to talk different, think different, dress different, eat different, and even look different. A person who never cared for reading will start to read—not only the Bible but also books by Faith & Prosperity preachers.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for spreading a practically applicable faith.

3. Commitment to Scripture

To hold the Bible in high regard is a collective belief in Faith & Prosperity Gospel circles. If you can’t find something stated in the Word of God it isn’t worth believing. “The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it.”

is a famous statement that speaks to the authoritative place the Bible has in the movement.

Many believers have found this uncompromising commitment to the inspiration and authority of Scripture refreshing, particularly as an alternative to *some* (certainly not all!) academic theology that deconstructs and promotes a critical stance toward Scripture and to forms of liberal Christianity that are wavering on which parts of the Bible to accept and what to reject.

Prosperity preaching promotes a common-sense kind of reading of Scripture that invites the believer to also interpret the Bible for themselves by the light the Spirit gives. The Word of God is directly related to a strong faith since, as often said, “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Believers therefore read, study, meditate, memorize, and talk about the Bible.

My time in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel nurtured a deep love and respect for the Word of God.

In many ways is the Faith & Prosperity Gospel a Bible movement of sorts; or as they often call themselves, a “Word movement”.



Check out the video “The Big Story of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel” on our YouTube channel.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for promoting a robust commitment to the Bible.

4. Radical Generosity

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel carries a bad vibe among many, partly because of the negative publicity some of the more well-known names have received. A common misconception is that Faith & Prosperity Gospel believers are just after lining their pockets; the Faith & Prosperity Gospel is whitewashed greed. We will come back to this problem in other teachings but

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for promoting a robust commitment to the Bible.



here I want to point out that anyone who has rubbed shoulders with Faith & Prosperity believers will quickly find that they tend to practice a special kind of generosity beyond what you find among many other Christian groups.

Stinginess is held as a sin and to freely give is encouraged. This generosity is not only directed toward ministries they are part of but toward others as well, believers and non-believers.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel often leads to the practice of a radical generosity. In what other Christian groups is it common to hear of people giving their car away, paying off someone's college fees, mortgage, or hospital bills? I know of Faith & Prosperity believers who pay their contractors more than their bills state, tip generously, quickly share their resources when they get to know of someone's needs, cook over-the-top meals, and the list of examples could go on and on.

The most generous Christians I've ever met have been in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel. A generous attitude toward pastors and ministers is a trait of the Faith & Prosperity mindset. Christian leaders and their families are to be well provided for by their congregations and members take pride in the financial well-being of their pastors.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for nurturing a generous faith.

5. Material Salvation

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel preachers will be quick to tell you that Jesus didn't just lay down his life for your sins (which he did too, of course). Jesus died also for your bodily, economic, emotional, and social well-being. 3 John 2 makes a theme text in the movement: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers". In other words, salvation in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel shape goes beyond the spiritual realm and reaches deep into the material, psychological, and social dimensions of human life.

Though these emphases have met strong critique from both inside and outside the church world, any serious Bible reader would have to agree that to focus on the material dimensions of salvation is right in line with Jesus's mission of bringing salvation for the whole human being and that the transforming work of the Holy Spirit affects all dimensions of life (e.g., Luke 4:18-19).

Traditionally, the gospel is said to simply be about the forgiveness of sins: Jesus came so that you could be free from guilt, escape the wrath of God, and go to heaven when you die. Such message says little of the gospel's bearing on your day-to-day life, on a transformed now.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel fills this vacuum by showing how faith in God leads to more (not less) than simply forgiveness. It invites believers into partaking of the life of God in a way that affects their bodies, finances, and everything else. As such it is heard as a message of liberation and good news for the poor and struggling.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for emphasizing how salvation also includes our bodies and economies.

The most generous Christians I've ever met have been in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel.

6. Developing Talents

In the Faith & Prosperity Gospel, not even the sky is your limit as you seek to always move upward. Whatever you can conceive by faith is possible. You are told that "don't take no for an answer" and keep standing in faith till the answers materializes. There are no problems too big, no devil too strong, no structures too powerful for you to reach where you want to reach. The message is empowering: your future is not determined by your past; your future is determined by your faith.

Such message has liberated believers to pursue their dreams, despite economic, ethnic, social, or educational limitations. Some of the movement's top leaders have rags-to-riches journeys, which inspire others to seek similar routes in life.

Since the Faith & Prosperity Gospel inspires people to move into God's blessings even when God seems inactive—"you don't have to wait for God to draw your number"—there is a culture of action and ambition. This leads believers to learn new skills, pursue further education, excel in their work, make economic investments, shine in sports, and start businesses (in one large Faith & Prosperity church in Africa, you are told every Sunday to turn to your neighbor in the pew and ask: "have you started your business yet?").

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel moves beyond simple positive thinking to offer practical guidance and applicable principles on many issues of life. Larger churches offer courses on subjects that before were not considered within the sphere of the church's interest. Beyond the more common courses on marital and family topics, Faith & Prosperity churches often offer introduction to college studies, guidance on mortgage, tips on investments, on business increase, sales tactics, etc.

This spirit of action and ambition has liberated believers to not accept status quo as a God-given destination but to seek to change their circumstances with the resources at hand. The Faith & Prosperity Gospel inspires people to dream and motivates them to take steps in the direction of its fulfillment. Every step is celebrated by friends in the movement and testimonies shared with the church; those who reach the top often become influential in the movement. The movement does not name and shame achievements that in other Christian contexts are sometimes seen as negative.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for motivating people to challenge their limitations, develop their potential and talents, and resist oppressive powers around them.

7. God's Goodness

Since the salvation preached by Faith & Prosperity preachers affects all dimensions of life—financial, bodily, family life, and so on—it speaks in the final

analysis to how good God is. Because God is truly a good God, He wants the best for His children.

In the message of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel, you encounter God's favor and smile over your life; you will hear of God who is longing to bless you in every area, who takes pleasure in your success and abundance. God is not after you; seeking ways to make you suffer and to decrease your health, finances, or happiness. Rather, your joy is His joy. He takes pleasure in your pleasure. Your prosperous and good life is a testimony to His goodness.

This positive view of God and the bedrock belief in God's goodness and favorable intentions towards His children are refreshing and welcome. It is truly a message of good news for those who have images of God as fierce, judgmental, and waiting to get you. Instead of a demanding God, the Faith & Prosperity Gospel shows God to be merciful, generous, and rewarding.

It should come as no surprise that this message resonates with millions of people from every walk of life and gives them hope and strength.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for spreading the good news of the goodness of God.

Salvation goes beyond the spiritual realm and reaches deep into the material, psychological, social dimensions of human life.

8. Focus on Missions

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel works with a strong commitment to missions. For outsiders it is easy to think that Faith & Prosperity Gospel churches are closed groups focused on achieving their own success. Yet any amount of time spent in Faith & Prosperity Gospel circles will quickly shatter this stereotypical image.

Rather, there is a clear and outspoken focus on reaching the nations with the gospel of Jesus. The message of the gospel is expected to be confirmed by the Holy Spirit working signs and wonders. Missionaries are sent out, churches planted, evangelistic campaigns are held, Bible schools started, food and clothes donated, messages recorded and broadcast on old and

new media, books printed, and the list could be extended.

Faith & Prosperity preachers have pioneered various mission endeavors. The Faith & Prosperity Gospel movements in Africa, for example, send missionaries and start churches literally on every continent of the world.

Faith & Prosperity preachers are effective in reaching out with a message of salvation and motivating believers to engage in doing the work of the great commission of going into the whole world (Matt. 28:18–20).

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for its ongoing commitment to missions.

9. Jesus's Victory

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel teaches that when Jesus was raised from the dead, he delegated all his authority to the church. Hence, the believer is always more than a conqueror, seated with Christ to rule in life now. Believers are encouraged to take Jesus's words seriously and personally that they have spiritual authority to drive out demons and heal the sick (Luke 9:1).

Satan's defeat is something which the believer is authorized to enforce in their life. Called to live in royal authority, believers are motivated to become acting parts in enforcing Jesus's victory on the earth.

That the believer now has Jesus's delegated authority is a key belief in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel; it underlies much of what is believed and practiced. Jesus is the role-model, showing how believers should use their God-given authority in similar ways.

There are some problems with this view of Jesus's victory that need to be discussed and I do that in other teachings. What I want to emphasize here is to note the positive contributions the emphasis on Jesus's victory and the believer's authority make to Christianity.



The Faith & Prosperity Gospel is not afraid of actually believing the reality of Jesus's words of giving spiritual power and authority to his disciples. This speaks powerfully to those who have various dark power-encounters, experience demonic powers, live in fear of curses and witchcraft and the like. That every believer can enforce Jesus's victory in their own circumstances and encounters with the devil is rightly emphasized.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for spreading the good news of Jesus's victory over Satan and the demonic powers.

10. Relatable Faith

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel is quick to pick up streams in the surrounding culture and use those as resources for spreading the faith. In other words, the Faith & Prosperity Gospel contextualizes the faith.

I can almost hear someone reading that and go "does what?". *Contextualize* is a term used by scholars and it is hard to find a better word, so I use it here to speak of how the Faith & Prosperity Gospel draws on the current circumstances in which people are living and presents faith in ways that speak to regular people living in today's world.

When you enter a Faith & Prosperity Gospel church or listen to their message online, you will find a language, dress codes, jokes, illustrations, architecture and decorations, music style, use of technology, sermon topics and so on that are relatable and relevant for people. Ministries are developed to speak to various needs of the church and in the wider community.

The gap between everyday life and faith is made much less in the Faith & Prosperity Gospel's way of doing church than in many other Christian traditions. That is why people all over the world testify to how the Faith & Prosperity Gospel is the first time they felt that Christianity "made sense" to them.

The Faith & Prosperity Gospel should be thanked for seeking new ways to make faith relatable to people.

Adding Value to Christianity

Considering these ten gifts the Faith & Prosperity Gospel contributes to global Christianity, we can summarize it by saying: The Faith & Prosperity Gospel adds value to Christianity by their expectant and practical faith, commitment to the Word of God, radical generosity, material salvation, emphasis on God's goodness, the development of talents, commitment to missions, and making faith relatable.

I am thankful to have had this kind of positive influence from the Faith & Prosperity Gospel early in my Christian walk. But having said that, these positive contributions come wrapped up with some very disturbing problems. None of these ten positives raised here are totally pure and healthy to simply swallow.

It is like a very sweet mango I ate once in Africa. When I was finishing the last remains on the pit, with the juice flowing down my cheeks, I found a crawling bug in my

mouth. It must have nested in the pit and been there since the fruit was in flower. I'm not sure if it was me or the bug that got the greatest shock. You can imagine that the bug looked very surprised when I spat it out into the light (I leave my own reactions for another time!).

My point is that within the sweet teachings of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel there are some elements that are foreign and need to be spit out; there is a bug hidden inside the sweetness of the Faith & Prosperity Gospel.

Regardless of how ugly and disgusting this reality is, we must be sure not to overreact and never eat mango again. There is some sweet mango to have. The situation is complex and what is needed is therefore a careful, Spirit-led and Bible shaped discernment. I am not claiming that what I do in my teachings fulfills that need but I trust it moves us at least a step forward in the right direction.

