

A guide to
PROPHECY
in Hope Church



hopechurchcorby.org

What is prophecy?

Prophecy is God's way of communicating His heart, through a person, to those in His Church or the wider world. We highly value prophecy as one amongst many spiritual gifts the Lord has given to His Church. Prophecy has sometimes been given a bad press due to excesses or abuses; these have sometimes led to there being mistrust, suspicion and even fear of this gift. However, our reaction should not be to side-line the gift of prophecy but to give clear teaching for its *proper* use.

It is clear that New Testament prophecy doesn't carry the same weight as Old Testament prophecy (where prophets were stoned to death if they got it wrong) and it should never be treated as having the same authority as the Bible.



The Bible, God's Word, is the primary way the Lord chooses to speak to us today. True prophecy will never add to, take-away from or contradict what is already revealed in the Bible. Those with a sound prophetic ministry also have a love for the Bible and an understanding of its teaching.

New Testament prophecy is for the '*strengthening, encouraging and comfort*' of God's people (1 Corinthians 14:3), although this doesn't exclude bringing correction and calling people back to God's standards. But it should always bring hope and be used to build people up. Even when a prophecy contains an element of correction, it should still be delivered with a heart of love and be delivered with kindness.

Good character is more important to God than our gifting or anointing. It is not necessarily a sign of spirituality to receive a revelation from God. It is what we *do* with that revelation that counts. It is not evidence of spiritual maturity, for example, to share, even for prayer, an insight about another that in any way diminishes them in the eyes of others. There is certainly no room for a superior or judgemental attitude towards another because of what God has made known. The Father always honours, builds-up, sets free and makes whole. Those who desire to be used prophetically need to have the same heart.

Paul puts it like this: *'If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge...but do not have love, I am nothing.'* (1 Cor 13:2)

What does prophecy achieve?

Amongst other things, prophecy has the following functions in the local church:

- 1. Predicting the future (foretelling)**
- 2. Revealing God's present priorities (forth-telling)**
- 3. Unveiling God's hidden purposes behind situations and events**
- 4. Awakening greater faith, love and obedience in God's people**

In short, prophecy shows us the things we cannot see. It does so by revelation from God (not through the study of contemporary trends and philosophies or by using psychological techniques). It is given to encourage, comfort and strengthen us so that we are able to see and marvel at the beauty, splendour, power, goodness and wisdom of God.

The person who brings a prophetic word can be compared to a postman. Do you know the name of your postman? When a letter is delivered to your house, the most important people are the one the letter is *from* and the one the letter is *to*. The postman's job is simply to deliver the letter. Similarly, when we deliver a prophetic word, the most important people are the One the message is *from* [the Lord] and the one the message is *to*.



Although it might be tempting to take the glory or to let others put us on a pedestal for our ministry, our job is simply to deliver the message and let God's word go to work.

Who can prophesy?

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came upon certain people at certain times for certain tasks. Old Testament prophets were anointed to speak on behalf of God as those speaking the very words of God. Their words carried so much weight that there were severe punishments for those found to be false prophets (Deut 18:20).

Moses knew the importance of prophecy and highly valued hearing the voice of God. He was frustrated that only a few, including himself, were able to hear from God directly and longed for all God's people to have the Holy Spirit and prophecy (Numbers 11:29).

At Pentecost this happened! The Holy Spirit was poured out and the Church was birthed. God's presence and power were made

available to every believer in a new and dynamic way (Acts 2:17-21):

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

So, the good news is that every Christian is capable of hearing directly from God. We should expect Him to speak. As we learn to recognise His voice, our part is simply to lean in and listen. The prophetic gift operates in proportion to our faith (Rom 12:6) and we grow in our faith by being obedient in response to the promptings of God.

How do people hear from God?

People hear from God in different ways. Some people hear an audible voice; some people see a vision; some people have spiritual dreams; some people have an impression or an inner prompting; some people feel led to share a specific scripture; some people see a symbolic picture or word in their mind; others feel prompted to speak but don't receive the words until the moment they open their mouths. There is a wonderful variety to how God does it, but we *all* have the privilege of hearing from God.

There are, however, some who demonstrate an accuracy and consistency in hearing from God that might lead others to describe them as 'prophetic'. Those who are prophetically gifted may then develop a ministry in the prophetic and, over time, may even be recognised as a 'prophet'.

How should I share a prophetic word?

1. **Ask God whether you have permission to share it.** Many times a prophetic insight is given for personal intercession only. What you receive may not be for sharing (or may be for sharing at an appointed time in the future). Maturity in the prophetic ministry is shown just as much by what is *withheld* as what is shared.
2. **Give it and leave it.** Your job is to deliver the message. Once you have done so, your job is over. The person receiving the word then has the responsibility for its evaluation.
3. **Share it with humility.** 1 Corinthians 13:9 says that we '*know in part and we prophesy in part*'. This means that we receive God's perfect words through an imperfect human filter. For this reason, as a church, we prefer people to steer away from definitive statements such as, '*Thus sayeth the Lord,*' or '*God has told me that...*' These kinds of statements falsely give the impression that what is spoken is the undiluted word of God. Instead, we would encourage you to use phrases such as, '*I feel that God might be saying...*' or '*I've got an impression that God is saying...*' That makes it easier for people to weigh what *is* from God...and what may *not* be from God.
4. **Don't glorify the strange.** God sometimes does strange things, but we don't have to be strange to be prophetic. In fact weirdness often damages the credibility of the prophetic ministry. So please try to be normal. Be '*naturally supernatural*'. Dial down the mysticism! You don't have to add weight to a prophetic word by using strange language or a mystical tone of voice (this is often learned behaviour and doesn't add anything to the word itself). If it is God's word, it has innate power and will accomplish that for which God gave it (Isaiah 55:11).

5. **Don't add to a word.** It is okay if you don't have a complete revelation. Sometimes God may give you part of a word or a picture that needs some interpretation. You may feel that what you have received doesn't make complete sense on its own. The temptation is then to fill in the gaps from our own understanding. But resist that temptation! God may have given only partial revelation to provoke the hearer to seek Him further for clarification.

There are usually three parts to a prophecy: the **revelation** itself, the **interpretation** & the **application** - i.e. 'What has God said?' 'What does it mean?' 'What should be done?' Sometimes one person is used by God to give one part and somebody else to give another. For example, Agabus was given a prophetic word about Paul in Acts 21 (vs10-11) but went beyond what God had shown him when applying it:

After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."



Agabus was accurate in conveying the essence of his **revelation** from God (i.e. the illustration using Paul's belt) but he did get one small detail of the **interpretation** wrong: it was actually the Roman soldiers and not the Jewish leaders who would arrest and bind Paul (Acts 21:31-33). And although Agabus correctly interpreted that Paul would be arrested, he misunderstood *why* God was showing this to him [the **application**]: Instead of being a warning to Paul *not* to go to Jerusalem (as Agabus and others incorrectly assumed), the prophecy was given in order to prepare Paul for what lay ahead. The revelation and interpretation were right, the application was wrong.

So, you may only be given part of the whole picture. Don't worry. If God hasn't given you the rest...**don't make it up!** Share only what God has *actually* shown you and trust Him to make the rest clear in due course.

What about on Sundays?

We usually only allow those with a mature prophetic gift to share words from the front on a Sunday. We never allow first time visitors or those who are not known to us to share from the front. If you feel you *are* known and have a prophetic word that you believe will strengthen, encourage or comfort the congregation, it will initially need to be brought to whoever is overseeing the meeting – usually one of the Elders. When this happens, please try to include as much detail as time allows (at least the essence of what you believe God wants to say).

If it feels right to allow the word to be shared, you will be advised of the most appropriate time to share it. If it doesn't feel right for the word to be shared, please don't interpret this as a rejection of either the message or the messenger. It may simply be that the word does not fit with the flow of what God seems to be doing at that time. Please try to be gracious...we won't always get it right.

Once a word has been shared, the church needs to 'weigh carefully' what is said (1 Cor 14:29). This may lead to further prophetic words, scriptures or testimonies being shared. Guidance may be given from the front about what God appears to be saying and what He may want us to do as a response.

We don't allow directive words for the church to be given from the front on Sundays (i.e. *'God wants Hope Church to close down all its midweek activities for three months'*). Words like these should be put in writing and sent to the Elders.



What about personal prophecies?

Personal prophecies, shared one-to-one, can be a great source of encouragement. However, they do need to be shared appropriately. The following guidelines should be used when sharing a personal prophecy with someone in Hope Church:

1. **Ask permission** of the person before you share a word with them.
2. As a rule, **steer clear of promises about babies, romantic relationships or marriages**. Also, don't prophesy death. If you feel strongly that you should share a word in these areas, please run it past the Elders first.

3. **Avoid grandiose general pronouncements** (i.e. *'you will have a ministry to the nations,'* or *'you will speak on a platform to millions of people.'*) unless you are very sure God is speaking. Ask God for specifics in such instances. Such words seem to be encouraging but can do a lot of damage if they're wrong.
4. **Write it down or record audio.** Where possible, write down or record audio of personal prophecies so that they can be weighed more effectively (see guide below for weighing prophetic words).

How should I weigh a prophetic word?

1 Thessalonians 5:20-22 tells us to 'test' all prophecies – to reject what is not of God and to *'hold on to what is good'*. We would encourage you to ask the following questions when weighing a prophetic word:

- **Is the person prophesying known to me?** Do they have good character (*'By their fruit you will recognise them,'* Matt 7:16)? Are they under spiritual authority? If the answer is 'no' to either of these, there should be a question mark over the prophecy.
- **Does it ring true?** Does the word that has been shared sit right with you? Does the Holy Spirit's peace rest upon it and do you have an 'inner witness'? A genuine prophetic word will not produce anxiety or confusion
- **Is it biblical?** The Bible is God's Word and the final authority on all matters of faith and conduct. If a prophetic word contradicts or deviates from what the Bible says, it cannot be from God. So reject it straight away if this is the case.

- **Does it glorify Jesus?** Revelation 19:10 says, *‘the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’*. This means that prophecy should have Jesus as the ultimate focus. A true prophetic word shines the spotlight on Jesus.
- **Does it need to be confirmed?** Don’t rush into applying a prophetic word to your situation. Wait for it to be confirmed. If God wants you to know something, He will make it clear. *‘Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’* (2 Cor 13:1)

Practice prophesying

If you desire to minister in the prophetic, **make sure you are grounded in the Word of God**. Know the Bible and this will protect you and those who hear you from going down the wrong path. There have been many ‘prophets’ that claim direct revelation from God but who teach heresy. Be very careful.

Life Groups are an excellent place to step-out in spiritual gifts.

If you are already part of a Life Group, speak to your leader about how your group can practice receiving, sharing and weighing prophetic words. This is a safe environment to ‘give it a go’ and even make a few mistakes along the way.

And, finally, **live prophetically**. Look for everyday opportunities to speak something from God’s heart into a person’s life. Constantly be asking God the question, “What are you saying, Lord?” Learn to hear His voice in the normal and seemingly mundane moments of life: What is He saying to the cashier who is serving you? What is He saying to your work colleague? What is He saying to your spouse or children? Prophecy isn’t just for church meetings...practice hearing God and sharing those things that are on His heart with others.

Remember...be **naturally supernatural!**



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