

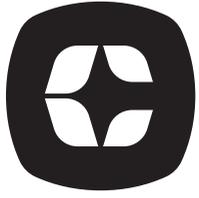


convergence: EQUIP

GUIDEBOOK



**Bridgeway
Church Workshop**



*building
a prophetic
ministry
in the
local
church*

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO CONTACT US,
PLEASE VISIT WWW.CONVERGENCECONFERENCE.ORG



Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

5-Step Power Evangelism Model by Brian Blount.
Reprinted by permission.

Excerpt from “Tough Topics 2” by Sam Storms.
Reprinted by permission.

This Guidebook is a free resource. You are free to print and distribute this material in part or whole, unmodified, for non-commercial purposes only. Any changes must be approved with written permission by Convergence Conference. To contact, email info@convergenceconference.org.

Visit www.convergenceconference.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Main Session Notes

1. Hearing the Voice of God.....	1
2. Basic Training in the Nature and Practice of Prophetic Ministry and the Word of Knowledge.....	13
3. Avoiding the Perils and Pitfalls of Prophetic Ministry.....	27
4. The Gift of Prophecy and the Sufficiency of Scripture.....	33

Breakout Session Notes

1. Building an Intercessory Prayer Ministry in your Local Church.....	45
2. Dream Interpretation.....	53
3. Equipping and Encouraging your Children in Prophetic Ministry.....	61
4. Equipping People for Prophetic Ministry in Corporate Gatherings and in Small Groups.....	73
5. Prophetic Evangelism.....	81
6. Prophetic Worship.....	99

HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD (MAIN SESSION 1)

Led by: Sam Storms (Lead Pastor of Teaching & Vision)

Description: Prophetic ministry is based on our belief that God still speaks to his children, primarily through Scripture but also directly and personally, by the Spirit, in their hearts and minds. How do we know God is speaking? What principles should guide us in discerning when it is God and when it is not? What is the precise relationship between hearing God and the spiritual gift of prophecy? Those are among the questions we will seek to answer in this session.

How God Speaks

Perhaps the single greatest criticism from cessationists is their belief that the charismatic embrace of revelatory gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy and word of knowledge, undermines and is inconsistent with the sufficiency of Scripture. As odd as this may initially sound, I believe the opposite is true. *It is the cessationist denial of the on-going validity of revelatory gifts that compromises the sufficiency of Scripture.*

By the sufficiency of Scripture many things are meant, but at the heart of the doctrine is our belief that the Bible contains every theological truth and every ethical norm that is required for living a Christ-exalting and God-glorifying life. What the Bible contains and teaches is “enough” to enable us to lead godly lives in this present age.

This then raises the question: “What precisely does the Bible say that God has done or provided to enable us to be edified and built up and thoroughly equipped for every good work?” Among the many things that it says God has done and provided is the blessing of the many spiritual gifts, those in 1 Cor. 12:7-10 in particular. The “all-sufficient” Word of God explicitly commands us to earnestly desire “the higher gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31a), which Paul goes on to identify primarily as prophecy. He again commands us to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). Again, “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:5a). And if there is any doubt about Paul’s meaning, he closes this chapter with the exhortation, “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39).

Note well: it is in the all-sufficient Scriptures that we find these exhortations. It is the Bible that we believe tells us everything we need for Christian growth and godliness in which we find these commands. Do we believe the Bible tells us what to embrace and what to avoid? Yes. Do we believe the Bible is altogether sufficient to give us every command that we need to obey and every warning that we need to heed? Yes. Do we believe the Bible warns us about those misguided beliefs and practices that may well threaten its own sufficiency? Yes.

Well, what then does the Bible say about revelatory gifts of the Spirit? It says we need them because they serve “the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). It says prophecy is given to God’s people “for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (1 Cor. 14:3). It says that when we come into the corporate gathering of God’s people “each one has a hymn, a lesson [or teaching], a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation,” and that all things should “be done for building up” (1 Cor. 14:26). And yet nowhere does it ever remotely suggest, much less explicitly assert, that the on-going validity of the very gifts it endorses are a dangerous threat to the reality of Scripture’s own sufficiency.

So, let me address myself to my cessationist friends.

Where do you think we continuationists derive our belief in the on-going validity of miraculous gifts of the Spirit? We didn’t concoct the idea on our own. We get our view from Scripture! It is the Scriptures, the all-sufficient Scriptures that teach us to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that we might prophesy (1 Cor. 14:1). It is the Scriptures, the all-sufficient Scriptures that teach us that such gifts are not merely given to authenticate the apostolic message but also to build up God’s people (1 Cor. 12:7; and all of 1 Cor. 14). It is the Scriptures, the all-sufficient Scriptures that tell us to “earnestly desire to prophesy, and” not to “forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39). It is the Scriptures, the all-sufficient Scriptures that tell us that in the New Covenant age inaugurated at Pentecost God’s people, young and old, male and female, will experience revelatory dreams and visions and will prophesy (Acts 2). And it is the Scriptures, the all-sufficient Scriptures that nowhere tell us that these revelatory gifts will only last for about 50 or 60 years and then disappear.

My point here is that to believe in the sufficiency of Scripture means that we believe what it says and obey its commands. *But you would appear to appeal to the notion of the Bible's sufficiency in order to deny the Bible's functional authority.* That is the irony. You say you believe the Bible is inerrant and sufficient to tell us all we need to know to live godly lives, but then you deny the Bible's teaching concerning the operation of spiritual gifts to build up and edify God's people. If you truly believe in the Bible's sufficiency, then tell me where in the Bible it teaches that the revelatory gifts of the Spirit and other miraculous charismata were designed only for the few decades of the first century.

I have heard not a few cessationists say something to the effect that God gave prophets to receive that revelation until the apostolic message reached its final maturity and so ceased. With the completion of the message, the need for the revelatory gifts was also complete. May I ask: *Where in the NT does any author ever say that?* What text or texts might you cite to support that assertion? One cessationist mentioned Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11 (the latter of which, by the way, says that apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastor-teachers were given "until" !!!! we reach our final and consummate maturity as conformed to Christ, and dare I say that won't happen until the second coming). But where in any of these texts or in any others are we told that the spiritual gift of prophecy is not needed because we have the "completion of the message"?

If, as you cessationists undoubtedly believe, the Bible is sufficient for all instruction and sufficient to provide inerrant guidance for whatever we might need to grow in godliness, then why does the all-sufficient Bible not say what you continually assert? Wouldn't it have been prudent for the apostles to have told us that their teaching on revelatory gifts was only intended by God to operate for a mere 50 or 60 years of church life?

What continues to boggle my mind is that cessationists who affirm the sufficiency of the Bible cannot admit that this very Bible fails to provide us with a single text in which we are told that the many gifts it encourages us to pursue and practice were temporary or were characterized by some inherent obsolescence.

I must repeat myself here. if the Bible is sufficient to give us all we need to live godly lives, and I certainly believe it is, then why does it not give us a single, solitary text in which it tells us to ignore the exhortations to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, or a single, solitary text in which it tells us that the revelatory gifts that were given to edify and encourage the people of God were not meant for any generation of Christians beyond those of the first century? Why does the written word only tell us to make good use of such gifts for the edification of the body and not tell us that such was only meant for the early church? I simply don't know how my cessationist friends can affirm biblical sufficiency when they disregard without textual support the many examples and exhortations concerning the use of these gifts.

So, in summary, I contend that if you believe in the sufficiency and the functional authority of Scripture, you *must necessarily* believe in the on-going validity and edifying power of revelatory gifts of the Spirit.

The Variety of Ways in which God speaks to His Children

The God of the Bible is a speaking, communicative, ever-revealing God.

1. **Scripture** – We hear God’s voice preeminently in and through the written Word of the Bible. On occasion we discover the Spirit speaking directly to our circumstances by alerting us to a text in which a biblical character was facing a similar challenge or decision. At other times the Spirit speaks more indirectly. That is, he alerts us to a principle or ethical truth that informs our decision-making process.

2. **Audible voice** – Among those who heard the audible voice of God are Abraham (Gen. 22:1-2,10-12), Moses (Exod. 3:3-6), the nation Israel (Deut. 5:22-24), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:1-10), Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-13), John the Baptist (Matt. 3:16-17), Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:5-6; cf. 2 Pet. 1:17-18), the general public (John 12:27-30), Paul (Acts 9:3-7; 23:11), Peter (Acts 10:9-16), and John (Rev. 1:9-12).

3. **Internal Audible Voice** – In such cases we genuinely “hear” a sound in our head, a voice that is decidedly not our own. But in this instance no one else would be able to hear it with their physical ears.

4. **Angelic messengers** – God also speaks to us through angelic messengers, as he did to Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15), Samson’s parents (Judg. 13), Isaiah (Isa. 6:6-13), Daniel (Dan. 9:20-27), Zacharias (Luke 1), Mary (Luke 1), Philip (Acts 8:26), Peter (Acts 5:19-20), and others (see esp. Heb. 13:1).

5. **Dreams** – God also communicates through dreams (Gen. 20:3; 37; Dan. 2,4,7; Matt. 1,2; Acts 2,10). Consider especially the overwhelming evidence that many Muslims are coming to faith in Christ by means of his appearance to them in dreams.

Darren Carlson, Founder and President of Training Leaders International, recently (5-31-18) wrote an article that appeared on the website of the Gospel Coalition, entitled: “When Muslims Dream of Jesus.” He tells of a study published in 2007 by Dudley Woodberry and others that came from their interview of 750 former Muslims who had converted to Christianity. Many of them said their conversion was the direct result of a dream in which Jesus Christ appeared to them. Missions Frontiers magazine reported that out of 600 Muslim converts, more than 25% experienced a dream that led to their conversion.

Some people are skeptical. As Carlson pointed out, both Islam and Mormonism started with someone’s claim to having experienced either a dream or vision. Many other cults claim the same thing.

In recent field work where Carlson interviewed Christian migrants who had converted from Islam, many reported a dream that led to their conversion. Their experiences of dreams and visions fit into the following categories:

- Jesus speaking Scripture to them, even Scripture they had never heard before.
- Jesus telling people to do something.
- A dream or vision that led to a feeling of being clean or at peace.
- A man in white physically appearing.

Carlson share some examples.

A friend of mine tells of a Persian migrant who arrived at a refugee center at 6 a.m., visibly upset. He told his story to a Persian pastor: During the night he saw someone dressed in white raise his hand and say, "Stand up and follow me." The Persian man said, "Who are you?" The man in white replied, "I am the Alpha and the Omega. I'm the way to heaven. No one can go to the Father, except through me." He began to ask the Persian pastor: "Who is he? What am I going to do? Why did he ask me to follow him? How shall I go? Tell me." In response, the pastor held out his Bible and asked, "Have you seen this before?" "No," he replied. "Do you know what it is?" "No."

The pastor then opened to the Book of Revelation: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." The man started crying and said, "How can I accept him? How can I follow him?" So the pastor led him in prayer and peace came over him. The pastor then gave the man a Bible and told him to hide it, since the Muslims in the camps could cause him trouble. But the man replied, "The Jesus that I met today, he's more powerful than the Muslims in the camp." He left and an hour later returned with 10 more Persians and told the pastor, "These people want a Bible." No one had to teach him an evangelistic strategy.

Another friend of mine had heard the gospel in Athens, but she struggled to believe. One day she went home despondent, and hid behind the couch in her family's apartment. She began to pray: "You know what, God? Since I have absolutely no excuse, absolutely none, I have run out of excuses. I don't know what to do, but following you means I have to deny everything I have believed and everything all of my family, generation after generation, believed. I can't be in the middle. I have to either follow you or not. I can't do it myself. It's just hard to make that step. I need you to help me."

After she prayed, she did not know whether she was awake or asleep, but a man in white walked into the room. Her reaction was to blurt out, "Don't come close to me. You are holy, and I am a sinner. Do not get close to me." The man replied, "[Name], I told you, and I tell you again, I am the way and the truth. No one comes to the Father except through me." That day she believed the gospel and was saved.

Similarly, there was an elderly Afghan woman that ended up in Athens alone. Her children were still in her home country. Each week she would walk into a ministry center, clearly overwhelmed with the troubles in her world. One Persian pastor had prayed with her many times and explained that the answer to all of her troubles was King Jesus. Like many Afghans, she was not interested in the gospel. One day the Persian pastor asked, "If God reveals himself to you and shows you the truth, will you follow him?" She just laughed.

A few weeks later she met Jesus. During the day she walked by the ministry, but no one was there. So she sat down to rest just outside of the door. Suddenly, she saw a bright light coming from behind her, so bright that she covered her eyes. The light was shining brighter than the sun. In front of her she saw a big shadow. Then she heard a voice, speaking in her language, "My daughter, my daughter, the door is open for you. Come!" She replied, "The door is closed!" Again the voice called to her, "I am the Son of God, Jesus. The door is open for you, my daughter. I am the door!" As she told the story she began trembling and her heart was pounding as she proclaimed the peace and joy that she experienced since hearing Jesus speak to her. She said, "Many times you [pastor] have encouraged me to pray that God would speak to me. I thought it was blasphemy! But now I know Jesus is *alive*." After talking to the pastor, she took some Bibles and began giving them to other people, insisting they must read the book.

There was a family in Kurdistan where each member of the household had a separate dream that they should cross the river the next day to find living water. The next day, without hesitation, they all went, and someone gave them a Bible. They still had that Bible when they came to Europe.

The husband of a woman I know became a Christian. He had gone to Greece, but she was still in Iran. He would call her from the refugee camp nearly every day to share the gospel with her. She decided she would need to get a divorce, since she couldn't be married to a Christian and remain a good Muslim. So she decided to look up all the verses in the Qur'an about Jesus. She was shocked to find him there, which then led her to find a Bible. One day, reading the Bible she recounted, "I was in my room alone, and the whole room became white and I felt completely clean. At that moment, through trusting in Jesus, I became a Christian."

There was a family on a boat with other migrants traveling from Turkey to Athens. On the way they lost their 7-year-old daughter into the water. Everyone in the crowded boat was looking for her but couldn't find her. Suddenly, she appeared on the other side of the boat, saying over and over, "A man who walked on the water took me and brought me to the other side of the boat." The parents dismissed her words as silly.

Upon arriving on the island of Lesbos, they met a Christian who made a fire and offered to talk to them. That day, without knowing what happened, he asked if they would like to know about a God who walked on water. They started crying.

The man had never used that illustration in evangelism, but that morning he felt like he had to. They asked him, "Who are you?" to which he replied, "I'm a Christian." They said, "What do you mean 'walk on the water'?" He opened the Bible and read the story of Jesus walking on the water. They continued crying. "Our daughter fell off the boat," they explained. "We thought she was crazy because she was dry on the other side. We didn't understand it. But she kept saying, 'It was a man who walked on the water that took me to the other side.'"

As I have pondered the legitimacy of these dreams, I have been drawn to passages like Matt. 12:22–36, where the validity of Jesus's own ministry was questioned. Would Satan cast out Satan? Would he give dreams filled with Scripture, pointing to Jesus, that ultimately lead to conversion and purity? I doubt it. The Spirit is still on the move, saving his people from among the nations. Of course Satan tries to attack and muddle what is real, but this should cause us to be discerning, not dismissive.

6. **Visions** – See Num. 12:6; Dan. 10:1-9; Acts 2:17; 9:10-12; 10:1-6; 10:9-16; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-18.

7. **Creation** – See Ps. 19 and 104 and especially Rom. 1:18ff.

8. **Spiritual Impressions** – These are "gracious incursions into our souls" (Willard, *In Search of Guidance*, 19). God often puts words, phrases, sentences, images and the like into our minds, *stamped with the indelible print of his voice*. Although undeniably subjective and occasionally slippery, "impressions" are a valid means of divine communication in our heart. In spite of the inescapable "subjectivity" of impressions, I believe we may justifiably expect that when God wants to tell us something, he will not be unduly obtuse. His purpose isn't to mislead or confuse but to guide us clearly and carefully. Whether through thoughts or perceptions that we intuitively recognize could only come from him, he makes his heart known. When God communicates he does so with specific information, often times in propositional utterances.

People in biblical times were not left to wonder about “hunches” or “impulses” or “feelings”. If God’s voice is occasionally “vague” it is to awaken us from slumber or perhaps alert us to our presumptuous attitude, or perhaps challenge us to press into his heart ever more intensely. I agree with Willard who said, “It is to be expected . . . that *if* there is something He would have us know, He will be both able and willing and will in fact plainly communicate it to us, if we are but open and prepared by our experience to hear and obey” (219). Even in the case of visions, dreams, and trances, there is *verbal* communication.

9. **Providence** – God may also communicate to us through providential guidance or by means of events that clearly reveal his will.

10. **Sympathetic physical pains or sensations** – On occasion God will communicate his desire to heal someone by stirring in your body a pain or sensation that corresponds to the affliction that another is experiencing.

11. **Other, unidentifiable modes of communication in which the Spirit (or an angel) simply “speaks” by some means not otherwise specified.** There are numerous texts in Acts where God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or an angel is described as speaking to or saying something to someone – Acts 8:26, 29; 9:10; 10:7; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 16:6-7; 18:9; 20:23; 22:21; 27:24.

12. The directives of the Holy Spirit are practical, suggesting what to do, where to go, and with whom to speak. They are *not* ethical principles. The rules and regulations that bind our conscience and carry absolute and universal moral authority for the Christian are provided only in Scripture. Whereas the Spirit will often lead us in the daily application of biblical principles or how to wisely navigate the confusing waters of human relationships, he will *not* dictate new laws of right and wrong. Rather they are words that concern the “here and now” of people and their actions; often divine directives concerning ways in which God’s people are to fulfill the mandate to preach the gospel to all nations (what might be called “divine appointments”).

Who Will Hear?

That God should speak to us is remarkable, but one does *not* have to *be* remarkable to hear his voice! God doesn’t speak merely to alleged superstars or super-saints. He speaks to ordinary believers who are exceptional only by virtue of their insatiable hunger for him. So, to what *kind* of people does God speak? In Acts we see that he speaks to apostles, to average Christians like Ananias (Acts 9), to deacons like Stephen (Acts 6-7) and Phillip (Acts 8), to unsaved Gentiles like Cornelius (Acts 10), to unnamed believers in congregations like the one in Antioch (Acts 13), to Phillip’s four unmarried daughters (Acts 21), and to elders at the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15) just to mention a few examples.

First of all, *it is doubtful you will hear God’s voice if you don’t believe he is speaking.*

Second, *God is more inclined to speak when he knows he is being heard. God speaks primarily to those who are willing to listen.* This principle is based on the truth that the hungry are those who get filled; the thirsty are those who receive drink; those who seek, find; those who pursue, obtain (see Josh. 5:14; Ps. 25:4-5; Isa. 30:18-19; 40:31; Jer. 29:13; Matt. 5:6).

Third, *hearing God’s voice is less dependent on your abilities than on your affections.* God is far more concerned with the depth of your commitment than he is with the diplomas on your wall. Earnest desire, not educational achievement, is of greatest value to him. This isn’t to belittle the mind or to suggest that ignorance is a virtue. It simply means that God doesn’t suspend his communication with

us on how many books we've either read or written! His question to us is: "Are you willing?" not "Are you able?" Or again, God is quick to speak to those who are quick to obey. Most of us are inclined to protest: "But *who am I* that God should speak to *me*? I've never accomplished much for the kingdom. My gifts are few and my talents unimpressive."

We assume that God speaks only to special people, unique people, extraordinarily endowed people, people with spectacular gifts, people with ecclesiastical authority, people with power and prestige and influence. We tend to think being *human* debars us from hearing God: we are too frail, too fragile, too fickle, too sinful, too weak. We don't have beauty or position; we can't speak well in public; our education is minimal, and therefore God wouldn't speak to us. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Examples: Moses (Ex. 4:10-14; 3:11) and Gideon (Judg. 6:14-17).

"So if you find yourself in the position of the one who can honestly say, 'God has never spoken to me,' then you might ask: 'Why *should* God speak to *me*? What am I doing in life that would make His speaking to me a reasonable thing for Him to do?'" (81). As Willard goes on to say,

"Perhaps we do not hear the voice [of God] because we don't expect to hear it. But perhaps we don't expect it because we know that we fully intend to run our lives on our own and never seriously considered anything else. The voice of God would therefore be an unwelcome intrusion into our plans. By contrast, we expect the great ones in The Way of Christ to hear that voice just because we see their lives wholly given up to doing what God wants" (83).

The question, "How do I hear the voice of God?" needs to be replaced by the question, "What would I *do* if I heard it?" Are you truly open to the extent to which the voice of God might disturb your plans?

Fourth, *the humble hear* (see Ps. 25:9; Isa. 57:15; 66:1-2; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5-6; and especially Num. 12:1ff.) Humility is simply preference for or submission to God's will. The proud want *their* way. The humble want *God's* way. The proud will exploit God's voice for their own glory, to exalt themselves in the eyes of others. The humble use it for God's glory. The proud man is so full of himself that there is little room for God. He is so enamored with what others say *about* him that he can't hear what God says *to* him.

How might we know when it is God speaking to us and not the projection of our own desires and fears?

Before answering that question we must address the "Message-a-Minute" view of divine guidance. "On this view God is either telling you what to do at every turn of the road, or He is willing and available to tell you if you only would ask Him" (Willard, 62). God does not want you to be afraid or hesitant to use your mind and common sense. It is dangerous to demand supernatural intervention when God has already provided you with sufficient wisdom and understanding, together with his written word, to make a decision. We must also be careful not to think that guidance by these latter means is sub-spiritual or reserved only for those believers whose faith is weak or whose maturity is second-rate.

So, how then do we discern when God is speaking as over against some other voice?

1. Ask the question: *What saith the Scriptures?* Anything God says outside of Scripture will **always** conform with what he has already said inside of Scripture. The voice of God within your heart will never, ever lead you to diminish the authority of Scripture or speak in such a way as to lead you to disregard its teachings. As far as Jesus was concerned, "It is written" brought an immediate end to every argument."

How Scripture functions in judging purported revelatory words: Explicit instruction / Implicit principles / Divine patterns and historical precedents

2. A second guideline in hearing God's voice is *obedience*. "Jesus answered them, [saying], 'My teaching is not Mine but his who sent Me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God, or whether I am speaking on my own authority'" (John 7:16-17). When our lives are attuned to the purposes of God, when our wills are committed and submissive to his will, the Holy Spirit produces in our hearts a sensitivity to his voice. We will feel an intuitive revulsion against anything opposed to him or that does not proceed from him. In other words, *doing leads to knowing*. This is why Jesus could hear the Father so well, for as he said, "I always do the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29).

The more by the grace of God we obey the will of God, the more the nature of God is formed in our souls. And, thus, the more like God we become the more in sync will our hearts be to his voice. Like is attracted to like. To the degree that we are at moral and spiritual odds with God we are less likely to discern the "sound" of his voice. But when the impulse of our will harmonizes with his and the passions of our soul are aligned with the passions of his, our capacity to hear him will increase and the potential for deception diminishes.

3. *Experience* is a helpful, though not infallible, indicator. When one first hears God's voice he/she may not recognize it. But after repeated experience, through trial and error, we come to discern the familiar way in which God speaks. God's voice is *self-authenticating*. When you hear it, it has the "feel" of God. There is a serene authority to his voice. God's voice bears within itself the marks of its divine origin.

4. Another indicator of whether or not it is God speaking is the spiritual *quality* of what is said. We respond to the voice of another person by taking note of its quality, whether it be high or low, its tone, style, speed, accent, spirit (passionate or cold, empathetic or stiff, frightening or reassuring), etc. The quality or spirit or tone of God's voice will be unmistakably characterized by peacefulness, confidence, and joy. It will be reassuring, filled with love and goodness.

God's voice does not threaten or intimidate. He promises and persuades and woos. God doesn't drive us; he leads. God's voice doesn't tear down with critical words that bite and belittle and destroy. He speaks as a tender father who loves and cherishes and protects and heals. In other words, God never speaks out of character! What he says is always a perfect reflection of who he is.

This is also one way by which we can differentiate between *conviction* that comes from the Holy Spirit and *condemnation* that comes from the Enemy. The former is usually definite and highlights the specific sin or issue that must be addressed. The Lord will tell you exactly what you've done. Satan's condemnation, on the other hand, is typically indefinite and vague and fuzzy. You feel guilty but can't identify any specific sin that accounts for it. There is a sense of dread that descends on your soul, but you can't put your finger on why.

Furthermore, conviction by the Spirit is generally recognizable. It will typically be something you have failed to confess, usually from the immediate past, that you know has not been dealt with. Condemnation, on the other hand, is elusive. If you can pinpoint it, it often turns out to be something for which you long ago received forgiveness. Lastly, conviction by the Spirit is attended with a definite solution and the assurance of mercy. God never convicts us without providing hope by directing our hearts to the finality and sufficiency of the cross. When we obey, we experience relief from the pain and guilt. With condemnation comes despair. If a solution is offered, it is usually irrational and unscriptural. The pain in our soul only intensifies.

I once heard someone say that God's voice will alert you to your depravity without belittling or destroying your dignity. Satan's voice, on the other hand, will insist that *because* of your depravity you have no dignity.

5. The principle of *community* is also important. What do the wise and mature men and women in your church say regarding what you think you've heard? People who are seasoned veterans of the Christian life as well as knowledgeable in the Scriptures should always be consulted. I'm not suggesting they are infallible or that you need always take their advice. But older and more experienced believers who themselves have struggled to develop spiritual discernment are an indispensable resource that only the arrogant and foolish will ignore.

6. Finally, what are the *consequences* of what you have heard in terms of *the fruit of the Spirit*? What is the moral harvest it has produced? Does it arouse humility or pride? Does it provoke sacrifice or selfishness? Does it stimulate gratitude or presumption? Does it increase love for Jesus or breed indifference? Does it turn you from self to God or from God to self? In sum, test every voice by the tendency it has to produce and prolong the fruit of the Spirit in your life. See especially 1 Cor. 14:3.

Perhaps these criteria for discerning the voice of God are not enough for you. Perhaps you regard the issue as too subjective and slippery. Your tendency is to say: "When I am *absolutely certain* that it is God speaking to me, then I will listen." But you cannot make infallibility a condition for listening to God. If you do, you will never hear him. Communication is unavoidably fallible, especially when one of the parties involved is weak and sinful. Even the infallibility of the speaker (God) does not guarantee the infallibility of the hearer (us).

Three Suggestions

First, *be silent*. Perhaps one of the reasons you don't hear God speak is that you yourself never stop talking! By "silence", however, I don't mean utter passivity. Rather, sit quietly and meditate on the word of God. God's advice to Joshua was that he "meditate on it [the written Law] day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success" (Josh. 1:8). See also Ps. 77:12; 119:97-100; 143:5.

Second, *be patient*. "Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield" (Ps. 33:20). Yet again the psalmist exhorts himself, saying, "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him" (Ps. 62:5; cf. Isa. 40:31).

Third, *be confident* (Luke 11:5-13).

BASIC TRAINING IN THE NATURE AND PRACTICE OF PROPHETIC MINISTRY AND THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE (MAIN SESSION 2 + 3)

Led by: Sam Storms (Lead Pastor of Teaching & Vision) + Tom Ball (Prophetic Leadership Team)

Description: In this session, we will focus on the nature and operation of the spiritual gift of prophecy as well as the gift of word of knowledge. We will examine the many ways God's revelation is imparted, what its purpose is in the life of the individual and the corporate body of Christ, how prophetic words should (and should not) be delivered, as well as the importance and practice of judging or weighing prophetic words.

The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and for Today

We begin our study of the spiritual gift of prophecy with 15 brief observations.

1. We learn from the events of Pentecost (Acts 2) that one of the primary characteristics of the Spirit's work in "the last days" (i.e., this entire present church age between the two comings of Christ) is empowering people to prophesy. See especially Acts 2:17-18.

2. The foundation or basis of all prophetic ministry is the *revelatory* work of the Spirit. In other words, prophecy is always the communication of something the Holy Spirit has "revealed" to a person. In Acts 2 this revelatory work of the Spirit is expressed in dreams and visions (Acts 2:18). In 1 Cor. 14:30 Paul makes it clear that a person prophesies only upon reception of a spontaneous revelation from the Spirit.

3. We may thus define prophecy as the speaking forth in merely human words something the Holy Spirit has sovereignly and spontaneously revealed to a believer. Prophecy, therefore, is not based on a hunch, a supposition, an inference, an educated guess, or even on sanctified wisdom. Prophecy is not based on personal insight, intuition, or illumination. Prophecy is the human *report* of a divine *revelation*. This is what distinguishes prophecy from teaching. Teaching is always based on a text of Scripture. Prophecy is always based on a spontaneous revelation.

Some have tried to make the case that prophecy is actually just another name for preaching. My sense is that they do this to avoid having to concede that prophecy is supernatural and based on the spontaneity of a direct revelation from God. There are numerous reasons why we cannot equate the two:

First, in Acts 2 Peter, quoting Joel, declares that prophecy is the direct result of revelatory visions and dreams and is the experience of young and old, both male and female.

Second, in Acts 13:1-2 we are told that there were in Antioch both "prophets and teachers" (v. 1). If all teaching/preaching is an expression of prophecy, this seems odd.

Third, in Acts 21 Luke refers to four daughters of Philip, all of whom had the gift of prophecy. So are we to conclude that his daughters regularly preached in the local church of which they were a part?

Fourth, in 1 Cor. 14:6 Paul differentiates between "revelation" and "knowledge" and "prophecy" and "teaching."

Fifth, again, in 1 Cor. 14:26 Paul describes how Christians are to approach the corporate gathering of the local church. "Each one," says Paul, "has a hymn, a lesson [lit., a teaching], a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." Here he clearly differentiates between a "teaching" and a "revelation". The former is based on a biblical text while the latter is the basis for prophecy.

Sixth, in 1 Cor. 14:29-30 he explicitly says that prophecy is based on a spontaneous revelation from the Spirit. Teaching/preaching, on the other hand, is the exposition and application of a biblical text.

Seventh, yet again in Eph. 4:11, Paul differentiates between "prophets" and "pastors and teachers" or more likely "pastor-teachers."

Eighth, two passages in 1 Tim. strongly suggest that prophecy is the report or exhortation or encouragement given by one individual to another for the latter's edification. Paul encourages

Timothy draw upon the prophecies spoken over him as a way to “wage the good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). And in 1 Timothy 4:14 he urges him not to neglect the gift he has that was given to him “by prophecy” when the council of elders laid hands on him.

Ninth, then, of course, there are those instances in Acts that, although not explicitly called prophecies, appear to be such. I have in mind things such as Peter’s supernaturally given knowledge about the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), the revelation from the Spirit that Paul and Barnabas were to be set apart for missionary service (Acts 13:1-3), Paul’s awareness that a paralyzed man had faith to be healed (Acts 14:8-10), the counsel given to Paul by disciples at Tyre (Acts 21:4), and the word given to Paul by Agabus (Acts 21:7-14).

Thus, preaching/teaching is grounded in an inspired text. *Prophecy is the fruit of a spontaneous revelation.* People may “learn” (1 Cor. 14:31) from prophecy no less than from preaching, but the fact that the *results* of each may be identical does *not* mean the *roots* are.

4. Whereas some prophetic utterances entail foretelling the future (see the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 11:27-28), most prophetic utterances entail forthtelling something pertaining to the present experience of another believer.

5. All Christians are responsible to earnestly desire and seek after prophecy: *“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy”* (1 Cor. 14:1). This is an **exhortation**, an **imperative**, a **command**, not merely a statement of fact. In 1 Cor. 12:31 Paul says, “earnestly desire” the higher gifts. The verb translated “earnestly (or eagerly) desire” (*zeloute*) is grammatically ambiguous (it can be either indicative [a statement of fact] or imperative [a command]). A few insist it is merely a statement characterizing the behavior of the Corinthians, hence “*you are eager* for the higher gifts.” In other words, they take it to be a statement of fact concerning a state of affairs, not an exhortation to future action.

But the Corinthians were *not*, in fact, seeking the greater/higher gifts. That was precisely their problem. They were placing far more emphasis on the gift of tongues, making it a mark of spirituality. In fact, the whole of chapter 14 is Paul’s attempt to encourage them to seek prophecy rather than uninterpreted tongues precisely because it is the greater gift insofar as it edifies others.

Also, the same verb form appears here in 1 Cor. 14:1 and again in 14:39 and is in both texts unambiguously imperative (i.e., a command). It is difficult to believe that the same verb, in the same form, in the same context, would be used by Paul in two entirely different ways without some hint or contextual clue to that effect. Consider also 14:12 where Paul writes, “So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts [referring to their collective enthusiasm for tongues], **seek** [imperative] to abound for the edification of the church [in particular, the gift of prophecy, as the context demands].”

In addition to the command in 1 Cor. 14:1, we read in v. 5 that Paul wants all “to prophesy”. In 14:12 he acknowledges that the Corinthians “are eager for manifestations of the Spirit” and encourages them to strive to excel in building up the church. The argument of chapter 14 would indicate that this is his way of encouraging the pursuit of prophecy, given its capacity to edify others in the body (14:3,4,5). Again in 14:12 and 14:39 Paul explicitly commands the Corinthians to desire and pursue the gift of prophecy.

The verb translated “earnestly desire” (ESV) means to have a strong affection for, to ardently yearn, to zealously long for. Or to use modern lingo, “I want you to want it really bad!” So, do you? This is not an option! This is not an issue of personality, as if some are more inclined than others to experience this kind of spiritual phenomenon. This is not an issue of “It’s for that church but not this

one. After all, we've got our mission statement and they've got theirs. If that's what God is calling them to pursue, fine, but we have a different divine mandate."

You cannot respond to Paul's words in this passage by saying: "Thanks God, but no thanks. I appreciate the opportunity you've offered me, but *it's just not my thing*, if you know what I mean." God, through Paul, says: "Yes I know what you mean. And I'm telling you to ***make it your thing!*** Or would you prefer to sin by disobeying a direct order?"

All churches, no matter how different they may be, have an identical mandate when it comes to obeying Scripture. No one is exempt or special or unique in such a way that they can justify disobedience to God's Word. This is not a suggestion or mere advice or wise counsel. This is a divine command, a mandate from God himself. If you and I are not earnestly desiring spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, we are disobedient.

This is not an issue for prayer. You do not respond to this passage by saying, "Well, ok, I'll pray about it." No. ***You don't pray about whether or not you are going to obey God. God is not giving us a choice. He's giving us a command.*** The only choice you have is whether or not you are going to obey.

Therefore, it is not enough to be *open* to spiritual gifts and their operation in the local church. One must be *zealous* for them and *earnestly desire* their presence, especially the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1, 12, 26).

Some have pointed out, correctly, that the exhortation to "earnestly desire" spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1) is in the *plural*. But they conclude from this, incorrectly, that Paul's command is therefore directed not to individual believers but to the corporate church. They argue that this is grounds for rejecting the idea that individual Christians should seek any spiritual gift.

Of course the verb is plural, as are virtually all Paul's commands in letters other than those addressed to individuals (such as Philemon, Titus, and Timothy). Paul is writing to everyone in the church at Corinth, each of whom is responsible for individually responding to an exhortation that has validity for the entire church. In other words, what is the corporate church if not a collection of individuals on each of whom the obligation falls? The plural of this exhortation simply indicates that all believers in Corinth are to heed the apostolic admonition. It is a duty common to everyone. That includes us as well.

6. The Scriptures are clear that ***both men and women*** can prophesy (Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:2-16). There is nothing to indicate that only men were allowed to prophesy. But in saying that all "can" prophesy does not mean everyone should expect to function consistently as a Prophet in the church. Paul wishes that "all" would prophesy (1 Cor. 14:5), but does that mean he *expects* them to? His desire for people to prophesy comes from his recognition that "the one who prophesies builds up (edifies) the church" (1 Cor. 14:4). In two other texts he seems to envision the possibility that any Christian might speak prophetically (1 Cor. 14:24,31). But again this *doesn't* mean that everyone *will*. Paul is probably drawing a distinction between, on the one hand, "prophets" who consistently display a facility and accuracy in this gift and, on the other, those who merely on occasion "prophesy". Thus not all will be "prophets" (cf. Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:29), but it would appear that all *may* prophesy.

7. What kind of information does God reveal in prophecy? Examples: disclosing the "secrets" of the unbeliever's heart (1 Cor. 14:24-25); a warning (Acts 21:4,10-14), a Scripture passage that applies especially at this moment in time to a person's life, a word of exhortation, edification, or consolation (1 Cor. 14:3), an invitation to some ministry opportunity, guidance for decision making (Acts 13:1-3);

a revelation of some illness which God intends to heal (Acts 14:9-10); or some spiritual gift that God intends to impart to a person (for an example of this, see 1 Tim. 4:14).

8. How can God, who is infallible, reveal something that is fallible? The answer is simple: He can't. He doesn't. The principle here is this: *every prophecy has three elements*, only one of which is assuredly of God.

- First, there is the *revelation* itself, the divine act of disclosure to a human recipient.
- The second element is the *interpretation* of what has been disclosed, or the attempt to ascertain its meaning.
- Third, there is the *application* of that interpretation.

God is alone responsible for the revelation. Whatever he discloses to the human mind is wholly free from error. It is as infallible as God is. It is true in all its parts, completely devoid of falsehood. Indeed, the revelation, which is the root of every genuine prophetic utterance, is as inerrant and infallible as the written Word of God itself (the Bible). In terms of the *revelation* alone, the NT prophetic gift does not differ from the OT prophetic gift.

The problem is that you might misinterpret or misapply what God has disclosed. The fact that God has *spoken* perfectly doesn't mean that you have *heard* perfectly. A person *may* interpret and apply, without error, what God has revealed. But the mere existence of a divine revelation does not in itself guarantee that the interpretation or application of God's revealed truth will share in its perfection.

This is especially troubling to some and has led them to conclude that NT prophecy is of no benefit to the church. After all, how can a gift that is potentially fallible be a blessing to anyone? A comparison of prophecy with the gift of teaching should help us answer the question.

Most will occasionally disagree with their pastor when it comes to the interpretation of a biblical text. Notwithstanding the presence of the objective, written *revelation* of God, you may walk away from a sermon or Bible study with conflicting views and differing applications of its relevance for your life. We might wish that God had promised to guarantee that our interpretation and subsequent communication of his revealed Word would always be accurate. But he hasn't.

What should you do? Should you denounce teaching and insist that a gift so obviously susceptible to error and abuse be banned from church life? Of course not. You realize that only the Bible has intrinsic divine authority. What a pastor/teacher says when he teaches has authority only in a secondary, derivative sense. Simply because someone may have come up short in his interpretive skills is no reason to repudiate the spiritual gift of teaching.

Like teaching, prophecy is also based on a revelation from God. In some way beyond ordinary sense perception, God *reveals* something to the mind of the prophet not found in Scripture (but never contrary to it). The revelation, having come from God, is true. It is error free. Like the Bible, it alone has intrinsic divine authority. But the gift of prophecy does not guarantee the infallible *transmission* of that revelation. The believer may *perceive or understand* the revelation imperfectly, and consequently she may *communicate* it imperfectly.

The gift of prophecy may result in *fallible* prophecy just like the gift of teaching may result in *fallible* teaching. Therefore, if teaching (a gift prone to fallibility) can edify and build up the church, why can't prophecy be good for edification as well (see 1 Cor. 14:3,12,26), even though both gifts suffer from human imperfection and stand in need of testing?

9. What is the *purpose* of prophetic utterances? Paul says prophecy *builds up (edifies), encourages, and consoles* (1 Cor. 14:3). When people are suddenly confronted with the inescapable reality that God truly knows their hearts and has heard their prayers and is intimately acquainted with all their ways, they are encouraged to press on and to persevere. We have often spoken with believers who, in spite of what they knew theologically to be true, *felt* as if God had forgotten them. Their prayers seemed never to be heard, much less answered. Then, often quite without warning, they receive a prophetic word from a total stranger that could be known only by God himself, and their faith is bolstered and their spirit consoled.

We are to earnestly desire that we might prophesy not in order to dazzle people, or for sensationalism, or to draw attention to ourselves, but to display the love of God for his people, to confirm his presence and power in our lives, and to show his providential care.

10. Prophecy can also function to disclose the secrets of the hearts of the unbelieving, leading them to repentance and faith in Christ (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

11. Prophecy can provide us with specific guidance on when to go, where to go, and with whom to go. See Acts 13:1-3. Some suggest that Paul and Barnabas already knew they were called on mission and even where they were to go. This prophetic revelation was simply confirmation to them of what God had already revealed.

As Michael Sullivant has said, “we need the ministry of the Holy Spirit to ‘tailor’ the generally revealed will of God specifically to our lives, circumstances and ministries” (91). However, we must remember that while God can make use of a prophetic revelation to guide and direct us, prophecy is not the primary means by which we make decisions in the Christian life.

12. Prophecy is often more of a confirmation to us of what we have already discerned in reading Scripture or have heard from the wise counsel of close friends.

13. Prophecy can provide us with the resources to wage war against Satan and the flesh and to encourage us in the Christian life. Consider what Paul said in 1 Tim. 1:18-19. There we discover that prophecy is one of the most powerful and reassuring tools God has given us by which we are to wage war in our on-going battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that *by them* [i.e., by means of the “prophecies” spoken to you] you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience” (1 Tim. 1:18-19a; emphasis mine).

Paul’s appeal to young Timothy resounds with ear-shattering clarity: “Timothy, please, I implore you as my spiritual son, don’t even think about trying to fight Satan, the enemy of our faith, without drawing strength and encouragement and power from the prophetic words delivered to you! Never attempt to face opposition in the church apart from the reassurance that flows from those revelatory words you received. Timothy, there is strength and confidence for you in the truth and certitude of those Spirit-prompted utterances that came to you at your ordination. By all means fight. Never fear. But fight fearlessly through the power of those prophetic words!”

How do you wage a good war? How does one fight and resist the seductive allure of the passing pleasures of sin? By “holding faith and a good conscience.” Paul has in mind both theological and ethical integrity, both right belief and right behavior, both orthodoxy and orthopraxy, both truth in our doctrinal affirmations and purity in our lives. This is no easy task! We are assaulted daily by those who would undermine our confidence in God and his Word. We struggle with anxiety, with provocations to lust, with greed, with despair and doubt and the temptation to quit. With what shall

we fight? What shall we bring to bear against the deceitful promises of sin? Paul is clear: It is by means of the prophecies made about you that strength to stand firm is found.

This is quite instructive given the fact that many think the spiritual gift of prophecy is inconsistent with sound doctrine or that if too much emphasis is placed on it that a person will go soft on theology and emphasize only experience. But Paul couldn't have said it with any greater clarity: The way you hold to the foundational truths of the Christian faith and resist the temptation to abandon them, the way you maintain a good conscience before God, is by thinking and reflecting on and drawing strength from the prophetic words given to you by the Spirit!

We don't know what these prophetic utterances were, but there is no shortage of possibilities. Paul may have in mind certain spiritual gifts that were promised to young Timothy, gifts on which he could rely and should now draw strength to fulfill his calling. Perhaps there were prophetic words spoken over Timothy related to ministry opportunities or open doors that would expand his influence. There may well have been simple affirmations of Timothy in terms of his identity in Christ and God's purpose for his life. I've known people who received unique prophetic promises of God's presence and protection in the face of unusual danger. In Timothy's case, perhaps someone spoke powerfully of a biblical promise, drawn from a particular biblical text, that applied directly to him. Someone may have had a vision or dream that reinforced to Timothy his fitness and giftedness for ministry which would prove especially helpful when those older than he began to question his qualifications. We could speculate further, but no need. Timothy obviously would have known what Paul meant, even if we don't.

How does one appeal to such prophetic words to wage a good war? By constantly reminding oneself of God's commitment and presence and unshakable purpose to enable Timothy (and us) to fight doubt and anxiety and fear and despair. It is incredibly reassuring to recall tangible, empirically verifiable evidence of God's existence and power and presence communicated through a prophetic utterance.

I suspect that, perhaps long ago, many of you received words you believed were of God. But for whatever reason you've lost confidence in his promise. You've begun to wonder if it was really the Spirit who spoke. I encourage you to dig up those words, rehearse them in your mind, meditate on them, put legs under them to see if God intended all along for you to be the means by which they are fulfilled. Pray them back to God (as did David in the Psalms) and hold him to his word. But whatever you do, never attempt to fight the battles of faith apart from the strength such words provide.

14. Is there such a thing as "ecstatic experience" when exercising the gift of prophecy? Much depends on one's definition of *ecstasy*. It may mean that a person experiences a sense of mental detachment wherein she becomes unaware of her surroundings and, in varying degrees, oblivious to sight or sound. This may or may not entail complete loss of consciousness. Others define *ecstasy* as something akin to divine seizure in which the Holy Spirit overrides and usurps control of one's faculties of thought and speech. Paul doesn't teach that *ecstasy* is a part of the prophetic experience. Several factors support this conclusion.

- Paul assumes the person prophesying is capable of recognizing from some form of signal that someone else had received a revelation and was ready to speak (v. 30). Clearly, then, she was not oblivious to her surroundings.
- The person prophesying is also expected to cease speaking upon recognition that another has received a revelation ("let the first keep silent"). The prophet could both speak and keep silent at will. Also, the second prophet didn't burst into speech but somehow indicated to the first, then waited until she had stopped.

- Paul says that all who prophesied could do so in turn, “one by one” (v. 31), indicating the sensible and voluntary control of their faculties.
- In 1 Cor. 14:32 Paul says that “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets.” He is referring to the many different manifestations of the one Holy Spirit through the spirit of each individual prophet (see also 14:12,14-16). This means the Holy Spirit will never force or compel a prophet to speak, but subjects his work to the wisdom of each individual. The Spirit voluntarily submits in this one respect for the sake of order. This isn’t a theological declaration that we are in some sense superior to or more powerful than the Holy Spirit. It isn’t the nature of the Spirit to incite confusion or to coerce the will; thus, he subordinates his inspiration to the prophet's own timing. This verse also answers a potential objection to Paul's instructions in v. 30. Someone might object by saying she was forced to prophesy, being unable to restrain herself and thus unable to defer to a second (v. 30). Paul's answer is that the Holy Spirit remains subject to the prophets, never forcing one to speak in a disorderly or chaotic way. The Spirit is neither impetuous nor uncontrollable.
- The case of tongues is in many respects parallel. The tongues-speaker could speak or be silent at will and was expected to follow a prescribed “order of service” in the exercise of the gift (vv. 27-28), something out of the question if he/she were in any sense mentally disengaged from events in the meeting.

Having ruled out ecstasy does not mean that the prophetic experience lacks an emotional dimension. The reception and communication of divine revelation may well entail spiritual excitement, a sense of urgency, and even an unmistakable sense of the presence of God.

15. All prophetic ministry is subject to and under the oversight of God and his sovereign will. This is what we see in Rev. 22:6 – “And he said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true. ***And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets,*** has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

The word “spirits” is what grammarians call an “objective” genitive. The idea can be paraphrased: “God ***over*** the spirits of the prophets” or “God ***ruling*** or ***inspiring*** the spirits of the prophets.” In any case, God is clearly portrayed as sovereign over what prophets prophesy. God, as it were, owns, operates, and oversees the ministry of true prophets. This confirms what we saw in the previous point in 1 Cor. 14, that the prophetic is entirely dependent on God, always awaiting his anointing and activity. Prophets may prophesy at will, but they only receive revelation by the initiative of God. Thus, more so than with the gift of teaching, prophets are somewhat *passive*, being *instruments or conduits* for the revelatory word of God, whereas teachers are more *active*, drawing directly from the Scriptures and expounding what they interpret. This is, in fact, the primary distinction between the prophetic gift and the teaching gift: the former is dependent on a spontaneous revelation while the latter is dependent on an inscripturated text. However, this should not be taken to mean that the Spirit is not also active in the exercise of other spiritual gifts, such as teaching.

Is the word “spirits” a reference to the human spirit of each prophet or is it a reference to the Holy Spirit? Some find it problematic to suggest that the Holy Spirit would be mentioned in the plural. But remember: (1) the plural is used for the Holy Spirit in Rev. 1:4; 4:5; 5:6; and (2) when the human spirit is energized by a charismatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit (i.e., when a spiritual gift is in operation), Paul seems to have in mind both; in 1 Cor. 14 it is difficult to know when one should translated *pneuma* as “Spirit” and when as “spirit”. Gordon Fee simply renders it S/spirit.

Paul uses the same terminology in 1 Cor. 14:32 (“the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets”; the only difference is that in Revelation the definite article appears: “*the* spirits of *the* prophets”). There he has in mind the control by the prophet of the manifestation of the Spirit, confirming what we saw

earlier that, contrary to those who think prophecy is an ecstatic and uncontrollable phenomenon that overwhelms and overrides the will of the prophet, each individual is capable of consciously refraining from prophetic utterance in accordance with the rules and decorum for prophetic ministry in the church.

Practical Guidelines on the Delivery of and Response to Prophetic Words

Avoid dramatic pronouncements such as, “Thus saith the Lord,” or “This is the word of the Lord for your life,” or “God specifically told me to tell you that you should...” Pastoral wisdom requires that we avoid any semblance of manipulation or coercion. It is far preferable to introduce prophetic utterances with statements such as:

- “I have a strong inner impression that I believe is from the Lord.”
- “I have a picture in my mind that I think may be for someone here.”
- “I had a sense from the Holy Spirit about what he wants to accomplish tonight.”
- “I had a dream which involved several of you, and I would like to share it.”

Speaking in this way puts people at ease and reassures them that they are not disobedient if they choose to wait or to consult others regarding the truth of what was spoken. Prophetic words may be highly symbolic and require extensive prayer and investigation. People should not be made to feel guilty if they respond with less than immediate and whole-hearted affirmation.

How to Respond to Questionable “Words”

On occasion you will experience an immediate check or hesitation in your heart regarding the authenticity of an utterance that purports to be from God. This doesn’t mean you are by nature a cynic or that you have questions regarding the validity of the gift of prophecy in our day. It more likely indicates that your knowledge of Scripture, together with common sense, has detected something amiss in what was said. If that should occur, I suggest the following steps.

First, some alleged prophetic “words” need immediate correction, especially if they are biblically misguided.

Second, in every case, be gentle, kindhearted, and encouraging. Don’t crush the spirit of the person or respond in a way that would make them fearful and hesitant to ever prophesy again. If their “word” is contrary to what is clearly taught in Scripture, it will be difficult to bring correction without incurring some measure of relational discomfort.

Third, if the “word” is general or vague or merely a repetition of some biblical text or principle already well known, don’t dismiss it, but commit as a group to pray about it and re-visit it at a later time.

Fourth, if the “word” is weird or unintelligible or embarrassing, simply say: “Thanks for sharing. Let’s discuss this in private at a later time. I’m not sure this is the direction the Spirit is leading us at this time.” But don’t be surprised if you subsequently discover that the “weird” or slightly “embarrassing” word was genuinely of God and proves to be beneficial to those for whom it was intended.

Practical “Do’s” and “Don’ts” of Prophetic Ministry

1. Do not publicly criticize or correct church leadership by name. Take such “words” privately to the Elders: “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19).
2. Don’t prophesy marriages, babies, moves, job changes, or public, political, and natural disasters. Exceptions?
3. If God reveals to you someone’s physical affliction, do not automatically assume it is his will to heal them then and there. God may have revealed this to you so that you can come to their assistance to accomplish tasks they otherwise can’t perform. Or it may be to inform and energize your intercession on their behalf.
4. Avoid using prophecy to establish doctrines, practices, or ethical principles that lack explicit biblical support.
5. Be cautious about excessive dependence on prophetic words for making routine, daily decisions in life. There are, of course, certain exceptions to this “rule”. Instead, “reckon” with the circumstances of any situation (Phil. 2:25; 1 Cor. 6:5), consider the needs of people, the principles of Scripture and the counsel of wise people. Make a sober evaluation of what is fitting or advisable. In some texts Paul appeals to ‘knowledge,’ ‘discernment,’ and ‘spiritual wisdom and understanding’ (Phil. 1:9-10a; Col. 1:9) as essential in the decision-making process. Revelatory insight from the Lord can be crucial in such deliberation, but God does not want us to be paralyzed in its absence.

Judging/Weighing/Assessing Prophetic Words

“Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:19-22).

Observe the parallel between v. 19 and v. 20. Paul’s exhortation in v. 19 not to quench the Spirit has to do with our response to prophecy (v. 20). The Spirit’s activity of imparting revelatory insight into the will and ways of God is compared with a fire that we must not douse with the water of skepticism, religiosity, or fear. *Rather than* quenching the Holy Spirit by despising prophetic utterances, examine everything. The word “everything” or “all things” in v. 21 is a reference to the prophetic utterances in v. 20. The “good” in v. 21 to which we are to hold fast, and the “evil” in v. 22 from which we are to abstain or which we are to avoid, are also references to the prophetic utterances mentioned in v. 20. Paul’s second exhortation is to “hold fast to that which is good.” Once you have determined that the word is *good*, that it is biblical and meets all other criteria and is therefore most probably from God, believe it, obey it, preserve it.

The fact that Paul felt compelled to write this is itself remarkably instructive. For one thing, it tells us that not everyone in the early church was completely happy about the gift of prophecy. Some were clearly disenchanted with its use in the church and were actually taking steps to suppress its exercise. This is remarkable for no other reason than that it was happening in the church at Thessalonica, one of the most godly and mature early congregations (see Paul’s praise of them in 1:1-10).

Simply put, it doesn’t matter how badly people may have abused this gift. It is a *sin* to despise prophecy. This is a divine command. Don’t treat prophecy with contempt; don’t treat it as if it were

unimportant; don't trivialize it. In other words, there is a real, live baby in that murky, distasteful bath water.

The alternative to not quenching the Holy Spirit isn't "anything goes." Rather, we are to test, judge, or examine, every word. Paul doesn't correct abuse by commanding disuse (as is the practice of many non-charismatics today). We are neither to gullibly believe every word that is spoken nor cynically reject them. Paul's remedy for sinful despising isn't unqualified openness. His remedy is biblically informed discernment.

The NASB renders it "prophetic utterances" and the NIV has "prophecies." This is the plural form of "prophecy" and refers not so much to the gift of prophecy but to the individual utterances or words that come forth in the life of a church. Quite simply, we are to test, to examine, to evaluate, to assess, to weigh, to judge these "utterances."

So how are we supposed to "judge" or "weigh" or "evaluate" prophetic words?

1. The early church was to evaluate them in the light of the apostolic traditions (2 Thess. 2:15) bequeathed them by Paul. The reference to what they were "taught . . . by word of mouth" obviously alludes to the oral instruction received from Paul during his stay in Thessalonica. The "letter" he mentions is likely a reference either to 1 Thess. or 2 Thess.
2. For us today, all prophetic words must be in *absolute conformity with Scripture*. In the wilderness, Jesus tested Satan's "words" against what the rest of Scripture said and exposed how he was misapplying texts (Matt. 4).
3. We also measure prophetic words by their tendency to edify or build up (1 Cor. 14:3). We must always ask: does it build up, strengthen, or tear down and create disunity and fear and doubt and self-contempt? Does the "word" have a tendency to exhort and encourage (1 Cor. 14:3)? Does the "word" have a tendency to console (1 Cor. 14:3) or does it lead to despair? If the "word" is predictive, empirical examination is in order to determine whether or not it comes to pass as prophesied.
4. We must also apply the test of love (1 Cor. 13) by which all charismatic gifts are to be measured and subordinated. Paul doesn't appear to care much for any gift of the Spirit if it violates the dictates of love. Thus, always ask the question: "Does this prophetic utterance seem to be motivated by selfishness and a grab for power and prestige on the part of the prophet, or does it come across as selfless and designed to bless and encourage the one to whom it is addressed?"
5. The test of community is also important. Wisdom demands that we always run the "word" by others who have skill and experience in evaluating prophetic revelation.
6. Finally, there is the test of personal experience. When Paul was given a "word" about the danger that awaited him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:3-4 and 21:10-14), he evaluated and then responded in the light of what God had already told and shown him (20:22-23). In effect, Paul says: "Yes, we all got the same revelation and interpretation, that suffering awaits me in Jerusalem, but we differ on its application."

This means there is a vast difference between prophesying falsely and being a false prophet. All of us have at one time or another, some more, some less, prophesied falsely. We have spoken words we thought were from God which, in fact, were not. But that doesn't make us false prophets. It just

makes us human! False prophets in the New Testament were non-Christian enemies of the gospel (cf. Matt. 7:15-23; 24:10-11, 24; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1-6).

The other primary text on judging prophetic words is found in 1 Cor. 14:29. There Paul writes: “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”

Who are the “others” in this passage who are to pass judgment or weigh what is said? These are probably the others *“in the congregation” as a whole*, that is to say, all other believers present. 1 Thess. 5:20-21, which calls for the evaluation of prophetic utterances, is directed to the entire church, not a specially gifted group.

What is the nature of this judgment to be passed? It isn’t the determination of whether the utterance is of the Spirit or of the Devil, but whether what is said is compatible with what the Spirit has already said (in Scripture, in the apostolic tradition, etc.).

If NT congregational prophecy is often a mixture of divine revelation and human interpretation and application (see Acts 21:4-6; 21:10-14, 27-35), it’s essential that the church evaluate and analyze what is said, rejecting what is wrong and accepting what is right (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19-22; see also 1 John 4:1-6). Only on the assumption that some of what the prophets say is their own contribution, and therefore possibly erroneous or misleading, could Paul command that their utterances be evaluated.

The take-away from this is simple. Anytime you are the recipient of a prophetic word, open your Bible and carefully assess what was said. To do so isn’t a sign of unbelief or cynicism or pride, far less suspicion of the person who spoke it. It’s your Christian obligation. My hope is that each of us will determine in our hearts neither to be skeptics who end up putting out the Spirit’s fire nor fools who gullibly believe everything we are told.

AVOIDING THE PERILS AND PITFALLS OF PROPHETIC MINISTRY (MAIN SESSION 4)

Led by: Sam Storms (Lead Pastor of Teaching & Vision)

Description: Sadly, there are many who abuse prophetic ministry and bring disgrace on the Holy Spirit and the gospel. What are some of the pitfalls and extremes that should be avoided? How might we discern when false prophecy is uttered and how can we grow in our facility of protecting the body of Christ without quenching the Holy Spirit? Those are a few of the issues we'll examine in this session.

In this session we will look at several perils and pitfalls of prophetic ministry that we must be diligent to identify and avoid.

1. People who are gifted prophetically often experience intensified and elevated emotions that cause them to conclude that if you question the accuracy of what they've "heard" you are doubting their personal integrity. They can become incredibly *defensive* about being "right". In other words, prophetic revelation can easily become "emotionally intoxicating." It is such a profound and glorious experience that some will do whatever they can to reproduce it on a regular basis, even when God isn't revealing anything.

2. Some who are truly gifted prophetically end up thinking that virtually every random thought or word or idea that enters their mind is a revelation from God. They've been told that since God is "always talking" we need to be "always listening." But it is quite rare than anyone will be in constant dialogue with God. We need to guard our hearts from fantasizing that we are always hearing God's voice. One prophetically gifted man was brought to a church to minister. He asked God, "Lord, what are you saying here tonight?" The Lord replied, "Nothing, and don't you say anything either!"

3. We need to guard against the tendency to treat the prophetic as a *shortcut* to guidance and growth in Christ. Prophecy was never intended by God to replace the need for prayer, Bible study, Bible memorization, community, accountability to others, and faithful commitment to the many spiritual disciplines.

4. If someone speaks a prophetic word to you that involves personal guidance or direction in decision-making, don't obey it immediately. Test it by asking others. Pray about it on your own. If God wants you to know his "will" on some important matter, in most cases he will tell you himself.

5. Once a person has become known for being gifted prophetically, others will often pressure them for "words" and guidance. But remember: prophecy is not at our command. It is always dependent on a spontaneous revelation from the Spirit. Don't ever be reluctant to honestly respond to someone by saying: "I'm sorry, but I don't sense the Spirit saying anything at present regarding your situation. But I will continue to pray for you and I will be sure to let you know if the Lord reveals anything to me."

Many have gotten themselves in serious trouble when they yield to the fear of hurting someone's feelings by not giving them a word. Under pressure to bless them, they "make up" something or concoct a revelation that is more from their own heart rather than from the heart of God.

There is the similar pressure a prophetically gifted person feels to retain their reputation or their standing in the church or the high regard in which others hold them. If they "fail" to prophesy on command or when asked, they fear they might lose stature or lose ground or lose influence in the lives of others. Needless to say, this is fueled by sinful pride.

6. Never forget: *You are not your gift*. You are God's beloved child. But you are not to be identified with your spiritual gift. Your identity is wrapped up in God's love for you in Christ, not in your particular spiritual gift. That way, if you fail in the exercise of your gift, you don't suffer personal damage or feel as if you have lost your value in the kingdom of God.

7. Resist the temptation to create a different moral standard for prophetically gifted people simply because they are prophetically gifted. Those with the gift of prophecy are just as obligated to observe the basic moral principles and responsibilities of Scripture as are all other Christians. There can be no double standards in the body of Christ, regardless of how supernatural or exciting the exercise of one's gift may be.

8. Related to the above is the tendency for some to think: "Since I hear so clearly from God and take my cues directly from him, I don't know need to submit to the leadership of the local church. Who are they to tell me what to do when God has already told me what to do?"

9. Resist the temptation to speak authoritatively on secondary issues on which the Bible is silent. Just because you may be prophetically gifted does not give you the right or freedom to dictate to others what movies they should or should not attend, whether or not they should ever drink alcohol (always, of course, in moderation), or other related matters.

10. Some prophetically gifted people feel the need to add a little salt to the meat. That is, they feel compelled to speak and act in a more dramatic and flamboyant manner given the fact that they are hearing from God. In other words, don't alter your normal language or tone of voice in an attempt to increase the spiritual authority of your word. You don't have to suddenly shift to using the King James English in order to communicate clearly what God has revealed.

11. Prophecy (and all other spiritual gifts, for that matter) is not a toy to play with or a game to play.

12. Three kinds of prophecy to avoid, or at least be careful with are: predictive prophecy (Jer. 23:16), directive prophecy ("you are supposed to marry that boy/girl"), and corrective prophecy. Direction and correction, in particular, are primarily the responsibility of the Elders/Pastors of the local church.

13. Church discipline should never be pursued or implemented based solely on an alleged prophetic revelation. We are to apply the principles of discipline on the basis of verifiable facts.

14. Some who hear clearly and consistently from the Lord end up drawing the sinful conclusion that since they are the recipient of so many words from God they don't need to hear him speak by means of Scripture. Prophetic revelation strikes them as so much more personal and vibrant and powerful than reading revelation in the words of Scripture.

15. Never use the prophetic to undermine the credibility of someone else or to create suspicion in the hearts of others concerning some person. Never use it to gain leverage in interpersonal relationships or use otherwise unknown facts to extract loyalty from someone.

16. Problems often emerge when there is a lack of wisdom in the delivery of so-called "negative" or "critical" prophetic words.

By "negative" I mean prophetic words that highlight or bring to awareness some sin in a person's life or some especially difficult situation in which they find themselves. We want to avoid speaking words in a harsh and uncaring manner and it hurt rather than help the person. At the same time, we want to be careful not to alter the content of the revelation we receive. I think there is a way to achieve both ends.

Some people argue that all prophetic words should be positive in terms of their content. They base this largely on 1 Cor. 14:3 where Paul writes: "On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation." But these three terms describe the effect or fruit of prophetic ministry, not necessarily and always its content. Thus you may deliver a word of rebuke to someone who is living in unrepentant sin. That is unavoidably negative, potentially even hurtful (depending on how the person receives it). But the result of the word may lead to the "upbuilding" or edification of the individual if they respond to it appropriately. Repentance is painful at times but should always result in greater spiritual maturity.

We should also remember that some of the more pointed prophetic rebukes and warnings are found in the seven letters in Rev. 2-3. These are forceful and threaten discipline if there is no repentance. But they can result in people being built up spiritually and encouraged upon hearing the truth of their situation.

There is also the case of 1 Cor. 14:24-25 where an unbeliever, through prophetic ministry, comes under conviction of his sin and is led to saving repentance and faith.

I would also point out that prophecy is not unlike preaching in this regard. Preaching the Word often comes in the form of correction or rebuke that leads to the conviction of sin. These can be somewhat “negative” in content but hopefully lead to positive development in terms of one’s relationship to the Lord. The same applies when it comes to counseling. Even “encouragement” or verbal exhortation may at times be sharp and unpleasant, but if delivered in love and concern for a person it can contribute to their spiritual growth.

First, never deliver negative or critical words or words that expose sin in a person’s life in a public setting. I say “never”, but I’ve known a few exceptions that might be granted. But in general it is almost always wiser and more pastoral not to call out a person and expose their struggles or sins or shortcomings in the presence of others.

Second, it is always wiser to go to the individual privately. It may also help to first share in confidence with someone who knows and loves the person, someone the person trusts. Then speak to the person in private. It may also be wise to take with you the person with whom you shared the revelation. Even when you deliver a prophetic word in private, it is still important that negative words never come across as accusatory, but rather as sanctifying and restorative.

Third, the best thing to do is to ***turn the word into a question***. For example, let’s say you receive something from the Lord that indicates a person is struggling with some sin, such as bitterness. Instead of saying, “The Lord said to me that you are in bitterness,” say this: “I have a sense from the Lord that there is a struggle in your life. Are you battling bitterness? Is there a relationship or an incident in the past that has led to bitterness taking root in your heart?”

By asking a question you open a door for the person to walk through at their initiative. They don’t feel like they’ve been accused or attacked, but the struggle in their heart has been identified. If they say, “No, I’m not bitter about anyone or anything,” you say, “OK, perhaps I missed it. I’ll continue to pray about it.” If you continue to hear this from God and are more persuaded that you heard the Lord correctly, circle back around and say, “I’ve been praying for you and I keep wondering if bitterness is really a battle for you. What do you think? Perhaps we should stop and pray right now for the Lord to make this clear.” That way the reality of the revelation, bitterness, is stated, but in a way that doesn’t sound accusatory or negative. It’s all about the ***tone*** in which it is presented.

A fourth thing to do is related to the first. “I have a strong impression in my heart. Whether or not it is from God is ultimately for you to decide. But is there some particular struggle in your heart that you need to deal with?” If they say yes, you come back and say, “My sense is that it may be bitterness.” That way ***you are not making a declarative statement*** but are saying you think it “may” be bitterness. It again leaves the door open for that person to respond.

Fifth, don’t alter or avoid the content of the revelation, but instead ***“transform the tone.”*** Even a very heavy and negative revelation can be pastored properly and delivered in a way that the person on the receiving end does not feel threatened or judged but loved. In this way we can remain true to the

content of what God revealed while being sensitive to the person. Maintain your gentle and pastoral tone while still communicating the essence of what God revealed.

Sixth, sometimes it is best to deliver the word by means of your own *personal testimony* or perhaps a story about another person who had the same battle. If you think they are battling bitterness you can say, "Hey, I had what I think is an impression from the Lord. And it resonated with something in my own experience. There was a time when I struggled with bitterness and unforgiveness toward a certain person, and it soured my relationship with the Lord. I'm wondering if perhaps you may be struggling with the same thing."

Seventh, sometimes you aren't ever supposed to speak the content of a negative revelatory disclosure. On some occasions the purpose of God in revealing something negative or sinful to you about another person is so that you can intercede on their behalf. In this case, prayer, not proclamation, is the purpose of the revelation.

17. Always be sensitive to *the allure of elitism*. By this I mean the tendency to consider yourself in a special class of Christians who are more highly favored and loved of God because he provides you, and not others, with revelatory insights.

18. Never think that a supernatural experience or revelatory encounter with God will automatically eradicate sin from your life so that you no longer need to employ the ordinary means of grace to wage war against the flesh. Consider Paul's experience in 2 Cor. 12.

19. Always be quick to sincerely acknowledge your weaknesses and failures. Doing so will not undermine your credibility in the eyes of others but only enhance it.

20. Be careful before you yield governmental authority in the church to those who have the gift of prophecy. By all means listen to them! Seek their counsel and insight. But at the same time remember that church leadership is the responsibility of the Elders. The NT doesn't say "Be subject to the prophets" but rather "Be subject to the Elders" (1 Pet. 5:5; Heb. 13:17). Paul didn't go from city to city to ordain or appoint prophets, but Elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:2; Titus 1:5). Whereas it's good that some Elders/Pastors are prophetically gifted, that alone does not qualify them for office. Elders are to be "able to *teach*" (1 Tim. 3:2), not necessarily able to prophesy.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE (MAIN SESSION 5)

Led by: Sam Storms (Lead Pastor of Teaching & Vision)

Description: The greatest challenge facing prophetic ministry today is the fear many have that to acknowledge the revelatory basis of all prophetic ministry is to undermine the sufficiency, finality, and authority of Scripture. How can the gift of prophecy be reconciled with our commitment to the sufficiency of God's written Word and the closing of the canon? In this final session, we will look closely at Scripture and develop a sure and solid foundation and justification for prophetic ministry under the final authority of the Bible.

Here is the question that we must answer if the spiritual gift of prophecy is to be properly exercised in the life of the local church:

“How can a person believe that the Bible ‘alone’ is the Word of God when he affirms that the Holy Spirit may still speak or reveal things beyond the time that the canon of Scripture was closed? Or again, ‘Can a person affirm **both** the on-going validity of revelatory gifts of the Spirit **and** the sufficiency and final authority of written Scripture?’”

The Sufficiency of the Christian Scriptures

Let’s consider how the sufficiency of Scripture has been understood by both a continuationist and a cessationist. Unsurprisingly, they agree on this point. Wayne Grudem, a continuationist, argues that “the sufficiency of Scripture guarantees that God will not give any new revelation in this age that adds to *the moral standards that he requires for all Christians to obey* during the church age. However, the sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that God will not give *additional specific directions to individual persons* for them to obey (such as a calling to serve in a certain church, or a calling to the mission field, etc.)” (257). When Grudem turns to an actual definition of the sufficiency of Scripture, he writes:

“The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contains all the words of God which he intends his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly” (258).

In view of Paul’s reference to “every good work” in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Grudem insists that we can rest assured that “there is *no* ‘good work’ that God wants us to do other than those that are taught somewhere in Scripture. Scripture can equip us for *every* good work” (ibid.). Again, “The sufficiency of Scripture shows us that no modern revelations from God are to be placed on a level equal to Scripture in authority” (263-64). Grudem does not say that no such “revelations” exist, but only that they are always subordinate to the final authority of Scripture itself.

More recently, in his excellent treatment of *sola scriptura*, Matthew Barrett defines the sufficiency of Scripture in these terms:

“The sufficiency of Scripture means that all things necessary for salvation and for living the Christian life in obedience to God and for his glory are given to us in the Scriptures. Not only is the Bible our supreme authority, it is the authority that provides believers with all the truth they need for reconciliation with God and for following after Christ” (*God’s Word Alone*, 334).

Barrett also reminds us that “while Scripture is sufficient, this does not mean that all things will be explicitly spelled out on the pages of Scripture” (336). Some matters “are not addressed *directly* by God’s Word” (336), but come to us indirectly. What this means is “that the Bible does not demand the exclusion of extrabiblical data... Human knowledge and thought in all disciplines always involves and requires extrabiblical data” (339). No one on either side of the charismatic debate would suggest that nuclear physicists should derive their knowledge of the sub-atomic world by reading Scripture. Whereas God is both Creator and Providential Lord over every molecule, atom, and quark, knowledge of these elements and their properties is not addressed in the Bible. The same may be said about the disciplines of mathematics, sociology, library science, and automotive mechanics, just to mention a few.

Those who believe in the cessation of the spiritual gift of prophecy believe that to admit the possibility of revelation beyond Scripture, primarily through the spiritual gift of prophecy, unavoidably implies a

certain “insufficiency” in Scripture that needs to be compensated for. But it is altogether insufficient to affirm the Bible’s sufficiency without then asking the question: What is Scripture sufficient *for*? As noted above, no one believes that the Bible is sufficient to provide us with exhaustive information on every conceivable subject. Rather, we affirm that when it comes to essential “teaching” on the nature of God and the content of the gospel, or the ethical principles which “reprove” and “correct” and “train” us in righteous living (2 Tim. 3:16), the Bible contains everything we need. It suffers from no deficiency. It stands in no need of supplement from human insight or research. But it is, in my opinion, no threat to biblical “sufficiency” to argue that God may still communicate with his people in highly personal and intimate ways and grant them guidance on matters where the Bible is noticeably silent.

So, for example, when a young man recently approached me, having discerned a “call” to devote his life to reaching the unreached with the gospel, there was no specific guidance in the Bible that might suggest he should consider moving to a remote village in northern India instead of inner city Hong Kong. And when Paul defines for us the purpose of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:3), we need not fear that the Bible’s sufficiency has been compromised should the Spirit speak words that bring to an individual encouragement, consolation, and spiritual strength.

The close of the biblical canon marks the point at which the general principles of God’s universal will are complete. All the doctrines, as well as all ethical principles, essential for the life of God’s people have been revealed. Nothing further will be said by God to extend or expand or contradict them. The Bible establishes the theological and ethical boundaries of what God will ever say.

But guidance and revelation and wisdom by which we gain the knowledge of how to apply these principles and truths in the practical details and decisions of life are ongoing. When we listen to God we do not expect him to say anything doctrinally or ethically new. But we do expect him to speak to the situation in which we find ourselves with wisdom and direction and insight and encouragement in *living out* the truths he has *written in*.”

The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy?

As defined repeatedly during this conference, the NT spiritual gift of prophecy is a merely human report of something that the Holy Spirit has spontaneously brought to mind.

You will notice that I have used the language of the Holy Spirit “bringing things to mind” in a spontaneous fashion, “things” not explicitly set forth in Scripture. Would it not be more helpful if we simply said that the Spirit often times “*reveals*” things otherwise unknown to the recipient of such a “revelation”? This is typically where evangelical cessationists get nervous. The idea that God might still be providing his people with “revelation” of any sort is thought to suggest, if not require, a repudiation of the notion that what we have already received in canonical and inspired form in the Bible is sufficient. If God has supplied us in Scripture itself with everything necessary for life and godliness, what need would there be for him to reveal anything beyond what we already possess?

Part of the problem is in the way that we employ the term “revelation” and the verb “to reveal.” The verb “to reveal” (*apokaluptō*) occurs 26x in the NT and the noun “revelation” occurs 18x. In every instance the reference is to divine activity; never to human communication. However, not every act of divine revelation is equal in authority. The tendency among many is to improperly assume that any time a “revelation” is granted it bears the same universally binding authority, sufficient to warrant its inclusion in the biblical canon. But divine “revelation” comes in a variety of different forms. For example, consider Paul’s statement in Phil. 3:15. There were present in Philippi some who took issue with certain elements in Paul’s teaching. He appeals to all who are “mature” to “think” as he does. If some do not, Paul is confident that “God will reveal” to them the error of their way and bring them into

conformity with apostolic truth. We see from a text like this that God can “reveal” to a Christian or in some manner disclose to their minds truths that no one would ever regard as canonical or bearing the authoritative weight of inspired biblical texts. The Spirit, instead, would bring something to mind spontaneously, some insight or truth designed exclusively for them and never intended by God to be taken as universally authoritative or binding on the conscience of other believers.

Jesus employed the verb “to reveal” to describe his own gracious activity in making known the Father to those who previously had no saving knowledge of him. But surely no one would insist that the insight given to such folk should be written down and preserved as canonical for subsequent generations of Christians. Paul again uses the language of “revelation” to describe the activity of God in making known the reality of divine wrath against those “who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Rom. 1:18). Thus God’s act of divine disclosure is again unrelated to the inspiration of texts that carry an intrinsic authority.

In view of this, D. A. Carson has rightly pointed out that not all “revelatory” activity of God comes to us as Scripture quality, divinely authoritative, canonical truth. Thus, says Carson, “when Paul presupposes in 1 Corinthians 14:30 that the gift of prophecy depends on a revelation, we are not limited to a form of authoritative revelation that threatens the finality of the canon. To argue in such a way is to confuse the terminology of Protestant systematic theology with the terminology of the Scripture writers” (*Showing the Spirit*, 163).

This brings us to the crux of my argument. Cessationists argue that NT prophecy invariably yields Scripture-quality words from God that are equal in authority to the canonical text itself. In other words, most (if not all) cessationists believe that all “revelatory” words from God must be treated as equal to and as universally binding on the conscience of God’s people as the “words” that ultimately were canonized in the sixty-six books of the Bible. If the cessationist is correct, then the post-canonical or contemporary validity of certain revelatory gifts like prophecy and word of knowledge would indeed compromise the finality and authority of the Bible.

But does the NT actually portray the “revelation” that comes via prophecy and word of knowledge as infallible, universally authoritative, and potentially canonical? Do the numerous descriptions of revelatory gifts in actual practice require us to conclude that the authors of the Bible regard them as providing us with Scripture-quality words? My answer to both questions is, No.

The Gift of Prophecy in Practice

In addition to the texts we’ve already noted, there are several others that lead me to conclude that not all “revelatory” activity was designed by God to be received as universally authoritative or canonical. Principal among them are several statements in 1 Cor. 14. In this chapter we find the closest thing in Scripture to a description of a corporate worship celebration. Paul gives explicit instruction on the preparation of individual Christians as they come to a corporate gathering. He writes:

“When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up” (1 Cor. 14:26).

Evidently a “revelation” would have been given to one or several individuals prior to the meeting (although a person could also be the recipient of a spontaneous revelation during the meeting, as we’ll see in v. 30). The content of such revelation is not specified, nor is the means by which it was

dispensed. But if all “revelation” carries the authoritative weight of Scripture itself, one cannot help but wonder what happened to these many revelatory words that were spoken in the corporate gatherings at Corinth and at other churches throughout the ancient world. Paul certainly was not in the least concerned that steps be taken to preserve these “revelations”. In fact, it is entirely probable that he anticipated some of them, perhaps even all, would be lost or discarded and thus inaccessible to subsequent generations of the body of Christ.

It's critically important to remember that cessationists argue that all prophetic revelatory “words” are infallible and serve to build or constitute the foundation on which the universal church of Jesus Christ is built (Eph. 2:20). My question is whether or not the way the NT portrays the operation of the prophetic is consistent with this. I will contend that it is not.

Consider Paul's instruction concerning what should happen when one believer is the recipient of a “revelation” while another is speaking:

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” (1 Cor. 14:29-32).

Paul's seeming indifference to the prophetic word being spoken by the first prophet catches many by surprise. Some insist that his instruction does not necessarily entail the loss of the first prophetic speech. Could not that person simply remain silent until the second had finished and then resume where he/she left off? But, in response, it has been pointed out that “if the first prophet was *expected* to resume speaking, why then would Paul command this *first* prophet to be silent at all? If the first prophet could retain his revelation and speak later, then so could the second prophet. And in that case it would make much more sense for the second prophet to wait, instead of rudely interrupting the first prophet and making him give his speech in two parts” (Grudem, *Prophecy*, 63). Again, Paul's apparent lack of concern for the loss of such prophetic words seems incompatible with a belief that they were equal in authority with Scripture itself.

There is yet another statement by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 that would lead us to believe that the “revelation” behind a prophetic utterance did not carry equal authoritative weight to apostolic teaching. It would appear that some in the Corinthian church were insisting that because they had “heard” from God in some “revelatory” manner, others should always submit to or heed their instruction. But Paul has a different perspective. He writes:

“Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (1 Cor. 14:36-38).

Paul isn't denying that such “prophets” existed in Corinth (and in other local churches). He has clearly affirmed that this is one of many spiritual gifts, indeed, the one gift that serves far better than uninterpreted tongues to edify or build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 14:3-5). He has stated clearly in v. 29 that “prophets” were present in Corinth and he encouraged their revelatory ministry. He even appears to envision the possibility that any or all Corinthian believers might at some time or other exercise this gift. In 14:24 he speaks of the spiritual benefits that accrue to unbelievers “if *all* prophesy,” and in v. 31 endorses the possibility that “you can *all* prophesy one by one” (emphasis mine). The force of “all” here has been disputed. Interpretations range from “all” the prophets, to “all”

without distinction as to gender or social standing (rather than a universal “all” without exception), or to “all” potentially, but not in actual practice. The latter strikes me as the more likely view.

Thus when Paul comes to vv. 36-38 he isn't denying or withdrawing his earlier affirmation of the validity of “prophets” in the church or their potential for building up other believers. He is simply making it clear that whatever “revelation” may come to them, it is always subject to the more ultimate and binding authoritative utterances of himself as an apostle. In fact, immediately following this warning to all prophets in Corinth that they must yield to his superior apostolic authority, he encourages believers in Corinth to “earnestly desire to prophesy” (v. 39)! I find it remarkably instructive that Paul would subordinate prophetic “revelation” to his own apostolic authority and then encourage the congregation in Corinth to be earnest in their pursuit of that very gift!

I take all this to mean that Paul's statement is designed to prevent them from making up guidelines for public worship, based on an alleged prophetic word, contrary to what he has just stated. His point is that a Scripture quality, authoritative “word of God” has not, in fact, been forthcoming from the Corinthian prophets. Paul does not deny that they have truly prophesied, but he denies that their “words” were equal in authority to his own. Such “words” were in fact of a lesser authority.

Paul is claiming in 14:37-38 a divine authority for his words that he is just as obviously denying to the Corinthians. Nothing said by the prophets at Corinth could ever have been sufficiently authoritative to prove Paul wrong. Once again, then, my question for the cessationist is how Paul could have said this if in fact the “revelation” on which prophecy was based was itself “Scripture-quality” and as authoritative for the lives of all people everywhere as were the words of Paul, Peter, Luke, and John.

Still, though, Paul believed the prophecy at Corinth to be a good and helpful gift of God, for he immediately thereafter exhorts the Corinthians once again to “earnestly desire to prophesy” (v. 39)! Paul obviously believed that the spiritual gift of congregational prophecy that operated at a lower level of authority than did the apostolic, canonical, expression of it was still extremely valuable to the church. One must also wonder about this exhortation if Paul actually viewed the revelation on which prophecy was based as infallible, morally authoritative, and essential to establishing the foundation of the universal church. *Are we really prepared to say that the Apostle urged every Christian in every local congregation to earnestly desire that he/she might be the recipient of inspired and authoritative revelation that would serve to lay the foundation for the body of Christ throughout all ages?* I'm not.

To these texts we must also add those in which Christians are urged to exercise discernment and judgment in weighing or assessing the validity of any purported claim to divine revelation. One must ask whether this responsibility, as described in these passages, is consistent with the cessationist notion that all prophetic revelation comes in the form of “Scripture-quality” information. The two texts I have in mind are 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 and 1 Corinthians 14:29.

The former of these texts is addressed to a congregation that highly esteemed the Word of God and was regarded by Paul as remarkably mature. The apostle said this of them in the opening chapter of 1 Thessalonians: “when you received the word which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13). Cessationists would have us believe that these Christians were instructed by Paul (and others) that all prophetic utterances were equal in authority to Scripture itself, indeed equal in authority to the very words that Paul is in the process of writing to them in his first epistle (as well as his second). But if that were the case, how does one account for the fact that they had come to “despise” such revelatory disclosures rather than highly esteem them? Yet this is precisely what the Thessalonians had done. Thus Paul's exhortation that they not “quench the Spirit” by “despising prophecies” (1 Thess. 5:19-20) but instead “test [or weigh, assess, judge, and evaluate] everything” and then “hold fast what is good” and “abstain from every form of evil” (vv. 21-22).

To what does the noun *prophēteia* (“prophecies”) refer? Is it the gift of prophecy itself, the person who claims to be speaking prophetically, or the verbal utterances of the person who prophesies? The strong likelihood is the latter, as the use of the plural and the absence of the definite article suggest. This is confirmed in v. 21a where the alternative to despising “prophecies” is that “everything” should be tested. Again, the plural “everything” (or “all things”) which must be tested has for its antecedent the “prophecies” in the immediately preceding verse. Much to our dismay, Paul “does not specify what criteria should be used in determining whether something is good or evil, but presumably he expected his readers to weigh supposed Spirit-inspired words and deeds against the doctrinal and ethical norms they had received from him” (Wanamaker, *1 Thessalonians*, 203).

Gordon Fee believes the answer is found in two additional Pauline texts. We know that many in the church in Thessalonica were disturbed by a false report regarding the arrival of the Day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:2). In response Paul urged them to “stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter” (2 Thess. 2:15). Perhaps, then, “the first test is the apostolic proclamation of/teaching about Christ. This is a test that has to do with the theological or doctrinal content of the utterance” (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 222). The second test derives from Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:3 where he says that prophecy has for its purpose “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. “This,” says Fee, “is the test of purpose, as well as content, and has to do with its helpfulness to the believing community” (ibid.).

Now let’s set this exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5 alongside Paul’s own personal experience as recorded in Acts 21. When he arrived in Tyre we are told that “through the Spirit [*dia tou pneumatos*]¹ they [the disciples at Tyre] were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4). Upon arriving in Caesarea several days later, he was the recipient of a prophetic word from a man named Agabus to the effect that, if he were to go to Jerusalem, he would be bound by the Jews and delivered over to the Gentiles. It is entirely likely that Agabus was joined in this word to Paul by the “four unmarried daughters” of Philip, each of whom “prophesied” (Acts 21:9). In any case, Agabus prefaced his word with the statement, “Thus says the Holy Spirit” (Acts 21:11a). The specific way in which the Spirit “spoke” through the disciples at Tyre and revealed this scenario to Agabus is not made known. Agabus, unlike those in Tyre, does not himself tell Paul not to continue his journey to Jerusalem, but upon hearing his revelatory vision concerning Paul, Luke and the people in Caesarea “urged him not to go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:12b).

Here is where the connection with 1 Thessalonians 5 comes into play. Paul chose *not* to heed the advice given to him (v. 13). In the final analysis, following what must have been highly emotional dialogue (see vv. 13-14) in which no agreement could be reached (v. 14a), the apostle retained his prior commitment to finish the journey. The conclusion of all concerned was mutual: “Let the will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14b).

At no time did Paul “push back” against either the Christians in Tyre or Agabus and insist that the Spirit did *not* reveal that his arrival in Jerusalem would bring harsh persecution. He did not suggest that the revelatory vision or word that Agabus claims came from the Spirit was in fact fabricated or misguided. Why, then, did Paul choose to act contrary to what the disciples in Tyre had said? The answer is found earlier in Acts 19:21. There we read that “Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’” Paul’s decision to go to Jerusalem was as much a product of the Spirit’s revelatory ministry as was that of the Christians in Tyre and of Agabus who warned him of persecution should he go there. He

¹ This same Greek phrase appears in Acts 11:28 to describe the means, manner, or perhaps better still the source and power through which Agabus delivered his prophetic word concerning an impending famine.

has resolved “in the [Holy] Spirit” to make the journey. This understanding is confirmed in Acts 20:22 where Paul declares:

“And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me” (Acts 20:22).

How do we account for Paul’s decision to resist the urging of his friends that he not go to Jerusalem? Clearly the Spirit who spoke to believers in Tyre and to Agabus and the four daughters of Philip had also revealed to Paul that he *should* go, notwithstanding what others might say. Indeed, he was “constrained” by the Spirit to finish this journey to Jerusalem.

I believe the best way to account for this is by recognizing that in any particular “prophetic utterance” there are at least three elements. There is (1) the *revelation* from the Spirit, which in all instances is inspired and infallible. There is also (2) the *interpretation* of what that revelation means. Finally, there is an attempt to make (3) *application* to the person(s) involved. Here is how I explained this elsewhere:

“Through some supernatural means that is not specified, the Holy Spirit communicated to the believers at Tyre that if Paul went to Jerusalem he would be persecuted, perhaps even killed. On the basis or on the grounds of this revelation, they in turn *interpreted* this to be God’s warning for him not to go. They then *applied* this to Paul by issuing a stringent warning and urged him to change his plans.... On this scenario, the disciples at Tyre, and later at Caesarea, all received the same revelation. They either had a distinct impression in their hearts or heard the Spirit speak audibly or more likely had a vision of Paul being threatened and beaten and perhaps in prison as a result. This *revelation* was unmistakable. Because this revelation was from God, it was infallible and altogether true. But they then *interpreted* the revelation as meaning that extremely perilous times awaited Paul. He was subject to severe persecution, perhaps even martyrdom. This in turn led to the *application*. They concluded that *it was not God’s will* for Paul to go to Jerusalem. It simply didn’t register with them that going to Jerusalem could be a good thing. Why would anyone venture into a territory where he knew persecution was certain to occur? And why would God lead him there? Combined with their love for him and their desire for his safety, they told and even urged him not to go. In other words, they got the revelation right, as well as the interpretation, but misapplied it in terms of how Paul should react” (*Practicing the Power*, 114).

And what was Paul’s response? He did precisely what he instructed the Thessalonians to do whenever a prophetic utterance is delivered. He *tested* it. He weighed and analyzed it against the standard of his own experience with the Spirit. Based on earlier, repeated guidance from the Spirit, Paul knew that the Christians in Tyre and Agabus and the others were correct that should he go to Jerusalem he would be sorely persecuted. But he obviously concluded that they had either misinterpreted or more likely still, out of understandable concern for his welfare, had misapplied the revelation by insisting that he not continue his trip.

Thus, we see that Paul’s own personal practice as a recipient of a prophetic utterance indicates that he did not regard the revelatory word as bearing Scripture-quality authority. Whereas the revelation itself was altogether true, it must be communicated by fallible human men and women. It strikes me as most plausible to conclude that Paul believed all prophetic utterances to be a mixture of sorts in which the infallible divine revelation is processed through the fallible interpretive grid of Christian men and women who in turn, on occasion, make applications that are inconsistent with what either Scripture might already have made clear or what one’s own experience under the guidance of the Spirit had previously established.

There is another quite similar passage. Although I realize that cessationists have a different understanding of 1 Corinthians 14:29, I believe Paul is saying here much the same thing as he said in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22. “Weigh” (*diakrinō*) what is said by the prophets. That is to say, *sift* the word and identify what is of God and what is the human and thus fallible admixture. Thiselton provides this helpful explanation:

“**The others** are to **distinguish between** (i) prophetic speech which is God-given and coheres with the gospel of Christ and the pastoral situation and (ii) speech which is merely self-generated rhetoric reflecting the speaker’s disguised self-interests, self-deceptions, or errors, albeit under the guise of supposed ‘prophecy’....The authentic is to be **sifted** from the inauthentic or spurious, in the light of the OT scriptures, the gospel of Christ, the traditions of all the churches, and critical reflections. Nowhere does Paul hint that preaching or ‘prophecy’ achieves a privileged status which places them above critical reflection in the light of the gospel, the Spirit, and the scriptures. It is never infallible” (1 Corinthians, 1140).

I find it difficult to believe that Paul would have commanded this sort of assessment if all prophetic words were by definition inerrant Scripture quality revelation from God. Thus David Garland is likely correct in his assessment of what Paul means:

“The assumption is that the prophets do not speak with unquestionable divine authority. The congregation is not to accept everything that is said just because a person claims to speak under the influence of the Spirit. The prophet’s words invite appraisal and discussion.... This is quite different from ascertaining whether the individual is a true or a false prophet. Presumably, the speakers reside in their midst, and the congregation would not need to examine them week after week, but they do need to evaluate what they say.... Prophets must allow the content of their revelation to be tested in the community and may need reminding that their ‘prophecy’ is only partial and temporary (13:9-10)” (1 Corinthians, 662).

Where Are All the Inspired Revelatory Words?

Yet another forceful argument against the proposal by cessationists that all “revelatory” speech was equivalent to canonical Scripture is the actual manner in which we would expect such prophetic revelation to have been treated. To say the same thing, if the “revelation” that is the basis of all prophetic ministry was, as the cessationist claims, always and without exception equal in authority to the very words of Scripture and served to build the foundation of the universal Church (Eph. 2:20), there are certain things we should expect to see in Scripture that are decidedly absent.

Paul’s instruction to the churches throughout the first-century world would undoubtedly have been identical to his instruction to the Corinthians. The apostle did not embrace one perspective on revelatory gifts that would apply to the Corinthians and yet another, different perspective for the churches in Macedonia and Italy and elsewhere. Likewise, the same set of practical guidelines imposed on the Corinthians would have been required of all Christians in every other city and church.

What this means is that if the cessationist is correct in her understanding of the nature and authority of prophetic revelation, we would be more than justified in our expectation of a certain scenario throughout the Mediterranean world. But it is, in fact, a scenario that is conspicuous by its absence. Let me explain.

A good place to begin is with the Day of Pentecost as described in Acts 2. There Peter described what life and ministry would be like during the age of the New Covenant:

“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18).

According to the cessationist understanding of such revelatory gifts, as well as the “revelation” that forms the basis of the “dreams” and “visions” that Peter said would be the experience of young and old and male and female, God would be everywhere providing inerrant, universally authoritative truths to those who were neither apostles nor elders in the local church. These, quite clearly, are average Christian men and women, young and old.

Cessationists have often asked me: “Sam, if the Spirit were still giving divine revelation, why wouldn't we gather up and include those words in our Bibles?” Clearly, the cessationist believes that all such revelatory disclosures as Peter declared were forthcoming were spiritually and morally equivalent to Scripture and thus warrant inclusion in our Bibles. He would necessarily say the same thing about the prophetic revelation being granted to Christians in Rome (Rom. 12:6), in Ephesus (Acts 19:5-7; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 1:18), in Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9), in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 5:19-22), and of course in Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14), as well as in countless other cities throughout the Mediterranean world of the first century.

This raises two crucial questions. First, what happened to all these revelatory words, images, visions, the content of dreams, impressions, and other expressions through which God made himself known? If, as most cessationists contend, all such “revelation” should be regarded as equally authoritative as Scripture itself and essential to the establishment of the foundation of the universal body of Christ (Eph. 2:19-21), where is it?

Although it is in a certain sense an argument from silence, it is a question worth asking: namely, why did not God's people and especially the apostles of Jesus Christ travel back and forth among the hundreds of churches in the first century and gather up all the prophecies spoken week after week and write them down and then preserve these “infallible and authoritative words of God” which would have been binding on the conscience of all Christians everywhere? There is no hint that any such thing was done or recommended.

As best I can tell, the only two recorded prophecies that were preserved and included in the canonical text of Scripture were both from Agabus (Acts 11:27-30 and 21:10-12). Does it not strike you as odd that no effort was made to retain and impose on the conscience of all Christians everywhere so much as a single, solitary syllable from all those alleged “Scripture-quality” and divinely inspired words?

My second question grows out of the exhortation of Paul that Christians should “earnestly desire the higher gifts” (1 Cor. 12:31), included among which (perhaps even most of all) being the gift of prophecy. Again, in 1 Corinthians 14:1, he writes: “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.” And as much as Paul wanted them all to speak in tongues, he desired “even more” that they should “prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:5). Finally, he closes this chapter in 1 Corinthians with the exhortation: “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39).

Now, let's pair this series of exhortations with what cessationists say about the nature of prophetic revelation. The latter, not to be repetitive, is allegedly equivalent in authority and importance to Scripture itself. Prophets, so they contend, served to provide those foundational theological truths

and ethical principles on which the universal body of Christ (the Church) would be built. This would require us to believe that Paul urged every Christian man and woman, young and old, to earnestly desire and pray that God would grant them those inspired and infallible theological concepts, moral values, and practical guidelines to which all Christians in every subsequent age of the Church would be bound to believe and follow. I find this highly unlikely, if not impossible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, I ask: Are the gifts of prophecy and word of knowledge compatible with an unwavering affirmation of the complete sufficiency and authority of Holy Scripture? Yes.

BUILDING AN INTERCESSORY PRAYER MINISTRY IN YOUR LOCAL CHURCH

Led by: Bob Armstrong + Tom Ball (Prophetic Leadership Team)

Description: Foundational to the operation of all spiritual gifts in the local church, especially prophecy, is the practice of intercessory prayer. In this session, we will talk about how to build a prayer ministry in your church, how to train and release people in the fundamentals of praying for one another, and the many dangers and errors to avoid.

The key to seeing prophetic ministry flourish in the local church is having people who are committed and trained to pray for others, certainly on Sunday mornings, but also in small groups, as well as other functions.

The people who are on our prayer ministry teams here at Bridgeway are required to go through our prayer training as a pre-requisite step. After this, they need to be released by a pastor, elder or community group leader. Then they can pray for others at our ministry times on Sundays and other church events.

On Sundays we have prayer ministry at the front of the Auditorium during the close of each service. We also have private prayer/prophetic times available during both services on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month. Members of the prophetic leadership team and the extended prophetic team are available to meet with to those who sign up to receive prayer in a private session.

Suggested Readings

- Prayer by Richard Foster (Harper Collins, 1992)
- A Praying Life by Paul Miller (Navpress, 2009)
- Praying the Bible by Donald Whitney (Crossway, 2015)

Remember Jas. 5:17-18. God often chooses to do extraordinary things through the prayers of ordinary people!

Goals for This Breakout Session

1. To develop a healthy theology of prayer

We don't base our understanding of prayer on a single passage of Scripture. This can lead to misunderstanding God's purpose in prayer.

- "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13 -14).
- "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7).
- "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matt. 21:22).
- "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).
- "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15).
- "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (Jas. 4:3).
- God often ordains our prayers as the means of His sovereign actions.

2. To increase expectancy when you pray for people and to increase your faith

Believing that God is intimately involved in our daily lives increases our enthusiasm to pray for people. The power that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in us. (Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:19; 3:16, 20)

3. To help us learn to be naturally supernatural

We need to know that praying for the sick, wounded, and spiritually oppressed is part of the normal Christian life – not just for the "professionals" or the highly gifted. (1 Thess. 5:17; Jas. 5:17)

4. To outline some practical guidelines on how to pray for people in most situations

The prayer model we use can help reduce the anxiety of praying for a perfect stranger and gives us confidence that we can do this.

5. To develop a deeper understanding of God and His purposes in prayer

This frees us from thinking that results depend on us.

The 4 “G”s

When you pray for others, remember these 4 “G”s.

1. God is **great**: He is in control and not us. It’s not about how powerful or perfectly articulated our prayers are but about His purposes and His results.
2. God is **good**: We find satisfaction in Him and His call to pray for others. (Luke 11:11-13) If we ask for a fish, He won’t give us a serpent. If we ask for an egg, He won’t give us a scorpion. He will give us the Holy Spirit!
3. God is **glorious**: We need not fear the results or taking a risk. (1 John 4:18) Faith is often spelled R-I-S-K. The more you pray for people, the more you will see God move.
4. God is **gracious**: We need not prove ourselves or compare ourselves to others. (Lam. 3:22-23)

Truths to Remember

1. Why pray?

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, what did He say? “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10). (also Luke 11:1-4)

Why did Jesus put such an emphasis on the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom is the reign and rule of God. In Luke 10:9, he sends out the 72 disciples saying, “heal the sick...and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’”

What happens when the Kingdom comes to earth? (Luke 4:18-19; Isa. 61:1-3)

- It brings liberty to the captives.
 - The Kingdom brings forgiveness and deliverance from sin, demonic oppression, shame, unforgiveness, addictions, and idolatry. People are set free!
- It binds up the broken-hearted.
 - The gospel brings peace to human hearts. (Isa. 61:2; John 14:27)
- It brings the oil of gladness.
 - Joy! (Isa. 61:3; Ps. 16:11)
 - “These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full” (John 15:11).
- It brings recovery of sight to the blind.
 - Physical and spiritual healing
- It brings comfort.
 - Those who mourn or are hurting are comforted (Matt. 5:4).
- It brings justice.
 - This is good news to the poor!

When we pray, we are primarily asking the kingdom of God to come now. When the kingdom comes, the king comes too in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

2. God is sovereign.

There is always some mystery concerning His purposes. (2 Cor. 12:7-10; Jas. 5:13-18) “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what He sees The Father doing...’” (John 5:19a). A sovereign God often chooses to do what only He can do through the prayers of His people. When you are praying for a stranger, pause and silently ask “Father, what do you want to do here?”

3. God can have a redemptive purpose in mind when allowing suffering.

Ps. 119:67 says “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.” (also Rom. 5:3-5)

4. How big of a role does faith play in healing?

There are several levels of faith:

- There is faith that **God is the sole source for blessing** and in Him alone is our hope.
 - Ps. 33:18-22; Jas. 1:17
- There is faith in **God's ability to heal**.
 - Matt. 9:28-29
- There is faith in **God's desire to heal** and knowing that His heart is towards healing.
 - Ps. 103; Luke 11:11-13
- There is faith that **God heals today**.
 - It is Kingdom thinking to believe that healing is part of God's plan. (Luke 10:8-9)
 - “And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and affliction among the people” (Matt. 4:23-25).
- There is the **spiritual gift of faith**.
 - 1 Cor. 12:9
 - When you pray, you are supernaturally filled with the sense that God is going to act now.
 - With this kind of faith, you have an inner sense that God is acting right now as you pray.

Remember: faith is often spelled R-I-S-K. The more you pray for people, the more you will see God do amazing things!

5. What about the “laying on of hands”?

This was present in Jesus' ministry and was certainly a normative practice in the early church.

It's important to be very sensitive about this. Ask the person first before you lay on hands. Avoid the area between the neck and knees. In general, it is best for men to lay hands on men and women on women.

Scripture references: Matt. 9:18; 19:13; Mark 2:40-42; Acts 3:7; 6:6; 8:17-19; 9:17; Heb. 6:2

The Practice of Prayer

The 5 “P”s of prayer ministry.

1. **Preparation:** Prepare your heart to bless and encourage. Consider fasting.
2. **Presence:** Since God is present, be focused as He is.
3. **Power:** We have to believe that God is able and chooses often to work through our prayers.
4. **Prayer:** 5-part model below
5. **Perseverance:** Continue to pray for as long as it takes unless God clearly indicates He has other intentions.

The Prayer Model

1. The Interview
 - Ask simple questions.
 - Where does it hurt?
 - How can I pray for you?
 - Is it spiritual? Physical?
 - Are you under attack?
 - Encourage them to be specific.
 - Use a scale of 1-10 to measure physical pain.
 - Don't be in a hurry. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance.
2. The Diagnosis
 - What is the cause of the condition?
 - Physical, spiritual, or emotional?
 - Living in a fallen world?
 - Ex: accidents, disease, etc.
 - Sin?
 - Be careful not to put guilt on them! (Jas. 5)
 - Anxiety, unforgiveness, or bitter roots?
 - Family history?
 - Ex: abuse, alcoholism, legalism, occult involvement, etc.
3. The Prayer
 - Prayer directed **toward** God: this is a petition for the presence of the Spirit and focused on the specific problem
 - Prayer **from** God: such as a command “Be healed in Jesus name.”
 - Avoid authoritative statements without clear Biblical warrant.
 - Do not believe the lie that God will only act if you say a perfect prayer!
4. The Practice
 - Ask them to close their eyes if they have not already. Keep your eyes and spiritual ears open.
 - If you sense God is touching them, bless what He is doing.
 - Be aware of physical manifestations.
 - Ask questions. Do they feel anything?, etc.

- Be very sensitive about laying on of hands. Ask permission. Anoint them with oil if they are willing.
- When possible, enlist someone of the same gender to join in the prayer time. This avoids potential problems of a man praying for something that a woman should pray over another woman.
- Again, avoid authoritative statements.
- God is not concerned with eloquent speech or theological precision in prayer but with the attitude of our heart.
- Sometimes it is necessary to lead the person through confession of sin and repentance, especially to release healing which those things can block.

5. Post-Prayer Suggestions:

- Healing can often be a process, so persevere in prayer.
- If nothing seems to happen, never say it is because of their lack of faith!
- Ask them how they feel. Are they encouraged? Do they sense God's love?
- Give direction for reconciliation, forgiveness, receiving more prayer, and possible inner healing prayer.
- Do not counsel.
- Avoid pronouncements. If they are healed, let them announce it.
- Pray from the heart. Remember, there is no such thing as a perfectly articulated prayer. If they are not healed, it is not a failure!

Praying for the Spiritually/Demonically Oppressed

Pray for discernment

It's good to have someone with you who has done this before. Ask God to speak to you. Keep your eyes open to observe what is happening.

Take time to explain

Let the person know what you are doing and what you sense is going on.

Declare your authority in Christ.

"The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' And he said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold I have given you authority to tread on serpent and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'" (Luke 10:17-20)

Remember that what you are seeing may not be demonic.

Physical seizures and medications can affect the person receiving prayer.

Ask pertinent questions.

- Ask them to affirm their faith in Jesus and His blood.
- Ask them how they feel. Observe any anger, agitation, violence, coughing, etc.
- Ask about family history that may have opened doors.
- Ask about their own past behavior like drug use or sexual immorality, etc. that may have opened a door.

Don't panic if a demon becomes apparent.

When the enemy becomes obvious, confront him with your authority in Christ. "Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4)

FOR EXAMPLE: Look directly into the person's eyes and say "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the power of His shed blood, I take authority over any demonic spirit, either present in or around person's name. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command any and every demonic spirit to leave person's name and never return."

Closing prayer

See what happens. End with a prayer for the filling of the Holy Spirit and with a prayer of blessing over the person. (Matt. 12:43-45)

DREAM INTERPRETATION

Led by: Cordell Ehrich (Prophetic Leadership Team)

Description: Peter tells us in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost that characteristic of life in the age of the New Covenant is the experience of dreams and visions. How can we know when a dream is revelatory and from God and not merely the result of natural causes? What guidelines might we learn that will enable us to interpret the meaning of our dreams. This will be the focus of this workshop.

There are two main reasons you might have come today: (1) Curiosity or questions. (2) You're having dreams and visions and want more understanding and knowledge.

Things we will cover today

- Why dreams and visions?
- What is the difference between a dream and a vision?
- Dream interpretation.
- Do I dream?
- What's a vision like?
- Are there different types of visions?

Dreams

Most often dreams are not literal but figurative. There are always exceptions, after all it is God!

- What is the real purpose for dreams? Intimacy, it is all about intimacy with the Father.
- Why doesn't God just tell me what he wants when I am awake or through His word?

What does the Bible say about dreams?

There are over 200 references to dreams or visions in the Bible i.e....Mary and Joseph, Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph...

For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, while they slumber on their beds, then he opens the ears of men and terrifies them with warnings, that he may turn man aside from his deed and conceal pride from a man; he keeps back his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword (Job 33:14-18).

And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, *I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream* (Num. 12:6).

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and *Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams* (Dan. 1:17).

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will *pour out my Spirit on all flesh*, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and *your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams* (Acts 2:17).

Big BIBLE Dreamers!

- Joseph - Coat of many colors, famine, interpretation
- Daniel – Insight into all dreams and visions, interpretations

Facts about dreams

- The average person has about 1,460 dreams a year.
- By the time we die, most of us will have spent a quarter of a century asleep, of which six years or more will have been spent dreaming.
- Every human being dreams.
- You can have four to seven dreams in one night.

Questions you may have at this point

- Do I have to be in “R.E.M.” sleep to have a dream?
- Why don't I remember my dreams?

Different types of dreams

This list is a good place to start but is not all-inclusive!

- Words of knowledge
- Soul/Flushing
- Deliverance
- Dark or Attacking/Spiritual Warfare
- Chemical/Bad pizza or Bad drugs
- Calling/Destiny
- Healing/Comfort dreams
- Strategy and Moves of God
- Inventions
- Hope/Joy
- Warning

Nightmares or Night Terrors

These are not from the Lord. Spirit of fear is not from the Holy Spirit. The enemy is trying to stop you from hearing from God or drawing close to Him - your defenses are down when you dream. (*Would Joseph have married Mary had he not had a dream?*) The Enemy often uses nightmares to scare children who have a “seeing” gift. Here are ways to battle!

- Pray: God can show you open doors. Pray through your house using the authority that Jesus has given you.
- Pray over your family and before you sleep. The enemy cannot chase you into the hands of God.
- Declare truth.
- Play worship music at night or through your house during the day.

Dream interpretation

Try to record your dreams. All of them? Keep a Dream Journal next to your bed and write your dreams down as soon as you have them. Five minutes after the end of the dream, half the content is forgotten. After ten minutes, 90% is lost.

- **Title and Date your dreams**
- **Establish the focus of your dream**
 - Who is it about?
 - Do you supernaturally know things in the dream?
- **Where are you in the dream?**
 - Are you participating, observing, or the focus?
- **Compare and Contrast**
 - Why this and not that?
 - Ex: Why a bicycle and not a car? Why an apartment and not a house?
- **Sphere of dream:**
 - **Intrinsic:** It's about you – heart issues, emotions, longings, opinions, relationship with God
 - **Extrinsic:** It's about others – cities, churches, nations

Are there any books for interpretation/resources for interpretation? The Bible v. Sigmund Freud?

Remember, it's about intimacy!

- Many times, you will receive the interpretation for a dream when you say it aloud to someone.
- God will help you to develop your own personal "dream language".
- It's not one size fits all: Dreams don't always mean the same thing to every person.
- A few examples from my dream language – tortoises, snakes, bees, spiders, dogs, mountain lions

Remember, a cow can mean one thing in one dream and a very different thing in another!

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13).

"For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:8).

Pray for dreams – If you're not having any, ask the Lord for dreams! Have your friends that dream pray for you and lay hands on you.

"Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, *but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries*, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Dan. 2:27-28).

Dreams could take years to develop/come to fruition.

Remember the key is **intimacy!!!**

Faith = RISK / Growth = RISK

How to share what I've dreamt!

Dreams for others

- Use caution and wisdom.
 - You may not be receiving a message about them, but about yourself.
- Always pray and ask God if you should share your dream (this is a general prophetic guideline).
- God never reveals something to expose another person in a harmful way.
- Edification should always be the end result (freedom, healing, encouragement).

Dreams for the church

Very Important: It is wise to present the dream to the prophetic team or elder if you believe the dream contains a message for the church.

- Length of presentation is key.
 - One sentence interpretation
 - Short interpretation and movie trailer version of dream
- Begin with edification, exhortation, and comfort.
- Once you submit the dream, trust your leadership to handle it appropriately.

Dreaming is fun! There are many kinds of dreams. Some are sad, some are revealing and life changing, some are peace giving. Remember, *it's about intimacy with God*. He is teaching you to hear His voice in a new and wonderful way.

Visions

Visions are very often literal, but of course not always!

What does the Bible say about visions?

"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram *in a vision*: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (Gen. 15:1).

"And *David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the LORD* standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces" (1 Chron. 21:16).

"Where there is no *prophetic vision* the people cast off restraint (or the people are discouraged), but blessed is he who keeps the law" (Prov. 29:18).

"Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. *The Lord said to him in a vision*, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight,

and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and *he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight*" (Acts 9:10-12).

"When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." *So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha*" (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Types of Visions

Again, this list is a good place to start but not all-inclusive.

- Direction/Plans of God
- Words of Knowledge
- Blessing
- Angelic
- Schemes of the Enemy
- God's Glory
- Coming Judgment

Visions can all come in different ways. Some examples of visions are:

- Quick pictures
- A video or movie
- Metaphor
- Literal picture
- Vivid (seems real)

Visions can be seen two ways:

- **Internal:** Your minds'-eye / Seeing in the Spirit / Eyes Closed
- **External:** Open vision / Eyes Open

Questions you may have at this point

- Do all of my visions have to be open-eyed and intensely overwhelming?
- What is the meaning of my vision? (Remember, intimacy!)
- I don't have visions currently. How can I have them?

EQUIPPING AND ENCOURAGING YOUR CHILDREN IN PROPHETIC MINISTRY

Led by: Krista Meyer (Director of BWKids) + Ashley Owen (BWKidsTeam)

Description: How can you equip ministry leaders and parents in your church to develop and nurture in children a relationship with God that not only includes but celebrates the gifts of the Holy Spirit? How might we train children in prophecy and other spiritual gifts while avoiding the extremes of hyper-spirituality? In this workshop, we will discuss various principles that will aid in teaching not only your children but all those in the children's ministry at your local church how children can begin to recognize his voice as they grow more confident in seeking spiritual gifts so that they can walk and minister in the power of the Spirit.

"And afterwards, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams" (Joel 2:28).

In today's workshop, we will share how Bridgeway's Children Ministry (BWKids) approaches the gift of prophecy. We will offer approaches and activities that Bridgeway uses to equip and encourage children of various ages in the prophetic at church and at home. We will share stories of what God has done to equip and encourage children at Bridgeway. Then we will practice some of these children activities together.

A Few Introductory Notes

- You must be seeking the gifts of the Spirit, particularly the gift of prophecy as commanded in scripture (1 Cor. 14:1) for your own life and intimacy with God before you can begin to equip and encourage children in your church or home. We can't give what we've not received.
 - Becoming comfortable in asking of the Lord for prophetic words to encourage the body begins in the hearts of leadership, not in children's classrooms.
 - There must be a safe place that allows leaders the freedom and comfort to grow in listening and receiving before implementing Listening to God activities in classrooms.
 - One way we do this is to ask the Lord for prophetic words to encourage one other on the children's leadership team and then offer much grace as each takes risks in giving these words. As we receive confirmation of the words given our faith grows!
- Today's workshop is not an introduction to a curriculum that will be laid out in four easy steps for teachers and leaders to read and follow.
 - A curriculum does not exist that embodies Bridgeway's language, culture and practices in regard to prophetic ministry, or other ministries of the gifts of the Spirit. This is something that develops among the leaders of the church and of the children's ministry. Then they can be naturally worked into a classroom's schedule and lesson, or a family's home.
 - We must live and breathe according to the leading of the Spirit. We have a team of individuals that leads our children's ministry at Bridgeway, and we have built our language and culture of prayer, prophetic and gifts of the Spirit by what we have heard God speak to us.
 - We create times of prayer where we do nothing but listen to where the Spirit may be leading us in everything from lessons and curriculum, to holiday events, summer camps and worship.
- The Lord is the one who speaks and we can't create anything apart from Him. Creating the "perfect" space doesn't obligate God to action. We **MUST** rely on Him to "build the house, otherwise we labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1). What God built at Bridgeway may not be how He would build a prophetic ministry among children at your church. You must learn to listen to Him for His plan and His time, so don't stop praying!

Having a Strong Foundation is Key

How do you talk about the Holy Spirit's gift of prophecy with children, who may be unbelievers?

1. It is important to have foundational truths to stand on at a young age, and also a common vocabulary to use. There should be a solid biblical foundation to teach and practice from. Some Big Truths to consider are:
 - **Who is God?** He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit; one God in three persons. He is the loving creator and ruler of all things, and He is the one Who rescues sinners!
 - **Who is the Holy Spirit?** The Holy Spirit is God Who lives in those who believe. He shows us God's truth, convicts us of our sin, gives us strength to obey God's commands, and fills His children with power to do mighty works in Jesus' name!

- **Does God talk to us?** Yes! God talks with us through the Word and by the Holy Spirit. And the children of God have the right to approach God boldly through prayer.

2. The Gospel is primary and important! The gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of prophecy are FOR the children of God, but we should be careful to not ignore the Holy Spirit's work and voice in the life of the unbeliever. John 16:9 says "and when he comes, he will convict the world of their sins" A practice in listening to God can be a work in the heart soil of an unbeliever.

3. There is no Junior Holy Spirit. There is no graduation day when we can suddenly receive the power that comes from the "grown up" Holy Spirit. Jesus had a special love and place for children and even taught that we must approach God with the faith of a child. We must never assume that one is too young for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This doesn't mean that we don't approach and introduce the Holy Spirit to children in child-like, age and developmentally appropriate ways, though.

How do you avoid the pitfalls of too inclusive a language when speaking of the Holy Spirit's gifts?

Be intentional to define WHO ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD? The Children of God are all the people that put their love and trust in Jesus. They are adopted into God's family and become heirs with Christ. And if heirs then empowered with the resurrection power of God living inside of them. We provide a place to display His power prophetically, through healing prayer and in pursuing other gifts of the Spirit, and we remind children that this power is for the believer. While making the distinction clear, we do not exclude non-believers from times of listening to God, because these very works of signs and wonders are designed to make them believe (John 4:48). So present the Gospel alongside all practices in the gifts of Spirit!

How do you control/correct what is likely not from God when practicing the prophetic with children?

1. There is plenty of space for loving correction while still encouraging a step of faith among children. An important key is to not be fearful of mistakes! Create plumb lines or questions to point children back to:

- Does it line up with God's word?
- Does it reflect God's character?
- Does it comfort, encourage and build up?
- Does it lead to hating sin and loving righteousness?
- Does it make much of God or much of man?

2. Have right expectations with children at different ages. Understand that prophecy is "human words reporting something God brings to mind" (Wayne Grudem). Immature believers will often have more a mixture of their own thoughts in what they think is a word from God. As they mature in Christ they will increase in their accuracy. Romans 12:6 says "Let us prophesy in proportion to our faith." Count all listening exercises as an opportunity to learn, direct and encourage.

3. Set up a structure that asks for prophetic words meant for others to be reviewed by a leader, teacher or parent before they are given. This provides a space for teaching not only in hearing, but also in how to give a prophetic word in the most loving way.

4. Teach the receiver of a word how to receive according to 1 Thess. 5:21 “test all things. Hold fast to what is true”.

5. Create an environment that celebrates obedience and taking risks, along with one that embraces loving, grace-filled correction. We are all perpetual learners.

How to Introduce the Prophetic Gift by Ages and Stages

Preschool ages 3-5 years:

This is an age where children are soft and sensitive to the things of God. We often pray John 10:27-28 over the children “My sheep here My voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hands.” This is the time of teaching who God is, how to listen to God, and to build trust—not necessarily a time to begin teaching about the gift of prophecy in any formal way. At this age our main focus is to create space for the Holy Spirit to draw children into a saving relationship with Jesus, while they learn to be still before Him and listen for His voice.

Early Elementary ages 5-8 years:

Here children are beginning to understand the gospel story. They are also growing in their knowledge of who God is and can understand more of His character. As we continue to create space for the Holy Spirit to work, salvations happen more frequently. Here, we speak intentionally of the Holy Spirit as the God who lives in those who believe. We begin to talk about the Holy Spirit as God who comforts, strengthens and empowers us. This is an appropriate age to introduce the gifts of the Spirit as one of the works of the Holy Spirit. Topical studies about the Holy Spirit at this age give a deeper teaching and understanding of who the Holy Spirit is. Here there are informal prophetic activities that encourage growth in listening and receiving words from God for self and others. It is here that we begin to teach from the resource called “How God Speaks to Us”.

Upper Elementary ages 8-12 years:

Children at this age have an ever-growing understanding of the gospel, and salvations continue to happen with increased frequency. Children can understand the gifts of the Spirit more specifically. Here we teach about the specific gifts of the Spirit that belong to those that believe, and we encourage times of asking for and practicing the gifts. Times of practicing happen within the relationship of small groups where there is safety and the freedom to step out in faith.

Activities for Listening and Practicing

Each of the following activities can be adapted to work in classrooms, VBS, summer camps, retreats and homes.

Be Still Listening Activity

Learning to “be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10) does not come naturally even to a child. In a busy world where constant stimulation abounds, children must be taught to be still in order to listen. We call this “God Time” or “Holy Spirit Time”. Sometimes we dim lights, play instrumental music or scriptural music. The children are directed to sit or lay quietly and be still. They are asked to think about the lesson and scriptures of the day, or to think directly on a Big Truth of God. The intention is to allow time for the Holy Spirit to touch their hearts with the truth they heard that day. Use language

that points them to listening to God. Preface this time with a reminder that God loves to talk to us and we get to listen.

Use the “How God Speaks To Us” handout to continually build the language and understanding of how God may reveal words to us. Then PRAY for God to give words to the children and teacher.

Encourage the children to ask for “pictures”. It is important that parents and/or teachers participate in this activity with the children and model what listening and hearing looks like using common language.

Provide a space for kids to share what they “heard”. In a preschool or early elementary child this may look like them expressing a feeling; something they remember from the bible story; a picture that is in their mind; or even a song they think about and sing.

These times of sharing can be in circle time and verbal in nature or through coloring and drawing pictures.

For older children this may be a time of journaling alone or in a small group.

This could be a time to share prophetic words by giving them to others in their circle as led by the Holy Spirit.

Our responsibility in discipling this activity could be to take time to discuss drawings with each child as they are working. Always encourage them for participating in listening to God.

Ask the Holy Spirit if there are words and scripture to help guide them in explaining their pictures, but be careful to not put your words to their “pictures.”

When able, write out what you talk to each child about on their paper, so that you can remember for later encouragement or if in a classroom setting, so that you can share with a parent or guardian.

It is important to bridge that gap with home. With older children help them to test each word according to the plumb lines you created.

Prophetic Blessings

This is a group activity where older children ask God to give prophetic words for one particular person in a small group. This time begins with listening to God and recording an encouraging word, vision, scripture, etc. We allow children to share if they feel like they have received one. One word of warning: be careful to not place an expectation of performance on any children during this time. Remember that this gift is for those that believe, but we do not have to exclude those that do not believe. This is an opportunity to display signs and wonders that lead to salvation.

We disciple this time by directing children to test each word: does it comfort, encourage and exhort? We also use this time to teach and remind the one who received to test the word according to the plumb lines.

This activity is fun to do on birthdays in the place of gifts or cards. This is an activity that builds faith for the receiver and the giver of the words; to one an assurance that God sees and knows them intimately, and to the other that God speaks to them and they heard Him through the power of the

Holy Spirit. Most often we have seen that the words that God gives will connect and bring confirmation.

Nature Hunt

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork..." (Ps 19:1-4) This activity takes children outside to find an item, like a leaf, rock or a flower, for example. After collecting an item, the children ask God these questions: How does this declare your glory? What does this say about your character? What does this say about me? Holy Spirit, what are you saying through your creation? And is this meant for me or someone else? This activity is a great one for summer camp or at home! This activity begins to teach children to make asking the Holy Spirit questions a normal part of life as they "live and move and have their being in Him" (Acts 17:28).

The responses to this activity are endless! Bring out all your art supplies and let the children worship God through the arts according to what they've heard sensed or seen.

Journaling is also a good activity. Keeping record of God speaking through dreams, visions, etc. is a great discipline and encouragement!

Our responsibility in shepherding this activity and response is mostly in helping those that received a prophetic word for another child. Here we would ask the giver to share with a teacher or parent first, where they would be encouraged to test it, and be given direction about how to give it to the recipient in the most loving and encouraging way. It would also be wise to have the adult present when it is given to help the receiver test, interpret, and apply it.

Scripture Cards

These are a great introductory activity to blessing others in a small group setting. Here a teacher or parent can prepare a bowl of printed encouraging scriptures. The bowl is passed about the room/circle and each child can either draw one at random or can look through the scriptures until they feel a prompting to choose one. After all the children have a scripture text in hand, lead the children in asking God to highlight a person in the circle that the scripture is meant for in that moment.

Allow the children to respond by sharing why they felt or sensed the scripture was for that person or what they heard or saw.

Then allow the receiver of the word to share how it might apply. Remember that an immature believer may miss the mark from time to time as they are growing and maturing in Christ, but in this activity the Word of God will never return void!

Another variation of this is one that we have done in our Worship and Arts Day Camp. We provide scripture texts and collaging supplies. After choosing a scripture, children prepare a beautiful card to present to the one that God highlights inside or outside of the classroom.

Use small group time to teach about giving and receiving words. They should always be given by leading out with love. Children, as well as adults should avoid interpreting or applying for the receiver, unless they have received that revelation from the Holy Spirit.

How God Speaks to Us activity

This activity involves asking God to speak to us in each of the ways that He's been seen to move as recorded on the "How God Speaks to Us" resource. Some of these are more conducive to exploring at home and throughout the day. This activity gives us a heightened awareness of where God is speaking. This activity is a wonderful teaching tool to introduce kids to how God speaks. You may focus on one point each week with an assignment to continually be asking God to speak in that way, and then report back. Be sure to celebrate with each child the simple act of asking Him, as well as the stories of hearing Him in the various ways!

Children's Worship

Children's worship provides a place for more corporate prophetic activities. In these settings, teachers are released to share words that they receive for children in the children's ministry corporately. These words are often about a struggle with fear or anxiety, or a call to respond to the gospel. This time will always end with a space for children to receive prayer in their seats from other teachers in the service. It is crucial in this time of sharing words to return to the foundational truths of God and His desire to talk with us. Explain what prophetic words are and how God uses them and give the children an expectation of how they can respond and what they might feel if the word applies to them.

On occasion we have had a child that has a word or passage of scripture that they feel is for all the children. In these cases, we ask them to share with a teacher first, and then they may be allowed to share with the children or the teacher may find it best to share on the child's behalf. This begins to teach children how the prophetic gift functions in the corporate setting of church.

When a child is sharing a word that may be shared with the group, allow the child to hear you ask the Holy Spirit if the word is for the group, for today, or to be shared aloud. It is important for them to know that you are asking God and not solely relying on your own judgement.

Even if you feel the word is not applicable or timely, encourage and celebrate the child for taking a risk. Tell the child that you will continue to pray about the word through the week, asking God for clarity and wisdom if you feel it is not to be shared.

Family Outings

A great activity for families is to encourage children to ask God to give them a clue about someone they may encounter at the mall, store or park. For example, God may show a green shirt and black pants, or even put a name in your mind! As you are driving to your destination, ask God how you should minister to this person should you find them. Is it a specific prayer, a prophetic word, or a word of knowledge? When you see the person that fits the description, approach the person and tell them that God had shown you or your child that you would encounter someone that fits the description. Share a specific word, scripture or ask them if you could pray for them. This creates an open door to share not only prayer, but the gospel! This one is very risky, but with big risk comes big faith!

Final thoughts and tips

- The prophetic is not a game, but it is fun to hear God speak and see His power on display. As you prepare your own listening and prophetic activities, rely on the Holy Spirit to guide you in bringing him glory and have fun doing it!
- “Holy Spirit” time is a piece of the classroom schedule. It is not an additional lesson. Use it as the response to a lesson, or a relationship building response to God.
- Use lessons to springboard a teaching about listening to God, or practicing the gifts of the Spirit. For example, if a lesson is on Jesus healing the leper, use that time to ask for the gift of healing and then pray for each other in response. Teach your church’s culture on prayer. If a lesson is on Pentecost then teach about the Holy Spirit and bring in your church’s language and culture on works and gifts of the Spirit.
- Spend time with the Holy Spirit each week as you prepare lessons for classes. Make space to listen and allow Him to lead you into activities for the children. Then encourage your teachers to listen in the moment with the freedom to move as the Spirit leads.
- Trust God at all times! He WANTS to talk to us! He will give wisdom when we ask. He will give age appropriate, spiritual-maturity appropriate words to His children. He is not a God of fear or confusion. His perfect love casts out fear.
- Err on the side of giving the Holy Spirit credit. Even when you or a child gets a prophetic word that seems too generic and broad, give the Holy Spirit credit and celebrate! When a scripture comes to your mind at just the right time to encourage a child, give the Holy Spirit credit for it! He is always at work and we can either excuse all the little things as the work of chance or coincident, or we can increase our view and faith in God and give glory to the One Who controls all things according to His purpose.

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

Scripture – the written language of God: God revealed His nature and character to us in the Bible. (Ps. 19; 119:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21)

Quickening portions of Scripture: The Holy Spirit may quicken portion of Scripture to us by making it come suddenly alive and giving us an understanding of what it means. There are times when the Bible does not deal with a particular situation, but the Holy Spirit gives us certain scriptures to apply to our situation to help guide us. (Heb. 4:12)

Internal Promptings – the gut language of God: Sometimes we strongly feel we should or should not do something. Usually we can't explain why we feel that way, but it may be God who has dropped that feeling in our spirit. (Neh. 7:5; Mark 2:6-8; Luke 5:22; Acts 14:9)

Dreams – the sleep language of God: The dream may be literal, but most of the time it is symbolic. He may or may not give us an immediate understanding of what the dream means. Take your dreams back to God and ask Him about them. (Gen. 40-41; Num. 12:6; Jer. 23:28; Joel 2:28; Matt. 2:13, 19)

Visions – the picture language of God: Visions are similar to dreams. They normally occur while we are awake. It is a supernatural picture of certain scenery or circumstances to the mind of a person. (Gen. 15:3-5; Isa. 6:1-8; Ezek. 40:3; Dan. 10:5-6; Acts 10:9-14)

Everyday Life: God will sometimes speak to us from our everyday life experiences to give us an understanding of spiritual reality. For instance, God may speak to us about His love for us as we are loving our children. (Jer. 18:1-6 - potter, Prov. 24:30-34 - field, 1 Sam. 15:27-28 - torn robe)

Nature – the earthly language of God: "All nature seems to speak. As for me, I cannot understand why everybody does not see it or feel it, nature of God does it for everyone who has eyes and ears and a heart to understand." - Van Gogh. (Job 38:8-11; Ps. 8:3-4; Isa. 40:12; Matt. 6:26, 28; Rom. 1:20)

Inner Voice/Audible Voice: The voice of the Lord comes to Christians in two forms: inward and audible. Audible is with your natural ears. Inward is an inner sense or permission that you receive in your spirit. (Gen. 22:1-2; Num. 12:6-8; John 16:13; Acts 9:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:17-18; 2 John 10:16)

Books, Movies, Songs, Art – the creative language of God: God can quicken things to us as we read a book, watch a movie, listen to a song, or see a piece of art. The parables of Jesus are stories; the Psalms are songs!

Angels – messengers of God's language: Angels may appear in their glory or in human form. (Ps. 34:11; Matt. 2:13; Luke 1:30; Heb. 1:14)

Repetition – the language of God's echo: Repetition is where God brings the same thing at you over and over again until you "get it"

Sentence Fragments – the short language of God: Sometimes God may only speak a single word. While the word may be clear, the interpretation may not be. Our glory is to search out meaning. (Prov. 25:2; Isa. 8:1)

Physical Manifestations in Our Bodies – the body language of God: We use our bodies to communicate love and do many other things. God also will use your body to tell you things. Ex: you may feel a chill when the presence of God is strong. Jesus felt healing power leave His body. (Luke 8:45-46)

Other People: God sometimes speaks to us through other people and then gives us a 'yes' deep in our own spirit. (2 Sam. 12)

EQUIPPING PEOPLE FOR PROPHETIC MINISTRY IN CORPORATE GATHERINGS AND IN SMALL GROUPS

Led by: Sam Storms (Lead Pastor for Teaching & Vision) + Matt Palmer (Executive Pastor)

Description: How does the gift of prophecy function in the larger, corporate gatherings of God's people? In this workshop, we'll look at ways to facilitate prophecy in the corporate assembly on Sunday morning, and especially in the context of small group life.

Guidelines for the Public Expression of Prophecy in the Corporate Assembly

Although the small group setting is more suitable to the exercise of prophecy (and most other spiritual gifts as well), room should still be given to its use in the corporate gathering of all God's people. The limitations imposed due to time and the size of the crowd will make it more difficult to steward this gift on a Sunday morning.

Our counsel is that you do not make available an "open microphone" near the platform or anywhere else to which people have more or less free access. Reasons:

- It increases the possibility of unwelcome and intrusive disruptions in the flow of corporate worship.
- It provides a strong temptation for ambitious and immature people to seize the opportunity to speak into the life of the church in ways that are often inappropriate.
- We have discovered that the majority of those who rush to make use of an open mic are either visitors or spiritually imbalanced folk.
- Another reason for our hesitation concerning this practice is that it does not give the leadership of the church any opportunity to assess the "word" before it is delivered. More on this below.

Here is our protocol at Bridgeway.

First, at each celebration there will be a *designated point person* who has the responsibility and authority to make the final decision on how prophetic ministry is to be facilitated. This will usually be either Sam, one of our Senior Leaders, one of the Elders, or a member of the Prophetic Team. Whoever is selected for this role needs to be biblically informed, spiritually mature, and of such a temperament that they can deal kindly but firmly with those who may "insist" that if they are not permitted to speak they are disobeying God.

Second, we instruct our people that if they believe the Lord has revealed something to them, they should share this with the appointed individual. We prefer that it be put in writing, but if that is not possible we encourage them simply to go to the leader and communicate what they believe the Lord is saying. I have grown accustomed to feel a tap on the shoulder or a tug on my arm as someone whispers in my ear, "Sam, I think the Lord has laid something on my heart that ought to be shared with the congregation as a whole."

Third, I will make an immediate judgment as to whether the individual has indeed heard from God. I encourage everyone to remember that neither I nor any other pastor or elder is infallible in making such judgments and that errors can and have been made in this regard. We simply ask that people not be offended or take it as a personal rejection if we determine that they have not heard from the Lord.

In this regard I strongly encourage you to read the chapter in *Practicing the Power* that addresses what is and what is not a legitimate prophetic word. Much of the time those who come with what they believe is a prophetic word for the church as a whole are simply responding to the conviction or enlightening ministry of the Holy Spirit that is common to all of God's people.

Fourth, if it is determined that the Lord has truly spoken to you, our first task will be to decide whether or not the revelation is for you *personally* or is designed for the church *corporately*. Often times what

you hear from God is intended for your personal edification or should become a focus of your own personal prayer life. If it is determined that your word is suitable for the whole body, several other decisions have to be made.

Fifth, at this time a judgment will be made as to *when* the word should be shared with the entire body. That is to say, should it be shared now or perhaps next week (or sometime thereafter), once additional time is given to prayer and discussion among the staff, Elders, and Prophetic Team? Sadly, some who are told that their “word” needs further evaluation and may be postponed to a later date respond by taking offense: “But God spoke to me today about immediate needs in our church. How can you choose not to communicate this to the church body as a whole, right now?”

Sixth, assuming that the word is appropriate for the entire church at the time you received it, a judgment will be made as to the most fitting time during the service when it should be communicated. Should it be shared immediately, or should we wait until after our time of singing, or perhaps after the sermon, or at some other time during the course of the morning service?

Seventh, once it is decided when the word is to be shared, the final decision concerns who should speak it forth. On occasion we will permit the individual who received the word to share it publicly. This will often depend on how well we know the person and if they have a demonstrated history of accuracy and maturity in the exercise of their spiritual gift. At other times, the point person will assume responsibility for communicating the word to the body as a whole.

Eighth, every believer in the congregation has a personal responsibility to pay close attention to the prophetic word and to judge or evaluate the biblical validity of its content (cf. 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19-22). However, Paul *may* be telling us that only men are permitted to articulate publicly this evaluation or judgment in the corporate gathering (1 Tim. 2:11-15; 1 Cor. 14:33-35). In our church, if there is a word spoken that I or the other Elders find inaccurate or unacceptable, we would typically respond in this way:

“Folks, please know that we highly value prophetic ministry. We want to do everything we can to encourage it and to learn from one another. But we also have a responsibility as your spiritual leaders to guard you from error. Our brother (or sister) obviously acted and spoke in a way they thought was what God desired, and I want to honor them for their sincerity. However, I don’t believe that what was said is altogether accurate. Let me take just a moment and explain what I believe is more consistent with God’s Word.”

Of course, if we are doing what we should do it would never come to this, as we would have evaluated the “word” before it was ever spoken to determine if it was truly of God.

Ninth, as noted earlier with regard to prophetic ministry in small groups, the Scriptures are clear that, at most, “two or three prophets” should speak during the course of any one corporate gathering (1 Cor. 14:29). We ask that everyone abide by this rule and that they not be offended or take it personally if we choose to limit the number of those who prophesy.

Tenth, if someone who is not familiar with the standard protocol for processing prophetic words in the corporate gathering should stand up and loudly begin to speak “prophetically,” it is best to approach them privately and gently inform them of the proper approach. If a public word of correction is needed, it can be framed in something along these lines: “Whereas we believe in prophetic ministry and the potential for any Christian to be used of God in this manner, we do have procedures for how this should best be done in the corporate assembly. I encourage our brother/sister to come to me or

one of our Pastors after the service so that we might provide you with instructions that we believe will make this a more helpful experience for all concerned.”

Guidelines for Facilitating the Prophetic in Small Groups

When people ask us how we facilitate the exercise of prophecy in our church, we typically begin by encouraging them to focus on its presence in small groups rather than in the larger assembly on Sunday morning (or even Sunday evening, should you still be one of the few churches that holds an evening service).

It's important to remember the first-century context in which Paul wrote his instructions to the church at Corinth. We can't be certain, but most scholars agree that the largest congregation that might be accommodated in the homes of the first century would be around 150. Most would be far fewer than that. So when we read Paul we need to keep in mind that he likely did not have in mind the modern day mega-church, or even one that exceeded 200 believers. His instruction is much easier to understand and implement in gatherings where virtually everyone was known to everyone else. For example, people have often been puzzled by Paul's counsel regarding the use of tongues in a gathered assembly. In 1 Cor. 14:27-28 we read the following:

“If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God” (1 Cor. 14:27-28).

The question we're often asked is this: “How could one even know if there was another present who had the gift of interpretation? Without this advance knowledge, it would appear to make Paul's instruction in this text difficult to obey.”

True. But we need to keep in mind that the likelihood is that, given the comparatively small size of house churches in Corinth, virtually everyone who attended one would be personally acquainted with everyone else. Each person would thus have a greater chance of knowing what spiritual gift was regularly exercised by every other individual. If one believed that he/she had a “tongue” that should be exercised publicly, they could easily determine if those who regularly exercised the gift of interpretation were present. In any case, in a substantially smaller crowd the opportunity for the exercise of all spiritual gifts would be significantly greater.

So how ought we to proceed with the exercise of prophecy in our small group meetings? The first thing we would recommend is that the leader of such gatherings explicitly and frequently tell the people that this is a “safe” environment in which everyone should feel free to take risks. As odd as that may sound, it will go a long way toward putting at ease the hearts of people who live in fear that if they make even the smallest of mistakes they will be rebuked or mocked or in some manner marginalized from the group.

It's important to remember that there will always be varying degrees of confidence in people regarding the question of whether or not they have truly heard from God. Paul wrote this in Romans 12:6 concerning the exercise of prophecy: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, *in proportion to our faith*” (emphasis mine). In his contribution to the book, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, Sam wrote this:

“Paul seems to be saying that ‘some who had the gift of prophecy had a greater measure of faith (that is, trust or confidence that the Holy Spirit would work or was working in them to bring a revelation which would be the basis of a prophecy).’ In other words, there will always

be greater and lesser degrees of prophetic ability and consequently greater and lesser degrees of prophetic accuracy (which, it seems reasonable to assume, may increase or decrease, depending on the circumstances of that person's life). Thus, the prophet is to speak in proportion to the confidence and assurance he or she has that what is spoken is truly from God. Prophets are not to speak beyond what God has revealed; they must be careful never to speak on their own authority or from their own resources" (210).

If this is indeed what Paul has in mind, and we believe it is, we should take it as an incentive to deal tenderly and patiently with those who are somewhat uncertain if they have a genuine "word" from God intended for another person or for the group as a whole. Thus we should tell our people on a regular basis, "Don't be afraid to step out in faith and give expression to what you believe God has revealed to you. If you don't get things perfectly, you need not fear that anyone will judge you or disregard you. You won't be put in a special class of sub-spiritual Christians who are not permitted ever again to exercise their gift lest we be damaged by the errors you espouse."

Simply put, people need to know that they are loved and valued and that their contributions are appreciated. In the absence of this relational atmosphere, many will simply keep their mouths shut and decline ever to participate in a meaningful way. They need to know that their courage in stepping out in faith will be honored and that they need not fear being exposed to public humiliation.

Another important practice relates to the structure of your small group setting. If the entire gathering is dominated by only one person, or if the time is entirely devoted to the teaching of the Scriptures, the opportunities for the Spirit to speak through revelatory gifts and to build up others is greatly reduced. We must never respond to this by saying: "But if the Holy Spirit wants to minister through a prophetic gift he will do it in some manner with or without our assistance. He can interrupt our proceedings any time he pleases." In one sense, that's true. He could. But we don't believe that is the Spirit's preferred manner of ministering in, to, and through us.

The Spirit does not overwhelm or intrude or treat us as puppets. There may well have been people in first-century Corinth who appealed to just such an argument. Paul was attempting to put in place certain restrictions on the number of those who might prophesy in any one gathering lest they dominate the meeting and make difficult, if not impossible, the exercise of a wide range of gifts by multiple individuals. To those who might respond to him by saying, "But I just couldn't help myself. The Spirit overwhelmed me and I couldn't refrain from speaking, notwithstanding your instruction that only two or three prophesy before the others pass judgment," Paul replied, "No, you aren't out of control; you can exercise restraint; after all, 'the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace'" (1 Cor. 14:32-33).

We regularly encourage our small group leaders to "make space" or provide ample time and opportunity for the prophetic gift to be exercised. If your group regularly spends time in singing or prayer at any one gathering, it may be helpful to pause in the middle, or even wait until the end, and then say: "Let's stop for a moment and remain silent. Each person should pray quietly and ask the Spirit if he wishes to make known something that would be of benefit and for the building up of others present tonight."

After a few minutes you can then ask: "Does anyone have a sense from the Lord about the direction of our meeting tonight?" "Is anyone hearing from the Lord for ministry?" "Did anyone have a dream recently or feel burdened or impressed in some way?" Don't be afraid of or offended by the awkwardness of silence. Maybe God isn't speaking at this time. And if he isn't, don't feel as if you have failed if no prophetic ministry is forthcoming. But if someone shares a "revelation" from God, give time for the others to ponder its content, to pray, perhaps even to search the Scriptures, to see if what was said is true.

If someone did hear from God and the word bore special importance for a particular individual, take time to pray this truth into their life. Either gather around that person or, better still, have them sit in a chair in the middle of the room while others lay hands on them and ask the Spirit to bring insight into the full meaning of the “word” and how the person in view might properly respond to what was said. When this is done we have seen instances where the Spirit continues to reveal something of value and practical application for that person’s life.

Devote sufficient time to helping visitors, unbelievers, or cessationists understand prophetic ministry. They will often feel confused or find it weird. Make sure there is time to dialogue and debrief about what has (or has not) happened. Encourage them to ask whatever questions they have. Make sure they know that you do not view them as cynics or skeptics simply because they wonder about the nature and legitimacy of prophetic ministry.

We’ve often found it helpful when such folk are present to preface the meeting with a statement such as this:

“We are so happy that all of you are with us tonight. We hope and pray that this will be a time of practical benefit and spiritual encouragement to you. But we are also aware that you may not understand or agree with what may happen. We believe that the Holy Spirit can speak to us through revelatory spiritual gifts such as prophecy, word of knowledge, and word of wisdom. It may be that someone will share a dream they recently had that has relevant application to our lives. We want you to understand that we will not allow anything to go unaddressed that conflicts with Scripture. The Bible is our highest and final authority for determining truth. So put your hearts at rest and know that nothing contrary to God’s written and inspired Word will be tolerated. That being said, some things might occur that simply make you feel uncomfortable. That often happens when we experience or witness something that we’ve never encountered before. We hope you will be patient with us. We are by no means perfect in what we do or believe. But if you will allow us to minister as we believe God is leading, we’ll be certain to provide ample time for you to ask whatever questions you might have or to voice whatever concerns are on your heart.”

Another word of counsel is to be slow to deliver prophetic words to unbelievers or even believers who are new to the group. It may be more helpful to them, and they may be more open to receiving the word, if it is done in private in a one-on-one setting. This way they do not feel exposed in the presence of people they don’t know.

It’s also important that you don’t let prophetic ministry dominate the meeting. Although Paul restricted prophecy to two or three in the corporate gathering of the church, there are no explicit guidelines on how many words may be spoken in a small group setting. There *are* other spiritual gifts that we should encourage and facilitate in our small groups.

Finally, the responsibility of all those present to “judge” or “weigh” or “evaluate” a prophetic word is the same in a small group setting as it is in a corporate gathering (see 1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19-22). Our suggestion is that as each word is spoken time be taken to ask all present to prayerfully evaluate what was said.

PROPHETIC EVANGELISM

Led by: Andy Edwards (Pastor of Missions & Evangelism) + Bob Armstrong (Prophetic Team)

Description: What does prophecy look like when it is taken outside the four walls of a church and beyond the small group gatherings of Christians? Are there guidelines and practical principles that will enable us to minister prophetically to unsaved people at the mall, on the streets, and in the office? That will be the focus of this workshop.

For those who wish to participate, a group will go to a public venue, perhaps a shopping mall, and engage in prophetic evangelism in the real world. This will take place during the GROUP B breakout session time.

Suggested Readings

- Sustainable Power by Simon Holley (Authentic Media, 2013)
 - Out of print, available in e-book format on Amazon, B&N, and iTunes
- Power Evangelism by John Wimber (Chosen Books, 2009)

What is Prophetic Evangelism?

“The proclamation and the supernatural demonstration of the kingdom of God.” – Kevin Springer

“The explanation of the gospel – the clear proclamation of the finished work of Christ on the cross – comes with a demonstration of God’s power through signs and wonders. It is a spontaneous, spirit-inspired, empowered presentation of the gospel.” – John Wimber

Wimber goes on to say, “It is preceded and undergirded by demonstrations of God’s presence and frequently results in groups of people being saved. The signs and wonders do not save; only Jesus and His substitutionary work on the cross saves.”

“It is the combining of gospel proclamation and the Holy Spirit’s demonstration of power to the unbelieving world. Proclamation is preaching repentance because the kingdom of God is at hand. Demonstration is seeing the power of God come through healing, prophecy, dreams and miracles.

It is making use of any form of divine revelation that brings people closer to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It may be in the form of a word of knowledge, word of prophecy or dream interpretation.” – Simon Peter

Remember, in all proclamation and demonstration, it is God that draws all men to himself. He is the initiator, sustainer and completer of each person’s faith.

Why Prophetic Evangelism?

Prophetic Evangelism opens the door to touch people **where they are** and demonstrate God’s love and power by affirming them with information one would never know without divine revelation. Odds are people are more likely to listen to a prophetic word or testimony on the streets than a sermon in a church. We all know getting people into church is becoming more and more challenging in our society. Taking the gospel in word, deed and power outside the walls is how broken and hurting people will hear about Jesus and see His power in their lives.

“Resistance to the gospel is overcome by the demonstration of God’s power, and receptivity to Christ’s claims is usually very high.” – John Wimber

“Cast your net on the right side of the boat...” Through prophetic gifts, God highlights the people in whom he’s already working and shows us where to “fish” (John 21:6). The results are often more fruitful than blind net casting.

A quick word of clarity about the proclaimed word as we talk about prophetic evangelism: The gospel alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). Many people have heard the verbal proclamation of the gospel and believed unto salvation with no other demonstration or explanation. We must *always* proclaim the gospel (Acts 10:34-43 - Jesus lived perfectly, died on the cross in our place for our sin, was raised to life and now offers us new life in Him if we repent of our sins and trust in His finished work). Signs and wonders are *complementary* to the message of salvation.

“In power evangelism, we do not add to the gospel or even seek to add power to the gospel. But we do turn to the Holy Spirit in our evangelistic efforts and consciously cooperate with His anointing, gifting and leading. Preaching and demonstrating the gospel are not mutually exclusive; they work together and reinforce each other.” – John Wimber

Is Prophetic Evangelism Biblical?

There are many prophetic (power) evangelism stories throughout the New Testament. Jesus was almost always doing power evangelism. Let's look at some passages.

Jesus lived proclamation and power.

- John 1:43-51 – Nathanael. Prophecy in the form of a picture.
- John 4:1-45 – Woman at the Well. Prophecy in the form of a word of knowledge.
- John 9:1-41 – Blind man is healed and believes in Jesus.

Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, was given the gifts of words of knowledge and wisdom, prophecy, healing and miracles (Matt. 12:18; 28; Mark 1:10; Luke 4:14). Even in that, he did not neglect to love the people well by responding to their physical, emotional and material needs. In the book of John, Jesus almost always opened their eyes with the use of the miraculous before preaching to them.

People might say, "Well, since Jesus is God, He used his divine God-attributes to heal, perform miracles, give words of knowledge and raise people from the dead." Those same people would then say, "Since we are not God but simply human, Jesus is not a good example of how to do evangelism, and more specifically, prophetic evangelism." We don't have time to go into this fully today, but the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus did not use the power of His divinity but relied completely on the person and power of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of His life, including performing every miracle and healing. We have provided notes by Sam Storms to help bring some clarity to this point.

"Jesus is our model for how God wants us to live in humble, reliant trust on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we can reasonably expect to "be like" Jesus, to 'live like' Jesus only to the degree that we draw from the same divine power on which he faithfully relied: the Holy Spirit." – Sam Storms

The Holy Spirit in Jesus is the same Holy Spirit in us - adopted sons and daughters of God (Luke 4:14; Acts 1:8).

Jesus commissioned others to do the same.

Jesus lived out his life empowered by the Holy Spirit and commissioned His followers to do the same.

- Luke 9:1-6 – Jesus sends out the 12 apostles to cure diseases, cast out demons and proclaim the good news that the kingdom is here.
- Luke 10:1-12 – Jesus sends out 72 people to heal diseases and proclaim the kingdom of God is here.

Here are some examples of regular everyday folks, along with some of the apostles, who performed miracles, heard the voice of God, saw healings and had prophetic words for others.

- Acts 6:8 - Stephen did **wonders**.
- Acts 8:6 - Philip proclaimed Christ and did **signs** in Samaria.

- Acts 8: 26-39 - The Holy Spirit **spoke** to Philip and told him where to go. When he arrived, God had set up the entire situation so that Philip could tell the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus - kind of like throwing the nets out on the right side of the boat.
- Acts 9:10-12 - Ananias has a **vision** for an unbeliever.
- Acts 10 - Peter saw a **vision** that lead to the salvation of Cornelius and his family.
- Acts 13:1 - **Prophets** in the church in Antioch
- Acts 21:9-10 - Philip's daughters **prophesied** along with Agabus.

We look at spiritual gifts and supernatural revelation through the lens of being adopted into God's family as sons and daughters. Since **we are sons and daughters** we have been given the Spirit of God which can lead to demonstration, alongside our bold proclamation (Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:13-14).

If we are correct in the definitions of prophetic evangelism and believe it is biblical, we need practical ways to begin living this power and love gospel in our everyday lives.

Things to Remember

Here are a few quick reminders before we get to the nitty gritty of hitting the streets:

1. **Redefine success.** Success equals love and obedience NOT getting it right every time (stories of apparent failures that are actually success). I have more apparent failure stories than what we would call success stories.
2. **Link in the chain.** Our goal is not necessarily to lead them to Jesus today, but to discern where they are and help nudge them a step closer to Jesus. We could be the 5th link in a chain that has 20 links. We are responsible to love, proclaim and ask for demonstrations of power. Paul planted, Apollos watered, God gives the growth.
3. **Encouraging people is the goal.** People should feel loved and encouraged throughout the conversation. They should feel like a person and not a project. We want them to experience the all-encompassing love of God, and that starts with the way we interact with them. So even if we are wrong about the word we thought the Lord gave us, they can still sense that we care about them. *There have been times we think the word given was wrong, but later on it became apparent the word was actually true.
4. **Everyone can live naturally supernatural.** How do we bring the gospel to bear on everyday people in the everyday stuff of life? Are we always asking Holy Spirit to give us revelation at the park, store, soccer game, etc. Are we sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our everyday lives so when God tells us to go because he is drawing someone into the kingdom, we go and proclaim the gospel. This is just like Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Prophetic evangelism is not just for the prophets and the evangelists. John Wimber was notorious for believing that equipping the saints for the work of the ministry was the only biblical way forward. No special ministers. Everyone plays.
5. **Teams for the win.** We believe ministering to people in teams is the best way. Jesus sent them out in twos. There is accountability in twos.
6. **Unintentional prophecy.** One can minister prophetically and never even realize it through the supernatural invasion of our hearts with words for others.

Quick Hits

- Power evangelism is not about our *ability* but our *availability*.
- Power evangelism always involves *risk*.
- Power evangelism works very well with other forms of evangelism (servant, friendship, proclamation) because it brings a demonstration of God's presence to validate the message in the other forms of evangelism.

5-Step Power Evangelism Model

**Written by Brian Blount. Reprinted by permission.*

Kingdom Encounters - Taking Love & Power to the Streets

Step 1: Approach

Always follow the way of love; cultivate values that set people at ease and demonstrate the love and power of a good God. Remember that you are serving the one you are ministering to.

- Treat the person with respect and honor.
- Approach the person with faith in Jesus' commission to heal the sick and confidence in His present activity in their lives.
- Smile. Be friendly. Introduce yourself and ask the person's name. (Use a breath mint!)
- Avoid Christianese (religious jargon that others may not understand).
- Experiment with creativity in your approach. Different approaches work best for different people. Remember, all approaches involve RISK. Risk opens the door for the impossible.

The "Can I Serve You?" Approach:

- "Could I serve you in a practical way by praying for a physical or spiritual need?"
- You can do this when you are shopping, at a restaurant (tip well), or just going about your day. This approach also works well when coupled with servant evangelism.

The Visible Need Approach:

- "I noticed you use a cane. What happened to you?"
- People often love to share about what is going on in their lives; they are just looking for a listening ear.

The Word of Knowledge Approach:

- "Do you happen to have a condition in your back?"
- They will probably ask you why you asked. You could say, "Sometimes I get pictures or impressions for people. Does that impression happen to make sense to you?" This response often evokes curiosity and invites conversation.

- If they ask you how you knew that, you might say, “I didn’t know that, but I’m a follower of Jesus, and he knows about your condition.” (In some situations you may wait until Step 5 to say you are a follower of Jesus because it may prompt unnecessary religious filters.)
- Again, be creative in your approaches. Experiment to find what works best for you.

Common Ways Words of Knowledge Come:

- **See it.** This is a picture in your mind. It often seems similar to a picture you imagined, but it is outside your train of thought.
- **Hear it.** It usually comes as a thought similar to your own inner voice, but it is outside your train of thought.
- **Feel it.** You feel a pain or sensation in your body that is not your own pain. Likewise, you can feel an emotion that is not your emotion.
- **Know it.** This is an inner knowing, or a sense that something is true without an understanding of why you know it to be true.
- **Most words of knowledge come as quick, fleeting impressions.**

Step 2: Ask

Ask questions to find out basic information about the condition. Listen for responses on two planes: listen to the person and listen to the Holy Spirit for more revelatory insight.

- “Where is your pain? How would you rate the pain level on a scale from 1 to 10 with 10 being excruciating?”
- “How long have you had the condition? Do you know what caused it?”
- “Can I pray for you now about that?”
- Always ask before touching someone. “May I put my hand on your shoulder?” or “Can I hold your hand as I pray?”
- If the person seems uneasy about you touching them or praying for them, you can say, “Hey, no one’s going to know that we are praying. I’ll keep my eyes open and pray just like we are having a conversation.”

Step 3: Pray

Remember that in public settings you usually only have 15-30 seconds to pray for someone. Use quick prayers of command, not petitioning prayers.

- Invite the presence of the Holy Spirit to come.
- Speak to the pain or the condition and tell it to go.
- Remember, Jesus prayed short prayers of command.

Step 4: Assess

Ask the person what they are beginning to experience in their body.

- They may experience relief of symptoms, warmth, tingling, coolness, or a sense of God’s presence. They may not understand what this is. They may experience nothing.

- Ask where the pain level is now on the 1 to 10 scale.
- Ask them to move and do something they couldn't do before to test the effectiveness of the prayer.
- Pointing out God's activity keeps connection and engagement in the prayer process. For example, you could say, "You said the pain started at an 8, but now it's a 6. That's amazing! If it went down to a 6, I believe it can go to a 0. Do you mind if I pray again?"
- Go back to Step 3 (Pray) if the pain is not fully gone and if they are open to more prayer.

Step 5: Explain

Without explanation, people will not always draw the correct conclusions from their experience.

- Tell them that what they experienced was Jesus coming near them because He loves them, He's real, and He desires a relationship with them.
- Explain the gospel in simple terms.
- Tell them, "What God did in your body He wants to do in your whole life."
- Explain how they can connect more with Jesus.
- You can invite them into community with your local church.

HOW DID JESUS PERFORM HIS MIRACLES?

**Excerpt from Tough Topics 2 by Sam Storms. Reprinted by permission.*

Of all the questions this book seeks to answer, many will consider this one to be the easiest. How did Jesus perform his miracles? Are you serious? He was God, for heaven's sake! He is omnipotent. Whenever the sick needed healing or the demonized needed deliverance, he simply drew upon the immeasurable strength of his divine nature to accomplish the task at hand. Or, at least, that's what I used to think. But no more.

Before I go any farther, let me set one thing straight so that there can be no doubt as to where I stand on the person of Jesus Christ. He was and is and always will be God! God the Son, the second person of the holy Trinity, became human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but in doing so never ceased to be fully divine. There may be occasions as you continue reading this chapter where you wonder if I really believe that. Trust me, I do.

Now we are prepared for the answer to my question. Here it is: It was not primarily by virtue of his divine nature that Jesus lived the kind of life he did and ministered in power to the sick and demonized, but rather through *his constant and ever-increasing reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit*. There are three issues that undergird this thesis, the first of which is *the unprecedented presence of the Spirit in the life of Jesus*. We read in John 3:34-35, "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand." Who is it that "gives" the Spirit and who is it that receives?

Some insist it is Jesus, the Son, who gives the Spirit to those who receive his testimony (v. 32). But more likely God the Father is "he" who gives the Spirit without measure to Jesus, the one "whom God has sent," the one who "speaks the words of God." I say this for the following reasons. First, this view alone makes sense of the first half of v. 34; i.e., the words of Jesus are to be identified with the words of God *because* Jesus receives the Spirit without measure. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires and enables Jesus to speak the very words of the Father. Furthermore, this view connects v. 34 with v. 35. Preeminent among the "things" given by the Father to the Son is the Holy Spirit. This view also sets up a contrast between Jesus and all who preceded him. In other words, however much of the Spirit the OT prophets and kings and priests may have had, Jesus has him all! Jesus, unlike those who came before, has received of the Spirit "without measure" (which is to say, superabundantly, bountifully, completely, in unlimited fullness). Finally, if Jesus spoke the words of God because he was God, if he acted and served and ministered solely by virtue of his own native or inherent deity, why would he be given the presence of the Holy Spirit (least of all "without measure")? What would be the need?

The second of three underlying principles that account for my answer is the reality of our Lord's *human nature*. Don't simply take this for granted, for the fact is that many evangelicals think little of the human nature of Jesus. They often fail to reckon with the fact that he had a true physical body. Indeed, the confession that Jesus was Christ come "in the flesh" became the touchstone of orthodoxy (see 1 John 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:16; Luke 24:39,43; Jn. 20:17,20,27). Jesus *experienced hunger* (Mt. 4:2), *he thirsted* (Jn. 19:28), *grew weary* (Jn. 4:6), *wept and cried aloud* (Jn. 11:35; Lk. 19:41), *sighed* (Mk. 7:34), *groaned* (Mk. 8:12), *glared angrily* (Mk. 3:5), and felt *annoyance* (Mk. 10:14).

He also had a true immaterial *soul*. "My soul," he declared, "is very sorrowful, even to death" (Mt. 26:38). It was to the divine purpose that he subjected his *will* (Lk. 22:42). It was into the Father's

hands that he committed his *spirit* (Lk. 23:46). And we read often of a genuinely human emotional life: he *felt compassion* (Mt. 9:36; 20:34; Mk. 1:41; 6:34; 8:2; Lk. 7:13; *love* (Jn. 11:3; 15:8-12; Mk. 10:21); *anger* (Mk. 3:5; Jn. 2:13-17); and *joy* (Lk. 7:34; 10:21; Jn. 15:11; 17:13).

The final underlying assumption to my answer concerns *the implications of his incarnation and humiliation*. In that famous passage in Philippians 2, Paul says that “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (vv. 6-8). Paul is not saying that the eternal Son of God gave up or surrendered any attributes of deity. Jesus “made himself nothing” or “emptied” himself by becoming a man, not by ceasing to be God. Thus, in becoming a man “the Son of God willed to renounce the exercise of his divine powers, attributes, prerogatives, so that he might live fully within those limitations which inhere in being truly human.”² That which he had (namely, all the divine attributes), by virtue of what he was (Deity), he willingly chose not to use. Thus we see a human being doing super-human things and ask “How?” The answer is: *Not from the power of his own divine nature, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

The Son chose to experience the world through the limitations imposed by human consciousness and an authentic human nature. The attributes of omnipotence, omnipresence, and omniscience were not lost or laid aside, but became *latent* and *potential* within the confines of his human nature. They are “present in Jesus in all their fulness, but no longer in exercise.”³ The incarnation thus means that Jesus “actually thought and acted, viewed the world, and experienced time and space events strictly within the confines of a normally developing human person.”⁴

Therefore, “it is the *Spirit*, experienced in the OT as special enablings (of charismatic revelation, wisdom, or power) that transcend human limitations, that becomes the means of Jesus’ human knowledge of God, of the revelation he receives, and of the power by which he preaches and acts. Jesus’ experience is in that sense paradigmatic of *Christian* experience of the Spirit, though the Spirit filled the incarnate Son to a unique degree.”⁵ Gerald Hawthorne articulates the implications of this for his original disciples and for us today:

“Not only is Jesus their Savior because of who he was and because of his own complete obedience to the Father’s will (cf. Heb. 10:5-7), but he is the supreme example for them of what is possible in a human life because of his own total dependence upon the Spirit of God. Jesus is living proof of how those who are his followers may exceed the limitations of their humanness in order that they, like him, might carry to completion against all odds their God-given mission in life -- by the Holy Spirit. Jesus demonstrated clearly that God’s intended way for human beings to live, the ideal way to live, the supremely successful way to live, is in conjunction with God, in harmony with God, in touch with the power of God, and not apart from God, not independent of God, not without God. The Spirit was the presence and power of God in Jesus, and fully so.”⁶

What this means is that Jesus is our model for how God wants us to live in humble, reliant trust on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we can reasonably expect to “be like” Jesus, to

² Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power: The significance of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 208.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵ Max Turner, review of *The Presence and the Power*, *The Evangelical Quarterly* 65 (January 1993), 80.

⁶ Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power*, 234.

“live like” Jesus only to the degree that we draw from the same divine power on which he faithfully relied: the Holy Spirit.

Merely asserting an answer to our question is one thing. Proving it biblically is another altogether. So let’s go on a brief tour of the life and ministry of Jesus and take note along the way of the pervasive, powerful presence of the Holy Spirit at every stage.

The Conception and Birth of Jesus

Even from the conception of Jesus in the womb, we see the presence and activity of the Spirit. Mary “was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 1:18; see v. 20). The source or cause of this miracle is the Holy Spirit. Mary is pregnant *from* or *of* the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, not Joseph or any other man (thus putting to rest Joseph’s natural fears), provided the generative force by which Mary’s pregnancy came to pass and the humanity of Jesus was initiated. “No human male, then, is to be thought of as the agent by which Mary’s child is begotten; rather the Holy Spirit is that which sets the whole process of this special conception and gestation into motion.”⁷

We see the same thing in Luke’s version. In Luke 1:35 the Spirit is said to “come upon” Mary in order to account for the conception of Jesus in her womb. This terminology is used in the OT of the powerful presence of God’s Spirit at work in the midst of his people. Often the Spirit would “come upon” OT saints to equip them for a special task (cf. Num. 24:2; Judges 3:10; 2 Chron. 15:1; see esp. Isa. 32:15). Luke is making the claim that “the conception and birth of Jesus was not to be part of the normal course of human events -- marriage, intercourse, conception, gestation, birth -- but a miracle, the direct intervention of God into the course of human events, so that Mary’s child to be born would be a gift of God in the fullest sense.”⁸

Moreover, the power of the Most High (a reference to the Spirit) will “overshadow” her (v. 35). Again, this word was used of the revelation of God’s glory in OT (cf. Ex. 40:35; Ps. 91:4; 140:7 = God’s powerful presence; see also Mt. 17:5; Luke 9:34). “As the tabernacle was full, contained, the Shekinah glory (i.e., the presence of God, Exod. 40:35), so Mary was to carry within herself the Son of God, the glory of God’s people Israel (cf. Luke 2:28-32, esp. v. 32).”⁹ In sum, the Holy Spirit was the divine creative element by which the fashioning of our Lord’s human nature was begun (cf. Heb. 10:5).

We should also take note of Luke 1:15 where John the Baptist is described as having been “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.” If John (the lesser) was filled with the Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb, how much more must it be true of Jesus (the greater). If this is true of the herald of Jesus (see John 3:30; Mt. 3:11), is it not reasonable to suppose it is true of Jesus himself? Since the Holy Spirit “came upon” Mary and “overshadowed” Mary and enabled her to conceive, it stands to reason that Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit” no less than he who was his forerunner.

The Childhood and Youth of Jesus

The same principle continues into the childhood and youth of Jesus. Luke tells us that “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40). We might translate this more literally to say that Jesus was growing strong “by being filled with wisdom” (the latter phrase tells how and with what Jesus was made strong). “Being filled” is in the present tense, likely pointing to a steady, continuous experience (“by being ever more and more filled with wisdom”).

⁷ Ibid., 71.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 72.

Also, he was “being” filled (passive voice) by someone other than himself (no doubt, the Holy Spirit; cf. 1:35). That with which Jesus was being filled was “wisdom” (most likely an allusion to Isa. 11:1-2). And “the favor (or grace) of God was upon him”, a reference not only to divine favor but also to exceptional and enabling gifts. Luke may have meant by these words that “God was even then in the process of graciously fitting Jesus out with those special powers requisite for the unique role he was to play in redemptive history, bestowing upon him the gifts he would need to be the Messiah, the Savior of the world.”¹⁰ In this regard, we should especially note Acts 4:33 where “power” and “grace” are probably synonymous, together referring to the Holy Spirit.

In the passage that immediately follows, Luke 2:41-52, we read of our Lord’s encounter with the teachers of Israel in the Temple. What accounts for his precocious knowledge (v. 47) of spiritual things? Luke is probably referring implicitly to the Holy Spirit, having drawn again from Isaiah 11:2, “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding.” Observe also that they were “amazed” (v. 47) at his understanding. This verb (*existasthai*) is used frequently in Luke to describe the reaction of people to the operation of divine power, which is to say., the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 8:56; 24:22; Acts 2:7,12; 8:13; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16).

The Baptism of Jesus

We turn next to the baptism of Jesus by John in the river Jordan. Several things are worthy of note. According to John 1:32, the Spirit not only came down upon Jesus at his baptism, the Spirit “remained” or “abided” on him, an indication of his continuing, ongoing, abiding presence. Unlike those of the OT on whom the Spirit came but for a time (1 Sam. 16:14; 2 Kg. 3:15) to equip them for a task, only then to depart, in the case of Jesus, the Spirit remained permanently, perpetually equipping and enabling him for ministry.

In Mark’s account (1:10), the Holy Spirit did not simply come “upon” Jesus but came “into” (*eis*, not *epi*) him. Perhaps this is Mark’s way of indicating that the Holy Spirit *entered into* Jesus, an indication that the relationship is not one of mere external enablement but internal intimacy. Jesus was now the permanent bearer of the Spirit. Even if “filled” with the Spirit from Mary’s womb, he now sustains a relationship to the Spirit unlike anything that has preceded.

Finally, we know that this descent of the Spirit upon/into Jesus constituted his “anointing” or empowering for public ministry (see Luke 4:18-21, fulfilling Isaiah 61:1-2).¹¹ Peter says the same thing in his sermon to Cornelius: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Here we see that to be anointed with the Holy Spirit is to receive that power which accounts for the “good” works of Jesus’ ministry, his healings, his delivering of those oppressed of Satan, etc. Thus, what he did, he did primarily because “God was with him” in, through and by means of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Temptation of Jesus

It is in the temptation narratives that we see most explicitly this relationship of the Spirit to Jesus. It was not by accident or even his own initiative that Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark (1:12) says the Holy Spirit “drove” or “thrust forth” Jesus into the wilderness. Whatever other plans Jesus might have had, the Holy Spirit overruled or in some way pointed out and directed

¹⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹¹ For anointing of kings and prophets in the Old Testament, see 1 Sam. 10:1-6 (cf. vv. 1 and 6); 16:12-13; 1 Kings. 19:16,19; and 2 Kings 2:9,15.

him to his encounter with the enemy. We don't know by what means the Spirit communicated this to Jesus, but it may well have been by an audible voice, or perhaps an inward impression, or even a vision.

Matthew (4:1) and Luke (4:1) both use a milder term (*agein*; to lead or guide), reinforcing the point that Jesus willingly submitted to the Spirit's guidance. Even here at the beginning of his ministry Jesus says, in effect, "not my will but thine be done."

Jesus was not only led *into* the wilderness by the Spirit (Mt. 4:1) but was also being led by the Spirit *in* the wilderness during the entire course of the forty days (Luke 4:1; it was, no doubt, the Spirit who led Jesus to fast). "If he was being tempted by Satan for forty days (Mark 1:13), he was being led by the Spirit for those same forty days (Luke 4:1). It is impossible to escape the conclusion that these Gospel writers want their readers to understand that Jesus met and conquered the usurping enemy of God not by his own power alone but was aided in his victory by the power of the Holy Spirit."¹² He was fortified and energized by the continual infusion of divine power from the Spirit of God.

In Luke's writings the filling of the Spirit results in inspired or divinely energized speech (Acts 6:3,5,8, 10; also 7:55; 11:23-24). Thus, Jesus was filled with the Spirit so he, too, would be enabled to speak appropriately in his war with Satan (observe Jesus' masterful use of the OT in each response to the devil).

We should not overlook one more important thing that Luke makes clear to us. The coming of the Spirit upon and into Jesus led Luke to describe him as being "*full of the Holy Spirit*" (4:1). The stunning thing is that these are the same terms used to describe the experience of Christians after Pentecost! Stephen, for example, was selected for the diaconate precisely because he was, among other things, "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5).

The General Ministry of Jesus

Following his victory over the temptations of the enemy, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee... And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all" (Luke 4:14-15). In what "power" and by virtue of what resource did Jesus begin to teach, preach and perform miracles? It was not through his own initiative or by virtue of his own inherent skills alone or even because he was God incarnate. Rather, "Luke precisely identifies Jesus' power as the power of the Holy Spirit, and thus attributes those things Jesus did, which caused people to spread his fame far and wide (4:14b), to the *dynamis*, 'the power,' of the Spirit."¹³

We then read in Luke 4:16-21 (cf. Isa. 61:1-3; 11:1-5) that Jesus himself was conscious of the fact that he had been anointed with the Holy Spirit and in this way was empowered to "proclaim good news to the poor" and "to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind" and "to set at liberty those who are oppressed." Again, if Jesus did all this in the power of his own divine nature, why was the anointing of the Holy Spirit necessary at all?

Finally, could it be that Jesus' exhortation that we pray for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) flowed from his own experience of the Spirit? Could it be that he himself prayed for continued, repeated anointings or fresh waves of the Spirit's presence and power to sustain him for ministry, and here encourages his followers to do the same?

¹² Hawthorne, *The Presence & the Power*, 139.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 148.

The Miracles of Jesus

In Matt. 12:22-32 Jesus delivers a demonized man and heals him of his blindness and his inability to speak. The Pharisees accused him of doing this through the power of Satan himself. Our Lord's response to this scurrilous charge is that it is absurd to think that Satan would fight against his own demons and thus contribute to the dissolution of his own kingdom. Jesus declares that "it is by the Spirit of God" that he casts out demons and by this they can know that "the kingdom of God has come upon" them (v. 28).

Clearly, Jesus himself understood that "his ability to heal, to make people whole, to restore sight to the blind and speech to the dumb, and to overthrow the destructive forces of evil lay not in himself, lay not in the strength of his own person, but in God and in the power of God mediated to him through the Spirit. In his action God acted. In his speech God spoke. His authority was the authority of God."¹⁴ In other words, Jesus was himself consciously aware of the ultimate source of his power. He knew himself to be dependent on the power of the Spirit. The Spirit did not work secretly through him.

It's also important to note why Jesus called their sin in this case blasphemy against the "Holy Spirit". Think about it: If Jesus *himself* performed this miracle, in the power of his *own* divine nature, would not their sin have been against him? They blasphemed the Holy Spirit because they were attributing the *Spirit's* work to Satan. As far as Jesus is concerned, the proof of the presence of the kingdom of God is the power of the Holy Spirit to bring deliverance to those in bondage to the devil. Jesus did *not* say the kingdom was present because *he*, Jesus, was present (although that *is* true). In this context, Jesus asserts the presence of the kingdom based on the presence and power of the *Spirit*. It is less *his* performance of an exorcism and more the power of the Spirit through which the exorcism is achieved that attests to the in-breaking of God's kingdom rule. Thus, it is not so much a case of "Where I am there is the kingdom," as it is "Where the *Spirit* is working through me, there is the kingdom."¹⁵

Often the word "power" is used to refer to Jesus' works and words. The significance of this is that in Luke's writings "power" is synonymous with the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:17,35). "The Spirit and power are thus indissolubly related and constitute God's creative, effective force present in the world and available to human beings."¹⁶ We see this again in Luke 5:17 where "the power of the Lord [i.e., the Holy Spirit] was with him to heal." This is why people were desperate to touch Jesus, "for power came out from him and healed them all" (Lk. 6:19; see Lk. 8:46). Indeed, often the miracles of Jesus are simply called "powers" (Mt. 11:20; 13:54). The miracles of Jesus were expressions of the *Spirit's* power (see 1 Cor. 12:10a).

The Inner Emotional Life of Jesus

One particularly fascinating text is Luke 10:21 where Jesus is said to have "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit." In some sense, even the emotions and passions of Jesus were evoked or stirred or aroused and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Here we see the exuberant joy of Jesus inspired by the Spirit! Would this not also be true of other emotions, stirred up at other times during the course of his earthly life? Note also that Jesus here "praises" the Father (v. 21). Surely it was the Spirit in and through whom Jesus worshipped (cf. Phil. 3:3).

¹⁴ Ibid., 169-170.

¹⁵ In Luke 11:20 it is by the "finger of God" that Jesus casts out demons. But "finger of God" = "hand" of God, which is an anthropomorphism for the immediate, effectual presence and power of God = the Spirit of God.

¹⁶ Hawthorne, The Presence & the Power, 155.

The Teaching Ministry of Jesus

Jesus was widely known and praised for the authority and accuracy of his teaching. In the opening verses of Acts 1, Luke declares that it was “through the Holy Spirit” that he issued his commands and offered his instruction to the disciples (v. 2; cf. also Luke 24:19). From this we see that after his resurrection Jesus was filled with the Spirit, and from the reservoir of wisdom and power supplied by the Spirit he issued new commands to the disciples. If this be true of Jesus after his resurrection, how much more so before it! The Spirit of God communicated the words of God the Father to the Son of God that he in turn passed on to his followers. In some sense Jesus depended on the Spirit to supply him with the wisdom and insights into the mind of God that formed the substance of his teaching. In this regard, see especially John 5:19-20,30-32; 7:16-18; 8:26; 8:38; 12:49; and 14:10.

According to Hawthorne, “there are recorded incidents in the life of Jesus where there is no mention of the Holy Spirit, but where his presence, power, and activity are assumed. The many references in the Gospels to Jesus acting with authority (*exousia*), performing his miracles with power (*dynameis*, *dynamei*), being perceived by the people, even by his closest friends, as a prophet, the bearer of the Spirit, or perceiving himself as a prophet, and so on, indicate that even without using the precise expression, ‘Holy Spirit,’ the Gospel writers were nevertheless stating in other ways their conviction that Jesus lived in the environment of the Spirit.”¹⁷

The Death of Jesus

The author of Hebrews tells us that it was “through the eternal Spirit” that Jesus “offered himself without blemish to God” (Heb. 9:14). The “eternal spirit” most likely refers, not to Jesus’ own eternal spiritual nature, but to the Holy Spirit. If he had meant “human spirit” he would have said “through *his* eternal spirit” (cf. Mark 2:8; 8:12). Thus, just as Jesus drew on the power and strength of the Spirit to teach, to perform miracles, to resist the temptation of Satan, so also he drew on the Spirit’s power to find courage and resolve to offer himself a sacrifice for sin.

The Resurrection of Jesus

What power raised Jesus from the dead? Was it his own inherent divine nature or power, or that of the Holy Spirit? Two texts imply that it was his own power. In John 2:19 Jesus declared, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” But then note v. 22 where it is said that Jesus “was raised,” suggesting that his resurrection was attributed to another power, probably that of the Spirit. Also, in John 10:17-18 Jesus declared that he would not only “lay down” his life but that he would also “take it up again.” Yet even this, he says in v. 18b, was because of the “charge” that had “received from” his “Father”. When we look elsewhere in the NT we see that the vast majority of texts indicate that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, raised Jesus (see 1 Cor. 15:14-18; 1 Peter 1:21). In fact, 17 times in Acts and the Epistles it is said that God raised Jesus (see especially Acts 17:31). If God the Father did it, how or by what means? Most likely, through the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 1:1-4; 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 1 Tim. 3:16)! Concerning the statement in 1 Timothy 3:16 that Jesus “was manifested in the flesh, [and] vindicated by the Spirit,” Hawthorne writes: “Jesus was put to death as a criminal, crucified for his supposed crimes, but vindicated in the end, declared to be innocent, proclaimed far and wide to be righteous, by the Holy Spirit who raised him from the dead.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 114.

¹⁸ Ibid., 194.

Conclusion

Without hesitation, therefore, I can say that it was by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit that Jesus not only performed his miracles but discharged the full range of responsibilities associated with his messianic office.

But before closing I want to make one final point of application. We should not read this chapter or the many texts cited as if they were only a historical relic, a by-gone record of ages past in the experience of one man. The fact is, *the Holy Spirit in Jesus is also the Holy Spirit in us!* We see this in numerous places, not least important of which is John 20:22 where Jesus “breathed on” his disciples and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Hawthorne is spot on in his analysis of the significance of this event:

“The very first thing Jesus did immediately after he was resurrected from among the dead and reunited with his followers was to pass on to them, as a gift from his Father (cf. Acts 2:23), that same power by which he lived, triumphed, and broke the bands of his own human limitations. On the very day of his resurrection, he came to them locked in by their fears, ‘breathed’ on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22).”¹⁹

John’s point, and that of Hawthorne as well, is that the mission of Jesus is not over. It merely passes into a new phase. Jesus continues the mission given him by his Father by sending forth his disciples in the same power with and by which the Father sent him forth, i.e., the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul echoes this truth in 2 Cor. 1:21 where he deliberately juxtaposes two words to highlight our position and power as the called of God: “And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ [*christen*], and has anointed (or ‘christed’) [*chrisas*] us.” Or one could even translate it this way: “Now he who establishes us with you in *the anointed one* and *anointed us* is God.” Thus, just as Jesus said of himself, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me” (Luke 4:18), so likewise Christians are spoken of as anointed ones because we too have received the Holy Spirit and are thus set apart and empowered to serve God and authorized to act on his behalf.

Similarly, John says in his first epistle (1 John 2:18-22, 27-28) that although we are humans, not gods, yet in a sense we may rightly be called God’s “*christs*”, his “*anointed ones*”, because we have received the same Spirit as did Jesus, *the Christ*. What conclusions may we draw from this? I leave it to Gerald Hawthorne to answer that question, and with his words I conclude:

“The significance of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus extends to his followers in all of the little and the big things of their existences. The Spirit that helped Jesus overcome temptations, that strengthened him in weakness, that aided him in the hard job of taking on himself the hurts of the hurting, that infused him with a power to accomplish the impossible, that enabled him to stay with and complete the task God had given him to do, that brought him through death and into resurrection, is the Spirit that the resurrected Jesus has freely and lavishly . . . given to those who would be his disciples today!”²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., 235.

²⁰ Ibid., 242.

Recommended Reading

John D. Harvey, *Anointed with the Spirit and Power: The Holy Spirit's Empowering Presence* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2008).

Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence & The Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991).

Fred Sanders & Klaus Issler, editors, *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007).

Bruce Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2012).

PROPHETIC WORSHIP

Led by: Shannon Jurrens, Ryan Smith (Bridgeway worship leaders), and Sam Storms (Lead Pastor of Teaching & Vision)

Description: What does Paul mean when he speaks of “spiritual songs” in Ephesians 5? How do these songs differ from hymns and other previously composed musical numbers? How might singers and worship leaders learn how to incorporate the prophetic into their worship sets? This workshop is specifically designed for worship leaders and singers and will go a long way in providing guidance for how to make the prophetic a vital part of your Sunday service.

All genuine, Christ-exalting, Christ-enjoying worship is in or through or by means of the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul meant when he said: “For we are the [true] circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). His point is that the Spirit evokes worship, directs our hearts and minds to Christ in worship, reminds us of all the right reasons for worship, and empowers and energizes us for worship.

The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 14:29-32 that the Holy Spirit may reveal something to a person during a corporate (or small group) gathering of God’s people, which in turn is then communicated to the body of Christ at large. Their responsibility is then to “weigh” or “judge” what is said. I suggest that the same phenomenon may occur in the course of corporate singing where the Spirit reveals something to a member of the worship band who in turn communicates this by means of singing. If this is the case, the same guidelines that apply to the spoken prophetic word (judging, weighing, etc.) would apply to the sung word.

Some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit is active in our worship would include:

- Spirit-prompted prayer in the selection of a set list
- Spirit-empowered rehearsal or practice
- Spirit-sustained unity among the band members
- Spirit-awakened expectations of what God might do during the course of worship
- Spirit-spoken direction in the atmosphere of Christ-exalting praise (Acts 13:2)

So what, then, is *prophetic* worship and how does it differ from the ordinary or routine expressions of praise and honor and gratitude that we read of in Scripture?

Spiritual Songs

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:18-21).

The most important point to draw from this passage is that Paul understands Christ-exalting worship to be the fruit of having been filled with the Holy Spirit. Apart from the Spirit’s empowering presence in us there can be no Christ-exalting singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. There may be singing, but little will be of value if not the result of being filled with the Spirit. Likewise, our giving of thanks to the Father in the name of Jesus must be the product of the Spirit’s work in our hearts. Simply put, all worship, and not just what we call “prophetic” worship, together with addressing one another in edifying ways, as well as expressions of gratitude to God in the name of Jesus, must flow out of the overflow of the Spirit’s presence in our lives.

We should also observe that Paul does not say, “be full of the Spirit,” as though one were full of the Spirit in the same way one is full of wine. He says, “be filled by/with the Spirit.” The emphasis is on being filled to the full by the Spirit’s presence. This is similar to Eph. 3:19 where Paul speaks of being “filled with all the fullness of God,” i.e., of being filled up with God himself.

Does Paul mean we are to be filled “with” the Spirit, as if the Spirit is himself the content with which we are filled? Or does he mean we are to be filled “by” the Spirit, the content of which is not clearly specified? We can’t be certain, but my sense is that it is the Spirit himself who fills us or empowers us.

There is also something of importance in the fact that the verb “be filled” is plural. Paul would never have countenanced the idea that the fullness of the Spirit and the worship that is its fruit was a special privilege for a unique and privileged few. This is a responsibility that falls on each and every one of us and not just those on the “worship team.”

Again, be careful to note what Paul says is the *consequential evidence* of being filled with/by the Holy Spirit. In other words, what happens when one is filled with the Spirit? What indication is there that this has actually happened? The answer is found in vv. 18ff.

- a. Speaking to one another in ministry
- b. Singing to God (wholehearted worship in corporate fellowship).
- c. Gratitude (for all things at all times).
- d. Mutual submission (as over against being self-assertive and demanding).

Our concern is with vv. 19-20. Clearly, Paul envisions believers communicating truth and knowledge and instruction by means of these various forms of singing. But *what's the difference, if any, between “psalms” and “hymns” and “spiritual songs”?* Some insist there is no difference between these items. But if he meant only one thing, what is the point of employing three different words? More likely Paul had a distinction in mind that's important for us to note.

“Psalms” most likely refers to those inspired compositions in the OT book of that name. Luke uses the word in this way in his writings (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33) and Paul encouraged Christians to come to corporate worship with a “psalm” to offer (1 Cor. 14:26). The word literally meant “to pluck” or “to strike or twitch the fingers on a string” and thus could possibly refer to singing with instrumental accompaniment (although we shouldn't restrict it to that).

The word *“hymns”* would be any human composition that focuses on God or Christ. Hannah's song in 1 Sam. 2 or the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 would qualify, as would Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1. Perhaps the most explicit examples would be the so-called “Christ Hymns” in Phil. 2:6-11, Col. 1:15-20, and 1 Tim. 3:16.

Why is the third expression of singing designated not simply as “songs” but as *“spiritual songs”* (although some contend that this adjective applies to all three)? Could it be Paul's way of differentiating between those songs that are *previously composed* as over against those that are *spontaneously evoked* by the Spirit himself? Yes, I think so. In other words, “spiritual songs” are most likely *unrehearsed and improvised*, perhaps short melodies or choruses extolling the beauty of Christ. They aren't prepared in advance but are *prompted by the Spirit* and thus are uniquely and especially appropriate to the occasion or the emphasis of the moment.

These are probably songs that we sing under the immediate prompting and infilling of the Holy Spirit. I have in mind spontaneous songs that break out unexpectedly in the midst of our worship. In other words, there is a difference between those songs that a worship leader rehearses and practices before we gather together (whose words appear on the screen or in a song book), and the unplanned melodies and phrases and short choruses that break out spontaneously.

This interpretation strikes many as strange for the simple fact that, outside of charismatic churches, there are virtually no opportunities for expressions of spontaneous praise. The only songs permitted are those listed in the bulletin, the words of which are either in the hymnbook or included in the liturgy. In these churches, singing is highly structured, orchestrated, and carefully controlled (but not for that reason any less godly or edifying). There is typically a distinct beginning and ending without the

possibility of *improvisation or free vocalization*. People are expected to sing what is written in the hymnal or projected on a screen, nothing more and nothing less.

But Paul seems to envision a “singing” in which the individual is given *freedom to vocalize his/her own passions, prayers, and declarations of praise*. Although this may strike some as chaotic and aimless the first time it is heard (it certainly did me!), it can quickly become a beautiful and inspiring experience as the Spirit is given free rein in the hearts of Christ’s people. As the instrumentalists play a simple chord progression or perhaps even the melody of a familiar song, the people spontaneously supply whatever words are most appropriate to their state of mind and heart.

On countless occasions I have been blessed and edified by what some have called “*prophetic singing*” (so called because it is believed the Spirit reveals something to the person who in turn puts it to music). Typically an individual who is part of a worship team is led by the Spirit into a spontaneous song that may well evoke another to respond antiphonally. Such “spiritual songs” can last a few seconds or several minutes. Often, what one person sings will stir up yet another with a similar refrain, which on occasion will lead back into a verse or the chorus of a hymn previously sung.

Returning now to Eph. 5, we see that such singing, whether psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs, are designed not simply to extol God but to educate his people. By means of them we “teach” and “admonish” one another. Clearly Paul envisioned songs that were biblically grounded and theologically substantive, songs that both communicated truth and called for heartfelt consecration, repentance, and devotion to the Lord. Let’s not forget that Paul is describing a situation far in advance of the printing press and hymnbooks. Thus these various expressions of singing were an invaluable means for transmitting and inculcating Christian truth.

Congregational Response to Spiritual Songs and Prophetic Singing

Not long ago one of the men in our church approached me with a concern. He was slightly uncomfortable with the way in which one of our worship leaders would spontaneously deviate from the song list and engage in free vocalization. His objection wasn’t theological in nature. He had no qualms about what was being sung, as if it were unbiblical, but only that it was being sung while he perceived others to have disengaged. “They don’t know what to do,” he said. “So many of them just sit down.” The incorporation of such “spiritual songs” in our time of corporate praise was obviously unsettling to him. He asked: “Why can’t he do that when he’s in his car or somewhere other than in front of hundreds of people who are attempting to follow his lead?”

That’s not an illegitimate question. I suspect that not a few others were wondering the same thing. So at the first opportunity I seized the moment to instruct our people on what one should do when worship took this unexpected turn. I told them that one must resist disengaging, on the false assumption that this expression of praise is only for the benefit of the person singing and has nothing to do with anyone else. Instead, I provided several suggestions.

1. **Listen and Learn!** Note again Eph. 5:19a – “addressing one another” in “spiritual songs.” Meditate on what is being sung. Focus on the words. Turn them over again and again in your mind. Ask the Spirit to quicken in your own heart the truth of what is being sung and to stir your affections with joy and love. Be open to being taught in those times of prophetic worship. The Spirit may well have prepared something uniquely and especially for you!
2. **Sing the same song.** Listen for recurring phrases and the melody line and if it lasts long enough, join the singer in whatever “spiritual song” he/she is singing. Illustration: Ps. 16:11 . . .

3. **Sing your own “spiritual song”**. Take whatever truth about God or Jesus the Spirit has awakened in your heart and put it in your own words, adapting it to the melody of the leader. It may be a short, simple phrase of praise or thanksgiving or proclamation or prayer. Those, such as yours truly, who possess the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, will often take advantage of such times to sing in tongues. This is surely what Paul had in mind when he made known his resolve to “sing praise with my spirit” (1 Cor. 14:15; see also Acts 2:11; 10:46).
4. **Pray**. Use the time to intercede for yourself or others. Or perhaps take the truth of what is being sung and let that shape and form the content of your prayers. *Turn their “spiritual song” into your own personal intercession!*
5. **Give thanks** (v. 20)! Spend time thanking God (either in prayer or in song) for all that he has done.

Additional Thoughts on Prophetic Singing

1. Perhaps the most common form of prophetic worship occurs when the worship leader senses the Spirit indicating the need to pause and reflect more deeply on something in the lyrics of a song, whether that be prayer or the specific application of some biblical principle to the people as a whole, etc.

2. The Holy Spirit can often speak or reveal something to a worship leader well in advance of the service. As he/she is praying over a potential set list, the Spirit can provide guidance and impress upon the heart something perhaps only tangentially related to what is contained in the song itself. This truth or emphasis may then be carried by the singer in his/her heart for days before Sunday arrives. During the course of the week they meditate upon it, pray it back to God, and ask for additional guidance on whether and when and how to introduce it into the worship set.

I would suspect that many of you who are worship leaders have often sensed God giving you a prophetic song days in advance of Sunday worship. You find yourself humming a melody or a specific lyric all through the week. That may be the Spirit’s way of prepping you to sing it on Sunday.

3. Prophetic worship may also be the fruit of writing songs under the influence of the Spirit. I’m not claiming infallible inspiration for a song, any more than I claim such when I write a book. But in both composing a song and in writing a book one can often sense the Spirit’s leading, often with suggestions of a particular word or image to employ.

4. Can prophetic worship be both horizontal and vertical in its focus? Yes. A horizontal focus means that the intent of the “song” or chorus is to communicate something directly to God’s people. A vertical focus means that its primary orientation is toward God in the form of explicit praise or adoration. But most often a prophetic song is a delicate combination of both.

5. What is the role of *musical instrumentation* in prophetic worship? We read in 1 Samuel 16 that music has more than simply a psychological or emotional effect on people. It also has the power to drive away, frustrate, and defeat demonic forces:

“And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him” (1 Sam. 16:23).

We are told back in 1 Sam. 15:10 that God said: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” The result of Saul’s sin

is that the Spirit of God “departed” from him (1 Sam. 16:14). Recall that in the OT the people of God were not permanently indwelt by the Spirit. But God would temporarily anoint kings and prophets and others with the Holy Spirit so they might be equipped and empowered to fulfill the calling on their lives.

Here we are told that not only did the Holy Spirit depart from Saul but also that ***“a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him”*** (1 Sam. 16:14b). God is sovereign over all of creation and can use or employ anything and anyone (even a demonic spirit) to discipline his people. The Apostle Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was inflicted upon him by a “messenger from Satan” but just as surely this messenger was doing God’s will.

The question for us today is this: “Why or how did David’s music have this effect? Why did the demonic spirit depart from Saul such that he was refreshed and made well, every time David played on the lyre?” There’s no indication that David sang. He played instrumentally. Others might have also played and nothing would happen. Why? ***What was so special about David?*** Why did ***his*** music carry such power?

The answer is in v. 18b – ***“and the Lord is with him.”*** There may well have been other musicians in Saul’s court who were more skilled than David. But something about David empowered his music to pierce through the soul of Saul. ***The Holy Spirit evidently infused the melodies and harmonies of David’s music with supernatural power.*** “The pleasing sounds rising from his instrument transformed his harp [or lyre] into a strategic weapon of war which drove the enemies of God into agitation and retreat” (John G. Elliott, “David’s Harp and the Demons,” TMS, Vol. 2, No. 2, 71).

If God had not been “with” (in a sense, the OT equivalent of being filled with the Spirit) David, his music might have been entertaining and sweet and enjoyable to hear, but it would not have carried the power to drive a demon from Saul’s soul and bring spiritual refreshment to him. There were probably others who were more skilled on the lyre than David, but in the absence of God their music would have left any demonic spirit firmly entrenched.

In other words, ***music played or sung by those who love God and are filled with God’s Spirit and who devote their talents to the glory of God irritates and agitates the enemy!*** This is why we often recommend to people who are under spiritual attack or are suffering from depression to constantly play both instrumental and vocal worship music, whether they are at home or in their car or at the office. Music devoted to God’s glory, played or sung by a person in whom the Spirit dwells, creates a spiritual atmosphere that is repellent and offensive to Satan and his hosts. There’s nothing magical in this. Demons don’t dislike music. It isn’t that they are offended by someone playing or singing off key. ***It is the presence of God in and with the one playing/singing that accounts for this powerful impact.***

We read in 2 Sam. 22:1 that “David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul.” It would appear then that ***David prophesied through singing.***

Even music written, played, or sung by an unbeliever can be used in this way if it is in the hands of a Spirit-filled, Christ-exalting believer. You don’t have to be the one playing or singing. You don’t have to be musically gifted in the least. The issue is whether or not God is “with” you.

Let’s look at another example. It is found in 2 Kings 3:15. The king of Israel was desperate to hear the word of the Lord regarding what would happen if he were to engage the Moabites in battle. So

he sent for Elisha. Elisha then said: “But now bring me a musician. *And when the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him*” (2 Kings 3:15). The result is that Elisha prophesied.

Why did Elisha want someone to play music? It would appear that, in a manner of speaking, music clears away the interference between heaven and earth. Perhaps an analogy is the way a rainstorm can clear the air of dust particles and make your radio more receptive to a distant station. *Anointed and godly music creates a spiritual atmosphere in which God's voice can more readily be heard. It eliminates distractions and enables the heart to focus on God.*

Elisha wanted to be quiet and calm before the Lord. He wanted to become emotionally and spiritually and mentally in tune with and sensitive to what God would say. Sometimes it's important to put oneself in a mood that is more conducive to receiving and understanding divine revelation.

We see in 1 Samuel 10:5ff. that often times people would prophesy while playing instruments, in this case the harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre. We also read in 1 Chronicles 25:1 that “David and the chiefs of the service also set apart for the service the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who prophesied with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals” (1 Chron. 25:1). Others are said to have “prophesied with the lyre in thanksgiving and praise to the Lord” (1 Chron. 25:3).

In what sense, if at all, can it be said that the instruments themselves prophesied? Or was it that the individuals verbally prophesied to the accompaniment of their instruments. Or are we to understand that the music served to open lines of communication and enabled the prophets to accurately hear the word of the Lord.

I've often been asked why we play background instrumental music when we pray for people. Are we just trying to create a mood and manipulate someone's emotions? **Yes**, we are trying to create a mood or atmosphere conducive to engaging with God and hearing his voice, and I make no apology for that. **But No**, we are not trying to manipulate anyone. We are simply seeking to minister effectively to people by acknowledging that the Holy Spirit is pleased to make use of music to soothe the heart of a person, to put them at ease emotionally, and to open their souls to God.

6. *The key to prophetic singing is familiarity with the Scriptures!* Much prophetic singing occurs when the Spirit quickens in your mind a particular biblical passage that has special relevance to what is happening in the service at that very moment. Thus, in speaking of spontaneous songs that the Spirit sovereignly brings to mind we are not saying that all prophetic songs are unrelated to Scripture. It may be that the Holy Spirit suddenly brings to mind a passage that you then weave into the melody of a song.

7. Absolutely essential to effective prophetic singing is humble prayer in advance, asking God to sensitize your heart and open your eyes and ears to be alert to his voice and leading. Otherwise you will end up being led by the flesh, perhaps with selfish, competitive, and ambitious motives.

8. The most effective prophetic songs are those that flow naturally out of what the congregation has just sung. One should in most instances resist the temptation to create a diversion from the focus of the set. It is somewhat jolting and unedifying to move instantly out of sweet melodies about God's love into loud and energetic declarations of wrath and judgment.

9. The content or focus of prophetic songs might conceivably cover a wide range of topics, such as:

- Gratitude
- A challenge to God's people to respond

- A prayer of intercession based on the truth of something just sung by all
- A reaffirmation or pressing into the truth of something just sung
- Joyful celebration
- Encouragement
- A cry for mercy
- A call for repentance

10. Finally, there is what Paul referred to in 1 Cor. 14:14-15 as singing “with my spirit.” This undoubtedly refers to his regular practice of singing in tongues. Since tongues, whether in spoken words or in song, is the result of the Spirit’s empowering presence (“the Spirit gives utterance,” Acts 2:4), it has the potential to be prophetic. In any case, it must be subject to interpretation in the same way that a spoken word in tongues would be. Otherwise it should not be employed in the corporate gathering of the church. And once a song in tongues is interpreted, it is also to be judged or weighed in accordance with the instructions we find in 1 Cor. 14:29 and 1 Thess. 5:19-22.

There is a strong likelihood, however, that Paul primarily has in view his regular practice of singing in tongues during times of private devotional prayer and praise. In such cases, since no one else is present, no interpretation is needed. Even though Paul confesses that he does not understand what he is saying/singing (i.e., his “mind is unfruitful”), he is nevertheless determined to continue this spiritual exercise.