

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 9, "Prosperity Gospel" Part 2

Podcast, Audio Overview

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Welcome back for another deep dive. Today, we're looking into something I think a lot of you are interested in. That's the prosperity gospel.

We're going to look at it through the lens of the book of Proverbs. Yeah, it's really a unique take. You've got these notes here from Dr. Knut Heim, his lecture notes.

And it's fascinating because he doesn't approach this from, like, a super religious perspective. He's really trying to find the wisdom that's hidden within these ancient Proverbs and what they say about wealth and generosity and, like, what does it really mean to be prosperous? Yeah, that's right. And it's not just kind of like the warm and fuzzy stuff.

Dr. Heim actually goes into the nitty-gritty of how Proverbs addresses the idea of getting wealth. Exactly. Like, some of it's actually really practical advice, even for us today.

I know. It's almost like, it's like a guide to being financially smart, but there's this added layer of ethics and morality to it. What I find super fascinating is how Dr. Heim talks about these proverbial clusters.

So reading groups of Proverbs together, because that gives you a much deeper understanding than just taking one verse out of context. Oh, that's interesting. So you're not just taking one verse in isolation.

You're like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. That's exactly right. Like if you take, for example, Proverbs 11.16-20, it creates almost like a mini narrative where it suggests that if you're a generous person, you're actually going to end up being rewarded in some way.

Those who are constantly grasping for more end up actually impoverished. Not just financially, but in a larger sense of the word. That makes me think about all the debates we have today about fair trade practices and living wages.

Could we look at those issues through the lens of these verses? That's a great point. It's like Proverbs is telling us, hey, you've got to think beyond just what you're getting out of it as an individual. Right.

Think about the well-being of the whole community. Right. Yeah.

Another cluster that Dr. Heim talks about is Proverbs 11.23-26, and there's this one proverb that I thought was really interesting. It says, some give freely, you grow all the richer. Others withhold what is due and only suffer want.

That could be about charitable giving, right? Oh, for sure. For sure. But Dr. Heim also points out that it could be about just ensuring fairness in all of our dealings.

Not just when it comes to charity, but if you're a business, paying your employees fairly. If you're a consumer, supporting businesses that are ethical, making sure that everybody's contributing their fair share. Proverbs is suggesting that real prosperity, true prosperity, is actually tied to a sense of collective fairness and responsibility, that we all have to play our part.

That's a really insightful way to put it, and I think it challenges us to look at our own roles in creating a more just and prosperous society, right? Okay. So Proverbs isn't saying, you know, get rich by any means necessary. It seems like it has some pretty strong opinions about those get-rich-quick schemes that we see so much of today.

Oh yeah. Absolutely. Like over and over, Proverbs warns against those schemes.

Right. Like, for instance, Proverbs 19.2 says, "Desire without knowledge is not good, and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way. It's like that saying, haste makes waste.

Exactly. Proverbs 20.21 says something similar: an estate quickly acquired in the beginning will not be blessed in the end. Right.

So it's really cautioning us against, you know, chasing after easy money without considering the consequences. The consequences can be pretty serious. Oh, absolutely.

Proverbs 28.20 says, "A faithful person will abound with blessings, but one who is in a hurry to get rich will not go unpunished. So it's not just about losing money. Right.

You could damage your reputation, your relationships, even your own integrity. Right. There's this image in Proverbs 23.5 that I always found really striking.

When your eyes light upon it, it is gone. For suddenly, it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven. Talk about wealth disappearing quickly.

It's such a vivid image, right? Yeah. And I think it can be interpreted in a couple of ways. On the one hand, it's literally talking about how wealth that's gained through, you know, maybe shady or quick means can disappear just as fast as it came.

So it's like a warning against putting too much emphasis on material possessions. Right. Exactly.

But I think it also speaks to something deeper. It's about the nature of satisfaction. Right.

Even if you manage to get rich quick, there's no guarantee you're going to find lasting happiness. Right. The things that you really, truly desire, things like love, purpose, meaning those things might still elude you.

Right. It's about something more than just money. But what about ill-gotten gain? Does Proverbs talk about that? Oh, yeah.

Proverbs 10.2-3 is really clear about this. Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

So it's saying that there's like a moral dimension to wealth, like how we get it matters just as much as how much of it we have. Exactly. It challenges that idea that, you know, if you're wealthy, you must be blessed by God.

Right. It's not that simple. As Proverbs 10.15 says, the wealth of the rich is their fortress.

But Dr. Haim connects that to the following verse, which suggests that it's actually your righteousness that builds that fortress. So it's not the wealth itself that gives you security. It's like the principles upon which you've built that way.

Exactly. And then if you go on to Proverbs 11.10-11, it contrasts this fortress of wealth with what it calls the strong tower of the Lord's name. So it's like Proverbs is saying real security comes from something much bigger than ourselves, like aligning our lives to something that transcends just material possessions.

That's a really powerful way to put it. And this idea is reinforced in Proverbs 11.28, which says those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves. So it's not just about having wealth.

It's about being a certain kind of person. You got it. And that brings us to one of the things that Proverbs is most outspoken about.

Okay. It's its perspective on laziness. Yes.

Proverbs does not hold back when it comes to criticizing laziness. Yeah. It's almost funny how vivid those descriptions are.

I know. Like, the imagery is so striking. You've got Proverbs 6.6-11, go to the ant, you lazy bones, consider its ways and be wise.

The contrast there between how industrious the ant is, how prepared it is, versus the person who's just kind of, you know, sluttish and lazy. That's so clever. And I bet that really resonated with people back then.

Absolutely. And you've got Proverbs 24.30-40, where it describes this neglected field. You know, it's overgrown with thorns and nettles.

It's like a picture of a life where you've wasted all your potential. And Proverbs doesn't shy away from humor either. There's that line in there.

The lazy person buries a hand in the dish and will not even get back to the mouth. Oh yeah. 19.24. That's a good one.

It's almost like a cartoonish image of what laziness is like, you know? Right. But the message is clear. Laziness robs you of even the simplest pleasures.

Yeah. And then there's the classic excuse. The lazy person says, "There is a lion outside.

I shall be killed in the streets. Ah, Proverbs 22.13. Yeah. Who hasn't used that excuse at some point? Right.

We've all been there. But you know, Proverbs uses that humor to show how ridiculous it is when we make excuses for not taking action. That's good.

I also love the image in 26.13.16. The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road. There is a lion in the squares. As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed.

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish. He's too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer discreetly.

It's almost like a caricature of what a lazy person is like, you know? Even down to that detail about how the sluggard thinks he's actually wiser than people who are actually productive. So it's like laziness can actually lead to delusional thinking. That's an interesting thought.

And it makes you wonder if laziness is really a symptom of something deeper, like maybe fear of failure or lack of self-belief. Right. So it's not just about being physically lazy.

It's like a mindset that can really hold you back. Absolutely. And then Proverbs goes on to contrast that with the benefits of being diligent.

It really highlights that connection between hard work and positive outcomes. Like it's saying, hey, if you want to achieve something meaningful in your life, you've got to put in the effort. Right.

And it's not just about working hard for the sake of it either. Proverbs 12.11 says, "Those who till their land will have plenty of food, but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense. So it's about directing your energy towards things that are truly meaningful, things that are going to produce good results.

Exactly. And then Proverbs 13.2 adds, "From the fruit of their words, good persons eat good things, but the desire of the treacherous is for wrongdoing. Right.

So there's this consistent message throughout the book. Diligence, when it's combined with righteousness, leads to good outcomes. So it's not just about working hard.

It's about working hard for the right things, for the right reasons. That's a good way to put it. Proverbs 12.13-14 gets really specific about this.

It says, the evil are ensnared by the transgression of their lips, but the righteous escape from trouble. From the fruit of the mouth, one is filled with good things, and manual labor has its rewards. So it's not just about the work you do with your hands, but it's about your words, your actions.

Right. Aligning those with principles of truth and integrity. So true success is like a holistic thing.

Exactly. And then there's this really ironic proverb in 12.24, the hand of the diligent will rule, while the lazy will be put to forced labor. I love that one.

It's like the people who are trying to avoid work end up having to work even harder in the end. Right. Like you might as well choose to work hard on your own terms because one way or another you're going to end up working.

Right. Now, Dr. Heim makes this really interesting statement in his lecture. He says, if you want to gain true prosperity from God, do not use generous giving to Christian ministries as a substitute for diligent, consistent, honest work.

Right. It's like he's saying, don't try to manipulate God or get out of personal responsibility by just giving money. Yeah.

True generosity comes from working hard and doing your part. I think that's a really important point, especially today when you hear so much about, you know, manifesting wealth or using spiritual practices as shortcuts to success. Right.

So it's not just about thinking positive thoughts or making donations. Yeah. You've got to roll up your sleeves and actually do the work.

That's a great way to put it. And this leads us to another theme that Dr. Heim explores: the care for the poor and vulnerable. This theme actually shows up a lot in Proverbs, and it's often presented in a theological context.

That's interesting. It sounds like Proverbs is pushing back against the idea that if you're wealthy, it's a sign that God favors you. You got it.

Like Proverbs 14.20 to 21 says, the poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends. Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor. Like even back then, people were struggling with these issues of wealth and poverty, the haves and the have-nots.

It's a timeless struggle. And Proverbs is reminding us that we need to look beyond those social hierarchies. Yeah.

Recognize that every person has inherent worth regardless of how much money they have. And Proverbs 18.23 and 22.16 also talk about how vulnerable poor people are. Proverbs 18.23 says the poor use entreaties, but the rich answer roughly.

And 22.16 warns against oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself. Are those verses really eye-opening, aren't they? They expose the power dynamics that exist between the rich and the poor. And it's interesting how this challenges modern attitudes about, say, wealth and taxation.

The idea that oppressing the poor to enrich oneself leads only to loss goes directly against the idea that if we lower taxes for wealthy people, that'll benefit everybody. Right, right. As Proverbs says, we have this collective responsibility to look after everyone in society, not just those at the top.

That's a really important point. And this call to care for the poor has deep theological roots. Like Proverbs 14.31 says, those who oppress the poor insult their maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.

So how we treat people who are less fortunate than us is a reflection of our relationship with God. Absolutely. And Proverbs 17.5 adds, those who mock the poor insult their maker.

Those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished. That's a pretty strong statement, you know, condemning indifference, calling us to have compassion. Right.

It's a reminder that we're all connected, that our actions have consequences for other people. And if we just ignore the needs of others, it ultimately comes back to harm us as well. Exactly.

And then Proverbs 19.17 points out that there's this reciprocal nature to generosity. Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and will be repaid in full. Now, this doesn't mean you're going to get some kind of material reward.

It means your actions have spiritual consequences. Right, right. And then there's that powerful image in Proverbs 21.13. If you close your ear to the cry of the poor, you will cry out and not be heard.

It's like if you ignore the needs of other people, don't be surprised if your own cries for help go unanswered. That's a really powerful image. And then Proverbs 22.1 through brings us back to this core truth.

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. Right. The rich and the poor have this in common.

The Lord is the maker of them all. It's a reminder that ultimately it's not about how much wealth you have. It's about living a life of integrity and compassion.

And that sharing what we have with those in need is a way of honoring the one who created us. You got it. And Proverbs 22.9 echoes this.

Those who are generous are blessed for they share their bread with the poor. It's like a blueprint for living truly. Yeah, I think that's a great way to put it.

And speaking of finding that balance, there's one more aspect of Proverbs that we should talk about. Okay, let's hear it. What else does Proverbs have to say? Well, it's not just about individual generosity.

You know, Proverbs also has a lot to say about the responsibility of those who are in positions of power. Those who have influence, whether it's in government, business, any sphere, really. Right.

They're called to use their power justly and to advocate for those who are vulnerable. Now, that's something I think we need to hear more of these days, especially with so much economic disparity in the world. It's like a reminder that those who have more are accountable for how they use their resources and their influence.

Exactly. And Proverbs 29.1 to 14 really drives this point home. It says, if a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked.

The poor and the oppressor have this in common. The Lord gives light to the eyes of both. If a king judges the poor with equity, his throne will be established forever.

So it's not just about being morally upright. It's about being smart, too. If a leader wants to stay in power, they have to be just and compassionate.

That's right. And Proverbs doesn't shy away from using strong imagery to describe those who abuse their power. For example, Proverbs 30.13-15 compares those who devour the poor to a leech, saying, "There are those whose eyes are lofty, whose eyelids are lifted high."

There are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are knives to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mortals. The leech has two daughters. Give, give, they cry.

Wow. That's pretty disturbing. But yeah, I get the point.

Exploiting vulnerable people for personal gain ultimately destroys things both for individuals and for society as a whole. Yeah. And then Proverbs 31.4-9 offers a powerful alternative to that kind of leadership.

Okay. It's a call to those in positions of authority to speak out for those who don't have a voice, to defend the rights of those who are marginalized. So it's about using your power to lift up and protect the most vulnerable people.

Exactly. It says it is not for kings, O Lemuel. It is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to desire strong drink, or else they will drink and forget what has been decreed and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Speak out for those who cannot speak for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy. It's like a direct challenge to those in leadership, you know, step up, be a true leader, advocate for justice.

And remember that leadership is ultimately about service, not self-interest. But this idea of responsibility, it goes beyond just people in those high positions, doesn't it? Oh, absolutely. Dr. Heim points out that Proverbs also warns against those risky business ventures, especially ones that involve really high interest rates and taking advantage of people who are desperate.

You mean like those payday loan places that seem to be popping up everywhere? They prey on people who are already struggling. Exactly. Proverbs 22.7 talks about that.

The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender. It reminds me of how easy it is to get trapped in debt and how that can keep people stuck in poverty. It makes you think about how important it is to have access to financial services that are fair and ethical, right? Absolutely.

And Proverbs 28.8 says that those who gain wealth through charging really high interest are basically just gathering it for someone else, someone who's kind to the poor. I find that really interesting. It's like the wealth that you get through shady means isn't going to benefit you in the end.

Right. It's almost like there's this cosmic redistribution of wealth, where it ends up in the hands of those who deserve it more. That's a great way to put it.

So it's not just about how much wealth you have, but how you got it and what you do with it. Exactly. And I think that brings us to this really fascinating passage that Dr. Haim talks about.

The prayer of Augur in Proverbs 30.7, the line. Okay. Tell me more about this prayer.

So Augur says, Two things I ask of you, O Lord, deny them not to me before I die: remove far from me falsehood and lying. Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, who is the Lord? Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God.

Wow. That's different than what you might expect from a book that talks so much about wealth and prosperity. You're right.

Augur isn't asking for riches or success. He's actually asking for something much deeper: contentment. He sees that both extremes, poverty and excessive wealth can be dangerous.

So he's saying, God, keep me somewhere in the middle where I'm not going to be tempted to either deny you or dishonor you. You got it. And what's really interesting is that he's acknowledging his own weakness.

He's not saying I'm so strong in my faith that I can handle any amount of wealth. He's recognizing that both poverty and wealth have the potential to corrupt him. It's a level of self-awareness that a lot of us could learn from, I think.

I think so, too. And I think this prayer speaks to a tension that a lot of us feel today. We want to be successful.

We want to achieve our goals. But we also don't want to lose ourselves in the process. Right.

It's like that age-old question. Could you be ambitious and content at the same time? That's a good way to put it. And I think Augur's prayer offers a different perspective on that dilemma.

It's not about rejecting ambition or success. It's about approaching them with humility, you know, and being aware of our own limitations. So finding that sweet spot where we can pursue our goals without compromising our values, without losing sight of what really matters.

Exactly. And I think that's a message that really fits with the overall message of Proverbs. It's not about how much you accumulate.

It's about living a life of integrity, generosity, and purpose. So how do we take all of this and apply it to our lives today? You know, in the 21st century, with all the challenges we face? That's a great question. And I think it's something we should delve into a bit deeper.

But for now, I'd encourage you to think about how these Proverbs challenge your own assumptions about wealth and poverty and what it means to truly live a prosperous life. It makes you think about, you know, what are we really pursuing in life? Is it just about the stuff or is it about something more? And that's where I think Dr. Heim brings up a really interesting point about the dangers of certain kinds of business ventures. He specifically talks about, you know, Proverbs warning against things like, you know, exorbitant interest rates and preying on people who are desperate, you know.

Like those payday loan places. Exactly. Like those kinds of things.

You know, Proverbs 22.7 says, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender. Yeah. It's a pretty stark reminder of how easily debt can trap people, you know, and keep them stuck in that cycle of poverty.

And it really highlights those power imbalances, you know, between those who have and those who don't. Right. It makes me think about how crucial it is to have access to, you know, ethical financial services, things that aren't going to exploit people.

I agree. And Proverbs 28.8 even suggests that, you know, those who gain wealth through these really high interest rates, they're ultimately gathering it for someone else, someone who's actually kind to the poor. Oh, that's interesting.

So it's like Proverbs is saying that ill-gotten gains don't really benefit the person who acquires them. You know, in the end, it's like, it's almost like there's this kind of redistribution of wealth where it ends up going to, you know, those who are more deserving. Almost like a cosmic justice.

Right. Okay. So it seems like Proverbs is saying that it's not just about how much wealth we have, but it's also about how we get it and how we use it, you know.

Precisely. And I think that's a great transition into the final passage that Dr. Haim highlights in his lecture, which is the prayer of Augur in Proverbs 30.7 or 5. Okay. The prayer of Augur.

I'm intrigued. Tell me more about that. Well, Augur says, Two things I ask of you, O Lord, deny them not to me before I die; remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread, otherwise I may have too much and disown you and say, Who is the Lord? Or I may become poor and steal and so dishonor the name of my God.

That's really interesting because it's not what you would expect from a book that talks so much about wealth and prosperity. Exactly. He's not asking for wealth or success.

He's actually asking for something much more profound, I think, which is contentment. He recognizes the danger of both extremes, both poverty and excessive wealth. So it's like he's saying, God, keep me somewhere in the middle where I'm not going to be tempted to either deny you or to dishonor you by doing something against your will.

Exactly. And what I find fascinating is that he's acknowledging his own weakness. You know, he's not saying, I'm so strong, I can resist any temptation.

You know, he's saying, you know, I recognize that both poverty and wealth have the potential to corrupt me. That's a level of self-awareness that I think a lot of us could use a little more of these days. For sure.

And, you know, I think this prayer also speaks to this tension that a lot of us feel today. You know, we want to be successful. We want to achieve our goals.

Right. But we also don't want to lose ourselves in the process. Right.

Like, can you be ambitious and content at the same time? You know, it's a tough question. Right. And I think Augur's prayer offers a really interesting perspective on this dilemma.

It's not about saying no to ambition or success. OK. It's about approaching those things with a sense of humility.

Right. And recognizing, you know, our own limitations. So it's about finding that balance where you can pursue your goals, but you're not compromising your values.

You're not losing sight of what really matters. I think that's a great way to put it. And it really aligns with the broader message of Proverbs.

Right. It's not just about what you have. It's about who you are.

Right. How you live your life, a life of integrity, generosity, and purpose. So as we wrap up this deep dive into the prosperity gospel in Proverbs, I think the question that we're left with is what kind of prosperity are we pursuing? Yeah.

You know, are we chasing after those fleeting material things? Or are we looking for something deeper, something more lasting, something rooted in? You know, those things we were just talking about. Character, generosity, our commitment to making the world a better place. Yeah, those are some big questions to think about.

And I feel like we've really only just scratched the surface of what Proverbs has to say about all this. Oh, for sure. This deep dive has just been a starting point.

You know, there's so much more to explore here. So to our listeners, we encourage you to revisit the book of Proverbs, you know, and keep digging into the wisdom that it offers on wealth and generosity and what it means to be truly prosperous. Because in the end, it's not just about gaining something.

It's about becoming someone, you know, someone who embodies the heart of God, someone who lives out those values of justice and compassion, and who uses their

resources and influence to, you know, make the world a better place, a place where everyone has the opportunity to experience true prosperity. That's a beautiful thought. Thank you so much for joining us for this deep dive into the prosperity gospel in Proverbs.

It feels like Proverbs is kind of giving us a roadmap for a whole different kind of prosperity. You know, one that's not just about our bank accounts or how much stuff we own. Yeah, I think that's a great way to put it.

It's about the quality of our character and, you know, the strength of our relationships and the impact we're having on the world around us. And what's really exciting is that this kind of prosperity is available to everyone, you know, regardless of their financial situation. Right.

It's not about what you have. It's about who you are and the choices that you make. Which brings us back to that prayer bugger.

You know, it's a good reminder that real contentment doesn't come from just chasing after material things. You know, it comes from aligning your heart with what's truly important. It's about finding that balance between, you know, striving for excellence and trusting that you'll be taken care of, you know, working hard.

Yeah. But also knowing that your ultimate security comes from something much bigger than yourself. So it's not about just settling or giving up on your dreams, you know.

It's about pursuing those dreams with a sense of perspective and being okay with letting go of the outcome a little bit. Yeah, that's a great way to frame it. It's about living a life that has meaning and purpose.

Yeah. You know, using your gifts and your resources to, you know, make a positive difference. And that's what's so inspiring about the prosperity gospel, the way it's presented in Proverbs.

It's not about trying to manipulate God or get rich quick. It's about cultivating, you know, a heart of generosity, integrity, and compassion. It's about recognizing that true prosperity isn't just something you pursue on your own.

Yeah. You know, it's something we create together as a community. It's about working towards a world where everyone has a chance to thrive, you know, where people's needs are being met and where justice and righteousness are prevailing.

That's a powerful vision. Yeah. Challenges us to rethink our definition of success.

Yeah. To measure it not by what we accumulate, but by, you know, how we're contributing to the well-being of others. Yeah.

It's about recognizing that we're all connected. You know, our actions have an impact on other people. And if we're pursuing true prosperity, you know, we need to be mindful of how our choices are affecting not just ourselves, but everyone around us.

So as we're wrapping up our deep dive into the prosperity gospel in Proverbs, you know, I think the question that we're left with is what kind of prosperity are we pursuing in our own lives? Are we chasing after, you know, that fleeting kind of wealth? Or are we seeking that deeper, more enduring prosperity, the kind that's rooted in our character and our generosity and our commitment to making the world a better place? You know? Those are some pretty big questions to ponder. And I feel like we've only just scratched the surface of what Proverbs has to say about all of this. Absolutely.

You know, this has been a great conversation, but there's so much more to explore. So to our listeners out there, we encourage you to go back and read the book of Proverbs. And keep uncovering the wisdom that it has to offer about wealth and generosity and the true meaning of prosperity.

Yeah. Because in the end, it's not just about gaining something. It's about becoming someone, you know, someone who reflects God's heart, someone who embodies those values of justice and compassion, someone who uses what they have to, you know, to create a world where everyone has the opportunity to experience true and lasting prosperity.

That's a beautiful thought. Thank you for joining us on this deep dive into the prosperity gospel in Proverbs. We'll see you next time.