

Joyce Meyer Ministries

An Evaluation from the Theological Perspective of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

History, Beliefs, Practices

Identity:

Joyce Meyer Ministries is a Christian non-profit organization with headquarters in Fenton, Missouri. Joyce Meyer is a popular Christian author and speaker.¹

Founder(s):

Joyce Meyer (b.1943) is the founder and president of Joyce Meyer Ministries; her husband Dave is the vice-president.

Statistics:

The television, radio and online programs of Joyce Meyer Ministries reach people in 70 countries. Special ministries of Joyce Meyer's organization include Hand of Hope (humanitarian outreach), Project Girl (encouraging marginalized women and girls) and the St. Louis Dream Center (helping those in need in the St. Louis inner city). In 2017, over 24,000 women attended Joyce Meyer's St. Louis "Love Life" conference.

History:

Pauline Joyce Hutchison married soon after high school and in 1966 was divorced from her first husband, with whom she had one son. In 1967 she married Dave Meyer, with whom she had three children. Joyce Meyer was at one time a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in St. Louis, a congregation of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In 1982, she left the Lutheran congregation to become an assistant minister at a storefront church called Life Christian Center. In 1983, she began a St. Louis area radio show, and in 1985, her Life in the Word ministry was organized as a non-profit corporation. Joyce Meyer Ministries was founded in 1987. Meyer has referred to herself as "an ex-housewife from Fenton, with a 12th-grade education"² She has received honorary doctorates in theology from Life Christian University in Florida, Oral Roberts

¹ <https://joycemeyer.org/about/who-we-are>, accessed March 23, 2020.

² Carolyn Tuft and Bill Smith, "From Fenton to Fortune in the Name of God," *Cult Education Institute*, reprinted from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 15, 2003, at <https://culteducation.com/group/1050-joyce-meyer/13441-from-fenton-to-fortune-in-the-name-of-god.html>, accessed March 15, 2020.

University in Oklahoma and Grand Canyon University in Arizona.³ Her husband Dave Meyer hopes to educate Christians about “America’s godly heritage,”⁴ and does so through his writing in *Enjoying Everyday Life* magazine and speaking at his wife’s conferences.

In 2003, Wall Watchers, a group that monitors the finances of large Christian organizations, asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate Joyce Meyer Ministries (and six other television preachers) for possible violations of a federal law that prohibits leaders of non-profit organizations from benefiting privately from money they raise.⁵ Joyce Meyer told *Christianity Today* magazine, “We do not spend irresponsibly and are prudent in the way we manage our ministry, returning 85 percent of all unrestricted donations back to help hurting people around the world.”⁶ Until 2004, Meyer received a salary and donated book royalties back to the ministry organization. In January of 2004, she began receiving a reduced salary and retaining the royalties on books sold outside of the ministry through retail and online stores.⁷

In 2007, Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) of the Senate Finance Committee investigated several church-based organizations, including Joyce Meyer Ministries. Meyer’s organization noted that an IRS letter that same year stated that Joyce Meyer Ministries continued to qualify as an organization that was exempt from Federal income tax.⁸ The Ministries’ audited financial statements are available on its website.⁹ In 2009, Joyce Meyer Ministries was accredited by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.

Texts:

Joyce Meyer has written more than 100 books, Bible studies and devotionals, including *Battlefield of the Mind* (2002), *The Secret Power of Speaking God’s Word* (2004), *Healing the Soul of a Woman* (2018), and *Your Battles Belong to the Lord* (2019).

Beliefs and Practices:

According to the ministry website, the mission of Joyce Meyer Ministries is “to present the Gospel to the lost, disciple nations, feed the hungry, clothe the poor, minister to the elderly, widows and orphans, visit prisoners and reach out to people of all ages and in all walks of life. God requires that we teach people how to apply biblical truth in every facet of their lives and encourage Christians to influence every aspect of the world around them.”¹⁰

³ <https://joycemeyer.org/faq>, accessed March 16, 2020.

⁴ <https://joycemeyer.org/about/board-of-directors/dave-meyer/>, accessed March 23, 2020.

⁵ Cory Cutrer, “Joyce Meyer Responds to Critics, Shifts Income Source,” *Christianity Today*, January 1, 2004, at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/januaryweb-only/1-19-13.0.html>, accessed March 16, 2020.

⁶ “Joyce Meyer Ministry Flap,” *Christianity Today* 48:3 (March 2004).

⁷ Cory Cutrer, “Joyce Meyer Responds to Critics, Shifts Income Source,” *Christianity Today*, January 1, 2004, at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/januaryweb-only/1-19-13.0.html>, accessed March 16, 2020.

⁸ Ted Olsen, “Senate Committee Investigating Six Major Ministries,” *Christianity Today*, November 6, 2007, at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/novemberweb-only/145-22.0.html>, accessed March 16, 2020.

⁹ <https://joycemeyer.org/about/financials>, accessed March 24, 2020.

¹⁰ <https://joycemeyer.org/about/who-we-are>, accessed March 23, 2020.

In an online video called “How to Know Jesus,” Joyce Meyer tells listeners that all have sinned, but that Jesus has paid for our wrongs. Quoting Ephesians 2:8-9, Meyer explains that salvation is a gift of God; the justice of God was satisfied when Jesus died on the cross. He rose from the dead and we are made alive in Him. Each believer is a new creation, and receives a new heart and a new attitude of serving God. In the video Meyer leads listeners in prayer and advises them to study God’s Word and attend a good local church.¹¹ In her “Everyday Answers” online articles, Joyce Meyer offers counsel on making decisions, serving others, studying God’s Word, living in freedom and a variety of other topics.

The Joyce Meyer Ministries website states: “We believe in water baptism, as taught and demonstrated by Jesus, as the way for believers to identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus ... The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. He helps empower the believer to develop the character of Christ and live every day in God’s will ... God gives all believers spiritual gifts. They are for the strengthening of God’s people (the Church) and proof of God’s existence and power to unbelievers. The gifts of the Spirit are active and relevant today ... Divine healing is active in the lives of people today through Jesus, who is the Healer. Healing includes physical, mental, emotional and spiritual restoration.”¹²

Speaking of sin, with reference to the language of a confession in the Lutheran liturgy, Meyer has said: “I am NOT poor! I am NOT miserable, and I am NOT a sinner. That is a lie from the pit of Hell. That is what I were [*sic*] and if I still was then Jesus died in vain! I’m going to tell you something folks, I didn’t stop sinning until I finally got it through my thick head I wasn’t a sinner anymore. And the religious world thinks that’s heresy and they want to hang me for it. But the Bible says that I’m righteous and I can’t be righteous and a sinner at the same time.”¹³

Concerning Christ’s resurrection, Meyer has written, “The miraculous lesson of Easter is this: Through Jesus’ death on the Cross, we have been granted a second chance. We have permission to leave our old lives behind and focus on the new day, with all its potential for joy and choices that honor God ... Stop reliving the past and beating yourself up over all the mistakes you’ve made. The slate has been wiped clean! Make a decision to paint a new life for yourself, bright with the colors of redemption, grace and renewal.”¹⁴

Joyce Meyer’s material success has attracted media attention and questions concerning accountability. Meyer says that this financial success is a blessing from God: “The whole Bible really has one message: ‘Obey me and do what I tell you to do, and you’ll be blessed.’”¹⁵ St. Louis Post Dispatch reported Meyer’s comments at a Detroit conference in September of 2003:

¹¹ <http://howtoknowjesus.joycemeyer.org/>, accessed March 16, 2020.

¹² <https://joycemeyer.org/about/what-we-believe>, accessed March 23, 2020.

¹³ Pastor Lepak, “Joyce Meyer’s Concept of Sinfulness,” *Communicating Christ Newsletter*, September 19, 2016, reprinted from Matthew Fenn, *Pondering Christ* blog, at <https://havasulutherans.org/2016/09/joyce-meyers-concept-of-sinfulness/>, emphasis in the original, accessed March 23, 2020.

¹⁴ <https://joycemeyer.org/everydayanswers/ea-teachings/the-miraculous-lesson-of-easter>, accessed March 23, 2020.

¹⁵ Carolyn Tuft and Bill Smith, “From Fenton to Fortune in the Name of God,” *Cult Education Institute*, reprinted from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 15, 2003, at <https://culteducation.com/group/1050-joyce-meyer/13441-from-fenton-to-fortune-in-the-name-of-god.html>, accessed March 23, 2020.

“God does not need our money. The giving thing is not for Him, it’s for us ... I should not have to work to try to support myself.”¹⁶ Meyer has said, “Why would He (God) want all of His people poverty stricken while all of the people that aren’t living for God have everything? ... I think it’s old religious thinking, and I believe the devil uses it to keep people from wanting to serve God.”¹⁷

In one of her “Everyday Answer” articles, Meyer writes, “I really want you to get this today: Everything God tells us to do is for our good. And the best thing we can do is obey His direction promptly and completely. Obedience to God is the answer to overcoming sin and any problem you face. It’s the way we grow and become everything He created us to be. And it’s the pathway to the life you really want to live!”¹⁸

A Lutheran Response

Joyce Meyer rightly teaches that we are saved by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In Christ, each of us is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). We have been born anew and are not to be conformed to the world, but transformed as we seek to follow the good and perfect will of God (Rom 12:1-2). Meyer separates “water Baptism” from “the Baptism of the Holy Spirit,” but according to our Lord Jesus, we must be born again “of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). According to Scripture that there is one baptism (Eph 4:5). But Joyce Meyer follows the Pentecostal understanding that there is a Spirit baptism which is greater than the baptism with water. Lutherans understand that baptism is an act of God, “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), in which we do not merely “identify” with the Lord’s passion, but are truly united with Jesus, buried with Him and raised to newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). While Joyce Meyer encourages listeners to study God’s Word and to join a local congregation, her guidance for new believers does not appear to include the importance of partaking of Jesus’ body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.

According to Scripture, we are righteous before God and, at the same time, we are still sinners. The apostle John, writing to children of God, says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). We repent of our sins, knowing that Jesus is our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and that through His redeeming death and resurrection, we have forgiveness for our sins. Baptized into Christ, we are clothed in His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). Yet while we live in the flesh, we will continue to war against sin and temptation in our lives. The apostle Paul spoke of his own struggle with sin (Rom. 7:17-20). Scripture warns believers against being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-15). The Lutheran Confessions

¹⁶ Carolyn Tuft and Bill Smith, “Money Pitch is a Hit with Followers,” *Cult Education Institute*, reprinted from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 17, 2003, at <https://culteducation.com/group/1050-joyce-meyer/13444-money-pitch-is-a-hit-with-followers.html>, accessed March 23, 2020.

¹⁷ Susan Brinkmann, *Women of Grace* blog, “Joyce Meyer’s Feel Good Religion,” November 9, 2012, at <https://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/?p=17314>, accessed March 23, 2020.

¹⁸ <https://joycemeyer.org/everydayanswers/ea-teachings/the-key-to-living-gods-amazing-plan-for-your-life>, accessed March 23, 2020.

state that “faith ... exists in repentance.”¹⁹ Martin Luther writes that “repentance endures among Christians until death because it struggles with the sin that remains in the flesh throughout life.”²⁰ Life in Christ is a life of humility, repentance and trust in the Savior’s forgiving love.

Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, we have new life. Our old self was crucified with Jesus, “so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (Rom. 6:6). We are to consider ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). Yet through Christ’s resurrection, we have much more than “permission to leave our old lives behind,” as Joyce Meyer says. Jesus’ resurrection is the guarantee that we too will be raised from death on the Last Day when He returns (1Cor. 15:20-23). As Jesus promised, “Because I live, you also will live” (John 14:19).

Joyce Meyer has enjoyed material wealth and prosperity through the donations of listeners, saying that she should not have to work to support herself and that her success is a blessing resulting from her obedience to God. When the Lord Jesus sent His disciples out to proclaim the kingdom, heal the sick and cast out demons, He told them, “You received without paying, give without paying” (Matt. 10:8). Although the apostle Paul wrote, according to the Lord’s command, “that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14), Paul goes on to say that he made no use of such rights. He sought to present the Gospel free of charge (1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Cor. 9:15-18).

Wealth and material success are not promised to those who believe in Christ. Such things are not forbidden to believers, and with our “abundance” we can provide for those in need (2 Cor. 8:14). Yet we are warned against placing our trust in earthly riches. “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils,” and has caused some people to wander from the faith (1 Tim.6:10). Jesus said, “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Luke 16:13). In His parable of the sower, Jesus spoke of the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches that can choke the Word sown in our hearts (Matt. 13:22).

Raised to newness of life in Christ, we are now “obedient from the heart” to the teachings to which we are committed (Rom. 6:17). We have been created anew in Christ Jesus “for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). The Lutheran Confessions say that believers “live according to the unchanging will of God ... and do everything, insofar as they are reborn, from a free and merry spirit.”²¹ Yet our good works do not earn God’s favor. We are blessed, not because we obey “promptly and completely,” but because of the obedience of our Lord Jesus, who for the sake of our salvation was “obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

¹⁹ Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV, *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 142.142.

²⁰ Smalcald Articles, III.3, *The Book of Concord*, 318.40.

²¹ Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VI, *The Book of Concord*, 590.17.

We have no promise in Scripture that our lives will be free of trouble, illness and suffering. Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Joyce Meyer has said, “Obedience to God is the answer to overcoming sin and any problem you face.” While we joyfully obey God’s commands, our obedience is not the answer to overcoming sin and trouble. That answer is found only by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ, who has won that victory for us: “But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

For Further Reading

An Evaluation of the Word-Faith Movement (St. Louis: Commission on Theology and Church Relations, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 2007)
<http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=401>

Links and Websites

<https://joycemeyer.org/>