

CONSCIOUSNESS, GROWTH & INCREASE

Final Week of a 3-Week Series inspired by the Catherine Ponder Book, "Open Your Mind to Receive"

With Rev. Richard Maraj

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So, a very rich man who really loved his wealth begged God to let him bring one suitcase of gold bars to heaven. And finally God agreed. And so, the guy died, and he's at the Pearly Gates. And St. Peter opens the bag and looks at it, and looks inside, and then kind of furrows his brow and says, "*So you brought pavement?*" [A few congregants laugh]

Where the streets are paved ... okay? Wool!

Today we're talking about prosperity, and that was clearly an example of lack. So, today we're in the final of our three weeks on the Prosperity series, looking at the book of Catherine Ponder called "Open Your Mind to Receive." And we've been exploring the different spiritual laws and spiritual principles of prosperity. You know, it is important for us to open our minds to all the good that life has to offer and to all the abundance that is available to us.

So, in Week #1, we looked at three prosperity principles: giving, receiving, and releasing. That each is vital and important, but particularly giving, because giving activates the flow of abundance, the flow of prosperity in our lives. So, she says we need to give to God; we need to give to ourselves; and that we need to give to others to truly begin to move ... knowing that as we give, so too shall we receive.

And the second portion of it -- to receive -- is important. There might be an abundance in the universe, but if we aren't willing to receive and accept and have that good that often we are blocking the good that is available to us. Not welcoming or comfortable receiving, whether it's compliments, gifts, or even abundance or help. And so we really need to learn how to expand and receive more good.

And then, finally, releasing: the art of allowing. You're doing the work, but then there's a the point in the creative process, we have to let it go and allow it to unfold in its highest and best way. Instead of forcing things, we really need to work with it and just allow it by releasing.

Last week, we looked at two more principles: the principle of prophecy and the law of expectation. And with prophecy, it means that we all have the power to speak the word of the good that we want to create in our lives, and to also see the vision of the things that we want to create. Like, whatever it is we want to create, we use the power of our word. Like, "*I am prosperous. I am successful. I am joyful, peaceful, and positive.*" Like, whatever words we want to speak -- "*Each and every day in each and every way, my life is getting better and better and better.*" So prophecy is a powerful gift that we've been given to see and create the things that may not be here now, but we create a vision to attract and create it.

And the last one is our level of expectation. You know, we rise or fall to the level of our expectation. [Unintelligible words about Coach Ben Johnson] "*Good, better, best. Never let it rest 'til your good is better and your better is best.*" And he'd been using that for two years. His first year, they had only won five out of 17 games. Last year -- using this affirmation after every game -- they won 11 out of 17 games. And last week, they not only won, but they scored 59 points, which was more points than anybody in the NFL last week. Because he's raising his level of expectation. And so, what is your expectation of yourself? What's your expectation of your career, of your life, of your relationship? And that's a powerful practice for prosperity.

And so, this morning, we're going to look at three more prosperity principles to open our minds to receive.

The first one is to **CHOOSE TO BE HAPPY.**

One of the best things we could do to live a prosperous life is to choose to be happy. You know, sometimes we want to wait till something good happens for us to be happy. You know, wait 'til you get that promotion. Wait 'til you make your first million. Wait 'til you get married. Wait 'til you have kids. Wait 'til the kids leave the house. You know ... whatever the thing may be, and then we'll be happy.

But we have the power to be happy. We have the power, you know, to choose our attitudes and our mindset, which is a huge determiner on the quality of the life that we live. Studies show -- we like to think that something good happens and we'll be happy. But it's the opposite! When you're happy, the things we do tend to prosper and we enjoy in even greater ways.

Victor Frankl in his book, "Man's Search for Meaning," says: *"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given circumstances. To choose one's own way."*

We all have the power, the freedom, and I would say the responsibility to choose our attitude, our mindset, our outlook ... and including choosing to be happy. Because it's about choosing how we show up in life. It shows us how we are experiencing life.

And so, how do we raise our vibration? Do we elevate and uplift ourselves to that level?

I mean, one of the things I always do when I hear people say, *"How do you raise your vibrational level?"* I always say, *"Stop doing the things that makes you lower your vibrational level."* Like, stop complaining. Stop judging. Could you imagine right now in your own life if you stopped complaining? Could you imagine the impact of not judging? Or the impact of no longer talking about what you don't want and what's missing? Or no longer talking about who you don't like? Or stop feeding difficult or unpleasant situations with the worst case scenario and awfulizing those?

And instead, maybe start seeing the good in all areas of our lives. Appreciating all the good that is in our lives. And also being kind and caring and compassionate to others, and seeing the good in others and appreciating the good in others.

One of the things about having a prosperous life is really ... it really is a reflection of the quality of our relationships. We really can't have a fully prosperous life without healthy, loving, positive, nurturing relationships. And so, we need to do some work on working on the quality of our relationships and activating our social life: meeting new people; developing a wider circle of friends. And also taking time to let go of things and people who may lower our vibration. And to look at our lives and make some new choices about how we relate and interact to individuals.

I think prosperity is not about how much we have, but how much we enjoy what we have. You know, how much we enjoy who we are. How much we enjoy what we do and who we do it and share it with. You know,

Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world. Let your light shine."* I believe that we are all here to let our light shine and brighten up our world.

And so, in what way could you brighten up your life just with your choice to be happy or your choice to be positive? How could you brighten up your home, your relationship, your office? And even how you interact with strangers? I mean, sometimes we underestimate the power of a smile and just being kind or encouraging to someone.

Catherine Ponder uses this affirmation. She says, *"My loving universe wants me to be happier than I've ever been before. My loving universe wants me to be happier than I've ever been before."*

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"My loving universe wants me to be happier than I've ever been before."* Can you take a deep breath into that? And would you be willing to welcome that, accept that, and live and express it?

"I have a divine right to be happy."

Together: [with congregants] *"I have a divine right to be happy."*

"So, I claim my happiness now."

[With congregants] *"So, I claim my happiness now."* Take a deep breath. And can you see yourself choosing to be happy, choosing to feel happy; choosing to express happy; and sharing your happy?

Because if we want to open our minds to receive and to live more prosperous, one of the things we need to do is to choose to be happy in all circumstances and all situations.

The second principle we're going to look at is how to **USE THE SECRET TO INCREASE**.

You know, millions and millions of books have been written on personal development and self-help. Why? Because we're all looking to find a better life. That we all want the secret to increasing the good, the wealth, the success in our lives.

And Catherine Ponder says that the secret to increasing our prosperity is this: systematic giving. She said systematic giving is the beginning of the systematic increase that we desire in our lives.

However, the giving must be done through **consistent sharing of tithes**. She said that the word tithe actually means one-tenth. And in ancient times, one-tenth -- the number 10 -- is the magic number of increase. She said our tithe should be given first, and 10% to the place where we are spiritually fed: the place where we are uplifted; the place that we're inspired; and the place that helps us remember the truth of who we are as spiritual beings.

Catherine Ponder writes, *"Systematic sharing with the universe of a portion of all that the universe shares with you is the beginning of financial increase. A friendly universe always wants us to have more and better than we have ever had before."*

You know, Catherine writes about this man who worked hard and long hours, and he had modest success, but nothing really lasting. And for years it was going on like that. He was getting by. He was getting by, working hard, getting by. And then he found out about the power of systematic giving and decided to try it. So, every Saturday morning when he had finished his week and was wrapping things up, he calculated all that he made. He gave thanks to God as the source of all of that good, and then he wrote his first check of 10% of that amount.

And he did it and made it a ritual every single week: acknowledging how much he has, thanking God for it, and joyously writing that check of 10%. And over a year, his income doubled, and he consistently gave the 10% every single week. He kept it consistent, and things began to improve. He paid off his mortgage. He bought, in time, a new building and took a vacation. And he said, *"Tithing spells success on all levels."*

And he means that, as we give, that flow of abundance moves in all areas of our lives. And he said it's not only a priority of making that giving, but to make sure our mindset is not to give of the least and the last, but to give of the first and the best. As we put God first consistently in all areas of our lives -- including our finances -- things begin to move and transform.

She cites several millionaires, including William Colgate and the Heinz 57 guy, and then J.D. Rockefeller. And in 1881, Rockefeller started tithing. And in that year, he made \$95, so he tithed \$9.50. The next year, he made \$287, and he tithed \$28. By year five, he tithed \$5,498.62, which means he made \$50,000 in 1890-something. Five years later, he was tithing \$250,000 a year, and then a million a year.

And people always say, *"Well, when I get a lot of money, that's when I'll tithe."* No, the tithing is what helps create and attract that good!

You know, she tells about a woman who was \$15,000 in debt, and she discovered systematic tithing, and she gave. And the interesting thing she said was: she didn't miss the tithe. But when she gave, she didn't feel like she was lacking. And she didn't complain about it, and actually found joy in giving. Returning 10% of the 100% back to God -- to the areas that she was spiritually fed -- absolutely brought her joy.

And it shifted her mindset to one of humility, one of faith, one of gratitude, and making it a joyful practice. Within two years, she had paid off her debt and had \$7,000 in the bank.

Anybody remember that like real estate crash in 2008? Anybody remember that? So, we had had like about three houses in that, and we went all-in on the real estate stuff, and ended up having two of those places be foreclosed on. And it was devastating. And I was going through a divorce at the time, not the most fun experience that I had. However, I did not stop tithing.

And I, in fact, wrote the prosperity program that we do called "The Principles and Practices of Prosperity" during that time instead of turning negative. And I will tell you, something magical happened -- that I got out of debt. I got out of the losses, found a fabulous home. Things went so well. And my life was actually better after than it was before.

And I get how scary that it can be, but if you're willing to step ... As Dr. Johnny Coleman said: *"It works if you work it."* And if you're thinking on it, if you're on the fence, I would really, really encourage you. Tithing is a powerful, powerful practice.

You know, she says just thinking positively -- which we all like to do -- and thinking prosperously is not enough. Why? Because while we're thinking all-positive, there's a part of us that has some fear and practices withholding. And that fear energy, you know, will always create some kind of blockage in the flow of abundance in our lives. But as we dive full in, you know, we can reap the benefits of the flow of abundance in all areas. We don't need to hedge.

And the other thing is: you can't cheat spiritual laws. You know, spiritual law will just work the way it's supposed to work. So, we need to work with it.

One thing she says is: when you hear, *"Give and you shall receive,"* is she says if you give sporadically, you'll receive sporadically. But if you give consistently, you'll receive consistently. If you give generously, you will receive generously.

Here's what Catherine Ponder says. She says, *"Tithing releases a mystical power to prosper you and increase your good. Once you make a habit of giving, you will never miss those tithes. The very act of tithing will provide you a sense of security, protection, and guidance like nothing can. Systematic giving is 10% given consistently to where you are spiritually fed. And it's not just giving; it's returning 10% to the source that makes it all possible. It is circulating our good."*

In fact, giving isn't just a practice. It is a process that builds our prosperity consciousness and our oneness with God.

And the final principle of prosperity is **THE POWER OF AGREEMENT**. This is a teaching that declares that we came into this world equipped with everything we need to handle everything in our lives and to be able to live a prosperous life. But we must be willing to agree with the situations, people, and events that come up in our lives. That, when we cooperate with life, that life will cooperate with us. And when we disagree with life, life will disagree with us.

And so, how many people here have ever disagreed with life? Or anybody ... let me put it a better way. How many people know someone else who's disagreeable? [Congregants laugh] I always get more hands on asking it that way.

And so, when we live in a disagreeable way -- meaning fighting against life, fighting against situations and relationships -- that we tend to find life can be a battle. Life can feel tough fighting against those -- always disagreeing; always thinking that life is unfair; you know, resisting and hating. It makes life harder when we disagree with life.

But when we agree with life, there is a sense of ease. There's a sense of acceptance and making peace that, *"That may be how my life is right now but it will not be stuck there, and I will not fight against it."*

But instead, utilize our power to work on ourselves spiritually so that we can be guided into gaining what we're supposed to gain from them and then have them be transformed into something better.

Somebody said that what you fight to get, you fight to keep.

And so, this whole thing about the power of agreeing is really, really powerful. Because the more willing that we are to accept and refrain from fighting against life, or dwelling and staying stuck in the negativity ... That, when we refrain from that, we tend to stay more in the flow of the universe.

Catherine Ponder tells the story of a successful woman. She was a great businesswoman. She was prosperous in incredible ways. She had a good social network of friends, and her kids had grown, and it was the time for her to have the time of her life. But, rather than appreciating and agreeing with all the good that was in her life, she disagreed, dwelled and dwelled upon what she didn't have. And the main thing was a man. She thought not having a relationship was really pulling down the quality of her life.

So, Catherine Ponder said to her, *"Practice the power of agreement."* And so, she went and she practiced agreeing that this was the situation of her life. All this good is there. And then, also, the struggle is there, but she wasn't going to dwell on that struggle. And so, some men came into her life, and that didn't work. But she kept agreeing with the situation. And over time, she attracted a wonderful relationship.

And one of the things Catherine Ponder says for all of us to be careful about in this situation -- the power of agreement -- is that sometimes we will talk our good away. Meaning this: let's pretend our life is 80% fabulous, and 20% is not as fabulous. So, when she's saying we talk our good away, it's that, even though 80% is great, all we do is concentrate on the 20% and how bad it is ... and we don't have what we want ... and this isn't right ... and this isn't fair. And she says what we do is: we talk our good away, and that 20% becomes 25% is not as good as we want. Or 30%. Or 35%. So, it's important: don't talk your good away by dwelling on it and keep regurgitating all of the sad stuff or stuff that you don't like or you wish was different.

And so, this is the two aspects of the power of agreement. One is accepting all the stuff that's going on in your life: don't hate it. Don't dwell on it. Be aware of it, but stay present to it and keep noticing and enjoying the good. And that's the second: to acknowledge and appreciate how good your life is.

You know, sometimes, we wonder and wish that this problem wasn't mine, or we wish we were born in a different era, or all kinds of different things. Anybody ever wish that you had somebody else's life? Well, you don't. [Congregants laugh]

And the fact is: anything that is up in our lives is meant to be there. We avoid and run away from it, thinking that there's something wrong; that's an obstacle, it should be there. No, it actually is supposed to be there. And that's the level of acceptance: knowing that it's supposed to be there and there's something in us that needs healing ... or something in us that we need to utilize that power and draw that power to overcome the thing that is before us.

Remember in Scripture -- in Matthew 5, Verse 25? It says, *"Agree with thine adversary quickly."* And it's saying: if you've got something in your life that isn't working the way you want, agree with it. Make peace with it quickly so it doesn't cause you pain or turmoil. And, instead, you utilize that energy to overcome that and to gain whatever lesson that we are meant to gain from it.

A husband once practiced this kind of agreement. And when, at the end of the first year of their marriage, his wife decided that the time had come for them to share their faults about each other with each other. She said, *"Now that we've been married a year, we should be able to be honest with each other. So, I'm going to point out all your faults to you, my dear. And then after, you can share all my faults with me."*

And so, she proceeded with a very long list of woes. And when she finished, she said, *"Now it's your turn. Tell me all that's wrong with me."*

And her very wise husband paused and said, *"My dear, you are perfect in every way. I would not change one thing about you."*

And there was silence. And then the wife inwardly vowed that she would never dwell on her husband's faults again. And it brought a healing and a closeness to the relationship that went on for years, joyously and in nurturing and in a healthy way.

Gentlemen, if you want, I'll just want to repeat it: *"My dear, you are perfect in every way."* [Congregants laugh] *"I would not have one thing about you changed."* Just in case you wanted to use it.

So, another phase of the power of agreement is, again, to see the good in adverse situations. Even now, looking back on situations in the past, are you willing to find agreement that there was good in those and maybe even discover them in retrospect?

Also, the power of agreement of whatever is going on in your life now that might have adversity, and acknowledge that there's good in it. And good in it that you could actually see, or maybe good in it that you can't see right now, but you know good will come from it in some way.

And so, by pronouncing it good and seeing good, we really take advantage of that power of agreement and get to utilize that incident and our resources to stay present and to enjoy our lives and get the most out of those situations.

Catherine Ponder was inspired by a guy who did this. And here's what he said. He said, *"I call every event in my life by the same name: success. If I have a failure, I call it success, and it will always prove itself to be a success in some way. I agree with the good in every experience, and the good agrees with me."*

When we agree with life, life will agree with us.

Two men are shipwrecked and end up marooned on a small, deserted island with nothing around them except ocean and a single palm tree. The first guy is pacing back and forth in a panic, screaming, tearing his hair out, saying, *"We're going to die! There's no food. There's no water. We're going to die out here!"*

And the second guy is just leaning against the palm tree, just kind of snoozing and just soaking up the sun. Completely dumbfounded by this, the first guy runs over and shakes the guy. He says, *"Don't you understand? We're stranded. We're going to die!"*

The second guy opens his eyes, opens one eye and says, *"You don't get it, man. I make \$100,000 a week."*

And the first guy says, *"What difference does that make? We're out here in the middle of nowhere on a rock with no food. We're going to die!"*

And the second man smiles and calmly says, *"I make \$100,000 a week, and I tithe 10% of it faithfully every week to my church. I guarantee you, my pastor will find me."* [Congregants laugh] I just wanted to let you know: if you were lost like that, I would find you.

Prosperity, prosperity. It's available. We live in an abundant universe. It's all available for us! Except we've got to do the work. Dr. Johnny Coleman, as I mentioned, said, *"It works if you work it."*

And the question is: Are you willing to work it? How much do you truly want a life of abundance? and a prosperous and happy life?

We need to demonstrate and activate these dynamic, powerful, spiritual principles. Number one: choose to be happy. You have that power to choose to be happy. And when you do, you bring that happy into all of our different experiences ... to me, which is prosperous living.

Practice the secret of prosperity: 10% every week to the place you are spiritually fed. It will circulate and increase the good in all ways. And it will even lighten you to allow it to be a joyful experience to give and

share. I could say, *"I love giving."* In fact, I feel funny if I'm not ... because this has been a part of my life my mom taught me years ago. It is a powerful spiritual practice.

And the last one, of course, is the power of agreement. Agree with those situations that may not be as perfect in your life, and agree how good your life is and how blessed you are.

This is the path to prosperity. This is the path that will help us open our minds to receive.

God bless you all.

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