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Connecting the Pulpit and the Home Domain: Pastoral care strategies for enhancing family well-being

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore theological resources from a pastoral care perspective to enhance family well-being. The paper also aims to interpret the situation through the lens of lived faith, Scripture, church social teachings, and other valuable resources within the Christian tradition. The paper 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 paper offers a critical comparison between the current impacts of teachings and the authentic demands of Christian faith: justice, compassion, integrity, and the nurturing of family life in God's grace and truth. Contextual theology requires that faith engage 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.

Keywords: pulpit; home; pastoral care; strategies; family well-being.

Clarification of terms

Prosperity Gospel

Prosperity gospel refers to a religious message or preaching tradition that teaches that faith in God, positive confession, obedience to spiritual authority, and financial giving especially through tithes and offerings will result in material wealth, physical health, success, and personal advancement.

Prosperity Theology

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Prosperity theology refers to the broader theological framework or doctrinal system underlying the prosperity gospel, seeking to provide biblical and theological justification for teachings that connect faith, blessing, health, and wealth.

Prosperity Teachings

Prosperity teaching is a broader and more descriptive term referring to the various sermons, doctrines, practices, motivational messages, and church instructions that promote prosperity-related beliefs.

Although these terms are related and frequently overlap in usage, they are not strictly synonymous. In this paper, the terms are used in a closely connected sense to describe Christian teachings that associate faithfulness to God with material prosperity, health, and success.

For the purpose of this paper, prosperity theology/gospel/teachings refer to a Christian belief system and teaching tradition that links spiritual faithfulness, positive confession, and financial giving with divine rewards such as material wealth, physical well-being, success, and social advancement.

Introduction

The prosperity gospel (PG) has become one of the most influential religious movements in contemporary Christianity, particularly within African, Asian, and North American contexts. Its teachings generally associate faithfulness with material wealth, physical health, and visible success, often presenting prosperity as evidence of divine favor. While these teachings appeal to communities affected by poverty, unemployment, illness, and social uncertainty, growing scholarship has raised concerns regarding their theological distortions and their impact on the spiritual and relational well-being of families (Bowler, 2018; Maina et al., 2018). In many cases, families exposed to prosperity teachings experience unrealistic expectations, emotional distress, guilt, spiritual confusion, and weakened resilience when promised breakthroughs fail to materialize (Nwankwo, 2019; Magezi & Manzanga, 2024). Consequently, the need for a pastoral theological response that restores a biblically grounded understanding of suffering, hope, dignity, and holistic flourishing has become increasingly urgent.

This paper explores theological resources from pastoral care that can enhance family well-being in contexts shaped by prosperity gospel teachings. The study is grounded in the conviction that authentic Christian pastoral care should address not only spiritual concerns but also the emotional, relational, ethical, and socio-economic realities affecting families. Drawing from Scripture, theological traditions, and contextual pastoral theology, the paper critically evaluates the theological assumptions of prosperity teachings while proposing constructive pastoral resources capable of nurturing resilience, justice, compassion, and spiritual maturity within families (Holland & Henriet, 1984; Bevans, 2002:26). The discussion is framed by the following research question: What pastoral care theological resources can be used to enhance the well-being of families affected by prosperity gospel teachings? The scope of the paper includes theological foundations such as biblical realism, the theology of the cross, and the doctrine of the imago Dei, together with practical pastoral resources including theological counselling, spiritual disciplines, contextual pastoral approaches, liberation theology, African communal spirituality, and holistic biblical prosperity (Louw, 2015; Katongole, 2017).

The paper argues that effective pastoral care must reclaim the biblical vision of holistic well-being by grounding families in God's grace rather than in material achievement. Such an approach

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challenges the commodification of faith and restores a theology centred on justice, compassion, endurance, and communal flourishing (Heuser, 2016; Bowers du Toit, 2022). In doing so, pastoral theology becomes a restorative and transformative resource that equips families to endure suffering faithfully, resist exploitative religious practices, and cultivate healthy spiritual and relational lives (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024).

The paper is structured as follows. The first section introduces the study by outlining the research problem, aim, scope, and research question. The second section discusses the theological foundations for pastoral care, focusing on biblical realism, the theology of the cross, and the *imago Dei*. The third section examines theological and pastoral resources for enhancing family well-being in contexts influenced by prosperity teachings. The fourth section explores practical pastoral strategies, including theological education, holistic pastoral well-being, contextual pastoral care, and spiritual disciplines. The final section concludes the paper by synthesizing the major findings and highlighting the significance of pastoral theology in strengthening family well-being.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative, theological, and pastoral analytical approach to explore theological resources for enhancing family well-being in contexts influenced by prosperity gospel (PG) teachings. The study was grounded in contextual theology, which seeks to interpret Christian faith within lived social realities rather than merely repeating inherited doctrinal formulations in abstraction (Bevans, 2002). In addition, the study was guided by a hermeneutical-practical theological framework, which integrates biblical interpretation, lived experience, and ecclesial tradition in order to generate contextually relevant pastoral responses.

The hermeneutical orientation of the study drew on the hermeneutical spiral of practical theology, where interpretation moves between Scripture, tradition, and lived experience in a continuous process of critical reflection and application. This allowed the study to read prosperity teachings not only as doctrinal claims, but as lived religious practices that shape meaning, identity, and family relationships.

The methodology therefore focused on critically engaging theological literature, biblical teachings, and pastoral scholarship related to prosperity theology, suffering, family spirituality, and pastoral care. The study utilized a descriptive and interpretive literature-based design. Relevant theological and pastoral sources were purposively selected to examine the impact of prosperity teachings on family well-being and to identify theological resources capable of addressing these challenges.

The analysis drew extensively from biblical texts, pastoral theological scholarship, African contextual theology, and public pastoral care literature. Foundational theological concepts such as biblical realism, the theology of the cross, and the doctrine of the *imago Dei* were critically analyzed because they provide alternative theological frameworks to the triumphalist and materialistic tendencies associated with prosperity teachings (Heuser, 2016; Hobson, 2019).

The methodological orientation of the study was also informed by practical theological hermeneutics, particularly the “pastoral cycle” approach of experience interpretation reflection action, as indicated by Holland and Henriot (1984). Within this framework, human experience families affected by prosperity teachings is brought into dialogue with Scripture and tradition in order to generate transformative pastoral responses. In this regard, the study examined the lived realities of families affected by prosperity teachings, including disappointment, emotional distress, guilt, unrealistic expectations, and socio-economic vulnerability.

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The study further employed contextual and interdisciplinary analysis by incorporating insights from African theology, liberation theology, eco-theology, covenantal theology, and pastoral counselling. These perspectives were included because they address broader socio-economic and cultural realities affecting families, particularly within African contexts shaped by poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social instability (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024).

Thematic analysis was therefore used to organize the discussion into major categories. These themes included theological foundations for pastoral care, theological and pastoral resources for family well-being, practical pastoral strategies, spiritual disciplines, and contextual pastoral approaches. The findings emerging from these themes were then interpreted within the broader framework of pastoral care and family spirituality.

The study did not involve empirical data collection from participants. Instead, it relied on scholarly literature, theological reflection, and biblical interpretation as primary sources of analysis. This approach was appropriate because the purpose of the study was not to measure behavioral patterns quantitatively but rather to develop a theological and pastoral understanding of how families affected by prosperity teachings may experience healing, resilience, and spiritual restoration through biblically grounded pastoral care. The methodology, therefore, enabled a critical theological engagement with prosperity teachings while proposing practical pastoral responses aimed at strengthening holistic family well-being.

Reviews of relevant Literature

This section explores scholarly perspectives on pastoral care and theological resources for enhancing family well-being in contexts influenced by PG teachings. The review is organized around three major areas. First, it examines the theological foundations for pastoral care, with particular focus on biblical realism, the theology of the cross, and the doctrine of the imago Dei as critical frameworks for addressing the theological distortions associated with prosperity teachings (Nwankwo, 2019; Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2022). Second, the review discusses theological and pastoral resources that promote resilience, dignity, hope, and holistic well-being among families affected by socio-economic and spiritual challenges linked to prosperity theology (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024; Sibabnda, 2024). Third, it analyses practical pastoral strategies, including theological education, holistic pastoral well-being, contextual pastoral care, and spiritual disciplines, as important approaches for strengthening authentic Christian discipleship and family spirituality (Van Emmenes, 2019; Baloyi, 2024). Through these themes, the review demonstrates that pastoral care grounded in biblical and contextual theological principles can provide transformative resources for restoring family well-being beyond the materialistic assumptions promoted by the prosperity gospel.

Theological Foundations for Pastoral Care

This section discusses the theological foundations that inform pastoral care responses to prosperity gospel teachings. It specifically examines biblical realism, the theology of the cross, and the doctrine of the imago Dei as theological frameworks that provide a balanced understanding of suffering, dignity, resilience, and Christian discipleship. These foundations are essential for developing pastoral care that strengthens family well-being beyond material prosperity. However, while prosperity theology is critically assessed for its theological limitations, its attractiveness is not only theological but also deeply socio-economic and existential. The promise of healing, financial breakthrough, and upward mobility resonates strongly with lived experiences of deprivation and social struggle. In this sense, prosperity theology functions not

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merely as doctrine, but as a practical hope-language that appears to offer immediate solutions to pressing material needs. Moderate forms may emphasize God's care, blessing, gratitude, stewardship, and holistic flourishing without entirely denying the reality of suffering or the necessity of spiritual maturity. In such expressions, material blessing is viewed as one aspect of God's provision rather than its sole indicator. By contrast, extreme forms tend to absolutize wealth and health as guaranteed outcomes of faith, often interpreting poverty or suffering as evidence of spiritual failure or lack of faith

Biblical Realism

Biblical realism provides an important theological foundation for pastoral care in contexts shaped by prosperity gospel (PG) teachings. Unlike prosperity theology, which frequently associates faith with uninterrupted material success and physical well-being, biblical realism recognizes suffering, weakness, and adversity as integral dimensions of the Christian journey (Heuser, 2016; Wariboko, 2014). Scriptural teachings such as Philippians 4:11–13 and 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 demonstrate that Christian faith is not grounded in triumphalism, but in dependence upon God's sustaining grace amidst hardship. According to McCoy (2025), prosperity preaching often creates unrealistic expectations among believers, resulting in guilt and spiritual disappointment when poverty, illness, or bereavement persist. Biblical realism, therefore, offers a corrective by affirming that suffering does not signify divine abandonment or spiritual failure.

Some scholars further argue that biblical realism enables pastoral caregivers to engage honestly with the lived realities of families facing socio-economic hardship. Banda (2025) contends that a theology grounded in realism and the cross restores integrity to the Christian faith by situating suffering within God's redemptive purposes rather than interpreting it as evidence of weak faith. Similarly, Heuser (2016) criticizes prosperity teachings for ignoring structural realities such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality, thereby reducing suffering to a purely spiritual problem. In contrast, biblical realism equips pastoral care to accompany families compassionately through pain while fostering resilience, hope, and communal solidarity (Bowers du Toit, 2016). Katongole (2017) adds that lament forms an essential aspect of biblical realism because it allows families to express grief honestly before God without resorting to superficial assurances of blessing. Consequently, biblical realism supports a mature spirituality rooted in endurance, humility, and trust in divine providence.

Theology of the Cross

The theology of the cross represents another significant theological resource for pastoral care. Rooted in the Reformed tradition and Calvin's pastoral theology, the theology of the cross views suffering as central to Christian discipleship rather than as a contradiction to faith (Calvin, 1559/2008). According to Van den Brink and Van der Kooi (2017), Christ's suffering demonstrates God's identification with human brokenness and provides hope amidst trials. This perspective challenges the triumphalist assumptions of prosperity theology by affirming that God often reveals divine grace through weakness rather than worldly success.

Recent scholarship emphasises that the theology of the cross is particularly relevant within African contexts characterised by poverty, displacement, and inequality. Banda (2020) argues that African prosperity teachings frequently prioritize material blessing while neglecting the theological significance of suffering. In contrast, the theology of the cross offers families a framework for interpreting hardship redemptively. Katongole (2017) maintains that cruciform theology sustains authentic Christian hope because it encourages lament, resilience, and resistance against injustice. Waruwu and Gulton (2025) similarly contends that God's solidarity with suffering

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humanity through the Cross provides comfort and courage to communities experiencing oppression and despair.

Pastoral theologians further argue that the theology of the cross nurtures emotional and spiritual resilience within families. Pratt (2024) notes that suffering should not be viewed as punishment from God, but as part of a transformative process that cultivates maturity, solidarity, and compassion. By contrast, prosperity teachings often individualize suffering and blame families when prayers for prosperity remain unanswered (Bowers du Toit, 2016). Thus, the theology of the cross reclaims suffering as an avenue through which believers encounter God's sustaining presence and develop enduring hope grounded in Christ rather than material accumulation.

Imago Dei

The doctrine of the imago Dei also provides a crucial theological basis for pastoral care. The concept affirms that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore possess inherent dignity and worth regardless of economic or social status (Middleton, 2005). This perspective is significant in this study because it shifts human value away from material achievement towards divine identity and sacred worth. This theological principle directly challenges prosperity teachings that equate human value with wealth and material achievement. According to Banda (2020) and Edigbo and Nwube (2025), prosperity theology often commodifies faith and measures spiritual worth according to visible success. The researcher observes that such interpretations distort biblical anthropology by creating spiritual hierarchies based on economic status. The doctrine of the imago Dei, therefore, rejects such assumptions by grounding human identity in God's creative act rather than economic prosperity.

Pastoral scholars maintain that the imago Dei contributes significantly to family well-being by restoring dignity and relational wholeness. Magezi and Manzanga (2024) argue that pastoral care rooted in the imago Dei enables families to recognize their God-given worth even amidst poverty, illness, or marginalization. The researcher concludes that this perspective is particularly relevant in communities where socio-economic hardship often weakens self-worth and spiritual confidence. Similarly, Hoekema (1986) argues that the imago Dei encompasses humanity's relationship with God and with other people, providing the basis for human dignity and responsible relationships. This study, therefore, views the imago Dei as essential for nurturing healthy family relationships grounded in compassion, equality, and mutual respect. Heuser (2016) further asserts that teaching prosperity dehumanizes believers by reducing faith to material success, whereas the imago Dei affirms the equal worth of all people. The researcher argues that this affirmation is central to pastoral care because it restores dignity to vulnerable individuals and families who may feel spiritually inferior due to economic struggles.

African theologians also emphasise the social and prophetic dimensions of the imago Dei. Chitando (2024) argues that the doctrine challenges systems of inequality, patriarchy, and exploitation by affirming the dignity of vulnerable people. The researcher maintains that this understanding broadens pastoral care beyond individual spirituality towards social justice and communal transformation. Mufanebaza and Masengwe (2025) adds that pastoral care informed by the imago Dei inspires communities to pursue justice, compassion, and solidarity. In view of this study, such an approach is essential for strengthening holistic family well-being in contexts affected by poverty, inequality, and exploitative religious practices. Consequently, this theological framework supports holistic family well-being by promoting dignity, equality, and communal responsibility.

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Theological and Pastoral Resources for Enhancing Family Well-Being

This section examines theological and pastoral resources that strengthen family well-being in contexts influenced by prosperity teachings. It focuses on pastoral frameworks and spiritual resources that foster resilience, hope, justice, and relational healing while challenging the individualistic and materialistic tendencies associated with prosperity theology.

Public Pastoral Care and Creation Theology

Theological resources for enhancing family well-being extend beyond doctrinal reflection to include practical pastoral frameworks that respond to social and economic realities. Public pastoral care addresses the individualistic tendencies promoted by prosperity theology by integrating spiritual care with social responsibility (Nanthambwe, 2024). Such an approach reflects God's concern for both spiritual and material well-being and assists families struggling with poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion.

Creation theology also contributes to holistic pastoral care by emphasizing God's sustaining presence within creation and human community. Cook and Hamley (2020) explain that creation theology enables families to interpret suffering within God's restorative purposes rather than viewing hardship as evidence of divine punishment. LaMothe (2018), Heuser (2020) and Baab (2018) further argue that theological reflection on creation nurtures hope and resilience by encouraging believers to trust God amidst scarcity and uncertainty. Louw (2015) adds that African theological reflection strengthens communal connectedness through creation theology, thereby helping families interpret struggles collectively rather than individually.

Lament, Hope, and Forgiveness

Lament, hope, and forgiveness are essential spiritual resources within pastoral care. Prosperity teachings often suffer silence by promoting continuous success and victory narratives (Mashau & Kgatle, 2019). The researcher observes that such triumphalist narratives frequently discourage believers from expressing emotional pain and vulnerability openly within faith communities. Biblical lament, however, allows believers to express pain, disappointment, and confusion before God honestly. Brueggemann (2016) argues that lament sustains covenantal faith because it enables believers to remain relationally engaged with God amidst suffering. The researcher agrees that lament strengthens spiritual authenticity because it creates space for believers to process suffering without fear of condemnation or accusations of weak faith. Lewis Hall (2016) similarly contends that lament resists denial and creates space for healing and resilience. In the view of this study, lament becomes a transformative pastoral resource that helps families confront hardship realistically while maintaining hope in God's presence.

Hope grounded in God's promises further strengthens family well-being. Nduku (2025) describes Christian hope as eschatological because it sustains believers amidst suffering while anticipating God's ultimate renewal. The researcher maintains that this understanding of hope shifts the focus of faith away from immediate material gratification towards enduring spiritual meaning and future restoration. Families affected by prosperity teachings, therefore, require a theology of hope that redirects attention from material accumulation toward spiritual growth and restored relationships (Tizon, 2022; Elliot, 2020). The researcher argues that such a theology of hope is essential for helping families develop resilience and emotional stability during periods of socio-economic hardship and spiritual disappointment.

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Forgiveness likewise contributes to emotional and relational healing within families. Volf (2005) and Lee (2025) explain that forgiveness breaks cycles of bitterness and restores trust within communities. The researcher notes that forgiveness is particularly important in contexts where families have experienced manipulation, exploitation, or relational tensions resulting from distorted religious teachings. Pastoral care that encourages forgiveness enables families harmed by exploitative teachings or relational conflict to experience reconciliation and spiritual renewal. The researcher, therefore, views forgiveness as a restorative pastoral practice that strengthens relational wholeness, emotional healing, and communal harmony within families and faith communities.

Practical Pastoral Strategies

This section explores practical pastoral strategies that enhance family well-being and address the distortions associated with prosperity theology. The discussion focuses on theological education, holistic pastoral well-being, contextual pastoral care, and spiritual disciplines as practical approaches for nurturing resilient and spiritually mature families.

Theological Education

Sound biblical and theological education remains central to pastoral responses addressing prosperity theology. Prosperity teachings frequently distort Scripture by linking faith with guaranteed wealth and health (Jones & Woodbridge, 2017). In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, where Paul recounts his “thorn in the flesh” and his repeated plea for its removal. The divine response “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” reframes suffering not as a sign of divine absence or failed faith, but as a paradoxical space where God’s power is disclosed. Similarly, Philippians 4:11–13 offers a corrective to prosperity-oriented interpretations of Christian contentment. Paul writes that he has “learned to be content whatever the circumstances,” whether in abundance or in need. The verb “learned” indicates a process of spiritual formation rather than automatic spiritual entitlement. Consequently, pastors require robust theological training that equips them to interpret Scripture responsibly and guide families towards a holistic understanding of the gospel. Phillips (2015) argues that hermeneutical training prevents proof-texting and theological manipulation, while Van Emmenes (2019) highlights the importance of pastoral counselling and family ministry education in supporting struggling families.

Theological education also strengthens pastoral integrity and resilience. Jentile (2021:3) contends that pastors grounded in sound doctrine are better equipped to challenge false teachings and foster spiritual maturity within congregations. In African contexts, contextual theological training addressing poverty, unemployment, and social injustice is particularly necessary (Williams, 2022). Such training enables pastors to respond compassionately and critically to the socio-economic conditions that often make prosperity teachings appealing.

Holistic Pastoral Well-Being

Holistic pastoral well-being constitutes another important practical strategy. According to Brunsdon (2024) and Van Emmenes (2019), effective ministry depends upon the spiritual, emotional, relational, and psychological well-being of pastors themselves. Pastors shaped by prosperity expectations may experience burnout, emotional exhaustion, and pressure to demonstrate material success. Consequently, intentional self-care, emotional intelligence, stable family relationships, and spiritual formation are necessary for sustainable ministry.

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Scholars argue that emotionally healthy pastors are better positioned to support families experiencing hardship. Magezi and Manzanga (2023) observe that spiritually resilient pastors are more capable of mediating conflict, fostering communal healing, and guiding families through suffering. Koenig (2021) further notes that prayer, reflection, and emotional awareness support empathy and mental health among clergy. Mentoring, counselling, and peer support, therefore, become essential resources for preventing pastoral burnout and maintaining healthy congregational leadership (Emslie, 2025:10).

Contextual Pastoral Care and Spiritual Disciplines

Contextual pastoral care seeks to integrate theology with the lived realities of families. In African contexts, poverty, migration, environmental crises, and social instability significantly affect family well-being (Twumasi-Ankrah & Adorkovi, 2025). Eco-theology, therefore, provides a contextual pastoral framework linking faith, stewardship, and social justice. Hrynkow (2017) argues that eco-theological pastoral care encourages families to interpret themselves as participants within God's broader redemptive purposes rather than as isolated individuals pursuing prosperity.

Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, Bible study, and family devotionals also strengthen resilience and spiritual maturity within families. Baloyi (2024) notes that family devotionals encourage intergenerational faith formation and cultivate scriptural identity within households., The children, youth, and adults encounter and internalise faith together in a shared setting.which moves faith from being a purely pulpit-centred to a home-centred, where belief is consistently reinforced through daily life. Grudem et al. (2020) further argue that sound doctrine learned through systematic Bible study protects families from theological deception by grounding them in biblical truth and against false teaching. Prayer and fasting nurture dependence upon God while redirecting faith away from materialism and toward spiritual transformation (Adeboye, 2019). Finally, spiritual discernment and maturity remain crucial in guarding families against exploitative teachings. Nanthambwe and Magezi (2022) contend that discernment involves critical theological reflection and scriptural literacy that enable believers to identify manipulative teachings. Wright (2010) further argues that authentic Christian maturity develops through lifelong discipleship shaped by justice, compassion, and communal responsibility. Through these practical pastoral strategies, families are empowered to cultivate resilient, holistic, and gospel-centred spirituality amidst the challenges posed by prosperity theology.

Results and Findings

The findings of the study reveal that prosperity gospel teachings significantly affect the spiritual, emotional, and relational well-being of families by promoting material success as evidence of divine favor. The study found that prosperity teachings frequently create unrealistic expectations regarding wealth, health, and personal success, resulting in disappointment, guilt, anxiety, and spiritual disillusionment when such expectations remain unfulfilled (Nwankwo, 2019; Bowler, 2018). Families exposed to these teachings often struggle to interpret suffering, poverty, illness, and socio-economic hardship within a meaningful theological framework.

The findings further reveal that biblical realism serves as an important theological corrective to prosperity theology. Biblical realism acknowledges suffering, weakness, and hardship as normal aspects of Christian discipleship rather than signs of failed faith (Heuser, 2016; Wariboko, 2017). The study found that pastoral care grounded in biblical realism enables families to interpret adversity through God's sustaining grace rather than through feelings of condemnation or spiritual inadequacy. Scriptural teachings such as Philippians 4:11–13 and 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 were

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identified as significant theological resources that encourage endurance, humility, and resilience amidst suffering.

Another major finding was that the theology of the cross provides a strong pastoral framework for addressing emotional and spiritual suffering within families. The study found that the theology of the cross challenges triumphalist interpretations of faith by emphasizing God's presence within human suffering and weakness (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi, 2017). Families affected by prosperity teachings benefit from pastoral approaches that reinterpret suffering not as divine punishment but as part of Christian discipleship and spiritual transformation (Magezi & Manzanga, 2024). The findings also indicate that the theology of the cross encourages communal solidarity, compassion, and hope amidst socio-economic hardship.

The study further found that the doctrine of the imago Dei restores dignity and self-worth among families affected by prosperity teachings. Prosperity theology often measures spiritual worth according to financial success and social achievement, thereby contributing to shame and feelings of inadequacy among economically vulnerable believers (Heuser, 2016; Banda, 2020). In contrast, the imago Dei affirms that all human beings possess inherent dignity because they are created in God's image (Middleton, 2005). The findings indicate that pastoral care informed by the imago Dei promotes relational healing, equality, and communal responsibility within families and faith communities.

The study also found that theological and pastoral resources such as lament, hope, forgiveness, public pastoral care, and creation theology contribute significantly to family well-being. Lament enables families to express suffering and disappointment honestly before God, thereby promoting emotional authenticity and spiritual healing (Brueggemann, 2014). Hope rooted in God's promises enables families to develop resilience despite socio-economic struggles, while forgiveness contributes to reconciliation and relational restoration within households and communities (Volf, 2001).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that theological education and holistic pastoral well-being are essential practical pastoral strategies for addressing the influence of prosperity teachings. Pastors who receive sound theological education are better equipped to interpret Scripture responsibly and challenge theological distortions associated with prosperity theology (Phillips, 2015; Jentile, 2021). The study also found that emotionally and spiritually healthy pastors are more capable of supporting struggling families, mediating conflict, and promoting communal healing (Brunsdon, 2024; Magezi & Manzanga, 2023).

Another important finding was that contextual pastoral care, and spiritual disciplines strengthen resilience and spiritual maturity within families. Eco-theology, African communal spirituality, and liberation theology were identified as contextual approaches that address socio-economic realities while promoting communal solidarity and ethical responsibility (Twumasi-Ankrah & Adorkovi, 2025; Bujo, 2001). Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fasting, and family devotionals were also found to strengthen intergenerational faith formation, theological discernment, and dependence upon God rather than material prosperity (Baloyi, 2024; Foster, 1988; Willard et al., 2014).

Discussion of the Findings

The findings demonstrate that prosperity theology continues to shape family spirituality in ways that often undermine holistic well-being. The emphasis on wealth, success, and miraculous breakthroughs as indicators of divine favor creates theological distortions that weaken families

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emotionally, spiritually, and relationally when promised blessings fail to materialize. These findings support the argument of Bowler (2018), who contends that prosperity teachings foster unrealistic expectations and individualistic spirituality. The study therefore confirms that families influenced by prosperity theology frequently struggle with guilt, shame, disappointment, and weakened faith during periods of suffering or economic hardship. The findings on biblical realism indicate that effective pastoral care must reclaim a theology capable of addressing suffering honestly. Biblical realism rejects triumphalist spirituality and instead affirms that suffering forms part of the Christian journey. This finding aligns with Nwankwo's (2019) argument that prosperity teachings collapse when confronted by illness, bereavement, and poverty because they fail to provide a sustainable theology of suffering. By grounding pastoral care within biblical realism, families are enabled to develop emotional resilience, humility, and dependence upon God's grace rather than on material success. Such an approach also supports authentic spirituality because it allows believers to lament, struggle, and persevere faithfully amidst adversity.

The findings concerning the theology of the cross further reinforce the importance of a Christ-centred understanding of suffering within pastoral care. Prosperity teachings often interpret suffering as evidence of spiritual failure or insufficient faith. However, the theology of the cross reframes suffering as a context in which God reveals divine presence, compassion, and redemptive grace (Waruwu & Gulton, 2025). This discussion confirms Katongole's (2017) view that cruciform theology nurtures resilience and hope in contexts marked by poverty, violence, and inequality. The findings, therefore, suggest that pastoral care grounded in the cross enables families to reinterpret suffering meaningfully while resisting exploitative teachings that commodify faith.

The study also demonstrates the significance of the imago Dei in restoring dignity and self-worth among vulnerable families. Prosperity teachings frequently create systems of spiritual hierarchy in which economically successful individuals are viewed as more blessed or spiritually mature. Such assumptions contribute to shame, inferiority, and exclusion among struggling families. The doctrine of the imago Dei challenges these harmful perceptions by affirming that all people possess inherent dignity as image-bearers of God (Middleton, 2005). The findings therefore support Heuser's (2016) criticism that prosperity theology dehumanizes believers by equating spirituality with material success. Pastoral care rooted in the imago Dei promotes equality, relational healing, and communal solidarity, thereby contributing to holistic family well-being.

The discussion further reveals that spiritual resources such as lament, hope, and forgiveness play a significant role in emotional and relational healing. Prosperity teachings often suppress expressions of grief and vulnerability by emphasizing victory and triumphalism. However, the findings confirm Brueggemann's (2014) argument that lament is central to authentic covenantal faith because it enables believers to express suffering honestly before God. Similarly, hope grounded in God's promises rather than material gain strengthens resilience amidst socio-economic hardship. Forgiveness additionally promotes reconciliation within families and communities damaged by disappointment, conflict, or exploitation. The findings on theological education and pastoral well-being highlight the importance of competent and emotionally healthy pastoral leadership. Prosperity teachings frequently flourish where biblical literacy and theological discernment are weak. This discussion supports Phillips' (2015) argument that sound theological education equips pastors to resist proof-texting and doctrinal manipulation. Furthermore, emotionally healthy pastors are better equipped to provide compassionate support to struggling families and to model resilience, integrity, and spiritual maturity (Brunsdon, 2024).

Finally, the findings demonstrate that contextual pastoral care and spiritual discipline remain essential for strengthening family spirituality. African communal spirituality, eco-theology, and

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liberation theology address broader social realities such as poverty, inequality, environmental crises, and communal responsibility. These contextual approaches challenge the individualism associated with prosperity teachings while promoting solidarity, justice, and holistic flourishing (Bujo, 2001). Likewise, spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fasting, and family devotionals strengthen theological discernment and intergenerational faith formation. The study, therefore, concludes that holistic pastoral care rooted in biblical truth, contextual theology, and communal spirituality provides an effective response for enhancing family well-being within contexts influenced by prosperity gospel teachings.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to practical theology and pastoral care by critically demonstrating how prosperity gospel teachings may undermine family well-being when material success is presented as the primary evidence of divine favour. The study argues that such teachings can weaken spiritual resilience, distort Christian identity, and place emotional and relational pressure on families experiencing suffering, poverty, or unfulfilled expectations. In response, the paper highlights the importance of theological resources that recover a holistic and biblically grounded understanding of human flourishing rooted in grace, dignity, compassion, communal care, and faithful endurance.

The study further contributes by showing that pastoral theology offers constructive resources for strengthening families within contemporary socio-economic realities. The integration of biblical realism, the theology of the cross, lament, forgiveness, hope, and African communal spirituality provide a framework through which churches can nurture emotionally healthy, spiritually mature, and socially responsible families. These theological resources challenge consumerist and individualistic interpretations of faith and encourage a more balanced understanding of Christian discipleship and well-being.

The practical significance of this study lies in its implications for pastoral ministry, theological education, and church practice. The findings suggest that pastors and church leaders should develop contextual pastoral care approaches that address emotional suffering, economic hardship, family relationships, and spiritual formation holistically rather than focusing narrowly on material prosperity. Churches are also encouraged to strengthen theological teaching that promotes ethical responsibility, resilience, and authentic Christian hope. Furthermore, theological institutions may use these insights to equip future church leaders with pastoral strategies that respond critically and compassionately to the realities faced by families in prosperity-oriented religious contexts.

Although the study provides important theological and pastoral insights, it is limited by its largely conceptual and theological nature, without extensive empirical engagement with families directly affected by prosperity teachings. Future research may therefore include qualitative or empirical studies exploring the lived experiences of families within prosperity-oriented churches across different cultural and denominational contexts. Further studies could also investigate the role of gender, youth experiences, economic inequality, and digital religious media in shaping contemporary prosperity beliefs and family well-being.

Ultimately, this paper argues that pastoral theology remains an essential resource for guiding churches and families toward a holistic vision of Christian life in which faithfulness to God is not measured by material success alone, but by spiritual maturity, justice, compassion, relational healing, and enduring hope amidst life's challenges.

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