

Why the Prosperity Gospel Is Such a Big Hit With Reality TV Show Producers

About two years ago, a casting producer working with a major television studio contacted me about starring in a new reality TV series about women of faith.

The producers wanted to follow me around at work, at church and at home. I prayed about it and decided it wasn't what the Holy Spirit had in mind for my life. I don't think the show was ever produced, but over the last two years, many "Christian" reality TV shows have hit the airwaves. Some, like Kirk Cameron's *The Way of the Master*, are inspiring. Others, like *Duck Dynasty*, are so popular that the faces of the Robertsons stare at me from lunchboxes every time I shop at Wal-Mart.

What's more, a slew of new "Christian" reality TV shows are in the works. Some essentially mock Christians while others just let Christians mock themselves. *Preachers of L.A.* is one of the latter and has sparked so much controversy—and probably high ratings and advertising revenue—that a copycat is already emerging, called *Thicker Than Water*. The new show seemingly hopes to blend *Preachers of L.A.* and *Duck Dynasty* with a jazzy twist.

Bravo describes the show this way: "This southern family integrates their strong religious conviction with their penchant for the finer things in life. With the belief that 'God wants us all to be millionaires,' the Tankards aim to be the best and brightest in everything they do."

The trailer for the new show shows the Tankard family playing croquet in a lush green yard at their Nashville, Tenn., mansion. One of the daughters celebrates hitting the ball

through the wires when you suddenly hear best-selling jazz musician Ben Tankard's voiceover explain, "The Tankard clan is a blended family. We are the black *Brady Bunch*."

The trailer goes on to display the interior of the Tankards' luxury home, complete with its indoor fountain, expensive chandeliers and grand piano.

"We live life on the good side. We live in a three-level mansion ... seven vehicles to drive," Tankard says. "Plus, I love my airplanes. My financial success comes from my musical talent. I've been poor; now I'm rich. Believe me, rich is better."

Tankard's wife, Jewel, then appears on the video, explaining how the first time she realized God wanted her to be rich was when she was a senior in college. She saw a man preaching the Word.

"Honey, there wasn't nothing broke about him!" she says. "I said, 'Oh, Lord, this is the Jesus that I love.'"

The trailer goes on to introduce other members of the Tankard clan, like Brooklyn, who admits things haven't always been easy for her. "I've been in trouble with the law and my family, but I'm a survivor, baby," she says.

Son Benji can see himself being a multimillionaire within five years. He plans on owning two hotels, a couple of McDonalds', and having two or three kids. "I don't want to be like my dad," he says. "I want to be better than my dad. I want to be the man!"

The youngest is Cyrene, who claims, "I know just what to say and just what to do to get what I want."

Another daughter, Britney, says she's the piece of the puzzle that doesn't fit—working her 9 to 5.

The trailer concludes with Jewel proclaiming, "The Tankards,

we will do everything big—his and hers Mercedes, airplanes, houses—but we are doing what God called us to do. Sometimes that bothers people, but somebody’s got to have it, so why not us?”

The trailer fades out with the sound of laughter.

I’m not against prosperity—nice cars and houses. I believe God wants us to prosper. But I don’t believe He wants us to make a spectacle of ourselves in the process or advertise God as a big sugar daddy in the sky just waiting for someone bold enough to approach His throne of grace to ask for the big cars, diamond rings and grand pianos. Likewise, I don’t believe God wants us to gloat about our prosperity or propagate a prosperity-centered gospel on cable television that gives people wrong ideas about Christianity.

They call it reality TV, but it’s not reality. It’s a gross exaggeration—and even an abuse—of the gospel message concerning prosperity.

I have been in the media business long enough to know how producers—even Christian producers—craft a story around your life that the market finds appealing to sell products. I understand the pressure to go along with the story line. I’ve seen people coached and editors cut video clips out of context to make people’s words sound as extreme as possible so people will tune in or shell out money.

I’m sure the Tankards sincerely love God and are clearly blessed, but secular producers are having a field day with their prosperity story. That’s the problem with some of these so-called “Christian” reality TV shows. Secular producers have found a cash cow in the prosperity gospel and are exploiting it for all its worth. Don’t be surprised to see more *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* with Christians agreeing to be primed and pimped out on shows like *Preachers of L.A.* and *Thicker Than Water* on your cable network in the

months ahead.

Let's just pray these shows don't contribute to the love of many growing cold and the Great Falling Away as people pursue the God for prosperity instead of salvation and the character of Christ in these last days.

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