



# **Detrimental effects of the Prosperity Gospel on the spiritual well-being of families: A pastoral care response**

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## DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that the mini dissertation entitled, **Detrimental effects of the Prosperity Gospel on the spiritual well-being of families: A pastoral care response**, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Theology in Pastoral Studies at the North-West University, is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other University for any qualification or award.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Prosperity Gospel, frequently referred to as the “Health and Wealth Gospel”, has gained significant popularity in recent years despite its psychological ramifications for the well-being of its adherents. Families are drawn to Prosperity Gospel churches in pursuit of material gain and recognition, as promised by these teachings. Followers are encouraged to seek out material wealth, often placing considerable strain on family relationships and leading to financial disputes, instances of gender-based violence, and psychological distress. Consequently, families are often classified according to their possessions, such as houses, vehicles, income, and perceived success. This shift has contributed to the creation of a competitive atmosphere within both society and the church itself. When families’ aspirations remain unfulfilled, they may return to their previous congregations in a state of disillusionment, seeking pastoral care and support. The purpose of this study was to investigate the harmful effects of the Prosperity Gospel on the spiritual well-being of families and to examine the ways in which pastors may assist those affected. Osmer’s (2008) four tasks for practical theology served as the methodological framework for the research. Initially, the researcher outlined the effects of the Prosperity Gospel on adherents by collecting data through a review of the existing literature. Subsequently, the literature concerning reasons for adherence to the Prosperity Gospel were critically examined. The third stage involved identifying relevant theological resources from a pastoral care perspective that may contribute to improving family well-being. Finally, the study proposed strategies to guide pastors in offering spiritual support to families negatively impacted by the Prosperity Gospel.

**KEYWORDS:** Prosperity Gospel; Family Well-being; Families, Pastoral Care, Detrimental Effects, Spiritual Well-being

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|      |                                     |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| AIDS | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome |
| ATM  | Automated Teller Machine            |
| HIV  | Human Immunodeficiency Virus        |
| NET  | New English Translation             |
| PG   | Prosperity Gospel                   |
| USA  | United States of America            |

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# **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

## **1.1 Introduction and background**

The Prosperity Gospel (PG) has emerged as a significant religious phenomenon, gaining rapid and sustained prominence within certain Christian circles over the past few decades (Nwaomah, 2020:3). Currently, millions subscribe to this belief system, regarding it as a means to address socio-economic adversity and personal challenges. However, scholarly literature indicates that the commercialisation and uncritical acceptance of this theology may adversely affect families' spiritual well-being (Andrew, 2021:7).

Driven by the pursuit of status and recognition, families are often drawn to churches that promote the PG. Adherents are encouraged to prioritise material wealth, which places considerable strain on family relationships and precipitates financial conflict, gender-based violence, and psychological distress. When these aspirations remain unfulfilled, families frequently return to their previous churches, often experiencing profound disillusionment and distress. The present study seeks to examine the harmful effects of the PG on families' spiritual well-being, as well as to identify how pastors might support those who have been negatively impacted.

Van Emmenes (2019:2) reports that numerous individuals in South Africa have moved from one prominent PG church to another, motivated by feelings of anger and disappointment upon discovering they had been deceived. Many also express concern for friends who remain in such congregations. Proponents of the PG maintain that wealth signifies divine blessing and serves as a reward for prayer and giving beyond the standard tithe to the church, televangelists, or other religious organisations (Koch, 2009:1). This conceptualisation of divine favour is often misconstrued, leading to the belief that material acquisitions are the exclusive markers of God's approval (Koch, 2009:4).

The PG centres on speech acts focused on faith, wealth, and victory, often accompanied by ritual practices regarded as evidence of divine favour (Heuser, 2016:1). Within this theology, God is viewed as a commercial partner who is contractually bound to fulfil the requests of those who have met their obligations

through tithes and substantial offerings (Barron, 2022:94). Families following this gospel believe they are entitled to blessings of wealth, which they anticipate receiving by "sowing a seed" and subsequently enjoying the rewards (Heuser, 2016:1). At its heart, PG theology teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially prosperous, and personally content (Sadiq, 2019:7).

In his critical analysis of the PG, Sadiq (2019:9) examines how well-known preachers draw upon elements of biblical truth to support their teachings. Referring to Kenneth Copeland, as quoted in his book *The Laws of Prosperity*, Sadiq explains that Copeland argues prosperity is part of God's established covenant and is therefore a right (Sadiq, 2019:9). Likewise, Paula White asserts that God's Word contains numerous covenants granting blessings such as healing, deliverance, salvation, financial prosperity, wholeness, and fulfilment (Sadiq, 2019:11). According to her, these promises become accessible through the covenant and are realised by faith. Joel Osteen, another influential pastor, conveys a similar message, stating, "I love Scripture that says if we belong to Christ, we are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise, that means we can all experience the blessings of Abraham" (Sadiq, 2019:11). By referencing biblical texts, these preachers play a substantial role in promoting and legitimising the PG.

Uroko (2023:123) notes that pastors often assure their congregations that miracles are imminent, and that God is all-sufficient, promising to meet their needs at the most appropriate time. However, when these promises do not come to fruition and congregants continue to experience the same impoverished conditions, it results in distress and hopelessness. According to Uroko (2023:123), some pastors proclaim that the year will not pass with you, but will pass with every challenge that has kept you stagnant. Such preaching cultivates false hope and unrealistic expectations among families in the church.

For example, pastors declare, "It shall all be gone; the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again," with "Egyptians" symbolising the difficulties in people's lives. Families are then compelled to respond with a loud "Amen" and to give financial offerings at their pastors' feet in hopes that these problems will be eradicated (Uroko, 2023:123). Nwankwo, referencing Pastor Ben Hinn, states that it is time to clarify that

the gospel is not for sale, nor are God's blessings, miracles, or prosperity (Nwankwo, 2019:12).

Nevertheless, one may question the purpose of exposing false preaching when the preachers have already benefited from it. More importantly, the effect on families' spiritual and overall well-being is often overlooked. When PG messages are delivered from the pulpit, they spread rapidly throughout the church (Nkari, 2018:98). Congregants tend to accept everything spoken from the pulpit, readily embracing prosperity teachings without question, as they consider them to be decrees from God. From a scholarly viewpoint, research has shown that the PG negatively impacts families' well-being, leading to distress and a loss of hope in some instances (Uroko, 2023:125). The situation of those who attempt to "sow a seed" frequently remains unchanged, creating a disparity as the preachers live extravagantly while the givers' circumstances do not improve.

The researcher calls for a re-examination of Christian theology regarding the PG and the need to raise awareness of its harmful effects. It is important to investigate its impact on the well-being of families within the church. In light of ongoing scholarly debate about the PG, research from a practical theology perspective on its influence on family well-being is warranted. This study therefore set out to examine the detrimental effects of the PG on families, to develop or identify pastoral care strategies to support those affected, and to suggest possible initiatives to protect vulnerable families from being drawn in by the PG.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

According to Nwaomah (2020:4), the origins and global reach of the PG can be traced to several influential figures, including Essek William Kenyon (1867–1948), A.A. Allen (1911–1970), Kenneth Hagin (1917–2003), Kenneth Copeland (1936–), and Fredrick K.C. Price (1932–). Addressing the harmful effects of the PG on followers and the church requires a redefinition of this doctrine and the strengthening of pastoral care. The PG has a considerable impact on its followers, often resulting in observable changes in behaviour and lifestyle, which in turn affect their well-being. Some families go so far as to withdraw their savings, sell life insurance policies, homes, and land, and dedicate nearly all their resources to the church. This may lead to violence,

ineffective parenting, marital conflict, and even psychological disorders (Koch, 2009:5).

Barron (2022:94) observes that the PG does not accommodate a theology of poverty or suffering, implying that poverty or illness among believers serves as evidence of insufficient faith. This perspective places responsibility for hardship on those who experience it. Furthermore, research suggests that the PG can have harmful effects on individuals, making further investigation essential to better understand its impact on the well-being of churchgoing families.

The core issue with the PG lies in its teaching that repentance and faith in Jesus Christ not only grant salvation but also guarantee prosperous health and wealth (Sadiq, 2019:15). This belief transforms families' expectations, leading them to prioritise the pursuit of health and wealth. They may remain devoted and confident Christians when circumstances are favourable, yet often experience a crisis of faith when their aspirations go unfulfilled. The PG places particular value on material possessions, physical well-being, and success in this life – such as financial abundance, good health, clothing, housing, cars, job promotions, business achievements, and other markers of worldly success (Adeleye, 2011:11).

Consequently, the focus for many within the church shifts away from building strong family relationships, seeking heaven, or nurturing a deeper relationship with God, and instead centres on acquiring material possessions. Many families no longer regard God as the source of all wealth; their attention is instead fixed on material gain. The PG's promise of rapid improvement resonates with the poor and destitute, reviving their hopes for a better future (Sadiq, 2019:21). However, this teaching fails to offer practical strategies for escaping poverty or imparting financial management skills; rather, it fosters the belief that a better life is attainable simply through giving.

The PG creates significant challenges for families in the church, frequently encouraging them to take substantial financial risks. Some individuals take out bank loans, sell assets, or even withdraw money from their children's education savings. Certain preachers worsen this situation by exploiting these individuals, urging them to make such sacrifices. This places an added burden on those already struggling with poverty or illness, who may come to view themselves as cursed – further straining

relationships between families in need and those who seem to prosper. The psychological impact can be profound for those who do not experience the promised results. Preachers may take advantage of their followers under the guise of "planting a seed" for miracles, enriching themselves at their congregants' expense (Nkari, 2018:98). For this reason, the focus of the proposed study will be the documented effects of the PG on its followers and their families.

### **1.3 Literature review**

This study adopted a literature review approach, consulting a range of sources to gather relevant information. Snyder (2019:2) explains that a literature review is the process of systematically collecting and synthesising previous research. When conducted effectively, a literature review provides sufficient background knowledge to facilitate further development and theory formation. By integrating the findings and perspectives of several empirical studies into a single review, it is possible to address the research question with a depth and breadth unattainable by individual studies. Articles on the PG have emerged from various disciplines; however, developmental psychology has historically been the dominant field. Relying solely on this perspective risks what has been called a deficit approach, in which attention is given exclusively to the harmful aspects of PG teachings. To counter this, the current study adopted a practical theological perspective to explore not only the detrimental effects of the PG on the spiritual well-being of families within the church, but also to consider the positive effects these teachings may have.

#### **1.3.1 PG and its main teachings**

Ideologically and sociologically, the historical foundations of prosperity theology are closely associated with Kenneth E. Hagin, who was born with a deformed heart and an incurable disease that afflicted him until he experienced a miraculous healing in August 1934 at the age of seventeen. This healing experience, along with Hagin's connections with Pentecostal leaders, provided the basis for the development and wider adoption of his Word-Faith theology, which eventually became known as the PG. Prosperity theology originated in the United States before spreading to other regions of the world, as stated by Boaheng *et al.* (2023:1359). At present, prosperity preaching has gained significant traction in Africa and is most prevalent within neo-

Pentecostal and neo-charismatic churches. It is founded on a specific interpretation of biblical promises regarding abundance in life through Christ, as Barron (2022:89) notes, “I have come so that they may have life and may have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10b, New English Translation [NET]).

When discussing divine healing, Gloria Copeland observed that she had previously regarded finances and prosperity differently from aspects such as divine health. She remarked, “If a symptom of sickness came on my body, I would not stand for it. You should refuse lack just as quickly as you refuse sickness” (Boaheng *et al.*, 2023:1359).

The PG primarily advocates material possessions, physical well-being, and success in this life, including abundant financial resources, good health, clothing, housing, cars, job promotions, and success in business and other endeavours (Adeleye, 2011:20). Adeleye (2011:20) also notes that the teachings of the PG cause families to focus more on visible, material indicators of success. As a result, they often measure their spirituality and relationship with God by what they own, rather than by their spiritual growth. Consequently, families influenced by the PG may overlook their spiritual development, placing material wealth above holistic well-being and ignoring physical, emotional, and relational needs.

The core of PG theology centres on the belief that God wishes believers to be physically healthy, materially prosperous, and personally happy (Sadiq, 2019:10). However, this concentration on physical and material well-being frequently neglects the emotional and relational dimensions of family life. The drive to attract and retain members seeking financial success has led to an environment of heresy and deceit among adherents of various denominations (Uroko, 2023:123). This dissatisfaction has prompted some Christians to move from one church to another in search of fulfilment (Nwokocha, 2022:15).

### **1.3.2 Detrimental effects of the PG**

The PG raises an important concern. It places undue weight on wealth as the primary measure of spiritual success, relegating other significant traditional values such as humility, sacrifice, and even wealth itself to a lesser position. This can distort the true essence of Christianity – shifting the focus from its ultimate principles to its more

immediate teachings on humility and sacrifice, which are overshadowed by the pursuit of wealth and health as central aspects of spirituality. As a result, families may experience guilt and sadness, believing that attaining wealth and health is the definitive measure of spiritual fulfilment (Butler, 2014:35).

Furthermore, the PG's focus on positive confessions and financial contributions, or "sowing seeds", can foster a transactional outlook in the relationship between the individual and God, eroding the core of grace and faith. This may give rise to a profound sense of spiritual emptiness and a weakened connection with the divine. Additionally, the PG can promote a culture of individualism and self-reliance, placing the burden for both spiritual and material well-being solely on the individual. Such an approach can weaken the sense of community, reduce engagement in shared spiritual practices, and limit support during periods of hardship or adversity (Attanasi, 2012:4, Heuser, 2016:6).

Limited empirical evidence indicates that, while prosperity theology may yield certain positive outcomes for adherents, it also produces significant negative consequences. One notable effect is the encouragement of individuals to seek financial gain through improper or unethical means, with some even resorting to harming others to achieve their objectives (Nyambo, 2023:100). The PG risks generating a dichotomy among Christians: those perceived as lacking faith – and therefore remaining in poverty – are left facing profound disappointment and discouragement, whereas others prosper materially. Such division engenders a culture in which individuals are blamed for their lack of prosperity, resulting in further alienation (Boaheng *et al.*, 2023:1359).

Moreover, families influenced by this theology frequently conflate health with material wealth, often placing financial advancement above holistic well-being. This pattern leads to the neglect of physical, emotional, and relational needs (Adeleye, 2011:20). One of the most misleading aspects of the PG is that it presents a semblance of biblical truth while failing to address families' overall well-being, focusing predominantly on material success. The restricted emphasis can adversely affect psychological health (Sadiq, 2019:10). Prosperity theology also advances individualism, as adherents are expected to pursue personal prosperity through practices such as "naming and

claiming". Such a mind-set encourages selfishness and self-centredness, ultimately compromising communal and relational welfare (Boaheng *et al.*, 2023:1359).

### **1.3.3 Pastoral care response**

Given the detrimental impact of the PG on the spiritual well-being of families, a pastoral care approach is crucial in addressing this issue. Pastoral care is always a very active and all-inclusive approach, providing care for individuals as well as groups within socially constructed communities. It involves sustaining others through ongoing difficulty or immediate need. This means that pastors need to support people in their journey towards healing and attaining wholeness (Jibiliza & Kumalo, 2021:1). Pastoral care today continues the mission of Jesus and the early church by reaching out to people wherever they require emotional, physical, or spiritual support. This care is primarily provided by pastors, chaplains, trained counsellors within the church, and spiritual directors (Perkins School of Theology, 2022:1). In the Christian tradition, pastoral care is deeply rooted in the biblical image of the shepherd, as depicted in Psalm 23:1. This distinguishes pastoral care from social work, counselling, and other helping professions (Redding, 2012:3). Pastoral care in the church should be holistic, attending to all levels of humanity and addressing their spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being.

Pastoral care and counselling provide holistic support and guidance to individuals and families, adapting to meet people's needs within their specific contexts (Magezi, 2016:1). The four primary functions of pastoral care – healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling – cover a wide range of caring activities, with pastoral counselling serving as one means to assist people in managing their problems and crises in a more developmental way (Magezi, 2016:1). Although the ministry of pastoral care is inherent in the act of baptism, which calls Christians to care for one another in Christ, this duty extends beyond the Christian community, reflecting the compassion of the Good Samaritan (Redding, 2012:3). This includes providing spiritual guidance, counselling, reflection, supporting families, offering ongoing spiritual nurture, reassurance and comfort, and, lastly, promoting healing and reconciliation.

#### **1.3.4 Adherence to the PG**

The lavish lifestyle of PG preachers conveys a powerful message of divine prosperity to their followers. Many of these preachers live extravagantly, owning luxurious cars, private jets, mansions adorned with gold-plated fixtures, expensive designer clothing, and frequently holidaying in exotic locations. This opulent lifestyle acts as a constant reminder to their followers of the power of faith, which, according to PG teachings, can transform hidden spiritual realities into material wealth (Nwaomah, 2020:10). Adherents of the PG are assured that their generous giving will result in overwhelming returns, making the promise of economic or financial freedom particularly alluring (Boaheng *et al.*, 2023:1360).

According to Gifford (cited by Barron, 2022:95), the PG encourages its followers to take advantage of existing economic systems rather than critically assess them and seek remedies to social ills. Many people are attracted to the PG for economic reasons, as the Lausanne Theology Working Group rightly notes that this doctrine flourishes in African contexts where high rates of poverty lead people to view it as their only hope amid ongoing frustration and political failures (Boaheng *et al.*, 2023:1360). In addition, the PG appeals to the health concerns of Africans, as the belief that evil spirits cause illness and require divine intervention for healing is widespread in almost every community.

#### **1.3.5 Impact of PG on the well-being of families**

The emphasis on PG teachings can lead to heresy and corruption, causing division within families and churches (Barron, 2022:100). Nkansah (2023:4) and Uroko (2023:124) observe that the PG negatively affects the mental health of families, not cultivating positive emotions such as happiness and optimism, but instead provoking feelings of guilt, anxiety, and depression. Sadiq (2019:14) notes that Kenneth Hagin's teachings, which describe poverty as a curse and a consequence of sin, can cause confusion and stress within families. Those who remain in poverty may view themselves as cursed, which has a detrimental effect on their mental well-being. Furthermore, when individuals are encouraged to give with the expectation that their circumstances will change, but no improvement occurs, it intensifies trauma and distress, resulting in increased suffering and hardship (Nkansah, 2023:5).

According to Uroko (2023:125), many congregants believe that God will transform their situation in the near future and that they will receive a miracle. They are told that poverty is a curse and that those who give will never lack, yet for many, their financial and health conditions continue to decline. As their hopes are repeatedly disappointed, they become exhausted and disillusioned. Uroko (2023:125) further explains that some congregants have even taken their own lives when their hopes are broken. When families are promised improvement, their emotions and expectations are elevated, but when change fails to materialise, it causes anxiety and affects their mental health. This continual disappointment can result in a loss of hope and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts, particularly among fathers who feel they have failed their families.

Essien (2020:5) notes that PG preachers frequently use the Bible to justify claims that their teachings do not reduce social misery, poverty, or corruption; rather, they worsen these problems. The extravagant and ostentatious lifestyles of church leaders are sustained at the expense of impoverished church members. These leaders urge people to "sow seeds" for their own enrichment, while their congregants continue to suffer. PG preachers enjoy luxurious living, driving expensive cars and residing in opulent homes, while their followers remain in desperate circumstances.

According to Uroko (2023:125), PG preachers assure their members that giving to God will result in their offerings being multiplied tenfold. People often donate money needed for essential expenses, believing that God will double it. Unfortunately, the more they give, the deeper they sink into poverty. This belief, resembling a pyramid scheme, often motivates congregants to give generously in the hope of receiving significant returns. Some have even taken out bank loans to make donations, convinced that the more they give, the more God will bless them. This has led families to borrow money, further deteriorating their financial situation. Turgong (2023:13) note that PG messages foster an unrealistic sense of optimism, increased emotional arousal, and greater willingness to take financial risks. Some individuals have sold their homes, liquidated investments, and even withdrawn pension funds to give to the church, expecting a financial windfall, only to lose everything. The PG encourages people to undertake perilous financial risks.

According to Uroko (2023:123), PG teachings frequently suggest that if families do not experience a breakthrough, they are not genuinely serving God. The belief is that serving God should not result in poverty or want. Sadiq (2019:25) argues that this ideology shapes families' identities around material accumulation, implying that a lack of wealth signals insufficient devotion to God. This notion of the 'poor sinner' introduces a hierarchy within the community of believers, where those who are poor, ill, or unemployed are viewed as not giving or believing enough, causing them to feel inferior to others (Uroko, 2023:123).

Prosperity preachers commonly claim that God desires financial prosperity for all His children, so for a family to remain in poverty is to live outside God's will, equated to living a "Satan-defeated life" (Sadiq, 2019:25). Such teaching can profoundly shape the beliefs of families, causing those in poverty to feel like outcasts, unloved by God. It diverts their attention from genuine faith to their material shortcomings, resulting in spiritual and emotional distress (Sadiq, 2019:25).

## **1.4 Aim, objectives & research questions**

### **1.4.1 Aim**

The aim of the study was to explore the detrimental effects of the PG on the spiritual well-being of families to identify pastoral strategies for supporting affected families.

### **1.4.2 Objectives**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Investigate the detrimental effects of PG teachings on the spiritual well-being of adherents.
2. Identify the factors that attract families to PG teachings.
3. Explore theological resources from a pastoral care perspective that can be used to enhance family well-being.
4. Develop pastoral care strategies to guide pastors in providing spiritual support to families detrimentally affected by the PG.

### **1.4.3 Research questions**

The main research question guiding this study was:

“How do the detrimental effects of the PG on the spiritual well-being of families inform the spiritual support pastors provide to those affected?”

The subsidiary research questions were:

- How do PG teachings detrimentally affect the spiritual well-being of families in the church?
- Why are families attracted to PG-preaching churches?
- What pastoral care theological resources can be used to enhance the well-being of families?
- What pastoral care strategies can be used to address the detrimental effects of the PG?

### **1.5 Central theoretical argument**

The central theoretical argument of this study is that, from a practical theological perspective, pastoral care – together with complementary resources such as narrative therapy and positive psychology – can effectively support individuals and families affected by the PG. This study adopted Osmer’s fourfold practical theological model as its guiding framework, as it enables the systematic progression from exploring the detrimental effects of the PG on family spiritual well-being to theological evaluation and the development of pastoral responses.

The model integrates theory and practice by fostering transformation through the connection of lived experiences, theological reflection, and pastoral intervention. It also allows for an open and dialogical approach, encouraging engagement with diverse perspectives and integrating pastoral theory, narrative therapy, and positive psychology within a coherent practical theological framework. Thus, this study not only identifies the detrimental effects of the PG but also proposes practical pastoral strategies, making implementation central rather than optional.

The model underpinning the theoretical argument was implemented in four ways:

- Data were gathered through a review of relevant literature to explore how PG teachings affect the spiritual well-being of families, identifying recurring patterns such as guilt, disillusionment, financial strain, and spiritual anxiety.
- The study identified factors that contribute to families being attracted to PG teachings, such as theological distortion.
- Biblical theology, sound doctrine, ecclesiology, and pastoral principles were utilised to critique and contrast the distortions associated with PG teachings.
- Finally, the study identified practical ways in which pastors can provide spiritual support and respond to families who have been adversely affected by PG teachings.

## **1.6 Research methodology**

This dissertation, which aims to contribute to the field of pastoral care, operated within the epistemological paradigm of practical theology. As Müller (2005:73) asserts, practical theology happens “whenever and wherever there is a reflection on practice, from the perspective of the experience of the presence of God”.

The structured definition followed that of Osmer (2008:4), who describes the task of practical theology as an interpretive one operating through the use of four questions, namely:

- What is going on?
- Why is this going on?
- What should be going on?
- How might we respond?

The study is grounded in practical theological interpretive theory shaped by Osmer model which understand research as contextually embedded, theological normed, interpretive in nature and orientated toward transformation. The significance of this model in this study was as follows:

- Experience: families affected by PG teachings. It provided a coherent theoretical framework in investigating the detrimental effect of PG, where it did not stop at level of criticism, did not isolate theology from lived experience, but moves towards constructive pastoral intervention.
- Interpretative: Why PG harms spiritual well-being of families: It critical evaluate PG theology or teachings in harming families then bring biblical theology in assessing the impact of PG in the spiritual well-being of families.
- Normative evaluation: Biblical theory of suffering, grace, stewardship enhancing family well-being. It integrates empirical realities with theological normativity, able to take lived experiences of families, interpreted those experiences, evaluating using scriptures ending in the development of pastoral care.
- Pastoral action: Pastoral strategies using narrative therapy and positive psychology in addressing families who are affected: It facilitate pastoral reconstruction not just critique, identifying ways in which pastors can provide support to families affected by PG.
- It strengthens epistemological position, recognize theology as interpreted within lived contexts affirming that scripture functions normatively but interested responsibly.

This study employed Müller's (2005) definition to reflect on pastoral practice from a practical theological perspective. In doing so, it also incorporated Osmer's understanding of the interpretive task of practical theology, aiming to articulate how pastoral care should respond to the present needs of individuals. The epistemological point of departure in this research formulates the foundation of what is understood as pastoral care, which, according to Magezi (2024:148), is "the expression and representation of the sensitivity and compassion of the Scripture's understanding and portrayal of God's encounter, intervention, interaction and involvement in our being as human".

Epistemologically, the research is grounded in a hermeneutical-interpretative approach in which knowledge emerges through engagement with lived experience, social experience, and theological reflection, integrating interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, sociology, and psychology (Pieterse 2017:3). Within this framework, Scripture and Christian tradition function as normative sources, providing

fundamental criteria for evaluating spiritual well-being and discerning the harmful effects of PG on families. This approach ensured that empirical insights, theological norms, and pastoral responses were coherently aligned in addressing the research problem.

Osmer (2008:11) developed a specific model for practical theology, and his attention to individuals' actions, as well as to the context in which these actions take place, prompted the researcher to select this particular model of interpretation. Two characteristics of the model were especially influential in motivating this choice:

Firstly, Osmer's employment of the hermeneutical circle helps to elucidate the relationship between the four tasks. The distinct yet interconnected nature of these tasks enables the researcher to move systematically within the model as new insights arise (Osmer, 2008:11).

Secondly, Osmer's four guiding questions, each aligned with one of the four tasks, aided the researcher in systematically collecting information for the literature review, while effectively addressing the research questions.

The four tasks proposed by Osmer (2008) are described in more detail below:

### **1.6.1 The descriptive task**

This task begins by exploring the context of the study, which focuses on examining the impact of PG teachings on the spiritual well-being of families. As Osmer (2008:4) explains, the principle of this task is the systematic collection of data to accurately determine and describe what is occurring in a specific circumstance, episode, or context. During this phase, information and data are gathered concerning particular episodes, circumstances, or contexts within the community. At the core of this task lies a spirituality of presence: "it's a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations" (Osmer, 2008:34). This attending takes the form of "priestly listening," reflected through the quality of attentiveness given to people and events in their everyday lives within the presence of God (Osmer, 2008:33-34). The research employed a qualitative, explorative, and descriptive design through a literature study, undertaken by means of data collection based on secondary

sources, which include national as well as international scientific resources, academic books, journal articles, and websites.

### **1.6.2 The interpretative task**

This task analyses the causes and factors contributing to the problem, as well as the consequences of the situation. Osmer (2008:4) states that, after completing the descriptive-empirical task, the collected data will be interpreted to answer the question: "Why is this going on?" In this stage, data were gathered through a review of existing literature to determine why families are drawn to PG-preaching churches and how their spiritual well-being is influenced. A literature review on the detrimental effects of the PG within practical theology and pastoral care was carried out to explore why families are attracted to this movement. The review included literature from related disciplines at the intersection of practical theology, psychology, and sociology, aiming to demonstrate relevance to the lives of families in churches that preach prosperity theology.

The "transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue" was used to gain interdisciplinary perspectives from fields such as practical theology, sociology, and psychology (Osmer, 2008:170). This approach followed the evaluation provided by Osmer (2008:114):

- Identify and evaluate the model or theory as well as the conceptual field built on this model.
- Identify the disciplinary perspective the theory uses and the level of reality this discipline addresses.
- Identify and assess the soundness and strength of a theory's arguments, which is the central argument of these theories.

### **1.6.3 The normative task**

The normative task involves making "an effort to understand more broadly and deeply the analysed situation and context in the light of living faith, scripture, church social teachings, and the resources of tradition" (Holland & Henriot, 1984:9). As Osmer (2008:4) explains, the purpose of this task is to determine what ought to be going on,

that is, what should ideally occur, envisioning the ideal state of affairs in the light of Christian theological resources related to the well-being of families. The normative task seeks to present a theological perspective by taking into account the need for the Holy Spirit's guidance in this process, and utilising prophetic discernment as defined by Osmer (2008:133).

The normative task was addressed through exegetical studies of Scripture concerning the warnings about disappointments and dangers that may accompany wealth, presenting a theological viewpoint on the effects of PG teachings (Mt 6:19-21, Mk 10:23-27, Lk 12:15-21, Prov 11:28, Tim 6:9-10). Further, exegetical studies were conducted to explore how families should respond to prosperity theology (Mk 8:34-38, 1 Pt 4:19, Deut 6:6-7). The research also developed the theme of hope from a biblical perspective to support those who have suffered as a result of PG teachings (Is 53, 1 Cor 15:19).

The third task extended the foundation established in the previous two phases by critically engaging with theological literature on prosperity. The chapter assessed the contributions of selected Christian scholars who discuss the well-being of families within the church context. It addressed the third sub-question: "What pastoral care theological resources can be used to enhance the well-being of families?" Normative principles were formulated to delineate the partnership role of practical theology in this domain. Engaging relevant literature further informed the normative task undertaken in this dissertation.

#### **1.6.4 The pragmatic task**

The pragmatic task concerns the actions that God expects from his chosen people. It addresses the final sub-question of this study: what type of spiritual support can pastors offer to families negatively affected by the PG? According to Osmer (2008:4), strategies of action are determined during the pragmatic task, aiming to influence the circumstances towards the desired outcome. This task involved synthesising the research findings obtained through a practical-theological methodology. Strategic perspectives on pastoral care were developed to support families of adherents who have been affected, proposing possible initiatives to protect vulnerable families from falling victim to the PG.

**Table 1-1: Schematic representation of the study**

| <b>Title: Detrimental effects of the PG on the spiritual well-being of families: A pastoral care response</b> |                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Research Question (RQ)</b>                                                                                 | <b>Objective</b>                                                                                                                               | <b>Methodology</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| RQ1: How do PG Teachings detrimentally affect the spiritual well-being of families in the church?             | Objective 1: To investigate the detrimental effects of PG teachings on the spiritual well-being of adherents.                                  | <b>Descriptive task:</b><br>Information will be collected based on a literature study within the interdisciplinary field of PG theology to explore the effects of the PG on adherents and their families                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| RQ2: Why are families attracted to PG preaching churches?                                                     | Objective 2: To identify the factors that attract families to PG teachings.                                                                    | <b>Interpretative task:</b><br>This phase will focus on “why this is going on” by assembling data based on a literature review. The goal is to identify the factors that attract families to PG-preaching churches and to understand why their well-being is affected.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| RQ3: What pastoral care theological resources can be used to enhance the well-being of families?              | Objective 3: To explore theological resources from a pastoral care perspective that can be used to reimagine family well-being.                | <b>Normative task:</b><br>Building on the findings from the descriptive and interpretative phases, this phase will examine relevant theological literature on PG and its impact on family well-being. This phase will engage with RQ3: "What pastoral care theological resources can be used to enhance the well-being of families?" Normative principles will be established for the role of practical theology in addressing these issues. The literature review will contribute to the normative framework of this dissertation. |
| RQ4: What pastoral care strategies can be used to address the detrimental effects of the PG?                  | Objective 4: To develop pastoral care strategies to guide pastors in providing spiritual support to families detrimentally affected by the PG. | <b>The pragmatic task</b><br>This final task will explore what actions God expects of his people, addressing RQ4: "What pastoral care strategies can be used to address the detrimental effects of the PG?"<br>This phase will synthesise the research findings from the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

| Title: Detrimental effects of the PG on the spiritual well-being of families: A pastoral care response |           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Question (RQ)                                                                                 | Objective | Methodology                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                                        |           | practical-theological methodology to develop strategic perspectives for pastoral care. These strategies will focus on supporting affected families and finding initiatives to protect innocent families from falling prey to the PG. |

## 1.7 Clarification of key concepts

The key concepts used in this study are defined below.

### 1.7.1 Prosperity Gospel

The “*Prosperity Gospel*” is a Christian belief system that sees poverty and illness as consequences of sin, while holiness is reflected in God's blessings, including material wealth and good health. Anything that opposes these blessings is considered either misfortune or a demonic attack within the context of spiritual warfare against God's kingdom (Félix-Jäger, 2019:281). This belief system is also referred to as the "Health and Wealth Gospel" or "prosperity theology" (Bishau, 2013:1). According to Gbote (2013:5), citing Coleman (2000:27-33), the PG teaches that wealth and health are signs of God's favour. It maintains that material blessings are evidence of God's approval and that believers can attain prosperity through positive confession, faith, and financial contributions to religious leaders or institutions. The PG is a religious system with a doctrine claiming that God wills financial prosperity for all Christians and the well-being of believers' descendants when the believer demonstrates sufficient faith. Nel (2021:6) states that the PG defines a lifestyle marked by excessive consumption, where self-worth is measured by symbols of wealth, a value system aligned with the ambitions of the new African elite of affluent entrepreneurs.

### 1.7.2 Families

The word "family" has long been widely debated across disciplines, with biological and legal definitions on the one hand, and sociological, cultural, and theological formulations on the other.

The traditional formulation describes *families* as units of kinship-based social organisation, resting primarily on marriage and blood ties. Murdock (1949:1) offers an early anthropological definition, describing the family as a "social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction." In this definition, the functional aspects of families are particularly clear, as they serve as primary units for socialisation, care, and survival.

However, contemporary scholarship emphasises that the family is not static but dynamic, shaped by cultural, economic, and religious contexts. According to Giddens (2013:206), the family should be understood as "a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume responsibility for the care of children." This more sociological framing reflects the evolving structures of families, including nuclear, extended, and non-traditional forms.

From an African perspective, Mbiti (1969:106) notes that families extend beyond the nuclear household to include kinship networks and communal interdependence. He observes that "the individual does not and cannot exist alone, except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations". This reflects the deep sense of collective belonging and responsibility at the heart of African understandings of family.

Theological perspectives present the family as both a spiritual and social unit. In the words of Pope John Paul II (1981:14), the family is described as the "domestic church", since, in normal circumstances, it is primarily responsible for imparting faith, moral values, and communal identity. Oduyoye (2001:23) argues that families within African Christianity are not simply biological spaces but also theological symbols of God's covenantal relationship with humanity.

For the purpose of this study, families are understood as socially and spiritually interconnected units, which may take various forms (nuclear, extended, or single-

parent), but share the common duties of care, support, and identity formation. Within PG churches, families are not only recipients of religious teachings but are also actively engaged in sustaining church life through shared practices of giving, worship, and testimony.

### **1.7.3 Family well-being**

*“Family well-being”* is a multidimensional concept that covers various aspects of the health, happiness, and quality of life of families – their physical, emotional, social, and economic dimensions (Wollny *et al.*, 2010:3). McKeown *et al.* (2003:5) define family well-being as something that most often equates to happiness and includes both physical and psychological elements and relationship factors within the family – between the parents themselves and between the parents and their children.

### **1.7.4 Pastoral care**

*“Pastoral care”* refers to the support and comfort given by a pastor or religious worker to those who need help with their spirit, emotions, or mind. It considers the holistic needs of a person, which can include emotional, spiritual, and sometimes physical health, offered through love and concern grounded in faith. It is described as “the ministry of the cure of souls that consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns” (Yohannan, 2022:10).

According to Magezi (2024:148), pastoral care is the expression and representation of the sensitivity and compassion found in Scripture’s understanding and portrayal of God’s encounter, intervention, interaction, and involvement in our humanity. Christian pastoral care is described as a narrative, ecclesial, and theological practice that recognises the inseparable interconnection between our personal life stories, the stories of others, broader cultural narratives, and God’s story (Scheib, 2016:1). Pastoral care is a common practice across various Christian cultures and sects, focusing on providing emotional and spiritual support to one’s congregation (Beaumont, 2011:117; Hughes, 2015:2). Brunsdon (2014:2) states that the goal of pastoral care may primarily be seen as change, achieved by bringing God’s involvement into people’s lives during the pastoral encounter, where human being is

transcended through the grace of God, the promises of his Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit. This proposed study aims to provide support that aligns with the faith and value system of the individual, as well as their emotional and spiritual needs.

#### **1.7.5 Detrimental effects**

*“Detrimental effects”* refer to adverse impacts on spiritual and emotional well-being caused by various stressors, experiences, or conditions. These harmful effects can hinder day-to-day functioning, diminish overall happiness, and reduce satisfaction with life. In this proposed study, detrimental effects are understood as the influence of different factors, experiences, or conditions on families' spiritual and emotional state, evident in ways that affect thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and overall well-being. While these effects may be both positive and negative, they are primarily associated with spirituality, mental processes, emotions, or mental activity (Rubin & Wessely, 2020:2). Such effects shape emotional responses, which can involve various levels of motivation, intensity, energy, or even aspects of personality (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009:168).

#### **1.7.6 Spiritual well-being**

*“Spiritual well-being”* refers to an expanding sense of purpose and meaning in life, shaped by personal morals and ethics. It may involve religious practices and participation in a community with shared beliefs, but can equally encompass individual practices outside the framework of any specific religion. Spiritual well-being includes exploring beliefs, principles, and values that provide meaning and direction. It is about engaging in traditions or rituals – whether communal or personal – that enhance your overall sense of well-being. Spiritual well-being is distinct from psychological well-being (Chirico, 2016:45).

### **1.8 Significance of the study**

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the body of knowledge and valuable insights that will be generated for those involved in pastoral care, as well as for organisations and governing bodies responsible for church-related policies. It also hopes increase community awareness of the harmful impact of the PG on the spiritual well-being of individuals and families within the church.

## **1.9 Ethical considerations**

Although this research did not involve empirical data collection, it followed the ethical guidelines for conceptual research provided by North-West University. The researcher also ensured a balanced and accurate representation of the relevant literature. The estimated risk level for the study is none or low, as it is a literature review that does not include human participants.

## **1.10 Outline of chapters**

This study consisted of the following six chapters:

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter introduces the study by outlining the research problem, objectives, and significance of the investigation. It situates the research within the broader context of pastoral care and the rise of PG teachings, highlighting their potential impact on the spiritual well-being of families. The chapter also explains the methodological framework and provides an overview of the structure of the study.

**Chapter 2:** The descriptive-empirical task – examining the detrimental effects of PG teachings on the spiritual well-being of families

This chapter focuses on gathering and describing empirical data related to the effects of PG teachings on families within the church context. It explores how these teachings influence spiritual values, family relationships, and faith practices. The findings aim to present a clear picture of the real-life consequences of PG beliefs for family spiritual well-being.

**Chapter 3:** Interpretative task: Attraction of families to PG-preaching churches

This chapter seeks to interpret the reasons families are drawn to churches that promote PG teachings. It analyses underlying social, psychological, and theological factors that contribute to this attraction, such as economic hardship, hope for material improvement, or the appeal of charismatic leadership. The interpretive insights help explain the motivations and expectations shaping family engagement with such churches.

**Chapter 4:** The normative task: Pastoral care theological resources for enhancing family well-being

This chapter turns to theological reflection, identifying biblical and doctrinal resources that can strengthen the spiritual well-being of families. Drawing on Scripture, church tradition, and pastoral theology, it develops a theological foundation that contrasts PG teachings with authentic Christian understandings of faith, blessing, and discipleship.

**Chapter 5:** The pragmatic task: Effective pastoral care strategies to address the detrimental effects of the PG

In this chapter, the focus shifts to practical application. It proposes pastoral care approaches and strategies that can help families recover a balanced and holistic spirituality. The chapter discusses how pastors and church leaders can guide families toward spiritual maturity, resilience, and faith practices grounded in sound theology and compassionate care.

**Chapter 6:** Research findings, relevance & conclusion

The final chapter summarises the study's key findings, theological insights, and practical implications. It reflects on how the research contributes to the field of pastoral care and offers recommendations for future ministry and research. The chapter concludes by reaffirming the importance of addressing the spiritual needs of families influenced by PG teachings through contextually informed pastoral care.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

Chapter 1 has laid the foundation for this study by clarifying key concepts, examining the background and problem statement, and presenting the research framework, aim, objectives, and methodology. It has highlighted that the PG significantly affects the spiritual well-being of families, often prioritising material wealth, physical health, and personal success over spiritual growth, relational harmony, and holistic family development. The chapter also emphasised the importance of pastoral care as a vital resource to support affected families by addressing their spiritual, emotional, and psychological needs.

Building on the foundation established in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 focuses on the descriptive-empirical task, providing a detailed exploration of the detrimental effects of PG teachings on the spiritual well-being of families within the church. It systematically examines how PG theology, practices, and teachings shape family life, relationships, and spiritual growth. Particular attention is given to how materialistic focus, transactional faith, and the promise of divine blessings influence families' emotions, behaviour, and overall spiritual health.

Furthermore, the chapter broadens its scope by examining the global impact of PG teachings on family spirituality. It highlights patterns and experiences shared across different cultural contexts, offering insight into how these teachings affect families' faith practices and well-being worldwide.

## **CHAPTER 2 EXAMINING THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL TEACHINGS ON THE SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING OF FAMILIES**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the question of "what is happening" within PG movements regarding the harmful effects of such teachings on the spiritual well-being of families. It explores the first objective and question investigating the detrimental effects of PG teachings, specifically answering the question, "How do PG teachings detrimentally affect the spiritual well-being of families in the church?" This forms the central focus of the descriptive phase of the research, as outlined by Osmer (2008:4). In line with Osmer's typology, this chapter examines the adverse effects of PG teachings on families' spiritual well-being. These effects are described based on data collected from a wide range of secondary sources both within and outside the country. Scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles at national and international levels, along with reputable websites, were used to provide robust evidence through an evidence-based approach to demonstrate how PG messages are impacting family spirituality across different parts of the world.

### **2.2 Positionality of the researcher**

This study was conducted by a Black African male pastor, who was born and raised in Limpopo province, in a family environment that drew strength from both traditional African customs and Christian faith. As a Venda individual, I grew up in communities where family, community, and spirituality were closely connected. My immediate family practised Christianity while also engaging in traditional rituals and practices. This duality often led to internal tensions as I, and many like me, navigated the process of forming our own spiritual identities.

As a researcher, I was exposed to biblical teachings from an early age at church, being born into a Christian family and mainly surrounded by Christian friends and community members. As my faith developed and I achieved spiritual maturity, I began to distance myself from activities that conflicted with biblical teachings. However, this process was accompanied by internal conflict that needed to be resolved in order to bring about

change. Going against long-standing cultural traditions and expectations was difficult, especially when my choices were perceived as disrespectful or rebellious.

In such a cultural context, it is common for children and young people under their parents' care not to challenge the authority or confidence of spiritual or cultural leaders. They are generally expected to obey and follow the instructions of their parents and other elders in the community.

I have observed, both in my own experience and among those around me in Christian faith communities, how maturity in the gospel is often associated with material prosperity. I noticed how certain teachings can misrepresent biblical principles, leading many households to pursue financial prosperity at the expense of genuine faith and marital harmony. Consequently, extended family members and members of the wider community have been drawn to teachings on breakthrough and wealth, which usually generate false hope and spiritual confusion. Many have witnessed relationships falling apart under financial strain as a result of misplaced trust. My main motivation for conducting this research was to explore how such teachings might influence, or more specifically affect, the spiritual health of families. In many instances where promised gifts were not realised, those involved felt spiritually inadequate or believed that God had abandoned them.

I observed how the PG shaped what Lahayne (2016:140), citing Walter Brueggemann, remarked about people not feeling they have enough and always wanted more, focusing on promises of abundant blessings. This has led to many families becoming greedy and unkind towards those who appear less prosperous, while the notion of abundance suggests that our lives and well-being ultimately rest in God and cannot be taken from us. I also noticed how the PG marginalised the vulnerable, especially children, whose spiritual and emotional needs were often overlooked in favour of adult-centred promises of abundant blessings, as stated by Harries (2016:15).

This study further contributes to the ongoing discussion between theological responsibility and the need for a biblically holistic understanding of family spirituality within African Christian contexts. I write not only as a first-time researcher but also as an observer and participant in these lived realities.

## **2.3 The global impact of PG teachings on families' spiritual well-being**

### **2.3.1 General overview**

The PG, which relates faith to material wealth and health, has received global attacks for misplaced spiritual priorities and putting the family institution at risk. The beliefs of individuals who vigorously promote the 'Prosperity Gospel' are not only untrue but a great misrepresentation of the Bible (Lausanne Movement Working Group, 2010:100).

The PG has taken deep root within the evangelical and Pentecostal movements in North America, particularly the United States of America (USA) and Canada. As Robbins (2017:558) notes, in the early days of the church's growth in the USA, faith was accompanied by worship and a willingness to submit to divine health and healing. Within this framework, many new voices sought to apply similar faith-based concepts to the economics of church life. Conversely, prosperity gospel preachers present a belief that links spiritual blessings to material success, health, and personal development. Bowler (2018:30) argues that the rise of the pastoral gospel is grounded in the American ideal. This has produced a harmful theology that treats wealth as a sign of divine favour, marginalising the poor and placing enormous spiritual burdens on them. Bowler (2018:30) also notes that, in family contexts, this belief system sets unrealistic expectations and fosters spiritual shame when financial difficulties arise, ultimately undermining the emotional and relational wellbeing of the home.

Bowler (2013:32) explains that megachurches and televangelism in the USA, with their significant growth, have continued to spread this message, often targeting low-income families with promises of breakthroughs dependent on financial seed offerings. The blend of spiritual assurances and financial desperation is deliberately marketed to vulnerable groups. This demonstrates how the ideology is internally contradictory and ethically unstable, as prominent figures who once advocated prosperity theology have distanced themselves from its excesses (Medina & Cornelio, 2021:76; Bowler, 2018:102). Such excesses have already been publicly criticised by Benny Hinn and Joyce Meyer. Medina and Cornelio (2021:76) observe that the authoritarian leadership style within these church systems reduces familial autonomy and critical thinking, consolidating power around pastors. Wrenn (2019:426) notes that congregants and families sometimes fall into debt, hoping their generosity will lead to miraculous

intervention. These patterns reveal systematic exploitation within prosperity ministries, where spiritual guilt is used alongside financial pressure through promises placed at the heart of theology.

The PG is less common but increasingly popular within charismatic and immigrant church contexts in Canada. According to MacTavish (2014:213), it is often introduced by the media and through international church networks. It describes this particular harm as spiritual trauma due to broken promises. Families internalise failure, usually attributing it to weak faith when the promised blessings do not materialise. As Bowler (2018:102) observes, children who grow up in households where financial success has been spiritualised tend to be confused and continue to believe that God's love is based on a transaction. This has been found to diminish authentic discipleship, while also promoting a works-based religion devoid of grace, patience, or civic responsibility.

In Western Europe, the PG has adopted a newer, softer form, though it continues to spread largely through immigrant Pentecostal congregations and charismatic groups. Where Catholicism has previously shaped the spiritual lives of Italians, French, and the Irish, as pointed out by Hargaden (2018:219), the PG contrasts more sharply with major dogmas and tends to attract followers mainly among economically marginalised groups who are searching for hope. As noted by Adogame (2013:40), this is how it found its way into the United Kingdom within African and Caribbean diasporic churches, as well as branches of Nigerian-founded ministries. These teachings stress wealth acquisition, financial independence, and victory, offering an appealing message to immigrant families striving to adapt to challenging new socio-economic circumstances. However compelling this message may be, it reduces very complex social and structural issues to matters of individual belief and personal investment.

Sandu (2017:40) notes that families in such contexts encounter tension between traditional European religious values – sacrifice, suffering, and liturgical solemnity – and the PG's optimistic materialism. This divergence can lead to theological confusion, spiritual exhaustion, and a fragmented family spirituality when prayers for healing or financial stability remain unanswered.

Additionally, PG teachings often neglect the communal and sacramental dimensions of faith that have long been central to European Christianity (Portilla, 2019:365). This

has contributed to a consumerist approach to spirituality, where families feel compelled to perform faith and offer money in hopes of receiving blessings. As Badone (2021:89) explains, in countries such as France and Ireland, where secularism is strong, prosperity teachings have gained ground, causing scepticism about Christianity as a whole and reinforcing stereotypes of religious manipulation and financial exploitation. On the other hand, Asamoah-Gyadu (2014:115) observed that when individual gain becomes more important than communal spiritual practice, the PG reduces religion to mere transactions. In highly secularised European societies like France or Ireland, this could further alienate populations already wary of institutional motives behind religious acts.

In Asia, the PG has evolved into culturally nuanced forms and flourishes in countries with high levels of poverty and strong socio-religious aspirations. In India, the doctrines of the PG readily resonate, as Hinduism and caste consciousness exert a powerful influence on identity, with people striving to overcome entrenched economic adversity, inequality, and injustice. Pentecostal and charismatic churches that promise heavenly elevation have experienced significant growth among lower-caste and tribal communities (Mathew, 2022:43). This development has occasionally resulted in spiritual disillusionment when breakthroughs fail to materialise, as observed by Wiegele (2004:45).

In the predominantly Catholic and charismatic prosperity-oriented Philippines, the PG has merged with established Marian devotion and miracle-seeking traditions. Mega-churches and television evangelists preach that donations will bring healing and prosperity. This teaching greatly affects family financial dynamics. Many poor families contribute from their limited income, as noted by Walker and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (2014:711), in an act of altruism with the expectation of receiving blessings from God. Such practices can not only increase poverty levels but also place strain on family relationships.

Bauman (2022:125) and Baker (2016:15) argue that South Korea represents a unique case in which Christianity's growth, specifically megachurches such as Yoido Full Gospel Church, is tied to the country's economic development. The gospel of success has matched the national development ethos. However, Suh (2019:563) notes that, over the last decades, there has been a spiritual backlash among younger

generations, who reject church leadership's materialism when promises to go unfulfilled. Many households feel spiritually empty, and youth is increasingly secular. In these Asian countries, the teachings of the PG often distract from biblical teachings about suffering, humility, and social justice (Rom 5:3-5; Philip 2:3-5; Isa 1:17). This doctrine focuses on individual rather than collective care and opens space for spiritual exploitation in the name of religion. Often, according to Kinoti, Kagema and Orina (2024:67), it replaces the real content of spirituality with motivational slogans, leaving families vulnerable when crisis occurs.

In Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, the gospel of prosperity is a central message within Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal congregations (Milemba, 2017:35; Gunda, 2018:110). It thrives on a theology centred on miracles, breakthrough, and deliverance, as well as financial favour, offering hope to societies seeking answers amidst unemployment, inflation, and unstable, corrupt governance. Writing from Nigeria, Moyet (2021:11) notes that preachers such as David Oyedepo and Chris Oyakhilome emphasise wealth as a sign of God's favour. As a result, churches become arenas for economic aspiration, where families are encouraged to 'sow seeds' in pursuit of promotion, healing, or even marriage.

Similar patterns are evident in Kenya and Zimbabwe, where families often prioritise contributions to the church over meeting basic household needs, believing that such acts will ultimately result in divine blessings. When anticipated gifts are delayed or fail to materialise, spiritual guilt, family conflict, and marital tension may arise within the home (Sibanda *et al.*, 2024:3). Milemba (2017:35) contends that the theology of seeding reduces the relationship between God and humanity to a purely transactional dynamic. Children raised in these environments may perceive God as a divine Automated Teller Machine (ATM), thereby equating spiritual growth and maturity solely with material gain.

PG teachings also divert attention from systemic injustice, inequality, and ineffective governance. Rather than confronting political corruption or promoting collective upliftment, they encourage individual deliverance through giving and confession (Gukurume, 2017:37; Bishau, 2013:66; Milemba, 2017:38). Such teachings may be interpreted as fostering fatalism and a lack of accountability, ultimately diminishing families' capacity for resilience and effective advocacy for justice.

It is true what Gunda (2018:111) says that prayer becomes a transactional activity, going to church becomes an activity, and suffering or poverty is looked down upon by the family because they have not received their “breakthrough” yet. Similarly, Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5) note that when miracles fail to occur, some people lose faith, while others continue giving in repeated cycles of generosity and expectation. This dynamic reflects a theological distortion, where human effort and material reward take the place that rightfully belongs to Christ.

Moses (2022:21) observed that South Africa presents a distinctive blend of African traditional beliefs, Christian revivalism, and Western consumerism. The gospel of prosperity has rapidly gained ground in both urban and rural areas, mainly promoted by charismatic churches led by self-proclaimed apostles, prophets, or pastors. While Moses (2022:21) attributes this rise primarily to charismatic leadership, I firmly believe that the wider socioeconomic environment – characterised by high unemployment, crime, and inequality – also contributes to the appeal of such teachings for vulnerable individuals. These movements attract economically and historically disadvantaged communities by promising financial breakthroughs, miraculous healings, and social upliftment (Gbote & Kgatla, 2014:3; Thebe, 2020:40). However attractive the promise of upward mobility may be, its sustainability should be questioned, as it can lead to disillusionment when expectations remain unmet.

To most families, the impact is deeply spiritual and psychological. Parents are practically coerced to make sacrifices, sometimes at the cost of their children's education or health needs. As much as Coleman (2011:24) may wish to lay bare the dangers involved in pressurising parents into such sacrificial acts, it should equally be noted that these sacrifices can run parallel to immediate well-being within a family setup and continuously pave the way for poverty and misery. This happens concurrently with the public display of wealth and success stories of some church members, while the struggling ones are silently castigated or told in hushed tones that they do not have faith by giving more (Udechukwu, 2021:270). It is also possible that such a setup could reduce communal solidarity and trust in leadership, both of which have been symbols of *ubuntu* in South Africa for quite some time now. The trend creates conflicts within families when financial problems persist after tithing, offering, sacrificial seeding, and fasting. Though this shows how religion, hope, and money

problems mix in the South African PG movements, new family and community problems call for more critical help and practical support.

Also, Chitakure (2017:50) states that prosperity theology disrupts African spirituality, traditional aspects of ubuntu community, reverence for ancestry, and resilience in the face of suffering, as it places excessive focus on demons, curses, or witchcraft as the causes of poverty and hardship. This perspective frames poverty as a spiritual failing or curse, further isolating the already marginalised. Moreover, when children grow up in churches that idolise wealth, they develop a distorted understanding of theology, connecting material success with the presence of God. According to Magezi and Manzanga (2024:3), this often leads to spiritual confusion, weariness in faith, and decreasing trust in religious institutions and their leadership.

The societal context of South Africa is marked by inequality, poverty, and structural domination, which leaves people vulnerable to messages promising quick success and denigrating wealth. PG teachings often foster a reliance on church leaders, who are expected to provide solutions but instead manipulate the emotions of an already burdened congregation, rather than encouraging them to face their circumstances with faith. Gbote and Kgatla (2014:5), along with Magezi and Khlopa (2021:10), are among many researchers who have warned that PG doctrines have diverted genuine pastoral care in South Africa away from Christ's teachings towards consumerism and spectacle. Therefore, families require a revival of gospel-centred theology that cultivates perseverance, stewardship, and intergenerational faith rooted in love rather than financial gain.

### **2.3.2 Doctrinal errors and theological misunderstandings**

The PG, which presents faith as a transactional mechanism for attaining health and riches, has received widespread criticism for distorting basic Christian doctrines and misrepresenting biblical teachings. Recent investigations and theological critiques have identified numerous important misconceptions and distortions.

#### **2.3.2.1 Transactional faith versus biblical stewardship**

Theology of prosperity is frequently criticised for presenting faith as a contract by which, if one gives money or makes positive confessions, material things will be added

unto them. As Orukotan (2024:66) puts it, the transactional faith worldview reduces God to a cosmic vending machine who must respond to donations made by the believer, rather than a sovereign Father. This reductionism is not consistent with the biblical principle that defines faith as trust within a relationship and obedience within a covenant.

PG preachers often quote verses such as Mark 11:24: "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it," as proof texts for guaranteed blessings, but neglect the teachings of Jesus on self-denial. They disregard Paul's lessons about being content in all situations and conditions (Phil 4:11-12). Jones and Woodbridge (2011:5) argue that this selective interpretation leads to a theology that is imbalanced and confuses God's promises with consumerist expectations. Piper (2005:18) also insists that real faith stays steadfast in Christ through troubles, not by receiving money.

The Bible does not permit the comparison of riches with heavenly favour. It expressly states that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10). As derived by Mofokeng and Kgatle (2019:5), what prosperity theology often does is abuse this premise by interpreting greed as 'faith.' However, in both the biblical model and academic view of stewardship, the use of resources expresses responsibility, accompanied by gratitude and an emphasis on trusting in God's sovereignty over outcomes (Wright, 2004:142). Stewardship affirms God as the owner of all things (Ps 24:1), while presenting believers as managers who must use their gifts and possessions to serve God and neighbour (Banda, 2020:15).

In addition, Scripture also teaches that the fulfilment of God's blessings – where there will be no poverty, pain, or suffering—belongs to the next life, in eternity with him (Rev 21:4; Isa 25:8; Rom 8:18; 1 Cor 2:9). Adamo (2021:3) further critiques prosperity preachers for twisting the eschatological hope by locating these blessings in the present age. Thus, prosperity theology appears to conflate the "already" and "not yet" dimensions of Christian eschatology, disregarding biblical truths that suffering and bearing fruit are integral to discipleship (Rom 8:17; Acts 14:22).

This pre-emptive claim of eschatological blessings destroys families spiritually by creating expectations that, when unmet, lead to despondency, guilt, and disillusionment in most cases; in fact, it is very consistent that if the "breakthrough"

does not come, people become despondent (Magezi & Banda, 2017:5). As Marossy (2022:49) argues, besides destabilising households through such theological error, it commodifies salvation by reducing Christian hope from eternal glory to temporal wealth.

Job 14:1 begins this biblical realism on suffering with these words: "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." Prosperity teaching mostly speaks about pain or ignores it, rather than preparing believers for hardships. This, however, has dire consequences in the lives of families stricken by sickness, poverty, or loss, as they begin to question their faith or presume divine rejection (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022b:98).

Biblical stewardship permits embracing suffering as part of sanctification and discipleship. As Nel (2021:23) has observed, challenges even strengthen the faith of believers towards God and shift their minds from perishable wealth to everlasting inheritance. This perspective argues that divine rewards are not measured in terms of earthly material wealth or physical health, but rather by the level of fidelity, resilience, and hope in Christ.

Contemporary scholars demonstrate that there is a global consensus critiquing the transactional style of faith which sits at the heart of prosperity theology. Lephoko (2024:9544) argues that, in Africa, prosperity teachings reduce – or rather recast – stewardship into mere transactional giving, thus minimising the communal principle of ubuntu. In North America, Bowler (2018:30) and Tudor (2019:73) show that it aligns too closely with consumer capitalism – faith to be had like any other good – undermining genuine discipleship. In Asia, Mathew (2022:43) notes that prosperity theology has mainly planted unrealistic hopes among poor families and then blames them for an absence of faith when expected results do not materialise.

Nor have all writers wholly cast aside prosperity. Anderson (2021:76) points out that "The stress it places on empowerment can yield psychological strength among the marginalized even when its theological foundations are utterly flawed." This goes to show that, though prosperity teaching can create some superficial motivation in the short run, it collapses miserably both biblically and practically.

### **2.3.2.2 Neglect of pain and the eternal perspective**

The reinterpretation of pain as evidence of deficient faith represents a fundamental flaw in PG teaching. This perspective stands in direct contradiction to Jesus' clear warning that "in this world you shall have tribulation" (Jn 16:33) and to the consistent witness of the New Testament regarding affliction as the means by which Christian character is formed (Rom 5:3-4). Bowler (2018:139) and Marossy (2022:53) indicate that it has, in fact, been argued that prosperity rhetoric erases such redeemability by collapsing future hope into present-tense assurances of both health and wealth, forsaking biblical patterns of cross-shaped discipleship for what Piper (2011) would term mere comforts – a spirituality that interprets comfort as consumerism.

Recent practical theologians from Africa and beyond show how prosperity preaching undermines pastoral care in the face of inevitable adversity. In the words of Mofokeng and Kgatle (2019:5)) and Banda (2021:13), this occurs in South African contexts where grief, unemployment, and chronic disease are often misinterpreted as results of spiritual failure. This complicates matters with guilt, inflicting further isolation on families at a time when communal cooperation is most needed. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:79) further argues that African Pentecostalism possesses indigenous resources of grieving, endurance, and communal solidarity, which are diminished if faith is solely regarded in terms of transactional causality. Where the Scriptures provide a grammar for faithful perseverance – "contentment in all circumstances" (Phil 4:11-12) – these providence frameworks are hollowed out by replacing them with techniques such as confession and seed-giving as the means of trusting divine providence (Wright, 2004:212; Banda, 2020:6).

Eschatology lies at the centre of the debate. The classic Christian hope orients believers towards the coming fullness of God's kingdom, in which every tear will be wiped away (Rev 21:4), while the "already-not-yet" pattern avoids absolutising present blessings (Nel, 2021: 6). By over-realising eschatology and promising tomorrow's fulfilment today, prosperity teaching distorts the scriptural understanding of weakness as the place where God's power is made perfect (2 Cor 12:9–10) and turns trials from opportunities for growth into accusations against one's faith (Tudor, 2019:73). Vondey (2020:375) maintains that ideal Pentecostal spirituality holds together both cruciform

endurance and charismatic expectancy; when the latter is neglected, spiritual development stalls.

The consequences are devastating for families in a pastoral context. When recovery, employment, or financial “breakthrough” does not occur, caregivers often internalise blame, and marriages come under strain due to differing interpretations of “blocked blessings” (Hobson *et al.*, 2021:415). Practical-theological responses therefore require a renewed focus on biblical lament (e.g., the Psalms), catechesis in stewardship and contentment, and communal practices that can acknowledge weakness without attaching moral judgement to it (Lephoko, 2024:9544; Anderson, 2021:78). According to Wright (2020:119), Christian hope avoids both fatalism and triumphalism; it is the ability to remain with those who weep while still expecting resurrection.

By trivialising suffering and reducing eternal hope to an immediate outcome, prosperity theology diminishes the deep discipleship found in the perseverance of familial faith; yet pain and glory can coexist within enduring hope, as reflected biblically in pastoral practice.

### **2.3.2.3 Prioritising materialism over spirituality**

A fundamental theological flaw in PG preaching lies in its elevation of material and physical conditions above spiritual values. As noted by Baron (2022:90) and Turgong (2023:10), since prosperity theology regards wealth, health, and other forms of secular achievement as the ultimate indicators of God’s favour, it diverts attention from seeking inner spiritual transformation towards the pursuit of material gain. In reversing the true order of priorities, it ultimately distorts the essence of biblical discipleship, substituting spiritual growth with consumerist expectations.

This is not a genuine reference to prosperity, as proponents of ‘prosperity’ preaching suggest when citing John 10:10. Prosperity theology interprets “abundant life” as financial success and good health, whereas, according to New Testament scholars, Jesus was actually referring to the fulfilment found in communion with God (Wright, 2010:144). Paul’s instruction that believers should “set their minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2) affirms the value of spiritual realities over material

possessions, directing focus towards eternal rather than immediate material reward. Through the PG, this great eternal message has been reduced to what Phillips (2015:33) fittingly calls “doctrinal poverty”, where Christ’s profound work of redemption is diminished to a formula for worldly success.

Recent studies confirm this concern. As noted by Balogun (2021:50), in many African contexts, the PG operates as a form of consumerism that has been spiritualised, since success is measured by material possessions rather than by holiness or service. According to Banda (2021:7), by reducing repentance, discipleship, and eschatological hope to mere fleeting happiness that could be found anywhere, this theology fosters spiritual malnutrition. Scholars such as these caution that interpreting faith through the lens of prosperity may hinder Christian maturity and leave families spiritually vulnerable when the anticipated breakthrough does not materialise.

Materialism promoted by prosperity teaching stands in stark contradiction to biblical warnings about worldliness. As John (2:16–17) in his Gospel writes, “Everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, comes not from the Father but from the world”. Prosperity messages effectively legitimise these desires by presenting them as blessings from God, suggesting that God will satisfy every want. In contrast, Marossy (2022:50) discusses the Johannine perspective, which regards such desires as temporary and encourages one to seek eternal life rather than the fulfilment of immediate wants. Piper (2011:67) contends that this misrepresentation turns greed into faith, cloaking covetousness with a spiritual pretext.

Materialism theologically weakens sanctification. As Nel (2021:21) states, true discipleship involves aligning with Christ in humility and sacrificial love, rather than the pursuit of accumulation. In her review of the history of the American prosperity movement, Bowler (2018:132) observed that this materialistic approach frequently leads to the commodification of grace – God becomes a vending machine, and believers mere petitioners seeking personal gain. This leads to what Tudor (2019:73) termed “consumer spirituality”: a form of spiritual consumption that may be satisfying but lacks genuine transformational depth.

From a pastoral perspective, prosperity theology undermines the spiritual foundation of families. Turgong (2023:3) found that families influenced by prosperity preaching

were more likely to enter into risky financial commitments, such as excessive tithing or “seed sowing”, in anticipation of immediate rewards. When these expectations were not fulfilled, disappointment followed, accompanied by guilt and a decline in faith. Lephoko (2024:9544) assert that this trend disrupts African communal values of solidarity, replacing them with individualistic pursuits and competition centred on displays of wealth. Prosperity theology fosters environments of envy and rivalry instead of nurturing supportive Christian fellowship, and consequently contributes to spiritual division within families.

The materialistic focus of PG preaching misrepresents Christian priorities. To claim that blessings from heaven are signified by wealth and health contradicts Jesus’s call to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). Wright (2020:46) describes biblical abundant life as being found not in material possessions, but in deep relationship with God – a richness far greater than worldly offerings. Since PG theology endorses secular ambitions, it leads to superficial spirituality. As a result, Christians often feel not only disappointed, but also misled in their journey of discipleship.

#### **2.3.2.4 Exploitation and selective utilisation of Scripture**

The tendency towards selective use of Scripture, which not only distorts biblical doctrine but also enables followers to be exploited, is one of the characteristics that serves to define PG theology. A significant moment occurred when Hinn (2019:13) publicly recanted portions of prosperity teaching, revealing how fundamentally flawed the movement is and how vulnerable it is to misuse for personal gain. His admission demonstrated how prosperity leaders frequently choose specific passages from the Bible to justify wealth and lead extravagant lives, while disregarding the broader biblical narrative that strongly advocates justice, compassion, and care for the vulnerable.

Profitability preaching often uses verses such as Malachi 3:10 to encourage “seed-sowing” and tithing, but largely ignores verses like Deuteronomy 15:11, which remind God’s people to “open your hand to the poor.” When this verse is omitted, according to Nwankwo (2019:21), it has the effect of individualising guilt and silencing inequality by redefining poverty as a spiritual flaw rather than recognising it as a social reality resulting from structural injustice. As Jesus said in Matthew 19:23, wealth is an

obstacle to entering his Kingdom, thereby indicating sympathy with the less privileged contrary to the misreading described by Nel (2023:350). Thus, the Bible does not favour the prosperity preachers' message over humility, generosity, and solidarity, and to do so undermines the integrity of Christian discipleship.

Recent academics have intensified this criticism. Wariboko (2020:118) argues that prosperity theology encourages "scriptural consumerism", in which texts are commodified to maintain the religious market, with little regard for coherence or context. Miller (2025:50) notes that prosperity preachers employ deliberately reductionist hermeneutical techniques, reducing Scripture to "success formulas" that serve only to reinforce the preacher's authority and ensure the congregation's dependence for promised miracles. In this way, leadership retains financial and spiritual control over believers, manipulating their hopes and fears.

This selective reading of the Bible is closely linked to material exploitation. As observed by Heuser (2016:3), prosperity churches in South Africa require high tithes and "prophetic seed offerings" from financially struggling households, pressuring them to make payments in hopes of upward mobility amid unemployment and poverty. Theologically, such practices undermine biblical stewardship by channelling support towards sustaining the lavish lifestyles of church leaders rather than assisting others. The net effect is what Asamoah-Gyadu (2021:33) describes as the 'sacralisation' of wealth, where monetary gifts are treated as inviolable acts of faith, which in turn shields leaders from accountability.

From a biblical-theological perspective, this selective use of Scripture reveals how the radical demands of discipleship can be obscured. Blomberg (2013: 55) gives Jesus catalogues warnings as to the spiritual dangers of wealth (Lk 12:15–21) and, in addition to service ministry, models humility towards all and inclusion of the marginalised (Mk 10:45). Togarasei (2020b:76) noted that when such precepts are ignored, prosperity preachers propagate a gospel that is even shorter, further alienating the poor, whom Christ made His priority. Marossy (2022:50) also observed that the hermeneutics of prosperity repackages greed and excess as blessings from heaven; thus, it makes justified systemic inequity appear legitimate because it comes draped in spirituality.

This exploitative environment more broadly impacts the witness of the church. Suh (2021:89) asserts that the selective application of the Bible in the PG reduces Christian integrity, as it presents a partial and inadequate message that fails to recognise pressing matters in society, where issues such as unemployment, poverty, and corruption are rampant. The church stands on shaky ground, running a risk of becoming an accomplice in sustaining inequality through theological deception and silence, rather than becoming salt and light (Matt 5:13–16).

In sum, the PG weakens and ruins the social and spiritual witness of the church through its selective, exploitative interpretation of Scripture. It fosters cultures of deceit and indolence because wealth is made the ultimate end, while biblical injunctions for justice are set aside, and injustice is spiritualised. That theology undermines the gospel in its comprehensiveness – by humility, by generosity, by solidarity with the oppressed and impoverished – in addition to misrepresenting biblical anthropology.

#### **2.3.2.5 Distortion of the atonement of Christ**

The PG frequently presents a parallel between Christ's atonement and assurances of physical healing, material prosperity, and personal success – a theological distortion some regard as both unreasonable and damaging (Bowler, 2018:102; Medina & Cornelio, 2021:76). Biblically, the atonement concerns humanity's sin, reconciliation between humanity and God, and salvation for eternity. Prosperity teachings diminish the significance of the cross by recasting it as a means to immediate material benefit, ostensibly obtained through faith or financial offerings, and by asserting that believers are exempt from suffering or adversity (Hee, 2025:235; Marimbe, 2024:102). Joyce Meyer, once a prominent proponent, expressed this idea by framing faith as a guarantee against hardship – a stance she later conceded lacked sound theological foundation (Medina & Cornelio, 2021:76). Such an interpretation not only minimises the redemptive work of the cross but also shifts the focus from Christlikeness and communal responsibility to personal comfort and trivial ambitions (Adeyemo, 2019:112; Bowler, 2018:103).

Orthodox Christian doctrine, meanwhile, situates the atonement within a broader framework of humility, perseverance, and hope directed toward everlasting life. As Peter affirms, "In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope". Yet

long before, the Preacher cautioned, "Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied" (Adamo, 2021:3; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:23). Recent studies suggest that the PG overlooks this profound biblical perspective – that human suffering is both redemptive and formative. As Olunlade (2025:48) asserts, such a gospel leads to superficiality by encouraging believers to 'measure' God's approval by the extent of their material or physical blessings, thereby discouraging the patient endurance fundamental to genuine Christian discipleship.

It is a theological error of great consequence to family and community. By endorsing the transactional view between salvation and blessings, gospel teachings propagate self-centeredness, spiritual dependency on church leaders, and unrealistic expectations that usually end in disappointment accompanied by guilt and strife with others (Nyambo, 2023:101; Boaheng *et al.*, 2023:67). Families that perpetuate these theological systems illustrate what Kinoti *et al.* (2024:68) describe as reducing God to a "divine ATM", a notion that undermines his providential care while promoting materialistic expressions of faith at the expense of intergenerational discipleship.

PG theologians distort the atonement and tend to misrepresent the cross by putting temporal gain above eternal significance, such that superficial, self-centred faith is the result. Biblical Christianity teaches that one has to go through adversities, grow spiritually, and attain heavenly goods rather than earthly wealth and riches (Matt 6:19-20; Adamo, 2021:3; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:23). Marimbe (2024:102) and Hee (2025:235) indicate that this teaching has to be critically analysed towards a Christocentric understanding of the atonement from which individual and family spiritual health benefits.

### **2.3.3 Emotional and psychological effects of the PG**

PG messaging may at first inspire optimism, hope, and motivational support, but it eventually leaves individuals and families emotionally and psychologically vulnerable when the expected material or health-related blessing does not come forth (Goliam, 2013:111; Nyambo, 2023:99). According to Boaheng *et al.* (2023:1356), prosperity theology contradicts biblical teachings on suffering, contentment, and giving by relating spiritual value to monetary success. This distortion evokes a range of emotional responses.

Goliama (2013:111) says that many believers internalise the theological principle that if wealth or health does not manifest, then there is some spiritual lack, thus creating cycles of anxiety and self-condemnation when reality does not yield to expectation. Adeyemo (2019:45) shares that where a relationship between faith and material results exists, this can precipitate chronic stress in parents or primary earners who feel obligated to show devotion through sacrificial offerings, mostly at the expense of their children's education, healthcare, and general family well-being.

Prosperity preaching does not permit open discussion about failure, loss, or money problems. Nyambo (2023:99) says that it portrays those things as signs of weak faith. Such pressure, both social and spiritual, can drive families apart, block coping mechanisms, and build shame. Children raised in such conditions usually develop a transactional view of God as a heavenly source who grants blessings based on their performance rather than as a loving presence in all moments of life (Kinoti *et al.*, 2024:68; Marimbe, 2024:102). Twisted views can create emotional dissonance, spiritual uncertainty, and weakened family togetherness, thereby reducing individual as well as communal resilience.

Recent empirical studies support these claims. Burrell (2020:12) found that greater exposure to prosperity teachings increases the risk of despair and disillusionment, particularly among low-income households when anticipated returns on their investments do not materialise. Hobson *et al.* (2021:420) argue that this results in a cycle of optimism and disillusionment, which undermines spiritual and psychological well-being. Turgong (2023:29) notes that waiting for favours now commonly linked by much of the population to financial offerings heightens stress, especially among poorer followers.

Boaheng *et al.* (2023:1358) observe that the emotional consequences can alter family dynamics; parental guilt and stress contribute to marital conflict and affect parent-child relationships. Children develop a conditional understanding of love from God, which can lead to spiritual dissonance and, at times, resistance to religious practices. According to Adeyemo (2019:47) and Kinoti *et al.* (2024:68), these psychological challenges may persist into adulthood, shaping attitudes towards God, faith, and interpersonal trust.

The result is that the PG's association of material wealth with spiritual devotion often disrupts true discipleship and family well-being, creating anxiety, guilt, humiliation, and emotional discord. Where such patterns appear, this points to a clear need for pastors to refocus their teaching, giving greater attention to what the Bible says about contentment, suffering, God's loving care, as well as resilience and emotional literacy within church communities (Nyambo, 2023:101; Marimbe, 2024:102).

### **2.3.3.1 Guilt and humiliation associated with the lack of blessings**

The PG holds that money, wealth, and physical health are indicators of God's favour, whereas poverty and illness indicate a lack of faith, spiritual failure, or even a curse. This teaching can cause tremendous guilt and shame in Christians who do not receive the promised blessings (Goliam, 2013:111). Such believers may internalise their failure as a personal or spiritual flaw, or blame it on family curses and bewitchment, exacerbating their feelings of inadequacy. Nyambo (2023:99) contends that prosperity theology prepares individuals to perceive their lived reality as a product of their own faith performance, which creates cycles of self-blame when expectations are not met. This individualised responsibility shifts the burden of systemic, social, or health challenges onto believers, creating the perception that their misfortunes are self-inflicted due to insufficient faith.

The pressure to continually "perform" faith through sacrificial giving, positive confessions, and public displays of devotion often leads to feelings of spiritual inadequacy, particularly when hardships persist. Boaheng *et al.* (2023:1366) note that the PG's narrow association between financial success and divine favour creates psychological burdens resulting in guilt, humiliation, and disillusionment. This theological approach also neglects biblical teachings regarding endurance, suffering, and God's ongoing presence during times of trial (Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:9-10). Gunda (2018:115) contend that prosperity-driven messages disregard the redemptive value of suffering and ignore the biblical witness that faith does not insulate Christians from adversity, but rather sustains them through it.

Contemporary literature expands upon this critique by noting how PG messages frequently intensify mental health challenges. Togarasei (2024:147) elucidates that equating blessing with wealth increases internalised stigma among the poor, causing

them to view themselves as spiritually deficient. Hensen and Cilliers (2018:28) further explain that unfulfilled promises of blessings often result in spiritual fatigue and alienation from the church community, as individuals interpret their difficulties as signs of divine disapproval. Kgatle (2021:3) warns that within pastoral contexts, the PG fosters a "toxic spirituality," wherein the inability to achieve success is attributed to faulty faith, depriving Christians of assurance in God's love.

Prosperity theology reduces the Christian faith to a results-driven pursuit, causing significant psychological harm and compromising the church's pastoral responsibility to affirm God's unconditional presence. Rather than fostering resilience and unity in the face of hardship, it places undue pressure to achieve success, leaving many disheartened when hopes remain unfulfilled (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022b:89). This cycle of unmet promises, self-blame, and humiliation deeply affects the spiritual and emotional well-being of families, making a more pastorally sensitive and biblically grounded approach essential.

#### **2.3.3.2 Depression or disappointment brought on by unfulfilled expectations**

More scholars agree that the constant infusion of PG messaging leads to overly confident and unrealistic futures. As Kaczor (2015:15) and Nyambo (2023:101) describe, it is a message that builds up an expectation culture where believers are now waiting for financial breakthroughs to come very soon, miraculous healings, and success in all endeavours. When these promises do not materialise, a large number of the congregation fall into disappointment, despondency, or spiritual malaise. As Hobson *et al.* (2021:420) contend, emotional disintegration frequently manifests in acts of humiliation within church institutions toward those perceived as lacking in visible blessings.

Empirical research supports these conclusions. Investigations conducted at the University of Toronto demonstrate that exposure to PG sermons leads individuals to believe that above-average success and well-being are attainable regardless of their circumstances (Zulak, 2018:1; Hobson *et al.*, 2021:420). Turgong (2023:21) clarifies that when such elevated expectations remain unfulfilled, emotions such as sadness, spiritual exhaustion, and withdrawal from faith communities commonly ensue. Such

experiences erode inner resilience by perpetuating a cycle of hope followed by disappointment.

Contemporary scholars offer a broader perspective. Hensen and Cilliers (2018:29) assert that the unfulfilled promises of miracles principally induce “existential despair” by prompting questions regarding the justice and even presence of God, while Kgatle (2021:4) contends that prosperity theology cultivates what he terms a “fragile faith.” Such faith disintegrates during periods of adversity because it is rooted in transactions rather than divine grace. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:83) notes that these teachings hinder the attainment of spiritual maturity by encouraging an entitlement mentality instead of nurturing perseverance amid challenges. Collectively, this critique clarifies how prosperity theology can inflict psychological harm and erode communal faith within the church, particularly when its promises are perceived as manipulative or deceitful.

Such theology fails to accurately reflect the biblical narrative of suffering and the spiritual presence afforded by God in times of need. Paul’s words in Philippians 4:11–13 and Jesus’ teaching in John 16:33 affirm that Christian faith does not guarantee deliverance from suffering; rather, it calls on believers to cultivate contentment and draw strength from Christ regardless of their material circumstances. When not viewed from this perspective, prosperity preaching reduces the gospel to a transactional proposition, leaving Christians vulnerable to disillusionment and doubt when outcomes diverge from their expectations (Gunda, 2018:116; Togarasei, 2024:148).

Unmet expectations arising from PG teachings present not only a pastoral challenge but, more significantly, a theological crisis when disillusioned believers attempt to reconcile their experiences with the false promises they have accepted. There needs to be a move towards a more comprehensive theology of suffering and resilience – one that enables churches to respond effectively to growing discontent and emotional harm among their congregants.

#### **2.3.3.3 Anxiety over ongoing giving despite financial difficulties**

The belief that financial donations—often made at personal sacrifice – are necessary to receive divine blessings is central to PG teachings. This theological concept carries

both psychological and financial consequences, particularly for the poor, as observed by Bowler (2018:33) and Bishau (2013:69). Most prosperity preachers present giving as a spiritual investment, encouraging members to contribute their resources by fostering enthusiasm and optimism about imminent returns. While such messages may initially inspire hope among believers, unfulfilled promises can result in a cycle of declining finances, increasing anxiety, and spiritual guilt.

According to Hobson *et al.* (2021:420), this theology steadily accumulates "block blessings", or luck, for those who do not give or whose giving is considered insufficient, a situation they claim does not occur. This keeps followers in what can be described as a cycle of nervous generosity, where continuous giving is driven by fear of spiritual loss rather than by genuine faith. Kgatle (2021:5) explicates that this theology persuades Christians to give more than they might otherwise wish by promising multiplication through divine means, leading to exploitative dynamics within the pastoral context. Hensen and Cilliers (2018:29) affirm that the "financial trauma" largely results from unmet expectations stemming from unreciprocated generosity.

Recent critiques draw greater attention to the ethical dimension. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022b:89) remarked that prosperity preaching commodifies faith and manipulates vulnerable groups – particularly women and the poor – into giving disproportionately. This theological stance undermines biblical stewardship and distorts the true nature of divine blessing. Togarasei (2024:148) expresses that a focus on transactional giving reduces collective responsibility and places an economic strain on households, as believers redirect resources from family welfare to meet church demands.

From a biblical standpoint, manipulative giving contravenes the apostolic instruction that generosity must arise from voluntary cheerfulness rather than compulsion or fear (2 Cor 9:7). The biblical principle of giving is defined not by anxiety or self-interest, but rather by confidence in God's provision, sharing with others in their need. In contrast, prosperity teaching turns giving into an act to demonstrate faith, thereby sustaining cycles of financial pressure and spiritual pain.

Thus, the anxiety generated by PG donation practices becomes not just an individual matter but also a pastoral and theological issue. This brings into critical consideration the ecclesiastical obligation to safeguard vulnerable congregants, to advocate biblical

stewardship, and to emphasise God's grace as being unconditional and not related to any financial exchanges.

### **2.3.4 Disruption of family dynamics and relationships**

The PG's focus on material gain and transactional faith intensifies familial tensions, often disrupting important relational dynamics within households. By advancing the belief that divine favour is directly linked to financial success and unwavering faith, it places unnecessary pressure on individual church members and their families. This association of wealth with spiritual standing can lead to feelings of disappointment, guilt, and conflict, ultimately weakening genuine spiritual growth and stable family relationships.

#### **2.3.4.1 Strained marriages and parent-child conflicts due to financial giving**

PG teachings place continual pressure on families to prioritise tithes, freewill offerings, and seed sowing above fulfilling basic household needs. These payments are described as acts of faith and allegiance to God. When limited resources are redirected to churches, this often leads to tension within families, as described vividly by Bowler (2018:33) and Adeleye (2019:57). A parent who insists on paying tithes instead of meeting the medical or educational needs of their children risks fostering resentment and undermining trust within the family. PG teachings may also create conflict between spouses involved in budgeting, as one partner may interpret reduced giving as spiritual failure; this discord contradicts biblical guidance on shared stewardship and household care (1 Tim 5:8).

Ayantayo (2010:210) notes that prosperity teachings elevate sacrificial giving above relational responsibility, suggesting that financial sacrifice is an expression of faith, even when it compromises the family's well-being. Hensen and Cilliers (2018:30) aptly describe this as "economic spiritualism," where economic decisions are spiritualised to the detriment of family cohesion. Recent research by Kgatle (2021:5) reveals that the pressure to give, even during financial hardship, has contributed to marital breakdowns in some Pentecostal contexts, as one spouse may accuse the other of lacking faith or being financially careless. Such beliefs not only add economic pressure

but also erode the trust and partnership essential to healthy relationships. Parent-child relationships are similarly affected.

Togarasei (2024:149) observes that children from affluent homes may view the church as competing with their family for scarce resources, resulting in lasting resentment towards both religion and parents. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022b:92) notes that such tensions weaken intergenerational trust and spiritual formation by teaching children that faith necessitates deprivation, rather than love and care. The constant expectation to prioritise church giving can fragment family unity, with parents appearing to value service to church demands above familial responsibilities.

From a pastoral perspective, these disputes emphasise how inaccurate prosperity theology is in its promises of God's reward as an outcome of giving. Rather than love, trust, and common objectives, prosperity teaching can turn stewardship into a source of quarrel. Authentic Christian stewardship is grounded in loving care, mutual accountability and solidarity, rather than financial compulsion (Gunda, 2018:116). By idealising sacrifice without adequately considering relational and domestic well-being, prosperity preaching threatens the very basis of family life that the church seeks to safeguard and nurture.

#### **2.3.4.2 Neglecting familial responsibilities in pursuit of material blessings**

The PG encourages the pursuit of wealth at the total neglect of other important family responsibilities and domestic peace. Parents may advance the notion that since they are providers, they have fulfilled all righteousness. This does not take into account the emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions of family life. Hinn (2019:15), following Jones and Woodbridge (2017:20), contends that while 'prosperity parenting' prioritises material success over the cultivation of virtue, moral integrity, love, and faith, it paradoxically substitutes wealth for parental presence and guidance. Children in households focused on wealth may perceive their parents as disinterested or unappreciative, potentially interpreting this approach as a form of spiritual loss.

Medina and Cornelio (2021:76) remark that this misplaced focus often leads families to abandon long-term healthcare and education plans in favour of risky financial 'faith investments', speculative business ventures, unaffordable housing projects, or

church-sponsored schemes that promise miraculous returns. Such patterns not only perpetuate cycles of instability but also undermine families' abilities to provide care and support for future generations. As Nyambo (2023:104) reiterates, in these prosperous environments, the pressure to succeed creates a constant demand for parents to assess themselves based on performance and outward appearances, rather than the quality of their relationships, thereby weakening strong family bonds.

Speaking from a pastoral perspective, Hensen and Cilliers (2018:30) assert that the PG leads to "spiritual displacements" in homes, as it prioritises material ambitions over family obligations. Kgatle (2021:6) contends that the PG does not reflect biblical models of stewardship, which strive to balance provision with nurture, love, and discipleship. As a result, children are more likely to associate Christianity with deprivation rather than relationship and spiritual abundance. This demonstrates how teaching that centres on wealth not only distorts theological priorities but also jeopardises the transmission of faith to new generations, as Asamoah-Gyadu (2022b:94) suggests.

According to the Bible, this misconstrues the teachings of Jesus, who cautioned against storing up treasures on earth, where they are exposed to theft and decay (Matt 6:19–21). The comprehensive nurturing of children in faith, love, and discipline defines genuine Christian parenting, as opposed to merely providing material goods. As Gunda (2018:116) points out, prosperity theology disregards this biblical responsibility, thereby reducing the well-being of a family to an economic measurement rather than a covenantal calling.

By equating blessings solely with wealth, PG teachings shift attention away from the holistic care of families, promoting financial ambitions at the expense of relational stability and spiritual growth. This deficiency undermines the very foundation of family life and calls for a pastoral response that places biblical stewardship, love, and comprehensive nurture at the centre of Christian homes.

#### **2.3.4.3 Family divisions when faith and teachings create rifts**

PG theology often causes divisions within families and disrupts livelihoods when some members do not accept its core principles. Children raised in prosperity doctrine

households may choose not to pay tithes, take part in specific rituals, or meet faith-based expectations, and can quickly be accused of spiritual defiance (Hinn, 2019:16; Ayantayo, 2010:210). Medina and Cornelio (2021:76) and Bishau (2013:67) note that this mirrors the family conflicts experienced during Jesus's ministry, when his mission did not align with his family's expectations, illustrating the strain that differing beliefs can place on close relationships.

In extreme cases, spouses or siblings may distance themselves from relatives who question or reject prosperity teachings, viewing their uncertainty or reluctance as a potential risk to collective well-being, spiritual status, or divine approval. Nyambo (2023:106) mentions that such situations are common within Pentecostal settings, describing them as "faith-enforced conformity," with familial bonds being set aside in favour of adherence to prosperity teachings. Hensen and Cilliers (2018:30) argue that the highly transactional and materialistic nature of prosperity theology intensifies these challenges, as family unity becomes dependent on participating in wealth-centred religious practices.

They stand in sharp contrast to biblical models of unity, which are rooted in relationships, humility, patience, and reconciliation (Eph 4:2–3). Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:79) avers that prosperity preaching places greater emphasis on doctrine rather than fostering grace within relationships. With this approach, transactional spirituality often takes the place of mutual support. Consequently, households may become emotionally and financially destabilised; children and spouses may experience spiritual coercion, internalise guilt, and face strained communication. Trust and unity within the family are weakened.

According to Andrews (2024:17), restoring healthy family dynamics requires a renewed focus on biblical principles of stewardship, contentment, and love that is not dependent on material success or outward displays of faith. Gunda (2018:117) argues that pastoral interventions should, alongside theological instruction, cultivate an environment where diverse expressions of faith can coexist without harming family relationships. The divisiveness caused by wealth presents both theological and pastoral challenges, necessitating thoughtful teaching to harmonise faith practices with relational and familial responsibilities.

### **2.3.5 Spiritual dependency on church leaders in PG contexts**

#### **2.3.5.1 Blind allegiance to prosperity preachers**

PG teachings frequently centralise authority around charismatic church leaders, particularly founders or senior pastors, cultivating uncritical loyalty among followers. Congregants are often conditioned to regard pastors as intermediaries whose instructions – spiritual, financial, or personal – are treated as synonymous with God's will (Jones, 2014:35). Such dynamics transcend conventional pastoral leadership and, as noted by Maina *et al.* (2018:37) and Torbet (1969:585), create a form of cult-like dependency wherein any challenge to the leader's integrity is construed as rebellion against God, commonly justified through selective scriptural references, such as 1 Samuel 15:23.

Certain prosperity churches formalise this dependency through roles such as “armour-bearers”, requiring members to attend to pastors' personal needs by managing finances, paying school fees for their children, running errands, or supplying groceries, all under the pretence of spiritual service (Jones, 2014:35; Maina *et al.*, 2018:37). Such practices blur the distinction between ministry and personal servitude, fostering conditions conducive to exploitation. Kgatle (2021:7) maintains that such unquestioning loyalty weakens accountability structures, enabling leaders to prioritise personal wealth and luxurious lifestyles over the well-being of their congregants.

Recent work emphasises the psychological aspects of this reliance. Nyambo (2023:108) notes that adherents frequently internalise the notion that disobedience or scepticism towards the pastor signifies spiritual failure, resulting in fear, worry, and suppressed critical thinking. Hensen and Cilliers (2018:30) further observe that this dynamic diminishes congregants' individual engagement with scripture, as the pastor's interpretation is seen as authoritative without contestation. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022b:99) cautions that the excessive centralisation of spiritual authority in one individual promotes hierarchical structures that prioritise loyalty over Christ-centred discipleship, potentially transforming faith communities into instruments of manipulation rather than environments for spiritual development.

This culture of blind devotion contrasts dramatically with biblical concepts of accountability, servant leadership, and reciprocal submission (Matt 20:25-28; Gal 6:2). By supplanting devotion to Christ with loyalty to a leader, PG churches risk normalising exploitation, financial abuse, and spiritual coercion. Gunda (2018:118) posits that pastoral oversight must prioritise openness, collaborative governance, and ethical accountability to avert the entrenchment of authoritarian tendencies and protect the spiritual and material welfare of congregants.

In conclusion, the centralisation of authority among PG leaders engenders unquestioning loyalty, exploits spiritual aspirations for personal benefit, and undermines biblical purity. Restoring Christ-centred leadership necessitates reaffirming scriptural authority, promoting theological knowledge among the congregation, and instituting accountability frameworks to avert exploitation.

### **2.3.5.2 Undermining of personal faith development and discernment**

PG charismatics tend to focus on leaders and less on the Word, something that can actually retard the spiritual growth of Christians. In such cases, discipleship becomes more of a practice of ritual repeating faith confessions, glossolalia, or following certain “spiritual steps” and does not involve developing a relationship with God (Torbet, 1969:585; Jones, 2014:35). Jones (2014:35) notes that members are actually taught according to the 9 Marks report to depend on pastors for all spiritual understanding, thereby sidelining independent Bible study, thought, and discernment.

It encourages a works-based faith. Salvation, benefits, and even one’s supposed spiritual state depend on meeting the requirements set by the pastor, rather than on grace through faith, theological understanding, or personal devotion (1 Pet 2:9; Nel, 2023:350; Jones, 2014:33). Over time, members lose their ability to critically assess teachings and church rituals, which leaves them vulnerable to theological distortion and spiritual abuse (Maina *et al.*, 2018:37). This reliance fosters what Togarasei (2024:150) has described as a form of spiritual infantilism, where the leader’s authority is accepted without discernment, rather than encouraging the development of independent theological thought.

A recent study discusses the long-term effects of this approach. As noted by Turgong (2023:122), when believers' engagement with Scripture is mediated solely by a pastor, not only is spiritual growth hindered, but faith also becomes superficial, allowing outward performance to take precedence over genuine transformation. Kgatle (2021:8) maintains that prioritising the authority of individual study by the pastoral community can undermine confidence in God's accessibility, reduce appreciation for the priesthood of all Christians, and discourage personal responsibility for spiritual growth.

Asamoah-Gyadu (2022b:101) claims that genuine Christian praxis must entail discernment, personal study, and the communal exercise of spiritual gifts, rather than simply following any human leader without question. The more PG teachings elevate the authority of the pastor over personal engagement with Scripture, the more they depart from the fundamental principles of discipleship through grace and communicative discernment between God and His people. This causes the congregation to perform rituals uncritically and be obedient without engaging in thoughtful reflection, theological development, or genuine spiritual growth. Jones (2014:37) asserts that such dependency removes the believer from the liberating aspects of the gospel, allowing doctrinal error and spiritual manipulation to persist.

#### **2.3.5.3 Loss of faith in God following any health-related disappointments**

When promised blessings fail to materialise, the dissatisfaction initially directed at leadership often shifts towards God, as followers internalise their unmet expectations. Mirroring the transactional approach, the PG advances a faith methodology predicated on the anticipation of tangible outcomes. Crises emerge when prayers remain unanswered, as believers begin to feel spiritually abandoned. Hinn (2019:17) and Nel (2023:350) advance that veracity can be seen in the fact that people who live in disease, poverty, or unemployment still consider this to be an act of divine rejection against them praying devoutly and expressing all rituals of faith.

Examples of people who, after years of "confessing healing" without tangible results, sank into deep melancholy and anxiety with a broken faith are provided by Anderson (2021:2). Togarasei (2024:150) asserts that persistent spiritual disappointment can result in a form of spiritual trauma, characterised by a diminished trust in God and an

increased reliance on human intermediaries. Such experiences are not reflected in the biblical record and, in fact, contradict it, as the scriptures demonstrate God's faithfulness during times of suffering (2 Cor 12:9-10). Furthermore, this tendency opposes biblical guidance that cautions against reducing faith to formulaic expectations (Eccl 8:14-15; Ayantayo, 2010:210; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:105).

Transactional interpretations reduce the spiritual experience to the level of a means for personal advantage, making believers vulnerable if the vicissitudes of life continue even after consistent affirmations of trust. Such methodologies, as noted by Turgong (2023:131), result in conditional spirituality because hope is based on explicit results rather than on God's ultimate sovereignty and providence. Again, Kgatle (2021:9) notes that this vulnerability is heightened by authoritarian systems in PG movements whereby individual trust in God is replaced by reliance on human leaders whose instructions are equated with divine intention.

Turgong (2023:27) notes that this type of transactional approach diminishes spiritual resilience, rendering religion more performative than relational. According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2022b:104), restoring robust spirituality begins with reorienting adherents toward the sufficiency of Christ by nurturing both individual and communal discernment (Acts 17:11), and by returning to a scriptural understanding that God is sovereign over outcomes. Gunda (2018:118) contends that pastoral care should centre on cultivating enduring trust in God, teaching believers to integrate hardship into a maturity grounded in grace received through spirituality, rather than associating religion solely with material or physical rewards.

Ultimately, the absence of trust in God when hopes for health or wealth are unmet demonstrates the theological errors and pastoral challenges inherent in PG teachings. Effective support should prioritise relational faith, the priesthood of all believers, and a confident trust in God's enduring presence and purpose during times of difficulty.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

Chapter 2 opened with the researcher positioning himself within the context of the study by reflecting on his childhood and pastoral experiences that inspired him to undertake this research. Drawing from worldviews on the detriments of the PG on

families' spiritual well-being across regions – from North America and Europe to Asia and Africa – the PG is observed to displace traditional spiritual values, mostly replacing Christ-centred discipleship with material ambition and individualism. This undermines authentic discipleship, fostering works-based faith. Where families' values are based on sacrifice, it leads to theological confusion, spiritual burnout, and fractured family spirituality.

This chapter addressed a critical distortion of the gospel that has given rise to further theological misconceptions and doctrinal errors. It explored how the PG emerged within this framework, promoting the belief that steadfast faith and generous giving will compel God to reward believers with material wealth and physical health. Much as it has attracted many families experiencing economic hardship, this eventually leaves them deeply disappointed, even more financially strained, and spiritually confused when the promises do not come true. Attention was given to how this theology further distorts Christian doctrines by replacing, rather than emphasising, aspects such as spiritual growth, grace, or communal responsibility, with transactional expectations regarding wealth and success. It attempts a critical appraisal of how PG theology is essentially oppressive by victimising vulnerable populations through the commodification of prayer and faith, and by the mere fact that it stigmatises suffering, thereby reducing family and community resilience.

Drawing on current research, the chapter explored the emotional and psychological impact of the PG on families, as many believers internalise feelings of failure and guilt when blessings do not materialise as expected. It was found that this can lead to emotional and psychological challenges such as guilt, shame, and anxiety over continuous giving, which may also serve as an indicator of levels of belief and trust in the church.

The chapter also examined how prioritising material gain disrupts family relationships, increasing tensions and leading to strained marriages and parent-child conflicts. Financial giving, especially when tithing is prioritised over essential family needs, often contributes to these strains.

Additionally, spiritual dependency within families was also reviewed, especially where PG teachings undermine authentic discipleship, encourage authoritarian church

structures, and discourage critical thinking – particularly when church leaders hold unchallenged authority. Furthermore, the socio-cultural factors that lead families to adopt these teachings were considered, such as economic instability, migration, and the search for hope in the midst of hardship.

The next chapter explores why families around the world are drawn to churches that preach the PG.

## **CHAPTER 3    ATTRACTION OF FAMILIES TO PROSPERITY GOSPEL-PREACHING CHURCHES**

### **3.1    Introduction**

The chapter examines the underlying causes and contributing factors behind the increasing influence of PG teachings, exploring why families are drawn to these messages and the subsequent effects on their spiritual well-being. It outlines the second objective of identifying the factors that attract families to PG teachings, answering the question, "Why are families attracted to PG preaching churches?" This is achieved through a review of relevant literature and existing studies that explore why families have recently shown greater interest in churches that promote PGs.

Predominantly led by charismatic leaders, these churches welcome members from all social classes but are particularly appealing to economically vulnerable groups; unemployment, poverty, and social insecurity are identified as the primary motivations. The chapter examines how challenges and hardship shape spiritual choices, contributing to the global expansion of gospel churches that offer messages of hope and faith, while also taking advantage of people during times of crisis.

### **3.2    Attraction of families to PG-preaching churches worldwide**

#### **3.2.1    Brief overview**

The PG, now a global religious movement, is often associated with the promise of health, wealth, and general success as signs of God's blessing. Its widespread appeal across diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds reflects both its adaptability and the deep optimism it fosters. Families seek not only spiritual guidance in prosperity-preaching churches, but also respond to explicit assurances of support for socio-economic, psychological, and existential challenges. Drawing on recent scholarship and critical perspectives from North America, Asia, Africa, and other regions where PG churches have achieved remarkable popularity among families, this section explores how prosperity theology serves simultaneously as a source of empowerment and a means of exploitation.

According to Corbin (2005:344) and Bowler (2013:70), the PG finds a particularly receptive context in North America, especially within the USA, where families are influenced by consumerism and individualism linked to the "American Dream". I agree with these scholars that theological messages about divine favour, which encourage material success, resonate with families seeking affirmation for their personal ambitions and social mobility. As Bowler notes (2013:70), most American families regard financial blessings as a clear sign of God's favour – a perception reinforced by media-savvy pastors who blend religious teaching with motivational self-help rhetoric. Similarly, Hoover and Echchaibi (2014:212) explain that prosperity preachers often draw on elements of consumer marketing, effectively using branding and aspirational imagery to appeal to family aspirations for social status and upward mobility.

In Canada, the growing attraction of families to churches that preach prosperity is observable within immigrant communities of African and Caribbean backgrounds. The pull factors are not only based on theological promises of blessings, but also social capital embedded within church networks that provide community support, cultural continuity, and a shared framework for navigating diasporic life (Wilkinson, 2016:375; Mwaura, 2008:198). As mentioned by Adogame (2013:144), prosperity theology articulates the shared values among these families, who seek both material stability and spiritual affirmation. This approach resonates particularly within a mainstream society that offers them few opportunities for meaningful upward mobility.

Critically, scholars have observed that PG theology continues to conceal broader structural inequalities. As articulated by Jones and Woodbridge (2011:45), with whom I agree, this particular theology individualises economic success – if you have not succeeded, you simply do not have enough faith – rather than considering more significant factors such as systems that perpetuate poverty, racial discrimination, or unequal access to resources. Furthermore, as Meyer (2004:89) argues, such a theological approach operates within the practice of religious “moralising capitalism”, diverting attention from the real issue of social justice while embedding neoliberal values into religious practice. Goliama (2013:111) and Nyambo (2023:99) reiterate that families exposed to such teachings may internalise guilt and spiritual disillusionment when promises fail to materialise, resulting in conflicts, stress and a breakdown of cohesion within the family unit. The concern raised by these two

scholars holds true, as many families experience conflict and stress when expectations are not fulfilled.

Not all scholars share the perspective that the PG has been wholly destructive to family life. Asamoah-Gyadu (2010:57), supported by Lephoko (2024:9544), maintain that in certain families prosperity-preaching churches do provide psychological and social resources, offering hope, resilience and community solidarity to some members. Such churches may also provide structured support systems, mentorship, and role-modelling to strengthen familial bonds in their communities, regardless of whether the promised financial blessings are fully realised. However, I align with Mofokeng and Kgatle (2019:5) and Nyambo (2023:102), who argue that this positive framing mainly focuses on how the teachings foster materialistic values – promoting investment in wealth over spiritual or relational development.

At its core, the appeal of the family unit to PG churches in North America is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural context, social aspiration, and religious conviction. The theology's promise of divine reward for faithful effort resonates with deeply held desires for security and recognition. However, scholars warn that the individualisation of success and the moral framing of wealth can lead to psychological and relational strains within families when expectations are not met (Adamo, 2021:4; Hobson *et al.*, 2021:421). Careful analysis of these dynamics allows pastoral theologians and social researchers to better understand what attracts families to the PG, as well as the potential risks to their overall well-being.

In India, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have enabled the PG to take firm root, particularly among Dalits and lower-caste families who continually seek liberation from systemic oppression, social marginalisation, and poverty (Mathew, 2022:41; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022b:89). According to Nag (2014:59), the appeal of prosperity theology is less theological and more socio-political, offering hope and dignity to communities historically relegated to the margins. Tan (2017:476) indicates that this results in a narrative where divinely sanctioned material success transforms faith into a vehicle for both social and economic mobility. Goliama (2013:111) states that promises of wealth, healing, and supernatural intervention serve as very real incentives in rural or economically marginalised areas lacking state support. However,

I disagree with Goliama, as not all families receive what is promised; therefore, these cannot be considered genuine incentives for everyone.

Mathew (2022:53) notes that the theology associated with reversing caste-based exclusion presents financial blessings as a reward for faith, prayer, and giving. Although this resonates with the hopeful aspirations of many households, Nyambo (2023:95) points out that an individualised approach to theology obscures structural injustices by shifting the responsibility for poverty and social disadvantage onto believers and their faith practices. Psychologically, this may place undue pressure on families when blessings do not occur, as Hobson *et al.* (2021:420) contend. I agree with Miller (2025:50), who argues that while Pentecostal families may view prosperity theology as a spiritual means of social advancement, it actually fosters reliance on transactional faith rather than encouraging communal or systemic change.

In South Korea, megachurches such as Yoido Full Gospel Church reflect how prosperity teachings intertwine with narratives of post-war economic recovery and the nation's rapid development (Bégin & Shin, 2014:2317; Marossy, 2022:49). As Lee (2020:45) observes, families adopted this theology in line with the nation's "can-do" ethos – interpreting material success as evidence of divine favour, contingent on personal diligence. Jeong (2022:63) critiques this association, noting that an excessive focus on performance-based spirituality has contributed to rising rates of depression and burnout – particularly among younger family members who struggle to meet both spiritual and societal expectations. I agree with the scholarly view that, while prosperity theology can be both empowering and motivating, it also places significant psychological and familial pressures on adherents, potentially undermining its intended benefits (Nyambo, 2023:99; Williams, 2022:3).

Comparative scholarship reveals the global movement of families towards prosperity-preaching churches in India, South Korea, North America, and Africa, driven by a combination of theological, social, and economic factors (Anderson, 2021:102; Mathew, 2022:53; Bégin & Shin, 2014:2317). Jones and Woodbridge (2011) and Adamo, 2021:4) critically note that when prosperity theology connects God's favour with material success, it places the responsibility for social and economic outcomes on individuals, often leading to unfulfilled expectations and resulting in guilt or spiritual anxiety. Nyambo (2023:95) and Jeong (2022:63) reinforce this point, and I agree with

their analysis that, under such circumstances, children and young people in these families become particularly vulnerable. Performance-based spirituality intersects with both cultural and societal pressures, increasing emotional and familial stress.

At heart, the scholarly conversation reveals that the draw of families to PG-preaching churches is multidimensional: spiritual aspiration and socio-economic hope mingled with cultural resonance and psychological needs. Even as it does offer empowerment and affirmation to historically and economically marginalised families, that same theology puts them at risk not only of emotional strain but also intra-family tension plus the internalisation of systemic inequalities (Hobson *et al.*, 2021:420; Mathew, 2022:53; Nyambo, 2023:99). A critical reading of these perspectives is what leads one to assert there is indeed a dire need for balance between the perceived benefits of prosperity teaching and its spiritual, psychological, and social consequences.

In Nigeria, the PG is tightly connected to the popular religious culture of families amidst their economic struggles (Ijaola, 2018:140). Kalu (2008:115) notes that Winners Chapel and Christ Embassy churches function not only as spiritual but also as socio-economic support systems, providing families with hopes of supernatural breakthroughs where structural inequalities such as unemployment, inflation, and corruption, including weak legal enforcement, squeeze the conventional pathways to upward mobility. As Nwokocha (2022:11) describes it, repackaging religiosity into promises of material elevation indicates that the PG occupies a dual function, both as theology and coping mechanism, by providing spiritual consolation while functioning as an aspirational framework for economic advancement.

The social capital gained from attending wealth-preaching churches also attracts families to them. As Okereke, Nkamnebe and Okeke, (2024:180) observe, families gain access to networks, business contacts, and schools for their children through active spiritual participation. Bowler (2013:70) comments that, although the PG is often presented as a single-dimensional product, its appeal lies in the combination of devotional and practical incentives. Similarly, Marossy (2022:49) explains that Pentecostal practices such as “seed sowing” and declarations serve not only as religious rituals but also as socially recognised investment strategies, thereby closely connecting faith with economic ambition.

Carpenter (2024:105) notes that in Kenya, the wealth gospel provides psychological comfort to families facing political instability and persistent poverty. Nyambo (2023:98) corroborates this perspective, contending that it is primarily the emotional and psychological aspects of prosperity teachings that render them appealing when state institutions fail to deliver basic welfare. Participation in prosperity-focused rituals is often perceived by families as an expression of agency, enabling them to influence their circumstances despite structural barriers (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022b:91).

In Zimbabwe, prolonged economic decline and widespread corruption have similarly driven families to seek alternative sources of security and hope. PG practices – including seed sowing, fasting, and declarations – are characterised by Chitando and Biri (2016:73) as symbolic acts of investment that sustain faith in divine justice in the absence of institutional justice. Nevertheless, Magezi and Banda (2017:3) critically point out that such practices can constitute spiritual exploitation, as the church frequently solicits financial sacrifices without demonstrating measurable social accountability or tangible outcomes. As Togarasei (2024:149) asserts, these dynamics risk transforming hope into a commodity marketed to highly vulnerable families.

This scholarship demonstrates that the PG's appeal to families is neither solely theological nor purely material (Hobson *et al.*, 2021:421). It engages with socio-economic aspiration, emotional support, and spiritual affirmation all at once. Churches share stories of divine favour and material success when addressing families who are seeking security for their households. However, these narratives can also introduce the risk of spiritual and financial exploitation, threatening both household stability and individual dignity. This prompts questions about family well-being and the attraction of such homes to these churches, requiring a nuanced understanding from socio-political, psychological, and theological perspectives. Such an approach is crucial to fully grasp why families are drawn to these churches and how this involvement affects household and community life (Balogun, 2021:50; Kgatle & Banda, 2022:5).

In contemporary South Africa, the attraction of families to PG-preaching churches remains strongly linked to persistent socio-economic challenges, including high unemployment, entrenched inequality, and the slow realisation of post-apartheid promises (Kgatle, 2017:6; Bafford, 2019:25). For many black South African families, particularly those in townships, informal settlements, and peri-urban areas, these

churches offer hope in the face of economic precarity, positioning spiritual faith as a mechanism for upward mobility and personal transformation (Kapp, 2024:95; Mbiti, 2019:88). Heuser (2016:3) opines that PG churches serve as sites of social resilience, offering aspirational narratives that counteract both generational poverty and disillusionment with the state.

Such churches act as informal welfare providers, addressing gaps left by inadequate government support through distributing food parcels, paying school fees, running youth mentorship schemes, and creating networks that improve employment prospects (Bafford, 2019:25; Kapp, 2024:97). Meyer (2010:756), supported by Mkhize (2020:114), notes that religious institutions form a vital part of the social infrastructure in urban South Africa, offering both material assistance and psychological support while fostering communal solidarity. In this context, the PG provides not only spiritual direction but also practical means to help families navigate economic difficulties.

However, the theology in many such churches teaches that prosperity is a straightforward transaction between faithfulness and material blessing. Nel (2023:355) and Williams (2022:71) argue that this perspective places responsibility for systemic failure on the individual, blaming poverty and economic stagnation on a lack of prayer or spiritual weakness. Nolan (2024:13) presents a similar view, observing that families often internalise structural shortcomings as personal failings, leading to cycles of guilt and eventual spiritual disappointment. Balogun (2021:50) and Hobson *et al.* (2021:420) discuss how this principle of wealth as a moral indicator increases both spiritual and material pressures on families, further heightening vulnerability in already fragile households.

The pressure is both gendered and intergenerational. Women, as primary household managers, often experience heightened demands to engage in income generation and church programmes. Children and youth are socialised within a faith context that links spiritual commitment to material prosperity (Chitando, Gunda & Kügler, 2014:12; Mofokeng & Kgatle, 2019:5; Nyambo, 2023:98). Such dynamics may exacerbate family conflict, adversely impacting the mental and emotional well-being of children and perpetuating a cycle of stress underpinned by unrealistic expectations (Hobson *et al.*, 2021:424; Magezi & Banda, 2017:3).

The observations of Togarasei (2024:149) and Goliama (2013:111) note that this situation allows for exploitation, as individuals are asked to make sacrifices without clarity on existing accountability measures, thereby reducing hope to a mere commodity. From this perspective, while PG churches provide social, emotional, and spiritual support, they risk fostering a dependency on religious intermediaries instead of promoting long-term structural empowerment.

In the South African context of 2025, marked by the cost of living crisis, youth unemployment rates exceeding 60% in some regions, and ongoing spatial inequality, it is understandable why families are drawn to PG churches. Families seek not only the promise of wealth and success, but also a sense of agency, identity, and belonging that these churches appear to foster. As noted by Kgatle (2021:4) and Nyambo (2023:110), PG communities serve both as sanctuaries for spiritual affirmation and as spaces where families navigate hope, survival, and aspiration amid persistent socio-economic challenges.

Across a range of global contexts, families do not turn to PG churches chiefly for spiritual nourishment. Instead, they seek solutions to their socio-economic, psychological, and existential challenges. As Amarkwei (2021:135) observes, the appeal of the PG lies in its capacity to connect faith with everyday struggles, offering meaning and a sense of agency in confronting poverty, unemployment, illness, or any form of social exclusion. These churches preach hope in desperate circumstances, foster a sense of belonging amid alienation, and suggest the possibility of agency when much seems to be working against you. However, as this researcher notes, they also risk perpetuating harmful narratives by treating structural issues as matters of individual responsibility. As a result, they may obscure broader socio-political injustices by focusing solely on personal faith and charitable giving, which in turn can be exploited by church leaders who present themselves as mediators of divine favour. This points to the urgent need for an informed and contextually aware theological response – one that affirms the dignity and resilience of struggling families without questioning their faith or spiritualising poverty. Tsele (2001:203) contends that theology must reclaim its prophetic voice, speaking out against injustice and standing in solidarity with the poor, rather than urging silence in exchange for vague spiritual assurances.

### **3.2.2 Socio-economic vulnerability**

#### **3.2.2.1 Poverty and unemployment as drivers of hope for financial breakthrough**

In numerous communities where economies are underperforming, PG churches prosper by promising divine intervention in financial matters, or rather, economic transformation and breakthroughs in finances. The persistent conditions of poverty and high levels of unemployment create fertile ground for PG churches to emerge, as families enduring continual hardship turn to them in hope of rescue (Gifford, 2007:19). This pattern demonstrates how, often out of desperation and structural neglect, religious choices are made, with the PG providing a theological framework that spiritualises economic suffering. Bowler (2013:29) remarks, "The wealth preachers usually preach that it is your divine right to be wealthy and just like any other rights you have to claim it by having faith". For those who are formally excluded from economic participation, such narratives are especially compelling, as they offer the prospect of upward mobility through personal piety. This message resonates deeply with individuals who experience systemic exclusion from economic opportunity. Kgatle (2017:4) posits that the PG flourishes amid inequality because it reinterprets socio-economic suffering as a spiritual ordeal that can be overcome through giving, believing, and declaring. The researcher's insight suggests that this shift transfers the responsibility for transformation from unjust systems to individual believers, thereby obscuring the underlying systemic factors that contribute to poverty.

Pentecostal and Charismatic churches do not share the same origin. Pentecostalism emerged in the early twentieth century, foregrounding baptism in the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues and healing regarded as normative Christian experiences. Charismatic churches, by contrast, developed later within traditional denominations by adopting only certain Pentecostal practices, while remaining aligned with mainline theology. Nevertheless, both traditions express strong emotional content, vibrant worship, and practical support systems, which may be perceived as lacking in mainline churches (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:236). Where parents face challenges in providing, seemingly ordinary rituals such as tithing or "sowing seed" serve as spiritual coping mechanisms, offering psychological relief and inspiring hope for provision from God

(Hinn, 2019:15; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:108). It therefore affirms the dual role of spirituality and sociality that is played by such churches in vulnerable communities.

Pentecostal and charismatic churches often provide emotional and social support that mainstream churches typically do not, making them attractive and practical sources of assistance for those who are socially or spiritually vulnerable (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:236). Pentecostalism originated in the early twentieth century, focusing on the experience of baptism by the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and healing as normal aspects of Christian life. Charismatic churches emerged later within traditional denominations, adopting Pentecostal practices while remaining within mainstream theological frameworks (Agadjanian, 2012:5). In families where parents are struggling to provide, the belief that tithing or sowing a seed can lead to employment, business success, or cancellation of debts functions as a spiritual coping mechanism and offers psychological relief (Hinn, 2019:15; Jones & Woodbridge, 2011:108). Such practices reflect how these churches serve both spiritual and social roles within vulnerable communities.

### **3.2.2.2 Promises of immediate solutions to long-standing material problems**

PG preachers often present “instant” miracles and financial breakthroughs during their services (Mabuza, 2018:21). This approach fosters the belief that persistent issues such as joblessness, unemployment, and poverty can be swiftly resolved through faith expressed by giving. Their message strongly appeals to families facing immediate crises – such as medical bills, housing instability, or unemployment – who frequently find social and government support to be slow or inaccessible, leading to disillusionment (Ayantayo, 2010:212). To this researcher, this situation illustrates how the family – traditionally viewed in Christian theology as a divine institution established for nurturing faith, love, and social stability (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:25–33) – can become both vulnerable and pivotal within the context of the PG.

Bvute (2018:19) mentions that prosperity preachers often focus on the family, as it is within this unit that collective needs and aspirations are found; therefore, it is emotionally and financially receptive to promises of breakthroughs. In such settings, the church serves both as a spiritual sanctuary and as an alternative economic network, offering healing, wealth, and stability through faith and giving. According to

Mpofu (2022:73), this reflects a shift from communal solidarity to spiritualised capitalism, where family struggles are monetised through religious practices. In the view of the researcher, this trend requires urgent theological and ethical examination.

Bowler (2013:44) and Torbet (1969:585) note that leaders of these churches often present the act of fulfilling their prophetic instructions – such as giving sacrificially or “partnering with the anointing” – as a guaranteed route to prosperity. Partnering with the anointing refers to financially supporting a spiritual leader believed to possess divine favour or power, most commonly by sowing money or investing in church-related projects, with funds being directed straight to accounts held by church leaders. Givers are promised substantial rewards in return. The immediacy of these promises, combined with highly emotional worship and persuasive success stories, generates both urgency and expectancy, especially when contrasted with the delayed or uncertain assistance offered by secular systems. As Nel (2023:353) notes, this theology transforms material suffering into a spiritual trial, but one with a clear and attainable path towards hope, which families are willing to embrace completely, despite the significant risks involved. This pattern has ruined the livelihoods of many individuals, as they continue to contribute money in the hope of receiving great rewards.

### **3.2.3 Charismatic leadership and emotional appeal**

#### **3.2.3.1 Dynamic preaching influence, entertainment, and motivational speaking**

Preachers of the gospel of wealth who fall into this category tend to be highly rated for their dynamic styles of delivery, accompanied by entertainment and motivational speaking, which keeps their listeners glued (Bowler, 2010:19). The mixture of belief and dramatics is based on an approach that reflects strategic engagement in keeping emotion alive and thus developing group solidarity. Charismatic pastors practise strong personality authority and prove it through loud, confident, uncompromising performative deliveries; thereby creating an understanding between themselves and their followers as visionaries leading faith-based personal development (Resane, 2017:5). The sermons are built on promises, where emotions are highly evoked with promises attached not only to spiritual but also to material breakthroughs – of

particular interest to the upwardly mobile seeking concrete success (Oakes, 2015:323; Resane, 2017:5). This draws from both the spiritual and material interests of the congregation, whereby such transactional theology belongs within just that type of preaching as a gospel assertion.

According to Mabuza (2018:19), the PG church leaders do not just preach energetically but entertain at the same time to keep the congregation in high spirits. In fact, there is a deliberate swing from traditional didactic preaching to more experiential engagement, requiring attention in a culture of increasing media saturation. As Stevenson (2013:111) and Butler (2014:33) note, charismatic, confident deliveries establish authority, often marked by theatrical flair that resonates with audiences seeking spiritual and material breakthrough. This performative approach works both as a persuasive tool and as a form of leadership branding that directly attracts aspiration-driven followers. Most of the time, involving popular music artists among big crowds performing upbeat gospel music during service hours attracts even bigger crowds. The calculated use of amplified music before and during worship creates an electric mood, often seeming more like a show than a normal rite. This sensory immersion is designed to lift emotions and align the group with the words of the leader.

This reflects the biblical recognition of music as a powerful spiritual tool, as seen in Psalm 150: "Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet... with loud clashing cymbals". Similarly, Psalm 98:4 states, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, rejoice, and sing praise". However, for believers in most prosperity churches, this principle has been commercialised. Worship has become a performance.

Haglund (2024:112) argues that sonic and visual elements are particularly appealing to a young, upwardly mobile demographic for whom faith increasingly represents a blend of spiritual expression, emotional release, and cultural entertainment. Chambala (2023:105) and Malembe (2017:40) concur, noting that motivational speaking, emotionally charged music, and assurances of transformation through faith position PG churches simultaneously as sanctuaries and vibrant social spaces. Within these contexts, hope, success, and celebration converge in distinctively performative expressions of contemporary Christianity. While this approach is innovative, it raises

important questions concerning theological depth, spiritual authenticity, and the sustainability of faith development over time.

### **3.2.3.2 Use of testimonies and visual success stories to influence congregants**

Visual and oral evidence of success form part of persuasive strategies, explaining why families are drawn to PG churches. Asamoah (2013:200) notes that evening services often feature congregants sharing accounts of miraculous financial breakthroughs, healings, or life transformations attributed to acts of faith, particularly through sacrificial giving. These "living sermons", as Chitando and Biri (2016:73) describe them, form a subjective theology in which testimony serves as a means to authenticate the fulfilment of promises associated with PG teachings. Akinwumi (2019:5) adds that such testimonies are reinforced visually, from the designer clothes worn by pastors' spouses to glossy media productions broadcast on church-owned television channels and shared across social networks.

Testimonies, through their performance, inspire and subtly persuade. Bowler (2013:47) posits that testimonies act as narrative evidence, fostering a communal sense that the promises of prosperity are attainable for all who apply the correct principles of faith. Bvute (2018:33) further asserts that this creates a mimetic theology, encouraging congregants to imitate the actions of other 'successful' believers or their leader through giving, loyalty, and public declarations of faith. I concur with these scholars, noting that in family settings, such testimonies offer models not only for individuals but also for entire households, encouraging the belief that collective obedience and sacrificial giving will unlock blessings intended for them.

Visual success stories play an equally important role. In the words of Ukah (2020:328), who has studied Nigerian megachurches, the ostentatious display of wealth, such as exotic cars, designer clothing, and expensive church buildings, serves as 'visual sermons' that present the PG as materially credible. Similarly, Kalu (2008:118) avers that visual signs of affluence offer aspirational models, particularly to families experiencing poverty, thereby reinforcing the belief that divine favour can elevate them into a higher socio-economic class. This fosters what Meyer (2010:744) describes as

"aesthetic formations", in which images and performances are not merely symbolic but act as formative influences on religious imagination and identity.

In sociological terms, such evidence and visual presentations help to normalise the culture of aspiration and consumption within the life of the church. As Ter Haar (2009:45) argues, by "framing success stories within spiritual narratives", prosperity preachers merge religious devotion with neoliberal ideals of individual achievement. This helps to explain the appeal for families who find in these narratives a dual promise – combining hope for immediate economic survival with the potential for upward mobility, in a context where structural inequalities inevitably restrict opportunities.

However, scholars also warn of the ethical dangers at the centre of such practices. As Gifford (2007:20) claims, most testimonies serve only to showcase exceptional cases, creating unrealistic expectations among the general public who may never experience similar breakthroughs. This selective visibility ensures that disappointing stories remain hidden, which can encourage a cycle of guilt within families for not having attained the promised prosperity. Similarly, as Togarasei (2024:149) argues, such testimonies can be used as instruments of manipulation, placing congregants under pressure to give sacrificially with the assurance of returns from God.

Testimonies and visual success stories continue to be effective in attracting families to PG churches, as they transform what many consider abstract theological claims into tangible, relatable narratives. Visual success stories offer psychological encouragement and communal affirmation to families facing difficulties. As described by Nye (2019:211), such narrative strategies present faith as a matter of lived experience, "seeing is believing", and where hope persists so long as it is sustained, even when the ultimate breakthrough remains indefinitely unattainable for some.

### **3.2.4 Cultural and religious expectations**

#### **3.2.4.1 Social pressures to affiliate with successful churches**

Communal social pressures are a significant catalyst for family inflows into PG-preaching churches. In most urban and peri-urban contexts, "success" is increasingly defined by the visible trappings of wealth, media portrayal, and the size of the institution (Sibanda *et al.*, 2024:8). Prosperity churches convey images of success

through vast church buildings, leaders who are charismatic and present themselves in luxury, and large, vibrant congregations that are frequently televised or streamed worldwide. Mere affiliation with such churches is regarded as both a sign of spiritual maturity and social accomplishment (Machingura, 2017:96).

Jones (2014:36) notes that prosperity churches utilise media visibility and strategic branding to cultivate a perception of divine favour, making them attractive spaces for families seeking both spiritual validation and social advancement. Gifford (2007:22) expresses a similar view, stating that the symbolic success of prosperity churches serves as a “social magnet”, attracting those who believe that membership grants them divine favour. This aligns with Meyer’s (2010:758) observation that Pentecostalism puts on a show, prioritises aesthetics and material display, and resonates with broader consumerist cultures where religious identity merges with aspirations for upward mobility.

The communal desire to belong to “winning” congregations is shaped by religious consumerism (Coleman, 2015:280), with individuals choosing churches not only for their theological stance but also for the social capital and prestige they provide. Such memberships indicate that a family is successful, divinely favoured, and modern. The membership signifies success, divine favour, and modernity. Asamoah (2013:200) remarks that this sense of belonging is reinforced by testimonies of financial breakthrough and conspicuous donations. Togarasei (2011:340) notes that prosperity congregations are environments where aspirational identities are formed, as faith is intertwined with lifestyle branding.

Peer and family influence also reinforces these pressures. In workplaces, schools, and neighbourhoods, high-profile prosperity churches are often regarded as the places to be affiliated with to gain respectability, credibility, and ambition (Ukah, 2020:328). There is both implicit and explicit encouragement for families to join such movements in their pursuit of belonging and legitimacy. This reflects what Van Dijk (2014:87) describes as “religious competition”, in which congregants strategically align themselves with churches that can provide visibility, networks, and access to PG churches’ influence.

Critics argue that such social pressures may perpetuate nominal faith, where status and belonging become more important than genuine discipleship. Kapp (2024:93) contends that when a church's identity is commodified, spiritual formation is reduced to public image and spectacle, creating opportunities for families to be easily exploited. In many African and global urban contexts, PG churches function as centres of aspiration, where social inclusion, symbolic power, and perceived divine favour come together—this is a key reason why families are drawn to these communities.

#### **3.2.4.2 The stigma of failure interpreted as lack of faith**

A less recognised yet significant reason families are drawn to PG-preaching churches is their fear of being labelled spiritual failures. In prosperity theology, achievements in health, wealth, and relationships are often seen as proof of strong faith, while setbacks are typically attributed to insufficient belief, lack of devotion, or inadequate giving (Chinkwo, 2018:33; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:200). This establishes the dynamic within households that motivates families to join prosperity churches during periods of adversity, seeking to ensure their circumstances are not perceived as a result of insufficient spirituality. As noted by Bowler (2013:70), households are drawn to these congregations to demonstrate their faith and assert their entitlement to blessings promised as their divine right.

Manchala (2017:205) indicates that where prosperity teaching is not a dominant phenomenon, simply not belonging to such movements can itself become an accusation of unbelief or spiritual negligence. This social pressure places families within prosperity churches, seeking validation while avoiding marginalisation. The simple fact that poverty has been framed as unbelief, which comes with feelings of shame as described by Gifford (2007:24), ensures that families pray more in search of a breakthrough, thus reinforcing the stigma against poverty. In this context, praying more draws these same households towards spaces that promise quick deliverance, both socially and spiritually.

It is in the public, through testimonies of success, that this attraction is consolidated. Services in which people rise to narrate tales of miraculous debt cancellation, employment, or business growth are presented as proof of God's faithfulness (Akinwumi, 2019:5). Where a family is facing financial difficulties, the absence of such

testimonies in their lives can cause anxiety at the very least. This situation demands a performative religiosity and sense of triumph, which Coleman (2015:280) describes as pressure to project success and to belong to so-called “winning” congregations, in order to avoid appearing spiritually unworthy. Families sit in prosperity churches ostensibly awaiting blessings; at the same time, they participate in fellowship to a greater extent, so as not to be perceived as having “little faith.”

Kapp (2024:93) notes that the attraction motivated by stigma reflects a fear of being excluded, where participating in prosperity communities acts both as a shield from shame and a search for identity. In circumstances of unemployment and poverty, the PG offers families a way to interpret their struggles as spiritual challenges they can overcome through loyalty, giving, and faith declarations (Kgatlé, 2017:5). This type of framing attempts to address the issue yet simply encourages persistence in a different context. It also fosters a culture of conformity, where mere membership is seen as evidence of resilience and being favoured by fate.

In the end, it becomes clear that failure, redefined as a lack of faith, draws families to these churches in search of both spiritual and social legitimacy. Instead of facing marginalisation by remaining inactive, most prefer to risk involvement in these congregations, where testimonies of success, promises of breakthrough, and the desire to avoid shame all come together. This combination makes prosperity preaching congregations especially appealing.

### **3.2.5 Institutional and community influence**

#### **3.2.5.1 Peer influence and communal trends**

Religion is most effectively experienced as a lived social practice within a network of relationships that foster belonging, recognition, and conformity. In prosperity congregations, families encounter considerable social pressure to meet communal expectations, such as regular attendance, sacrificial giving, and participation in public testimony. Akinwumi (2019:10) affirms this as a faith expressed through sharing; it cultivates solidarity as group norms validate her commitment to prosperity teachings, further reinforced by affirmation from peers.

Recent scholarship has shown that PG churches are highly effective in generating social capital. Families are drawn not only by theological promises of wealth and healing but also by relational networks that provide emotional support, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement (Putnam, 2000:22; MacTavish, 2014:213; Sibanda *et al.*, 2024:5). As Milemba (2017:38) mentions, these networks become especially appealing in times of economic insecurity, as they offer not just spiritual encouragement, but practical means of social mobility, such as business contacts, job openings, or access to children's homework resources. Community involvement is therefore regarded by families as a way to fulfil religious obligations while also gaining material advantages.

Berger (2011:57) notes, "The more a religious movement utilizes the force of peer influence, the more resilient it will be"; furthermore, "Once social conformity has internalised religious commitments, participation sustains itself". Coleman (2015:280) and Hoover (2012:88) demonstrate that in prosperity churches, this resilience is continuously strengthened through members' public declarations of breakthroughs. These declarations both affirm the teachings on prosperity and encourage others to adopt similar practices, anticipating comparable outcomes. For families, this provides not only spiritual reassurance but also a sense of belonging to a community defined by aspiration, faith, and eventual success.

Prosperity churches become more appealing in communities where church membership is associated with social respectability. Sibanda *et al.* (2024:6) explain that in most urban contexts, belonging to a thriving congregation signals divine favour and personal achievement. Families join such congregations not solely for religious reasons but to secure social acceptance within their community circles; this aligns with what Bourdieu (1986:248) described as symbolic capital, since successful institutional affiliation contributes to one's status and sense of belonging.

Communal reinforcement can become exploitative. Peer-driven dynamics in prosperity churches pressure struggling families to continue giving and performing religious practices, even when they do not experience breakthroughs, as argued by Magezi and Banda (2017:5). According to Gifford (2007:24), communal reinforcement mechanisms intensify the experience of failure among those who do not prosper, as such 'communal reinforcements' often heighten feelings of guilt and anxiety over

unsuccessful household production. However, even the real possibility of such risks does not prevent households from becoming vulnerable, because the concept fosters strong communal bonds, peer approval, and social opportunities.

Peer pressure and social trends help explain why families are drawn to PG-preaching churches. The transformation of individual faith into collective belonging creates a community for families to participate in, where hope is continually reinforced through testimonies, success stories and shared practices. Social capital, along with aspirational identity, offers both tangible and symbolic value. These houses of worship serve a dual purpose, acting as both spiritual refuge and social network; as a result, they attract particular interest in areas marked by socio-economic uncertainty.

### **3.2.5.2 Church marketing and visibility in media (TV, social platforms)**

Marketing is a key factor in attracting families to PG churches. Modern prosperity churches have refined their methods of communicating beyond church walls, effectively using television and radio broadcasts, social media, and online streaming to reach a wide audience (Jones, 2014:35; Meyer, 2007:145). Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:45) remarks that these are not merely platforms for relaying sermons, but powerful channels for presenting narratives of divine blessing and material success in ways that are clear, relatable, and moving. Such messaging resonates with families seeking hope and social advancement in the face of economic and social instability.

Scholars maintain that part of the appeal lies in the deliberate cultivation of public personas by prosperity pastors. Kenneth Copeland, T.B. Joshua, and Shepherd Bushiri exemplify leaders whose visibility, wealth, and media presence serve as tangible demonstrations of the promises made by prosperity theology (Bowler, 2013:41; White, 2011:236). Families are particularly drawn to these figures, perceiving their apparent success as attainable through faith, tithing, and participation in church activities. According to Akinwumi (2019:12), visual testimonies of miraculous financial gain, healing, or employment, amplified through media exposure, fuel the aspirations that motivate families to join congregations where such achievements are prominently celebrated.

Media also presents the church as legitimate and authoritative. As Anderson (2004:77) notes, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have historically used mass media to extend their reach beyond local congregations, achieving regional and even international influence. Families, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, are drawn to such a widely recognised and successful church, which in turn affords them communal prestige and social validation (Sibanda *et al.*, 2024:7). The media shows that these congregations are thriving both materially and spiritually, thus making them very attractive to families since material wealth goes hand in hand with stability and opportunity.

The interactive media contribute to this appeal. These forms of engagement take place on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as through church-specific apps that enable participants to share live or recorded testimonies, respond to church events, and even experience worship virtually (Meyer, 2007:160). Asamoah-Gyadu (2013:47) notes that families regard such digital participation as a means of spiritual inclusivity and aspirational belonging, as their involvement situates them within visible expressions of God's favour and communal recognition. This digital presence transforms the church into a centre of social aspiration, where faith intersects with social capital, allowing families to be spiritually guided while also receiving genuine socio-cultural benefits.

Scholars have observed that this media-driven approach raises ethical and theological concerns. As Gifford (2008:88) points out, the constant display of wealth and success risks reducing faith to a transactional commodity, where giving and devotion become means to secure material rewards. Taru and Settler (2016:118) similarly contend that the consumerist framing of religion through media marketing can prioritise spectacle over discipleship, thus undermining comprehensive spiritual development. Nonetheless, if these strategies draw families to the church, they are regarded as highly effective. Families are attracted to churches where success is demonstrated through media presence, since this visibility offers both role models to follow and psychological encouragement, especially in contexts where economic uncertainty intersects with social aspiration (Coleman, 2015:280; Bowler, 2013:41).

Through assertive promotion and media exposure, churches become leading choices for families. By employing a combination of aspirational storytelling, public

demonstrations of divine favour, and interactive engagement, many churches cultivate an environment in which spiritual and material promises merge, giving families both hope and tangible examples of success that reflect their social, economic, and emotional ambitions. The church thus emerges as a powerful centre of faith, ambition, and communal identity, shaped within a thoughtfully mediated environment.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Chapter 3 examined the intricate dynamics that attract families worldwide to PG preaching churches. It established that such churches are predominantly headed by highly charismatic and persuasive pastors. They seem to appeal particularly to families grappling with economic challenges, health problems, or other personal crises. In these situations, the PG positions itself as a hopeful scheme, offering the prospect of a financial breakthrough, upward social mobility, improved health, and general well-being.

The main insight here is that poverty and unemployment are the major factors driving this attraction. PG churches typically present material wealth and physical health as conditions or results of divine favour, obtainable through faith and obedience to church rituals regarded as the means to their attainment. This generates a strong motivation under which families actively participate in church life, hoping for a transformation in their circumstances.

It discusses dynamic preaching, emotive worship, and the testimonies of fellow congregants who testify to success because they believed and persevered. This creates an extremely powerful narrative that makes believers feel empowered, encouraged, and part of a supportive community. Families are drawn not only by the promise of material benefits but also by a sense of belonging, emotional upliftment, and inspiration from these churches.

However, the chapter identifies a significant tension at the heart of PG teachings. While it is true that success is often presented as dependent on the faithfulness of individuals, in most cases people are left to shoulder personal responsibility when things do not work out. If blessings fail to materialise as promised, individuals and families may experience guilt and psychological stress. Most importantly, this

individualistic approach obscures wider social, economic, and other systemic injustices that render families vulnerable and perpetuate systems of inequality.

Though PG churches do offer hope, encouragement, and community, the analysis outlines that the strength of their appeal lies in a complex intersection of spiritual aspiration, social pressure, emotional support, and economic desire. This study also calls for critical engagement with PG theology from both pastoral and family well-being perspectives.

The next chapter explores pastoral care theological resources that can help families achieve holistic well-being, developing strategies for overcoming spiritual and material challenges and building resilience, hope, and ethical responsibility.

## **CHAPTER 4 PASTORAL CARE THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR ENHANCING FAMILY WELL-BEING**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the third objective of the study, which seeks to explore theological resources from a pastoral care perspective to enhance family well-being, answering the question, "What pastoral care theological resources can be used to enhance the well-being of families?" The chapter aims to interpret the situation through the lens of lived faith, Scripture, church social teachings, and other valuable resources within the Christian tradition (Holland & Henriet, 1984:9). At this stage, the study envisions an ideal reality grounded in theological and ethical principles that foster the spiritual and holistic well-being of families.

Drawing from biblical teaching, historical doctrine, and the church's enduring moral vision, the chapter offers a critical comparison between the current impacts of PG teachings and the authentic demands of Christian faith: justice, compassion, integrity, and the nurturing of family life in God's grace and truth. As Bevans (2002:26) contends, contextual theology requires that faith engages with contemporary cultural and social realities, rather than merely repeating inherited doctrines in isolation. From this perspective, theology must be oriented towards the lived experience of families and refrain from distorting this experience through consumerist interpretations of faith.

### **4.2 Theological foundation for pastoral care**

Strong theological foundations are essential for pastoral care that seeks to address the distortions associated with PG theology. Such care must be underpinned by robust theological principles. PG theology frequently claims that prosperity and health are guaranteed solely by faith, a premise that represents a significant distortion (Heuser, 2016:5; Wariboko, 2017:42). Nwankwo (2019:120) and Magezi and Manzanga (2019:3) maintain that biblical realism recognises suffering as a necessary aspect of the Christian journey, while Katongole (2017:56) and C. Banda (2020:8) argue that the theology of the cross reveals God in weakness, rather than in worldly triumph. The doctrine of *imago Dei* affirms the intrinsic dignity and value of every individual regardless of material wealth. Together, these theological concepts offer a crucial

framework for pastoral caregivers aiming to promote family well-being within communities shaped by prosperity teachings (Louw, 2015:112; Phiri, 2025:51). Such a theological grounding equips pastoral care to reject the commodification and consumerist tendencies prevalent in some Christian expressions, fostering instead resilience, holistic flourishing, and a commitment to justice within families (Heuser, 2016:3; Bowers du Toit, 2016:6).

#### **4.2.1 Biblical realism**

Biblical realism acknowledges the complexity of human existence. It recognises that faith does not preclude adversity but enables the believer to gain strength in bearing it. In Philippians 4:11–13, Scripture speaks of Paul learning contentment in every situation because he draws strength from Christ; and in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Paul gladly welcomes his weakness, for it is here that God reveals his power by resting upon him. This has placed the Christian religion on foundations that rest heavily on endurance and humility, depending on divine grace rather than any promised prosperity. Realism, therefore, directly challenges the triumphalist message of the gospel by asserting that testing, human frailty, and suffering are essential elements of discipleship, which faith does not remove but rather transforms through sustaining grace (Niebuhr, 2021:3; Jackson, 2006:651).

Contemporary scholars emphasise that biblical realism offers a corrective to prosperity theology's shallow optimism. Nwankwo (2019:119) argues that prosperity preachers create unrealistic expectations that collapse when families face illness, poverty, or bereavement, leaving them vulnerable to guilt and disillusionment. Similarly, C. Banda (2025:5) contends that a theology of the cross, intertwined with biblical realism, restores the integrity of Christian faith by placing suffering within God's redemptive purposes rather than treating it as evidence of divine displeasure. In this sense, biblical realism not only resists the commodification of faith but also nurtures resilience and hope among families navigating socio-economic pressures.

As noted by Heuser (2016:5), prosperity preaching often denies the structural realities of poverty, inequality, and unemployment in Africa, causing believers to interpret hardship solely as a spiritual problem. Biblical realism posits that Christian hope is not escapism from realities but rather engagement with reality; thus, it offers lessons for

the church in accompanying families through genuine struggles with adequate practical support. This is succinctly expressed by Bowers du Toit (2016:6), who argues that prosperity theology fails to acknowledge systemic injustice, while true pastoral care based on biblical realism motivates communities that suffer to recognise God's presence in their plight and to work towards transformation.

Further, Katongole (2017:59) situates biblical realism within the wider Christian narrative of lament. Through lament, families and congregations can express their pain to God honestly, without denial or superficial assurances of blessing. This realism fosters resilience and authentic spirituality, where suffering is neither idolised nor dismissed but instead brought into God's redemptive purposes. Wariboko (2017:45) also describes biblical realism as a corrective to the consumerist tendencies of prosperity theology, shifting faith towards relational trust in God rather than a transactional expectation of material reward.

Biblical realism recognises that suffering and limitation are not signs of failed faith, but circumstances through which God may most fully reveal Himself. In this way, pastoral care, grounded in biblical realism, helps families move beyond disappointment with unfulfilled prosperity promises towards a more mature, resilient, and grace-centred faith.

#### **4.2.2 Theology of the cross**

At the heart of the Reformed tradition lies the theology of the cross, deeply embedded in Calvin's pastoral theology (Calvin, 1559, 2008 printing:III.8.1). This theology emphasises suffering as an integral part of the Christian walk, presenting Christ as the true Pastor who not only shares in the miseries of earthly life but also leads his sheep toward spiritual wellness and safety amid tribulations (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2017:49). For John Calvin, pastoral care is inseparable from the suffering inherent in Christ's ministry; while it offers comfort on the one hand, it also calls for a path to be followed with steadfast patience on the other. According to Ramsay (2018:271), such a perspective strikes at the very heart of PG triumphalism by situating suffering firmly within God's plan of salvation as redemptive, rather than equating material prosperity with divine favour.

Recent scholarship affirms that the theology of the cross provides a powerful and sufficient corrective to prosperity theology, especially in contexts marked by poverty and inequality. "African Pentecostalism does not embrace suffering as a valid contextual reality; African Pentecostalism prioritises material blessings. Properly understood, this presents a valid argument: it is in experiences of suffering that God reveals himself through his grace (C. Banda, 2020:5). According to Heuser (2016:4), the PG denies the biblical testimony of suffering and endurance; ultimately, it leads to disappointment, as its promises fail when confronted by reality. In contrast, pastoral care can guide families towards hope, as Christ shares in the suffering of all humanity.

Katongole (2017:61) develops this argument by situating the theology of the cross within Africa's realities of violence, poverty, and displacement. He maintains that only cruciform theology can sustain authentic Christian hope amidst systemic suffering, not by sidestepping pain but by creating opportunities for lament, resistance, and resilience. This resonates with Moltmann's (2015:113) assertion that it is through the cross that God identifies most profoundly with human brokenness, offering both comfort to communities and courage to confront injustice.

Furthermore, pastoral theologians pay attention to the transformative dimension of the cross. Through 'taking up the cross', pastoral care enables families to find meaning in suffering – not as punishment from God, but as part of a redemptive process that nurtures maturity, love, and solidarity (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:6). Prosperity teaching, by contrast, often places blame on families when prayers for material success go unanswered. As Bowers du Toit (2016:8) expresses, prosperity theology individualises faith and overlooks the presence of structural injustices, whereas the theology of the cross calls the church to stand with those who are suffering and to address socio-economic inequalities with prophetic resolve.

The cross is what reclaims suffering as central both to Christian identity and to caring for others. It does not lead to a faith of denial; it does not lead to triumphant faith but affirms that God reveals himself in weakness (2 Cor 12:9). Real hope is found, not in riches but in Christ having conquered sin and death. To families who have heard plenty about wealth gospels, this particular theology would definitely emancipate them by bringing back the vision of discipleship that has long been lost but was based on endurance, solidarity, and eschatological hope.

### 4.2.3 Imago Dei

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* avers that human beings are created in the image of God. It does not focus on immediate factors such as production, economic standing, or social status, but rather centres on each person's inherent dignity, value, and worth (Middleton, 2005:11). Therefore, PG theology – or any form of mammonism – cannot define human identity by wealth or material acquisition. The *imago Dei* offers a corrective to prosperity theology by ensuring that faith is not commodified and people are not evaluated according to their financial achievements. Human value is determined by God's creative act, not by shifting economic conditions (Banda, C., 2020:6; Nwankwo, 2019:119).

Recent scholarship affirms that the *imago Dei* provides a solid foundation for pastoral care, helping to restore dignity and wholeness to families in contexts where prosperity teachings often generate shame and feelings of inadequacy. Magezi and Manzanga (2024:3) declare that an *imago Dei* approach to pastoral care enables families to recognise and internalise their God-given value, even in times of poverty, illness, or social marginalisation. Similarly, Szczerba (2020:517) points out that this doctrine introduces several key considerations: it calls for relational accountability within and between communities for mutual care, asserting that human worth is found in participation in God's relational nature, rather than in material possessions.

For African theologians, the *imago Dei* is central to resisting exploitative theologies. As Heuser (2016:4) states, "prosperity gospel dehumanizes believers because humanity cannot be reduced to material success as a valid test of faith, thereby disrespecting the dignity of poor people". In contrast, *imago Dei*-inspired pastoral care maintains the equal worth of all people and empowers families towards resilience and solidarity. This perspective, as Katongole (2017:63) explains, leads *imago Dei*-based pastoral care to inspire believers to act justly and extend love towards others, especially those who are victims of violence, displacement, or economic deprivation.

Phiri and Nadar (2021:29) affirm that *imago Dei* in pastoral practice is not only theological but also prophetic, challenging patriarchal and economic systems that work together to perpetuate inequality. Recognising every person as God's image-bearer obliges the church to engage more fully in gender justice, care for the

vulnerable, and holistic family well-being. Thus, this doctrine provides an important lens through which pastoral caregivers can address both the spiritual and structural dimensions of the problems associated with prosperity-gospel theology.

Referring to the contributions of scholars, the *imago Dei* fosters a theology of dignity, equality, and mutual responsibility. It challenges PG narratives that measure human worth by material possessions, instead guiding families towards holistic well-being in Christ. By affirming the divine image in every individual, pastoral care can nurture communities that are resilient, compassionate, and committed to justice, as their sense of worth is grounded in God's grace rather than worldly riches.

#### **4.2.4 Theological resources**

Pastoral care for families affected by PG teachings should draw on theological resources capable of restoring and enhancing spiritual well-being by reconnecting faith with its biblical and theological foundations. Beyond biblical realism, the theology of the cross, and *imago Dei*, additional frameworks are required to address the spiritual and socio-economic needs of families. In both Old and New Testament narratives, God's consistent concern for justice, love, and human flourishing is evident. The laws within Israel's code repeatedly ensure protection for the poor, widows, and orphans (Deut 24:17–22), while Jesus' ministry places good news for the poor and freedom for the oppressed at the heart of God's Kingdom (Lk 4:18-19). These theological foundations demonstrate that Christian faith is never confined to material accumulation but rather encompasses holistic well-being within covenant relationship with God and neighbour.

In this context, the practice of public pastoral care addresses the individualistic and consumerist attitudes promoted by prosperity theology. This may be achieved through integrating spiritual formation with social responsibility, reflecting God's concern for both soul and body, as proposed by Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5). The public pastoral care model also offers what Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5) describe as 'a practical response', relevant to families disoriented by prosperity messages, unemployment, poverty, and desolation in Africa. This integrated approach strengthens family well-being by fostering resilience and hope in solidarity, countering the shame and guilt associated with unfulfilled promises of prosperity.

Creation theology has much to do with the strengthening of family spirituality. Redden (2016:236) suggests that God's creative sovereignty over chaos empowers caregivers with powerful images of renewal and re-creation, whereby struggles can be interpreted as opportunities for God's sustaining grace to manifest. Scheib (2016:231) adds that a theological grounding enables pastoral care to build hope beyond material prosperity through faith practices both in abundance and in scarcity. From Louw's perspective (2015:182), African theological reflection deepens communal connectedness within creation theology. It encourages families to interpret their struggles within God's broader restorative purpose for community life, rather than perceiving those struggles in isolation.

Moreover, the implementation of these theological resources leads directly to improved family spirituality. Highlighting the *imago Dei* by pastoral caregivers immediately reminds families that their intrinsic value before God is not based on economic productivity, which can instil dignity, respect, and relational healing. When the theology of the cross is instituted, families reinterpret suffering not as a withdrawal of God's presence but as a context in which Christ's redeeming presence is made known (Ramsay, 2018:271; Van der Kooi, 2016:49). The integration between public pastoral care and creation theology empowers families to challenge socio-economic pressures with resilient, compassionate, justice-oriented faith.

Vine (2016:40) rightly cautions that whenever suffering is neglected in favour of triumphalism, discipleship is reduced to a transactional pursuit of wealth. Therefore, pastoral care should be grounded in biblical realism, cross-centred faith, the *imago Dei*, creation theology, and a public approach that restores a vision of Christian life which strengthens families spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. The flourishing of families is cultivated where love is fostered through shared struggles, and where gratitude and faithfulness are woven into everyday life, extending justice and compassion into broader communities.

Theological resources not only address the imbalances of the PG but also support the spiritual well-being of families. By developing pastoral practice informed by Scripture, tradition, and contextual theological insights, caregivers enable families to respond faithfully during adversity, find meaning in suffering, and convey a spirituality marked by dignity, hope, and resilience, rather than one defined solely by achievement.

### 4.3 Pastoral care and the impact of the PG

The PG, with its focus on material rewards and health-related spiritual demands, often diminishes important theological and pastoral concerns regarding family relationships and social challenges. In North America and certain Asian countries (such as South Korea and India), pastoral care must contend with the appeal of sound biblical theology and practical support, set against the allure of the PG's promises. Ford (2013:515) and Seo (2020:23) note that most pastors lack formal theological training and resources, making it difficult to prevent congregations from being drawn to messages offering easy solutions to complex issues. According to Crossway (2024:1) and Belz (2021:39), initiatives providing doctrinally robust theological resources – covering areas such as caring, marriage, family, and counselling – equip pastors to support families more effectively and promote well-being within the church community.

A similar situation exists in Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. In these countries, widespread poverty and other socio-economic challenges – such as unemployment and low life expectancy – persist despite the popularity of PG preaching, thereby calling into question the effectiveness of such teachings in addressing real-life hardships. As noted by Agbiji and Agbiji (2016:4), Kagema *et al.* (2019:55), and Magezi (2019:413), "Prosperity gospel proponents emphasize divine intervention and spiritual warfare neglecting practical socio-economic aspects that might uplift support to families who are vulnerable and in pain".

Smit (2015:4) notes that in South Africa, social challenges include the absence of fathers, gender-based violence, children and single mother-headed households, as well as moral dilemmas. Eco-theology informed pastoral care has been proposed as a means of strengthening family resilience by encouraging community participation and holistic perspectives on social issues. Magezi (2019:413) expands the scope of pastoral care beyond individual well-being to encompass ecological and social factors that affect the overall health of families.

### **4.3.1 Theological resources for enhancing family well-being**

#### **4.3.1.1 Effective pastoral care for families exposed to PG teachings**

People and families exposed to the PG teachings require sound biblical and theological education, holistic pastoral well-being, and contextualised pastoral approaches that critically engage with PG theological teachings.

##### **4.3.1.1.1 Biblical and theological education**

To provide pastors with sound, orthodox theological education is crucial. This contributes to the spiritual well-being of families where PG teachings have taken hold. Prosperity theology frequently misinterprets the biblical message, linking faith with material wealth and physical health (Jones & Woodbridge, 2017:20). Such distortions place unrealistic expectations on families, leading to guilt and anxiety when promised blessings do not materialise. In contrast, theologically informed pastoral care can encourage families to embrace a more holistic understanding of the gospel – one that values spiritual, emotional, relational, and communal well-being rather than focusing solely on material success (Bowler, 2018:87; Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:4).

Biblical and theological education provide pastors with principles of accurate interpretation, enabling them to affirm the dignity and resilience of families. As Phillips (2015:15) points out, hermeneutical training helps address tendencies towards proof-texting, which often emerge in prosperity preaching, and offers families a more substantial and realistic engagement with God's Word. Training in pastoral care, marriage and family life, and Christian counselling, as Van Emmenes (2019:102) notes, is vital for supporting families through everyday challenges. This well-rounded training equips pastors to nurture faith practices that foster harmony and resilience within households and their wider communities.

Pastors who receive thorough training help families integrate faith with everyday experiences, enabling constructive responses to poverty, illness, and conflict, and steering them away from the 'quick fixes' promoted by prosperity teaching. This approach helps reduce the influence of such teachings in Nigeria. According to Jentile (2021:3), pastors grounded in sound theology are better prepared to challenge false doctrines, foster spiritual maturity, and guide families towards deeper discipleship.

Louw (2015:110) also maintains that robust theology connects doctrine to life's challenges, allowing pastoral leaders to support families in times of suffering through the sustaining grace of God.

Practical initiatives include the Global Pastors Book Set (Crossway, 2024:1), which provides resources on pastoral care, family ministry, and counselling that strengthen leaders for family-sensitive ministrations. In the African context, Agbiji and Agbiji (2016:5) assert that contextual theological training to address socio-economic issues of poverty and unemployment will improve the well-being of families. Kinya (2023:42) maintains that when pastors are trained in integrity and accountability by embodying these values, families gain more trust in spiritual leadership, thereby attaining greater well-being collectively.

So, biblical and theological learning builds the spiritual well-being of families through raising pastoral leadership that is faithful to the Bible, contextual, and relational. It provides a certain theological background for families that helps them recognise their value in God's image, understand how to meet the problems of life with hope, and develop religious practices that create and build intergenerational faith.

#### 4.3.1.1.2 Holistic pastoral well-being

Recent studies make it clear that the well-being of pastors is crucial, not only for its inherent value but also as a driving force for the healthy development of families and communities that depend on their support. According to Van Emmenes (2019:102) and Brunsdon (2024:4), the components of holistic pastoral well-being include spiritual formation, emotional intelligence, intentional self-care, and stable family relationships. These elements, whether collectively or individually, help sustain effective ministry, support resilience under pastoral stress, and preserve the ability to nurture congregational life.

I agree with these scholars that a pastor with strong spirituality and emotional stability is more likely to offer ministry that is sensitive, maintains integrity, and remains theologically clear. In contexts where families have been shaped by the PG, many congregants – who often associate faith with material gain – experience disillusionment, guilt, or anxiety when their expectations are unmet (Magezi &

Manzanga, 2016:4; Bowler, 2018:87). When pastors receive well-rounded support, they are better equipped to resist both cultural and congregational pressures to conform to prevailing ideas of success based on prosperity. Van Emmenes (2019:102) notes that, with proper support, pastors can guide families to interpret difficult times through a gospel perspective.

Further research shows that the emotional and spiritual resilience of pastors affects the well-being of the entire congregation. Pastors with high emotional intelligence can demonstrate healthy coping strategies to leaders and maintain doctrinal integrity during crises. As Brunsdon (2024:4) points out, this helps families navigate challenges such as poverty, illness, and moral uncertainty without resorting to the oversimplified promises often found in prosperity teachings. Magezi and Manzanga (2023:4) also observe that pastors are most effective in mediating family conflicts and fostering communal healing when they first cultivate their own spiritual and emotional health.

Other scholars, therefore, advocate practical strategies for holistic pastoral formation. Prayer and meditation, as Koenig (2021:156) notes, should also involve theological reflection on the discipline of the mind to support mental health and sustain empathy. Emslie (2025:10) has also identified that mentoring among clergy, peer supervision, and professional counselling offer valuable opportunities to promote awareness of the emotional factors contributing to burnout. This finding is particularly significant in contexts where pastors face substantial congregational expectations shaped by prosperity theology. Ncube (2022:88) maintains that nurturing stable family relationships within the pastoral household serves as a model for congregational families, demonstrating relational integrity, mutual care, and intergenerational faith formation throughout African contexts.

Holistic pastoral well-being is both a foundation for and a catalyst of effective family ministry in environments affected by the PG. Only when pastors are spiritually healthy, emotionally resilient, and relationally grounded can they lead families towards authentic faith, renewed hope, and communal flourishing, creating a setting where theological balance is restored and lasting spiritual growth is encouraged.

#### 4.3.1.1.3 Contextualised pastoral approaches

According to Bowler (2018:87) and Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5), in African contexts, families mainly complain about the unrealistic expectations to which they have been exposed through prospering gospel teachings, as these teachings link faith to material gain. This can lead to disillusionment, stress, and spiritual confusion. A contextualised holistic pastoral care approach can serve as a corrective by responding to both the spiritual dimension and the socio-environmental realities that impact family life. The pastoral practice of eco-theology brings such a framework into focus, as within it, faith, stewardship, and justice are interconnected through the relationship between God, humanity, and creation (Twumasi-Ankrah *et al.*, 2023:880; Blasu, 2020:46).

Environmental degradation, climate change, and resource scarcity hurt vulnerable families the most. This increases the socio-economic hardship and emotional stress they go through (Hrynkow, 2017:83; Pederick, 2016:72). Eco-theologically informed pastoral care enables families to recognise their spiritual responsibility towards creation while also assisting them in addressing urgent issues such as water crises, food insecurity, and displacement. Such support encourages families to nurture a faith that manifests hope and resilience through ethical action, thereby counteracting the narrow materialistic focus promoted by prosperity teachings (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:5; Blasu, 2020:48).

Contextually grounded pastoral approaches foster emotional, relational, and spiritual resilience within families. Twumasi-Ankrah *et al.* (2023:882) observe that families who engage in care and participate in community stewardship initiatives develop stronger relational bonds and a sense of purpose and hope – factors that contribute to spiritual flourishing even amidst trauma and socioeconomic pressures. Hrynkow (2017:85) observes that eco-theology encourages families to see their lives as part of the wider redemptive narrative of God, providing grounding in spirituality rather than materialism.

Eco-theology can be practically applied to pastoral care in several ways: promoting family-based education on sustainability, encouraging community participation in environmental justice, and creating a care consciousness in worship and discipleship (Pederick, 2016:73; Crossway, 2024:1). This enables families to put an active faith

into practice, fostering communal solidarity and ethical responsibility as they reach new levels of spiritual maturity. With support from pastors connecting these challenges to biblical teachings on creation, families find hope, discover the capacity to forgive, and continue to grow even amid ecological and social issues arising from unmet expectations informed by the gospel.

Drawing on the insights of leading scholars, contextualised pastoral care grounded in eco-theology promotes holistic resilience, ethical living, and a deeper spirituality, all of which strengthen family spiritual well-being. This empowers families to address socio-economic and environmental crises with trust in God's constant providence, cultivating a theology of hope, stewardship, and relational flourishing that counters materialistic and individualistic tendencies associated with PG teachings.

#### 4.3.1.1.4 Critical engagement with prosperity theology

The PG, both in theory and practice, requires pastoral care to engage critically with its theological distortions, as well as the socio-economic consequences it produces. In contexts marked by poverty, inequality, and social vulnerability, prosperity theology promotes a transactional understanding of faith, where total fulfilment is measured by material wealth and physical health. This misguided perspective often leads families to disappointment, guilt, and alienation when the promised blessings fail to materialise, resulting in a loss of trust in God and strained relationships (Maina *et al.*, 2018:37; Jones & Woodbridge, 2017:19; Kgatle, 2025:363). Bowler (2018:87) claims that the PG's triumphalist narrative fosters individualism and competition, which erode both the spiritual and communal well-being of families.

A pastoral response must therefore draw on a theology of suffering, hope, and communal solidarity. Biblical narratives repeatedly affirm God's sustaining presence during hardship; as Redden (2016:236) notes, trials cultivate strength and resilience of spirit. Romans 5:3-5 exemplifies the type of hope that endures through suffering. Root (2021:142) argues that hope rooted in the faithfulness of God equips families to face life's uncertainties, rather than be misled by the assurances of prosperity teachings. This approach encourages pastoral leaders to redirect their focus from individual gain to relational and communal care, fostering mutual support, ethical

responsibility, and spiritual growth (Nanthambwe & Magezi, 2022:12; Keener, 2017:201).

Critical engagement necessitates addressing the socio-economic dimensions of PG influence. As Agbiji and Agbiji (2016:4) opine, in African contexts, such exploitation capitalises on economic vulnerability; although a message of prosperity may initially appear to address structural poverty, it ultimately leaves families both spiritually and materially unprovided for. This has led to spiritual disillusionment among families in North America and parts of Asia, including the USA, Canada, India, and South Korea, when promised prosperity fails to materialise. This highlights the global need for pastoral intervention that is contextually relevant yet faithful to theology (Bowler, 2018:87; Seo, 2020:23).

Theological resources, comprehensive care, and practical tools strengthen pastoral care. Van Emmenes (2019:102) and Brunsdon (2024:4) note that providing support for pastors to maintain spiritual and emotional resilience enables them to offer careful guidance, avoid triumphalism in ministry, and lead families in the right direction. Training in biblical interpretation, pastoral counselling, and family ministry equips pastors to lead congregations in presenting a gospel that balances spiritual depth with relational integrity and ethical responsibility above material gain (Phillips, 2015:15; Jentile, 2021:3).

Additionally, critical engagement with prosperity theology is restorative for families. As noted by Keener (2017:201) and Nanthambwe and Magezi (2022:12), dismantling exploitative teachings helps believers reclaim spiritual agency and trust, while also fostering intergenerational faith formation. This is supported by Maina *et al.* (2018: 37), who argues that when families confront the socio-cultural assumptions underpinning prosperity narratives, they set more realistic expectations and find resilience in adversity, with hope grounded in God's providence rather than material gain. When such pastoral strategies are critically contextualised to families' real-life situations, they cultivate holistic psychological and spiritual well-being, communal solidarity, emotional health, and ethical living across cultural and economic contexts (Smit, 2015:4; Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:5).

Pastoral care that thoughtfully engages with prosperity theology is essential for the spiritual well-being of families. Incorporating theological rigour, emotional support, and contextual awareness, this form of pastoral care assists families in navigating spiritual, relational, and socio-economic challenges related to the influence of the PG. By fostering a balanced theology, nurturing hope, and encouraging perseverance, it enables families to pursue a gospel-centred life, cultivates resilience, and supports holistic flourishing with depth in relationships.

### **4.3.2 Reclaiming biblical foundations of prosperity**

Prosperity is not primarily about material or financial gain, but rather the state of complete well-being under God's covenantal love – spiritual growth, healthy and stable relationships, emotional resilience, and social wellness (Middleton, 2005:11; Phillips, 2015:15). It refers to maintaining these qualities through God's providence. Scriptures such as Deuteronomy 8:18, 3 John 1:2, and Proverbs 3:9–10 indicate that factors contributing to prosperity include God's will, as well as obedience, stewardship, humility, and compassion towards others. Restoring these foundations, which give priority to these areas, challenges triumphalist messages in gospel teachings about prosperity. This shifts the focus from individual accumulation to family-centred spiritual growth, ethical responsibility, and trust in God's providential care (Root, 2021:142; Redden, 2016:236).

#### **4.3.2.1 Teaching holistic biblical prosperity**

Biblical prosperity is holistic. It comprises spiritual depth, emotional health, relational harmony, and purposefulness in life, rather than just material accumulation. In Scripture, such as 3 John 1:2 and Psalm 1:1–3, true prosperity has *shalom*, or peace, as its elements – not only well-being but also righteousness; God's intention for human flourishing within relational and ethical frameworks (Middleton, 2005:11). This understanding stands in direct contrast to that of the narrators of the gospel of prosperity, who reduce the gospel to the pursuit of wealth, health, and social status by being faithful, while neglecting formation in spirituality and relational integrity (Bowler, 2018:87; Maina *et al.*, 2018: 40).

Holistic biblical prosperity encourages a life of flourishing in relationship with God, self, and others, integrating spiritual, emotional, and communal dimensions. Mbonu (2016:71) contends that authentic Christian teaching must reclaim this comprehensive vision, framing prosperity as a means of nurturing discipleship, emotional resilience, and ethical living, rather than personal gain. Nanthambwe and Magezi (2022:10) similarly argue that pastoral teaching grounded in holistic biblical principles equips believers to navigate suffering, resist false doctrines, and embrace their spiritual identity in Christ, fostering enduring spiritual and relational health.

Teaching holistic prosperity also challenges the materialistic and individualistic emphasis often promoted by PG messages. It draws attention to internal transformation, stewardship, and relational well-being as core elements of God's blessing, rather than prioritising financial increase (Phillips, 2015:15; Redden, 2016:236). When pastors prioritise ethical living and communal flourishing, congregations can cultivate environments where spiritual growth, mutual care, and moral responsibility are fostered, as opposed to self-enrichment. As noted by Brunsdon (2024:4), such an approach assists families in building resilience, enabling them to navigate socio-economic challenges with a coherent worldview rooted in God's justice, love, and provision, especially when this perspective is effectively communicated by pastors.

It also aligns with the pastoral imperative to nurture the spiritual well-being of the family. Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5) state that pastors can integrate biblical insight with practical counsel to help families establish and maintain effective stewardship practices, as well as foster relational harmony – both essential and complementary sources of emotional and spiritual resilience. Holistic prosperity, therefore, serves not only as a theological corrective to misunderstandings of the PG but also as a pragmatic expression aimed at cultivating families that exemplify gospel-centred discipleship, ethical integrity, and relational flourishing.

Holistic biblical prosperity, as taught, extends beyond material definitions of blessing to encompass comprehensive well-being, spiritual growth, relational maturity, and moral integrity. According to Mbonu (2016:71), Nanthambwe and Magezi (2022:10), and Bowler (2018:87), it enables families to experience God's abundant provision in ways that foster discipleship, strengthen community bonds, and build spiritual

resilience. This approach presents a transformative alternative to the limited perspectives of the PG.

#### **4.3.2.2 Emphasising stewardship, contentment, and God's timing**

A biblically grounded understanding of prosperity must extend beyond material gain to encompass spiritual formation, relational integrity, and holistic family flourishing. Central to this vision are the principles of stewardship, contentment, and trust in God's timing, which provide families with a framework for navigating socio-economic challenges while nurturing spiritual resilience and ethical living (Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni, 2019:215; Mbonu, 2016:75).

The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) addresses the stewardship of all resources with which God has blessed believers – finances, relationships, and personal gifts. Piper (2011:18) and Jones and Woodbridge (2011:5) affirm that it is a principle of accountability and faithful investment, offering families a model for integrity and thoughtful planning rather than the impulsive pursuit of wealth. When pastors encourage families to adopt a stewardship mindset, they cultivate environments characterised by spiritual maturity, relational harmony, and communal responsibility. In doing so, they foster households where family members support one another and grow in faith together.

Contentment, as described in Philippians 4:11–13, fosters emotional and spiritual strength by encouraging individuals to value God's provision in every circumstance. Mhaka-Mutepfa and Maundeni, (2019:214) explain that when pastors exemplify contentment, they help families resist the pressures of consumerism and the allure of instant-gratification promises found in PG teachings. Similarly, Mbonu (2016:76) argues that cultivating an attitude of contentment nurtures gratitude, relational harmony, and psychological well-being, enabling families to experience God's blessing beyond mere material gain.

It is in God's time; this is how the writer of Ecclesiastes 3:1 expresses it, thereby affirming the principle of patience as we wait for God to fulfil His providence. Magezi and Manzanga (2024:6) explain that when families recognise that God's plans unfold for His purposes, hope and endurance are fostered, even amid significant economic

or social challenges. Such trust encourages family members to prioritise spiritual growth, sound ethics, and healthy relationships over the immediate pursuit of material success.

These principles support pastors in guiding families towards holistic spiritual well-being within challenging circumstances. The misconceptions of prosperity theology are addressed, helping families to develop resilience, remain faithful, and care for one another by trusting in God's timing and embracing contentment. Such teaching enables families to navigate socio-economic pressures with integrity while maintaining their spiritual identity and advancing together in relational and ethical maturity (Piper, 2011:18; Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni, 2019:215); Mbonu, 2016).

Ultimately, teaching these biblical principles is not limited to fostering good morality; rather, it uplifts the spiritual, emotional, and relational well-being of families, allowing them to experience God's blessing as multidimensional flourishing rather than merely material abundance. In this way, families learn to reject empty promises, accept God's providence, and nurture a faith rooted in hope and genuine spiritual foundations.

#### **4.3.2.3 Use of lament, hope, and forgiveness as spiritual tools for healing**

Restorative theology relies on lament, hope, and forgiveness to support the spiritual well-being of families harmed by false promises of prosperity. It provides a framework for families to process disappointment, loss, or unmet expectations towards God. Mashau and Kgatle (2019:3) observe that if gospel narratives focus solely on ongoing success, families are left without opportunities to express feelings of despondency or unrealised expectations.

If pain must be silenced by triumphant theologies, then biblical lament does not silence pain but instead provides families with an avenue through which feelings of grief and despondency towards God can be expressed. Texts such as Psalm 13 and Lamentations 3 highlight that lament does not mean listening to God; rather, it is an act based on a firm belief that God does listen. Brueggemann (2014:51) states, "It is central to covenantal faith because it permits us suffering protest yet staying involved relationally with God". For families navigating poverty, illness, or broken expectations fostered by prosperity theology, lament validates their struggles and creates space for

pastoral care that embraces authenticity rather than denial. Brueggemann (2014:51) adds that lament is a form of prayer that resists resignation, holding God to his promises while enabling the believer to remain in active and relational engagement with God.

It is important for families who are struggling under the weight of socio-economic pressure, illness, or relational breakdowns to understand that overcoming these challenges does not necessarily mean they have been triumphant, as prosperity teachings suggest. West (2016:12) attests that biblical lament validates suffering as part of the human condition and creates a pastoral space where one can be authentic and emotionally honest. Lament does not turn faith weaker but makes it stronger because despair is directed toward God rather than away from him. Katongole (2017:98) explains that lament in situations of poverty and trauma is highly theological since such action resists denial and false hope while simultaneously opening up the family to God's sustaining grace.

Hope, grounded in God's promises, is the opposite of despair and resignation. Paul, in Romans 8:18–25, presents hope as relief not immediate, but rather accompanied by patient confidence in God's redemptive purposes beyond present suffering. As Moltmann (2012:28) asserts, Christian hope is essentially eschatological; it encourages communities to bear tribulations with anticipation of God's ultimate renewal. This is the kind of hope that challenges prosperity narrative families and thus helps them recover resilience by redefining flourishing – not as material abundance, but as restored relationships and spiritual development, alongside faith in the providence of God (Magezi & Manzanga, 2020:5).

Forgiveness also relieves emotional and relational burdens, thereby promoting the general well-being of the family. In cases where prosperity leaders have caused pain or there is conflict within the household, forgiveness makes way for reconciliation and allows healing to begin. Volf (2005:146) argues that forgiveness is not mere forgetting; it is a transformative act that should break the cycle of revenge, enabling community members to re-establish trust. Pastors who practise and teach forgiveness provide ways for families to attain spiritual and relational wholeness that counteracts the bitterness and division that undermine well-being.

Lament, hope, and forgiveness can indeed cultivate a spirituality that makes room for vulnerability even as it seeks restoration. These three practices are also highlighted by McDaniel (2023:5) in their discussion on how holistic recovery is enabled by reorienting believers to the grace of God while sustaining communal empathy. Families nurtured in this way develop resilience, authenticity, and relational depth; faith communities, including families, prove to be better keepers, capable of withstanding the socio-economic and emotional trials that prosperity theology so adamantly denies. As Dames (2026:10) remarks, this is a healing spirituality integrated through pastoral care towards trauma, thus addressing both the immediate concern of trauma and the broader dimension of capacity building for sustainable flourishing in Christ.

#### **4.3.2.4 Theological counselling using scripture, prayer, and pastoral presence**

Theological counselling, in terms of Scriptures and prayers combined with pastoral presence, offers a deeply restorative response to the emotional and spiritual damage caused by distortions in prosperity teachings. Families who have embraced PG narratives often internalise false guilt and misguided expectations when the promises fail to materialise and breakthroughs never occur. This can bring familial relationships to crisis point, undermine faith, and perpetuate ongoing cycles of disappointment and disillusionment (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019:3). Theological counselling is thus introduced as a redemptive practice that re-orientes believers towards the tenets of truth and grace, fostering spiritual resilience that can restore families' spiritual health.

Van Emmenes (2019:105) observes that theological counselling must address communal disillusionment when prosperity promises are unfulfilled, as well as the individual pain experienced. It is the failure of the PG that often leads to breaches of trust within families and congregations, resulting in shame and isolation. Pastoral caregivers can frame suffering within narratives from biblical texts, such as the lament Psalms, Christ's sufferings, and Paul's theology of weakness (2 Cor 12:7–10), enabling people to name their suffering without denial while affirming God's abiding presence, even in times of trial. The cultivation of such resilient faith, which relies on God's sustaining grace rather than material success, is, according to Magezi and Manzanga (2023:5), what breaks into the real world with its pain yet hope, contrasting with the triumphant faith promoted by prosperity teaching.

Prayer is another essential aspect of this model. Sorley (2011:139) notes that intercessory prayer not only heightens the conscious realisation of divine presence but also strengthens communal solidarity, as families are prayed for by their pastors and fellow believers. As stated by Dames (2026:10), prayer may be seen as a theological act reinforcing reliance on God's provision, as well as a therapeutic discipline that reduces anxiety and despondency. In contexts where prosperity narratives have caused harm, prayer redirects the expectation of immediate wealth towards trust in God's timing and sustaining care.

The pastoral role is equally important. As Nouwen (2013:39) explains, this is the ministry of availability, where clergy offer Christlike compassion through empathetic presence rather than quick fixes to problems. It conveys divine care more profoundly than words ever could, affirming dignity while comforting families amid the pain of broken faith. Swinton (2017:53) argues that such a pastoral role becomes a sacramental sign of God's nearness when hope is restored following His perceived absence. In this way, ministers reverse the alienation caused by prosperity failures and help individuals rediscover God's lovingkindness.

This integrated model of scriptural prayer and pastoral presence brings not only emotional relief but also nurtures spiritual maturity within families. When families engage in learning how to interpret their suffering through the biblical witness, cast their worries upon God in prayer, and experience genuine pastoral companionship, they gain strength to rebuild their faith on grace, truth, and hope. Such counselling cultivates resilience and relational harmony, fostering holistic spirituality that stands in opposition to what prosperity theology distorts, and situates families within God's redemptive purposes (Piper, 2005:22; Machingura, 2017:97).

#### **4.3.2.5 Applying liberation theology, African communal spirituality, and covenantal theology**

The application of such a blend of liberation theology, African communal spirituality, and covenantal theology helps to develop a perspective that is both culturally relevant and biblically correct in empowering families to resist the harm caused by PG theology. Liberation theology, primarily reflecting the thoughts of Gutiérrez (1973:198; 2019:448), underlines justice and dignity with God's preferential option for the poor

(Lk 4:18–19). It is, therefore, especially responsive to African communal struggles concerning economic inequalities, exploitation, and other forms of social injustice. This context highlights the inadequacy of household wealth promises made by PG teachings if the actual structural issues of poverty and oppression are never addressed (Cone, 2010:42; Katongole, 2017:88). Through the integration of liberationist pastoral care into household care ministries, pain will no longer be misinterpreted as a sign of ungodliness; rather, it will be recognised as the very locus wherein God's justice is manifested in solidarity. Thus, households could be empowered to embrace hope and resilience, and to advocate for justice itself as an instrument for improving their own spiritual well-being.

African communal spirituality draws its content from *ubuntu*, interdependence, and collective flourishing. One of the principles found in these traditions affirms that "a person is a person through other persons", which directly contrasts with the extreme individualism evident in the teachings of the PG (Kobe, 2021:101). For Carpenter (2024:105), the definition above cultivates a sense of sympathy within families, fostering more accountable and resilient relationships that share responsibility for both immaterial and material well-being. Bujo (2001:23) contends that African spirituality, by resisting commodification, anchors faith in communal values such as solidarity, respect, and intergenerational care. In this manner, African communal spirituality offers an alternative understanding of prosperity, which centres not on individual enrichment but on collective flourishing through the development of strong familial ties.

Theology adds to stability by underlining God's faith and relational commitment over many generations (Gen 17:7; Heb 8:10). Pratt (2024:33) states that "Covenantal theology reorients families toward God's promises of enduring love and grace". Brueggemann (2016:52) adds that covenantal thinking "affirms God's steadfast love (*hesed*) as the foundation of human relationships" and teaches families to build justice, mercy, and faithfulness into their lives. Similarly, Benezet Bujo (2001:23) notes that covenantal theology returns to an understanding of the family as actors in the mission of God, participants in stability, and in passing on faith across generations. Such a reading has improved the spiritual well-being of families, as it roots them in a theology of faithfulness and continuity rather than a wealth-based faith that interprets instability.

Liberation theology, African communal spirituality, and covenantal theology create a synthesis for pastors to draw culturally germane yet biblically firm principles for healing both the spiritual and relational damages wrought by PG teachings. This renews Christian discipleship into justice, mutual responsibility, and holistic well-being. Such families possess adequate covenants to defend themselves against exploitative theologies, creating resilience in adversity and abundant spiritual thriving based on God's covenantal love, communal solidarity, and liberating grace.

#### **4.3.2.6 Integrating pastoral theology with specific realities of African families**

Pastoral theology, when integrated with the lived experiences of African families, enables theological reflection to move beyond abstraction and become grounded in the everyday challenges and hopes people face. African families contend with poverty, unemployment, and the pressures of migration. Additionally, they experience intergenerational trauma and the negative effects of PG teachings, which link faith to material success (Turgong, 2023:27; Maina *et al.*, 2018:38). These realities result in stress, disillusionment, and fractured relationships, calling for a pastoral response that is empathetic, contextually aware, and biblically grounded in order to remain relevant.

When pastoral theology is meaningfully contextualised, it addresses these complex issues by blending theological reflection with the actual experiences of families. As Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5) state, theology must be "embodied" in African contexts, engaging with both traditional values and contemporary challenges. For example, affirming the dignity of family roles, supporting single parents, and addressing gender-based violence against women in fractured households all illustrate the need for pastoral care that is lived out, rather than confined to theory. Injustice and indignity inflicted on families can undermine their spiritual well-being; however, theology that is embodied fosters justice and resilience, particularly in times of hardship.

Recent scholarship affirms the value of developing theology within a community context, rather than imposing it externally. Jackson (2025:17) argues that pastoral leaders must attentively engage with cultural narratives and integrate them with biblical teaching to ensure theology's continued relevance. According to Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5), such collaborative creation resists exploitative religious practices

while enabling families to reclaim agency and rebuild faith upon gospel-centred foundations. In this way, pastoral theology becomes both liberative and restorative.

In addition, as Machingura (2017:97) and Bvute (2018:19) note, contextual pastoral care must take into account immediate social issues such as HIV/AIDS, youth unemployment, and displacement, thus connecting family spirituality to wider struggles for justice and survival. This can be achieved through the application of Lartey's (2013:85) intercultural pastoral care model, which encourages a synthesis between indigenous knowledge systems and international theological understandings. Approaches of this kind not only recognise communal African values similar to *ubuntu*; they also facilitate holistic thriving through the understanding that there can be no well-being without harmonious relations, economic equity, and psychological restoration.

By connecting pastoral theology to the lived experiences of African families, church leaders can foster resilience and advance reconciliation, while simultaneously addressing the distortions of the PG that prey on vulnerability. Such an approach positions the church as a holistic, healing, justice-orientated, and family-supportive community – an entity dedicated to spiritual well-being, firmly grounded in God's grace, communal unity, and cultural authenticity.

#### **4.3.2.7 Encouraging regular prayer, Bible study, fasting, and family devotionals**

Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fasting, and family devotionals go a long way in building the spiritual strength of Christian families, as well as fostering resilience towards challenges and overall well-being. These practices create an environment of love among those gathered at the table, with increased sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Prosperity preaching, however, has shifted focus towards outward success and material gain rather than true spiritual matters. E. Baloyi (2024:3) indicates that daily family devotional time opens up opportunities for intergenerational learning, teaching identity based on Scripture, and value-sharing that helps sustain the household in times of crisis.

Jaru (2019:41) states it is through the continuous, regular practice of spiritual disciplines that believers grow strong morally and spiritually, enabling them to view life from a Christ-centred perspective. Such strength can be sustained by prayer and

fasting, increasing reliance on God in difficult times. This nurtures a spirituality that does not deny suffering but interprets it within God's providence (Adeboye, 2019:22). As highlighted by Barron (2022:90), Bible study makes families doctrinally sound and keeps them safe from any form of theological distortions, such as prosperity teachings. Through scriptural engagement, families become grounded in truth, capable of resisting deception, and are nurtured in patience, humility, and generosity.

Knoetze (2019:5) further asserts that family devotionals provide sacred moments for spiritual connection, mutual support, and the transmission of faith across generations. In contexts where material wealth undermines faith and fosters false expectations, these practices help redirect attention to God's grace, the value of Christ, and the sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit. Dames (2026:10) adds that when spiritual principles are demonstrated by church leaders and intentionally woven into group life, they enable the Church to be recognised as a community of believers rather than a marketplace of talents.

Ultimately, intentional prayer, fasting, Bible reading, and family devotionals will strengthen Christian households to resist the spiritual decline brought on by materialistic ideologies. These practices provide families with resilience to face difficulties with gratitude and hope, steadfastly embracing the redemptive promises found in God's Word, and making spiritual maturity the distinguishing mark of their journey.

#### **4.3.2.8 Teaching discernment and spiritual maturity to guard against deception**

Spiritual maturity and discernment are crucial theological resources that can be employed to guard families against the distortions of PG teachings. The PG has gained significant momentum in equating faith with wealth and health, while either silencing or entirely overlooking any reality of suffering and vulnerability. Discernment enables believers to judge all teachings by the authority of Scripture (1 Jn 4:1), while spiritual maturity builds a faith that can withstand hardship in the fulfilment of promises (Heb 5:14). According to Hove, (2025:3131), families that develop these qualities are rightly positioned to judge, rather than sit in the accusatory seat when prosperity's promised material rewards fail to manifest.

Prosperity teachings flourish where biblical literacy is low and theological reflection is shallow. There must be a pastoral response, teaching discernment as an intentional spiritual discipline, which Nanthambwe and Magezi (2022:10) contend should include the fostering of critical theological thinking and scriptural literacy by pastoral leaders within families and congregations. Such formation will help believers identify manipulative preaching, unbiblical promises, and the commodification of faith. As noted by M.E. Baloyi (2024:59), a family that is biblically grounded shows resilience in any socio-economic adversity, as such strength is drawn from the Word of God and not from misplaced hope in instant miracles.

Galatians 5:22-23 indicates that the fruit of the Spirit is present in Christian families where spiritual maturity prevails. Consequently, love, patience, and kindness, accompanied by self-control, would characterise relationships between family members, thereby enhancing communal bonds and relational resilience. As Dames (2026:10) observes, maturity provides individuals with the capacity to reinterpret suffering within providence, thus sustaining hope rather than slipping into despondency. Wright (2010:216) similarly argued that true Christian maturity means living out God's mission in the everyday, standing against consumerism by practising justice and compassion.

The church plays a critical role in developing this maturity. According to Muyonga (2024:50), African families mostly look to the church for guidance amid economic predicaments. Churches that allow biblical discernment to thrive, rather than promote the manipulation of prosperity, support the spiritual health of communities. Oduyoye (2001:73) further postulates that Christian formation in Africa must nurture critical faith practices which instil and teach dignity, challenge exploitation, and foster interdependence within families and communities.

Van der Walt and Vorster (2017:241) also note that insight and maturity flow between generations. Families who engage in group Bible study and prayer add strength through theological reflection to their children. This improves family well-being, as it establishes a legacy of faith that is not easily broken by deceptive teaching. As indicated by Bosch (2011:401), real discipleship requires growth over a lifetime and an investment that enables believers to resist the various ways in which the gospel is distorted in different cultural and economic contexts.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The pastoral care approach plays a crucial role in sustaining family well-being, particularly in supporting families affected by PG teachings. In many parts of the world, popular versions of these teachings associate wealth and health with divine favour, while overlooking genuine socio-economic realities. As a result, unrealistic expectations can undermine family stability. Pastoral care therefore requires a strong theological foundation to address distortions within gospel teaching from a theological perspective. Three principles to be discussed include biblical realism, the theology of the cross, and *imago Dei*.

Biblical realism acknowledges the complexities of human life, recognising suffering and weakness, and challenges the idea that faith will always lead to material prosperity. Scriptural examples, especially Paul's teachings on contentment and embracing weakness, encourage endurance and reliance on God's grace rather than equating faithfulness with prosperity. The reformed tradition is rooted in a cross-centred theology, presenting suffering as an integral aspect of Christian life, and viewing hardship as holding redemptive value, whilst turning hope towards Christ rather than material success. The gospel teaches that everyone is created in God's image – the *imago Dei* affirms inherent dignity and worth, advocating for respect and holistic care within the family context, in contrast to the PG's focus on material achievement as a measure of worth.

This perspective also calls for comprehensive pastoral care, sound theological education, and emotional and spiritual support for pastors, as well as contextual approaches such as eco-theology and critical engagement with prosperity teachings. Pastoral care that reclaims a biblical vision of holistic well-being – encompassing spiritual, emotional, and relational dimensions – can help restore hope and build resilience in families affected by PG teachings, fostering authentic faith. The next chapter explores effective pastoral care strategies that can address these challenges.

## **CHAPTER 5 EFFECTIVE PASTORAL CARE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presented the fourth objective, which seeks to develop pastoral care strategies to assist pastors in providing spiritual support to families adversely affected by PG, addressing the third question: “What pastoral care strategies can be used to address the detrimental effects of the PG?” This chapter, therefore, undertakes the pragmatic task described by Osmer (2008:7) as the process of formulating suitable responses to real-life challenges in pastoral ministry. It is guided by the central question, “How might we respond?” (Osmer, 2008:4) and seeks to develop practical strategies to address the harmful effects of PG teachings on families.

The descriptive-empirical, interpretive, and normative tasks in the previous chapters have discussed how the PG has undermined family well-being, spiritual formation, and community life. This chapter builds on those insights by focusing on specific pastoral interventions that are biblical, contextually relevant, and socially transformative.

Several scholars highlight the importance of practical pastoral responses in African contexts. Magezi (2016:5) contends that pastoral care must be contextually sensitive, recognising both the socio-economic vulnerabilities that make the PG appealing and the theological distortions it perpetuates. Similarly, Kgatle (2017:3) points to the need for pastoral leaders to engage with both the spiritual and socio-economic realities of their congregants. These perspectives suggest that an effective pastoral response cannot consist merely of theological critique; it must also provide practical alternatives that restore hope, rebuild faith, and empower families for sustainable living.

This chapter discusses four interrelated pastoral care strategies:

- (a) Contextual pastoral counselling, which provides individual and group counselling, as well as safe spaces for individuals and families to share their stories.

- (b) Educational and empowerment programmes, which include theological training, financial literacy, and life-skills development.
- (c) Building supportive faith communities through small groups, fellowship gatherings, and mutual accountability structures.
- (d) Prophetic pastoral praxis, which challenges exploitative systems while advocating for justice and holistic well-being.

According to Louw (2015:321) and Swinton (2017:7), these strategies enable churches to recover their vocation as healing communities reflecting Christ's compassion, justice, and truth.

## **5.2 Contextual pastoral counselling**

Pastoral counselling provides an immediate space for individuals to express spiritual and emotional crises arising from unfulfilled promises of prosperity. An effective counselling process considers not only the theological imbalances at play, but also the tangible experiences of believers who feel disappointment, guilt, and a sense of broken trust. Contextual pastoral counselling should adopt a holistic approach, incorporating both individual and group interventions that address spiritual uncertainty and familial strain, while simultaneously fostering theological clarity and facilitating emotional healing (Magezi & Banda, 2017:5; Zaluchu, 2021:66).

### **5.2.1 Individual and group counselling for affected families**

Pastoral care represents a primary strategy for addressing the spiritual, emotional, and financial distress experienced by families when the promises of PG teachings remain unfulfilled. These teachings frequently associate faith with material wealth and physical well-being, fuelling significant expectations that, when unmet, often result in profound disappointment. Such disappointment not only affects individuals but also impacts family dynamics, manifesting in issues such as financial strain, marital discord, and crises of faith. Magezi and Banda (2017:5) argue for a greater focus on pastoral counselling to assist believers as they navigate these challenges, particularly when confronting the disillusionment caused by unfulfilled promises related to wealth and health. I concur with Magezi and Banda that prioritising pastoral counselling for affected families is essential for supporting their recovery.

As noted by Kgatle (2017:4), in the South African context, families have redirected their resources towards “seed sowing” and “faith giving”, resulting in significant economic hardship for many households. Such practices have strained relationships and eroded trust within families, often leading to feelings of bitterness and blame when financial sacrifices fail to yield anticipated outcomes, further weakening familial bonds. Kgatle (2017:3) also observes that pastoral counselling, whether conducted individually or in groups, can serve a restorative function. It provides theological clarity and emotional support, assisting families to recover from disappointment and navigate both financial and spiritual losses, while fostering a more balanced understanding of Christian stewardship.

Group counselling, in particular, creates an environment of mutual support, enabling families to share experiences and draw strength from one another. Zaluchu (2021:66) notes that through collective reflection, individuals can be reoriented towards a biblically faithful theology of suffering, endurance, and hope. Group counselling offers a vital channel for fostering solidarity, reducing the sense of isolation and shame experienced by those disillusioned by prosperity teaching. Moreover, as testimonies of resilience and spiritual renewal are shared in these settings, affected individuals are encouraged to persevere and restore their faith.

At the individual level, pastoral counselling provides believers with an opportunity to express their pain, doubt, and fear in a private and confidential setting. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:74) states that many people feel guilty when their expectations are not met, attributing this to a perceived lack of faith. This leads to further confusion on a spiritual level and creates distance between the individual and God. Individual counselling serves as a means of addressing these theological misunderstandings, which can be damaging, and reaffirms God's love, which is not dependent on material prosperity. Consequently, Magezi (2019:413) identifies the pastoral need, particularly at this time, for a biblical theology of suffering that teaches Christian discipleship, rather than viewing suffering as evidence of failed faith.

Counselling also addresses the financial distress that can arise from prosperity teachings. As Nell (2020:15) indicates, the focus on “sowing seeds” often results in debt and poverty, leaving victims vulnerable to exploitation. Pastoral counsellors should therefore be prepared to equip families with practical tools for financial

stewardship and responsible resource management. This approach combines biblical principles of contentment, accountability, and sharing with practical financial literacy. In this way, counselling becomes not only a source of emotional healing, but also a means of empowering families to build sustainable livelihoods without falling prey to manipulative promises.

Pastoral counselling should engage with the theology of suffering, an area frequently overlooked or avoided by PG proponents. The New Testament shows that suffering plays a significant role in the Christian faith; it shapes character, fosters endurance, and produces hope (Rom 5:3–5). Pastoral counsellors can help families reinterpret their struggles in light of Christ's teachings, offering assurance of God's sustaining presence in times of trouble. This corrective theology shifts the relationship with God from one based on transactions to one grounded in trust. According to Zaluchu (2021:66), such a reorientation builds resilience in believers, enabling them to withstand trials on the basis of faith in God's faithfulness rather than on financial outcomes.

Also, pastoral care, whether individual or group, helps to restore community and church life. Families often avoid congregational participation because they feel betrayed by the teachings of prosperity. This leads to spiritual isolation. Louw (2017:5) notes that pastoral care should restore broken trust and bring families back into a real Christian community. Through honest conversation, empathetic listening, and deeper insight into scriptural teaching, pastoral counselling strengthens the relational aspect of the church, which leads to a healthier ecclesial culture.

Critically, scholars also advise that counselling should not be limited to an aspect of therapy. I note and support Magezi (2016:2), who says pastoral counselling should be based on theology; thus, the goal is not simply emotional relief but genuine spiritual transformation. Theological grounding prevents the risk of merely replacing one kind of shallowness with another and ensures that families receive a holistic, valid type of pastoral response that is scripturally faithful to the context.

Pastoral counselling is essentially the balancing act and healing mechanism for families hurt by teachings on the PG. It brings not only theological recalibration but practical and emotional restoration as well. Utilising individual and group models to

work towards an integrated pastoral response that affirms family dignity, strengthens faith, and re-establishes hope founded in Christ rather than financial promises will make pastoral care an agent of renewal, leading believers into more authentic relationships with God.

### **5.2.2 Safe spaces for sharing stories of disappointment and restoration**

The most effective pastoral strategy for families victimised by the PG would perhaps be encouraging the sharing of spaces where they can vividly narrate their stories of disappointment, financial loss, and spiritual confusion. The teaching of the PG predominantly involves miraculous wealth, success, and healing, leading many believers to invest heavily – emotionally, financially, and spiritually – into “seed sowing” or “faith pledges”. My concern aligns with Nell (2020:16), who indicated that if these promises do not come to fruition, families may first face economic hardship, followed by a crisis of faith and disillusionment with God. It is from this context that spaces for dialogue, testimony, and reflection become a pastoral necessity for helping believers express their pain and dismantle false theological narratives on their journey towards restoration.

Pastoral counselling, group support meetings, and church-based community dialogues can be considered safe space exercises. In these expression-oriented forums, there is no fear of vulnerability or any form of chastisement that may be directed toward acts of voicing disappointment; rather, they uphold the dignity of all parties involved. Spaces such as these go a long way toward breaking what Kgatle (2017:3) referred to as the culture of silence that PG preachers foster by disallowing questioning or criticism of their teachings. When transparency is encouraged and opened up through storytelling, pastors create opportunities for families to bring private struggles into the open, finding solidarity in shared experiences. The sharing of stories holds therapeutic value in itself, as it validates that an individual is not alone in his struggles but is part of a community experiencing similar challenges.

The practice of testimony in safe spaces is both therapeutic and theological. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:73) claims that faith becomes less about transactions – believing or sowing seed offerings so that God will bless with material things – and more about the quality of attributes within the character of God. This calls for trust and

reliance on him, aligning more explicitly with the general biblical narrative that tells stories of pain and ultimate redemption. Disappointment testimonies, when reframed scripturally, become restoration testimonies because the individual discovers God's abiding presence amid tribulation, rather than expecting trials to lead only to manifest blessings. In this pastoral strategy, one begins to heal the wounds left by exploitative PG teachings while rejecting their theology, which ignores real human suffering in discipleship.

Safe spaces also offer a theological re-education exercise. "One of the prosperity gospel's most enduring damages", according to Zaluchu (2021:67), "is a distortion of biblical notions of blessing, suffering, and faith". Most believers consider blessings to be bequeathed exclusively through material means, while suffering can only indicate God's wrath or personal spiritual failure. Scriptural engagement led by pastors within a supportive environment, carefully reading to challenge these imbalances, can be found in passages such as Romans 8:28–39 and James 1:2–4. These provide corrective lenses, affirming that testing serves rather to strengthen faith and draw one closer to God. Such conversations facilitated by pastors help families reformulate their theology, replacing malformed, prosperity-driven narratives with holistic understandings of God's purposes.

The need for safe spaces goes beyond theological correction to emotional healing. As Louw (2017:6) points out, and I agree, pastoral care should offer a combination of spiritual guidance and emotional or psychological support to address the deep wounds that disillusionment can inflict. Families feel betrayed not only by the preacher but also by God when their investment in prosperity teachings fails. In a compassionate and non-judgemental environment, helping people express anger, grief, and confusion – emotions that are vital to healing – pastors who listen empathetically validate these emotions and show that God's gracious presence occurs in times of brokenness. This serves to counter the kind of spiritual isolation that often sets in after moments of disillusionment.

Also, safe spaces foster communal resilience, as networks of support and accountability are established. Bowers Du Toit (2016:6) notes that the conditions of poverty and vulnerability in many African contexts lead numerous families to fall victim to PG promises while searching for hope in difficult times. When such promises fail to

materialise, the communal network intervenes. Within the church, support groups provide not only a setting for sharing stories but also opportunities for mutual encouragement, practical assistance, and shared theological reflection. It is through this collaborative nature of safe spaces that resilience develops, enabling families to move beyond despair and place their hope in God rather than in manipulative promises.

Creating safe spaces is, in itself, an act of prophetic resistance. Magezi and Banda (2017:6) argue that pastoral care should challenge systems and teachings that exploit vulnerable believers by opening up conversations to symbolically break the silence imposed by prosperity preachers and to resist theological manipulation that equates giving with receiving from God. This form of pastoral resistance conveys to the congregation that miracles are not for sale here; rather, this is a community of grace, compassion and truth. Consequently, safe spaces serve as mechanisms for healing, as they represent acts of theology that redefine what authentic Christian community means.

Critically, scholars contend that safe spaces must be carefully managed to prevent them from devolving into echo chambers of misery or bitterness. Lartey (2010:90) maintains that for pastoral spaces to function effectively, they must find equilibrium between honesty and hope – recognising pain without permitting despair to dominate conversational dynamics. Achieving this balance requires intentional facilitation by pastors, who ground discussions in scriptural references and guide participants towards theological reflection. Consequently, such safe spaces not only provide settings for lament but also serve as laboratories of hope, where disillusionment can be transformed into deeper faith.

Safe spaces where pain may be narrated function as pastoral strategies to support families wounded by PG teachings, providing an environment in which healing may commence. Pastoral guidance should be purposefully and sensitively implemented, as indicated by Van Emmenes (2019:72), to cultivate contexts where disillusioned believers can express disappointment, articulate suffering, and rediscover hope in Christ – rather than in material gain. Testimonial safe spaces, as proposed by Magezi and Manzanga (2016:4), are rooted both in Scripture and in communal solidarity; these environments equip families to theologically dismantle shame and resist the

exploitative mechanisms of prosperity-focused preaching. Obadare (2022:4) further advances this perspective, maintaining that restorative communities have the capacity to re-establish family fellowship based on truth, compassion, and resilience, particularly in response to the alienation fostered by PG ideology. The creation of such safe spaces ultimately restores the church as a home of solidarity and faith for families previously led astray by unattainable promises and consequent disappointment.

### **5.3 Educational and empowerment programmes**

To effectively counter the influence of PG teachings and support families affected by them, churches should offer educational and empowerment programmes that address theological shortcomings while also teaching practical life skills. The PG has largely thrived where theological foundations are weak and socio-economic vulnerability prevails, leading to an environment in which promises of wealth, miracles, healing, and success are readily accepted by believers (Magezi & Banda, 2017:5). As Nell (2020:16)) maintains, where biblical literacy is low and there is little or no critical engagement with the Scriptures, false teaching finds fertile ground for acceptance and continuation. Biri (2022:118) further notes that, although seemingly oriented towards prosperity, this discourse exploits socio-economic suffering by offering false solutions, which increase rather than reduce hardship. This demonstrates the need for pastoral strategies that move beyond reactionary or corrective measures, creating spaces for proactive empowerment to enable believers 'to discern truth from exploitation' and embrace a holistic Christian faith. Teaching financial literacy, vocational skills, and responsible stewardship, alongside deepened theological formation, will allow families to apply these principles and thrive spiritually even in the midst of economic challenges. In doing so, they will also foster resilient Christian communities.

Programmes include seminars, workshops, and Bible study series. These offer structured opportunities for sound biblical theology on subjects such as suffering, discipleship, stewardship, and the providence of God – topics often misrepresented or misunderstood in prosperity teaching. Within these settings, key theological insights can be provided. Kgatle (2017:3) claims that education-based theological empowerment restores believers' confidence in God's attributes and helps prevent the conflation of faith with material possessions. Z.J. Banda (2020b:17) succinctly states: "Sustained Bible Engagement nurtures discernment", noting that Christians may

otherwise become vulnerable to exploitative interpretations that turn faith into a commodity. In addition, Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:73) finds that theological education equips believers with the resources to reinterpret experiences of pain through a Christ-centred perspective, rather than relying on prosperity-based promises. These initiatives encourage perseverance by presenting biblical examples such as Job's patience and Paul's steadfastness during suffering, thus encouraging a deeper and more complete understanding of God's favour as revealed in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

Beyond theological grounding, educational programmes should incorporate practical life skills. Areas to be addressed include financial literacy, vocational training, and community development. Zaluchu (2021:68) mentions that PG narratives often prey on economic desperation by offering empty promises to the unemployed and those in financial distress. When believers acquire financial stewardship, budgeting, and entrepreneurial skills, they are less susceptible to manipulative teachings and can achieve dignified self-sufficiency. Biri (2022:131) also contends that the church can reduce the appeal of prosperity narratives by addressing the actual socio-economic conditions of its members. This is significant, as Magezi and Manzanga (2016:5) report that practical skill-building among believers serves as a pastoral response, fostering resilience in both livelihood and faith. Education thus becomes a tool not only for spiritual discernment but also for socio-economic empowerment, enabling communities to critically evaluate exploitative doctrines while improving the material realities that make such teachings attractive.

Ultimately, education empowers believers to cultivate a faith that is intellectually robust and practically applicable. As Louw (2017:6) advocates, pastoral care should adopt a holistic approach by integrating spiritual, emotional, and practical dimensions of life. By establishing structured educational and empowerment programmes, pastors can facilitate environments where believers develop discernment, strength, resilience, and a biblically grounded yet socially responsible faith. These are not merely defensive responses to PG manipulation, but proactive strategies that foster flourishing families and communities based on truth and genuine empowerment for sustainable living.

### **5.3.1 Seminars and Bible teaching workshops focused on clear and solid doctrine**

Educational initiatives are crucial in correcting the theological distortions that arise from PG teachings. Where an oversimplified and misleading message has been presented – that wealth and success can be achieved through faith, giving, and positive confession – educational initiatives must focus on teaching sound, biblically based doctrine. Workshops and seminars are strategic, as this approach allows for interaction, critical engagement, and theological reflection within communities. Kgatle (2017:5) identifies considerable strain in South African households caused by relationships that have drained finances into “seed sowing” ventures with little or no tangible return. Seminars can present an alternative narrative in these contexts, challenging exploitative teachings and thereby equipping families with robust knowledge of God’s providence. Such teachings may cover biblical stewardship, the meaning of contentment, and the theology of suffering, as exemplified by biblical figures such as Job and Paul (Jones, 2020:144). Through this process, believers are repositioned towards the authentic, Christ-centred gospel. This also restores an attitude of trusting God for more than just material gain.

The main mission of these educational campaigns is to dismantle the dangers of transactional faith, wherein God is regarded as a divine benefactor compelled to bestow material wealth in exchange for offerings or proclamations (Zaluchu, 2021:66). Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:73) declares that pastoral teaching should instil an immediate understanding of the relational nature of God’s attributes, which requires trust, obedience, and perseverance. Through seminars, learners can engage more deeply with Scriptures, exploring passages that emphasise God’s presence in suffering (e.g., Ps 23; Rom 8:28; 2 Cor 12:9-10). This approach builds resilience and helps restore families who have suffered disappointment due to unfulfilled promises of prosperity.

Educational workshops go beyond doctrinal instruction to include practical life skills, e.g., financial literacy, budgeting, and strategies for building resilience. Magezi (2019:8) argues that the pastoral response should be holistic, addressing spiritual confusion while also tackling the real socio-economic struggles that leave communities vulnerable to the manipulations of the PG. Financial literacy taught within

church seminars empowers families to make informed decisions and avoid exploitative “seed sowing” practices, while cultivating sustainable stewardship habits. This aligns with what Golo (2023:287) describes as a practical theology of transformation, whereby the church empowers believers to live responsibly within their socio-economic realities, while maintaining faithful discipleship.

Biblical literacy will also be another major component of such initiatives. As long as Zaluchu (2021:67) is correct in saying that many consumers of the PG do not possess the apparatus by which to differentiate between context-bound biblical promises and general principles, workshops can indeed provide participants with hermeneutics-equivalent training to read Scripture responsibly by recognising literary genre, historical context, and theological themes. For instance, if believers are aware that Jeremiah 29:11 was addressed to the exiles in Babylon, rather than as a general promise of material blessing, they can apply the text meaningfully without imposing interpretations that were never intended. This empowers believers to resist proof-texting strategies often employed by prosperity preachers, and to embrace a more coherent biblical theology.

They should encourage conversation and allow for the expression of disappointment as well. Mucherera (2017:118)) explains that in an African setting, communal healing is very important, with families sitting together to share their feelings of loss and sadness. Workshops that use storytelling, small group discussions, and testimonies help families break down harmful prosperity concepts and build their faith on strong support systems. This type of interaction honours their emotional pain and demonstrates God’s love when His promises about prosperity do not seem to materialise.

Moreover, preachers must ensure that such orientation is not a once-off event but forms part of the existing discipleship structure of the church. Regular Bible teaching workshops, Sunday school curricula, and leadership training must consistently emphasise sound doctrine. As Nel (2015:105) points out, faith formation happens over time and there is a need for intentional nurturing of all age groups. Incorporating these workshops into congregational life helps preachers foster a culture of discernment and theological depth, reducing vulnerability to misleading teachings.

Theological seminars and workshops should focus on the biblical tension between suffering and glory. According to Wright (2010:211), to be a follower of Jesus, Christian disciples cannot detach their lives from the reality of suffering; thus, education programmes help families prepare to interpret hardship as an avenue for spiritual growth and a time to sustain reliance on God, rather than as an indication of God's displeasure. Nell (2020:16) indicates that this contrasts with prosperity teachings that attribute hardship directly to a lack of faith, thereby intensifying the feelings of guilt and shame experienced by affected families.

Seminars and Bible teaching workshops are therefore both corrective and constructive. Just as it is necessary to dismantle theological distortions, an alternative framework of biblical fidelity, resilience, and responsible stewardship must be established. When families receive such tools—theologically and practically—pastors are able to nurture faith that is both sustainable and resistant to manipulation. This is what Wanyoike (2020:55) describes regarding the pastoral task as "equipping the saints for maturity", helping believers move towards discipleship that values obedience, service, and community above material prosperity. In this way, as Mofokeng and Kgatle (2019:5) mention, sound pedagogy builds resilience by rooting Christian doctrine against exploitative teaching. Asamoah-Gyadu (2022a:75) also emphasises that the positive aspect of such programmes lies in shaping the theological imagination of believers, enabling them to relate their suffering and explain blessings and success within the broader narrative of God's redemptive purpose, rather than from a narrow perspective of wealth accumulation.

Seminars and Bible teaching workshops are a major pastoral strategy, serving as an immediate means of assisting families who have been victims of such teachings. They also restore theological integrity, renew strength in facing adversity, and empower believers with biblical and practical wisdom to discern between true prosperity and the genuine meaning of success. It is only by building up sound doctrine within community life that pastoral leaders can help families reclaim the dynamism of faith, enabling it to thrive in every season of life, both in abundance and in suffering.

### **5.3.2 Financial literacy and practical life skills training from a Christian worldview**

Pastoral financial literacy and life skills education based on a Christian worldview is necessary as a remedy to the destructive financial habits that the PG encourages: going into debt, manipulative giving, and unrealistic expectations of divine return. In most cases, prosperity theology does not promote sound financial management, as it teaches that wealth and favour from God come through sowing seeds (Ofoe, 2019:3; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022a:73). This orientation not only renders believers powerless but also creates systemic weaknesses in households where resources are scarce, yet invested based on promises of miracles. Bowler (2018:93) argues that the PG is a misreading of Christian hope, attaching it predominantly to material gain; hence, its followers are unprepared for economic adversity and disappointment. Similarly, Gifford (2015:109) found that desperate poverty can be manipulated by the preaching of miraculous deliverance from structural poverty while discouraging sustainable long-term planning. A pastoral response must, therefore, re-centre financial discipleship on biblical principles of stewardship, responsibility, and contentment as a counter-narrative that enables families to resist manipulative teachings and remain grounded in resilient Christian faith.

Financial literacy training in the church should go beyond basic money management and develop an integrated curriculum that merges scriptural wisdom with practical knowledge. The Bible, in many instances, associates wealth and provision with foresight and planning. Proverbs 21:5 encourages us to consider the rewards of diligence, while Luke 14:28 teaches the necessity of careful financial planning. These teachings can be harmonised with modern financial practices such as budgeting, saving, debt reduction, and responsible borrowing. Kgatle (2017:5) notes that prosperity teachings strip congregants of their agency by framing giving as a substitute for financial planning, whereas biblically informed literacy restores agency through the cultivation of discernment and discipline.

Simpson *et al.* (2023:412) similarly argue that equipping Christians with practical economic knowledge helps them avoid financial exploitation and enables them to participate responsibly in society. Recent scholarship also postulates that faith-based financial training has a transformative effect on communities by inculcating resilience,

accountability, and long-term empowerment (Togarasei, 2020:29; Kanyuira, 2021:70). The church thus becomes not only a centre of worship but also a platform for holistic formation, where the concept of discipleship extends from the spiritual to encompass the moral and economic dimensions.

Another important aspect is the provision of practical life skills such as vocational training, entrepreneurship, and relational skills, which enable believers to live successful lives regardless of the fulfilment of prosperity promises. As some of these initiatives help congregants relate faith practically to issues of work and family life, they counteract the escapist ethos cultivated by prosperity preachers (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024:3). This aligns with Magezi and Banda's (2017:5) prescription for a theology of work that honours diligence, resilience, and responsibility as acts of worship.

Relational life-skills training can be used to address issues within families where financial pressure leads to conflict, distrust, and instability (Hendriks, 2014:52). Such training would help believers become self-sufficient in maintaining healthy family relationships, allowing families to 'flourish' without dependence on miracle wealth, by strengthening the family through practical skills such as conflict resolution, vocational guidance, and entrepreneurship. From a theological perspective, integrating financial literacy with life skills affirms God's mandate of stewardship in creation (Gen. 2:15), while also fulfilling Paul's exhortation to responsible living and care for others within Christian communities (2 Thess. 3:10–12).

Several practical models of faith-based financial training demonstrate the viability of this approach as a pastoral strategy. In North America, some evangelical churches run programmes such as Dave Ramsey's (2019:41) "Financial Peace University", in which budgeting and debt reduction are combined with Biblical stewardship. Although contextual differences exist, these initiatives provide opportunities to explore how church ministry can materially empower believers without resorting to prosperity rhetoric. Community-based savings groups facilitated by churches in Kenya and Uganda have enabled families to build sustainable livelihoods while fostering spiritual accountability, according to Gukurume (2023:206). These models offer compelling evidence that integrating life-skills training with financial literacy education fosters resilience and reduces dependency on promises of prosperity.

Freeman (2012:14), along with other critics, has cautioned that unless such programmes are adapted to local contexts, they may be perceived as imposing Western, individualistic economic ideals – an accusation that is not unfounded. In African societies, wealth-sharing is typically a communal activity, contrasting with the more individualistic approach common in the West. Thus, adapting such pastoral programmes to the local socio-economic environment would ensure that financial literacy education inspires and empowers not only individuals but also entire communities.

Some scholars warn that financial literacy holds little value if not framed theologically. Bwiruka (2019:121) highlights that unless economic education is grounded in a vision of justice and solidarity, it risks perpetuating individualistic and consumerist values akin to those promoted by prosperity theology. This indicates a clear need for a theological framework that resists both the materialism sometimes associated with the gospel and the consumerist values of the secular marketplace. As Wright (2010:119) suggests, stewardship involves acknowledging resources as belonging to God and entrusted to humanity for the flourishing of all creation; such a vision calls on the church to encourage believers to prioritise communal well-being over narrow personal advancement, guided by the principles of generosity, justice, and simplicity. This perspective echoes Odhiambo's (2020:97) appeal for African churches to urgently reclaim biblical stewardship as a means of confronting exploitative theologies that commodify faith. In this sense, financial literacy can be understood as a pastoral tool shaped by a theological vision of justice, fostering responsible living and faithful participation in God's mission of holistic transformation.

Pastoral structures that promote accountability and discipleship, and provide support for financial and life skills training, should be established. Congregational mentorship programmes connect financially prudent believers with families who have been affected by the PG. Churches can also introduce cooperative savings schemes or small business support initiatives, embodying the communal values of Acts 2:44-45, where believers shared resources in solidarity. These efforts can ease financial strain while fostering a sense of belonging and mutual care. Spaces dedicated to accountability and mentoring nurture both spiritual and material growth, enabling

families to recover from financial manipulation by redirecting their focus towards sustainable living, as noted by Magezi (2018:6).

When pastors offer financial literacy and practical life skills training, they help to dismantle the exploitative dynamics of PG teachings that have ensnared believers, restoring a biblically grounded vision of stewardship. This pastoral approach encourages holistic well-being, empowering families to thrive both spiritually and materially. It transforms congregations into communities that demonstrate resilience, self-reliance, and reciprocal support, providing an alternative to the consumerist individualism prevalent in prosperity discourse. Ultimately, Scripture-based financial wisdom and sound stewardship protect families from becoming trapped in cycles of poverty, disillusionment, and dependency. This allows pastors to foster genuine prosperity – not through manipulative promises, but through the holistic flourishing of families living faithfully under God's care.

#### **5.4 Building supportive faith communities**

Following the negative impact of PG teachings, with their elements of extreme individualism, materialism, and transactional perceptions of faith, it is essential to reconstruct Christian communities on biblical values of love, service, and fellowship. The gospel of prosperity demonstrates a clear preference for individual gain rather than communal responsibility. The relational and covenantal dimensions of Christian identity become secondary considerations (Bowler, 2018:115; Gifford, 2015:112). While Pentecostal spirituality should ideally be highly communal and participatory, as noted by Vondey (2017:23), the expression oriented toward prosperity distorts the message by reducing faith to a private economic transaction with God. Most believers who do not receive the promised wealth (and healing) become disenchanted and withdraw from meaningful participation in church life and community, thus creating conditions for spiritual isolation accompanied by emotional burnout and institutional mistrust (Magezi & Manzanga, 2016:3).

To deliberately reverse these trends, churches must intentionally foster environments of support and relationship, prioritising the holistic development of spirituality over success in the material realm. As Kalu (2008:286) states, African Christianity finds its best expression within communal practices that facilitate solidarity, sharing stories,

and mutual help against the destructive individualism of prosperity theology. Again, Tiénou (2021:108) writes that Christian communities need to rediscover welcoming practices that include shared prayers and systems of accountability between hosts and guests as immediate means of resistance to exploitative religious ideologies. This draws believers back into real communal life, whereby churches can directly address the wounds of disappointment and distrust, not to mention the spiritual exhaustion promulgated by PG teachings.

An effective way forward involves building faith communities that focus on authentic relationships and shared spiritual journeys, fostering mutual accountability. Insight from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* (1993:26), which has become a foundational work, continues to offer guidance; Bonhoeffer maintained that Christian fellowship is founded not on individual wishes or dreams but firmly on Christ, who unites all believers as one body. This perspective reflects biblical models of community life found in the New Testament, particularly in Acts 2:42–47, where believers dedicate themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, and sharing resources in all aspects of communal life. Communities shaped by these values nurture resilience and spiritual maturity, providing believers with a sense of belonging and purpose that cannot be reduced to any material product.

#### **5.4.1 Establishing small groups and family fellowships**

The small groups and family fellowships in the church are another pastoral strategy to be emphasised in assisting families damaged by PG teachings. The wealth gospel, which emphasises individual material benefits and transactional faith, violates the communal life of the church, reducing discipleship to financial transactions with God (Bowler, 2018:92; Gifford, 2015:31). This distortion has left many families vulnerable to financial exploitation, spiritual disillusionment, and relational strain. Authentic forms of relational discipleship are what Magezi and Manzanga (2024:4) describe as the recovery needed to address the pastoral damage caused by ministries centred on prosperity. Communal life and mutual support systems are also what Chitando and Biri (2021:15) note as necessary for theological clarity to return and for believers to build resilience. In this context, small groups and family fellowships facilitate healing, shared discipleship, and genuine fellowship, countering the alienation and isolation

typically brought about by prosperity teaching. They reconstitute the church community as one of care and truth.

The early Christian church offers a paradigm for such communal living. In Acts 2:42–47, believers are seen sitting in homes, praying, listening to the word, and sharing their resources. This sets forth the principle of solidarity, sharing, and caring for one another. As Wole (2023: 40) puts it, "Such a communal ethos stands diametrically opposed to the narratives of prosperity gospels that have material wealth as concomitant with true spirituality". Small groups establish belonging and accountability, restoring faith to a communal practice rather than an individual quest for wealth. Similarly, Bonhoeffer (1993:28) has noted, "authentic Christian community involves confession and encouragement and mutual service practice that thrive best in small intimate settings", rather than in impersonal mega-church gatherings where the prosperity doctrine holds sway.

Family fellowships adapt this communal vision to the home, where prayer, sharing of the word, and spiritual activities strengthen the resilience of households against materialistic pressures from prosperity teachings. Mahoney (2010:810) emphasises that families who pray together and practise joint spiritual activities have stronger relational ties and greater strength in managing crises. On this note, Nanthambwe, (2024:1213) stresses that African households fractured by prosperity promises must be deliberately reoriented towards spiritual formation within the home. Making the family a centre of discipleship will help churches restore households as the foundational unit for transmitting faith, thus breaking the destructive effects of exploitative prosperity practices which often strip families of financial stability and cohesion.

Participatory discipleship is realised in small groups by empowering believers to exercise their gifts towards the life of the community. The primary focus in prosperity settings is on the "man of God" (Togarasei, 2020:29; Williams, 2024:166). Recent studies, therefore, support the view that small group models decentralise ministry, allowing the laity an active role in teaching, mentoring, and pastoral care (Golo, 2023:287). This participatory approach guards against manipulation and dependency through critical engagement with Scripture – inviting families to identify false doctrine.

This fosters resilience, as faith is not placed in a single charismatic leader but is built through shared discernment and accountability.

The psychosocial benefits of small groups have also gained increased attention in recent literature. In a comparative study, Odhiambo (2020:95) observed that respondents involved in small-group fellowships reported higher levels of trust and communal resilience, not to mention spiritual maturity, compared with those whose participation was limited to the large Sunday gathering. Similarly, Putnam (2000:390) affirms through research on religious social capital that small groups are significant contributors to emotional well-being, community cohesion, and civic responsibility. For families harmed by PG promises of miraculous wealth, these networks offer tangible support, both spiritually and practically, in ways that large prosperity-driven congregations cannot provide.

Also, caution is essential. Bwiruka (2019:121) explains that small groups have the potential to become inward-looking or to replicate materialistic values if they are not grounded in theological justice, generosity, and stewardship. This notion is supported by Golo (2023:287), who asserts that without a missional orientation, small groups tend to drift into exclusivity, thus becoming social cliques rather than transformative communities. Pastoral leadership must shape small group curricula around biblical themes of stewardship, simplicity, and care for the vulnerable, so that fellowships may be both spiritually enriching and socially transformative.

Family fellowships, in particular, must be sustained by pastoral support, integrating financial literacy, relational healing, and shared discipleship within the household context. Recent scholarship has emphasised that Christian families who fell into debt due to prosperity beliefs and are now disillusioned need guidance in reshaping trust and resilience (Kanyuira (2021:70; Biri, 2022:18). Wright (2010:119) notes that households should develop a lifestyle of generosity and simplicity as an expression of witness to God's kingdom. The investment of churches in activities through which householders can build up, rather than withdraw from, prayerful budgeting and communal service will help provide resistance to corrosive consumerism within prosperity theology and offer an embodiment of covenantal faithfulness.

The small groups and family fellowships are an effective pastoral response mechanism that corrects the distortions of PG teaching. It is within such structures that the reorientation of the church towards biblically modelled fellowship, discipling, and mutual care can be realised, while equipping families with a dynamic ability to resist materialistic pressures and find healing from exploitation. Engaging both classical and recent scholarship demonstrates that these initiatives foster resilience and holistic accountability among families towards well-being. More importantly, they reflect what appears to be the New Testament vision of a loving, solidaristic community sharing in collective mission praxis – a prophetic, reconciling narrative that stands in contrast to the individualism and consumerism at the heart of PG ideologies.

#### **5.4.2 Promoting mutual care and accountability among believers**

The promotion of mutual care and accountability among believers is a significant pastoral approach to countering the hyper-individualism, materialism, and transactional faith promoted by the PG. The PG places a sanctified veneer on common human desires for wealth, presenting these as indicators of spiritual achievement. It also diminishes communal responsibility and other relational dimensions intrinsic to church life (Medina & Cornelio, 2021:76; Bowler, 2018:102). Recent scholarship demonstrates how such teaching can fracture family solidarity, leaving families not only materially but also spiritually desolate (Williams, 2022:5; Chitando *et al.*, 2014:12). Conversely, fostering mutual care encourages believers to consider the well-being of others, often prompting them to support those who feel excluded due to unfulfilled promises, especially vulnerable individuals. This corresponds with Togarasei's (2020:25) observation that Pentecostal African groups prioritise mutual care, resulting in greater resilience and communal cohesion. Therefore, mutual care ought to be regarded as a strategic foundation for congregational life, rather than purely an ethical one.

Such mutual care entails practical support including financial assistance, emotional encouragement, and various forms of aid shared among members for holistic well-being. It draws from Scriptures that urge believers to bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2), to rejoice and weep with others (Rom 12:15), and to love not merely in word or speech but also in action and truth (1 Jn 3:17–18). Recent studies have shown that churches practising these forms of mutual care possess stronger trust, spirituality, and

internal resilience (Kgatle, 2025:363; Frimpong, 2025:42). Solidarity support networks help families recover from financial hardship caused by activities prevalent in PG contexts. At the same time, Nanthambwe (2024:1213) demonstrates biblical stewardship and mutual dependence within family units. Likewise, Biri (2022:18) observes that mutual care networks provide households with immediate psychosocial relief in the face of debt, relational tensions, and emotional strain.

Accountability works alongside mutual care by fostering moral integrity, ethical stewardship, and spiritual discernment. In contrast to the PG, which tends to manipulate believers into equating piety with material reward, accountability structures guide congregants to pursue holiness and responsible living as expressions of obedience and gratitude (Jones & Woodbridge, 2017:24; Kgatle, 2025:363). Recent research indicates that peer accountability groups, mentoring schemes, and shared service activities cultivate transparency within the congregation and promote trust (Frimpong, 2025:45; Chitando *et al.*, 2014:12). Magezi and Manzanga (2024:6) note that these are effective mechanisms within African church contexts, where relationship-based approaches can address hierarchical authority structures that may otherwise serve as channels for exploitation in prosperity-focused ministries. Consequently, accountability frameworks not only protect families from spiritual manipulation but also support ethical decision-making and holistic spiritual growth.

The role that relational accountability can play in the recovery of communities harmed by PG teachings is increasingly recognised in recent academic works. Wole (2023:40) points out that there is a structured peer accountability process at work in churches where greater congregational cohesion, trust, and other attributes of spiritual maturity are present. This is corroborated by Frimpong (2025:47), who documents that relational accountability fosters emotional well-being and stability in families. This is particularly effective for households working through disillusionment and unmet material expectations. It has theological support in the understanding that this body must practise mutual accountability to realise its vision, as described in the New Testament (1 Cor 12:12-27). Relational networks of care and accountability equip families with spiritual agency and resilience, so that believers can resist exploitative prosperity narratives.

Practically, churches may implement mutual care and accountability through small group fellowships, mentorship programmes, service projects, and family-centred discipleship initiatives. Magezi and Manzanga (2024:6) claim that relational intimacy, combined with practical life guidance involving aspects such as financial literacy, conflict resolution, and household spiritual practices, complements support for families affected by PG teachings. Williams (2024:166) further states that when the laity participate in accountability through peer mentoring fellowships and community service, authority becomes decentralised, so that no single charismatic leader can manipulate the congregation. These practices foster a stewardship ethic towards responsibility and communal flourishing, while strengthening nuclear family units in their holistic well-being.

The promotion of mutual care and accountability is a pastoral imperative in restoring the integrity of the church to protect families from harm caused by the effects of teachings on the PG. Relational support, integrated with peer accountability, mentorship, and family-based discipleship, will foster resilience, spiritual maturity, and communal solidarity in churches. Mutual care and accountability are thus not optional but central to a Christ-centred vision of church life, wherein families thrive spiritually, relationally, and materially, while reclaiming the prophetic witness of the church in society. Such practices return families to communal life and nourish spiritual and moral maturity. A culture of mutual care strengthens families of believers as they contend against all forms of exploitation that could be inflicted upon them by teachings propagated by preachers.

## **5.5 Developing a prophetic pastoral praxis**

Prophetic pastoral praxis is the way in which a minister can directly confront the exploitative theological and economic roots of PG teachings, while at the same time advocating for the holistic wellness of congregants and their families. According to Bowler (2018:92) and Gifford (2015:44), the message of prosperity centres chiefly on material wealth, miracles, and individual benefit, reducing faith to a mere transaction with God. Families shaped by such paradigms often fall victim to financial exploitation and subsequently suffer from emotional strain, spiritual disillusionment, and relational breakdown. Prophetic pastoral praxis should endeavour to challenge these

destructive narratives, while also offering theological, emotional, and practical support towards the reclamation of agency and dignity that lead to holistic flourishing.

Magezi (2019:6) defines *prophetic pastoral care* as the act of confronting false theological constructs while simultaneously creating spaces of hope and truth through which believers can reclaim their faith identity. Biri (2022:128) notes that this requires the provision of holistic care involving emotional and relational dynamics, along with family spirituality, since prosperity teachings have penetrated all these aspects. According to Mashau and Kgatle (2019:3), prophetic pastoral praxis is transformative and future-oriented; it involves long-term individual and communal formation processes through programmes that integrate spiritual formation with ethical discernment and family life education within the broader context of social responsibility.

It is through praxis that people challenge structures that not only exploit but also build up practices directed towards strengthening spiritual resilience, restoring relationships, and promoting economic well-being. Prophetic pastoral praxis draws from critical resistance and constructive formation, providing a holistic approach that addresses not only the immediate harm caused by PG teachings but also enables families to undertake the deeper tasks of Christian faith for sustainable discipleship.

### **5.5.1 Exposing exploitative structures in prosperity teachings**

In most PG messages, there is a pronounced tendency to place wealth as the chief evidence of divine favour, consequently reducing faith to a transactional relationship with God (Bowler, 2018:102). This creates vulnerabilities for families who may overextend themselves financially in the hope of miraculous returns, thereby perpetuating damage akin to that which Bowler (2018) describes as having historical and structural roots within the ideology. In practical terms, pastors must translate such critique into guidance for families by exposing these exploitative structures, making it clear spiritually that blessing cannot be commodified, and that true fruitfulness comes through obedience, ethical stewardship, and relational responsibility rather than material accumulation.

The manipulative mechanisms of prosperity teaching are exemplified in the practice of "seed-faith" giving. Ofoe (2019:3) argues that it is common for members to be asked to give beyond their means, with the promise that returns will be multiplied. If this critique were doctrinal, what is now required in pastoral praxis is a process of empowering families with financial literacy and acumen to recognise such manipulative practices. This will ensure that families resist being coerced into making risky financial commitments, thus safeguarding both economic and emotional stability (Kyeyune & Ntayi, 2025:5). The pastoral role here moves beyond mere critique to equipping, through responsible stewardship modelling that is linked to contentment theology and concern for the community.

The hierarchical authority systems in prosperity churches increase the vulnerability of families. As noted by Williams (2024:166), the concentration of power within charismatic leaders discourages questioning and fosters dependency. Though their study primarily describes structural dynamics, pastoral engagement can actively resist such patterns by promoting transparency and accountability through shared decision-making. In such a model, families move from being passive participants to becoming active members of a church community where authority is exercised ethically and inclusively. This restores agency to family units, enabling them to participate meaningfully in spiritual and communal life (Frimpong, 2025:45).

Theologically, understanding exploitative structures challenges the reductionist approach to blessings in prosperity theology. As Tamfu (2020) observes, reducing God's blessing to material wealth trivialises the biblical message of justice, mercy, and care for the most vulnerable. By engaging with this critique, pastors can teach households that blessings encompass spiritual, relational, and communal development. Nanthambwe (2024:1213) adds that theological education centred on holistic well-being builds resilience in families recovering from spiritual and material harm caused by PG teaching. This then serves as a pastoral guide grounded in Scripture, forming a corrective narrative that overtly challenges the promises made through transactional preaching on prosperity.

Exposing exploitative practices also provides practical empowerment. Families who know the dangers of manipulative teachings willingly participate in financial literacy programmes, vocational training, and ethical stewardship programmes (Kanyuira

2021:70; Mashau & Kgatle, 2019:8). When such programmes are combined with theological reflection, they go beyond simply providing material skills and inculcate a spiritual ethic of prudence, diligence, and communal responsibility. At the same time, support networks in the form of peer accountability groups and mentorship initiatives begin to build emotional and spiritual resilience too (Magezi & Banda, 2017:5; Kgatle, 2025:363). The role of the pastor here is multidimensional, serving as an educator, facilitator, mentor, and ethical guide.

In the end, exposing exploitative structures helps to restore trust in the church as a protective and nurturing institution. Bowler (2018:104) postulates that the credibility of prosperity-focused ministries often rests on secrecy and hierarchical control. By contrast, pastors who break secrecy by implementing transparent financial dealings, encouraging community involvement, and demonstrating servant leadership build trust, relational cohesion, and spiritual integrity. Families observe in such faith communities that fellowship can indeed be a place for care, accountability, and holistic formation – this directly challenges the isolating and materialistic ethos that prosperity teachings promote (Chitando *et al.*, 2014:12).

The open exposure of exploitative structures within PG teachings is therefore a corrective and empowering strategy. Through critical engagement with the theological, structural, and practical aspects of these teachings, pastors support families in gaining the knowledge, skills, and relational motivation to recover from past harms. This pathway revives financial prudence and spiritual discernment, as well as developing resilience, relational health, and holistic well-being – qualities that enable families to thrive in communities founded on justice, care for everyone, and faithful discipleship.

### **5.5.2 Transformative and long-term formation**

PG families often emerge from it spiritually, relationally, and economically vulnerable. Prosperity theology constructs its transactional framework on the promise of material blessing for faithfulness; when this fails, it frequently disrupts relational harmony and leaves households financially overextended (Bowler, 2018:102; Ofoe, 2019:3). Thus, as an immediate and long-term transformative response by pastors that goes beyond addressing direct damages towards building holistic resilience among families, this paper shall emphasise such an approach. This would involve the integration of

spiritual, relational, and practical dimensions over time to assist families in thriving sustainably within both church and societal contexts.

Transformative formation seeks to address and correct the worldviews and spiritual practices malformed by prosperity theology. Magezi and Manzanga (2024:5) argue that long-term pastoral interventions help families internalise a biblical concept of blessing, placing spiritual growth, obedience, and communal responsibility above material accumulation. Thus, transformation is not only behavioural but also cognitive and theological; it involves learning to question the veracity of spiritual claims in light of Scripture and aligning daily praxis with Scriptural imperatives (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022a:79). As Bowler (2018:105) indicates, such reflective, long-term formation of households militates against debt-inducing, “seed-faith” giving theology, which would eventually lead to disillusionment within families.

Long-term formation instils enduring spiritual discipline, relational strength, and practical life skills. Families will appreciate pastoral care when it goes beyond occasional interventions to cultivate biblical literacy, ethical stewardship, and relational mentoring as constituents of daily life. Consistent involvement provides an opportunity for families to develop and sustain prayer, communal worship, and service habits, as well as financial prudence, which can dissolve the individualistic, materialistic ethos inspired by prosperity preaching. This affirms Bwiruka’s (2019:121) argument for sustainable spiritual development through the long-term infusion of ethical and communal values into the fabric of daily life rather than short-term corrective programmes.

This strategy essentially involves relational training. Prosperity theology places many competing, and sometimes adverse, individual expectations for wealth within a family; when these do not materialise, families are left with relational fragmentation (Chitakure, 2017:50). Small-group fellowships, mentorship networks, and family-oriented discipleship programmes instituted by pastors would set the right environment for developing empathy, accountability, and conflict resolution relational skills (Magezi & Banda, 2017:6). Maina *et al.* (2018: 39) emphasises that relational accountability networks provide both corrective feedback and emotional support, enabling families to process past disappointments and rebuild trust in both spiritual leadership and one another.

Practical formation goes hand-in-hand with spiritual and relational interventions by equipping families with tools for self-sufficiency. According to Kanyuira (2021:70), financial literacy, vocational guidance, and training in ethical stewardship, if provided within a biblical worldview, would empower families to overcome economic challenges. Practical skills training reduces the risk of future exploitation, as was the case for families who were taught how to give, save, and invest – decisions that require knowledge about resources (Kyeyune& Ntayi, 2025:2). Thus, long-term formation is about being transformed morally and spiritually, alongside being economically and socially empowered.

Transformative and long-term formation develops resilience by fostering learning accompanied by sustained support. Families are not simply undergoing immediate correction or education but are gradually being empowered to embody a holistic theology of life, embracing aspects of faith, relationships, and practical stewardship (Kgatlle, 2017:6). This presents a challenge to the reductionist promises found in prosperity preaching which, as indicated by Tamfu (2020), will help believers understand that God's blessing involves spiritual depth within well-relatedness and communal flourishing. Such teaching on general holistic well-being as more than material accumulation can nurture families with strong and dynamic faith lives, enabling them to withstand any form of manipulative or exploitative teaching.

Long-term formation also strengthens the prophetic witness of the church. As families begin to internalise values of justice and humility, and an ethic of responsibility, they become a contrast to the consumerist and individualistic ethos that is truly propagated within the teachings of prosperity (Chitando *et al.*, 2014:12). This modelling becomes instructive as other congregants observe sustainable stewardship in caring relationships and discover what it means to be spiritually mature. Transformative formation over time establishes a church culture that prioritises holistic flourishing before any type of transactional religiosity, thereby supporting multiple families simultaneously.

Transformative and long-term formation will provide a comprehensive approach for families who have been victims of PG teachings. Therefore, sustained pastoral engagement which adequately involves theological reflection, relational mentoring, and practical life skills can fruitfully address the multipronged dimensions of harm

caused by exploitative teachings. Long-term formation positions families for resilience in the holistic challenges – spiritual, relational, and economic—of their lives, informed by ethical discernment that leads to holistic well-being. The proposed strategy embodies a pastoral vision of the church as a space for restoration, ministering empowerment and discipleship in faithfulness.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Chapter 5 presented an immediate pastoral response to the devastating effects experienced by individuals, families, and faith communities due to exposure to PG teachings. The chapter began by describing several negative consequences of the PG, such as spiritual confusion, financial exploitation, and widespread disillusionment, particularly among economically vulnerable groups. It outlined three short-term strategies: contextually based pastoral counselling, education and empowerment programmes, and fostering supportive faith communities. Contextual pastoral counselling is essential for assisting affected individuals and families as they process their spiritual disappointment; both individual and group sessions offer safe environments for honest reflection and theological guidance towards healing.

Educational and empowerment programmes, including seminars on sound doctrine and financial literacy, help believers recognise exploitative teachings and maintain a Christian life that requires responsibility. This, in turn, teaches skills for living, managing finances, and developing a deep theology, enabling congregants to resist false doctrine and sustain both spiritual and material resilience in the long term. It shows how supportive structures such as small groups promote mutual care and accountability among believers, and, lastly, how pastors can actively confront the exploitative theology of PG teachings.

The next chapter provides a summary of the findings.

## **CHAPTER 6      RESEARCH FINDINGS, RELEVANCE & CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by highlighting the relevance and significance of the study, establishing the context for the key findings that follow. It then presents and discusses the major findings in a structured, chapter-by-chapter format, aligning each set of results with the corresponding research question and Osmer's (2008:4) tasks, questions, and focus area. This organised approach ensures clarity and coherence in addressing the objectives of the study. Each section concludes with a focused summary of the findings discussed in that chapter, emphasising their implications for pastoral practices. The final section of this chapter provides overall closure, synthesising the key insights and laying the foundation for concluding reflections on the study's potential weaknesses and recommendations for future research.

### **6.2 Relevance of the study**

The spread of the PG in Christian churches worldwide has prompted urgent theological, social, and pastoral questions, particularly concerning its impact on families' spiritual and emotional well-being. In many settings, the PG's promise of material wealth and health in return for faith and financial contributions has proven both appealing and problematic, especially for families experiencing economic hardship. This study is particularly relevant as it critically examines the doctrinal foundations and socio-cultural influences underlying the PG's widespread appeal, while also addressing its negative effects on family relationships, spiritual growth, and community strength. By providing pastors with practical, biblically grounded strategies to support families affected by these teachings, the research addresses a significant gap in pastoral theology and practice, especially within African and other global contexts where such teachings are common.

The researcher utilised Osmer's (2008) methodology of practical theological interpretation for practical theology, which consists of four guiding questions designed to focus the researcher on the key tasks of practical theological research (Osmer,

2008:4). These four central tasks, shaped by the guiding questions, were examined in this study:

### **6.3 Presentation of the findings based on the study's objectives**

The findings of the study are presented in the following discussion, organised according to the specific objectives that guided the research.

#### **6.3.1 Chapter 2: Descriptive task: Examining the detrimental effects of PG teachings on the spiritual well-being of families**

Chapter 2 addressed Objective 1 which investigated the detrimental effects of PG teachings on the spiritual well-being of adherents. The findings of this investigation revealed:

Misplaced spiritual priorities and theological distortion

The first major detriment identified is the PG's tendency to equate faith with material wealth and physical health. Scholars widely critique this teaching for misrepresenting Scripture and distorting core Christian doctrines. Its emphasis on material gain over spiritual depth undermines genuine discipleship, biblical stewardship, and the transformative nature of faith.

Emotional, relational, and spiritual harm to families worldwide:

North America: Prosperity teachings often create unrealistic expectations and foster spiritual guilt. When promised blessings fail to materialise, families experience emotional strain and relational breakdown. Additionally, authoritarian church structures suppress critical thinking and limit familial autonomy.

Canada and Western Europe: In these regions, PG teachings frequently lead to spiritual trauma and confusion, particularly among immigrant and economically marginalised families.

Asia: The PG exploits existing religious traditions, leading to spiritual disillusionment and financial strain when blessings do not materialise.

Africa (Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa): When financial or miraculous breakthroughs fail to materialise, families experience guilt, conflict, and spiritual fatigue. These teachings distract from addressing social injustice and governance issues, promoting fatalism and dependency on church leaders rather than empowering communities.

#### Psychological and financial exploitation

The findings reveal patterns of psychological and financial exploitation within families, particularly among those in vulnerable socio-economic contexts. These families are often pressured to give sacrificially in the hope of receiving financial or physical miracles, a practice that can result in debt, deepened poverty, and the neglect of essential needs.

Doctrinal errors and theological misunderstandings, including:

(i) Transactional faith vs. biblical stewardship:

The PG promotes a transactional view of faith, where giving money or making positive confessions is believed to guarantee material blessings, reducing God to a "cosmic vending machine".

(ii) Misinterpretation of Scripture and eschatological hope:

Prosperity preachers selectively use Scriptures to promise immediate blessings, ignoring teachings on contentment, suffering, and the ultimate fulfilment of God's promises in eternity. This creates false expectations, leading to disappointment and spiritual crises when hardships occur.

A growing body of theological scholarship critiques the PG for distorting the core of Christianity. This teaching shifts attention away from spiritual growth, grace, and salvation, and instead promotes material acquisition and individual success. The communal, sacramental, and justice-oriented aspects of the Christian faith are set aside in favour of a transactional approach to God. Such an outlook can lead to spiritual fatalism, where suffering is interpreted as a lack of faith, and may deter believers from pursuing social justice or advocating for structural change. The Gospel of Christ, rooted in compassion, sacrifice, and communal upliftment, is frequently replaced by a theology that regards wealth as the primary sign of divine favour.

In response, scholars and practitioners call for a renewed, biblically grounded theology of prosperity – one that values spiritual growth, contentment, and stewardship above material abundance. Pastoral care should become family-centred, addressing both the spiritual and practical needs of the household. There is a pressing need for theological resources and practical guidance to assist pastors in leading families toward healing. This includes challenging inaccurate teachings, cultivating resilient faith communities, and encouraging individuals to embrace the joy and responsibility of genuine Christian living. Holistic approaches that integrate biblical discipleship with social support can address the damaging effects of PG ideology.

The researcher approached this study from a deeply personal perspective, informed by lived experiences as a black African pastor from Limpopo, South Africa. This context highlights the cultural tensions and spiritual challenges that families encounter as they navigate traditional beliefs alongside the promises of the PG. These competing influences often create uncertainty and discord within households and congregations. By prioritising African Christian experiences, the study aims to encourage theological integrity and promote a comprehensive understanding of family spirituality. Its goal is to equip pastors, families, and communities with tools to critically assess PG teachings and to nurture faith communities that are spiritually vibrant and socially responsible.

## **Conclusions from Chapter 2**

The global spread of the PG has had far-reaching consequences, especially for families. While it offers hope, it often delivers disappointment, financial strain, and spiritual confusion. This chapter highlighted the urgent need for pastoral intervention, theological clarity, and community support. By promoting a more holistic, grace-filled, and justice-oriented understanding of Christian faith, churches can help families heal from the wounds of prosperity teachings and nurture resilient, authentic expressions of discipleship rooted in love, humility, and hope.

### **6.3.2 Chapter 3: Attraction of families to PG-preaching churches worldwide**

Chapter 3 addressed Objective 2 which sought to identify the factors that draw families to PG teachings. It provided a comprehensive analysis of the elements underlying the global appeal of PG churches among families. The findings indicate a multifaceted interplay of socio-economic hardship, charismatic leadership, cultural aspirations,

religious expectations, and media influence. Collectively, these factors create a compelling attraction for families pursuing both spiritual and material solutions to their life challenges. The findings from this chapter revealed:

(a) Socio-economic hardship as a primary driver

Across multiple regions, including the USA, Canada, South Korea, India, and various African nations, economic vulnerability consistently arises as a key reason for family participation in PG churches. Families facing poverty, unemployment, inflation, or state failure often turn to these churches in search of supernatural intervention and hope. In countries such as Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, churches serve as alternative welfare systems, providing not only prayer but also education, food, networking opportunities, and a sense of community.

(b) Socio-economic vulnerability

- Poverty and unemployment as catalysts for the hope of financial breakthrough

PG churches flourish where poverty and unemployment prevail. These churches redefine economic struggle as a spiritual trial and promote faith-based strategies – tithing, seed sowing, declarations – as solutions. This resonates with many families, transforming economic distress into an opportunity for divine intervention.

- Promises of instant solutions to persistent problems

Another core appeal is the promise of immediacy – that instant wealth, jobs, or healing can be received quickly through sacrificial giving or spiritual obedience. In societies where public institutions are slow or unresponsive, this message holds power. Testimonies and success stories by peer church members reinforce this belief, turning churches into alternate systems of economic hope.

(c) Charismatic leadership and emotional appeal

- Dynamic preaching, entertainment, and motivation

PG pastors typically possess strong oratorical skills, blending motivational speech with theatrics and entertainment. This performative style, accompanied by emotional music, keeps congregants highly engaged and emotionally invested. The worship

experience is often curated to resemble celebratory events, attracting younger generations and the upwardly mobile.

- Testimonies and visual displays of wealth

Testimonies of healing, business success, and financial breakthroughs – often accompanied by visual displays of affluence – serve as persuasive tools. These examples validate the PG message and serve as aspirational models for other congregants. Church-owned TV stations and media platforms are used to amplify these stories and reinforce the church's credibility and divine backing.

(d) Cultural and religious expectations

- Social pressures to join successful churches

In many communities, being associated with a prominent PG church is viewed as a symbol of personal and spiritual success. The visibility of wealth – via buildings, cars, clothing, and media exposure – creates an aspirational image. Families are drawn to these congregations not only for faith but also for the social status and respect associated with membership.

- Stigma of failure interpreted as weak faith

Failure to attain prosperity is often interpreted as evidence of spiritual failure or lack of faith or issues of demons. This belief creates a culture of guilt, shame, and increased pressure to give more or exhibit greater faith. It also results in performative religiosity, where families feel obliged to project success while privately grappling with unfulfilled promises and psychological strain.

(e) Institutional and community influence

- Peer influence and communal trends

The PG thrives in highly networked communities. Peer encouragement fosters a culture of conformity and reinforcement where giving, attendance, and positive declarations are shared norms. Mentorship and networking within churches offer perceived pathways to success, anchoring families more firmly within the church ecosystem.

- Church marketing and media visibility

Prosperity teaching churches effectively use media-television, social platforms, books, and celebrity endorsements to craft and project an image of divine favour, growth, and relevance. This media visibility significantly enhances their attractiveness, positioning them as modern, progressive, and powerful spiritual institutions.

### **Conclusions from Chapter 3**

The findings presented in this chapter illustrate that families are drawn to PG churches through a complex interplay of economic desperation, cultural aspirations, charismatic leadership, and emotional connection. These churches address not only spiritual needs but also step in where social, political, and economic systems have faltered. Nevertheless, the theology espoused frequently redirects accountability from systemic injustices to individual believers, thereby raising risks such as increased guilt, financial exploitation, and spiritual disillusionment. A theologically contextualised assessment is necessary to engage with the underlying causes of this attraction, without negating the hopes harboured by struggling families. Such analysis should uphold the dignity and legitimate needs of believers, while simultaneously interrogating exploitative and reductive manifestations of faith that commodify divine favour.

#### **6.3.3 Chapter 4: The normative task pastoral care theological resources for enhancing family well-being**

Chapter 3 explored theological resources from a pastoral care perspective that can be used to enhance family well-being. The research found that pastoral care plays a crucial role in promoting the well-being of families, particularly in socio-religious contexts influenced by PG theology. This reductionist view of spirituality distorts the role of pastoral care and misguides family expectations. The findings revealed that PG teachings tend to offer superficial responses to profound socio-economic issues, fostering a sense of false hope. Consequently, families facing ongoing poverty, illness, or hardship may feel spiritually deficient or abandoned by God, leading to emotional distress and family instability. Thus, the absence of meaningful, theologically grounded pastoral engagement in such settings can have detrimental consequences for familial resilience and cohesion.

(a) Theological foundations for effective pastoral care

The research highlighted the need for pastoral care to be grounded in robust theological principles that directly challenge the distortions propagated by the PG. Several theological frameworks emerged as corrective tools:

- Biblical realism was identified as essential, as it recognises the reality of suffering, struggle, and human weakness.
- The theology of the cross was another vital theological lens, as it emphasises the redemptive value of suffering and centres Christian life on the sacrificial love and suffering of Christ.
- The doctrine of *imago Dei* (the image of God) affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person, regardless of economic status or social standing, reminding believers that human value is rooted in divine creation rather than material possession.

Impact of the PG on pastoral care

The findings revealed that the global spread of the PG has significantly shaped both the practice and perception of pastoral care in various regions. In many contexts, including North America, Asia, and Africa, the PG's focus on material success has often eclipsed deeper pastoral and theological concerns. The study found that a lack of formal theological education among many pastors has contributed to the uncritical acceptance of PG messages.

This issue was particularly apparent in several African contexts. In countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, the research indicated that the PG frequently overlooks the real socio-economic challenges families face, such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate basic services. Literature noted that despite the PG's promises of breakthrough and blessings, tangible improvements in livelihoods remain limited. Consequently, pastoral care is frequently reduced to motivational preaching rather than a holistic ministry. The study also observed that eco-theology could be employed to address the relationship between environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality, providing a theological response to the practical needs of affected families.

## Theological resources for enhancing family well-being

The research identified several theological and practical resources needed to support families exposed to PG teachings:

- **Biblical and theological education** emerged as a critical component. Various studies agreed that sound theological training is essential to equip pastors to challenge PG distortions effectively. Such education empowers pastors to teach holistic Christian living that includes spiritual growth, emotional stability, strong family relationships, and community engagement as agreeable. Training in marriage, family counselling, and pastoral care was also seen as vital for equipping ministers to address the complex needs of contemporary families.
- **Holistic pastoral well-being** was another key finding. The emotional, spiritual, and relational health of pastors directly influences the quality of care they provide. The study found that pastors who are spiritually grounded and emotionally resilient are better equipped to support families who have become disillusioned by the unfulfilled promises of the PG. Conversely, burnt-out or theologically misinformed pastors often reinforce unhealthy spiritual expectations.
- **Contextualised pastoral approaches**, such as eco-theology, were recommended for their ability to engage with local realities. Eco-theology's emphasis on justice, stewardship, and care for creation aligns with biblical values and provides a platform for addressing environmental and economic issues that deeply affect family life in rural and urban settings alike.
- **Finally, critical engagement with PG theology** was seen as non-negotiable. Pastoral care must confront the PG's transactional view of faith, which treats God as a guarantor of material returns for religious acts. The research called for a shift in pastoral messaging toward a theology of hope, suffering, and communal support that values spiritual maturity over material gain.

## Reclaiming biblical foundations of prosperity

The findings confirmed the need to redefine prosperity in accordance with biblical principles. Scholarly sources noted that true prosperity in scripture is not confined to material wealth; it also encompasses spiritual vitality, emotional well-being, relational harmony, and purposeful living. The concept of *shalom* – encompassing peace,

justice, and well-being – was presented as a holistic vision of prosperity rooted in Scripture.

In addition, the study demonstrated the importance of teaching stewardship, contentment, and trust in God's timing. Instead of promoting instant wealth, biblical prosperity involves prudent financial management, gratitude for what one already possesses, and faith in God's ongoing provision. This approach reframes success as faithfulness and obedience, challenging the performance-based, consumerist messages of the PG. Teaching this broader understanding enables families to resist false doctrine and to build enduring spiritual and emotional foundations.

### **Conclusions from Chapter 4**

The findings revealed that effective pastoral care, rooted in sound theology and contextual awareness, is essential for improving the well-being of families impacted by PG teachings. Key strategies for strengthening pastoral care include offering comprehensive biblical and theological education, supporting the emotional and spiritual health of pastors, adopting contextual approaches such as eco-theology, and reclaiming a biblical understanding of prosperity focused on faithfulness, contentment, and holistic well-being. In this way, pastors and congregations can better resist exploitative doctrines and foster spiritual resilience, family unity, and social integrity.

### **6.3.4 Chapter 5: The Pragmatic Task: Effective pastoral care strategies to address the detrimental effects of the PG on adherents**

Chapter 5 addressed Objective 4, which sought to develop pastoral care strategies to guide pastors in providing spiritual support to families detrimentally affected by the PG. The findings indicate that the rise of the PG has caused considerable spiritual, emotional, and financial harm among individuals, families, and entire faith communities, particularly in socio-economically vulnerable contexts. However, with intentional and context-specific pastoral care strategies, the negative effects of the PG can be addressed and even reversed. Three main strategies identified in this study are contextual pastoral counselling, educational and empowerment programmes, and the development of supportive faith communities.

(a) Contextual pastoral counselling for healing and theological realignment

The study found that many individuals drawn into PG teachings experienced profound disillusionment, spiritual confusion, and financial distress when promised material blessings did not materialise. In some cases, literature notes that this resulted in a crisis of faith, strained family relationships, and feelings of guilt over perceived personal spiritual shortcomings. Individual and group pastoral counselling was recognised as an essential intervention in addressing these emotional and theological scars. Pastoral counsellors played a vital role by offering empathetic listening, challenging harmful theological assumptions, and guiding affected believers towards a biblically grounded understanding of suffering, stewardship, and hope. This included revisiting teachings on perseverance, contentment, and God's faithfulness, especially during periods of hardship. The study indicated that such counselling restored spiritual trust and shifted believers' perspectives from a transactional view of God to a deeper, more relational faith.

Additionally, the creation of safe spaces – in the form of support groups, testimonies, or faith-based discussion circles – enabled individuals to process their disappointment in a communal setting. These supportive environments were crucial in addressing the shame, isolation, and internalised guilt experienced by many after PG teachings fell short. Literature demonstrated that sharing stories and engaging in theological reflection within a community helped individuals recover emotional resilience, gain spiritual clarity, and renew their sense of identity in Christ, rather than in material achievements.

#### Education and empowerment for theological discernment and financial resilience

Another key finding was the pressing need for theological education and practical empowerment within the church to address the misinformation spread by PG teachings. Seminars and Bible workshops focusing on sound doctrine were identified as vital for theological renewal. These educational platforms corrected false teachings by presenting a biblically grounded perspective on suffering, stewardship, faithfulness, and spiritual growth. They fostered critical engagement with Scripture and promoted a theology that prioritised relationship with God over material gain.

Equally significant was the introduction of financial literacy and life skills training rooted in a Christian worldview. The study found that PG teachings often encouraged

irresponsible financial behaviours, such as giving beyond one's means in expectation of miraculous returns, which led to debt and economic strain. In contrast, faith-based financial education, including budgeting, saving, and ethical financial planning, enabled believers to make informed and responsible decisions.

Furthermore, vocational and entrepreneurship training contributed to greater self-sufficiency and reduced reliance on miracle solutions. These programmes provided participants with tools for economic resilience while supporting a theology of stewardship, diligence, and ethical living. Such initiatives restored agency to believers and enabled them to live with integrity and purpose.

### Building supportive faith communities rooted in biblical values

The third major finding revealed the significance of restoring communal life within the church as a response to the individualism and consumerism promoted by PG teachings. Literature noted that PG teachings often reduce faith to a private transaction between the individual and God, marginalising the role of community, accountability, and shared discipleship. In response, churches that encouraged small groups and family fellowships helped to nurture genuine relationships, deepen spiritual practices, and strengthen collective responsibility for spiritual growth. These close-knit settings reflected the early Christian model found in Acts 2, where believers met in homes, shared their lives, and supported one another. Within such relational environments, believers were more likely to receive pastoral care, access mentoring, and develop resilience against exploitative teachings. Family fellowships also played a role in instilling Christian values at home, enabling households to resist the materialism encouraged by PG teachings and to refocus on spiritual growth and service.

The encouragement of mutual care and accountability within the church emerged as another transformative approach. It was found that when congregants cared for one another – whether through emotional support, financial assistance, or spiritual accountability – the community became a powerful counter to the isolating and competitive ethos of PG theology. Through peer mentorship and communal service initiatives, churches reclaimed their prophetic role and became places of healing, justice, and holistic discipleship. This mutual accountability cultivated spiritual

maturity, reduced susceptibility to manipulation, and fostered a shared commitment to godly living.

## **Conclusions from Chapter 5**

The findings make it clear that effective pastoral care strategies must be holistic, contextually sensitive, and firmly grounded in Scripture to address the damaging effects of the PG. By integrating counselling, theological education, practical life skills training, and community-building initiatives, churches can restore spiritual health and socio-economic dignity to those harmed by PG teachings. These approaches not only challenge false doctrines but also foster resilient, compassionate, and biblically grounded Christian communities.

### **6.4 Limitations of the study**

Several limitations were identified during the research:

**Scope of literature:** The study primarily relies on secondary sources and may not fully capture the diversity of experiences in all global contexts, as well as recent developments within PG movements.

**Potential bias in literature selection:** While efforts were made to conduct a comprehensive and balanced review, there remains an inherent risk of selection bias in the literature included in this study. This may stem from the researcher's disciplinary orientation and familiarity with specific academic databases, or a tendency to prioritise studies that align with the research focus or worldview. To minimise this bias, inclusion criteria were clearly defined, multiple databases were searched, and literature from diverse geographical, theoretical, and methodological backgrounds was considered.

**Lack of empirical data:** The study largely consists of qualitative reviews and would benefit from empirical data, such as interviews or surveys with affected families and pastors, to substantiate its findings.

**Focus on Christian contexts:** The research focused on Christian communities and may not reflect similar dynamics present in other faith traditions influenced by prosperity teachings.

## 6.5 Recommendations for future studies

Building on the findings and addressing the limitations, future research may focus on:

- **Empirical investigations:** Conducting fieldwork, interviews, and surveys with families and church leaders to provide quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of prosperity teachings.
- **Comparative studies:** Examining the influence of the PG across different cultural, denominational, and socio-economic contexts, including non-Christian faiths.
- **Longitudinal impact:** Investigating the long-term effects of PG teachings on family structures, faith retention, and community resilience.
- **Children and youth:** Focusing on how prosperity teachings shape the spiritual formation and psychological well-being of children and adolescents within affected families.
- **Pastoral training:** Assessing the effectiveness of various pastoral care models and theological education programmes in equipping church leaders to respond to these challenges.

## 6.6 Final conclusion

The study reveals the profound and frequently detrimental effects of the PG on the spiritual well-being of families globally. By elevating material success above genuine faith, these teachings contribute to disappointment, financial strain, and spiritual uncertainty, particularly among vulnerable groups. Critical engagement with both the doctrinal and socio-cultural aspects of the PG enables pastors and church leaders to recover a more holistic, biblically grounded approach to family spirituality. The research provides a basis for formulating effective pastoral strategies that foster healing, resilience, and authentic Christian discipleship, thereby equipping families to confront the challenges posed by PG teachings with wisdom, compassion, and integrity.

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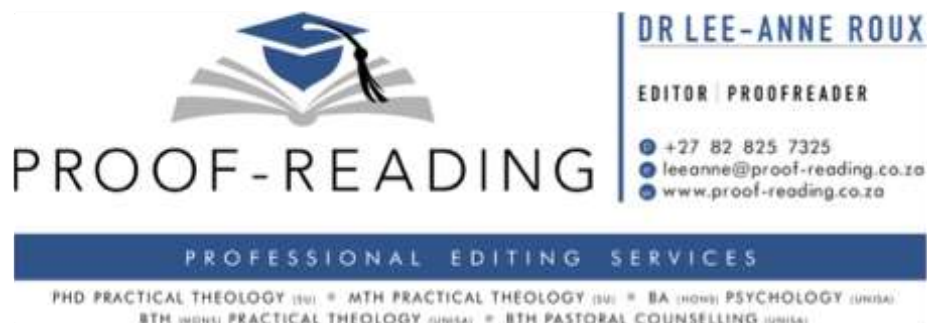
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## APPENDIX A: PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING



13 November 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**RE: LANGUAGE EDITING**

This letter serves to confirm that I have edited the dissertation titled:

**Detrimental effects of the Prosperity Gospel on the spiritual well-being of families: A pastoral care response**

By

Muvhango Reuben Mudzuli

[This certificate does not cover any alterations made subsequent to the editing process].

Please feel free to contact me if you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Lee-Anne Roux