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The Gift of Prophecy Today

The Bible tells all of us to expect God to speak today through prophecy, and shows us what this looked like in the life of the apostle Paul and the first Christians.

1. Prophecy is for today

God has spoken to us through His Son, Jesus, through His Word, the Bible, and He speaks through the gift of prophecy today. The Bible promises us this: *Joel 2:28*, “*I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*” is described by Peter in *Acts 2:39* as being “*for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*” The rest of the New Testament illustrates and assumes this (*Acts 19:6, 21:9, 1 Timothy 4:14*), and Paul says that prophecy will only cease when Jesus returns (*1 Corinthians 13:8-12*).

Prophecy we’re focusing on today does not replace or redefine what God has said timelessly and perfectly in the Bible but the Bible does tell us to expect God to speak to us now and encourages Christians to desire to prophesy.

2. Prophecy is for all of us

Paul was part of a community that expected and treasured the gift of prophecy (*Acts 11:27, Acts 13:1, 15:32*). Prophecy is often assumed to be just about predicting the future. It may involve that but the word used in Acts 15 to describe what those prophets did is “encourage” and Paul teaches the same idea to the Corinthians: “*the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation*” (*1 Corinthians 14:3*).

The prophetic when we gather should also be outward-looking, God can use it to bring people to salvation (*1 Corinthians 14:24-25*).

Even if you don't have the gift yourself, you can still receive prophetic words and be part of a church community which is shaped by them.

3. Prophecy gets things started

Acts 9:10-19 describes Ananias giving Paul a prophetic word. It wasn't good advice, or common sense, or even quoting the Bible: God revealed something to Ananias for Paul.

It took great boldness for Ananias to believe God that Paul had really become a believer in Jesus, and prophecy almost always involves this sense of risk and trusting God. Because Ananias obeyed God and shared what he'd been given, Paul received a prophetic word that shaped the rest of his life. Prophecy can have that big an impact! Interestingly it was over a decade before that work really began to be fulfilled (*Acts 13:1-3*). In between times, Paul was involved in the whole church responding to a prophetic word about a coming famine (*Acts 11:27-30*).

Prophecy is so important because it often plants a seed in us, or triggers us into something new. This should be true for the church as a whole and individuals within it.

4. Processing prophecy

Receiving and responding to a prophetic word has three parts: the revelation, the interpretation, and the application. It's helpful to separate those three things because the Bible tells us that we might get one part right and another part wrong (*Acts 21:10-14*).

How people get prophetic words tends to vary but the common factor is that you want to hear from God, and you are seeking Him (*1 Corinthians 14:1, Jeremiah 23:22*). Most of the things in our life demand reactions: bosses, children, to-do lists, news, social media – we very rarely get prophetic insight from them! How can we be prophetic rather than reactionary? By taking time to listen to God through the Bible and contemporary prophecy. This tells us what is true, encourages and consoles us so that we can be faithful and useful rather than frazzled and chaotic.

We want to be confident when sharing but not arrogant or presumptuous, so I'd tend to start, "I believe God is saying..." * (It's fine to admit that you want to say something that just seems like Christian common sense.) Gifts grow as we are faithful with them. Talk to people you know with this gift and find out about their experience – but don't copy them!

As Paul told the Corinthians, we prophesy “*in part*” (13:9) – we will get things wrong. Perhaps it’s just our imaginations working overtime, perhaps we have heard God speak but have then added some unhelpful thoughts of our own. Prophecy sometimes involves that lack of clarity in order that we rely on God and His people, and not ourselves alone: a prophetic community should work together to process what has been said: (1 *Thessalonians 5:19-21*, 1 *Corinthians 14:29*) Paul is clear in 1 Corinthians 14 that weighing prophecy is ultimately an eldership role, it’s that important, and true prophets love godly authority because it gives a security so they can act in faith. We weigh words by considering whether they contradict the Bible, which is our authority in judging the truth, as well as the context in which they’re given (who has given it and to whom). This is all quite liberating if you think you’ve got a word – you just have to be faithful with that. You don’t have to know exactly what it means or what people should do about it! Say what you see or what you’ve heard, then others can get involved.

Recommended reading: Surprised by The Voice of God, by Jack Deere

Questions for group discussion

- What does the gift of prophecy itself tell us about God?
- How has God used prophecy to speak to you?
- How would you explain what we believe to a Christian who doesn’t think that prophecy is for today?
- Are you “earnestly desiring the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy”? (1 Corinthians 14:1)
- What causes us not to do this?
- “If they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people” (Jeremiah 23:22) – what are you doing to spend time in God’s presence?
- Like any gift from God, prophecy is a gift that grows as we’re faithful with it – how can you as a small group encourage its growth among you?



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