

God's Requirements for Recession-Proof Living

How to not only survive but even prosper amid today's economic challenges{jcomments on}



Before a pilot takes off on a flight, he goes through a checklist of things that must be cleared to ensure his plane is in good working order. If he forgets to check his list, he may miss something, and that could cost him his life. This awareness causes him to be extremely careful not to make any mistakes. As Christians, we should be as diligent in our everyday lives at searching the Scriptures to see if we are missing something God's Word instructs us to do.

We are under grace, so I am not talking about earning anything from God or obeying by our own power. It is His grace that enables us to obey His Word, as Hebrews 12:28 states: "Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

From searching the Scriptures, we know that the Bible says part of God's covenant with us is prospering us (Deut. 8:18; 28:2). Yet do we even know what biblical prosperity is? Is it synonymous with being financially rich? No, I don't believe that.

The Bible's definition of *prosperity* is "sufficiency in all things." Biblical prosperity is God's grace abounding toward us so that we have sufficiency in everything. Here's the way 2 Corinthians 9:8 defines it:

"And God is able to make *all* grace abound toward you, that you, *always* having *all* sufficiency in *all* things, may have an abundance for every good work" (emphasis added).

Although God says being prosperous isn't the same as being

rich, He is not opposed to His people having material prosperity. But He is opposed to *covetousness* (lusting, excessively desiring, being greedy). We know this from 1 Timothy 6:10-12:

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called.”

Money is not evil, but the love of it is. Part of our “good fight of faith” is to follow after righteousness and not lust for money. If we keep our focus on eternal things and serve God, His desire is that we prosper.

Examination Time

Yet what if we aren't prospering? It might mean we aren't obeying God's Word and need to examine our lives to see if we are following His scriptural requirements for prosperity.

When something goes wrong in our life, my wife and I first examine ourselves in light of the Word of God. Usually it is because I missed it somewhere. This is not a condemning remark, but instead a welcomed heed to correction. We want to be sure that what we are doing lines up with Scripture.

The Bible says we should judge ourselves and not others (Matt. 7:1; 1 Cor. 11:31). If we can be honest, it takes humility for us to receive instruction and admit we may have missed it.

God wants us to accept correction. It leads to His life being perfected in us, and He promises blessing for us if we receive instruction—as well as difficulties if we don't:

“For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Prov. 6:23); “He who

keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray” (Prov. 10:17); “Poverty ... will come to him who disdains correction, but he who regards a rebuke will be honored” (Prov. 13:18); “Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to words of knowledge” (Prov. 23:12).

Before we can prosper in the way that God intends for us to, we must follow certain requirements that He has spelled out in His Word and expects us to obey. The point is this: If we live godly lives, we will have success—during any economic period.

The Keys to Prosperity

So what requirements has God established that lead to a pathway of prosperity? The Bible reveals several overarching keys.

1) Seek Him. Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). All *what* things? All the things He mentioned in the verses preceding verse 33—such as treasures upon earth or what you will eat or drink or wear. We are not to seek those things first. We are to seek the kingdom first.

What does it mean to seek the kingdom? It is seeking to do His will. His will is what He did on the earth, such as healing all (Acts 10:38), casting out devils (Mark 16:15-18) and preaching repentance (Matt. 4:17).

Jesus went about teaching and preaching the gospel (Matt. 4:23) and told us to preach the good news of salvation: setting people free from bondages, laying hands on the sick and feeding the poor (Is. 61:1-2; Matt. 25:35-36; Mark 16:15). How could we feed the poor and support the gospel if we are broke ourselves?

Colossians 3:2 states: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (KJV). So, let us understand that He will not prosper us unless we are committed to seeking Him

first.

2) Help the poor. Proverbs 19:17 says: "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given" (NKJV). Throughout the Bible we are instructed to help the poor. Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) to illustrate giving of ourselves for the welfare of others.

Tommy Barnett, co-founder of the Dream Center urban outreach ministry in Los Angeles, explains it this way: "The secret to a successful, happy life is giving yourself away. According to the Bible, you will succeed in direct proportion to how much you give yourself away. ?

"Giving is truly the key to blessing ?.??.? because we have learned to focus more and more on servanthood, downward mobility, on giving everything away."

He goes on to say: "We are conditioned to think in terms of limits, and therefore the world operates on the principle of lack.??

"God approaches life from the opposite angle. He operates on the principle of plenty. In God's kingdom, the successful man or woman is the one who gives the most away. The world says, 'He who dies with the most toys wins.' The kingdom says, 'He who gives the most away wins.'"

Jesus also said in Matthew 6:19-21 not to "lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. ... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." This is the only 100-percent-safe investment. For us to be about the Father's business is laying up treasures in heaven.

3) Examine ourselves. As I mentioned earlier in the article, when my wife and I are faced with challenges, we take time out to pray, read God's Word and examine ourselves to see where we

may have missed the mark.

This is a biblical exercise. We see it in, among other verses, Ecclesiastes 7:14: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity *consider*: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other" (emphasis added); 2 Corinthians 13:5: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves"; and Haggai 1:7: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Consider your ways!'"

In examining ourselves, we are not to feel that we cannot come to Him if we have not kept every Scripture verse. No, because it is by grace that we receive the things we desire from Him. We do not try in our flesh to live holy. We live holy because we desire to, and it's by His grace we can do it.

In addition, God loves us regardless of how we perform. We don't score points with God, and if we are good enough He will love us more.

No, He loves us already the way we are. However, His desire is for us to grow and mature in Him. Anytime God corrects us, it is because He loves us. Hebrews 12:6 states, "Whom the Lord loves He chastens."

4) Obey His Word. I want to make it clear again that I am not talking about legalism when it comes to obeying God's Word. We are not trying to earn God's grace or to be burdened under "performance." We can't earn anything, as it has already been given to us freely.

We are justified by Christ's blood and by faith in what He did for us on the cross only. (See Rom. 3:24-25; 4:25; 5:9, 16, 18; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Titus 3:7; 1 John 1:7-9.)

As I've mentioned, God's grace empowers us to obey His Word. We cannot obey by our own power or ability but only by His Spirit.

The difference is, when you are truly in love with God, you are eager to please Him. It is not a burden to keep His Word but a delight. We keep His Word because of a heartfelt desire and not our performance (Ps. 119:16, 24, 47, 72).

When we understand His grace, there is a joy that comes to us, because we see it is not based on our power to keep His Word or resist sin, but by His power. However, searching the Scriptures to be sure we are obeying His Word doesn't nullify grace; being obedient to His Word is a result of grace.

We are to continually strive to better ourselves by receiving correction from His Word. Our desire should be to grow from glory to glory. Our goal is to become more like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). If we say we love Him and do not obey Him, we are liars. We don't really love Him (1 John 2:3-4), and we don't know Him (John 14:15).

It is our attitude that makes the difference. An obedient heart seeks to do what pleases Him.

God's Word is a mirror, and if we look into the face of His Word, we can see where we are. It should give us the desire to want to improve ourselves and please Him.

David said he loved God's commandments above gold (Ps. 119:127). Solomon said God's wisdom was better than rubies (Prov. 8:11). Both comparisons are to "treasures" of significant material value "hidden" in the ground.

If I told you I had \$10 million hidden for you and gave you the treasure map, you wouldn't feel *burdened* to go look for it, would you? No, you would be *excited* to look for it. In the same way, we are to value God's Word and apply it to our lives (Prov. 3:1-2). We are to seek after wisdom, knowledge and understanding as hidden treasure (Prov. 2:1-6).

Another important truth we need to apply to our lives is that God's Word is also *holistic*—it all ties together. There are

built-in safeguards in His Word that cause it to work in its fullness only as a whole.

For instance, if you don't tithe, you won't prosper God's way (Mal. 3:8-9; Matt. 23:23). However, if you do tithe and do not build God's house (focus on saving souls), the money you are blessed with will have holes in the bag and run out the door (Hag. 1:5-9).

If you do not have faith, you will not receive anything from God (James 1:6-7). However, if you have great faith to move mountains and have not love, it will not do you any good (1 Cor. 13:2-3).

Yet, if we do all of these, but do not honor our parents, it will not go well with us (Eph. 6:2-3).

If we do not put on all the armor of God, we won't be able to withstand in the evil day (Eph. 6:13). If we do not submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, he won't flee from us (James 4:7). If we don't forgive anything, Satan will get an advantage over us (2 Cor. 2:10-11).

If we labor for souls but lose our zeal for the Lord, we have left our first love, and Jesus says He will remove our candlestick (Rev. 2:2-4).

Do you see how God's Word all fits together? It is our responsibility to learn all of God's precepts and do them. As we do, God will prosper us, as Joshua 1:8 reveals: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate ... [and] observe to do according to all that is written in it. For *then* you will make your way *prosperous*" (emphasis added).

Promises of True Prosperity

God directly links His promises with our prosperity. With that in mind, here is a summary of what we are to do to prosper. If we do these things, we will never fail or have shortage.

Seek after wisdom. Proverbs 3:13-16 states: "Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. ... Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor." This is a promise that is not dependent on our economic system.

Tithe. Malachi 3:10-11 is the only passage in the Bible where God tells us to test Him. If you trust Him with our tithes, it says, He will "pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." That is a promise from God.

Honor your parents. The apostle Paul notes in Ephesians 6:2-3 that this commandment is the first one with a promise. He says to obey it so "that it may be well with you."

Fast. God says in Isaiah 58:11 that if you fast and share with the hungry He will "satisfy your soul in drought." How's that for a promise? Satisfied in drought means *during a recession*. Psalm 37:19 similarly says, "In the days of famine they [the righteous] shall be satisfied."

Be humble. Proverbs 22:4, which says, "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life," is one of the most important keys in the Bible. Whoever will walk in humility and the fear of the Lord will always succeed.

Show God your faith. From Hebrews 11:6 we learn faith pleases God and that "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him." First John 3:22 says, "And whatsoever we ask we receive from Him" (KJV) because we keep His commandments and do the things that please Him. "Whatsoever" covers a lot!

Understand grace. We understand that it is by His grace and not by our works that we can obtain the blessings He has for us (Eph. 2:8-9; 4:7; Col. 1:6; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 2:1). Second Corinthians 9:8 says, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every

good work” (NKJV).

Understand the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 19:23 says that the one who fears the Lord will “abide in *satisfaction*” (emphasis added).

Pray for Jerusalem. Support Israel in prayer, finances and love. When you do that, you will prosper. Psalm 122:6 says, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” (KJV).

Express God’s love. Love “never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8). That is amazing. If we operate in God’s love, we can never fail. That is a solid guarantee for success.

The promises of God’s Word are for all who will believe Him and obey Him. He has fulfilled His promises for me for more than 40 years and has never let me down—not even once.

You can be delivered out of any and all problems, no matter how serious. His Word works—all the time, in any market and in any condition. Be willing and obey His Word. Deuteronomy 29:9 (NKJV) promises that blessing will come from obedience: “Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.”

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