

Hearing God and the prophetic - Week 2

The gift of prophecy

WHAT is it? And also WHY do we need prophecy.

In **Acts 2:17** when quoting from Joel it says:

"I will pour out my Spirit on all mankind; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy....both men and women I will in those days pour forth of my spirit and they shall prophesy."

Acts 19:6

"When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied."

There is great inclusivity in this - that they all began to prophesy, no one was excluded. From these verses and also 1 Corinthians, which we look at in detail later, Scripture is clear that "all" may prophesy. Not just pastors, not just leaders, not just older Christians, all!

What is prophecy?

Prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is given so that you can bless others. In this sense it is not so much a gift to you but through you.

It is a gift of grace and is not earned.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

"7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, **to another prophecy**, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines."

Biblically we find it being two things:

1. "Foretelling" i.e. future related. Telling of what God will do in the coming days, weeks, months years.
2. "Forthtelling" i.e. speaking the "now" word of God to a group of people / society.

It doesn't always have to be a "Thus says the Lord" type of word. It can be taught, preached and shared i.e this is what God is saying to us as a church, this story in the bible is key for us.

Biblically, we find that it is given for 3 specific reasons:

1 Corinthians 14:3

3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

1. To Edify

The word translated as 'edification' literally has the suggestion of a building and the building process. Prophecy will sometimes encourage to action, and it will often communicate the heart of God in tender love and comfort. It strengthens you and the local congregation, meaning they are more readily equipped to help others.

2. To Exhort

Exhortation is the Greek word "paraklesis", which means "solace, entreaty, consolation or comfort." This word is related to the word "parakletos" - or "Comforter" - a name for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit uses prophecy to comfort believers and to exhort them to holiness, love, worship, praise, prayer, evangelism, humility and giving - Godly living.

3. To Comfort

Comfort is the Greek noun "paramuthia" which means "consolation". This is a different type of comfort, and it is especially important for believers who are suffering or struggling in their faith.

It is therefore not there to scare, bring discouragement, to be harsh or negative!

1 Corinthians 14:1

"Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy."

The apostle Paul encouraged the church to eagerly desire spiritual gifts. The word 'desire' in Greek carries the suggestion of 'being jealous for' and to have 'great zeal'. This is a strong statement and one we should pay attention to in our own lives.

How do we hear God?

- From reading the Bible. When reading we notice something and feel that God is speaking, as He highlights a particular verse or narrative.
- Even when not actually reading the Bible, a verse can come to mind as we seek God about a matter.
- As you seek God in prayer, maybe something from your life journey comes back to mind and God uses it to speak to you.
- A thought/phrase. Can be one word that we feel impressed on our heart as we seek Him.
- Hunch/feeling - a deep sense of God laying something on your heart.
- A picture in your mind.
- A dream
- A vision
- God may use something from our memory, such as a film scene; a place we have been on holiday
- An angel - they were often messengers to people in the Bible.

There are many ways that God can speak. Depending on your character and personality, God knows how to speak to you in a way that you will get it.

How to start

If you have never prophesied before, how do you start?

Here are some helpful ways:

1. Believe that God can reveal something to you. The Old Testament & New Testament is filled with normal people just like you and me. Be expectant!
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you something.
3. Receive it in faith. Regardless of the form it comes in, receive it from the Lord.
4. Choose a smaller, safe environment to start with - i.e not a large Sunday morning meeting. Maybe in a small group meeting with friends until you get used to moving in this gift.
5. Deliver it with humility and no additions. Just share what you feel the Lord has given you.

How to bring what you think God is saying

1. Say it in a clear, simple way. Use normal language and bring it in a helpful way.
2. Is it Biblical?

Prophecy, if from God, will never violate the written word of God that stands forever!

3. Bring it in a loving way.
4. Bring it to encourage, exhort & comfort.
5. Bring it to point people to Jesus.
6. Bring it from a place of being at peace and clarity.

How we share what He says

1. With humility, wisdom and care. Prophecy can come over as "impressive" to some and can therefore be abused.

When a postman delivers a letter the focus is the letter not the postman! We serve others by operating in the gifts of the Spirit.

2. Is it meant to be shared privately or in a public church meeting? Words for the church obviously need to be public, but personal words probably not.

Speaking into peoples lives is a privilege, do it with humility and grace.

3. Don't "police" it - it's up to them and others to weigh it. Deliver what you have to give and leave it there.

4. Never use prophecy to manipulate others. If it's from God - He will take care of it. Also, be careful not to "prophecy" from knowledge of a situation or personal opinion or agenda!

5. Be wary of prophesying about emotive, personal issues.

6. Consider your language

Try and avoid the 1st person "I give you peace" - as if speaking on behalf of God.

It's better to speak in the 3rd person:

"I feel the The Lord wants to say today He wants you to know His peace."

7. Describe a picture accurately

Describe what He is saying as clearly as possible: the focus is to help the person understand.

8. Be open

A prophetic word can be received at any time.

Sometimes this will be spontaneously in a meeting, at other times it may be given by The Holy Spirit beforehand. Both are valid.

It is good to be open to receiving prophecy and prayerfully consider what God is saying in both cases. It's better to take time to "fully receive" what God is saying and to bring it properly than in a rushed, unclear way.

9. You don't need to explain how you got the word, it is not important and can sometimes just be a distraction to it's content. Just share what the word is!.

10. Be clear and concise, don't keep repeating yourself and ramble on.

Prophecy is an amazing and extremely useful gift from God. That's why Paul wants us all to do it.:

1 Corinthians 14:1-5

1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. 2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. 3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. 4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. 5 Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

11. Publicly in a meeting, it should be done in order. 2 or 3 at most should speak.

1 Corinthians 14:29 - 33.

"29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people."

We don't want 15 different words! God is a God of order and peace.

12. All prophecy should be "weighed"

Prophecy should be "weighed" i.e. "is this God?" by others present - see 1 Corinthians 14:29 above. That means when a word comes to the church publicly, we as leaders need to question "is this from God?".

In addition, this means that the giving of "personal prophecy" to individuals without at least another to hear and weigh can be dangerous and is to be avoided. There are many Christians who are holding a word or have made decisions in their lives based on a word, who never got it weighed. Practice Biblical wisdom here. We are all human and we all make mistakes, no matter who gave the word to you, take it to your leaders, your pastor and weigh it.

13. Prophecy "according to your faith" - don't go beyond it.

Romans 12:6

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;"

Some final points to consider:

Whilst tongues is “godward” prophecy is to man / the church 1 Corinthians 14:3-4 (see above)

It is a powerful tool in evangelism in church meetings!

1 Corinthians 14:24

“24 But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all”

In a world where nothing is secure, knowing that we serve a God who holds the future in His hands and will lead us and guide us down the best path for us, is incredibly reassuring.

It is a real witness to others when you are not worried or fearful, but at peace knowing He will reveal each step to you at the right time.