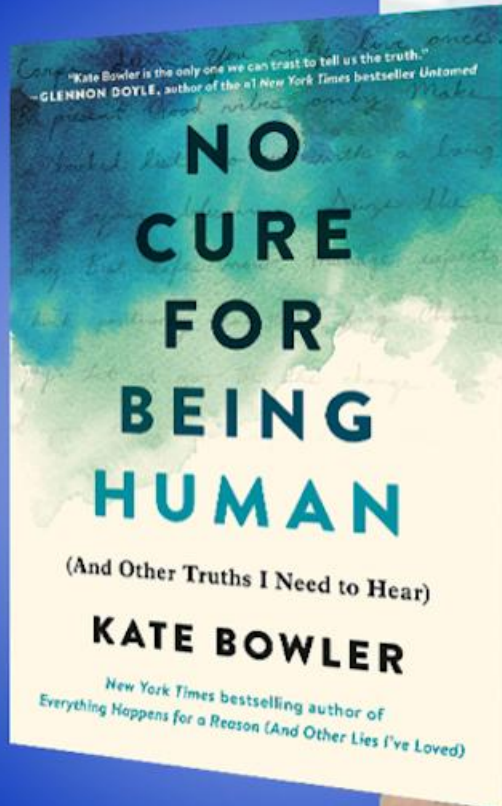


Week 3: Preparing for Willard Lecturer Kate Bowler

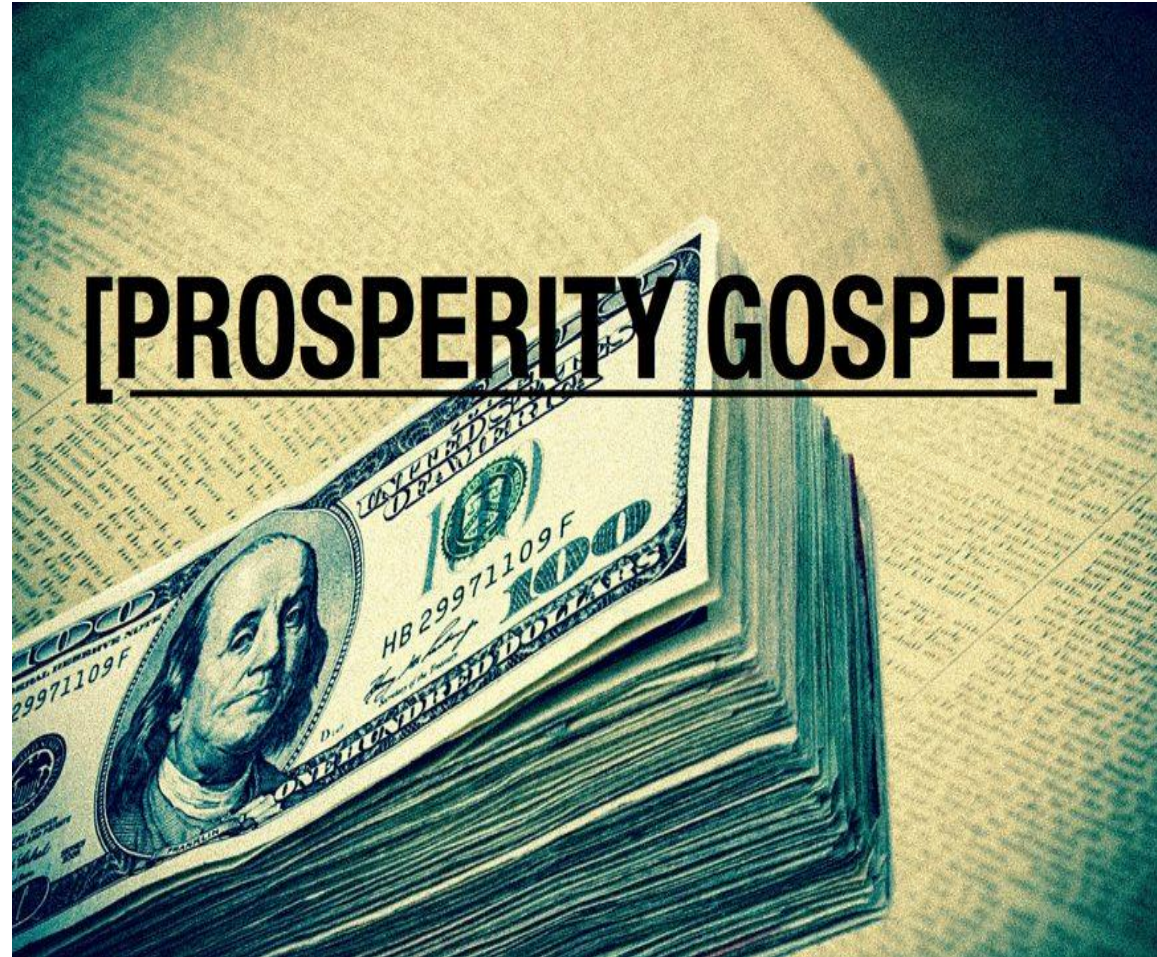


Week 1: What is the Prosperity Gospel and its Challenge?

“Put simply, the prosperity gospel is the belief that God grants health and wealth to those with the right kind of faith.” - Kate Bowler

VERSUS

“The Bible doesn’t promise prosperity but rather calls us to live with faith amid trials.” - Mary Margaret Porter



Week 2: How is the Prosperity Gospel Influencing Our Culture?

“The prosperity gospel sprang, in part, from a late 19th-century American metaphysical tradition . . . about the power of the mind: *Positive thoughts yielded positive circumstances, and negative thoughts negative circumstances.* Variations of this belief became foundational to the development of self-help psychology.” [The power of positive thinking]

- Kate Bowler



Week 2: How is the Prosperity Gospel Influencing Our Culture?

“A neighbor knocked on our door to tell my husband that everything happens for a reason.

“I’d love to hear it,” my husband said.

“Pardon?” she said, startled.

“I’d love to hear the reason my wife is dying,” he said, in that sweet and sour way he has.

- Kate Bowler



Week 2: How is the Prosperity Gospel Influencing How We Respond to One Another?

- Minimizers: (1) Spiritual Minimizers; (2) “At least”(3) Calamity Olympics - you think YOU have it bad?
- Teachers: (1) All suffering is intended to teach us a life lesson; (2) “I hope you have a Job experience!”(3)
- Solutions: (1) “Have you tried...?” (2) Power of Positive Thinking



Week 3: How Can We Respond Well to Others During Difficult Times?

- Not perfectly (personal disclaimer), but ideally without inflicting harm or creating distance

- Acknowledging that we are meaning-makers

- Kate Bowler: “One of the most endearing and saddest things about being sick is watching people’s attempts to make sense of your problem.”

- Sometimes we find purpose, not meaning

- Suffering brings mystery, and the importance of God’s presence



“Suffering has a way of heaving you beyond the shallows of life where your faith tends to feel ankle-deep. Suffering casts you out into the fathomless depths of God, a place where Jesus is the only One who can touch bottom.”

-Joni Eareckson Tada



What Makes it Difficult to Show Up Well?

- Self-Conscious
 - Worrying about saying the wrong thing
 - Worrying about what to say next so we stop listening
 - Uncomfortable around death and hardship
- Positivity Filters
 - Want things to be all right
- Default Lenses - How Do We See Things?
 - What life experiences have we had, what is our personality, etc.



What Have You Found Well-Intentioned, But Not Helpful in Difficult Times?

- Prosperity Gospel residue
- Sayings that are painful
- Unconsciously asking you to tend to them because of your difficulty
- Awarding you a trophy for surviving something you never wanted in the first place
- Thinking words can ease the pain



What Have You Found Helpful in Difficult Times?

- Being heard
- Being given permission to share the way you want to share, without being interrupted by questions or comments
- Listening, listening, listening
- Confidentiality - a safe place to be honest
- Prayer - being held in someone's prayers, even if we are mad at God



Where is God in Difficult Times?

- A refuge/present help in times of difficulty/trouble
- Peace that passes all understanding
- A God who personally knows suffering, being misunderstood, and experiencing isolation because of life's experiences
- Elie Wiesel (give up on God?)
- We don't always feel supported by the people we think we will, but God will bring supporters if we ask (and even if we don't)



How Can We Respond to Ourselves During Difficult Times?

- Be tender (exhaustion is real)
- Remember that we all grieve and experience things differently (self-advocate if others don't understand the way you grieve)
- Ask for help - try not to isolate



How Can We Respond Well in Difficult Times?

- We are simply trying to offer love – not just ours, but God's
- Pray continually because we need Christ's help (before you connect, while you are together, after you leave and beyond)
- Humility - apologize if needed
- Lovingly - this is not about meeting our need; this is not about us
- Listen and listen and listen some more
- Help the person to be seen and heard



How Can We Respond Well in Difficult Times?

Grow in Awareness

- It helps to begin to build our awareness of what we bring that we aren't even aware of
 - For example: our own feelings, our own needs, the need for things to be better, our need to "fix" things, our fears, the influence of "toxic positivity, our past)



How Can We Respond Well in Difficult Times?

- We want to make as much room as possible for God and for healing love to surround those who are hurting.
- Often that means listening hard to God and to the person and simply allow love to flow within the mystery of suffering.



