

Who's Getting Rich With the Get-Rich-Quick Gospel?

Get-rich-quick schemes, er, programs are a dime a dozen—but they'll leave you with empty pockets and plenty of useless products if you buy into them. And the get-rich-quick gospel may cost you a little more.

You may remember the question-mark-suit-wearing Matthew Lesko, the infomercial icon that peddled many books, including *Free Money to Pay Your Bills*. The New York State Consumer Protection Board exposed him for misleading advertisements, but not before he sold countless books at \$40 a pop that he admittedly plagiarized. Get-rich-quick gospel gainsayers are a little more difficult to expose but not hard to discern.

Then there was the “Greatest Vitamin in the World” heist from Don Lapre. All you had to do was shell out \$35 for a chance to make millions selling the vitamins, which promise to help with everything from diabetes to cancer. There's no telling how much Lapre raked in before the FDA warned the public about Lapre's false advertising. Likewise, there's no telling how much the get-rich-quick gospel preachers will stuff in their pockets before truth catches up with them.

Finding Your Miracle Money

It seems even Spirit-filled, blood-bought believers are buying into the most outlandish scams in order to make miracle money. Some of these are worldly scams; others are churchly scams. Both are leaving believers with big promises and dented bank accounts, and both show desperation or lack of discernment—or both—among many in the body of Christ.

I was talking with a pastor last weekend about a member of his church whose bank account was completely wiped out because he fell for the “Spanish prisoner” scam. You may know it as the

“Nigerian 419” scam: You get an email from Nigeria (or India or Russia or South Africa) asking your help accessing unclaimed money in exchange for a cut of a multimillion-dollar inheritance. Scammers ask you to send wire transfers to pay costs associated with processing the claim.

This poor gullible saint—who was actually an assistant pastor in a local church—praised the Lord when he received the email offer. He had been praying for a financial breakthrough and saw the opportunity as a miracle answer from God!

My pastor friend—and others—warned him that it was what the old-timers called a “confidence trick,” but he was either too desperate or too naive to heed the wisdom. He sowed thousands of dollars because he was utterly convinced he would soon be a multimillionaire. His lack of discernment—and his refusal to take wise counsel—devastated his finances.

The Get-Rich-Quick Gospel

The get-rich-quick gospel often works in the same way. You get email from a ministry asking for your help to keep a television broadcast on the air—or maybe even an orphanage open in Nigeria. There is nothing wrong with ministries sending out pleas for donations. The problem is what some of these ministries are promising in return. The get-rich-quick gospel scams make shallow, hollow promises that are not likely to come true for anyone—except for the few who are propagating the message.

Let’s look at a couple of these gimmicks.

Maybe you’ve watched Christian television programs—or even seen in person—saints coming and laying money at the feet of the preacher, leaving it on the stage or even stuffing it in his pocket when he walks by. The idea here is to give to the anointing to get a quick return. They are sowing into the message they hear in order to reap a harvest. Scripturally, they stand on Acts 4:34 but blur the context, which was to

distribute goods for the needs of people in the early church—not to heap up a quick financial return on a seed because of a “special anointing” on a message.

Or maybe you’ve seen variations of the Luke 6:38 swindle. The preacher says he had a vision or received a prophetic word that all those who commit to sow \$638 over the next six months will get a massive financial breakthrough. Other gospel hucksters have offered a \$1,000 return on a \$58 seed—but only if you’ll quickly go to the phone right now! And you’d better hurry because it’s only available for 300 people who really need a miracle. Others just look for vows to give in exchange for an anointed prayer, then harrass you with letters to no end. Still others offer special anointed prayer shawls, anointing oil, special soaps or other merchandise that promise miracles in exchange for big bucks.

Common Sense and Discernment

Usually it doesn’t take much discernment to recognize one of these schemes, but they aren’t always so blatant. Sometimes it’s much more subtle. That’s why you need to stop and pray about your giving. If you sow a seed into a false prophet’s pot, you aren’t likely to get the reward you are looking for. Much like the local pastor who fell for the Nigerian scam, the miracle will never come.

Worldly get-rich-quick schemes and churchly get-rich-quick schemes have plenty in common. Typically, both imply a fast return on your investment thanks to a special revelation or a special anointing. Typically, both use pressure tactics to get you to let go of your cash quickly before you have time to really consider what you are doing. Sometimes they use testimonies from others who previously bought into the message and found fast success.

Don’t fall for these tactics in the world or in the church. Again, the only one getting rich off get-rich-quick schemes

are the ones crafting the scams—or helping promote the scams. Yes, they'll have to answer to God one day for fleecing the sheep. But that doesn't mean you don't have a responsibility to be a discerning, wise steward. So believe God wants to prosper you, but don't buy into the get-rich-quick gospel. It doesn't work any better than Lesko's *Free Money to Pay Your Bills* scam.

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