

MAKING
THE
Prophetic
PRACTICAL
HEARING THE HEART OF THE FATHER

DAN SNEED

MAKING
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Prophetic
PRACTICAL
 HEARING THE HEART OF THE FATHER

HOW TO BE PROPHETIC
WITHOUT BEING WEIRD

BY DAN SNEED

Published by Water of Life Community Church
Fontana, California

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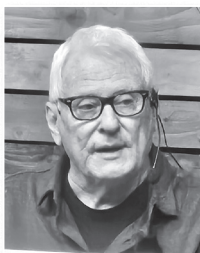
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dedication

This book is dedicated to those on the Water of Life staff and my assistant, Daniel Lopez, who have worked endless hours to make it possible. Above all, I want to dedicate it to a new generation of prophetic voices who are learning not only to hear the heart of God but to live it out in new, fresh, and practical ways.



about the author



Dan often describes his ministry gift as “a pastor with a prophetic edge”. That understanding, coupled with his passion to help others hear the heart of the Father, is what shapes his perspective on prophetic ministry.

After graduating from what is now Life Pacific University, Dan and his wife Bev, have served as associate, youth, and lead pastors. Dan was the director of the Los Angeles Teen Challenge and has served as nonresident faculty at the University of the Nations in Kona, Hawaii. He taught in Youth With A Mission discipleship, counseling, and leadership schools worldwide. He was the European coordinator for Foursquare Missions, the missions arm of the U.S. Foursquare Church. He is also a founding board member of Hope Force International, a disaster relief ministry.

Dan currently serves as the Staff Care Pastor at Water of Life Community Church in Fontana, California. He continues to travel extensively as a pastor to pastors. Dan and Bev have four adult children; they are grandparents and great-grandparents. They live in Granada Hills, California.





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foreword

The fall of 1989 found my wife and I sitting in a class while attending a Discipleship Training School in Kona, Hawaii, at Youth With A Mission's University of the Nations campus. The fact that we were there was quite miraculous in and of itself, but even in those circumstances, what was about to unfold was life altering. It was a Monday morning, the beginning of our week of study, and Pastor Dan Sneed was about to proceed with his teaching for the week when he abruptly stopped, stared at the back of the room in our direction, and then proceeded to apologize as he pointed out my wife and me. He then launched into a twenty minute prophetic picture of our lives. He talked about the previous two very painful years we had spent leaving a church we served in and were part of for many years. He then began to unfold the purpose of God bringing us to the present moment. An answer to many, many prayers and heart-searching cries in the midst of our uncertainty. He explained that God was intentionally allowing us to experience pain we had never before known in order to glorify Himself and that the future would unfold in ways we never could have imagined. Well, sitting here 36 years later, it is hard to explain just how simple and yet profoundly accurate this prophetic word meant to our destinies. We had never met Dan before that day, and yet with clarity and accuracy that could only come from the Spirit of God, he spoke out the details of our lives. He declared we would meet people we never had any business knowing and serve in a church that would touch the world. That ministry began with seventeen faithful yet very flawed people and grew to over twenty thousand faithful attendees. Dan's word was something we have re-listened to many times over the years and marveled at its simplicity and accuracy. In a time when prophetic ministry is often abused and criticized, it is crucial for Jesus followers to remember the Apostle Paul's admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, *"Do not despise prophetic utterances."*

Dr. Dan Carroll

Founding Pastor of Water of Life Community Church



THE BOOK I NEVER WANTED TO WRITE

intro

The last thing I ever thought I would write about is prophetic ministry. Not that I don't believe in its value, because I do. In fact, it has been a significant part of my life and ministry. However, when you write about something like prophetic ministry, people immediately put you into a category. He's one of those prophet guys or at least he thinks he is, you know, a wannabe! Which means you're trying to be something that you're not but wishing you were.

You're stereotyped as intense, most likely a little extreme, very emotional, and possibly verging on a little weird. The stereotype often includes the belief that Prophetic people can see right through you, and they notice every flaw in your life. They often know what you're thinking, what you're hiding, and most likely waiting for the right moment to expose it. If they express love at all it's tough love. They are loud, authoritative, and judgmental. In other words, they are a little scary and definitely not the kind of person you want to hang out with.

Another reason that I've been reluctant to write about prophetic ministry is the controversy that often surrounds anything labeled prophetic. It is often characterized by sensationalism; it focuses on the gift itself or the "gifted one" rather than the giver or the one it is being delivered to. Often, the attitude toward it becomes, I have the gift, come watch me demonstrate it. Because I'm prophetic, I know things you don't, I know what's really going on. We create conspiracy theories, promote fear and division, and make outlandish predictions without any sense of accountability.

Social media has provided a clear and easy platform for anyone to say, whatever they want to say regardless of its validity. Because of the spontaneous nature of prophetic ministry, things can be said without considering the effect those words can have on the listener. Like many of you, I've discovered that because we're dealing with human beings, it can be difficult to separate our opinions from what we believe the Spirit is saying. Remember, New Testament prophecy is not "thus saith the Lord." We are not speaking for God; we are speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who now lives in us. You may feel something deep in your spirit but not know how to adequately express it.

For several years, I have been encouraged to write about my experience with prophetic ministry, to this point I have successfully avoided it. Another reason I haven't wanted to write about prophetic ministry is that when you write extensively on any subject to some degree, people look at you as an expert in that area, or at least you think you are, that's why you're writing about it. Let me be really clear, I certainly don't think I'm an expert in the prophetic. In fact, the longer I live, the more experienced I become, the more I realize I don't know.

Prophetic ministry is about hearing, communicating, and living out the heart of God. How could anyone ever think they completely understood God's heart and are experts in communicating it? I also realize there are different ministry styles and perspectives, the Church of Jesus is incredibly diverse, and I love that. We should celebrate it more, not allow it to become a point of division. The Holy Spirit works through human personalities with all of our weaknesses and shortcomings. Our life experiences are different, as is our theological understanding and biases.

I say all of that, realizing that I have a perspective that may be a little different from many others. I know there will be those who disagree with some of those perspectives. Like I said, I'm convinced that's a really healthy thing. I have been around prophetic ministry most of my life I have had amazing experiences, I've seen lives transformed by a word that was spoken, hope rekindled, broken people mended, and the destructive works of darkness exposed. I know the incredibly positive effect of a word spoken at the right moment from the heart of the Father.

Tragically, I also know the destructive side, manipulative, hurtful, misguided, untested words spoken to a hungry heart eager to hear a word of hope. "I know the confusion and damage it can cause. While I have occasionally had those awkward moments when some well-intended person introduced me as a prophet, that's not how I see myself at all. Just in case you're wondering, Prophet Dan will never be on my business card. If I were going to describe my ministry role, I would say I'm a pastor with a prophetic edge. Without a doubt, that gift mix clearly shapes much of my perspective and values.

The pastor in me is always concerned with four things; is what's being shared consistent with biblical truth, does it reflect the heart of God, how will this word be received, and what will it accomplish? The prophetic edge is more about challenging, motivating, inspiring vision and courage to face life issues and to become all you were created to be. Another thing you'll quickly discover about me is that I'm not into titles, rigid definitions, and categories. I'm not always sure where one spiritual gift ends and another begins, and how important that is anyway.

Titles can help define areas of responsibility, but they can also become our focus and limit the scope of our call to serve. That's a crucial point I don't want you to miss. Our call is to serve regardless of our gifting or abilities. I'm a pastor with a prophetic edge that's my gifting; my call is to serve! The gifts you have will make room for you; they will always find a way to be used and expressed. Our call is to serve Jesus and the people that He passionately loves.

Having said all of that, let me get back to my reason for writing. I'm convinced that a new generation of prophetic ministry is developing. Honestly, I want to influence and help shape its values and direction. The rapidly changing environment that we live in requires fresh understanding, perspectives, and the development of contemporary prophetic ministry models. People who are clearly connected to the truth of God's word, the heart of the Father, and the needs of people.

While prophetic ministry is rooted in the supernatural touch of the Holy Spirit, it's most powerful and effective when spoken in a natural,

conversational, engaging way. Remember this is not the “Thus saith The Lord” thundering from the Old Testament prophet. It’s the gentle dove, the Holy Spirit communicating the heart of the Father. Don’t mistake thundering for authority, and don’t underestimate the power of a gentle word inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoken at the right time.

I grew up with the understanding that spiritual gifts, for the most part, were limited to a church service, prayer meeting, or small group; they were definitely for a church setting and outsiders would never understand or benefit from them. They were also for a special category of believers, the Pentecostals or Charismatics. It was almost impossible to think of them in terms of the marketplace, workplace, neighborhoods, or society in general. They were sacred, not secular, so how could they possibly function outside of a protected spiritual cocoon? Since then, I’ve discovered that God doesn’t divide the sacred from the secular. It’s always about God’s heart for people.

The gifts of the Spirit belong wherever hungry hurting people are open to His touch. Wherever you find broken humanity looking for answers, I emphasize this because I’m convinced that spiritual gifts including prophetic insight belong in the places where everyday life happens. home, school, office, neighborhood, but for it to be meaningful and effective it must be genuine, natural, motivated by love, and delivered with care and humility. Its motivation cannot be to impress with our spirituality or gifting. Remember, the gift is for the one who needs it, the one receiving it, not the one delivering it. The way I deliver or present the gift will often determine its acceptance!

Lastly, as you read these pages, two things are extremely important to me. That you understand my heart and motivation in writing this. I believe the prophetic voice is needed today more than ever. People are deeply hungry, desperately looking for real answers to life problems, discouraged, disillusioned, stressed out, and often battling hopelessness. The heart of New Testament prophetic ministry is clearly laid out in 1 Corinthians 14:3 *“But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort”*.

That's why I say that prophetic ministry is needed today more than ever. That's why I'm passionate about a new generation of prophetic ministry and committed to the development of fresh contemporary models that are connected to the heart of The Father, built on the truth of God's word with a clear understanding of New Testament prophetic ministry in a rapidly changing culture. Prophetic ministry has often been discredited by the way it's presented or lack of understanding of its New Testament purpose. We often confuse the role and model of the Old Testament prophet with New Testament prophetic ministry, or we mix the two, not realizing the clear distinction.

New Testament prophetic ministry is not so much about prediction as it is about making sense of current happenings and preparing us for the future. My perspectives are a little different because my experience and personality are a little different. I'm not saying my perspectives are right and the others are wrong. I am saying it's time to stop and reevaluate, reimagine if you will, what prophetic ministry could look like for a new generation. A generation desperately hungry for a fresh touch of God's Spirit, in a way that is genuine, authentic, practical, and real. Perhaps with less spiritual hype that has often been associated with the prophetic.

The last thing I want to communicate is that while sound biblical theology is extremely important to me, after all, the word theology simply means "thinking about God", and that's not a bad thing! It's studying the character and nature of God, what He's like and how we relate to Him. This writing is not intended to be a theological discourse rather it's a practical guide to hearing a little bit of the heart of God, living it out, and communicating what the Spirit is saying to the Church. The followers of Jesus.







HEARING GOD'S HEART

It was well after midnight when I ran down the escalator stairs to catch the last underground train going to the place I was staying in central London. I just made it to the train as the doors were closing. I finally sat down and breathed a sigh of relief. Now I could close my eyes and rest, at least for a few minutes. All I had ahead of me now was a short walk to where I was staying and bed. I was more than ready for that. It had been a long and exhausting day. There were only a few other passengers sitting on the train. All of them looked like I felt, exhausted and wanting to rest.

Everything suddenly changed when the train stopped at the next station. Seven or eight loud, drunk, and completely obnoxious young men got on the train. Immediately, the peaceful atmosphere changed to one of fear and anxiety. They were arguing and shoving each other. It seemed as though it could escalate into a full-blown fist fight at any moment. This was the last thing I needed at the end of an incredibly busy day. All I could think of was moving to another part of the train. As the train stopped and I stood up to leave, it seemed that everyone else had the same idea. None of us were interested in listening to these angry young men curse at each other, and we certainly didn't want to be involved in a fight. As I followed the others getting off the train, suddenly I was stopped by the sound of a beating heart.

At first, I thought it must be my heart racing. After all, I had been in a scary and potentially dangerous situation. I quickly realized, however, that it wasn't my heart racing. I had heard the sound before and never understood what it was or why it was happening. It was a sound that I would become all too familiar with in the years that followed. At that

point, I knew I needed to turn around and sit back down. I couldn't follow everyone else to another part of the train, as much as I wanted to. Little did I know, this was a divine appointment that would change my life forever.

As I sat back down, I noticed it was just me and the seven angry, drunk young men. Everyone else had left. I remember thinking, what in the world am I doing? This is crazy! What happens if they turn on me? What will I do? I'm no match for any one of them, let alone all seven. If they try to talk to me, what will I say? They're so drunk and angry. Nothing I say will even make any sense to them. Why am I sitting here? I should have gotten out of here while I had the chance. The doors closed. There was no turning back.

I felt completely alone as the train began to move. I had no idea what to do. Should I confront them? Should I try preaching to them? After all, wasn't it my responsibility to point out their sin and brokenness, and ask them if they would allow God to change their lives? I could certainly shame them for the way they were acting, or I could judge them. That's always a great tool for evangelism. People love to be judged, especially by those who don't even know them and the circumstances of their lives. For a brief moment, I even considered putting my arms around each one and telling them how much God loved them. I don't think that would have gone down very well.

What do I do? Why am I here? Why did God so dramatically stop me from leaving the train? Was it really God, or was it my fear? I discovered a long time ago that when you run out of options and you don't have any idea of what to do next, praying is always a good place to start. Simple, desperate, "God help" kind of prayers always seem to work for me. This was a perfect time for that. I guess, deep inside, I was hoping they wouldn't notice me. How crazy is that? I was the only other person around. How could they not notice me?

As I sat there wondering what to do next, I realized the only thing I could really do was, in fact, the most powerful thing I could do. I could pray for them. I decided that I would quietly pray for each one of them.

I wanted to see their faces as a point of reference, but I didn't want them to think I was staring and invite a conversation. I would glance at one and quickly look away while I prayed. Then, I would glance at the next one and do the same. God knew exactly who they were. He knew them by name. He knew their story and, more importantly, how to touch their hearts.

That experience took place a long time ago, but I still remember some of their faces. It may sound a little crazy, but I don't believe we just happened to meet on the London underground that night. I can't say I completely understand why it happened, but I'm convinced that God was involved in that meeting. It was a divine appointment, and the prayers that I prayed have had a significant impact on the lives of those young men. Even though I doubt they remember that night at all, it was a night I'll never forget.

I encountered the heart of God, and it forever changed my understanding of what He is like. It showed me how much God loves people and what ministry is really all about. As I was getting off the train a few stops later at Oxford Circus, one of the young men said to me, "Goodnight, sir". I turned and noticed a slight smile on his face. I've often wondered if he had any idea that I was praying for him and his friends. I smiled and said goodnight, then began my short walk out of the underground station and back to the place I was staying.

I don't remember much about the other events of that day. I couldn't tell you what I taught at the church that evening. In fact, I don't remember much about that entire trip. But I'll never forget the faces of those young men and the sound of the heart beating in my ears. Over the next years, there had been several occasions when I've heard that same heartbeat. Every time, without exception, it was in relationship to hurting and broken people.

I left the underground station and walked up Regents Street toward Hallam Mews, where I was staying with my friends. My mind kept going back to what I had just experienced. Inside, I was still shaking. Not out of fear of what could have happened had those young men

become more aggressive. It was more about encountering the heart of God for those young men. It was overwhelming! I hoped that my friends would still be awake when I arrived. I desperately wanted someone to process all of this with. Someone I trusted who could help me understand what I had just experienced.

I opened the door, and the little flat was dark, except for a nightlight that had been left on for me after they went to bed. Processing with someone would have to wait until morning. As I lay in bed with the events of that evening racing through my mind, I found it impossible to fall asleep. I was exhausted and needed rest, but what I had experienced that evening was so profound and perplexing that I couldn't turn off my own mind. What was its significance? I had never heard anyone talk about hearing the sound of a beating heart in their ears.

Ministry training hadn't prepared me for this. I lay there going over all that had happened that night. I remembered a prophetic picture that had been given to me when I was a youth pastor several years before. At that time, I knew it was significant, but I didn't really understand it. It was one of those words that didn't make a lot of sense when it was given, but I couldn't forget it. Several times each year, a group of local youth pastors would spend time together "hanging out". I love that term, hanging out. It means just being together without an agenda! If there was an agenda, it was encouraging and praying for each other. We connected well and had built strong relationships. It was a safe place. A time we could share our hearts, struggles, and our dreams.

As the youth pastors prayed over me, one of the guys had what he called a "prophetic picture." It was a picture of me sitting on the lap of Jesus with my head on His chest, listening to His heartbeat and then speaking out what I heard to those around me. Listening to His heartbeat. Was this the fulfillment of that prophetic picture? I had never heard of anything like it, and honestly, I didn't have any idea what it really was all about, and I wasn't sure that I even wanted it. It seemed too real.

Pictures tell stories and communicate messages often more powerfully than words. That prophetic picture of me sitting on the lap of Jesus with

my head on his chest, listening to His heartbeat and sharing it with those around me, is permanently etched in my mind. For me, it defines what the heart of ministry is all about, especially prophetic ministry. Remember, in defining what my ministry call is, I am primarily a pastor with a prophetic edge. That requires listening to and communicating the heart of God, through both words and actions.

That picture also communicates heart attitudes and even the steps necessary in hearing and listening to the heart of God. It isn't automatic; it doesn't just happen. Let's look at it for a minute and see what those steps are. Sitting on the lap of Jesus communicates childlike simplicity, with your head on His chest, intimacy, and humility, listening to His heart. Though often used interchangeably, there's a huge difference between hearing and listening.

Hearing is a passive process, listening is an active process that involves focusing on what you hear and giving your full attention to the person or people speaking, in this case, the Holy Spirit. It also requires understanding what you're hearing and processing it so that you can respond appropriately. Then there's speaking it out or responding to what the Spirit is saying. For most of us, listening is a struggle; we hear, but listening requires focus and understanding.

I remember when Bev and I were first married I prided myself on being able to read, watch television and talk to her all at the same time. Whenever she would say, you're not listening to what I'm saying I would respond by repeating exactly what she said, that seemed to only upset her more. I heard the sound of what she said, but what she wanted was for me to stop and listen, pay attention, to focus and understand at a much deeper level, not just hear the sound of words.

That night on the underground train I heard the sound of a heartbeat, I had no idea what it was all about, what it meant or why I was hearing it. It was later that night lying in bed desperately wanting to fall asleep, but couldn't, that I began to listen to what the Holy Spirit was saying. It was then that I began to understand that what I heard was a little part of God's heart for people, and how passionately He loves!

My experience that night on the London Underground was dramatic. I don't want you to think I have those kinds of experiences all the time. For me, it was a defining moment that forever changed my understanding of the heart of God, the value of people, and focus of ministry. By the way, having those kinds of dramatic encounters doesn't make you more spiritual than those who have not experienced them. Some of us just seem to require more dramatic experiences before we will stop and listen.

Don't wait for a dramatic experience, that's such an important statement, let me say it again, don't wait for a dramatic earth-shaking experience before you realize God wants to talk to you! Hearing God's heart is not reserved for a special, deeply spiritual group of people; it doesn't require special gifting, it does require chasing after it, by that I mean making it a priority, taking time, and learning to listen.

Several years ago, I heard the story of the Native American walking through Times Square with a friend. The story not only deeply impacted my life but it clearly illustrates the point I want to make. A Native American and his friend were walking through Times Square in New York City, as usual, the streets were busy, noisy, and filled with people. The sounds of the city were almost deafening. Suddenly, the Native American said, "I hear a cricket." Shocked his friend responded, "You heard what?" "I heard a cricket!"

"You couldn't hear a cricket with all of this noise!" "No, I'm sure of it," the Native American said, "I heard a cricket." "That's just crazy, there's no way you could possibly hear a cricket with all this noise!" said the friend. The Native American listened carefully for a moment and then walked across the street to a big cement planter where some shrubs were growing. He looked into the bushes, beneath the branches, and sure enough, he found a small cricket.

In utter amazement, the friend said, "That's incredible! You must have superhuman ears." "No," said the Native American. "My ears are no different from yours. It just depends on what you're listening for." The friend replied, "There is just no way. I could never hear a cricket

in this noise.” But the Native American simply replied, “It depends on what is really important to you. Here, let me show you.” He reached into his pocket, pulled out a few coins, and discreetly dropped them on the sidewalk.

Even with all the noise of the crowded street blaring in their ears, nearly every person within twenty feet noticed the sound of the coins and turned to look and see if the money that hit the pavement was theirs. “See what I mean?” “It all just depends on what’s important to you, what you’re focused on, and what your ears have been trained to hear.” Like I told you, my story of the London Underground is extraordinary it’s not an everyday happening, but being led by the Holy Spirit and hearing the voice of God deep inside can be. Over the years, I’ve discovered several ways God speaks to us.

Scripture

The Bible is the primary way God speaks to us.

I can’t say it strongly enough, become a student of God’s word.

“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path”. Psalm 119:105

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work”. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT

Prompting of The Holy Spirit

As a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in us.

Jesus told us The Spirit would guide into all truth.

He will direct and protect us and reveal the heart of The Father.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that He will receive what He will make known to you”. John 16:13-14

Dreams and Desires

Often when I'm asked how I can find vision for my life or how I can find God's will for my future? I respond with questions like these: What are your dreams and desires? What do you really want? What's deep within you? Dreams and desires can be the door to discovering God's plan.

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."

Psalms 37:4 ESV

Opportunity's

He opens doors of opportunity that lead us to fulfillment. The Bible is full of stories of those who were at the right place at the right time, doing the right thing, not realizing that all along God was directing their steps through doors of opportunity.

"I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."

Revelation 3:8

Prophetic Voices

Trusted people who speak words of challenge and encouragement at the right time. Words that confirm what the Holy Spirit is doing in you or speaking to you. Words that give courage to move forward and become all that God created you to be.

"But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort." 1 Corinthians 14:3

Life Circumstances

God often speaks to us through our circumstances. He uses difficult people and situations, even pain and suffering, to teach valuable life lessons. Never ignore circumstances but never allow them to control your life. Circumstances are never the final word; God is always greater!

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" Romans 8:28

Supernatural Experiences

Times when the Holy Spirit intervenes and speaks through dreams or visions, signs, and wonders. The sound of a rushing mighty wind (Acts 2:2); experience like the one I had on the London Underground, hearing the clear sound of a beating heart.

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” Acts 2:17-18

Like most of us, I’ve questioned over and over if I’m really hearing God’s voice or is it just me, is it just wishful thinking? Remember when we talk about hearing God’s voice, we’re not talking about an audible voice, though that can and does happen, but it’s not the norm. We’re not talking about strange voices telling us what to do or how to think. We’re talking about deep impressions from the indwelling Holy Spirit. These impressions should always be tested, especially as you’re learning how to discern where they’re coming from.

Here is a simple check list that I have found helpful.

-  Does what I’m hearing line up with biblical truth?
-  Is it consistent with the character of God?
-  Does it glorify Jesus?
-  Does it bear witness to you?
-  Does it bear witness to those you trust?
-  Does it bring a sense of hope and courage?

One of my struggles has been overthinking, analyzing, and reanalyzing every thought. I’ve often wondered how many times I have talked myself out of believing that the Holy Spirit is speaking to me. I realized the importance of getting it right. I want to know that I’m hearing

clearly, not just following my own desires and thoughts. After carefully evaluating what you believe The Holy Spirit is saying using the simple checklist I gave you above, take a step of faith with confident humility.

That almost sounds like a contradiction, confident humility, but it's not. Here's what I mean, I feel confident that the Holy Spirit is speaking to me, giving direction and showing what action to take or word to share. I also realize I'm human and make mistakes. If you're afraid to make a mistake, you'll most likely do nothing. Take the step of faith and remain open and teachable.

Because the Holy Spirit lives in us, 1 Corinthians 2:16 tells us that "*We have the mind of Christ*," even our own human thinking can be inspired by the Spirit, don't dismiss it too quickly as just your thoughts. Ask Him if your thoughts are in line with His. Steps of faith are also necessary; I have never been so confident that I was hearing from God that it didn't require moving in faith and humility. Confidently take the steps of faith but remain open and teachable.

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27. Notice that it doesn't say lambs, it says sheep. Lambs learn the shepherd's voice by following the sheep. That tells me there's a process in becoming familiar with the shepherd's voice. It takes time, making mistakes, being teachable and open to correction it takes getting to know the good shepherd, Jesus!





THE OLD DOUBLE SWING

my journey 1

I've often told the story of the old double swing that hung on my grandparent's front porch all of my growing-up years. I've often wondered what it would be like if that old swing could talk. It would have some amazing stories to tell. Some of them I would love to have you hear, others I'm not quite so sure. That old swing became a Sneed family treasure, believe it or not, I still have it. It hung on my front porch until a recent move, when it was carefully placed in storage, waiting for a new generation of stories to be told.

Over the years, I would often sit on the old swing remembering the stories, conversations and events that shaped my life and praying for the generations to come. At the close of the Second World War, my grandfather bought the swing at Sears where he worked. I remember as a kid growing up, the hot summer nights when it was hard to sleep, grandma would make root beer floats or lemonade, and we would sit on the swing and listen to my grandparents tell their stories, often late into the night.

Both of them were great storytellers. Grandpa's stories were always about growing up on the family farm near Centerville, Iowa. He would make the stories so real and descriptive that years later, when I visited the area, it was just like grandpa said it was. Almost as though time had stood still. His stories were always about his boyhood, life on the farm up until about the age of eleven or twelve. I later learned that's when his dad died, and life for him changed significantly. As I look back, it was almost as though he was emotionally stuck.

Telling his stories was comforting and healing for him. My grandmother's stories always had a purpose. She wanted to teach us something, to instill values and share her experiences. Especially spiritual ones. When she talked about Jesus, she was always passionate; it was like he was her best friend, and she wanted us to know him in that same way. She also would talk about her experiences with the "Holy Ghost." If you're not familiar, that's King James for The Holy Spirit. She would tell stories about lives being transformed, people being set free from a life of addiction and oppression, physical and emotional healings, things that she had actually seen and experienced herself.

Her stories were not only captivating but left me with a desire to know Jesus like she did. As we placed that old swing in storage, I found myself wondering if it was time to replace it with a new one, after all things get old and worn, but for me, it is so much more than an old swing. It was the place I began to discover the heart of God. Speaking of family treasures, I have two of my grandmother's old Bibles and one of my dad's. My dad loved to study and dig into the meaning of things, so his old Bible is underlined and marked with references. My grandmother also underlined verses that had special meaning to her; many of those same verses were stained with her tears.

I can (vividly) picture her with tears running down her face as she read and prayed. I've often wondered how many of those prayers and tears were for me. I can remember the times I quietly came into the house, certain that she didn't know I was there. I would hear her pray often for me, asking Jesus to touch my life, to protect me, to fill me with His Spirit. She wanted me to know Jesus like she did. Later I realized that she knew exactly when I came into the house and that she wanted me to hear her pray, especially when she prayed for me.

She not only wanted me to know that she prayed for me, but how she prayed, what she was asking God to do in her grandson's life; in reality, she was helping to shape my life. She was teaching me how to chase after God's heart, to know Jesus like she did, to experience the power of the Holy Spirit, and she was teaching me how to pray. She knew exactly

what she was doing. My grandparents moved to Los Angeles in early 1923; the city was booming with people arriving from everywhere.

For them, it was the promise land, hundreds of miles from the bitter cold winters of Iowa and the backbreaking work of the farm. My grandfather had been working for the railroad, and Los Angeles was the end of the line. It was a place to start over, a place to begin a new life with his young family. It was also the center of a spiritual awakening that would literally touch the entire world. Angelus Temple, the place that seemed to be the epicenter of the awakening had just opened, and the city was buzzing with amazing stories of lives transformed, miraculous healings both physically and emotionally, sight being restored, and the crippled walking.

My grandparents were spiritually hungry and soon found a home at Angelus Temple. Years later when I was eight or nine my grandparents would take me to Angelus Temple or as they called it “The Temple.” After the service they would take me to the lobby on the second level where wheel chairs, braces, crutches with stories and pictures, old newspaper articles and doctors letters documenting the miraculous healings that had taken place.

To a young boy, at first it seemed both overwhelming and perhaps a little meaningless. Just old relics, until my grandmother would point at a picture or a pair of crutches and say, “Danny, I was here when that happened, I saw it with my own eyes.” Then, as she explained what she experienced, it would come alive to me. I don’t remember exactly how old I was when I first opened my heart to Jesus. It seemed that he was always there. I’m sure there was a specific moment, but like many others, I really can’t pinpoint it.

When I was seven, I began my first church! Yes, you heard it right, seven! I like to say that I was the world’s youngest pastor. I would gather the neighborhood kids in my backyard every Saturday morning to tell them about Jesus. We would sing, and I would preach from behind an old wooden orange crate that was my pulpit. I guess you could say that my

grandmother had succeeded in inspiring in me a passion for Jesus and a heart for people. Get this, about once a month, I would ask the kids to bring their parents, and some did. I'm not exactly sure what I talked about or what we sang, but I know that I told them about Jesus! At seven, I felt sure that one day I would be a pastor.

I've heard it said that often your greatest strength can also be your greatest weakness. One of my strengths is sensitivity, I'm sensitive to the Holy Spirit and to the needs and struggles of people. I think it's that sensitivity that allows people to feel safe with me. However, the downside of that is I can easily be oversensitive to my own hurts and struggles. I've had to learn over the years how to develop a tough skin so that I could maintain a soft, sensitive heart. It's not always easy!

In "The Power of a New Identity," I wrote about my third-grade experience and its devastating effect on my life. Let me give you the significantly condensed version. When I was in the third grade about 8 years old, I had a humiliating accident in class. I desperately needed to get to the boy's restroom; however, the teacher would not give me permission. After repeatedly not getting her permission, I couldn't wait any longer. I had diarrhea, and even though I tried as hard as I could, I still couldn't control it. Let your imagination go just about as far as it can, and that's exactly what happened.

There are some things that are not easy to hide, especially when you're dealing with a classroom full of eight-year-olds. Immediately, the other students begin to react like third-grade students do, "Teacher, it stinks in here! Look what Dan did!" I can't really describe the embarrassment and humiliation I felt; nothing like this had ever happened to me before. However, the worst part of the humiliation and embarrassment came when the teacher who should have tried to help me out of the situation decided to join in with the students, making an already painful and embarrassing accident much worse.

Her first words to me: "You dirty boy," stuck in my mind and haunted me for years. It's been said that with every wound in your life comes a

message. That message tells you something about your worth and value, what you're like, what life is all about, even what God is like. Because it comes out of a wound, the message is almost always misunderstood or often a complete lie, but to some degree we believe those lies, allowing them to have a huge impact on every aspect of our lives!

My experience and the message that came from it were life-changing for me. Why that event impacted me as much as it did, I don't know, but it did. It shaped much of how I thought about myself, how I viewed life, and how I thought about God. It always amazes me how one negative event and the message that comes out of it can have so much influence over our lives. There's so much more to that story that I would love to tell you. If you want to know more, it's all in "The Power of a New Identity".

For the rest of my school years, I lived locked up in those lies. I could tell you stories of lying in bed crying myself to sleep, I was so lonely, desperately wanting to break out of my fear and self-imposed isolation, feeling hopeless. I could tell you of writing notes to my parents telling them I wanted to kill myself; I didn't have anything to live for. My parents never saw the notes, and thankfully, I never made any attempts. To be completely honest, I don't have good memories of my school years.

In reality, I was isolated and locked up by the lies that governed and dominated my entire life. Several years later as a freshman at Life Bible College, now Life Pacific University in San Dimas, California, I unexpectedly met the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Why I went to Bible College I don't know, it certainly wasn't because I wanted to study the Bible or planned to go into ministry, in fact, I'm not even sure where my relationship with Jesus was at that time.

I know I loved Him, but I also believed that He was responsible for the brokenness of my life. At the very least, He could have stopped the lies from dominating my life. Where was He all those nights that I cried myself to sleep feeling so lonely and isolated because of my fears. I lived for years with a deep and very destructive inferiority complex; I didn't see

any value or purpose in my life. There was no way I could stand in front of a group of people and tell them about the love of Jesus.

If He really loved me, why did He let all this happen? I couldn't hold a conversation, let alone speak to a group of people. So why did I go to Bible college? What was the point? There are only two reasons that make any sense at all. From the time I was seven and gathered all the neighborhood kids in my backyard to tell them about Jesus, everyone expected that I would go into ministry. The other reason, perhaps the main one, was that I had no idea what else I would do with my life.

No dreams, no desires, no plans, so in reality, I went to Bible college because everyone expected me to, and I had nowhere else to go. After about six months, I was done; there was no reason for me to be there. I hated it, I hated myself, and though I would never have admitted it, I hated God. When I said I was done, I meant I was done; I wanted out. I remember going to the dean's office to check out.

No one knew what I was planning to do, not even my dog, she was my best friend, and I told her everything, but not this. No one knew! The dean's personal assistant told me that he wasn't in but would be back in about an hour, so I agreed to come back then and went on to my next class. As usual, the class began with worship, even though I didn't want to be there, I didn't want to stand out either, so I put on my worship mask, you know the one with a huge angelic smile, heavenly gaze, hands lifted and swaying to the worship music.

I have to admit I was really good at this mask stuff; I had become an expert in wearing them. I'm convinced the deeper the pain and brokenness, the better the masks we wear. As the song neared an end, I dropped my hands and said to myself, "I will never do this again, I'm done"! The room went completely silent, I kept my eyes closed as tight as I could, it felt like every eye in the room was on me, I know that's not true, but that's how it felt.

About that time, one of the students began to speak out what I would call a prophetic word, a word that brings insight into what's happening, it brings courage to face the challenges, to allow the Holy Spirit to do his work of healing and restoration, a word that brings hope and points the way to freedom. Remember, no one knew what I was planning to do, no one! I think I knew from the minute this student began to speak out the word it was for me, or maybe I should say I hoped it was. Deep inside, I longed for God to break through.

I wanted to know that He saw me, that I was important to Him, though I don't think I expected anything that dramatic. "You can leave here today like you plan to, and I will go with you and bless you because I love you. If you choose to stay, I'll set you free and use your life to touch the lives of many others. But you can leave as you planned, and I'll go with you and bless you because I love you". For the first time that I can remember, I heard the heart of God clearly saying I love you! Those were the words I needed desperately to hear, and believe me, I heard them!

In all honesty, I don't know where I would be today had I not gone to class while waiting for my appointment with the dean. If that young man had not taken the step of faith and spoken out what the Holy Spirit had put in his heart. He had no way of knowing what was going on inside me, but the Holy Spirit did. I want you to carefully listen to what I'm about to say! This is a key reason the prophetic word is so important in today's world.

I was a broken mess and desperately needed answers but did not know where to turn. I'm not sure that I even realized what the problem was or where it came from. I was desperately lonely, confused, and ready to run. Then, in obedience to the Holy Spirit's prompting a young College student who knew nothing about me or what was going on in my life takes a step of faith and speaks a word inspired by the Spirit right to the heart of my need. Those were the words I desperately needed to hear.

The word was a gift to me, delivered by a young college student who brought hope, that cracked the walls of fear and shame I had built

for protection. It was a breakthrough moment that began a process of healing and restoration that changed my life forever. One of my favorite stories is found in Matthew 4:18-22, it's where Jesus calls his first disciples. You may already know the story well. Simon (Peter) and his brother Andrew were fishing, casting their nets into the lake.

As Jesus was passing by, He simply called out to them, "Follow me", and immediately they left everything and followed him. Shortly after that, He sees James and John sitting with their father Zebedee preparing their nets. Again, He calls out the same words "Follow me" and they too immediately leave their father and their nets and follow Jesus. I've always believed the story because it's in the Bible. But in all honesty, it seemed really strange that they would leave immediately, without question, they didn't even ask where He was going or why He wanted them to follow?

In fact, it's not quite clear how well they even knew him! Yet He was asking them to leave everything and follow him. Did Jesus have some strange, mesmerizing power? They seemed to understand that He wasn't asking them to take a walk; it was to leave everything behind and make a life decision to be His disciples. That seems a little extreme and, for me, hard to understand until I dug into it and discovered the significance of what those words "follow me" would have meant to the brothers. It's important in studying the Bible to understand context and culture.

Without some understanding of the culture, a lot of Bible stories can be very perplexing to the Western mind. This is one of them. Why were those words so life-changing for these young men? Why were they so eager and willing to leave everything and follow Jesus? Those simple words "follow me" spoken by a rabbi in the time of Jesus was more than an invitation to discipleship. It was the rabbi saying, *I believe in you, I see something in you, follow me, let me do my work in you, I will make you into more than you ever dreamed you could be. You make the decision to follow me; my Spirit will take in from there and shape you into my likeness.*

At about six years old, boys would begin their formal education. It was called "Bet Sefer, the house of the book". It would most likely be at the local synagogue taught, by a rabbi. They would study and memorize

the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament containing the law of Moses. At about age 10, they moved to the next level where they memorized the entire Old Testament, all thirty-nine books, and learned how to discuss and defend it. This level was known as “Bet Talmud, House of learning”, a place where Jewish students learned the Torah, oral traditions, and Rabbinic interpretations.

At about 12 or 13, the young men became responsible to fulfill and guard the law; it's known as Bar MIT. There was also another stage of education, “Bet Midrash, house of study”. Very few students ever went to this level, after being scrutinized and questioned intensively by the rabbi to evaluate the young man's ability not only to know and define Jewish law and scripture, but did he have what it took, in the rabbi's opinion, to become just like him. The rabbis were highly respected in the Jewish culture.

It was a huge honor to be invited by a rabbi to become one of his talmidim, or his disciples. If the rabbi did not accept the young man, the rabbi would say something like “Go home and continue to learn your father's trade” often adding “You don't have what it takes to be like me!” Can you imagine the disappointment the young man would feel? This was what he lived for, his goal, his dream. This is what he worked so hard for, poured his life into, then to hear you don't have what it takes, you're not enough!

There were other higher education opportunities, but for many, their world would have been shattered and the dream crushed. When Jesus the young rabbi, just forming his talmidim, passes by and spoke those words that I believe had a prophetic tone, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” those were the words those young men desperately needed to hear, I believe in you, I see something in you, you've got what it takes because I'm going to put my Spirit in you to make it happen.

“Follow me,” that's all you have to do, “I will make you fishers of men,” and that's exactly what happened, that's prophetic! That meets New

Testament prophetic criteria. To strengthen, encourage, comfort. It brings hope and healing, speaks vision and challenge.

That day in the class room all those years ago, When a young unknowing college student spoke the words the Holy Spirit prompted him to speak “you can leave here today like you plan to, I’ll go with you and bless you because I love you” he had no idea what they would mean to me and the hundreds and hundreds of lives they would touch.

Every time I tell the story, I watch how the Holy Spirit continues to bring release, healing, and freedom through them. They were very simple words, perhaps in and of themselves meaningless, but spoken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they were life changing. That’s what prophetic ministry is about, it breaks barriers, penetrates hard hearts, dismantles arguments, it goes to the deepest parts of our lives, releases hope, and brings healing.





GOD OR MY CRAZY MIND?

My journey 2

At times, as I prayed for people, seemingly unrelated thoughts would go through my mind. People would ask me to pray for a specific thing, something as simple as a new job or things that were taking place in their family that required wisdom and grace to deal with. At other times, they would just ask for prayer, knowing something was wrong but not sure why or where it was coming from. As I prayed at times, a completely random thought would come to mind. Most often, I would shake it off because it seemingly had nothing to do with what I was being asked to pray for.

At times it was a picture, but again seemingly unrelated. As these random thoughts began to intensify, I found myself seriously questioning what they were all about. What's going on in my mind? Why was this happening? What does it mean? I began to wonder how emotionally and mentally stable I was. Why did I have these random thoughts? Why were they so real? I would never speak them out or even ask questions about them because they seemed so unrelated. I didn't want people to think I had mentally or emotionally lost it! I just kept it to myself but became more and more concerned.

After months of struggling, I decided I needed to find out what was happening before I did or said something really stupid. Finally, I got up enough courage to ask a longtime friend and mentor, Jean Darnall, someone I really trusted and knew she would be open and completely honest, even if that meant telling me I needed to see a counselor.

When I told her what was going on, she looked me directly in the eye and spoke with the authority that only a spiritual mother could.

It sounds to me like the Holy Spirit is stirring something prophetic in you. He's giving you insight into people's life situations and knowledge of how to pray and what to do. That was the last thing I wanted to hear! I had spent years running away from anything prophetic. I honestly think I would have felt relieved if she would have said, Dan, I think it would be good for you to see a counselor; these thoughts in your head are troubling!

The last thing I wanted to hear was what she said, "It sounds to me like the Holy Spirit is stirring something prophetic in you," as much as I trusted Jean, I did not want to accept what she was saying. I thanked Jean for her insight and advice, even though I didn't want to hear it and certainly didn't plan to do anything with it. As the British often say, she was "spot on", and deep inside, I knew it, but I was determined it wasn't for me.

For the next several months, I agonized over the whole thing. Why would God stir up things in me that I desperately wanted to get away from? Many of the prophetic models I had seen really troubled me. It often seemed that they were trying to speak with the authority of the Old Testament prophet; in fact, they even would begin with a loud and clear announcement, "thus saith the Lord, " and would conclude often by thundering those words again, as if to make sure everyone knew this was God speaking, not them.

What I had often experienced was a strange mix of Old and New Testament prophetic ministry, and they are as different as the old and new covenants. New Testament prophecy is given primarily to strengthen, build up, encourage, and comfort, to confirm and clarify, to inspire fresh vision and understanding of what the Holy Spirit is doing. The Old Testament prophets spoke for God when the Spirit came upon them. They were the authoritative and directive voice of God, primarily to Israel. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit living in the followers

of Jesus and the Word of God was the primary way God spoke to and gave direction to His people.

I valued prophetic insight. I knew that the right word spoken at the right time was life changing. I knew how important prophetic vision was in the direction and future of the church. I was also aware of the dangers if not used responsibly and with accountability. I wanted to be a pastor, to love people, to be there for them, to encourage them as they faced the challenges of their lives. I wanted to bring practical spiritual help; if it doesn't work in everyday life, it doesn't work! What I had experienced of prophetic ministry just didn't seem very practical at all.

Over the next months, as I continued to pray for people, these random thoughts continued to fill my mind. Except, they didn't seem quite so random anymore. Let me give you an example I think will help you understand what I mean. One day, walking into a class of adult students I had never met before, I noticed a young man sitting off to the side. During the teaching, when I would look at him in my mind's eye, his face became a computer screen. How random is that? What do you do with that?

At the end of the class, he was among the students who wanted to be prayed for. Every time I looked at him, I would see the computer screen. Finally, I said to him something like, "This is crazy, it seems totally off the wall to me, but every time I look at you, I see a computer screen." Suddenly, all the students standing around began to laugh, and then they told me he was the lead computer programmer for Air Canada. His entire adult life was spent looking at a computer screen.

His entire life was defined by his success as a computer programmer. He was safe and successful behind the computer when God had so much more for him. He came to the seminar hoping to discover more of himself and who God made him to be. That morning, as a result of what I thought was a dumb picture of a computer screen, a picture that made absolutely no sense to me, was not only the beginning of a breakthrough in his life, but a fresh understanding of God's heart for him.

One day, I woke up to the realization that if what Jean Darnall said was right and these thoughts were inspired by the Holy Spirit, then He had a purpose for giving them. Was it possible that they were a significant key to breakthrough and healing in that person's life? Could they shine light on past experiences and the lies that were believed as a result? Could they give insight and understanding on how to resolve difficult problems?

Could they inspire courage and spark new hope? I still didn't understand a lot of what I had seen in the past that was called prophetic, most often it seemed to focus on the one bringing the word. Often, like "Come and watch me display my gift," not the Holy Spirit who inspired the word or the one the gift was being delivered to. At other times, it seemed harsh, unloving, or even a little self-serving! It was at that point that I realized that so much of what concerned me was not the gift itself, but was how it was presented. I didn't have to present it the same way.

The inspiration was from God, but I could choose now to present it. I was responsible for the packaging while the Holy Spirit inspired the content! Even though I was still not convinced this was the Holy Spirit, I knew I needed to take a step of faith. Like Peter in Matthew 14:22-33, when Jesus called him to step out of the boat and come to him, I knew this was my walking on the water moment. Was I going to take the step or not? It was time to face what I had been running from for years.

It was time to step out and carefully take a risk. It was time to put these thoughts to the test and see if they were really inspired by the Holy Spirit or if they were just my crazy mind. I'm sure that part of my reluctance was self-protection, I really didn't want to speak something out and then discover I was completely wrong. I also didn't want to back people into a corner and attack them with what I thought was "a word from the Lord". I wanted people to be able to hear what was being said, to evaluate and process it in a safe environment, and then receive and embrace it.

It was the Holy Spirit's gift to them, how I presented it could possibly open or close their hearts and minds. To test the thoughts that would come to mind while I was praying for them, I would often say things like, "While I was praying, I had this really off-the-wall crazy thought"

or “I had a really strange thought or picture go through my mind. It probably has nothing to do with what we’re praying, but let me share it with you, and let me know if it relates at all.”

Sometimes I would even say, “To me it seems like a really crazy thought, and most likely it will seem that way to you as well, so if it doesn’t mean anything, don’t worry about it.” To my complete surprise, over and over, people would say, “Yes it does make sense to me, I remember something like that did happen; that’s been my struggle for years, but I didn’t know what to do with it!” Of course, there were those who said it doesn’t make sense to them at all, or where did that come from?

I would just say, “I told you it seemed off the wall to me”, and I most often added, “Don’t worry about it, if God is in it, He will make it clear to you at the right time.” Never insist that you are right, don’t try to prove your point or argue, that’s not your job, leave that to the Holy Spirit. Let go of the need to be right for the sake of being right! New Testament prophetic ministry flows from the Holy Spirit who lives in you, giving insight, inspiration, and anointing. Remember you are not speaking for God like an Old Testament prophet!

That’s a crucial point to keep in mind, so let me say it again: you are not speaking for God in the way the Old Testament prophets did! Avoid saying things like, God told me, or “thus saith the Lord”, which implies that you think you’re speaking for God. Not only is that misleading to the one receiving, but it puts you in a difficult and pretentious situation.

Since I first took that step of faith, and believe me, it was a huge step for me, it still is, there have been a number of practical insights that I’ve gained and hard lessons I’ve learned that have shaped much of my perspective on prophetic ministry. I’m convinced that genuine New Testament prophetic ministry is needed today more than ever if we are to effectively communicate the heart of God to a desperately needy but increasingly skeptical pluralist society. Let me share some of the practical insight that I’ve gained over the years.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO SPEAK TO YOU AND THROUGH YOU

For years, I struggled with the question of why God would want to speak through me, or, for that matter why He would even want to talk to me? I'm not good enough or as holy as I should be. I fail, make mistakes, sin, have bad attitudes, little faith, and wrong thoughts. I could always find reasons why I was disqualified. He wants to talk to you because you're his child. One of the most important terms in the New Testament is "In Christ" or "in Him". When you became a follower of Jesus and put your faith and trust in Him, the scriptures tell us you became a new creation, you have a new identity and your identity, is in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17, The Father identifies you with His son Jesus, that's how He sees you and accepts you. It has nothing to do with how good you are. He put His Holy Spirit in you to deal with areas of sin, brokenness, unrighteousness, and imperfection. He sees you in the same way He sees His son Jesus. You are enough because you are in Christ. He wants to speak to you and through you because you are His. That's mind-blowing! Understanding that will free you to know He not only wants to speak to you, He wants to speak through you. 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 1:1-14

LEARN HOW TO LISTEN TO THE PROMPTING OF THE SPIRIT

Remember the story of the young Native American in Times Square. He heard the sound of a little cricket in a concrete planter in one of the noisiest and busiest places in the world. When asked how it was even possible, "you must have superhuman ears," his friend said in absolute amazement, "My ears are no different from yours." It just depends on what you're listening for." Prophetic ministry does not begin when the word is spoken out; it begins by listening, hearing the heart of the Father and the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

The prophetic word is often spontaneous; it happens in the moment when you're praying for someone, in the middle of a conversation, speaking to a group of people, or when the Holy Spirit draws your attention to a particular person. When I sense the Spirit's prompting, there are a few questions I ask myself: Who is this for? Is it for me personally, is it for the person I'm praying for, or is it for the group? Is it a word to speak out or carry in my heart for prayer? If I'm to speak it out, is this the right time and place? Don't assume that because the Holy Spirit shows you something, it's for you to speak out. Over the years, there have been a number of times the Holy Spirit allowed me to see into a situation or someone's personal struggle or spiritual roadblock so that I could pray for them more efficiently. Many times, it was never spoken out not even to the person or persons involved.

IT WILL ALWAYS REQUIRE A STEP OF FAITH

I told you about the struggle I had in the beginning. Those first experiences were so scary for me; I was so uncertain of what I was doing. When I first felt the nudging of the Holy Spirit and I knew it was time to step out, I was beyond frightened but had to take the step of faith and see what the Holy Spirit wanted to do. That was over forty years ago, and I still find that it's always a step of faith. I'm more confident now and sensitive to the nudge of the Holy Spirit, but it still requires obedience and a step of faith. I'm still a little nervous when I get up to teach or pray for a group of people. I guess that's really positive, it keeps me dependent on the Holy Spirit and not myself.

IT IS NEVER ABOUT YOU

If I see or think of myself as the gifted one, "I have the gift of prophecy," then it becomes all about me and my gift. Come watch me use the gift of prophecy. We would never say that, but that's often how we think.

The focus is on “the gifted one”. However, if the gift is for the person receiving, the focus becomes Jesus the giver and the one receiving the gift. My responsibility is to deliver the gift in a way that it can best be received. That changes everything! It’s never about me or you and our gift! Remember all of the gifts of the Spirit are given to express the Father’s incredible love and desire to meet human need. They were not given to validate your worth! Our worth and value are in Christ, not our gifts.

“Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.” Romans 12:3 NLT

LET THE HOLY SPIRIT DO HIS WORK

After you have given the word that you believe the Spirit gave you, let Him do His work. While we are responsible to deliver the word in a way it can best be received, we cannot make them receive it. Leave that to the Holy Spirit. Don’t try to force it, defend it or over-explain it. Remember it’s not about being right, it’s about expressing God’s heart for them and His desire to touch their lives. If the word does not seem to be received, give them time to think and process it. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to them. I often say things like, “If it doesn’t make sense at first, don’t throw it away. Ask the Holy Spirit what it means and ask Him to confirm whether it’s right or not. If He doesn’t confirm it, file it away until He does.”

DON’T EXPECT PERFECTION

If you’re afraid to make a mistake, you will most likely do nothing. Give yourself grace to not deliver the message perfectly, especially in the learning process. I was so afraid to fail, disappoint God, and others, I would not step out and share what the Holy Spirit put in my heart. I was sure I could not do it right, so I did nothing. Remember the verse in 1 Corinthians 13:9, “*We know in part and prophesy in part*” which indicates that there’s room for incomplete words and human error.

I've discovered that if you move in humility and willingness to admit mistakes, the Holy Spirit will cover you, and others will not be damaged. Remember, you are not an Old Testament prophet where perfection was needed. Remain open and teachable. Those early steps of faith were really hard for me. I was sure I couldn't do it. I was so afraid I would say the wrong thing or I wouldn't say it right. I was afraid I would hurt people like I had seen so many times. I struggled for years, desperately wanting to get away from anything prophetic. I honestly didn't want to be involved. However, the Holy Spirit wouldn't let up until I said yes.

Not long ago, I was teaching a seminar about prophetic ministry, after telling my experience of desperately wanting to get away from anything prophetic and finally giving in to the persistent Holy Spirit. A young couple came up after the secession and said how glad they were that I gave in, reminding me that I had prayed over them several years before when their marriage and life were falling apart. I had not met them before and knew nothing about them. While praying with them, the Holy Spirit gave me one of those nudges and I shared a prophetic word with them.

A word that seemed to go right to the heart of their struggle, as a result, their lives were transformed. The Holy Spirit brought deep healing and freedom. I'll never forget the next thing they said "we're so glad you took that step of faith and allowed the Holy Spirit flow through you, we most likely would not be here if you hadn't and certainly not together." I hear stories like that often I am so humbled by them and grateful the Holy Spirit was so persistent when I was so stubborn and so determined to run from anything close to prophetic.





THUNDER FROM HEAVEN

Old Testament prophets

Have you ever secretly desired to be like an Old Testament prophet? After all, they had a lot of authority and power. When they spoke, people listened. Miracles seemed to follow them wherever they went, kings were afraid of them, and nations trembled at their presence. Don't tell anyone I said this, but I could go for that! I like it when people sit up and pay attention to what I say.

Authority can be intoxicating. However, there is more to authority than just having everyone's attention. If you answered yes to my question, then you most likely don't understand the downside of the job or what everyday life was like for an Old Testament prophet. They faced huge persecution, suffering, and were often required to live out the Word they proclaimed.

We all want to be heard and know that people will pay attention to what we say. I'll admit, the power stuff does sound fun, but I'm not so likely to sign up for the suffering part. For me, getting up to speak and being center stage is great! I guess you could say I like the attention, but the glitz and glamor quickly fade when you read the stories and realize what these prophets really faced. While there were a few prophets who died in peace at an old age, most of them faced horrendous challenges.

The Jewish Talmud tells us how Isaiah was so hated by King Manasseh that he ordered him to be sawn in two with a wooden saw. Jeremiah was stoned to death by his fellow countrymen, as was Zechariah and

Habakkuk. Remember how Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and cried, *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to you”*. *Matthew 23:37*

We love to read their stories and celebrate their amazing lives, but walking in their shoes is another story. Old Testament prophets not only spoke the Word of the Lord but were often required to live out its prophetic message. Their lives and actions became a prophetic message themselves. A great example of this is the prophet, Hosea. He came on the scene in the eighth century BC, at a time when Israel had walked away from its relationship with God.

It was during this same time that God directed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. Yes, you read that right. It was not a typo. God directed Hosea the prophet to find a prostitute and marry her! If you're still thinking about being an Old Testament prophet, you might want to reconsider. I can't even imagine God saying that. I can see all kinds of problems with that theologically, morally, and ethically, but that's exactly what he was told to do.

Israel had become involved in idolatry and spiritual prostitution. God wanted to send a strong and clear message: I love you and came to find you even though you walked away from me. It's an incredible picture of God's grace, but don't forget, Hosea was being directed to live that out. I'm not sure how I would have responded to that one! He finds Gomer, a prostitute, and asks her to marry him. It could be a great book title, “The Prophet and The Prostitute.”

I wonder if people had a problem with his prophetic words after that. Remember, this was all under Old Testament law, which required a prostitute to be stoned to death. How could God do that? Did He forget His own rules? Hosea should have been calling for her execution, not for her hand in marriage! How would he meet Gomer in the first place? Prophets shouldn't be hanging around with those kinds of people anyway, right?

How does a prophet marry a prostitute without creating a major scandal? What was the point? Why would God violate all of the rules? Why would He ask such a scandalous thing of the prophet in the first place?

There is only one answer: outrageous, unexplainable, and unending love! God loved rebellious Israel so much that even when they walked away and turned to idolatry, He kept calling them back. The Hebrew name Hosea (Yeshua) means “to save” or salvation. Hosea is known as the “Prophet of Grace.” God directed the prophet to not only speak God’s heart to them, but to demonstrate and live it out as well. Are you still thinking you would like to be like the Old Testament prophets? Well, we’re not done yet, because it gets even more difficult.

Have you ever struggled with your name? My middle name is Calvin. I always hated it. I would never tell anyone my middle name until Calvin Kline became so popular. Then suddenly it was cool to be named Calvin. I wanted everyone to know that was my middle name. If you don’t like your name, wait until you hear the names that Hosea’s kids had to live with and what their names meant. Remember, the prophet not only speaks the Word, but they also demonstrate it as well.

The first child was a son they named Jezreel. It literally meant “God will sow or scatter.” When he was named, this message came to Hosea: “Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel.” It really was a promise of judgement. The second child was a girl, and her name was Lo-ruhamah, meaning “no more mercy” or “one who never knew a father’s love.” The third, another son named Lo-ammi, meaning “you are not my people.”

Can you imagine how exciting it would have been when mom or dad opened the door and called the kids to come inside? The hour of punishment has come, no more mercy, you’re not my people anymore. I would have run the other direction, and never looked back. Each of their names communicated a message to the nation. Maybe the only thing more difficult than being an Old Testament prophet was being the son or daughter of the prophet.

At some point, Gomer decides she's had enough. Being a prophet's wife was not for her. As degrading and risky as her old life was, it kept drawing her back. She decided she wanted out of the marriage and went back to prostitution. I can't imagine the pain that Hosea must have felt: hurt, rejection, anger, shame, humiliation. What does he tell his kids? What does he tell people? He put everything on the line to marry her in the first place, and she still chose to go back.

In the middle of all these emotions, God instructs him not to write her off or reject her, even though she has rejected him. Instead, God tells Hosea to buy her back. How do you do that? She has made it clear that she doesn't want him. He has every reason to get the marriage over with and move on with his life. Too much has happened to ever think you could work it out. It's over!

How could God expect him to buy her back? It's completely unreasonable. What she's done would seem unforgivable. God then reminded Hosea of what Israel had done to him. He felt everything that Hosea had felt but He couldn't let Israel go! They were His people, the apple of His eye. There are always consequences for our actions. The names of Hosea's children clearly speak of the price Israel paid for its sin, but even then, there is always the promise of redemption. God may not always remove the consequences of our actions and choices, but He will redeem them and use them to build us into everything He created us to be.

Hosea clearly heard God's instruction, went to find Gomer, bought her back, and brought her home. It's an amazing picture of God's heart and grace. Grace that the prophet had to live out and not just talk about. Prior to the Old Testament prophets, all Israel possessed in the form of God's will was the Law, the Tablets of Stone which contained the Ten Commandments, and the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament).

They contained the ordinances, rites, duties, and rules that would govern Israel. The prophets came on the scene to meet the need for interpreting the will of God in current situations. They brought specific revelation

to issues not covered in the Law. They became the voice of God in the nation of Israel. The prophets spoke to their generation with a current word that would often explain things and events that had recently taken place. By divine revelation, they proclaimed God's will. The Holy Spirit would come upon them.

That's a key point of understanding. Let me say it again; the Holy Spirit would come upon them. They spoke by divine revelation, gave direction, insight, and vision. Repeatedly, you would hear them say "Thus saith The Lord" because they were speaking for God. That will become an important distinction between Old and New Testament prophets as well as prophetic ministry. The prophets were often called "seers" because they saw what others could not see. They saw spiritually, in their mind's eye as well as through visions and dreams. Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, "*Come, let us go to the seer.*" *1 Samuel 9:9*

"Man of God" was the most common term applied to prophets and key spiritual leaders. It was a term of great respect, and it's repeated throughout the Old Testament. They were also called "servants". "*Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets*" *Amos 3:7*

They were also simply called prophets. The Hebrew word Nabi is the most common word used for prophet and comes from the root meaning, "to bubble forth as from a fountain." The Holy Spirit would come upon the prophet, and they would "bubble forth" and speak for God. The message of the Old Testament prophet was not primarily judgment or prediction, though it is often characterized that way. While their message could certainly contain a warning of impending judgment or a prediction of things to come, the primary focus was God's heart for Israel and His answer to human need.

*Four themes that became the focus of
Old Testament prophets.*

1 THEY SPOKE TO AND INTERPRETED THE TIMES

A.W. Tozer wrote: “Scholars can interpret the past; it takes prophets to interpret the present.” The Old Testament Prophets spoke for God. They were His mouthpiece. The Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they would interpret the things happening around them, speaking into current issues and situations. They gave divine insight and wisdom as to what should be done. Old Testament prophets spoke into what was happening, why it was happening, how to best respond, and God’s promise to us.

A great example is a verse that many are familiar with, Jeremiah 29:11. *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* While we may be familiar with the verse, most are not aware of the background.

Because of Israel’s continuous sin, God allowed the Assyrians to overpower them and take them captive. The first wave of captives had been taken to Babylon. They were certain that God would not allow them to remain captives for long. Many thought it would be a short stay.

There were prophets who were basically advising them not to even unpack because the stay would be so short. God would certainly not allow His people to be held captive and suffer under such a wicked, brutal, and ungodly people. The prophet Jeremiah wrote Israeli captives a letter with a message from God that they didn’t want to hear. Have you ever had one of those? In the letter, Jeremiah prophesied that it would not be a short stay at all. In fact, it would be 70 years.

Even more unthinkable, God was involved in their being taken captive and brought to Babylon. That was a shocker! How could God do that?

Why would He allow this to happen? It gets even more interesting when the message instructs them to settle in, build houses, plant gardens, and have children. They were to love the city and pray for it because their welfare was connected to the welfare of Babylon! Really? How could God really say that? Love the city and pray for its welfare. That had to be more than the Israelites could handle. It would be easier to understand them praying for judgment or calling fire from heaven, but they were instructed to love and pray for blessings!

Then comes the promise. God had a plan, a plan to bless and prosper His people. Deliverance would come. They would go home! That was God's promise to them. You can count on it! The prophet interpreted these troubling times, brought understanding to the crisis, and hope for the future!

2 THEY CALLED THE NATION OF ISRAEL TO GENUINE REPENTANCE

Israel's history is actually a great picture of human nature. They would live in close relationship with God and experience blessing, peace, and prosperity. Over time, they would begin to spiritually cool off, go their own way, lose connection with God, and turn to idolatry. God would then raise up a prophet to speak to them, calling them back to a relationship with Himself and warning them of the consequences of continuing in the wrong direction. It was a call to genuine repentance.

We don't hear a lot about repentance these days. When we do, it always seems so negative. It's really an incredibly positive word. Repentance is recognizing when we're heading in the wrong direction, realizing when we are not going where we want to go or doing things that we don't truly want to do. With God's help, we turn around and go another direction. It really is God offering a way out of our mess! Repentance is acknowledging that the way we are going is not working, and God's response that if we turn around, He will show us the way out.

Repentance makes starting over possible. It is incredibly positive! Why are we so afraid of it? There is something in our humanity that doesn't want to admit we're wrong. We stubbornly hold on to our way even when it's clearly not working, and everything is crumbling around us. Historically, Israel went through this cycle repeatedly. At its lowest moments, God would raise up a prophetic voice to call them back to connection with Him. He would remind them of His incredible love and commitment to them and the promise of restoration and blessing. The prophet would also warn them of the consequences of continuing in the wrong direction.

A key role of the prophet was to call for individual and national repentance. When Old Testament prophets foretold the future, their prophecies often came with a rebuke and a call to repent. The troubles coming Israel's way were often troubles of their own making. Does that sound familiar? It was the prophet's job to name sin (2 Samuel 12:1-15) and call the people to repent (2 Chronicles 24:19).

3 THEY SPOKE OUT AGAINST SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND INJUSTICE

"Speak up for the people who have no voice, for the rights of all the down-and-outers. Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute!"
Proverbs 31:8-9 MSG

Repeatedly, the focus of the Old Testament prophet was social and justice issues; the poor, the widows, the orphans, the marginalized, the foreigner, repressive laws, and actions. The prophets were constantly reminding Israel of God's heart. Listen to the prophet Isaiah as he delivers a prophetic warning to Israel:

"Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless." Isaiah 10:1-2

At another point, Isaiah boldly confronts religious leaders who were more concerned about religious piety than demonstrating the heart of God. *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”* Isaiah 58:6-7

Time and time again, the prophets of the Old Testament defended the poor and powerless. Repeatedly, they spoke about social justice, fairness, hunger, poverty, oppression, homelessness, the stranger in the land, the treatment of widows, orphans, the helpless, the least, last, and the lost. They confronted kings, rulers, religious leaders, and challenged them to hear and respond to the heart of God.

The prophet Amos has been called “the prophet for all ages” because of his bold proclamations concerning the poor and oppressed. His anointed words have echoed down through history, touching every generation. *“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”* Amos 5:24 *ESV*

4 THEY PROCLAIMED GOD’S ANSWER TO MAN’S NEED FOR SALVATION

Perhaps the most common theme of the Old Testament prophet was God’s heart for His creation and man’s need for relationship with Him. God had a dream for His creation. Mankind, who was created in His image, would not only share rulership and responsibility in governing the earth but would also share His heart.

The devastation of man’s sin is so great that it cannot be easily fixed or cleaned up. The destruction at the core of man’s being—his identity—is so deep and thorough, only an act of the sovereign creator’s grace and mercy could bring restoration. Because of God’s determination to restore

His original destiny for mankind, He initiated His plan of redemption, even before man left the garden. (See Genesis 3:15, 21)

Throughout the Old Testament, the Father continued to unfold His redemptive plan: first, in relationship to a man (Abraham), then to a family (the sons of Israel), and finally to an entire nation (Israel). The Law was given to bring man face to face with his inability to achieve righteousness apart from God. Through the prophets, He pointed to the Messiah, God's ultimate promise and provision.

Repeatedly, the prophets spoke of man's need for redemption and God's answer to that need, Jesus, the coming Messiah! None more clearly and frequently than Isaiah, who wrote about the coming of Jesus; *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."* Isaiah 9:6 KJV

After His death and resurrection, Jesus was walking on the road with two of His disciples toward the little village of Emmaus. The disciples, unaware that they were walking with Jesus, were overwhelmed and confused by all that was happening around them. Jesus reminds them of the prophet's predictions about Him. "How foolish you are, how slow you are to believe everything the prophets said! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?" Jesus then explained to them what was said about himself in all the scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets. They said to each other; *"Wasn't it like a fire burning in us when He talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"* (Luke 24:25–32).

The prophets repeatedly spoke of man's need for redemption and God's provision to meet that need. They spoke of God's heart to restore broken humanity into all that we were created to be. The Old Testament prophets consistently reminded Israel of God's heart for them, and His original intention was that through them, the entire world would be blessed. Those four themes were the primary focus of the Old Testament prophets.

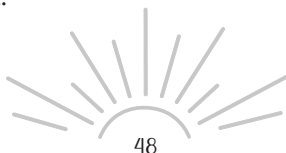
In the Old Testament, prophecy primarily functioned through recognized prophets, but that was not always the case. Here are some examples: Abraham is called a prophet in Genesis 20:7, Aaron in Exodus 7:1, as well as his sister Miriam, who is called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20, and Deborah, who likewise was called a prophetess in Judges 4:4.

In Numbers 11:25, the 70 elders appointed by Moses prophesied, *“Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again”*. Saul is said to have prophesied in I Samuel 10:5-6 and again in I Samuel 19:20-24. The Old Testament speaks of others who did not hold the office of prophet and were not recognized as such, but God spoke through them prophetically on at least one occasion.

Let me quickly summarize the clear distinctions of the prophetic voice in the Old Testament. First, God used the prophetic word and the office of the prophet to communicate His will, direction, and correction to Israel. Prophecy was the voice of God and was often prefaced with “thus saith the Lord.” Second, because of the critical role prophecy held in directing Israel and God’s people, there was no room for human imperfection. The prophetic word had to be one hundred percent accurate and true. False prophets were not tolerated.

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet that speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.” You may say to yourselves, “How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?” If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed. Deuteronomy 18:20-22

With all of that in mind, do you still want to be like an Old Testament prophet?





THE DAY EVERYTHING CHANGED

New Testament prophecy

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. Acts 2:17-18.

Those words from Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost is a direct quote from the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28), who lived about 400 years before Christ (there is some discrepancy in exact dates) and was the second of Israel’s twelve minor prophets. He was speaking prophetically of what was taking place on the Day of Pentecost and centuries to follow. Everything changed at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given, and the church was birthed.

Prophetic ministry and the office of prophet remain, but with an entirely different purpose and function. God’s Word and the inner voice of the Holy Spirit are the primary ways God speaks to and guides the believer. Prophecy is now a spiritual gift given for the purpose of building up, strengthening, encouraging, and comforting. It confirms what the Holy Spirit is speaking.

In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophetic voice making His will known, giving direction and correction. The prophetic voice became the voice of God as the Holy Spirit came “upon” them, they received (was given and accepted) revelation. The words “thus saith the Lord” are used 430 times in the Old Testament because the prophet was speaking a direct message from God and accountable only to God.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit lives in the believer and flows out from within; it's no longer the Spirit coming upon the speaker to deliver a specific message from God; it's the Spirit now flowing out from within. Revelation was perceived (understood or interpreted), that's a significant change. "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this, he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

"Up to that time, the Spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified." John 7:39. New Testament Prophecy, though diverse in its function is primarily speaking God's heart, mind, and purpose by the inspiration of the Spirit, it's the indwelling Holy Spirit bringing revelation, understanding, and insight into what's happening and why. Its primary purpose is to build up, encourage, comfort, and communicate God's heart.

It is far more relational, clarifying, challenging, confirming, and healing than it is predicative, directive, or corrective. New Testament prophecy more clearly reflects the heart of the father and the spirit of the new covenant. That's an extremely important statement, let me say it again, New Testament prophecy more clearly reflects the heart of the Father and the Spirit of the new covenant.

Jesus came not only to redeem and restore broken humanity. He came to fulfill the purpose of the law and prophets. *"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose."* Matthew 5:17 NLT
With that purpose accomplished, Jesus instituted a new covenant of grace, mercy, and hope. New Testament prophecy reflects that new covenant.

While New Testament Prophecy remains a powerful tool of the Spirit it does not carry the same level of spiritual authority that Old Testament prophecy did. Because it's perceived revelation, understood and interpreted, it's not like the Old Testament "thus saith the Lord" and leaves room for human imperfection. "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part," the New Living Translation puts it this way. *"Now our*

knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture!” 1 Corinthians 13:9

In the New Testament, there are three distinct lists of spiritual gifts. The list in Romans 12:6-8, often referred to as the gifts of the Father, creational or motivational gifts. It's what motivates you, the way you're wired. They often seem to be natural strengths and abilities. Then in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 the gifts of the Holy Spirit, supernatural abilities, inspired by the indwelling Holy Spirit to meet human need.

In Ephesians 4:11-13 the gifts given by Jesus to His church. *“So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers. To equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”*. These leadership gifts, or as they're often called office's ministries, were given by Jesus himself for the purpose of equipping believers to do works of service or to do the things Jesus himself had been doing.

The Greek word translated equipping here, *katartismos*, is translated preparing in Mark 1:19, *“When He had gone a little farther, He saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets...”* after a catch, they would carefully examine the net to make sure it was not damaged in any way. If it was, they would repair the damage, then arrange it so that it was ready for the next catch.

These office or leadership gifts were given by Jesus Himself to mend or bring healing to damaged, hurting people. Those torn apart by life circumstances. To arrange, help people discover who they are, find their place, including gifting and abilities.

The New Testament Prophet is a key part of that team. The Old Testament prophet was a lone voice speaking for God as the Holy Spirit came upon them.

The New Testament Prophet is a team player with insight into what's happening and how to respond, anointed by the Holy Spirit living in them to speak the heart of God for the purpose of strengthening, giving

courage, and insight into what's happening. A New Testament Prophet is not defined by how many prophetic words they give, how often they give them, or how authoritative they sound.

It's not about predictions and certainly not about passing judgment. It's about speaking the heart of God, commitment to biblical truth and investing in the development of others. The office gift of a prophet like the other office gifts, was given for *katartismos*: equipping, mending, arranging, and preparing people for works of service. It's not about a position, an office, a platform to be seen and heard, it's about giving yourself away in acts of service and preparing others to do the same.

There are three Greek words Paul uses to describe the function of New Testament prophecy.

But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort. 1 Corinthians 14:3

The first is ***oikodome***, which means to edify, build up, and strengthen. It carries the idea of erecting a building. It's actually two words: to build and house. Edification builds and strengthens people spiritually into maturity.

The second word he uses refers to exhortation, ***paraklesis***. The meaning is "to come alongside" and ***kaleo*** meaning "to call". The word means to come near and comfort or call to, as in a summons to move ahead in a direction.

Finally, Paul added the word ***paramuthia***, which means to persuade or console, to help people understand what God is doing. Then, down in verse 31, he includes the element of instruction as one of the purposes. *"For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged."*

New Testament Prophecy is speaking under the inspiration of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit. Its purpose is strengthening, building up, encouraging, or inspiring courage to move ahead, to help us understand

what God is doing. While there can be an element of instructions involved, it's intended to confirm, not direct. The main source of direction is the Word of God, and the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Maybe this will help clarify. Just as the prophetic voice in the Old Testament was primarily given to Israel and clearly reflects the Spirit and purpose of the Old Covenant, to reveal God's holiness, the depth of man's sin, man's need of redemption, and the coming of Jesus the Redeemer. The New Testament prophetic voice clearly reflects the spirit of the New Covenant, Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promised redemption, restoration, forgiveness, and healing.

A covenant filled with hope, marked by love and grace that is available to everyone. There's a clear distinction in purpose, tone, and function. In many cases, including mine, the prophetic word came as an intervention. Earlier, I told you the story of my bible college experience. I was desperate, ready to run to where I don't know I just wanted out of there. I had no idea what I would do with my life, no next steps in mind.

I knew I could not go on feeling like I did! I had an appointment set with the dean to tell him I was checking out. I don't know why I didn't just walk out, after all its college what could they do if I just left. Whether it was just the force of habit, the Holy Spirit, or both I'm not sure, but I decided to go to my next class while waiting for the appointment time.

They almost always begin that class with a short worship time, maybe a song or two, and then lecture. When we begin singing, I quickly put on my holy, everything's fine worship mask, and believe me, I was really good at putting on masks: I could cover almost anything. Towards the end of the song, I decided I was done with this; I would never do this again.

I dropped my hands, stopped singing, and closed my eyes as tight as I could. When the song ended, and everything went quiet, I thought everyone was staring at me, they saw me drop my hands and my mask, of course, no one was staring at me, that was all in my mind. Suddenly, one

of the students spoke what I would call a prophetic word to the class that was life-changing for me.

They knew absolutely nothing about me or what I was thinking, or that in less than an hour, I was out of there. “You can leave here today as you plan, and I’ll go with you and bless you because I love you! If you stay, I’ll set you free from all the lock up and use your life to touch many others, but you can leave as you plan to, I’ll go with you and bless you because I love you!

A prophetic word, the obedience of one student to speak out what the Holy Spirit had put in his heart and mind turned my world upside down. Maybe even saved my life. That’s the power of the prophetic word spoken at the right time. It was a divine intervention That’s one example of New Testament Prophecy!

That was the day my life began to turn around; those were the exact words I desperately needed to hear! Words that begin a healing process. In so in many ways, I’m the product of a New Testament prophetic word, and the obedience of a young man stepping out by faith and give it.





SAFE PLACES

the Denver story

I had just arrived at the Denver International Airport and because of the thunderstorms in the area, my flight from Los Angeles had been a little rough, especially over the Rocky Mountains and landing in Denver. Honestly, it was a little scary. Now safely on the ground, I was headed for a connecting flight to Durango. I wasn't looking forward to going back up, especially because the plane I would be on flying on to Durango was much smaller. I've never liked flying on small planes, especially when there are storms around.

When I got to my gate, they had already begun boarding the plane. I got on board just in time for them to announce that, because of the weather conditions around the airport, they needed us to deplane and wait in the terminal for clearance to board again. After about ten or fifteen minutes, we were allowed to board again, only to be taken off the plane for the second time. In the process, I had noticed a young man standing off to the side a little. As I looked at him, I felt what I had come to recognize as the nudging of the Holy Spirit deep inside. "I want you to go talk to him, he needs encouragement, and I have something I want you to tell him." That was the last thing I wanted to hear. What do I do with that? Do I just walk up to him and say, "Jesus just told me to tell you." I'm sure that would go over big! He'll think I'm crazy, and before I say another word, he'll be gone. Not a good idea, Lord, trust me! But He didn't let up, and He wasn't taking no for an answer!

The more I tried to talk my way out of it, the stronger the impression came. I discovered a long time ago that when the Holy Spirit wants you

to do something, He's not so easy to ignore, He's very persistent. So, I decided to try and work out a deal, you know what I mean, you've most likely done the same thing at least a few times. "God, if you do this, then I'll do that" or "God, if you set it up for me, then I'll follow through." Actually, it would be so much easier if he would just walk up to me and say, "Did God tell you to tell me something?" Then I could say, in fact, He did and give him the message. Of course, I realized that wasn't going to happen. My experience is that the Holy Spirit always requires steps of faith and obedience, and that can be a little scary at times.

The next best thing would be if you really want me to talk to him, have him come up to me and start a conversation. If that happens, I'll go for it. That seemed like a fair deal. Two minutes later, he was standing in line right in front of me, waiting to get back on the plane, and would you believe he started a conversation, really about nothing, but it was exactly what I asked for, it was an open door, now what do I do? I still didn't want to do it. So, I briefly responded to him and let it go at that. Then comes that little voice inside, "you didn't do what you said you would", feeling really disappointed in myself, of course I try to do another bargain, if we come face to face again, I will find a way to start a conversation and follow through this time.

Within minutes after boarding the plane he walks down the aisle looking right at me but of course this is not a good time or place, you can't have a conversation with someone walking up and down the aisle on an airplane, everyone can hear what is being said, what if he responds negatively the entire plane full of people will know it. So, we come face to face again, and I just let him pass. That's twice now I have had the opportunity but didn't take it. I'm amazed at the persistence of the Holy Spirit I'm also in awe of His grace and patience. He knew my struggle in taking the step of obedience I needed to take, and He kept nudging until I took it. After all that would you believe I did the bargain thing again, and would you believe He let me get by with it? If he comes up to me again and begins a conversation, I'll go for it.

This time I was committed to following through, but I have to admit that when I didn't see him again getting off the plane, I was more than a

little relieved. When I got to baggage claim, there were only a few people waiting, and he wasn't one of them. At this point, my emotions were really mixed. I was genuinely relieved that he was nowhere to be seen. But I also knew I had missed an opportunity to speak God's heart into someone's life. I knew the Holy Spirit would find another way. He loved this young man too much to allow my lack of obedience to harm him.

There was no feeling of condemnation; I wasn't afraid of the wrath of God. I was disappointed in myself. Obedience is always a choice, regardless of how many years you have been walking with Jesus. I should have responded much sooner than I did. In reality, it wasn't rebellious disobedience, you know the attitude that says, I'm not going to do it and that's all there is to it! It was motivated by fear and maybe a little bit of pride. I don't know him or anything about him. This is strange, he'll think I'm crazy!

Regardless of the reasons, it's still disobedience! I'm not sure if I closed my eyes for a minute or if I just lost focus, but suddenly, there he was again, standing right next to me, asking me something about the luggage. I didn't need the Holy Spirit to nudge me again; I knew exactly what I needed to do, and I didn't want to miss the opportunity again. I still wasn't sure how to begin. What do I say? I had no idea how he would respond but it was obvious that God was up to something, and I needed to follow through. I didn't want this to be spiritually wired, I knew that would most likely scare him off, and he would not hear another word I said. I knew nothing about his spiritual background; in fact, I knew nothing about him.

I wanted it to be as natural as possible, conversational, and real. I didn't want it to sound arrogant or superior; I didn't want him to feel like I was looking right through him. I hear people say things like "you read my mail" I understand what that means and realize for the most part it's an affirmation like you nailed it you got it right but for some it's more like an invasion stripping away sense of privacy, they feel exposed and way to vulnerable so they build higher walls to protect themselves. Remember, the goal is not showing off my spiritual gift, because it's not my gift, it's theirs.

The goal is for them to receive it, to hear God's heart for them, and allow the Holy Spirit to do His work. After responding to his statement about the luggage, I said, "We seem to keep bumping into each other from Denver to Durango." I then introduced myself, and he did the same. Then he asked me if I lived in Durango and told me that he grew up there but had not been back in several years. That started the conversation and opened the door. He asked me why I was in Durango, and I told him that I was a pastor and was there to speak at a church the following day.

At some point, I said something like, "This may seem really strange to you, it does to me too. When I first saw you at the airport in Denver, I felt that I should pray for you, so I have been" I could tell he wasn't expecting that! Believe me his eyes were wide open now and I clearly had his attention. Then I repeated myself, "This may seem really strange to you, I know it does to me! But as I prayed, I kept feeling that as a result of some choices you made, you were alienated from your family and have been for a long time. You've gone from one relationship to another but have never found fulfillment."

At that point he looked straight at me and asked, "Who are you? what is this? Are you clairvoyant?" After I assured him, I wasn't clairvoyant, I reminded him that from the time I saw him back at the Denver airport, I had been impressed to pray for him, as I prayed, this is what kept coming to me. For a minute, he just stared at me as if he didn't know what to say. He told me that his family was Christian. When he was in his mid-teens, he began to rebel against it all, and by the time he completed High School he completely walked away from God and his family.

He went on to tell me that for the last several years, he was completely alienated from them; he had tried just about everything, but nothing filled the emptiness: drugs, alcohol, and sexual relationships, he did it all, but nothing satisfied him. You can imagine how relieved I was to hear that, I wasn't completely off the wall. What I had said to him was so specific that I was either right or wrong; there was no middle ground. He went on to tell me that several months before, he had an unexpected encounter with God that turned everything around.

Over the last several months, his relationship with his family had been restored, but this would be the first time he would actually see them face to face in several years. Before I could say another word, he asked the questions again, “Who are you? I don’t understand. What is this? How did you know those things?” I repeated what I had said earlier, “when I saw you in Denver, I felt I should pray for you, and when I prayed, those were the things I was impressed to pray about.” I didn’t try to explain the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or word of knowledge, or what a prophetic word was. That wasn’t the point. The point was Jesus loved him, understood where he had been, and wanted to express His love in a deep personal way. There’s something about that kind of encounter that makes it all so personal and life-transforming. There is a time for explanation, but that wasn’t it. Explaining in too much detail would have only taken the focus off God’s love for him and put it on the gift or the one delivering it. I wanted him to see how important he was to God. Instead, I ask him another question. A question I know the Holy Spirit put in my mind to ask: “Have you ever thought that someday you might be a pastor?”

“I know that sounds crazy, and it probably is the last thing you would ever want, but I felt like I should ask the question.” He told me that just recently he had been asked if he would consider joining a study group at his church to become a lay pastor. He hadn’t given them an answer yet, but felt he was to seriously consider it. After that evening at the Durango airport, I think I know what his answer was!

I’ve asked myself several times how I would have responded if he had said I have no idea what you’re talking about; those things never happened! I hope I would have been open and honest enough to say something like, “Remember I warned you that what I was about to say could sound strange, and if it did, forget it and simply say to yourself, the guys a little kookie, and I probably would agree with you! Don’t insist you’re right, try to force it, or defend yourself, let the Holy Spirit do His work. It’s important for them to receive and process it, for some, that takes time.

Also, keep in mind your human and humans make mistakes *“for we know in part and we prophesy in part” 1 Corinthians 13:9* that seems to

indicate New Testament prophecy leaves room for human imperfection “we know in part and prophesy in part” we might not have the full picture or understanding. In the Old Testament prophecy, was the voice of God speaking through the one giving the word. Most often, one is chosen by God as a prophet. There was no room for mistakes because they were speaking for God.

New Testament prophecy is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, while insightful and powerful, there is a significant difference between the two. Like many of you, I grew up believing that spiritual gifts only function within the walls of the church, and even then, you had to be very careful with them. They functioned best in what we called “believer’s meetings” or small group bible studies and prayer gatherings. The thought of spiritual gifts functioning outside of a church setting was almost unheard of. Spiritual gifts only function in a spiritual setting, right?

If we look at the ministry of Jesus, we will quickly discover that the opposite was true. Most of His ministry was in the marketplace, where people worked, shopped, laughed, debated, and discussed. It was where adults connected, and children played. The marketplace was the community center where everyday life happened. He often taught in their synagogues, but it was in the common places where life was lived that Jesus opened blind eyes, deaf ears were unstopped, and the crippled walked again.

A wedding feast was the setting where Jesus chose to work His first miracle, not in a local Synagogue or even the Temple. Out of the 132 times the gospels record Jesus connecting with people, all but ten of them took place where everyday life happened. The story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:1-42 is one of the most amazing stories in the New Testament for several reasons. Traveling eighty-five miles from Judea to Galilee with his disciples, Jesus stops at a well just outside the Samaritan city of Sychar. The men were hot, thirsty, and hungry.

Jesus sat down by the well to rest while the disciples went into the city to buy food. It was in the afternoon when the sun was hot and strong that the Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well. Most often, the women would come in the cool of the early morning and again in the evening as the sun went down. They would not only draw water from the well but strength and life from each other. It became a social center, a place to connect with other women.

For a woman to come alone in the heat of the day when you expected no one to be around was a pretty strong indication that she was not wanted, she didn't fit in, and she was a social outcast. The last thing she would have expected was to see a Jewish man sitting by the well. The Samaritans and Jews shared a common ancestry. Each side claimed to be the true descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Each side claimed to worship God in the only acceptable way, at the proper place, with the only acceptable sacrifices and rituals.

The animosity between them was so strong that at one time or another, they became offensive or even violent in expressing these differences. One Passover (around 400 B.C.), the Samaritans polluted the temple by scattering parts of dead animal bodies all over the temple grounds in Jerusalem. Sometime later, the Jews attacked and destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. The rivalry was bitter and sometimes deadly. For a Jew, there was little worse, in their view, than a Samaritan.

I can't imagine what she must have thought when Jesus asked her for a drink of water. In reality, He was opening the door for a conversation, but Jews didn't talk to Samaritans, a Jewish man would never invite a conversation with a Samaritan woman, it simply wouldn't happen. In most cases, a Jewish man would actually cross the street to avoid contact with a Samaritan woman. That's how deep the hatred goes! Here is another problem. Her water jug wasn't ceremonially clean, according to Jewish laws.

When he drank from it, he would have made himself unclean. The food brought back by the disciples most likely wasn't kosher either.

“Good” Jews wouldn’t touch anything belonging to a Samaritan, they wouldn’t dream of eating in their homes or sleeping under their roofs! Jesus and his disciples stayed here for two whole days, which “meant eating Samaritan food and possibly staying in Samaritan dwellings and communicating with them, all of which would be offensive to most Jews”.

When you read the gospels, it seems like Jesus was always connecting with the unacceptable; it actually seems like He sought them out. He wanted to be with them. After a short conversation about water of all things, did you notice how Jesus begins with the ordinary, something they had in common, they both needed water. Then He moves to the extraordinary, Living Water. If you drank it, you would never thirst again! Listen to what He said, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water. Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Did you also notice how He approached her? He didn’t condemn her, though that’s most likely what she expected. He established common ground, talked about something they both understood, and what He could do for her. When she asks for the living water that Jesus is talking about, He directs her to get her husband. Now, what would she do? She didn’t have a husband, but she was living with a man! Why would He ask her to get her husband? Was He wanting to embarrass her, expose and condemn her for her sin like so many others had? Was he trying to shame her? Would this be another rejection?

Her response was both evasive and truthful. “I have no husband.” Then Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.” Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.” Did you notice how Jesus broke through all the barriers, how He gently brought down

the walls that had been built around her? Before He confronted her question, he created a safe place, touched her heart, and offered hope.

There are few safe places in the world around us. Tragically, for many, the church and Christians are not seen as safe. While prophetic ministry has an incredible ability to break through spiritual strongholds, exposing the lies that have shaped and governed our lives, if you don't feel safe, you're not likely to really hear and receive what's being said and allow the Holy Spirit to bring hope and healing. If you don't feel safe prophetic ministry can be scary and something to avoid. Here are some things I've discovered about being a safe person and creating a safe environment. Remember, only a safe person can create a safe place.

Be Who You Are, Authentic And Real

Let the Holy Spirit flow through your personality. don't try to function like someone else or sound authoritative or spiritual, be who God made you to be. The Holy Spirit living in you will refine you, and teach you how to be more effective, learn from others, but don't try to do it just like they do, be you! Spiritual pretense creates an unsafe environment that limits openness and receptivity. I've discovered the more conversational I am, not preachy, not trying to be spiritually impressive, the more it flows. A key leadership principle is to know who you are, like who you are, and be who you are.

Genuine Humility

Humility means recognizing your own limitations and imperfections, it's focusing on others rather than yourself. It's about having an accurate self-perception. Humility allows you to acknowledge your mistakes and failures, to learn from others, and grow. Genuine humility creates a safe environment, allowing others to open up without shame and fear of judgment. Humility is not self-degrading or putting yourself down. It's been said that "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."

If you see the prophetic gift as yours, the focus is on you, the gifted one! In reality, it's a gift from the Holy Spirit delivered through you to the

person or group the spirit is giving it to; your responsibility is to deliver it in the best way possible. The focus is on the giver, the Holy Spirit, and the person it's being given to. That understanding will change how you function with spiritual gifts.

“...Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us.”

Romans 12:3 NLT

Treat People With Honor And Respect

People are valuable to God regardless of where they've been or what they've done. God wants to touch their life, and we have the privilege of being part of that. How we accept and respond to them will help either open their hearts for healing or strengthen the walls of protection. Notice how Jesus approached the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42. He valued her, she was important to Him, and He treated her with respect and honor. Even when He confronted her sin, He was gentle and honoring; He did not demean or put her down. It was important to Him that she feel safe with Him.

You be faithful in bringing the word with humility and grace. If they cannot or will not receive it, don't try to force it or argue for its validity. Let the Holy Spirit do the work. It's not yours to prove or make happen. A statement that has shaped much of my life and ministry philosophy comes from Dr. Maya Angelou: “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Love And Accept People Where They Are

The foundation of a safe environment is always love and acceptance. That doesn't mean we have to agree with their lifestyle or choices they've made; it does mean that we look beyond all of that and choose to love and accept them as Jesus does. In his book, *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness*, Pastor Jerry Cook writes, “When love, acceptance, and forgiveness prevail, the Church of Jesus Christ becomes what Jesus was in the world: a center of love designed for the healing of broken people

and a force for God.” Love and acceptance create a safe environment where people’s masks come off, walls come down, hearts soften, and they are ready for the touch of the Holy Spirit. The prophetic word is most effective in that environment. Here’s another statement from Jerry’s book: “If you come around here, we’re going to love you. No matter who you are or what you’ve done or how you look, smell, or behave, we’re going to love you.”

Build and maintain trust

People will never feel safe until they can trust that their story is safe with you; it will not be shared with others without permission. It’s also important to remember when the Holy Spirit reveals something to you about what’s going on in someone’s life situation. You keep it to yourself until you can share it with the person or people involved. It’s not yours to share with others. If it’s a dangerous situation, pray and seek wise counsel on how to manage it. Being trustworthy is vital to being a safe person, and only safe people can create a safe environment.

No Hidden Agendas Or Manipulation

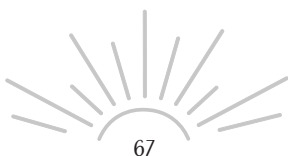
Never use the prophetic word to manipulate people or fulfill your personal agenda. Never allow the needs of people to manipulate you into saying what they want to hear. One of the most important prayers I’ve consistently prayed over the years is, “Lord never allow me to misuse the gift you’ve given, if I even get close to it, please take it away!” I know the incredible power and blessing of the prophetic word, I also know how easily it can be misused. I know the pressure that people can create out of their need. I love people and I want to help, I can share my thoughts, tell them what I think, but I never want to make them think it’s prophetic unless the Holy Spirit inspires it. Never use a pseudo-prophetic word to accomplish your purposes; that’s dangerous! Always encourage people to test the word and allow the Holy Spirit to confirm it.

Develop Accountability Relationships

Old Testament prophecy was seen as the word of the Lord. The prophet was God’s mouthpiece. The Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they spoke for God. They were accountable only to God for the word

that was given. Because of the critical role prophecy held in directing Israel, perfection was the standard. You had to be one hundred percent accurate and true. False prophets were not tolerated. The New Testament prophecy is given primarily to strengthen, encourage, and comfort, 1 Corinthians 14:3, and the prophetic voice is now accountable to the church community. *“...Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said” 1 Corinthians 14:29*

Without accountability, there is no safety. Often, prophetic people see accountability as control; they are not the same thing. Because the prophetic word is so powerful and influential. Accountability is essential. Accountability keeps it real, it strengthens and protects, control smothers and chokes. Social media has created a platform where people can say anything they feel like saying, when and how they want to say it. Prophetic ministry without relational and functional accountability can be dangerous. If I can say anything I want and call it a prophetic word, without Godly accountability, none of us are really safe.



ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

labels aren't helpful

The 1984 Summer Olympics were held in Los Angeles. It was at that time the largest Olympic gathering in history, with more than 5.79 million people attending the games, including the opening and closing ceremonies. It was a perfect opportunity for outreach and ministry. It was also an event that had the potential of bringing together church leaders who under normal circumstances would never connect. Leaders of church denominations, para-church organizations, seminary facilities as well as hundreds of local church pastors and youth leaders joined together in an informal outreach coalition.

For well over a year, we would gather regularly on the campus of USC to connect, build relationships, pray, and strategize. At each gathering, there would be several hundred leaders from all kinds of church backgrounds, some very formal, others extremely conservative Evangelicals, then there were the Charismatics, Pentecostals, Baptists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, and everything in between. It was the perfect setting to demonstrate unity, at least around a common mission and purpose.

My friend John Dawson was the chairman of the coalition and led those regular gatherings. Because of the wide spectrum of theological beliefs and our desire to maintain a spirit of unity, a great deal of wisdom and sensitivity was required. How the meetings were conducted became very important. The terminology we used was also critical. We didn't want misunderstanding to diminish the focus of our mission, and we certainly didn't want to offend and alienate. It was important to be sensitive to the

Holy Spirit and clearly communicate His heart, and at the same time, sensitive to the situation.

The Holy Spirit wanted to strengthen, encourage, and give insight to us as we strategized how to best fulfill our mission. We were also aware that only the Holy Spirit could bring genuine unity to such a diverse group of leaders. John had expressed that he wanted me and several others to be free to speak prophetically, but that we had to be very careful how we did it and the terminology we used. If we labeled it prophetic, we risk alienating a huge group of leaders. In other words, I guess you could say, we need the prophetic word, but we couldn't let them know or even think it was prophetic! The challenge is how do we do that without compromising what we believe the Holy Spirit is saying?

After struggling with it for a while and honestly questioning if it was even possible, I remembered my experience as a youth pastor at Central Lutheran Church in Van Nuys California. A significant part of the congregation, especially the High School, College, and Young Adult groups, were experiencing an amazing touch of the Holy Spirit, including the use of spiritual gifts. Because this was all so new to them, they wanted someone who understood the work of the Holy Spirit to come and help them.

I was pastoring a little church near Pasadena when a friend from Central Lutheran asked if I would consider leading a Young Adult Bible Study with an emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit on Friday nights. At first, it was only intended to be a weekly Bible study and worship time, but as my heart connected with these young men and women, it became obvious that God had another plan. They were hungry for Jesus and eager to learn more about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As the Friday night Bible study continued to grow, and I became more involved in the ministry of the church, they asked if I would consider becoming the youth pastor. By that time, my heart was already committed to these young women and men. God had already prepared my heart for the invitation, so the answer was a quick and easy yes!

During the time I was at Central as Youth Pastor, I would often assist the pastor in serving communion around the altar. I would listen carefully as he briefly prayed for each one. It was never just a simple “God bless you” kind of prayer. He prayed with amazing insight, prayers that seemed to go right to their hearts. Later, I would hear many of them say things like, he always seems to know what’s happening in my life and how to pray for me. His prayers were often very specific; at times it seemed like Jesus was speaking right into their lives with deep understanding and often answered to what they were asking without the pastor even knowing what was going on in them.

Often, I would hear them ask, “How does he know about those things?” He was always gentle but spoke powerfully with great insight. As I listened, I would often say to myself, “What he’s praying sounds almost prophetic.” It was like the Holy Spirit speaking into people’s lives with words of encouragement, strength, and comfort. Words that brought healing, gave courage, understanding, freedom, and life transformation. I remember asking him if he thought that what he was praying could possibly be prophetic. Without hesitation, he responded that that was exactly what he had asked the Holy Spirit to do. My next question was, of course, why not tell them? After all, wouldn’t knowing that make the prayer even more significant and meaningful?

In many ways, his answer and my experiences watching him prepared me for those times at USC and how to speak prophetically without having to put a label on it or defend and explain what it is. He reminded me that while there were a large number of people in the congregation who understood what spiritual gifts were and many who had been filled with the Holy Spirit. There were still a large number of those that had not; they didn’t understand what it was. Some were afraid of it, others, because of past experiences or extreme things they had seen or heard, opposed it. He was pastor to all of them, not just a certain group.

They were very open to receiving the things he prayed over them but would not be as free to accept if he labeled it prophecy, word of knowledge, or anything that sounded remotely charismatic. He could speak powerful words of strength, encouragement, insight, and hope,

never putting a label on it or telling them it was prophetic, and they received it with open hearts. As my experience at Central Lutheran with Pastor Ernie Gelatin came to mind, I realized my answer for the current situation, as well as hundreds of situations to follow.

I didn't have to change the tone of my voice or work at sounding spiritual and authoritative, and above all, I didn't need to put a label on it. All I had to do was be true to what I felt the Holy Spirit was speaking and share it in an appropriate, sensitive, natural way and let the Spirit do His work. At other times, in the appropriate setting I knew people would understand if I said "I think this is prophetic" or "I have a word that I believe the Spirit has given me to share," the key is being sensitive to what the Holy Spirit wants to communicate and appropriate to the setting or people involved. I know I say this a lot, but it's so important. The goal is that it's presented in a way people can receive; it's all about receiving the gift God has for them.

Over the course of the next several months, there were several occasions the Holy Spirit inspired me to share something, and it always seemed to be well-received. There was one interesting moment that I'll never forget. It came just after I had shared a particularly strong and pointed message. I didn't label it prophetic, and I didn't try to sound spiritual or authoritative, but I also was not trying to hide it. I was trying to be appropriate to the setting and sensitive to the leaders present. I don't remember the details of the word at all. Immediately after the meeting was dismissed, three young seminarians and the president of the student body from Talbot Seminary came to ask if what I had shared in the gathering was, in my opinion, prophetic?

Talbot at that time was a very conservative evangelical School and not known for their support of anything Charismatic. Because we very much wanted their participation in the outreach, we were committed to honoring their theological position concerning the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. So, when these young seminarians asked that question, I was not only surprised but concerned about how they would respond to my answer. Their question was direct, and it required a direct answer. When I responded, I simply said "Yes, I guess you could say that!" Their response

was also very simple, the leader nodded his head and said, “That’s what I thought!” With that they thanked me and walked away!

My immediate response was, “This isn’t good. I hope we haven’t lost their involvement!” I found myself wondering if I had done the right thing. Perhaps I should have been more sensitive and careful in sharing, should I have said it differently, maybe I should not have said it at all. For the next couple of weeks, I struggled a lot with it. What could I have done differently? Was there a more sensitive way to present it? I didn’t want to alienate them and felt that most likely I had. While I was struggling, thinking I had really messed it up, I received a completely unexpected phone call from the young man who represented the group. I think he was president of the student body, or perhaps a faculty member.

I thought for sure he was calling to explain why they were dropping out of the coalition, and it all came back to that word. They could no longer participate and endorse a group of crazy charismatics. I was totally taken off guard and shocked when I discovered he was not calling to announce that they were dropping out; he was calling to ask if I would consider coming to speak at a Talbot seminary chapel service representing the Olympic outreach. I’m not certain how long it took for me to comprehend what he was asking or to give an answer; it was the last thing I was expecting.

When he introduced me at the chapel service a few weeks later, he introduced me as a co-chair of the Olympic outreach coalition and the pastor of a growing church in Northridge, a suburb of Los Angeles; he conveniently left out any denominational reference. At first, I thought that was a little cowardly, but I soon realized the wisdom of that. If he had mentioned a Foursquare Church, most of the students and faculty would have turned off right then. I got him back when I announced my text for the message Acts 1:8, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

He was sitting in the first row, looking right up at me when I gave the text. I would have given anything for a picture of his face! His eyes opened

wide, his mouth dropped, I'm sure he was thinking that I was going to take this opportunity to talk about Holy Spirit stuff! Once he realized my message focused on "you will be my witness," he smiled and relaxed.

Several years ago, I was invited to share with a group of university students. They were involved in a summer ministry project for urban youth in the San Francisco Bay Area. These students were from several different universities and diverse church backgrounds.

I came to a point in the teaching where I felt the Holy Spirit nudging me to stop teaching and pray for some of the students. That's often the time the Holy Spirit will give me insight into what's happening in people's lives, a word of encouragement, or challenge. I wasn't exactly sure how to approach it. Again, I remembered pastor Gelatin and how he simply prayed over those around the altar, letting the Holy Spirit direct how he prayed. He never used charismatic terminology; he was just praying what the Holy Spirit directed him to pray.

They understood that and received the gift. So that's what I did, and the results were amazing. They were incredibly open and receptive. Some of them began to cry as I prayed; the Holy Spirit had touched them deeply. After the session several of the students came to me saying things like, I've never heard anyone pray like that, your prayer really touched me, you prayed about the stuff I'm struggling with, what you prayed really answered some questions for me. Several asked if I had time to talk and go a little deeper. Would that have happened if I had tagged it prophetic, or would it have caused confusion? The important thing was that they received the gift the Holy Spirit had for them.

BEING APPROPRIATE TO THE SITUATION

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Proverbs 25:11

The English word "appropriate" simply means suitable or proper in the circumstances. Fitting and relevant are also words that can help us understand what it means to be appropriate.

Shortly before Jesus was betrayed by Judas, knowing that the time had come for him to go to the Father. He wanted to wash His disciple's feet to honor them and encourage them to serve one another. Notice the importance of being appropriate to the situation.

"So, He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him." John 13: 4-5

He wanted to wash their feet, so He used what was appropriate to the situation, a basin. He didn't get a bathtub; He wanted to wash their feet, not give them a bath. He didn't bring a fire hose (if they even had a fire hose at that time) to blow them away, and He didn't just bring a washcloth; He brought the appropriate tool, a basin, for washing feet.

Sensitivity To What The Holy Spirit Is Speaking

He knows how to reach people's hearts in a way they can best receive.

Listen And Watch Before Speaking

Who are the people you're speaking to? Do you know anything about them? Because the Holy Spirit is opening something up to you does not mean you have to give it out right then.

Ask Questions

When I've been uncertain about the appropriate way to share what I feel the Holy Spirit has put in my heart I will often say, "I feel something stirring inside me and I'm wondering if I should share it?" Would that be appropriate, and if so, what would be the best way to do it?

Speak With Confident Humility

Remember you're delivering a gift to them. The focus is on the giver, the Holy Spirit, and the one receiving the gift, not on the one delivering it. Speak with confidence as the Holy Spirit prompts you, but do it with genuine humility and sensitivity to people's needs and understanding.

Submission To Protocol And Leadership

Every church, every group has a way of doing things. You may not always agree with it, and it may not be what you're used to, but it's how they function, and it works for them. If you want the gift to be received, be sensitive to how they can best receive it.

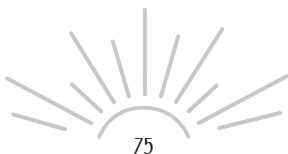
Openness To Do Things Differently

I grew up knowing exactly how a prophetic word should be given. The one delivering the word would most often stand up, at times even disrupting what was going on, and in a loud voice announce the prophetic word by saying "Thus saith The Lord" or simply "The Lord wants you to know." Once they had everyone's attention, they would give the word. That's how it happened; everyone knew this was a Holy Spirit thing! If you didn't it was a little startling and strange. Over the years, I've discovered there are many different ways to deliver the gift in a less startling and more appropriate way. Be open to doing things differently. The goal is for them to receive the gift.

No Need To Label It As A Prophetic Word

What makes it prophetic is the supernatural touch of the Holy Spirit. For many people, the term "prophetic" can be confusing and even scary. Remember my experience with the Lutheran pastor, he often spoke prophetically as he prayed, without saying or labeling it prophetic. People were open to receive because the prayers were right on the mark, and the Holy Spirit did his work. I would never be ashamed or afraid to call the word prophetic, but I don't always need to, and in some cases, putting a label on it is problematic and can defeat the purpose.

You must be tired of hearing me say it, but it's so important to me that you get it. So let me say it again. It's all about people receiving the gift the Holy Spirit has asked us to deliver to them. It's not about the one delivering it. How it's packaged and presented makes a huge difference. Being appropriate to the setting and sensitive to where people are in their understanding can make a huge difference in how it's received or if it's received.



THE MAN JESUS TALKS TO

how to be prophetic without being weird

The next question, of course, would be, is that even possible? I guess that depends on your definition of weird.

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated much of the Gulf Coast of the United States. With sustained winds of 127 miles an hour, this monster storm destroyed almost everything in sight from Louisiana to the panhandle of Florida. As a result, more than one million people were displaced, and over 1,800 people lost their lives. The estimated financial impact was also a staggering 125 billion dollars, making it one of the worst natural disasters in US history.

A significant part of the city of New Orleans was under water, with thousands left homeless, escaping only with the clothes on their backs. For several days, the New Orleans Super Dome and convention center became a living hell for thousands of evacuees, adding another level of tragedy to an already horrific experience. At its peak, over 275,000 people were housed in emergency shelters. Because of the huge number of displaced people and the lack of adequate shelter facilities, thousands of Evacuees were bused to neighboring cities.

The Astrodome and Reliant Center at the Reliant Park complex in Houston, Texas were one of those places housing over 25,000 evacuees. I had been asked by Hope Force International, a recently formed disaster relief organization, if I would go to Houston as a pastor and spiritual caregiver. At that point, it was a little uncertain how that would look, but the need was massive. People were scared, disoriented, and confused.

Most of them had lost everything, including family members. Hope Force was still in its infancy, my friends Jack and Cherie Minton, after almost twenty years working with Mercy Ships, began to hear the heart of God for people affected by disaster. Earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, fires, as well as manmade disasters like terrorist attacks, and mass shootings.

I am not sure that we realized when Hope Force was conceived how prophetic the vision really was. I remember the question that was repeated over and over when Jack and Cherie shared their dream for the church to be among the very first to respond to disaster situations and their desire to create a pathway and training for that to happen. What will you do between disasters? Sit around and wait for the next one? Honestly, sitting around and waiting has not been a problem.

Within a short time of our inaugural board meeting, the rate of natural disasters began to rapidly accelerate and has continued to do so. Let me explain what I mean when I say the vision of Hope Force is prophetic. The Minton's heard the heart of God for suffering distressed people, who had experienced trauma and loss. God gave them an action plan, what to do, how to serve, how to extend His love and grace at the point of their need. They communicated His heart. They responded to His call and invited others to respond. That's prophetic!

Our responsibility as spiritual caregivers were basically listening and being available when people needed help. For ten or twelve hours each day, we would walk through the crowded aisles, pausing to listen to one horrific story after another. People were waiting to hear from family and friends they had lost contact with during the storm and the days that followed. There were long lines of people everywhere, some waiting to fill out required government paperwork to request housing. They knew that they had nothing left in New Orleans but memories to go back to. There were lines of people waiting for medical attention, to use the toilet, to take a much-needed shower, and get clean clothes.

In the center of the building, there was a fenced-off secured area for young children who had been separated from their parents, some only

four or five years old. In the early part of the week, you could see the confusion and fear on their little faces. Would they ever find mom and dad again? Would they ever go home? By the end of the week, they had all been reunited with their families. The fenced-off area in the middle was empty! It had successfully served its purpose, keeping the children safe, and was no longer needed!

In Hope Force training, we often talk about the ministry of presence, just being there and available to people who have experienced tragedy and loss. You don't have to know all the answers, in fact, this is not the time for answers, it's the time to demonstrate the heart of God, to just be there, to love, listen and serve. That can be really difficult for a lot of us, especially leaders who tend to think we must have all the answers and be ready to give them when needed.

I will never forget the elderly woman who came to me with a handful, and I do mean a handful of government housing application forms to fill out. You could see the look of panic on her face. The application was at least eight or ten pages, very detailed, overwhelming, and intimidating. I took one look at the application and quietly prayed, "Please Jesus, don't let her ask me to help. I don't want to fill out that application!" Well, I don't think my prayer went very far because the first words out of her mouth were, "I don't know how to do these, can you please help me?" That was the last thing I wanted to do. But that's why we were there, to help them do whatever they needed us to do.

As I began to look through the application, it seemed even more daunting, and everything inside me screamed, silently of course, "I don't want to do this!" I asked her if we could pray before we started working through it. She agreed, and we prayed. I know it was a sincere prayer, and I was willing to help even if it meant doing something I didn't want to do. But I also have to admit I think I was stalling a little, hoping for divine intervention. While we were praying, I had a very strong impression that she needed to go to where the housing line would soon form.

At first, I wasn't certain if this was really a God thing or just wishful

thinking. The impression became stronger and clearer. “Tell her to go to the housing line immediately!” I wasn’t sure how to express that to her, if I say God told me, she will most likely think I’m crazy or at least weird. So, I simply said when we were praying, “I had a strong impression that you should go to the housing line right away. Even before doing the paperwork!” I could tell immediately she wasn’t going for it. They had explained the process and emphasized filling out the application first.

Without the completed application, they would not even talk about housing. I tried several times to convince her to go to the housing line right away, but she wouldn’t do it. Then I said, “This may sound a little strange, but when we were praying, I felt like Jesus told me to tell you to go to the housing line immediately. “There I said it, “Jesus told me to tell you.” The look on her face said it all; her eyes seemed to enlarge four or five times their normal size, she looked at me as if she thought I was from another world, and said, “Jesus told you!”

I tried to explain, “I know it sounds strange, but I really believe Jesus told me to tell you”. But she kept repeating “Jesus told you?” and backed away a little more. Each time she said it, she got louder and louder so that more and more people heard her, “Jesus told you!” They would look at me, and all I could do was nod my head yes as she kept backing away and getting louder! I’m sure she didn’t intend to end up in the housing line; she just wanted to get away from this strange man who thinks Jesus talks to him. However, she was heading right into the housing line when this special announcement was made. “We have just been informed that there are a few small single apartments available here in Houston, if you’re interested, come to the housing line immediately, even if you have not completed your housing application.”

Within what seemed like only a few seconds, two or three hundred people were moving toward the housing line, pushing and shoving to get to the front of the line. If this little elderly woman had not already been there when the announcement was made, she would have never been able to make it. She was the first one in line and the first to get an apartment. We later learned that there were only ten small units available, and several hundred people who wanted them. Later that day,

when she found me again with tears in her eyes and a huge smile on her face, she said, “I guess Jesus did tell you!”

A couple of days later when they were getting ready to move her into her new home our paths crossed and again with tears streaming down her cheeks and a smile on her face, she came to say goodbye and thank me. I reminded her that it wasn't about me, it was God's love for her, He wanted her to have that little apartment, He wanted to take care of her. We prayed again just before she left, and she invited Jesus to live within her. The gift was for her, and I was the one who got to deliver it. For both of us it was a surprise encounter with the incredible love of God. The reputation quickly spread at least for a few days!

As I walked the aisles between the thousands of cots, listening to one story after another and stopping to pray, I could hear someone say, “There's the man Jesus talks to.” Not a bad reputation! “The man Jesus talks to.” For many people, the idea that Jesus would actually talk to them seems strange, in fact, a little weird. Of course, I am not talking about audible voice, though I do believe that could happen. Most often, He speaks through the Holy Spirit living in us with what I would call deep impressions or an inner knowing, a nudging of the Holy Spirit.

When I was praying with the woman at the Astro Dome, there was a deep knowing that she should go immediately to the housing line that had not even formed yet. Trying to get away from this crazy pastor who thinks Jesus actually talks to him, she “accidentally” ended up at the front of what would soon be the housing line. She was the first one to get one of only ten little apartments. Who said the prophetic wasn't practical? That seems incredibly practical to me!

I would be the first to admit that there are a lot of things done in the name of prophetic ministry that seem strange, often bordering on what I would call weird. Let me define what I mean by weird. Mysteriously strange and unusual, not natural, odd, and the one I like most bizarre. To some degree, the supernatural can always seem strange or unusual. I'm talking more about strange actions and reactions, odd ways of thinking and being. I used to be far more critical of things people would do and

call it the Holy Spirit. In fact, that was the main reason I wanted nothing to do with it.

It was strange, weird, confusing, emotional, and served no-good purpose as far as I could tell. Why did people sit and tremble or shake, why the emotional outbursts or falling on the floor? It was strange. To add to that they would say it was the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit made me do it! Is that what the Holy Spirit does to people? There were times I would watch prophetic speakers, and it often seemed they were there to show off their gift. It became about them, not the giver or the one the gift was for.

As I watched over the years, I've realized what I was experiencing was not so much the Holy Spirit as it was people's reaction to the touch of the Spirit. I was watching people respond to His presence. People respond differently, and that's okay. In fact, realizing that makes all the difference in the world. People being themselves and responding to the touch of the Spirit. Some respond very emotionally, others more stoic, and everything in between, and that's a good thing! However, it's often in our different ways of responding that things get strange, or at least to our way of thinking, seem strange. Also, different culture's respond differently.

I've discovered that when it comes to the touch of God's Spirit one size doesn't fit all. I've discovered that if we open our eyes and welcome it, we will see a beautiful mosaic the Spirit is weaving. The "I couldn't help it," or "the Spirit just took over" raises a question for me. Genuine submission to the prompting or nudge of the Spirit is always required; it's a choice we make. We choose to submit to the prompting of the Spirit; He does not force us. The spirit will not just take over my mouth, I always have a choice to obey His prompting or not.

PRACTICAL STEPS THAT HELP US STAY GROUNDED

Prophecy, like all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is given as a practical tool to demonstrate the heart of The Father. God desires to meet human need, to bring healing and restoration, to set captives free in the moments of discouragement and despair, and to bring revelation

and understanding. Let me say it again, the gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy, are incredibly practical.

I remember a gift I received when I was about five or six. The way it was wrapped, and the gift wrap itself, was a little scary to me. It turned out to be a really great present, but at first, I didn't want to even touch, it let alone open it. Once I stopped crying, and my mom helped me open it I discovered how great it was, but because of the way it looked and was presented I almost refused it. I often wonder how many times people resist the prophetic word that God intended to bless and heal because the one delivering it seems a little weird, or the way it's presented put people off? Let me share some things I've discovered that can help us from going over the edge.

KEEP YOUR FOCUS & PRIORITY'S RIGHT

While prophecy is a powerful tool of the spirit it is also an imperfect ministry gift. I say imperfect because of the human element. The prophetic word is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but it is given through people like you and me with all of our imperfections. 1 Corinthians 13:9 states: *"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part."* Prophecy, like the other gifts of the Spirit, as wonderful and useful as they are, cannot become the center of our focus. Jesus and the heart of the Father must always be at the center of everything we do.

True prophecy is never about the message or the messenger; its focus is always Jesus. The gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy, are given to communicate the heart of God in a very relevant and practical way. Jesus must always be the center of our focus. Knowledge of God's word and knowing the heart of the Father are essential to our own personal growth as well as effective ministry. Because prophetic ministry is such a powerful tool to touch people's lives, it's easy to allow it to become our focus and be consumed by it. I have a friend who often says, "Keep the main thing, the main thing." Jesus and His incredible love for people is always the main thing; keep it that way.

However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your namesake are written in heaven." Luke 10:20

KEEPING BALANCE

There's something about prophetic ministry that can be captivating. People long to hear from God in a tangible way. It's easy to allow prophetic ministry to become consuming and the center of our focus. Balance in our lives and ministry is crucial. I love to be with prophetic people. I love it when someone speaks a word the Holy Spirit has inspired. I love it when the Holy Spirit inspires me to speak a life-changing message from Him. When people write or come up to me after a service and remind me of an encouraging word, they were given I'm both humbled and grateful that the Holy Spirit allowed me to be the delivery boy.

I love being part of the Holy Spirit's work in people's lives. I'm also aware of how important it is to keep balance in my life, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Remember that old thing about "all work and no play makes Dan a dull boy"? Don't disconnect from life, engage at every level, don't isolate yourself from people and call it spiritual. We were created to relate and live in community.

RELATIONSHIPS

Deep Personal Friendships

Over the years, I've discovered that one of God's greatest gifts to us is friendships. People you can share your heart and life with. All of us need those who know all about us and still love us. When I have the opportunity to share with developing leaders, I will always encourage them to make relationships a priority. We need those who are always there, trusted friends who we know have our backs in every situation. They can speak truth to us even when we don't want to hear it.

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you". John 15:15

Diverse Relationships

This one is so important to me. Build relationships with people who

are different than you. They think a little differently, have different perspectives, that's so healthy! They add so much to our lives. I've been blessed with a very diverse group of friends. They all have added something to my life and helped shape much of my thinking and understanding. Also, let me encourage you to build friendships with people who are not prophetic. They can help balance and ground you, listen to them, and hear their perspective.

Prophetic people can easily over spiritualize things, reading more into them than necessary. I need those around me who challenge my thinking helping me to see a bigger picture. Seeing things from a different perspective. They see another side to the story. I need friends who are not believers, those that have a different political and theological perspective, or come from a different ethnic background.

Accountability Relationships

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon the prophet, and they spoke for God. They were accountable only to God. In the New Testament, the prophetic voice comes from the Holy Spirit living in the believer and inspiring them with insight and revelation. Prophecy is a powerful but imperfect ministry gift. *"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part."* 1 Corinthians 13:9

The word of prophecy given is to be evaluated by the church, especially other prophetic voices. Today, social media allows us a broad and powerful platform; to speak from, instantly, the entire world can read or hear our words, making accountability even more important. I am responsible for what I say, especially in a prophetic context. We need accountability relationships with trusted people who can speak into our lives. People we know love and care, they have our back, they can tell us the truth. They can say to us, "you're wrong", and we will listen.

"Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said." 1 Corinthians 14:29

"Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." James 5:16

BE REAL & AUTHENTIC, BE WHO YOU ARE

It feels like I keep repeating myself with this one, but it's so important to be real, authentic, and natural. Learn from others and their experiences, but don't try to be them or do it just like they do it, be who you are and let the Holy Spirit flow through you. Don't try to project a prophetic image; that's important, let me say it again, don't try to project a prophetic image or fit a prophetic mold! That's often when things get weird because you're trying to be something that you're not and it seems disingenuous. Here is an important leadership principle. Know who you are, like who you are, and be who you are.

DON'T TRY TO PROJECT A PROPHETIC IMAGE

I had an experience years ago with a young man who was a significant part of our church family. He had a strong prophetic edge with a servant heart. It was obvious to all of us that God's hand was on him. One evening as a guest speaker was praying over him, he referred to him as a prophet. That didn't surprise me, I was already watching that develop in him. I was a little concerned about the timing of speaking it out. I really wanted to give him a little more time to develop before putting a label on it. At times, I can be a little too cautious. Perhaps this was one of those times. After the word prophet was put on him, he quickly began to change. He became a little arrogant, harsh, and judgmental. He seemed to have a prophetic word for everyone. After watching it for a few weeks, I realized he was trying to be a prophet.

It was like something had been put on him, and he was trying to live up to it. He was unknowingly trying to project a prophetic image. When I confronted him, I didn't want to crush him or dampen his prophetic enthusiasm, but I didn't want him to live under a mantle of prophetic ministry he wasn't ready for. I told him he was an amazing gift to the church, and he certainly had a prophetic gift, but he was not a prophet,

at least at that time. It was like a weight lifted off, he took a deep breath and said, “Thank God!” Then thanked me for confronting him and setting him free. He was trying to project a prophetic image. It became a load God never intended to him carry. He went back to being the strong prophetic voice our church needed him to be.

BE PRACTICAL & DON'T OVER-SPIRITUALIZE

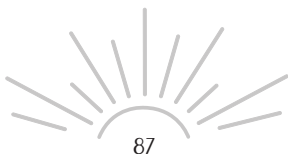
I'm sure you've heard it said of someone, “they're so heavenly minded that they're of no earthly good”. That's often how prophetic people are seen. Their heads are in the clouds, and their feet rarely touch the ground. If you were defining the word “prophetic”, I'm fairly certain the word practical would not be in your definition. However, my experience tells me just the opposite. What could be more practical when you're tired, discouraged, and ready to give up than someone with a word that speaks to the heart of the problem.

A word that brings hope and clarifies what's happening and confirms direction. Like the woman at the Astro Dome, who just experienced a devastating hurricane, everything is gone. You have no idea where your family is or what's happened to them. You're housed in a huge stadium with thousands of people you've never met, you're confused, disoriented, and hopeless. The Holy Spirit nudges the crazy guy praying for you with a message to go immediately to a housing line that hasn't even formed yet, just in time for them to announce ten little apartments, and you're in place to get the first one. That's as practical as it gets!

BE CONTEMPORARY & RELEVANT

Learn how to communicate in a simple, understandable, relevant way. Remember, the gift is for the one it's being delivered to. The goal is for them to receive it. Use language they can easily understand. It's not so common today, but I remember when prophetic words were almost

always given in King James English. I guess they thought it sounded more spiritual, but it actually was distracting and seemed strange. If we want to be relevant in today's world it begins with learning to listen to what people are saying, what challenges they face. Be contemporary in relating to people where they live, in ways they can understand. Relevancy is more than a new program or the latest trend, it's relating to where people are, it's heart-touching. When you meet people where they live, it's relevant.



GIVING, RECEIVING & EVALUATING A PROPHETIC WORD

GIVING A PROPHET WORD



Remember the elderly woman who came to me at the Astro Dome in Houston with seven or eight pages of application forms in her hands, asking for help. Everything in me said no! I don't want to fill out housing applications, but that's what she needed me to do. When we prayed, and I heard these words deep inside, "tell her to go to the housing line immediately." I honestly wondered if it was just me. Why would the Holy Spirit say that it doesn't make sense? I had to carefully check my motives, was it just me hoping for God's intervention or was it really the Holy Spirit? In this case, I have no question now that it was the Holy Spirit, but then I had to honestly stop and check. Learning to hear and recognize God's voice takes time and practice building relationship and heart connection.

Is It For Me Personally Or Someone Else?

Is this something the Holy Spirit wants me to know? Is it for my encouragement and strengthening? Is He preparing me for new things or giving insight into things going on around me? Is it for a specific person, a group of people, an entire church?

Is It For Prayer Or To Share?

I have discovered over the years that many of the things the Holy Spirit reveals is for prayer. He makes you aware of things going on in people's lives, situations around you, churches, even national or international

issues, so that you can pray with knowledge and understanding. The insight was given for intercession and most likely will never be shared.

Does It Fit New Testament Prophetic Criteria And Purpose?

1 Corinthians 14:3 carefully defines the purpose of New Testament prophetic ministry.

“But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”

When the woman at the Astro Dome first came to me with eight or nine pages of housing application, you could see frustration and hopelessness all over her. When I told her what I believed Jesus told me, “Go to the housing line immediately.” She was in complete shock and overwhelmed. I’m sure something inside her said, “The man I came to for help is completely crazy. Now what do I do?” All she wanted to do was get away from me as fast as she could.

Suddenly, everything turned around, she found herself at the front of a line she had no intention of getting into. Within minutes, all the paperwork was completed, and in two days, she was moving into her apartment. The next time she saw me; you could see the difference on her face. She seemed like a different woman; she had been strengthened, encouraged, comforted, and ready to face new challenges and move on. I’m sure that there were emotional scars and pain she still had to face. She had been through a horrific experience, but she had encountered the heart of God and rediscovered hope.

What is the most appropriate way to share it?

Remember, it’s a gift for them. How do I present it in a way they will receive it? Should it be given privately? If it’s a word of confrontation, or correction my first question is, do I have the relationship or position to give it? Never assume that you have the right to go around correcting people. You may feel that you have the authority to give the word, but that doesn’t mean they’ll receive it! Remember, the whole point is for them to receive it!

Approach people in a way that helps them feel safe so they can drop their defenses and receive! The words that come to mind when I think of the right approach are humble, gentle, caring, hopeful, and confident. I'm convinced that God was sending a clear and strong message when He placed the love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13, right between the instruction about the use of spiritual gifts in chapter twelve and the power and purpose of the prophetic word in chapter fourteen. He actually tells us that all of these gifts are meaningless without love! Strong words!

**Don't Try To Sound Spiritual Or Authoritative,
Or Like Someone Else. Be Who You Are, Be Real!**

Don't try to sound like someone else or say it just like they would, be real, be yourself. One of the highest compliments I have ever received came from a leader introducing me at a conference. His words were "Dan is naturally supernatural, or maybe it's supernaturally natural." At first, I wasn't sure exactly what that meant. I knew it was good but what was he really trying to say? It was simple, be natural, real, be who you are! Often, people make the mistake of trying to sound authoritative or spiritual. Some people seem to have a spiritual voice and an everyday voice. The spiritual voice is usually very authoritative and louder than their natural one. I guess it's to distinguish when the Holy Spirit is inspiring them and when it's just them.

Watch Carefully How They Receive And Respond.

Does the word seem to be connecting with the person or group you're sharing with? Are they receiving it, resisting it, or do they seem confused by it? Is there anything you can say that would help clarify it without losing or distorting its message? Remember, the gift is for them; our role is to deliver it in a way they can best understand, receive, and respond to it. If, after you have tried to make it as simple and clear as possible, and they still are not able to understand or receive it, don't try to force it or insist that you're right, let the Holy Spirit do His work. It's not your responsibility to make something happen. It could be that they're not ready to really hear it, or they need time to process it before they can embrace its message.

It is also possible that you didn't get it completely right. Remember, New Testament Prophecy is not speaking for God. It is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, bringing insight, understanding, and revelation. 1 Corinthians 13:9 tells us, "*We know in part and prophesy in part*". The New Living Translation puts it this way: "*Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture.*" What you share is most likely only a part of the puzzle. The Holy Spirit will be faithful to complete the work that He began.

Give Them Room To Receive, Process, And Respond.

After the word has been shared, allow the Holy Spirit to take it from there. Your part is complete. You delivered the gift in obedience to the Holy Spirit's prompting. It is not your responsibility to remind them or to check and make sure they followed its instruction. Leave that to the Holy Spirit. Remember, these are words of encouragement, strengthening, comfort, and confirmation.

Things To Avoid:

Over the years, I've discovered certain subjects or areas of life that require greater sensitivity when it comes to prophetic words. Experience has taught me to avoid things like putting dates on events or when something will happen. Here is an example, even though the Bible teaches us that Jesus will return, it also warns us against trying to put a date on His return. Jesus himself emphasized this point, stating that only the Father knows the day and hour (Mark 13:32). There have been thousands of dates set over the centuries, even though Jesus warned us not to. And of course none have been fulfilled.

Another area to avoid is dating and marriage relationships. The prophetic word should confirm what God is already doing, not give direction. Let the relationship develop naturally. Then watch for the Holy Spirit's confirmation in whatever way He chooses to do it. If you believe the Holy Spirit is showing you that He has brought a couple together, pray about it and keep it to yourself! That's the best advice I could give. Remember, "*we know in part and prophesy in part.*" 1 Corinthians 13:9, you could get it wrong!

Let their relationship grow and let the Spirit do His work in them. Speaking it out will only create unfair pressure on them. I've watched a number of people devastated by some well-meaning prophetic voice speak prematurely or wrongly into this. Don't do it. If someone says to you, "God told me you will or should date or marry this person." Thank them and get on with your life! Let me say it again, let the relationship develop naturally and let the Holy Spirit do His work in them.

Politics is another area of caution. It's easy to let your own political preferences dictate your prophetic understanding. Much of the US church has been divided and lost credibility because of what was labeled "A prophetic word" concerning who should win an election or hold a political office. When it did not happen, no one would step up in humility and take responsibility. Because of those kinds of things, there has come a significant credibility gap that has brought mistrust, I don't trust anything prophetic, and division. If you don't agree with me, you're just not spiritual!

Remember New Testament prophecy, including the office of prophet, is not about predictions, and it certainly is not political. In fact, the prophetic office in Ephesians 4:11 was given to bring about unity, not division. *"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

RECEIVING A PROPHETIC WORD



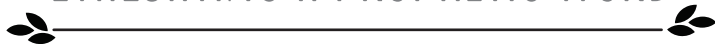
I couldn't even begin to count, let alone remember the words I've been given over the years. Some of them have left a lasting mark on my life, they were life changers, confirmed call and direction, and still are being fulfilled even to this day. Others meant a lot in the moment. They encouraged and strengthened me, they helped me understand what I was experiencing and gave wisdom on how to respond. Of course, there were

those that either seemed meaningless or questionable. There are words that can be dismissed easily, some you'll never forget. The prophetic picture the youth pastor had of me sitting on the lap of Jesus with my head on his chest, listening to his heart, was one of those words I knew was important for my future, but was uncertain about what it really meant until 10 or 12 years later that night on the London Underground.

Here are some thoughts about how to receive a prophetic word.

1. Always take time to listen, even if it doesn't make sense at first.
2. 1 Corinthians 13:9 *"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part."* What's the Holy Spirit saying, and what's the person communicating? New Testament prophecy leaves room for human error; that's why it's important to evaluate it carefully.
3. If you're uncertain or it doesn't make complete sense to you, don't throw it out, put it aside, and ask the Spirit to clarify and confirm. He will, at the right time.
4. It could be that the Holy Spirit is using that word to get your attention and begin a process in you. File it away and wait.
5. Never follow a prophetic word until the Holy Spirit confirms it to you.
6. Remember the highest form of guidance is the word of God and the Holy Spirit speaking to you.

EVALUATING A PROPHETIC WORD



We are told to evaluate or judge New Testament prophecy. The Greek word for judge here is "drakrino," it means to distinguish, separate throughout, to discern and decide. This is a process of thoughtful and investigative discernment. Wherein we partner with the Holy Spirit to determine the validity of the prophetic word.

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

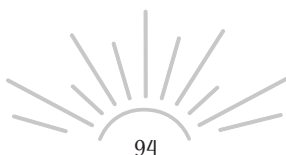
“Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.” 1 Corinthians 14:29

Questions to consider when evaluating a prophetic word.

1. Does it edify or build up, strengthen, encourage, console, or instruct? (1 Corinthians 14:3)
2. Does it agree with scripture? (2 Timothy 3:16, Isaiah 8:19-20)
3. Does it center on the truth of Jesus and bear witness to God's character? (John 16:13-14)
4. Does it bear witness with your spirit and others that you trust? (Romans 8:9-11, John 14:17, 26)

Principles to stand on when evaluating a prophetic word.

1. The prophetic will always bear good fruit. (Matthew 7:15-20)
2. The prophetic leads to freedom and life in Christ. (Romans 8:15-16)
3. The prophetic is intended to lead us towards God with our community of faith. Beware of prophetic words that ask you not to tell anyone.
4. The prophetic confirms what the Holy Spirit is leading you towards personally. Not something to be blindly followed. (Acts 21:10-14)





CONCLUSION

As the pastor was coming to the end of his already too long Sunday sermon, he said as he often did, “Now in conclusion”. A young boy with a very questioning look on his face turned to his dad and asked, “What does in conclusion mean?” The dad looks at his questioning son and simply says “absolutely nothing!” I think of that story almost every time I use those words in conclusion!

In the introduction to “Making the Prophetic Practical” I shared with you all the reasons I didn’t want to write this book. I shared some of my own struggles with prophetic ministry and how the Holy Spirit gently but unrelentingly kept nudging me to take a step of faith, that I really didn’t want to take. That was about fifty years ago now. I was a young pastor ready to turn the world upside down. The last thing I needed was some weird prophetic stuff going on.

Prophetic ministry can be messy. If you’re not willing to work through a little mess, you probably should stay away from it. However, if the Holy Spirit is nudging you and you’re willing to take the risk and let Him teach you how to do it, you’ll discover an incredibly powerful tool to touch lives at the deepest level. As I look back now over the years, having watched and experienced what I believe was the Holy Spirits intended purpose for the gift, I wouldn’t trade it for anything! I do often wonder why it took me so long to embrace the Spirit’s nudging.

I believe in the power of the prophetic word, when it follows biblical guidelines, is in tune with the heart and purpose of the Father and is

presented in genuine humility in a way those it's intended for can best receive it. As I shared in the introduction, the last thing I ever wanted to do was write about prophetic ministry. However, I am convinced the Holy Spirit is empowering a new generation of prophetic ministry, and I want to influence its development.

I believe the model of prophetic ministry is shifting; in the future, it will be far more relational, reflecting the Father's heart more clearly. It will not focus on the gifted one; it will focus on the giver, the Holy Spirit, and the one the gift is for. It will be far more Jesus, the arch-prophet, and less the Old Testament model. Writing this brought back a lot of old memories, most of them really wonderful, some not so great, and with old memories often come hurts and wounds. I found myself stopping more than once to ask Jesus to forgive me for my insensitivity to the people I prayed for. He had a gift for them, but the way I presented it did not always reflect His heart.

I also discovered there were still some areas of my life that needed His healing touch. Harsh prophetic words, which seemed to always speak doom and gloom or even judgment. Prophetic voices that at times seemed to use the gift the Holy Spirit gave to fulfill their own agenda. Misleading voices that brought hurt and confusion, like the night a man who many called a prophet prayed over my girlfriend and me with a word that promised God had brought us together for a life of ministry.

I was ready to go for it. Thankfully, it scared her to death. She wasn't ready for that. In reality, neither was I. The next day she broke off our relationship and I was left broken-hearted. Since that time, I've discovered God had a much better plan! By the way, never do that to a young couple, they don't need a prophetic word saying that God brought them together or it is God's will for them to get married! Even if you believe that The Holy Spirit has said that to you, keep it to yourself and pray for them, let them work their relationship out, and allow the Holy Spirit to do his work.

I meet people all the time who have been hurt, disillusioned, and crushed by prophetic ministry gone wrong. I don't know your circumstances or

experiences, but I do know that God is bigger and has an amazing ability to take the things that could have destroyed you and turn them into the very things that build you. He's able to take a misguided prophetic word and use it to bring about good things. To those of you who have been hurt or disillusioned by prophetic ministry, there are some things I want to say to you.

First, I want you to know that I understand. I have been there. When our oldest foster son (I've never liked the term foster, I've always referred to him as our son) was killed, I was teaching in Switzerland. The call came late at night, and by early morning, they arranged a flight home for me. As you can imagine, I had a lot of questions to ask God: Why did you let this happen? What about the promises I thought you gave me concerning Doug's life? They were never fulfilled!

As I flew home to be with my family, I faced things I never wanted to face. I began asking questions I hoped I would never have to ask. As I reminded God of His promises concerning Doug that had not been fulfilled, He would show me how in fact they had been. I didn't see its fulfillment because I thought I knew how it would be fulfilled, and it didn't happen that way. I discovered that I do a lot of that. The promise comes, and I immediately begin to assume how it will be fulfilled. When it doesn't happen the way, I assume it will, I can completely miss it.

I have also discovered in my own experience that I'm very good at hearing only what I want to hear. I think you'll understand what I mean. We often mix a lot of things together and then make assumptions. Forgive us for our lack of understanding, our insensitivity, imperfections, and yes at times, spiritual arrogance and unwillingness to say we got it wrong! New Testament prophecy, unlike the Old Testament, leaves room for human imperfections.

That is one reason we're told to evaluate prophetic words and allow others we trust to help us in that evaluation. What's not ok is refusing to humbly admit we got it wrong. It's not about placing blame it's about transparency and building trust. I can trust spiritual leaders who

are willing to say I was wrong! Remember, I told you that if I were to describe my ministry role, I would say I am basically a pastor with a prophetic edge.

From that point of understanding, let me ask those who have been hurt, deceived, and confused by prophetic ministry, **please forgive us!** Forgive us for making it more about us than Jesus, for seeing ourselves as the gifted ones rather than those who get to serve the gift to the one it's for. Remember the old saying, "don't throw the baby out with the bath water". That's what I wanted to do. Get rid of it all! It's too messy! Remember, it is a gift from the Father's heart to meet human need. Instead of throwing it out, let's embrace it and learn to do it right. Let's admit the gift comes through imperfect people who make mistakes, don't clearly hear, or are not able to express it completely.

Remember the words from 1 Corinthians 13:9 "*...we know in part and prophesy in part...*".

My challenge to all of us is to remain open and teachable.

Let's learn to do this right, learn to hear God's voice more clearly, and discover how to present the gift in ways that can best be received. We need prophetic insight now more than ever. For those young leaders who are developing a prophetic voice, learn from the successes and mistakes of previous generations. That is my heart. That is my passion. That is why I wrote Making the Prophetic Practical.



HEARING THE HEART OF THE FATHER

I have had the privilege over the years of calling Pastor Dan Sneed, counselor, teacher, pastor, and friend. One day, while we were meeting and praying, I said to him, “Do you know why it is so powerful and easy to receive from you?” He laughed and shook his head. “Because you are a relational prophet.”

Many people have benefited from his gift set of pastor/teacher/prophet. He releases the heart of the father with compassion and ease. One of the things that the next generation needs to witness is the powerful yet humble voice of the modern-day prophet. Be encouraged as you read and experience the pages of this book. Allow Holy Spirit to speak to you and impart in you what Dan has received over the past 60-plus years with The Lord. Open your heart to the loving voice of your heavenly father and take a step of faith as Dan makes the prophetic practical.

We are living in a time where people are longing to see and hear an authentic representation of Jesus on the earth. Pastor Dan Sneed is a glimpse of that kind of love being poured out.

This book has been almost 10 years in the making. A timely and powerful part of your legacy. Thank you for passing it.

~Lori Bryant

*Director of Healing Rooms International, Fontana/Upland
Healing Ministry Leader, Water of Life Community Church*



“One of the most loving, patient encouragers I’ve ever known”

~Jack Hayford



PASTOR DAN SNEED

Dan is currently the staff care pastor at Water of Life Community Church in Fontana, California. He travels extensively as a pastor to other pastors. Dan and Bev have four adult children and are proud grandparents and great-grandparents. They reside in Granada Hills, California.