



*Raquel lives in Lima, Peru, with her husband Angel and their young growing family. They are both Christian ministers, economically struggling as they proclaim the gospel among their people.*

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Dear Raquel,

In answer to your questions about prosperity and what we can expect of God, we need to look at how the Bible defines prosperity. Often our expectations are not biblical.

In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus tells us not to seek after our material needs (food, drink, clothes) like the unbelievers, but seek first Him and His Kingdom and He will give us all these other things. He challenges us not to worry about the future but to trust Him to take care of us. Paul writes in Philippians 4:11-12 that he has learned the gift of being content, whether he lacks or has abundance. He can live in any circumstances because God gives him the ability. He states in 1 Tim.6:6-8 that godliness with contentment is great gain. We brought nothing with us when we were born and we will take nothing when we die. Therefore, we should be content if we have food and clothes. Hebrews 13:5 tells us to be content with what God has given us because He promises to never abandon us or forsake us. Then in 1 Cor. 7:17 it says that each one should retain the place in life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him. Proverbs 16:8 says that it is better to have little with righteousness than great wealth and no righteousness. The writer of Proverbs 30:8 asks God to give neither poverty nor riches, but to feed him with food appropriate for him.

We are to ask for our daily bread. It is right for us to bring our concerns and our needs before our Father and expect Him to provide for us. When King David was old, he wrote in Psalm 37:25-27 that, in his entire life, he has never seen the righteous forsaken nor His people begging for bread. I believe that we can expect this for our lives as well. But God does not just give to us sparingly. He desires to give good things to us, for our pleasure and our joy. Everything we have is a gift from Him. We should be thankful for all that we have been given by Him. God is the source of wealth and He is the One who made us and sustains our lives, moment by moment. He has rewarded individuals with great wealth (Job, Solomon, and Abraham). Yet our Lord Jesus Christ Himself had very little. John the Baptist, the Apostles, and many godly Christians have lived in very humble circumstances.

Wealth and prosperity can be a blessing from God or His curse. When the nation of Israel began to grow prosperous in the Promised Land, they became indifferent and then rebellious towards God. This is the way of our human nature. It is very difficult for

humans to stay dependent on and grateful towards God when they seem to have all their material needs met. We tend to drift away from communing with Him, and rely on ourselves to manage our lives. We then can become proud and spiritually dull. If wealth promotes a climate where a soul becomes hardened to Christ and he forfeits eternal life, he is truly cursed by his material prosperity. If being poor or sick is what turns a person to God, then such conditions are ultimately better than having wealth or health. God knows what conditions are best for each individual person.

God has a good reason for where He places each person in this world, including us. Yet our circumstances are not reflective of how much He loves us. Certainly, He may cause trials to discipline us, but even that is for our good. Money is not just a reward, but is a tool to be used for spiritual purposes. Those who have been given wealth are responsible for how they use it. Those who are needy may be used by God as opportunities for those who have more to show compassion and share what they have. God identifies with the poor.

God may want to teach the poorer Christian how to trust Him to meet his needs without the direct use of money. Years ago God made it clear to me that not having money does not make one poor. Many times I have received the needed object directly without the exchange of cash. Sometimes God does not provide money because He wants us to lower our expectations so that we will be more content under a variety of circumstances. The poor are still expected by God to be generous with what they have and to give to others in need. That is the nature of all true Christians regardless of their economic condition.

The important thing is that we cultivate our faith in God's goodness and love for us no matter what our financial situation becomes. He alone knows what is best for us. He promises that if we serve Him and not money, He WILL take care of all our needs. We should pray and expect Him to manifest His provisions to sustain us. (Even ravens were used to feed Elijah the Prophet during a harsh drought.)

He calls some Christians to be sustained by "secular" jobs (though no job is "secular" before God). Everything we do is in obedience to Him and to His glory. Others are called to Christian ministries. Some of these people work part-time and also have a secular job. Paul often made tents to help support himself as he evangelized the Gentiles. The other Apostles may have been completely supported by the Church. God may also call certain people to be directly supported by Him through His special interventions. Which ever place He may call us, we are to serve Him there faithfully to His glory.

I used to complain a lot that our lifestyle is too hard. We rarely knew where our support would come from to meet our needs. It always felt like walking on water. If I took my eyes off of Jesus, I would worry about our needs, the future, and then begin to sink in fear and despair. All Christians live by faith, but some, such as us, live by "manna". God provides for our daily needs and rarely gives us any more beyond that. He provides for us as we serve Him, through donations from people and sometimes through

unexpected circumstances (even little secular jobs). Without faith in His promise to meet our needs, I would be constantly anxious. Sometimes I still struggle with my fears. What really changed my attitude was when I read in Numbers 11:4-11 how the Israelites were weeping before each of their tents because they had only manna to eat. I thought how foolish and ungrateful they were. Then the Lord showed me that I was the same way. Moses was not complaining about the provision God provided him in the desert. If God wants us to live by manna in order to glorify Him, then why should I complain? I am on this earth to serve Him and to glorify Him. How He wants to do that in my life is His business.

We must trust God in a way that is not dependent on circumstances. Otherwise we will be battling with fear. That fear can cause us to compromise the calling God has given us. We start to look to people rather than God to meet our needs. We may feel threatened or feel competition with others in ministry because they also need people to support them. Therefore, we must become convinced that God alone is our Provider and He is faithful to take care of us as we seek first His Kingdom. Whether we are rich or poor, we can be content and joyful because of the riches found in Christ.

If I were you, I would declare to the Lord that He did not make a mistake putting me in the place and circumstances that I now find myself. He has a perfect plan for me to serve Him right where I am. Then I would ask Him to make it clear what He would have me to do. I would ask Him also to provide for all my needs. I would try to be honest with Him about my concerns and give them to Him to deal with. I would tell God that I totally trust Him alone to take care of me. That without His help, I will perish. I would declare to Him that whether I live or die, I purpose to serve Him faithfully until my last breath.

Also, look at your present blessings and thank Him for His lovingkindness. Remember that we do not deserve anything. Everything we have is a gift from Him. Depend on His command in Proverbs to trust not in our own understanding, but in all our ways to acknowledge Him, and He will direct our ways. He will be faithful to you. But you must not depend on your own thinking on how things must be. God's ways are higher than ours, and He often answers us in ways that we do not expect.

When I struggle with fears about not having enough money, I try to remember these spiritual truths, and when I do, God gives me a peace and courage to face my circumstances better. The real battle is in the mind. Outer circumstances matter less when our confidence is anchored to Christ and His faithfulness. Material prosperity will never give us true riches, only faith in Christ. I hope this has been of some help.

Love to you,

Christy Shepard