

by ***Michael d’Offay***

“The really frightening thing is that 5 million people have bought *Your Best Life Now*, and a good portion of those have probably walked away thinking they have read the Christian gospel.<sup>1</sup>”

When best-selling books have words like ‘God’, ‘Jesus’, ‘gospel’ and ‘cross’ in it, we assume that it must be biblical and good. We assume it must contain the Christian gospel. Yet some of these authors end up giving you a false picture of Jesus and a faulty gospel. One of these half-truth gospels is what some have called the “Therapeutic Gospel.”

The Therapeutic Gospel teaches that Jesus is there to make you feel good about yourself and to help you be happy. It espouses a feel-good message with the aim for you to experience personal worth and significance. Jesus becomes a kind of religious therapist, your best friend who is always in a good mood towards you, who loves you as you are and wants you to realize your inner potential.

**Here are some symptoms that show you might live off the diet of a Therapeutic Gospel:**

- You never think about or talk about the cross and the mercy of God in your life.
- Phrases such as ‘confessing my sin’ are never spoken of, and practicing ongoing repentance is not done.<sup>2</sup>
- You believe God never wants you to experience suffering (see my article on suffering [here](#) which deals with this more fully).
- You follow your heart’s desires and think that God will bless that, because he wants you to be happy.
- You often find scriptures and have prophetic words to confirm that God endorses your desires (this is called confirmation bias- when we try to validate our carnal desires by spiritualizing them).

If you have the ‘symptoms’ I’ve described above, the Bible would at best call you a carnal Christian (and at worst a false Christian). In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul has strong words to say to the believers who had become self-centred. He calls them “people of the flesh.. infants in Christ”. Being “of the flesh” means living in a way that puts yourself at the center – independent from God. In this state you can never be pleasing to God and never receive the spiritual food he desires to give you (see 1 Corinthians 3:1).

I’ve struggled with being “of the flesh” at times. Rather than taking Jesus’ command to follow him, I’ve expected Jesus to follow me and to order his agenda around mine! I’ve fallen into the trap where my faith becomes about what makes me feel good. Prayer becomes a handy tool to try to get what I

want (see James 4:2-3), and memorizing scripture becomes a way to practice positive-thinking, rather than getting to know and obey God better.

For many of us, the Therapeutic Gospel is so appealing because it emphasizes self-esteem over self-denial, and happiness over holiness, and it teaches a Jesus which is foreign to the God of the New Testament. It is a substitute gospel that makes much of us but little of God, which makes it not actually good news.

### **Facing sin and the true gospel**

The Therapeutic Gospel never addresses the real problem that every single person faces – indwelling sin. For unsaved individuals coming into the church, they need to hear that their very nature is fundamentally sinful. Their sin is so serious they need a new birth. They are so offensive to God that only a radical death to the old will do; and that is found in Jesus.

The Therapeutic Gospel only tells people how much potential they have, how good they are, and how much God loves them. Giving someone this message is like arming a soldier with a wooden sword – it is totally inadequate in the battle against sin. These are half-truths and if the whole message is not given, this ‘gospel’ will send them straight to hell.

The gospel is not about us collaborating with God to make our lives more successful and happy. The gospel is not about a better life, it is about a new life. It is about the mystery of new birth found in Christ’s death and resurrection. Let’s not forget that we were so bad and corrupted, we needed a saviour. We were so lost, God came on a search-and-rescue mission to save us. The true gospel is packed with life transforming power that brings hope and peace with God. May we never settle for a cheap substitute that tickles our ears but lacks the true grace of God.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://9marks.org/review/your-best-life-now-joel-osteen/>

<sup>2</sup> Still today there are elements of indwelling sin that still lurk within each of us (see 1 Peter 2:11, Galatians 5:17, James 4:1). We still have desires that are self-centered. This is why we need ongoing repentance and an ongoing reminder of the power of the cross. Yes, the penalty of sin has been dealt with, but we still face the presence of sin until Jesus returns.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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