

7. The Holy Spirit Gives the Gift of Prophecy

Opening question

Who here has given and/or received prophetic words? Invite a couple of people to share their experiences.

Fact check: what is prophecy?

Prophecy is speaking on God's behalf to others.

God can use all sorts of ways to speak to us, including dreams, visions, supernaturally-given knowledge or insight, timely Bible verses, showing us something in our mind's eye or saying something in our mind's ear!

Read these verses to see what can happen when people prophesy:

- Acts 11:27-29
 - Acts 13:1-3
 - Acts 15:32
 - Acts 21:10-11
 - 1 Corinthians 14:3
 - 1 Corinthians 14:24-25
 - 1 Corinthians 14:31
 - Ephesians 4:11-14 (Note: Paul is referring here primarily to the role of Prophet rather than individual prophetic contributions, as also in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 2:19-20, but it's still worth seeing what the impact of this prophetic ministry is)
 - 1 Timothy 1:18-19a
 - 1 Timothy 4:14
-

Fact-check: prophecy is partial

No prophetic words given by God today will have the same kind of universal authority as those given in Scripture (e.g. 1 Peter 1:10). There were plenty of prophecies given in the Old Testament that didn't need to be recorded in God's Word (e.g. Numbers 11:25), and the same can be seen in the New Testament (Acts 19:6, 21:9).

Read these verses which show Paul's expectation about contemporary prophecy:

- Romans 12:6
- 1 Corinthians 13:9
- 1 Corinthians 14:29
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

Discussion

Does this make you more or less eager to give and receive prophetic words? How should we take this as an encouragement?

How can these three characteristics help us to grow in using the gift of prophecy: love, humility, intimacy with God?

Receiving the gift of prophecy

We are repeatedly commanded to desire this gift (1 Corinthians 14:1, 5, 39), and now is the chance to put this into action!

As with all the Spirit's gift, we need to ask with eager faith. Hopefully your discussions will have stirred this up, read these verses aloud to add to this:

- Luke 11:9-13
- Acts 2:16-18

Spend time as a group praising God, encouraging people to use the gift of tongues as well as praying and singing in human languages.

Invite all those who want to receive the gift of prophecy to ask the Holy Spirit for it. Encourage those who are familiar with it to pray and lay on hands for others to receive it.

Get people into groups of about six, and pray and prophesy for one person at a time. Don't force anyone who doesn't want this to happen to them, and don't expect that everyone will have something to share. Hopefully as prophetic words begin to be shared, more will follow (as per 1 Corinthians 14:29-32).

There may also be words for the group as a whole, for unknown individuals (e.g. "Someone here..."), and for the church, so make space for these to be shared too.

Start making this a regular part of your group's life together, so you can be obedient to the command to desire prophecy, and help the people in your group to grow in their gifting.

To reflect on during the week

God knows everything about everyone around you. Ask Him to speak to you about a family member / friend / colleague / neighbour who isn't a Christian. If you've got the faith to share what He tells you with them, go for it! If not, use what God tells you about them to pray for them.

Recommended resource

A member of King's gave a talk some time ago on a beginners' guide to growing in the prophetic, here are their main points...

If I could share three things to encourage you they would be these.

First: God cares enough to speak. Expect Him to. I think many people go through their day assuming that God isn't speaking to them. So they don't tune in to listen. My very simple challenge is this: try assuming that God does want to speak to you. How might He get your attention?

Second: It's very normal not to feel 100% certain. 1 Corinthians 13:9 means that learning to listen to God isn't an exact science. It's appropriate for us to use language like, 'I think God might be saying...' This is helpful because it gives the listener permission to weigh the relevance of what's being shared and it's good for the person sharing it because it means you're allowed to be a learner and try things out! My challenge with this is: If you're not sure, but it's a safe environment, and what you have to share is encouraging, comforting or strengthening, then go ahead and try it.

Third: You're allowed to ask Jesus questions. He's not the kind of communicator who phones you, yells a sentence and then hangs up (e.g. Jeremiah 1:11-12, Ezekiel 37:3). If you start to perceive something you think might be from God, keep the conversation open. Ask Him questions like, "What is this? What does this mean? Who is this for?". Often we don't get the whole thing in one go. I think this is one of His ways of inclining us to be closer to Him. We have to stay close to listen. And He likes having us near. He enjoys our company.

God speaks to us in different ways.

Mental image. Your mind's eye sees a scene, or object. Pictures are like parables: they depict a deeper meaning. Pictures are just a really helpful communication tool because they're easier to digest and remember than straight information.

Scripture. If you are praying and suddenly there is Scripture at the front of your brain, or on the tip of your tongue, it's often God speaking through that Scripture.

Emotion flares. If I suddenly feel afraid or lonely, for example, when praying with someone, I'll ask them if that's how they're feeling and they often say yes! It's like God giving you a glimpse of what He knows is happening inside of them so that you can pray into it. I've also had it the other way around when I'm praying for someone and suddenly feel a huge download of Love, or Joy, or Pride. These seem to be me getting a glimpse of how God feels toward that person. I love when that happens because as I speak out what I'm feeling, it means that my voice is really communicating the truth and emotion of God's heart for that person.

Physical Twinges. Similar to the emotion flares, I sometimes get a physical sensation in my body which corresponds to a sickness or illness that someone else has. This gives me – and them – faith to pray for healing because God has told me about it.

How do you know it's something to be shared with all of church? When the Holy Spirit wants me to share something publicly, He normally makes my heart beat out of my chest, and my feet get all jumpy and I feel a bit like I'm going to pop, if I don't share what's on God's heart. This seems to be his way of confirming it's really Him.

Also very worth saying that almost inevitably, after you have shared something you believe to be from God you will doubt it was God at all. I'll nearly always have to do battle the moment I'm back in my seat. Satan hates the edification of the Church and loves to nip at the ankles of those who build her up. Learn to dismiss those thoughts off-hand. Have a pal who knows you're trying to hear from God more ready to encourage you when you step out!

The best book I've read on the subject is *Growing in the Prophetic* by Mike Bickle. It's so easy to read and really practical.