

Happiness—Free of Charge

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Introduction

A Treasure That Does Not Look Like Treasure

I have spent most of my life around the phrase “prosper in the land,” and I can trace exactly where it took root. It is Book of Mormon covenant language, repeated so often that it becomes part of the background music of Latter-day Saint life: “Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013). I heard it in scripture, lessons, youth settings, and the way we naturally talk about obedience and blessings. Over time, it stopped sounding like a single verse in a single chapter and began to sound like a rule for how life works.

As a young girl, I assumed prosperity would mean stability, quick answers to hard questions, and a life that felt manageable. I did not imagine excess or luxury. I imagined comfort, and at least the standard of living I was used to growing up. Without anyone saying it outright, I absorbed a simple expectation from the way adults around me taught and testified: obedience should produce visible confirmation that God noticed my effort and that His promises worked in a fairly predictable way. When a phrase is repeated with such confidence within a faith tradition, it does not remain in the margins. It moves into your instincts. It becomes the lens you use to interpret whether you are doing life “right,” whether God is pleased, and whether the covenant is working.

Then life complicated that assumption. Some prayers remained unanswered. Some righteous choices led to consequences I neither anticipated nor chose. Some seasons felt like sustained effort with no clear reward. At that point, the promise to “prosper in the land” began to feel less like comfort and more like a theological problem. If the promise was real, then my definition of prosperity had been incomplete. That tension became the starting point for this anthology: *What does it mean to prosper if prosperity does not guarantee ease?*

The Book of Mormon itself invites this question. Lehi promises his children that obedience will lead them to “a land of promise,” and Alma repeats the covenant formula that those who keep the commandments will “prosper in the land” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013). Read quickly, these verses can sound transactional. They can train a young believer to expect that faithfulness will produce visible security. Yet lived discipleship, both ancient and modern, resists that simplification. Not every act of obedience results in immediate relief. Not every sacrifice produces clarity on demand.

Literature helped me see this tension more clearly than doctrine alone. Fiction, especially, tells the truth at an angle. In Orson Scott Card's work, spiritual realities are rarely delivered cleanly or comfortably. His stories assume that faith must survive amid ambiguity, flawed motives, loss, and moral cost (Card, 1986). What characters seek as "treasure" often arrives disguised as humility, truth, or painful growth. That pattern mirrors my own experience of discipleship. God's most meaningful gifts do not always look like gifts when they first arrive.

This recognition leads directly to the central claim of this anthology: prosperity, in its most durable and faithful sense, is a covenant-centered spiritual reality rather than a material display. Prosperity is the Lord's presence and protection under the covenant. It is guidance rather than ease, formation rather than comfort, becoming rather than acquiring. It is a kind of wealth that cannot be purchased and cannot be lost simply because life becomes difficult.

Why This Theme Matters in Latter-day Saint Culture

This question matters because it shapes lived faith. At twenty-three, I chose to serve a full-time mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Connecticut Hartford Mission, primarily in Rhode Island. I was committed to exact obedience. I worked hard, followed rules carefully, and tried to be relentlessly service-oriented. I believed deeply in the gospel. Quietly, I also believed that this sacrifice would secure future blessings—that my long-term prosperity would somehow correspond to the precision of my obedience.

That mindset is not unusual. Latter-day Saints speak fluently in covenant language. We emphasize commandments, blessings, sacrifice, and faithfulness. These emphases are not the problem. The problem arises when covenant language collapses into a simplified cause-and-effect expectation. When that happens, faithful people whose lives remain complicated may conclude that something is wrong with them or that God has failed to deliver. Either conclusion strains faith unnecessarily.

"Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments ye shall prosper in the land" is one of the most frequently repeated promises in the Book of Mormon, and repetition shapes expectation (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013). That expectation influences how Latter-day Saints interpret trials, success, mental health, finances, parenting, and self-worth. When prosperity is defined narrowly, discipleship becomes emotionally fragile.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson offers a doctrinal correction that is both direct and clarifying. He emphasizes that the Book of Mormon promise is fundamentally about

covenant presence, not circumstance, and that the opposite of prosperity is being cut off from the Lord's presence (Christofferson, 2025). This framing shifts the entire conversation. Prosperity becomes relational rather than transactional. It is about staying connected to God during formation, not about expecting predictable outcomes.

A material definition of prosperity also risks reducing faith to a bargain: "I obey, and God pays." That is not the relationship I want with Jesus Christ. A covenant must be resilient enough to endure waiting, loss, and ambiguity. If God is real, then His blessings must extend beyond surface-level success.

Reframing Prosperity: Covenant, Presence, and Becoming

My working definition of prosperity for this anthology is the following: *Prosperity is the Lord's sustaining presence and shaping power in a covenant life, expressed through guidance, growth, and enduring spiritual strength, whether circumstances are abundant or limited* (Christofferson, 2025; Hunter, 1997; Olson, 2025; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013; Wilcox, 2021).

This definition excludes several assumptions. Prosperity is not a measure of wealth. It is not proof of divine favoritism. It is not a guarantee of comfort. In some cases, comfort itself can be spiritually dangerous if it dulls reliance on God. Prosperity is also not perfection. If I confuse prosperity with perfection, then every weakness becomes evidence of spiritual failure. That is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Camille Fronk Olson articulates this reality with unusual clarity. Prosperity, she argues, is not the absence of sorrow but the persistence of divine companionship when answers do not come (Olson, 2025). Hardship is not inherently good, but it can become spiritually formative when it draws a person toward God rather than away from Him.

Michelle D. Craig names this formative tension "divine discontent," the space between who a person is and who they are becoming (Craig, 2018). That uneasiness is not evidence of failure. It is often evidence of growth. For someone who once equated prosperity with reassurance, this reframing was critical. Prosperity can feel uncomfortable while still being real.

Bradley R. Wilcox further dismantles a fragile understanding of worthiness by insisting that grace is help for weakness, not a reward for flawlessness (Wilcox, 2021). When prosperity is tied to perfection, hardship becomes a form of condemnation. Wilcox

replaces that fear with a more stable gospel logic: God works with willing, honest people who keep turning toward Him.

President Howard W. Hunter's teaching offers one of the clearest doctrinal anchors for this theme. At the end of life, he teaches, people are not judged by wealth, titles, or achievement, but by what they have become (Hunter, 1997). Prosperity, then, belongs to formation rather than accumulation. Once I accept that, my main question shifts from "Why am I not getting what I expected?" to "Who is God helping me become through what He gives and what He withholds?"

Why These Particular Writings Belong Together

These twelve works form a coherent argument across genres. Scripture establishes the promise. Prophetic voices correct shallow interpretations. Devotional and theological writing provides language for endurance and grace. Ancient wisdom recenters gratitude. Hymnody demonstrates belief under pressure. Podcast conversation and contemporary literature address lived discipleship. Fiction gives abstract truths narrative weight.

Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead* belongs here because it refuses shallow judgment and insists on the moral work of seeing people truthfully (Card, 1986). If prosperity includes becoming more like Christ, then truthful love, repentance, and communal healing are forms of prosperity, even when they require sacrifice. Card's novel quietly argues that the deepest form of wealth lies in communities that tell the truth and still choose compassion.

James Goldberg strengthens the anthology by writing about discipleship with intellectual rigor and spiritual clarity. In *The Five Books of Jesus*, he portrays Jesus Christ as a living center rather than a cultural ornament (Goldberg, 2012). The accompanying Maxwell Institute podcast conversation reinforces this emphasis by characterizing salvation as occurring within real life rather than outside it (Hafen, 2015). For my theme, that distinction is crucial: Christ does not meet disciples after life becomes neat. He meets them as it unfolds.

The pioneer hymn "Come, Come, Ye Saints" is significant because it is concrete. It is a belief under pressure. It is faith sung in motion, in hunger, in grief, and still able to say, "All is well; all is well" (Clayton, 1846/1985). The hymn confronts my impulse to equate hardship with failure. It also challenges the simplistic assumption that a "great reward" always comes after a struggle. As a cultural text, it is one of the strongest pieces Latter-day Saints possess for redefining prosperity as spiritual steadiness rather than comfort. It encourages hope, faith, and gratitude for what we have rather than

complaining about what we don't have, and, most importantly, dependence on our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has promised that all will be "well."

John Bytheway matters because he translates gospel truth into everyday language that people actually carry into their lives. His framing helps readers recognize that being "blessed and prospered" can mean a sustaining harvest amid storms, not a life free from storms (Bytheway, n.d.). His voice is important to this anthology because many Latter-day Saints are trying to remain faithful in circumstances that are complicated, not cinematic. Bytheway offers language that makes faith feel livable.

Finally, Pirkei Avot 4:1 delivers the thesis in one sentence: "Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot" (Pirkei Avot 4:1, n.d.). I include it because it is ancient, blunt, and honest. It exposes the reality of joy that comes from gratitude and humility, not from comparison. It also provides a closing that is simple enough to remember and demanding enough to change a life. Rejoicing in one's lot is not passive. It is a spiritual discipline. Ending with Pirkei Avot allows the whole anthology to resolve into a quiet, durable form of prosperity: not the treasure I once imagined, but the covenant joy of receiving God's portion with trust.

How This Anthology Is Organized

The order of entries is intentional. I begin with the Book of Mormon because many of our assumptions are formed there (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013). Then I move to prophetic reframing that centers presence and becoming (Christofferson, 2025; Hunter, 1997). From there, the anthology turns to works that address growth, unmet expectations, grace, and transformation (Craig, 2018; Olson, 2025; Wilcox, 2021). The final section widens the lens through hymnody, ancient wisdom, and contemporary literature and conversation (Bytheway, n.d.; Clayton, 1846/1985; Goldberg, 2012; Hafen, 2015; Card, 1986; Pirkei Avot 4:1, n.d.).

The thread holding all twelve works together is this: prosperity is not the world's version of treasure. Prosperity is a covenant connection to God, and the slow, holy work He is doing in a person who keeps walking.

Entries Excluded and Why

Curating this anthology required more than collecting every source that mentions prosperity. It meant deciding which works most clearly served the argument that prospering in the land is a covenant reality centered on God's presence, not a guarantee of material ease. Some pieces were beautiful but redundant; others were solid but too shallow or too broad for the project's objectives. The ten excluded works fall into three main categories: repetitions of stronger insights, expansions that drew attention away from covenant presence, and genre pieces that would have unbalanced the collection.

1. Strong but repetitive voices

Several excluded works echoed ideas already expressed more sharply by sources I kept. Ezra Taft Benson's "Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon," for example, links prosperity to the dissemination of the Book of Mormon and emphasizes the power of scripture (Benson, 1988). That theme is central, but it is already present in my use of the Book of Mormon itself, and in the way Christofferson and Hunter frame covenant promises (Christofferson, 2025; Hunter, 1997; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013). Including Benson would have added another call to flood the earth with the book rather than a new lens on what it means for a life to prosper.

Dallin H. Oaks's "The Challenge to Become" and Howard W. Hunter's earlier talk, "True Greatness," both emphasize becoming Christlike rather than merely doing or having (Hunter, 1982; Oaks, 2000). Those messages are deeply compatible with my thesis, but the later compilation, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, already provides a succinct, quotable statement that prosperity is measured by "what you have become" (Hunter, 1997). Faced with page limits, I chose the single clearest articulation rather than multiple overlapping versions of the same idea. Similarly, Bradley R. Wilcox's earlier devotional "His Grace Is Sufficient" powerfully teaches grace, but *Worthiness Is Not Flawlessness* addresses grace and prosperity in the more direct terms my introduction required (Wilcox, 2011, 2021).

2. Works that broadened the focus too far

A second group of sources was compelling but shifted the project toward a different theme. C. S. Lewis's *The Problem of Pain* and *Mere Christianity* are classics that shaped my sense of discipleship and suffering (Lewis, 1940, 1952). They address theodicy, free will, and gradual sanctification in ways that complement my argument. However, their focus is broader than the specific scriptural promise to "prosper in the land." Once I grounded my definition of prosperity in Latter-day Saint covenant language and contemporary LDS voices, these works began to feel like background influences

rather than core texts. They were ultimately cut so that Restoration scriptures and modern prophetic teachings could take center stage.

The same was true of a Holland family podcast episode that covered service, health, faith, and devotion in a wide-ranging conversation (Holland, 2022). It was moving and human, but it did not devote sufficient attention to the precise language of prosperity that my project interrogates. I limited myself to one podcast—the Maxwell Institute interview with James Goldberg—because that episode speaks directly to being “saved in our lives,” not from them, which aligns more tightly with the question of prospering under covenant (Hafen, 2015).

3. Genre and balance considerations

The final set of exclusions was intended to keep the anthology balanced across genres rather than to overload any one area. Gayle N. Lund’s BYU devotional “The Voice of the Lord” encourages listeners to recognize and heed divine guidance (Lund, 1997). That theme is important for prosperity, but its function was similar to that of Christofferson’s and Craig’s teachings on presence and divine discontent (Christofferson, 2025; Craig, 2018). Including another devotional with overlapping emphasis would have made the collection feel lopsided toward speeches at the expense of hymnody, ancient wisdom, and fiction.

Orson Scott Card’s short story “Salvage,” from *The Folk of the Fringe*, offered a powerful image of redefined treasure—soda-can “wishes” under the temple instead of gold (Card, 1989). I love that story, and it strongly influenced my thinking, but I ultimately chose *Speaker for the Dead* as my single Card entry. The novel’s focus on truthful remembrance and communal healing is more closely aligned with the mature definition of prosperity I sought to emphasize (Card, 1986). Using both would have tilted the anthology too far toward one author and one genre.

The 2023 “Prosper in the Land” Church podcast episode was also set aside, even though it directly addressed my key phrase (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2023). Its institutional voice overlapped with what I was already drawing from Christofferson, Olson, and the Book of Mormon, without adding the same narrative or imaginative richness that Goldberg’s podcast provided (Hafen, 2015; Olson, 2025; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013). To keep the anthology tight, I allowed only one audio entry to stand as my representative “conversation” piece.

Why these exclusions strengthen the project

Excluding these works was not a judgment on their spiritual value. Each could be included in another anthology on related themes. In this project, however, they would

have blurred the focus or repeated work already being done more effectively by other selections. By asking three questions—Does this source define prosperity in a covenant-centered way that holds up in hardship? Does it add something distinct? Does it strengthen my argument enough to justify its space? I ended up with a leaner, more coherent set. The final twelve entries trace a clear journey from a transactional reading of “prosper in the land” to a covenant understanding grounded in presence, formation, and gratitude. The excluded works helped along the way, but letting them go allowed the central argument to emerge with greater clarity and power.

Annotated Bibliography (12 Included Texts)

Book of Mormon – 2 Nephi 2:20; Alma 36

These passages anchor my anthology in the original scriptural language of “prospering in the land.” In 2 Nephi 2:20, Lehi promises his children that obedience will lead them to a “land of promise.” At the same time, Alma 36 repeats the covenant formula that “inasmuch as ye shall keep the commandments of God ye shall prosper in the land.” In my childhood, I heard these verses as a straightforward exchange: keep the rules, and life will become easier and more blessed in visible ways. As I have wrestled with unanswered prayers and complicated realities, these same verses have become less about guaranteed comfort and more about a relationship with God who leads, shapes, and sometimes constrains His people for their good. Placing this text first allows the rest of the anthology to function as a conversation with my earlier self, correcting a prosperity-gospel reading and inviting me to see prosperity as covenant companionship, guidance, and preparation for a promised future rather than as immediate earthly success.

D. Todd Christofferson – “Look to God and Live” (October 2025 General Conference)

In this address, Elder D. Todd Christofferson centers prosperity on turning toward God rather than expecting God to make our lives easy. He reminds listeners that the repeated Book of Mormon promise includes a warning: those who break the covenant are “cut off from [God’s] presence,” suggesting that His presence is the real blessing. In my own journey, this talk challenges the instinct to measure prosperity by outcomes and instead asks where I am looking when life is hard. By pairing it directly after the Book of Mormon verses, I demonstrate how a modern apostle reads the same promise not as a guarantee of comfort but as an invitation to continue seeking Christ for life, guidance, and courage, even when circumstances remain unresolved.

“Come, Come, Ye Saints” – Hymn No. 30 by William Clayton (1846)

“Come, Come, Ye Saints” offers a pioneer case study in prosperity without comfort. The second verse asks, “Why should we mourn or think our lot is hard? ‘Tis not so; all is right,” words that were sung by Saints who were hungry, sick, grieving, and far from any worldly definition of success. This hymn indicates that they experienced prosperity through trust in God’s plan and the courage to continue walking toward Zion despite continued uncertainty. In my anthology, the hymn bridges doctrine and lived experience: it embodies the shift from expecting prosperity to remove suffering toward learning to feel spiritually prosperous in the middle of it. The pioneers’ willingness to sing “all is right” when nothing looked right helps me reconsider my own disappointments and see them as part of God’s work of preparing me for eternity.

Michelle D. Craig - "Divine Discontent" (October 2018 General Conference)

Sister Michelle D. Craig describes "divine discontent" as the holy restlessness we feel when we sense the distance between who we are and who we can become. Rather than treating this feeling as evidence of failure or lack of prosperity, she frames it as a gift that moves us to "act, to change, to improve." In my earlier view, not receiving immediate blessings felt like proof that I was doing something wrong; this talk helped me see that some of the uneasiness I carried was, in fact, the Spirit inviting me to grow. Placing this piece early in the anthology demonstrates that prosperity entails the discomfort that drives us toward Christlike transformation, not merely the comfort that confirms we are already doing well.

Bradley R. Wilcox - Worthiness Is Not Flawlessness (2021)

Bradley R. Wilcox's message that "worthiness is not flawlessness" dismantles the hidden equation I had built between perfection, prosperity, and God's favor. He insists that God loves us as we are and walks with us as we stumble, emphasizing that grace is "the help for weakness," not a prize for those who already have their lives in order. When prosperity is misunderstood as a report card on our righteousness, any setback or delay can feel like condemnation; Wilcox replaces that fear with the assurance that sincere effort and honest repentance are what matter most. In this anthology, his book serves as a corrective to the notion that a lack of outward prosperity signifies spiritual failure, teaching instead that true prosperity is the ability to persevere with the Savior's help.

Camille Fronk Olson - But If Not: Finding God in Unmet Expectations and Unwanted Detours (2025)

Camille Fronk Olson's book explores what happens when God does not grant the miracles His people hope for, borrowing the phrase "but if not" from Daniel's friends to describe faithful endurance amid disappointment. She argues that some of the "sweetest, most personal manifestations of God's love" come precisely when hoped-for outcomes do not occur and believers discover that He is still with them. This perspective speaks directly to my experience of unanswered prayers, when my former definition of prosperity collapsed and I had to ask whether the promise in the Book of Mormon remained true. In the context of the anthology, Olson shows that prosperity can manifest as spiritual depth, increased trust, and a more intimate relationship with God, which emerges only when the life we imagined dies.

Howard W. Hunter – The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter (1997)

In one oft-quoted passage, President Howard W. Hunter teaches that at the end of our lives we will not be judged by “academic successes,” positions, or wealth, but “based on what [we] have become as persons and what [we] are in conduct and character.” This reframes prosperity from accumulation to transformation: the true measure of a prosperous life is who we are before God, not what we can display before others. For someone who once treated visible blessings as proof that the covenant was working, Hunter’s emphasis on becoming rather than having is both unsettling and liberating. Positioned here, his teachings mark a turning point in the anthology, shifting the question from “Why am I not getting what I expected?” to “Who is God helping me become through what He gives and withholds?”

John Bytheway – Teaching on Prosperity in Trials

In one of his short teachings on social media, John Bytheway suggests that being “blessed and prospered” may look less like the absence of storms and more like “enjoying a good harvest in the midst of them.” That simple reframing translates dense scriptural language into everyday terms and speaks directly to the younger version of me who equated prosperity with an easy life. Bytheway’s conversational tone makes it easier to admit that trials and blessings often arrive at the same time, and that God’s help is usually woven into the struggle rather than replacing it. In this anthology, his voice serves as a bridge between formal doctrinal statements and lived, practical faith, showing that prosperity can be recognized in small, sustaining mercies while the larger problems remain unresolved.

James Goldberg – The Five Books of Jesus (2012)

James Goldberg’s *The Five Books of Jesus* retells the ministry of Christ in a lyrical, narrative style that highlights small acts of compassion, shared meals, and moments of quiet belonging. Rather than focusing on dramatic miracles as proof of prosperity, Goldberg’s Jesus creates a community where outsiders are welcomed and burdens are shared, suggesting that spiritual wealth is found in covenant relationships and mercy. Reading this book, I began to see prosperity not as individual achievement but as participation in a people shaped by Christ’s love. Within the anthology, Goldberg’s work widens the lens from my personal expectations to a communal vision, reminding me that to “prosper in the land” is also to help others flourish in the presence of God.

Maxwell Institute Podcast – James Goldberg on The Five Books of Jesus (2015)

In the Maxwell Institute interview about *The Five Books of Jesus*, Goldberg explains that Jesus “does not save us from our lives; he saves us in our lives,” a line that has

stayed with me. Hearing him talk about writing for readers who feel wounded, weary, or on the margins helped me connect prosperity with the experience of being seen and carried by Christ in exactly the circumstances I would most like to escape. The conversation also highlights the role of imagination in discipleship: stories can help us recognize God's work in our own messy narratives. Placed after the book itself, this podcast functions as a kind of commentary track in the anthology, drawing out how narrative art can make doctrinal truths about prosperity feel concrete, personal, and emotionally honest.

Orson Scott Card - *Speaker for the Dead* (1986)

Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead* imagines a future in which a "Speaker" recounts a person's life in full, unvarnished detail so that a community can understand, forgive, and heal. The novel suggests that true prosperity is not power, safety, or technological success. Still, the courage to face painful truths and to love flawed people without pretending their flaws are virtues. As I wrestled with my own disappointments, this book showed me a kind of prosperity that looks like reconciliation, empathy, and moral growth inside a broken world. In the context of the anthology, Card's science-fiction narrative extends the conversation beyond explicitly religious settings, illustrating that the same covenant themes—truth, mercy, and transformed relationships—can define prosperity even on distant planets and in imagined futures.

Pirkei Avot 4:1 - "Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot."

Pirkei Avot 4:1 asks a series of questions about strength, wisdom, and honor, then answers the question "Who is rich?" with the deceptively simple phrase "He who rejoices in his lot." This saying offers a definition of prosperity that does not depend on the quantity of money, comfort, or accomplishments—but on the quality of one's relationship to what God has given. For me, it crystallizes the lesson that the other texts in this anthology have been teaching: that prosperity is not about getting everything I imagined; it is learning to recognize and rejoice in the portion the Lord has entrusted to me. Placed last, Pirkei Avot serves as a quiet, universal benediction over the whole project, allowing me to return to the Book of Mormon promise with new eyes. To prosper in the land, I now believe, is to live in covenant with God, to receive both abundance and limitation as part of His education of my soul, and to find joy—even gratitude—in the lot He lovingly assigns.

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