

Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living Your Full Potential

by Joel Osteen.

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Why are so many people drawn to the ever-smiling -boyish - looking preacher now seen on TV in millions of U.S. homes and over 100 nations around the world? Joel Osteen admits that his sermons are uncomplicated. Their depth is an inch thick and a mile wide. They are more practical advice for a happier life, here and now. His upbeat approach to the Christian faith could be called "religion - lite." His style of preaching goes a long way in explaining the huge crowds that gather to be entertained. He tells a lot of stories and anecdotes that somehow relate to the message. Joel and his wife Victoria take their upbeat message to capacity crowds in arenas all across America. In 2005 they visited 15 cities including Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York and Philadelphia. But if you want to attend one of their "crusades," you have to shell out \$ 10.00 for a ticket.

Joel, who has been called the reigning "King of the Charismatics," is the pastor of Lakewood Church, the largest church in America. Lakewood Church was started by Joel's father, Rev. John Osteen, who received his B.A. from John Brown University and an M.R.E. from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was ordained as a Southern Baptist minister in 1942. In 1958, while he was a pastor at Hibbard Memorial Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, Osteen was "baptized by the Holy Spirit." About that time, his daughter, who was born with cerebral palsy, was healed. This ushered Osteen into a healing ministry. He rejected his Baptist theology and his church split. Osteen established a new church in Houston, Texas, with about 150 members. His church eventually had a membership of 20,000. Osteen became enamoured with the charismatic renewal movement and eventually became a big crusader for the error of positive confession. This is the belief that we can either create or change our reality by the power of our words.

When Rev. Osteen died in 1999, his son Joel succeeded him. Joel did not attend a seminary and never preached a sermon until the death of his father. In summer 2005 Lakewood church moved into Houston's 17,000 Compaq Arena. It boasted an average attendance of 32,500. Joel has no theological training but has an admitted talent for marketing. He believes that he is specially anointed to preach and sees no need to study Church history, hermeneutics, systematic theology and to struggle through Hebrew and Greek as other ministers do. His two years at Oral Roberts University were focussed on television production and marketing. For seventeen years Joel was behind the scenes handling all the television and marketing of his father's ministry.

Joel, taught by his father, says "My message is: God is a good God. When you live according to his principles that I believe, he wants you to be happy and healthy and whole." Joel's motto is: "Discover the Champion in You." In his best-seller *Your Best Life Now*, Joel challenges his readers to break out of "a barely-

get-by" mentality, to become the best they can be, not merely average or ordinary. He writes, " I am what I am today because of what I believed about myself yesterday. And I will be tomorrow what I believe about myself now. God sees us as more than conquerors, able to fulfill our destiny. We need to see ourselves through the eyes of our Creator." Osteen lists seven basic steps to living our full potential: Enlarge your vision, develop a healthy self-image, discover the power of your thoughts and words, let go of the past, find strength through adversity, live to give, and choose to be happy.

Joel's theology of positive thinking goes so far as to define faith as a positive mental attitude. Consequently, he does not offer any comfort for the suffering and grieving. He says, "You can be at peace in the midst of your storms if you'll simply learn to choose the right thoughts." People can change their thinking by thinking positively, thus overcoming financial problems, bad health, and negative situations by the sheer force of their mental attitude. Faith turns the situation around. It is the believing that brings the healing. "God will help you, but you have to cast the deciding vote." Your faith can cause God to show up and work supernaturally in your life. Joel says that to experience God's immeasurable favour, you must rid yourself of that small-minded thinking and start experiencing God's blessing, start anticipating promotion and supernatural increase. We will become what we believe. Our words have creative power. God wants to make your life easier. " He wants to assist you, to promote you, to give you advantages. He wants you to have preferential treatment." We get what we want from God by faith-filled words. By following this method, Osteen says, he has been able to get priority seating in restaurants and the best parking spot in a crowded parking lot. He says to his son, "You watch Daddy, I'm going to get a front-row parking spot. I can just feel it. I've got the favor of God all over me." This belief is a far cry from the treatment the Bible says true believers will receive from the world. Jesus said that as My followers you can expect hatred from the world (John 15: 18-19).

In Joel's "can-do" theology healing comes through positive thinking and claiming health. You do your part, God does His. He believes, "If you are facing sickness today, you should confirm God's Word concerning healing. Say something such as, "Father, I thank You that You promised me in Psalms that I will live and not die and I will declare the works of the Lord. As you boldly declare it, you are confirming that truth in your life." But since all of us have to die some day, including Joel, he has his own upbeat version. He says that you can die in faith only if you live a faith-filled life. "When it's my time to go, I want to spend my last day here on earth full of joy, full of faith, and full of victory."

Humility is not one of Joel's spiritual gifts. He says that God blessed his parents "with four average children and one exceptional child, whom they named Joel." He also notes, "God has blessed us abundantly. He has prospered us through several real estate deals so we live in a lovely home and have all the material things we need." The Osteens live the life of prosperity Joel preaches. Their

home has been evaluated at \$ 1,265,000. Wherever Joel goes he stays in expensive suites at the finest hotels, and flies first class.

Joel habitually twists Scripture to suit his name-it-claim message. For example, he says that the Israelites' lack of faith and their lack of self-esteem had robbed them of the fruitful future God had in store for them they had to wander through the desert. God's promise to Abraham and Sarah to have a son could only be fulfilled when Sarah had conceived him in her heart before she was able to conceive him in her physical body. "She had to believe she could become pregnant before she actually became with child." Joel also believes that whenever you give something to someone, God will return the favour. He says that God is a good God, and He gives good things to His children. He uses a bizarre illustration to prove his point. He tells of a Saudi prince who gives to the poor. "I doubt that the Saudi man practices the Christian faith, but the principles of giving are spiritual principles. They work regardless of nationality, skin color, or even religion. If you give unselfishly, it is going to be given back to you. If you meet other people's needs, God will make sure your own needs are supplied in abundance."

Joel is a sophisticated religious marketeer, tailoring his message, his form of worship, and his theology to the consumer demands of the religious seekers. His messages are "light and informal," with liberal sprinkling of "humour and anecdotes" to suit TV programming. Joel's messages may give the viewers a positive "can-do" feeling, but they are biblically errant. Television may be entertaining, but truth is not entertaining. The truth of sin, the wrath of God, repentance, and hell cannot be presented in an entertaining way without robbing them of their Biblical meaning. Therefore, Joel carefully avoids the word sin and repentance. In fact his theology lacks the Christian understanding of human depravity and the obvious evil in our world today.

Johan D.Tangelder.