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Prosperity Theology With a Smile

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The New York Times profiles Houston pastor and mega-author Joel Osteen in today's edition. The [article](#), written by Ralph Blumenthal, features Pastor Osteen in his most positive mode:

After a warm-up of rousing original rock and gospel hymns with lyrics and videos flashing on jumbo screens around the arena, Mr. Osteen began to speak. "We come with good news each week," he told the packed crowd at his gigachurch in his native Texan twang.

The news for Mr. Osteen has lately been very good indeed: two weeks ago he signed a contract with Free Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, that could bring him as much as \$13 million for a follow-up book to his debut spiritual guide, "Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential," which, since it was published by Warner Faith in 2004, has sold more than three million copies. "I believe God wants us to prosper" is the gospel according to Mr. Osteen, 43, who offers no apologies for his wealth.

"You know what, I've never done it for the money," he said in an interview after Sunday's service, which he led with his glamorous wife and co-pastor, Victoria. "I've never asked for money on television." But opening oneself to God's favors was a blessing, he said. "I believe it's God rewarding you.

Mr. Osteen's motto is: "God wants you to be a winner, not a whiner."

More:

He is not shy about calling on the Lord. He writes of praying for a winning basket in a basketball game, and then sinking it; and even of circling a parking lot, praying for a space, and then finding it. "Better yet," he writes, "it was the premier spot in that parking lot."

There is actually very little new information in the profile, and there are few surprises for those already aware of prosperity theology. It would not be fair to characterize Mr. Osteen's ministry based upon a profile published in *The New York Times*. The real test of his ministry is what he does in the pulpit (or on the platform of his church, as it happens). Given the national and international reach of his television ministry, his messages are easily observed.

The first question is this — Would anyone watching his television program, or sitting in his vast church facility, hear in Mr. Osteen's message a clear and undiluted message of Gospel proclamation? Would this person have any reason, based on hearing Mr. Osteen's message, to know himself as a sinner and to understand how the cross of Christ is the only ground of his salvation? Would he come to know that Jesus the Christ is fully human and fully divine, and that He came in order that we might have everlasting life — not just a good parking space?

