

The Shady Side Of Joel Osteen

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Joel Osteen has endured plenty of criticism throughout his career. The toothy preacher has come under fire for everything from his physical appearance to his spiritual beliefs to his lack of theological training. In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, the Houston, Texas-based pastor attracted a lot heat for allegedly not doing enough to help, like so many selfless community members actually did, becoming heroes in the process.

But this preacher had already weathered plenty of controversy prior to the waters of Buffalo Bayou raising up around the southeast Texas city. From not being quick enough to condemn some clearly objectionable behavior, to being accused of misrepresenting the basic tenets of Christianity in a variety of ways, Osteen's public image is far from that of a flawless saint.

Let's take a look at what potentially lurks beneath this holy man's bright smile. This is the shady side of Joel Osteen.

Joel Osteen chose not to 'engage' with Neo-Nazis



Cindy Ord/Getty Images

Though leaders of other mega-churches condemned white supremacists and racist attitudes after an August 2017 neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Va. left one woman dead and several others injured, Osteen kept noticeably mum. His only commentary on the incident, and on the topic as a whole, was a vague Facebook post: "One of the biggest challenges we all face is getting along with people because everyone is different. We have different personalities, different temperaments. We come from different backgrounds. When somebody doesn't agree with us or not doing what we like, it's easy to get in conflict with them, to argue, to try to straighten them out, to prove our point. No, you have to be the bigger person. Just because they're doing wrong doesn't mean you have to engage."

Did Joel Osteen's church staff body slam a baby?



Cindy Ord/Getty Images

In March 2017, Radar Online reported that Osteen and Lakewood Church were being sued by a family accusing a church staff member of body slamming its baby girl. Court documents obtained by the site claim that in May 2014, "A representative of the church grabbed a child safety seat housing Victoria Wedderburn, a minor, and threw the seat off the church pew... [Victoria] landed face first on the floor, while still strapped to the safety seat...[causing] serious bodily injury and extensive mental and emotional damage."

Osteen's attorneys claimed the "incident [that] made the basis of this suit was caused by the actions of third parties over whom the [Osteens] had no control." Osteen also claimed the church and its employees he had no liability for the incident, based on the "Charitable

Immunity Act." The church reportedly settled with the Wedderburn family for \$15,000, despite asserting it had no wrongdoing and that the claims were entirely made up.

A church volunteer was accused of child abuse



Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images

In February 2010, a Lakewood Church volunteer in the church's special needs children's ministry, the Champions Club, was accused of "inappropriate" sexual conduct with a special needs child, leading to a Child Protective Services investigation into the organization, *Radar Online* reported. Court documents obtained by *Radar* revealed that a female volunteer "allegedly witnessed [Alvaro Daniel Guzman] touching the child assigned to [him] in an inappropriate fashion." The female volunteer reportedly told higher-ups, who "advised her that she should contact Child Protective Services and report to them what she had witnessed." Guzman was subsequently dismissed from his volunteer position.

By May 2011, Guzman was arrested and charged with "the offense of indecency on a child," though the charges were dismissed after a grand jury failed to indict him, reported *Radar Online*. In February 2012, Guzman sued Lakewood Church for "lost wages, damage to [his] reputation," and "anxiety, pain, and illness." He accused the church of negligence in its investigation of the indecent and claimed it "failed to properly secure video" that may have exonerated him. Guzman's lawsuit ended with "a summary judgment in favor of Lakewood" in December 2012; a judge claimed Guzman presented "no evidence."

Joel Osteen is 'not mad' at sinner homosexuals



Brian Blanco/Getty Images

When talk show host Larry King asked Osteen about abortion and same-sex marriage in his [2005 interview](#), Osteen replied, "You know what, Larry? I don't go there." But he did go there in January 2011, telling [Piers Morgan Tonight](#), "I've always believed, Piers — the scripture shows that it's a sin, but I'm not one of those that are out there to bash homosexuals and tell them they're terrible people and all that."

During another interview in October 2011, Morgan asked Osteen if his views on same-sex marriage and homosexuality had evolved. The preacher said his belief "really never changes" and that he's "not against anything," but it's "based out of the scripture. ... Homosexuality is a sin." He added, "Again, I would just reiterate what I said, I'm not after — I'm not mad at anybody. I don't dislike anybody."

[CNN's](#) Soledad O'Brien asked Osteen how he could call himself an "uplifting" pastor if he declares homosexuality a sin. "I don't necessarily focus on that," Osteen said. "I only talk about that in interviews. It seems like in Christianity we categorize sin ... I don't think [homosexuality] is God's best."

Hurricane Harvey was a PR disaster for Joel Osteen



Paras Griffin/Getty Images

In August 2017, Joel Osteen [faced enormous criticism](#) for not opening his Lakewood Church, which can house 16,800 people, to serve as a shelter after Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston, Texas. However, Osteen's camp insisted the controversy was a

misunderstanding. Claiming the church "never closed [its] doors," and that it would be "a value to the community in the aftermath of this storm," a Lakewood spokesman told CNN in a statement, "We will continue to be a distribution center ... We are prepared to house people once shelters reach capacity."

Osteen's reps told the press that Lakewood temporarily closed due to flooding, but first-hand reports of dry conditions in the area were picked up by TMZ and other outlets. In his defense, Osteen told Today that Lakewood was dealing with "safety issues" during the initial impact of the storm. He also said the church waited until the city asked it to operate as a shelter to start doing so. "I think some somehow social media can be very powerful and they can create this false narrative," Osteen told the morning show.

Joel Osteen told Harvey victims not to feel sorry for themselves



Joe Raedle/Getty Images

In his first sermon since the Harvey floods (via Fox News), Joel Osteen defended his church's decision not to open its doors until the internal flooding had subsided, and he told his parishioners, many of whom lost their homes, to buck up and deal with it.

"Had we opened the building sooner and someone got injured, or perhaps the building flooded and someone lost their lives, that would have been a very different story," Osteen said. "Now I don't mind taking the heat for being precautious. But I don't want to take the heat for being foolish. This is not just an attack on me, it's an attack on what we stand for—for faith, for hope, for love."

Later, he said, "We are not going to understand everything that happens but, you know, having a 'poor old me' mentality or 'look what I lost' or 'why did this happen,' that's just going to pull you down. Like we've been talking about all night, you just got to turn it over and say, 'God you're still on the throne.'"

Is Joel Osteen's church just a front to sell books?



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In January 2015, New York attorney Richard Garbarini told *the National Enquirer* that despite listing Lakewood Church as a non-profit, "[Osteen is] leveraging the church as a money-making vehicle! The church pays [to air] his sermons, which are just de facto infomercials to promote his books. The Lakewood Church is a shell to funnel people to his website so he can sell his books."

Daniel Boroff, head of Charity Watch, concurred, telling the tabloid, "A non-profit needs to be acting in the public interest and not in the private personal business interests of Joel Osteen. The church should benefit from the royalties of these books when they are shouldering at least some of the cost of promoting them. If it isn't getting something back, it oughta be. It's too much a promotional vehicle for him."

Osteen and Lakewood Church denied the allegations, telling the *Enquirer* that Garbarini's claims were "false and baseless," adding, "For more than 50 years Lakewood Church has adhered to the highest standards of honesty and integrity."

Joel Osteen is not Heaven's doorman, okay?



Emma Mcintyre/Getty Images

In a 2005 interview on *Larry King Live*, Osteen, who had no formal seminary training, came under fire from critics for seemingly contradicting himself. When King asked Osteen if he believed people of other faiths who don't believe in Jesus would go to heaven, Osteen offered a somewhat rambling and unclear response in which he said, "I'm very careful

about saying who would and wouldn't go to heaven. ... I believe there's what the Bible teaches and from the Christian faith this is what I believe." Of atheists going to Heaven, Osteen said he leaves it up to God to "be the judge of who goes to Heaven and Hell," adding, "You know, I believe it's a relationship with Jesus. But you know what? I'm not going to go around telling everybody else if they don't want to believe that that's going to be their choice."

Osteen later published a letter on his website apologizing for perceived waffling, writing that upon "review" of the show "transcript," he saw that he "had not clearly stated that having a personal relationship with Jesus is the only way to heaven." Osteen apologized and further clarified, "It was never my desire or intention to leave any doubt as to what I believe and Whom I serve. I believe with all my heart that it is only through Christ that we have hope in eternal life."

Joel Osteen messed with the bull



[Twitter.com/joelosteen](https://twitter.com/joelosteen)

Well, this is awkward: in May 2017, Osteen attended his son's graduation at the University of Texas. While there, Osteen and his son posed for a photo flashing the school's signature "Hook 'Em Horns" hand gesture, a sign meant to mimic the university's longhorn mascot. Unfortunately for the preacher, that led some of his followers down a dark rabbit hole.

Twitter users slammed Osteen for allegedly worshipping the devil, with one user writing (via the *Daily Mail*), "The sign sir... I honor you but that hand gesture sent a very bad signal sir!!!! Can't believe it's you." Another wrote, "Why on Earth would you use a devil sign? My goodness, a thumbs up would work."

Neither Joel nor his co-pastor wife, Victoria, commented on the allegations, probably because, well, they're patently ridiculous.

Tyler Perry Presents: Joel Osteen's Not A Scumbag



After coming under fire publicly, Osteen gained support from his equally shady pal Tyler Perry, who announced in a Facebook video that he donated \$250,000 to the Lakewood Church.

"I know that there's been some controversy about Joel Osteen and him not opening doors of the church. Let me tell you something: Joel and Victoria are amazing people. There is no way they would lock people out of the church and not let people in for shelter," Perry said. "There were some safety concerns. I spoke to them on the phone, and it all made perfect sense to me so before you just run and judge somebody really quick, you need to know the whole circumstances... This million dollars, I'm breaking it up into quarters. I'm sending \$250,000 to Lakewood to make sure that they can get all the supplies that people need. I know that they will, I know for sure that they will, because that's the kind of person he is."

Joel Osteen's collab with Kanye West isn't exactly a match made in... well, you know



YouTube

Joel Osteen teamed up with Kanye West for the rapper's Sunday Service program and will do more events with him in the future — but West's religious services have come under as much question (if not more) than Osteen's own work. NPR reported that some aspects of West's Sunday Service program seem more self-promotional and capitalist than pious and Christian.

"He is the church ... he is the text of the sermon. It's his songs. He is the worship. He is creating a church in himself and selling it, really," Jia Tolentino, a *New Yorker* staff writer who attended West's Sunday Service, explained on NPR's *All Things Considered*. Tolentino claimed that the reason West hosted Sunday Service at Coachella was to sell merchandise, including \$50 tube socks and a \$225 sweatshirt emblazoned with "Sunday Service at the Mountain." "It comes down to this complicated relationship between, you know, being a prophet or a supplicant," Tolentino said.

However beneficial it may be to Osteen's congregation and West's fans, Yeezus' praise definitely helps the prosperity gospel preacher and clothing designer alike: *TMZ* reported that West's guest appearance on Osteen's Sunday night service at his Lakewood Church in November 2019 raked in 4.17 unique viewers — a huge uptick from Osteen's usual 1.3 million.

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The most expensive things Joel Osteen owns



Paras Griffin/Getty Images

By Korey Lane/May 12, 2020 3:30 pm EDT

Unlike an ordinary pastor, Joel Osteen does not live a low-key life. Instead, he's a televangelist who leads a luxurious lifestyle down in Texas. The Christian evangelist has amassed an estimated net worth of \$100 million, according to *Celebrity Net Worth*. Osteen, who presides over the hugely popular Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, is also a husband, father, and successful author. But Osteen doesn't see anything wrong with all that money he's making.

In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Osteen explained that he doesn't take any funds from the church and has instead provided for himself and his family through the sale of his books "and other things like that." Although televangelists have earned a reputation for going after people's wallets, Osteen said, "I'm not asking [the audience] for money on television."

When asked if he makes any apologies for his wealth, Osteen was bluntly honest. "I really don't, Oprah, we just feel like this is God's blessings," he opined. "You know, we're big givers, we live what we preach, we've given millions of dollars. ... I don't think there's anything wrong with having a nice place to live and being blessed." Although he also doesn't believe money is the be-all and end-all, the pastor certainly has a collection of material possessions worthy of covetousness. Here's a look at some of the most expensive things Joel Osteen owns.

Joel Osteen's Tanglewood home is worth a pretty penny



Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images

Joel Osteen isn't one to go bragging about his assets. Sure, he's not ashamed of them, as he once told Oprah Winfrey, but that doesn't mean he's itching to give a virtual tour of his home on social media. However, it seems as though his house may just be something worth seeing. In fact, Osteen's house is high on his list of most expensive possessions.

As CultureMap Houston reported in 2010, the Osteen family owned a home in the Tanglewood neighborhood of Houston, Texas, which was valued at the time at \$2.9 million. The house was listed as having some pretty impressive specs. The publication described it as a large "5,600-square-foot, four-bedroom" house. Though, you have to admit, that is arguably pretty modest and small for someone of Osteen's wealth. However, the city's real estate market is no joke and Tanglewood is one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Houston, with the median home price falling at about \$1.5 million as of 2018.

As of this writing, it's unknown if the Osteens retain the impressive home, but CultureMap Houston reported that the family did not put their home up for sale upon relocating to another part of Houston in 2010.

Joel Osteen's second house is even more impressive than his first



Ah, to own two homes. Most people will never own more than one residence, let alone own two homes that are worth millions of dollars — *each*. But Joel Osteen is no regular person, nor is he a regular pastor. The Texan knows he's been blessed, but it's not until you look at the cost of his second home do you realize just *how* blessed Osteen really is.

CultureMap Houston reported that Osteen and his family relocated from Tanglewood to a "17,000-square-foot stone mansion in the Tall Timbers subdivision in River Oaks." River Oaks is a neighborhood that's even more expensive than Osteen's former neighborhood. In fact, *Houston Business Journal* ranked it the most expensive Houston neighborhood in late 2018.

Surely, 17,000 square feet is a lot of space for a family of four, but hey, everything *is* bigger in Texas. The publication further reported that the mansion sits on nearly two acres and boasts "six bedrooms, six bathrooms, three elevators, and five wood-burning fireplaces, with a one-bedroom guest house and pool house." So what's the cost? "The Harris County Appraisal District valued it at \$10.5 million," wrote the publication. No big deal. Pastoring a megachurch sure has a lot of perks, even when you don't take the pastor salary.

Does Joel Osteen really own a yacht?



Cindy Ord/Getty Images

Considering Joel Osteen is a pastor who makes *so* much money and lives in a wealthy neighborhood, he gets a lot of flack for his lifestyle. While most pastors across the United

States are not exactly raking in the big bucks and buying multiple homes, Osteen is. He even reportedly owns a yacht — but we'll get back to that in a second.

In 2017, Osteen received a *ton* of criticism for his initial response to Hurricane Harvey. As Harvey hit Houston hard, many people expected Osteen to lend a helping hand and invite people into his 606,000-square-foot Lakewood Church for shelter. But that wasn't the case, and Osteen was criticized for hesitating before becoming a good Samaritan. As the Houston Chronicle reported, Christian-satire site The Babylon Bee poked fun at the situation and wrote that Osteen was out on his "luxury yacht "S.S. Blessed" to make amends by tossing copies of *Your Best Life Now* to stranded flood survivors.

Of course, that wasn't true. However, The Washington Post did make mention of an actual yacht belonging to Osteen, citing it and other of his luxury items as one of the reasons Osteen had become "a subject of contempt among Americans, in general."

Joel Osteen and his wife Victoria like to shop



Cindy Ord/Getty Images

As someone who appears on television on a weekly basis and also preaches in front of thousands of people *live* at his Lakewood Church, Joel Osteen knows a thing or two about looking presentable. No, the Houston pastor may not sport Gucci belts and Yeezy sneakers like some other famous pastors, but that doesn't mean he isn't a sucker for nice things. In fact, his entire family likes to shop — and they have some pricey items in their closet.

In an interview with People, Osteen revealed that he often pokes fun at his wife Victoria in his sermons for her shopping habits. Of course, as Joel Osteen's wife and co-pastor, Victoria makes an effort to dress modestly, as she detailed to People, but just because she's covered up doesn't mean she can't look nice. Additionally, Osteen revealed that his wife isn't the only member of his family who likes to spend money on clothes. He revealed his own vice to be high-priced ties. Who knows? Osteen could just have an entire closet filled with designer ties, but considering he wears them on the regular, they may just be a worthy business expense.

Joel Osteen's cars are a bit of a mystery



D Dipasupil/Getty Images

With all the fame and fortune that Joel Osteen has accumulated over his years as a pastor at Lakewood Church, and for all of America via television, it's only natural he would find some fun ways to spend his money. For many men, owning a sports car is a dream only realized when they're old enough to afford it, but Osteen can afford as many sports cars as he wants. And, according to reports, he does own some.

Autordee reported that Osteen's garage at his expansive mansion in the Tanglewood neighborhood of Houston "is said" to be filled with nice cars. More specifically, the site claimed that Osteen regularly drive a Ferrari 458 Italia, which is so not your dad's Lexus. Because Osteen isn't necessarily the type to brag, he hasn't posted photos of him in a Ferrari, but it's not outside the realm of possibility. After all, as the Houston Chronicle reported, "An associate pastor at Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church" made headlines when he bought "his wife a \$200,000 Lamborghini Urus." And that's just an *associate* pastor. Osteen isn't one to apologize for all his nice things so, who knows, maybe he owns *more* than a Ferrari, but that's something between him and his garage — or is it God?

Joel Osteen's suits aren't budget-friendly



Emma McIntyre/Getty Images

Joel Osteen is somewhat old-fashioned when it comes to what he wears to church. Despite running a fairly contemporary non-denominational megachurch, Osteen's opts for a classic

style. That's why you'll typically see pastor wearing the same kind of outfit when he preaches: a suit, usually with a tie. Although he keeps it simple, all those suits are bound to add up cost-wise.

As USA Today put it, Osteen's "expensive-looking suits contrast with the biblical directive to eschew wealth and care 'for the least of these.'" One look at Osteen's Instagram page and it becomes clear that this is a man who is rarely caught *not* wearing a nice suit. Now, he isn't an #influencer, so he's not tagging the brands that he's wearing in his posts, but it doesn't take a genius to figure out that those suits aren't off-the-rack from Men's Warehouse. It's not a sin to dress well, but it's probably not off-base to assume that Osteen's wardrobe cost him an arm and a leg.

Did Joel Osteen spend thousands of dollars on plastic surgery?



D Dipasupil/Getty Images

Due to the rise of social media, there has also been a rise in plastic surgery. Procedures from botox to lip fillers and everything in between has become so commonplace that no one is surprised to learn their favorite Instagram influencer has had work done, too. But are preachers above getting work done? While that may vary from pastor to pastor, Joel Osteen has been honest about his opinions of plastic surgery.

In a 2007 interview with People, Osteen admitted that he didn't see anything wrong with plastic surgery, saying, "I want to look good!" And according to one specialist, he's staying true to his word as he's reportedly had some work done. "He looks five years younger than he did 11 years ago!" plastic surgeon Dr. Otto Placik, who did not treat Osteen, told The National Enquirer of Osteen's alleged plastic surgery. Placik added that it appeared as though Osteen had a lot of botox and fillers as well as an upper-eyelid tuck. "You couldn't even see his upper eyelid line 12 years ago, and now you can clearly see the upper eyelid skin and crease." So, if he did have plastic surgery, how much did his face cost him? Placik estimated it to be around a whopping \$36,000.

Joel Osteen has a private jet



One of the most expensive things *anyone* can own is a private jet. Private jets certainly make life easier for the rich and famous when it comes to travel. Not only does it put an end to squished-in middle seats or bland airline food, but they're also *so* ridiculously expensive to own and operate. But that's no biggie for Joel Osteen, apparently, as he owns a private jet.

According to [Aircraft Compare](#), Osteen reportedly owns "an \$86 million Airbus A19," which is *huge* as far as these aircrafts go and is one of the priciest jets money can buy. Since Osteen travels all over the country to preach, the expense of a jet may feel worth it. Plus, Osteen certainly doesn't think that he needs to be poor to be a good pastor.

In an [interview](#) with Piers Morgan, Osteen explained that he was humble, but not ashamed of his wealth. "There is a religious — I call it a spirit or something that says we have to be poor and broke and defeated and sad to show people that we're really humble and that we really love God," he explained. "And I don't believe that. I believe God wants us to be examples of what it means to live for him. And that our money is to be a blessing to others."

Joel Osteen's staff can't be cheap



Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images

It's not all that strange for busy, working adults to have some help at home. Whether it's a housekeeper who comes once a week or a babysitter to watch the kids every now and then, everyone could certainly use some help. [But Joel Osteen](#) has more than just *help*, he has a

household staff. Yes, not unlike power couple Kanye West and Kim Kardashian and other celebs who love him, Osteen has a literal team of people helping him run his life and his home.

As Osteen told People in an interview, the family has staff to help with "the cooking, cleaning, and driving," but that's not all. *People* also reported that Osteen's children have private tutors. All that help has to add up, especially when you take into consideration just how *many* staff members the Osteen family likely employs.

After all, you could reason that it takes more than one person to keep a 17,000-square-foot home clean, and then there's the lawn, the cars, the errands that need to be run. It's a lot, and Osteen probably spends a good chunk of his money on employing his staff. But whatever it takes to keep a household running smoothly, right?