



"This is a liberating message for anyone who is searching for understanding about what Scripture-based prophecy looks like. I'm passionate about sharing these insights because so many Christians have been hurt by those who have prophesied to them in an unsafe way. As a result, they are uneasy about being ministered to prophetically. Others are confused about how to prophesy, even if they have a strong prophetic anointing. My earnest hope is that this message will equip people to be used by the Father to speak His personal words of life to others." Ruth Johnson

We never outgrow the need to receive prophetic encouragement. We never become so mature or spiritually strong that we can fully live for Jesus without words of the Father's love being spoken to us. That's why it's not spiritual weakness as a believer to want encouragement. It's not a lack of dependence on God or a failure to trust Him. Rather the Father created us this way, and the more we give our lives to serving Him, the greater this need becomes. Consequently, this intense discouragement that Isaiah experienced can affect any man or woman of God:

The Lord told Isaiah: "You are my servant and you will bring Me glory." Yet Isaiah replied, "But my work all seems so useless. I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose. Yet, I leave it all in the Lord's hand. I will trust God for my reward." Isaiah 49:3-4 NLT

David quite vulnerably talked about his longing for someone to encourage him:

"You see all that my enemies are doing. Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair. If only one person would show some pity; if only one would turn and comfort me." Psalm 69:19-20 NLT

Even Jesus needed to be emotionally supported and encouraged by those He was in close relationship with during His years on earth. When He went with His followers to a place called Gethsemane, He said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him, and He began to be very sad and troubled. He said to them, "My heart is full of sorrow, to the point of death. Stay here and watch with Me." After walking a little farther away from them, Jesus fell to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, do not give Me this cup of suffering. But do what You want, not what I want." But when Jesus went back to His closest friends, He found them asleep and said to Peter, "You could not stay awake with Me for one hour?" Matthew 26:36-40 NCV

The Apostle Paul was just as transparent. "I'm eager to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours. In this way, each of us will be a blessing to the other." Romans 1:12 NLT He even gratefully said, "God who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus." 2 Corinthians 7:6 NLT

What's sad is that multitudes of sincere, good-hearted believers are stuck in discouragement. A tragic loss of hope is crushing them. If this continues, despair can even overtake them. Yet when disheartened people encounter sincere, healthy, Word-based prophetic words that comfort them with the Father's kind love, they can be renewed in their courage, and be restored.

Countless times my husband, Barry, and I have witnessed the amazing impact when someone experiences even just a few words of prophetic encouragement. We saw this take place in Africa when I told Saul, a dangerous, powerful witchdoctor: "I have a message from God for you. He wants you to know that He loves you." His face immediately softened. Tears came in his eyes. A short time later he was born again, and he became our son.

I often marvel how even a few, childlike sounding words that the Father prompts us to tell someone can, in a heartbeat, make it possible for a "new day and the hope of the Morning Star to arise once again in their heart." 2 Peter 1:19-22 NASB No wonder the Word tells us, "Gentle words can bring life and health. A person's words can be life-giving water, as refreshing as a bubbling brook." Proverbs 15:4, 18:4 NLT

Paul did everything he could to help the early believers grasp the profound importance of pursuing prophesying, but always with love:

"Those who prophesy are speaking to people to give them strength, encouragement, and comfort." 1 Corinthians 14:3 NCV

"Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives, especially the ability to prophesy." 1 Corinthians 14:1 NLT

The prophets during the birth of the church lived this way of prophetic encouragement and imparting the Father's love.

"Paul encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed through." Acts 20:2 NLT

"Judas and Silas, both being prophets, spoke extensively to the Christians, encouraging and strengthening their faith." Acts 15:32 NLT

However, to be quite practical, when the Father uses us in this way, it's by us speaking natural sounding words, rather than ones that are super-spiritual, grand, fancy, or that are spoken in a voice or volume that is not how we ordinarily talk. As we grow and mature in our gifting, we are also less apt to go "on and on" and past the point when God is still nudging us to speak.

It's also vital to remember that even if someone is very good at giving people a personal word from the Lord, it does not mean that they have learned to do this with maturity, wisdom, or with the Father's love. For example, the Corinthian church was heavily into prophesying. Yet they were so immature, Paul wrote to them: "When I was with you, I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world, or as though you were infants in the Christian life. You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord. And it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly do not!" 1 Corinthians 3:1, 11:17, 22 NLT

Likewise, God would not prompt us to force on anyone a prophetic message. To do this is not being led by the Holy Spirit. It's not love. Rather, it is unkind. It is pushy. It is putting pressure on someone can cause them to "shut down" on receiving prophetic words. Paul cared so much about the damage that words can cause that he cautioned the early Christians: "When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need, words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you." Ephesians 4:29 NCV

He also bluntly explained how strongly God feels about unkind, unloving prophesying: "If I could speak in any language in heaven or on earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would it be? If I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it. But if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever." 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NLT

This how the Word describes what that love looks like:

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted." Ephesians 4:32

“Encourage one another day after day.” Hebrews 3:13

“Encourage one another and build up one another.” I Thessalonians 5:11

It’s also crucial to understand that Paul *never* told the early Christians that the purpose of prophecy was correction and rebuke. He never urged them to “desire earnestly” to be able to prophesy so that they can tell people:

- How they need to change
- How they need to grow
- What they are doing wrong
- What they need to do to “fix” their problems
- What decisions to make
- How they should handle situations in their personal life

Yet, the Word does tell us: “Do not ignore it when the Lord disciplines you and don’t be discouraged when He corrects you. For the Lord corrects those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.” Proverbs 3:11-12 NLT Most often God’s correction happens when the Holy Spirit sovereignly works in our heart to show us when we are doing something that is not pleasing to the Father. Word-based correction can also happen when people have the authority to speak into our life, such as those in spiritual leadership in the Body of Christ whose authority we have placed ourselves under.

The Bible also instructs us: “As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.” Proverbs 27:17 NLT However this verse is not referring to believers having the liberty to tell anyone - they want that they are doing something wrong. It is only talking about a close, personal relationship with someone who we have decided to trust as a friend and whose honesty we want and welcome.

Scriptural wisdom about personal prophecy is extremely important. Therefore, we need to be aware that there are three sources for what anyone could speak prophetically to us:

THE HOLY SPIRIT

If what someone is “seeing” and wants to prophesy is truly from God, their words will produce the fruit of peace, joy, an awareness of His presence, an increase in realizing the Father’s love for them, and an increase in drawing closer to Him.

AN EVIL SPIRIT

There are rare situations when what a person is perceiving is coming from the demonic realm. There will be no peace or joy in response to the words that this person says are from God. Rather there will be confusion, uneasiness, and spiritual darkness if we receive what they are prophesying.

THEMSELVES

When a person prophesies, it can be coming from their own thoughts, feelings, judgments, experiences, or imagination. Yet, the Word tells us: "No prophecy in the Scriptures ever comes from the prophet's own interpretation. No prophecy ever came from what a person wanted to say, but people led by the Holy Spirit spoke words from God." 2 Peter 1:20 NCV Consequently, what can greatly help us to keep humble in our prophetic gifting is to remember that "We all know in part. We all prophesy in part." 1 Corinthians 13:9 NIV This means that no matter how anointed we are, how long we've been a Christian, how many years we have served the Father in ministry, or how certain we are that we hear accurately from God, with the best of intentions we can still "miss it."

The operation of a prophetic gifting can also be motivated by a person's pride. When this is happening, they often will do or say things out of their need to look "really prophetic" or "very anointed and powerful" in their gifting. Yet God warns us:

"There will be no pride allowed on My Holy Mountain." Zephaniah 3:11 NLT

"The proud will not be allowed to stand in Your presence." Psalm 5:5 NLT

There are also self-appointed "prophets" who are not accountable to anyone in leadership in the church. Yet a humble respect and honoring toward those in authority in the Body of Christ is the character of someone who is being led by the Holy Spirit in his gifting and calling.

These are a few additional ways that prophetic people can get out of balance in their gifting.

They are naturally drawn to what is visual. For example, the Prophet Ezekiel and the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation captured vivid descriptions of pictures. Paul and David also gave us these beautiful images: "We who have fled to Him for refuge can take new courage for we can hold on to His promise with confidence. This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God's inner sanctuary." Hebrews 6:18-19 NLT "He calms the storm to a whisper and stills the waves. What a blessing is that stillness as He brings us safely into harbor." Psalm 107:29, 30 NLT

However, the pictures a prophetic person sees can easily come from an over-active imagination, rather than from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Those who focus a great deal on seeing pictures are the most vulnerable to their own mind and thoughts being the source of what they are seeing. This is why it's crucial to have a solid foundation in the Word because:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, to be fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 NLT

The Father also has so much more He can draw from when He wants us to speak His words of comfort, encouragement and hope to people if our heart and our passion is to “rejoice in His word like one who finds a treasure.” Psalm 119:162 NLT

Sometimes a prophetic person can easily “see” graphic images of what evil is doing. Yet, if this becomes too much of a focus, the forces of evil are thrilled! Every moment a child of God dwells too much on seeing what the demonic is doing, they are not able to invest that time being close to the Father and seeing what He is doing. This can eventually cause spiritual darkness, fear, and an unhealthy awareness of the demonic realm. When this out of balance prophetic gifting occurs, evil becomes increasingly more real and more vivid to that person, rather than them primarily being aware of an intimate and strong awareness of the presence of God. We don’t see the prophets in the Bible being mainly riveted on the demonic realm. For example, Moses was surrounded by intense, relentless, and at times overwhelming evil. But when he spent personal time with God, it was intimacy with Him that happened, not an encounter with pictures or images of what evil was doing. As a result: “Inside the Tent of Meeting the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” Exodus 33:11 NLT

Then there is the Apostle Stephen. When he was surrounded by an angry, vicious mob that brutally killed him, rather than focusing on all that horrific evil, this is what he did: “Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily upward into heaven and saw the glory of God. And he told them, ‘Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand.’” Acts 7:54-56 NLT That’s why as he was being falsely accused, “Everyone in the council stared at Stephen because his face became as bright as an angel’s.” Acts 6:15 NLT

Another direction the prophetic gifting can easily be drawn to is a fascination with prophetic acts. There are compelling ones that God instructed His prophets to do, such as telling the Israelites to march around the walls of Jericho seven times and when the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and the walls collapsed (Hebrews 11:30, Joshua 6:20). Although God still does inspire people, at times, to use prophetic acts, they are always to help His people see more clearly what He is doing among them. However, if these “acts” are pursued or used often, there is the risk of it becoming man orchestrating it, rather than the Holy Spirit. We can tell if this is what is occurring because God’s presence will be missing from what is taking place.

Jesus did say: “Signs will accompany those who have believed.” He also told us that He “confirms the Word by signs that follow.” Mark 16:17, 20 NASB However, if someone goes the direction of wanting, seeking, or pursuing visible manifestations, it grieves the Father because always what He longs for is that we want most of all to pursue personal closeness with Him. Consequently, people who go to meetings to have manifestation of God experiences are robbed of closeness to the Father. Their fascination with the supernatural is what they want to see taking place.

We also need to be aware that just because there is something “miraculous” that’s happening, it does not mean that it’s always from the Lord. These manifestations can also be counterfeit. Both Jesus and Paul told us about this area of potential demonic deception:

“False Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” Matthew 24:24 NASB

“Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.” 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 NASB

Yet, God does display the power and magnitude of His presence. He even tells us that “the time will come when all the earth will be filled, as the waters fill the sea, with an awareness of the glory of the Lord.” Habakkuk 2:14 NLT But, when these miraculous demonstrations of His power happened in the Bible, and when they take place now, they never draw people away from intimacy with God and from seeking His face. These manifestations of the glory of the Lord only cause Him to be more compellingly real to those witnessing them. For example, these are a few of these supernatural manifestations that my husband, Barry, and I have experienced.

One morning when we were ministering in Africa, I sensed an alarming evil coming against us. I immediately alerted Barry and we began to worship. We knew we were safe in the presence of God and that all evil would be crushed that wanted to bring harm to us, because the Father had reminded us so many times of this: “As wax melts in the fire and smoke is blown by the wind, the wicked perish at the presence of God.” Psalm 68:2 NIV/YLT

After a short time, Barry left the room. He returned moments later with a stunned look on his face.

“Ruth,” he said, “there was a strong earthquake while we were worshipping. I felt the earth moving under me and the bed shaking, and I just thought maybe the bed was unstable. But when I left you, I found out that the whole building was moving so violently that the family on the top floor decided to come downstairs to make sure they were safe. They told me that the instant you began to play the harp, the entire building began to shake and as soon as you stopped, then the earthquake also stopped.”

We were overwhelmingly comforted by such a bold manifestation of God’s miraculous visitation. We also found out that this was the only place where there was an earthquake. Years later, when we unexpectedly encountered this family, the mother told us: “We still vividly remember the day of the earthquake as Ruth played the harp.”

At another time, several pastors and tribal leaders who were living on our compound for a week of Leadership Training, told us: "At night we can see tongues of fire on the top of the fence that surrounds your compound." It filled us with a holy awe to know that God was revealing Himself in such a supernatural way that reminded me of this happening to the Israelites: "To the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top." Exodus 24:17 NASB

There was also a supernatural manifestation that took place shortly after we arrived in an upper room in Kampala, Uganda. The moment our voices rose in "new song" worship with the harp we became like a heavenly choir. It seemed like the walls trembled with the sound of our voices as a revival move of God exploded in the room. People fell to their knees. Men unashamedly wept with repentance. Soon a hush fell upon us. All were overcome with awe by the visitation of God. The Lord of Hosts had miraculously come among us. Later Barry and our African team told me this incredible account: "While we were worshipping, all the cars and people were silent as far as we could see on Kampala Road. No one moved. People were looking up at the room where we were gathered. Many were pointing to the window and asking, 'What is this? What is happening in that place?' Then the moment the worship ended, everything went back to the way it always is on Kampala Road."

If we try to glean wisdom from any of the insights in this message, what's reassuring to remember is, "You will know them by their fruits. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." Matthew 7:16, 19 NASB Consequently, if what is being said, done, prophesied, taught, or is manifesting in a meeting gives us the peace of God, and if it draws us into closer intimacy with the Father and His Presence, then what is happening is most likely coming from the Holy Spirit. But if what is taking place causes fear, confusion, uneasiness, a troubled spirit, a lack of peace, a distraction away from an increase in closeness to the Lord, then it needs to be viewed with serious caution.

It's also tremendously helpful to remind ourselves that by exercising this discernment, it does not mean that we are judging. It's not an attempt to be critical or fault-finding. Rather we are obeying the Word that emphatically tells us:

"Do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." 1 John 4:1 NASB

"Test everything that is said and hold on to what is good." 1 Thessalonians 5:21 NLT

Consequently, if we are not certain that someone is a safe person for us to receive from prophetically, we should not allow it. And as soon as we realize that we feel uneasy or troubled about them speaking into our life, it's not rude to stop them. It's not unloving. Rather, our not allowing what we don't have peace about is exactly what the Father wants us to do.

Finally, down through the ages, the humble and teachable were the ones whom God raised up to be used in the fullness of His purpose for their gifting. This is how an eyewitness of the Azusa Street Revival described the profound importance of a humble heart for anyone who wants to be used by God in any way. What he wrote is a profound reminder of the kind of heart the Father wants us to have no matter how He uses us.

“Only those who were really humble could God release to do His work. Because He who prepares His work through the ages accomplishes it by using the most humble, broken instruments so that the work may be seen to be of God, and not of man. For a great work of God is never accomplished by the natural strength of man. It is from among the dry bones, the darkness, and the dust of death that God is pleased to select the instruments by means of which He designs to scatter over the earth His light and His glory. Therefore, those He chooses must be strong in character. But we must keep humble and little in our own eyes. If we get built up by a sense of our own importance, we are gone. History repeats itself in this connection.

God has always sought a humble people. He can use no other. The fact is, when a person gets to the place where he really loves obscurity, where he does not care to preach, and where he would rather sit in the back seat than on the platform, then God can lift him up and use him. And, not very much before. For there is much need of heart preparation before God can come, much need for consecration and humility.” Frank Bartleman

A few of the Responses to this Message

Dr. John Roddam, Rector of St. James Anglican Church, Kentville, Nova Scotia Canada

“I have known Barry and Ruth Johnson for over a decade. They are loving and gracious equippers in the Body of Christ who for years have trained believers to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Truly it is easy to endorse what Ruth has written. She is a friend who walks with grace and who teaches from a strong Biblical and experiential grid. I love the way Ruth sees how the prophetic, and the other gifts, need to be expressed in a safe and loving way. There is also a good balance of testimony and the Word in this teaching and it is written in a style that is understandable by young and old alike. It is excellent!”

Pastors Russ and Kim Babcock, Pursuit NW Church, Snohomish, WA

"We love your heart towards health in the Body of Christ and your desire for the Bride to walk in true freedom. We are also thankful for this honest and sometimes difficult conversation of instruction and correction where prophecy is concerned. Yet with it comes the beauty of what this gift was created for. You have once again communicated very well and with love and grace and truth, always pointing to the Word of God. We love that, and we are excited to have you put this in print and allow others to read it so that it can bring clarity to an area that at times is one of learned confusion."

Pastor Doug Martin at our Home Church, Sunrise Christian Center, Everett, WA

"The scripture says that Jesus came full of Grace and Truth and as I read this, I could see those qualities. You have been truthful about what the prophetic really is and areas which need correction. At the same time, you have been very understanding and graceful to everyone, as none of us are perfect at this and we are all learning. Thanks so much for taking the time and effort to shine a light on a subject which is not always well understood but can be so valuable when used the way God intended it to be used."

Pastors Dan and Cindy Duff, Calvary Family Church, Collinsville, IL

"We love the Word and balanced approach you have taken, Ruth, in this teaching on 'The Prophetic.' We both can really feel your love for the church and all of God's people. This is a very good and clear writing on the prophetic. I believe we need the prophetic and prophets in our churches today, as much as we ever have. But as pastors we also have experienced wrong, and even false prophecy from those in the Body of Christ who allow their perspective or their flesh to get involved. We know this can be very damaging and dangerous. As a result, prophecy concerns, and even scares a lot of people in the church. We strongly believe that the church needs to return to the Word because God is not the God of fear or confusion. Again, this is a great, balanced writing. Keep blessing the body of Christ!"

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