

The Prosperity Paradox –

The Prosperity Paradox is likely one of the reasons Christ mentioned to his disciples, *“And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”*¹

Over and over and over in scripture, particularly in the Book of Mormon, we are exposed to this paradox and likely pass over it casually.

In much of scripture prosperity has two primary purposes. One – to remove barriers to spirituality and foster increasing light and Two – to erect barriers to spirituality and trigger diminishing light. That’s the paradox.

God uses prosperity to feed the spiritual man; Satan uses that same prosperity to feed the natural man. And you, you’re stuck with the agency to decide which man you become by which you feed with your prosperity.

The Lord on one hand uses prosperity as a process to remove encumbrances in your life that prevent the kind of relationship with Him He would like you to have. If you use the prosperity He blesses you with to quiet your life, help others, pay off debt, gain self-sufficiency, reduce hectic pace, etc., you will find increasing spiritual and temporal sovereignty over yourself. He does this by blessing you in ways that are intended to meet your needs and allow excess to be used to remove barriers that impede your ability to worship Him. His blessings provide conditions in which the “spiritual man you” can be strengthened and elevate the “natural man you” out of a lower circumstance. Let’s call these conditions—Ascent Prosperity.

Satan on the other hand uses that exact same prosperity, stimulated by the cravings of the natural man, to entice you to satisfy carnal appetites of the flesh. This plan has the exact opposite effect of the Lords. It creates additional noise in your life, rules your life with additional debt for stuff purchased by your prosperity, robs your self-sufficiency, satisfies greed and lust and demands a frenetic pace, all of which erect barriers that interfere with your ability to focus on God. When your life is ruled by the “natural man you,” your “spiritual man you” is subjugated to carnal disgust. This condition perhaps aptly coined—Descent Prosperity.

Here’s one of the challenges we all face. The “natural man you” often reasons with the “spiritual man you” that he will use excess prosperity for good in an attempt to convince the “spiritual man you” that your Descent Prosperity is actually Ascent Prosperity – it’s not.

Think about your version of Zion for a minute – what’s missing? – all of the Descent Prosperity. Zion is essentially an environment where temporal barriers that limit spiritual ascent are removed or are at least minimized. There you can focus on obtaining, without the intrusion of worldly chaos, the character, perfections and attributes of God. But you don’t have to be in Zion to do that. If you use “prosperity” in the way God intended, you should be well on your way to Zion-like conditions in your life already.

I understand “life seasons” as described in Ecclesiastes – “*To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:...*”² – so live your “season” but make sure you know which one you’re in and live it like God intended – that’s never out-of-season. Whichever season you’re in, using what God blesses you with to ascend, is always requisite to His favor. Remember, Adam and Eve tried some fruit out of season and...well...cast out...making Ascent Prosperity a little more difficult—some new barriers erected.

Be aware however, God does not only use temporal increase as occasion for you to remove barriers that impede your ability to have time with Him.

In his recent Christmas fireside, Denver described liberty jail not as a place where Joseph was confined but as a place where he was set free. Free, however temporarily, from worldly chaos that demanded nearly all of his attention. “...liberty jail,” Denver reasoned, “really constituted the first time that Joseph Smith had an extended opportunity to think.” God, there, removed barriers that hindered Joseph’s ability to focus on what the Lord needed him to. “There [liberty jail] was this respite, for nearly six months, in which Joseph Smith was confined to prison...where for the most part he had peace and quiet.”³ A time to think, a time to quiet his world, a time to spend with God — a bit of a short Ecclesiastes-type season — so-to-speak. But what really had happened is that God put Joseph in a place where barriers, that had perhaps been interfering and competing with divine clarity, were removed for long enough that the Lord could spend some quality time with him.

Joseph on the other hand would have to decide which Joseph occupied his cell. The “natural man Joseph” or the “spiritual man Joseph.” Another Paradox where a seemingly bad situation was intended by God as good and an opportunity for Ascent Prosperity. Joseph could be grumpy—or not—but much would be learned by God in how Joseph spent this short season. As a dispensation head it was likely a pretty safe bet for the Lord that the “spiritual man Joseph” would win out – and he did.

But how about for you? When the Lord prospers you, which is essentially a verb for removing barriers to you suitably worshiping Him, which “you” wins out? Here’s where the Prosperity Paradox enters your life. Scripture describes it this way:

*“Yea, we can see that the Lord in his great infinite goodness doth bless and **prosper** those who put their trust in him. Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth **prosper** his people — yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks, and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind, and art sparing their lives and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies, softening the hearts of their enemies, that they should not declare wars against them, yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people — yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One, yea, and this because of their ease and their exceeding great prosperity.”⁴*

Satan uses the prosperity the Lord provides pretty effectively against you to harden your heart. That process, that of converting God's prosperity into a hard heart, is described by Koriath this way – *“Therefore, every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength, and whatsoever a man did was no crime.”*⁵

When the Lord removes barriers, or prospers you, that prosperity should be used to emancipate you — set you free from legal, social and political restrictions — and move you out from under the authority of others and burdens of worldly chaos that bind you. Unfortunately, too often, the natural man claims the very prosperity the Lord provides as his own, gained by “his genius and conquered by his strength”⁶ and uses it to purchase more chains, or flaxen as the scriptures call it, to bind us to the very thing we think we're escaping.⁷

Speaking of emancipation, one of the primary purposes of the Lord setting up a promised land was/is to liberate you from oppressive governments, remove barriers that prevent free worship and make out of you a sovereign being that can choose Him. More debt, more position, more power, more status, more, more, more tend to rob you of the very sovereignty He gifted to you as a citizen of a covenant land.

Bottom line for most of us is that the Lord, through prosperity, has removed enough barriers that we are free to worship “how, where or what we may.”⁸

As for me, one day I woke up and realized the Lord had removed any barriers that I could think of that would prevent me from worshipping him correctly—except for one—me and my own weakness. On that day he showed me the “Prosperity Paradox” and ask me which man I would be?

The Fight of Two Wolves Within You

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life:

“A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.

“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil — he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.”

He continued, “The other is good — he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you — and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

John Webster

¹ [NC Matthew 9:23](#)

² [OC Ecclesiastes 1: 10](#)

³ [Denver Snuffer Christmas Fireside 2020](#)

⁴ [\(Book of Mormon\) *Helaman 4:9*](#)

⁵ [\(Book of Mormon\) **Alma 16:3**](#)

⁶ [\(Book of Mormon\) **Alma 16:3**](#)

⁷ [\(RE2 Nephi 11:15\).](#)

⁸ [T&C 146:31](#)