

1. Pentecostalism is a revival movement in Christianity that started in the beginning of the 19th century. Main characteristics:
 - God is near and can be directly experienced by a person. Emphasis on direct religious experience also important in earlier revival movements in 19th century.
 - o Means a preference for more emotional styles of worship – enthusiastic singing; standing, raising hands in the air; spontaneous testimonies, preaching without preparation, led by the spirit; heart religion.
 - o Individuals need to experience a personal conversion. Just growing up in a religious family is not enough; something needs to happen that makes faith real for you. Realization of faith called being born-again.
 - o There is also an emphasis on so-called ‘gifts of the spirit’. If someone is born-again, he can receive a baptism in the Spirit, meaning that the Holy Spirit is believed to enter that person. This is seen through the ability to speak in tongues or in other spiritual gifts like healing, or prophecy.
 - God actively intervenes in the world. God is not far away, not an observer of his creation, not a metaphor for the principle of good, but acts with a personal agency in the affairs of this world.
 - o Emphasis on divine interventions like healing and other miracles
 - o God still speaks to his believers – giving messages in the form of prophecy; and hearing prayers
 - o Expectation that the end of times, in which there is a judgement day, is near.
 - All of this is seen in the Biblical story of Pentecost, in which the disciples, after Jesus death, resurrection and ascension met together in a house in Jerusalem. There, it is told, the Holy Spirit descended on them, and they were able to speak in languages they did not know before.
2. History of Pentecostalism is described as three ‘waves’, three periods of growth, each with its own theological focus.
 - First wave is period starting in 1906; known as classical Pentecostalism. Here the personal relationship with God is central, as is the manifestation of this relationship in the ability to speak in tongues.
 - Charismatic renewal is the second wave. Now 1960s. Renewal happened in both Protestant and Catholic churches. Mainline Protestants who were touched by this renewal found a new home in Pentecostal churches; Catholics started calling themselves Charismatics and met in Bible study groups and prayer groups, but generally stayed within the Roman Catholic Church. Focus of this second wave was healing. Physical problems, character defects and other issues can arise because of spiritual oppression – an evil spirit or demon that possesses or otherwise affects someone and needs to get rid of.
 - Third wave or Neo-Pentecostalism; starting from 1970/1980s. Spiritual warfare refers to the idea that there is a battle going on between two opposing forces: Good & Evil. God is fighting that battle against Satan, and every Christian should be fighting as well by renouncing worldly things (they belong to Satan), and by driving out demons (which also belong to Satan) wherever they can. Focus still on healing, but this healing now meaning in context of global war. Second focus on prosperity.
3. What are characteristics of the prosperity gospel?

- According to the prosperity gospel God is the source of all good things. That means wealth, and health, and abilities, and opportunities, success, employment, children, a loving spouse, etc.
 - You can get access to these things through what has been called ‘transactional giving’. This means that the person in church gives money to the church in the expectation that they will receive that money or other blessings back.
 - If you do not experience access to these good things, it may be that agents of the Devil (demons, spirits, Satanists, witches) are holding them back. A pastor – Man of God / Woman of God – can pray for you to drive these away. The pastor prays better if you give him money.
 - Or it could be that you are not faithful enough, or do not give enough.
4. This figure gives the percentage of Christians who believe that God will grant them wealth and health if they have good faith.
 5. Where do these ideas come from? First prosperity gospel can be called an American Gospel.
 - Already in the 19th century the idea that someone can grow from rags to riches – from poverty to extreme wealth – became an enduring myth in the American mind. This is not necessarily a religious idea, but it spreads the expectation of progress.
 - Also in the 19th century there appeared publications about the power of positive thinking: If you think positive thought, positive things will come to you; negative thoughts lead to the attraction of negative things. In Prosperity Gospel this idea transformed into an emphasis on positive confession, meaning that you should act as if you already have what you want – thanking God for your wealth even though you have not yet received it, or for making you healthy again even though you are not.
 - In the 1960s televangelists started to ask for seed sowing: giving money so that the giver receives blessings. (cf. Genesis – Jesus He Knows Me)
 - In the 1960/1970 the so-called ‘Word of Faith’ theology was developed, which states that if you are a believer, you are entitled to good things. Bible texts like Mark 11:23-24 “Whatever you shall ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will.” Some even go so far to say that asking isn’t even necessary, you just have to claim what should be yours: Matthew 9:29 “According to your faith be it unto you.”
 6. Secondly, the prosperity gospel can be called an African gospel.
 - In the traditional African worldview, God is seen as the provider, the one who makes sure that everything is right. Right rituals can give access to blessings.
 - If things are not right, this is either because you have done something wrong that angers the spirit world, or because of external agents that wish you harm – certain spirits or witches. God wants you to prosper; external forces may block his blessings. Things can be set right again through certain rituals. Classical mission churches – catholics, Presbyterians, reformed – had a different idea of where bad things come from. Did not believe in witches. Protestants emphasized that sin is in human nature, so an internal, not external force. Had no rituals to deal with external evil forces. Pentecostalism does have those rituals of deliverance, and connects therefore much better with African worldview.
 - You need a religious specialist who knows the workings of the spiritual world to help you. Traditionally diviner, now neo Pentecostal pastors and prophets seem to have the same role.
 7. Example of a prosperity gospel prophet who was active in Zambia until beginning of this year.
 8. How can we evaluate the prosperity gospel?

- On one hand news articles show concerns. People's good faith may be abused, and they may be swindled out of their money, which goes to an extravagant lifestyle of the pastor, and which they will not see back.
- Prosperity gospel addresses theological questions where different churches think differently about. Does the Bible favour wealth or poverty? Do you need a pastor with special powers to intercede for you? Is this idea of transactional giving magical thinking or has it a biblical basis?
- On the other hand there are scholars who argue that prosperity gospel may empower people, give them hope and encourage them to start business. Pentecostals are more likely to acquire individual wealth without feeling the need to share it with all their relatives, thereby stimulating upward mobility. Sometimes prosperity churches offer courses in how to grow business.

9. Luther and Calvin