

A large, abstract splash of purple watercolor paint dominates the upper two-thirds of the page. The splash is darker on the left and top edges, fading into a lighter, almost white background towards the bottom right. The texture of the paint is visible, with various shades of purple and blue.

Keith Powell

**THE PROPHECY
COURSE**



RESOURCE

THE PROPHECY COURSE

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THE PROPHECY COURSE

INTRODUCTION

The Prophecy Course has been written and designed for use in small groups. If you've never led a small group or been a participant in one before, don't be daunted! Things have been kept simple for you and we give you all the material and discussion starters you might need. The questions are kept as open as possible; the point isn't to lead people to 'right' answers or to correct 'wrong' ones, but to allow them space to explore what they think and feel about these topics in a safe space.

The aim is to be family together, to be free to express both confidence and trepidation in these areas. Allow space for the Holy Spirit to work – don't be afraid to speak, or be quiet in either the discussions or the times of prayer – both are perfectly fine!

STRUCTURE

We would suggest the following outline for your sessions, but of course feel free to adapt it to whatever works for the time you have:

- Start with some teach, coffee and possibly other refreshments.
- Make it a time to relax and be family together.
- Open with a time of prayer and/or worship. If you don't have a musician use a CD or music streaming service to play some worship music, even if people are content to sit quietly in worship rather than sing.
- Work through the session, sharing the duties of reading aloud the text in the session and the Bible extracts. Allow space for each question to be discussed but keep it on topic and maybe 'park' some thoughts to discuss at the end or in another session.
- Take time to close in prayer, giving space for people to be moved by the Holy Spirit.

SESSION ONE

WHAT IS PROPHECY?

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. (Rev. 1:1–3)

Some people think that prophecy is restricted to the pages of Scripture, a gift for the past, or believe that it is still alive, but only for a few specialists. Yet Scripture itself reveals that Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8) and that God discloses Himself, His character, His will, and His purposes in order that His people might remain in a righteous relationship with Him.

Prophecy is a gift from God, given to His people through the love of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God loves to share His heart with us, to speak directly into our lives and the lives of others. And He does so through prophecy, a living and active word. It is the God-given ability to hear, receive, and declare or speak out a word or revelation from God.

Prophecy is manifested in three main ways:

- 1** Forth-telling: preaching the inspired word of God from the Scriptures, in power.
- 2** Foretelling: speaking out God’s revelation about what is to come in the future.
- 3** Speaking blessings over places (Ezek. 36) and people (Ezek. 37): declaring the current word of God.

So in its simplest form, prophecy is about faithfully hearing the word of God and obediently speaking it out as led by the Holy Spirit. You can read examples of this in the accounts of God calling Ezekiel and Jeremiah to be His prophets.

EXERCISE

Read Ezekiel 1:28b–2:6 and Jeremiah 1:4–8

What three things do we learn are imperative about prophesying?

WHO CAN PROPHECY?

The Bible tells us that:

- ALL are called to seek and exercise the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:31,39).
- SOME are called to exercise a prophetic ministry (Acts 21:9).
- Only a FEW are called to the office of a prophet (Acts 21:10).

PROPHECY AND THE BIBLE

Prophecy must be consistent with God's word in the Bible, with the nature and character of God and the mind of Christ, and delivered from a heart of love. The Bible is like God's map – it is always true and reveals all we need to know about God, His Kingdom, our salvation, etc. – while prophecy is like a signpost along the way, telling you both where you are and pointing you in the right direction.

*The essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness to Jesus.
(Rev. 19:10 NLT)*

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1–2)

The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognised that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. (1 Sam. 3:19–21)

PROPHECY IN THE BIBLE

- 1** In Numbers 11 God tells Moses to select seventy elders and to make them come to the tent of meeting, and 'I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them' (v. 17). When the Spirit came they all prophesied.
- 2** In the book of Joel we find a prophecy concerning all of God's people. In Joel 2:28–29 we read of God's promise to pour out His Spirit on all people: 'Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.'
- 3** When Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman with words of knowledge about her life and marital status, past and present, her response to Jesus' insight is 'Sir ... I can see that you are a prophet' (John 4:1–26).
- 4** In Acts 1:5,8 Jesus promises His disciples the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit, to be His witnesses, and to build the church. This anointing on all the disciples would lead to a release of all the gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy. Peter even quotes the passage from Joel 2 in Acts 2:17–18.
- 5** Paul teaches clearly about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:1: 'Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.'
- 6** Finally, in the book of Revelation there are two key verses on the prophetic. In Revelation 10:11 John is told by a mighty angel, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.' And Revelation 19:10 says, 'It is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.'

PROPHECY IN ACTION

Prophecy may begin with a word of knowledge and grow into a longer revelation, either shared immediately at the time it is given, or written down and shared later. It is helpful to write down a prophetic word as an accurate record of what God has imparted, or record it on your phone so that it can be listened to later. Writing down or recording ensures that the word is not added to, or altered, in any way. It is not the job of the one who speaks the word to analyse it, but to faithfully share what is seen or heard. As God told Moses, 'Write this on a scroll, as something to be remembered' (Ex. 17:14).

SUGGESTED EXERCISE

Record any prophetic words given to you, in a journal, so that you can see patterns or encouragements or answers to prayer.

Prophecy must be spoken out or it dies. This may sound obvious but God often gives someone a word but they are afraid to speak it. This can happen for all sorts of reasons: lack of self-worth; fear of what people will say or how they will respond; shyness; lack of teaching; or a general lack of openness to the gift of prophecy in the church. The bottom line is that we honour and obey God more than we fear other people.

This precious gift not only brings direction and blessings to God's people but helps us to deepen our relationship with the Lord, as Paul reminds the church in Ephesus: 'I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better' (Eph. 1:17).

WHAT PROPHECY IS NOT

- 1** It is not the only gift of the Spirit, or always the most important, and often requires other gifts to be active, such as words of knowledge and wisdom, and the gifts of faith, discernment, and sometimes tongues.
- 2** It is not anything other than God's voice. In life there are various voices: our own voice, other people's voices, the enemy's voice, and God's voice.
- 3** It is not a substitute for receiving God's word through the study of the Bible.
- 4** It is not a reward and cannot be earned. It is a gift from God, given as and when the Holy Spirit decides: 'All these [gifts] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines' (1 Cor. 12:11).
- 5** Prophecy is not 'mischievous' public rebuke! The enemy seeks to twist this gift to attack the church, to shame it, or expose individuals to ridicule, or embarrass them in an unedifying way. Great care and discernment is needed to prevent the proclamation of false prophecies, visions, or dreams.
- 6** Prophetic ministry, or even the office of a prophet, is not an achievement and should not be given any special status in the church. It is not a reward for holiness and no one can take credit when God uses them in prophecy, or claim it is the result of years of Bible study, prayer, and Christian service. Instead, all who prophesy should humbly give thanks to God for bestowing this precious gift on His people.

FINAL QUESTIONS

Prophecy is only one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. How might any of the other eight gifts listed support the gift of prophecy?

Why does Paul highlight the gift of prophecy over other gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:1–5?

SESSION TWO

WHAT DOES PROPHECY DO AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The clearest description of what the gift of prophecy is for is given by Paul in his description of gifts and their use in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. In 1 Corinthians 14:3,4 Paul states: ‘The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. The one who prophesies edifies the church.’

HOW GOD USES PROPHECY

- 1 Strengthening the church.** Strengthening their faith, their devotion, their courage, and their resolve to witness to Jesus.
- 2 Encouragement.** This is more than mutual support or spurring one another on as the Bible teaches us to do, it is an inspired word from God that can lift us out of places of discouragement because we know God is ‘on the case.’
- 3 Comfort.** There are all sorts of times when Christians find themselves struggling and lacking peace, frustrated with unanswered prayers, or in challenging personal situations. A prophetic word can bring clarity and a new sense of God’s grace and peace. It may also stir us or nudge us out of a rut and back onto God’s track.

- 4 Edification.** This is more than a temporary strengthening but a ‘building’ of the church, the body of Christ.
- 5 Discernment of peoples’ gifting or calling.** Paul wrote to Timothy, ‘Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you’ (1 Tim. 4:14).
- 6 Guidance for the church and its leaders.** For example, in Acts 13:1 we find the apostles seeking God’s direction regarding selecting who should be sent on different missions.

EXERCISE

Read the whole of Acts 10.

What role did prophecy play in God’s call to Peter before he met Cornelius in Acts 10?

THE BIBLE AND LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

The Bible has already given the church guidance and ‘gifts’ to lead. Ephesians 4:11–13 reads, ‘So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up’. ‘Body’ in this verse refers to the church.

In 1 Corinthians 12:27–28 it says, ‘Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.’ In other words, God has shown us what sorts of leadership the church needs – prophetic prayer will help identify who is called to which position.

HOW PROPHECY HELPS US

- 1 **Prophecy helps to guide our prayers and intercessions.** Psalm 46:10 says, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’ If we learn to spend time in prayer, to wait on the Lord, asking Him to show us what is on His heart, and we then pray for what He has shown us, we are allowing the Holy Spirit to guide our prayers. We must learn to wait and listen.
- 2 **Prophecy can be given to warn, correct, rebuke, and convict of sin.** Just as the Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16–17: ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.’
- 3 **Prophecy can play an important role in evangelism.** One of the best examples of prophetic evangelism can be found in Acts 8:26–39. Philip is one of seven chosen for a particular ministry who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. An angel of the Lord gave Philip specific instructions about where to go and what he would see. All Philip had to do was obey the Spirit’s prophetic instructions. We may not see an ‘angel of the Lord’ but we can still hear the Spirit.
- 4 **Prophecy can be very useful at getting to the root of a matter.** This gift, with words of wisdom and knowledge and discernment of spirits, as listed in 1 Corinthians 12, exposes

things as they really are in a person’s life, even when the person themselves is not fully aware of it. Used with grace, love, and care, this can bring great healing and wholeness.

A young woman, who was being assessed for possible training as a church leader, attended a healing and wholeness course I was speaking at. On the final session, I felt a strong prompting to read a particular passage from the Bible, although I never normally include these verses in the course, even when teaching on spiritual health. The passage was Deuteronomy 18:9–13. It gives a list of detestable practices to God, including occult practices, such as divination, sorcery, witchcraft, casting spells, being a medium, etc. At the end of the evening this young woman came up to me in an anxious state, saying she was being considered for ordination but had been involved in at least half of the practices mentioned. A prophetic prompting had brought dark secrets into God’s light so that He could set her free by the love of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

QUESTIONS

How does the idea of bringing prophetic words, word of knowledge, or words of wisdom make you feel? Do you feel excited, nervous, hesitant, confident?

Spend a few minutes dwelling on this before answering, and then share with the group what you feel comfortable with.

We desperately need God to restore this precious gift of prophecy and the office of prophet to the church today:

- 1 To reveal His heart and mind to His people, day by day, moment by moment.
- 2 To reveal to God's people things which will come to pass in the future, confirming that which has already been written in the Scriptures.
- 3 To give specific guidance to individuals or churches. Prophecy can give particular instructions about specific needs or situations which the Bible does not give.
- 4 Prophecy reveals the truth, bringing the light of Christ into dark places and demolishing deception. It brings conviction of our sinfulness so that we see things as God sees them, leading us to confess, repent, and be forgiven by Jesus.
- 5 Prophecy can dismantle even the hardest resistance to God.
- 6 A word of prophecy can effect radical and lasting change.
- 7 Prophecy helps to reveal Jesus Christ to us. It can help restore our faith in Jesus, remind us that we are special to Him, and that He cares for us as individuals. It can open our eyes to see Jesus and God's glory.
- 8 Prophecy reveals what the Holy Spirit is doing, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10: 'As it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no mind has conceived" – the things God has prepared for those who love him – these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.'

WHY IS PROPHECY SO IMPORTANT?

One way of understanding the importance of prophecy is to consider the consequences to the church when there is a lack of prophecy or the gift has been shunned or ignored. In Daniel's great prayer of repentance, found in Daniel 9:5-6, he confesses, 'We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name.'

The consequences of a lack of prophecy may include:

- 1 **Following the wrong agenda.** Instead of following God's agenda and His commission the church becomes motivated by human thoughts, programmes, and worldly agendas. When no one is listening to God there is no divine revelation of God's plans for His people to 'prosper' and have a 'hope and a future' (Jer. 29:11).
- 2 **Loss of vision and direction.** Without prophecy God's people can lose hope and the encouragement needed to persevere on their journey with Jesus. They become like lost sheep who can no longer hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, straying into spiritual and moral decline – as the Bible teaches, 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (Prov. 29:18 KJV).
- 3 **There is a loss of awe and reverence for the 'almightyness' of God.** There is a decline in expectation and trust in what God can do, and also in what God can do in us.
- 4 **The danger of 'false prophets.'** A lack of true prophecy leaves God's people vulnerable to false prophets and false prophecies from the enemy. Jesus said, 'At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people' (Matt. 24:10-11).

FINAL QUESTIONS

Amos 3:7 says, 'Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.' Discuss together what this Scripture tells us about God's character.

What one thing can you do this week to allow yourself to be more receptive to the promptings of God's Spirit? Dwell on this question this week in your own time of devotions or quiet time.

SESSION THREE

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK?

Today, if only you would hear his voice, ‘Do not harden your hearts.’ (Ps. 95:7–8)

My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart. (Prov. 4:20–21)

God can speak to us in many different ways: in Scripture, in creation, in a vision, in a word of knowledge. But there is one constant, as can be seen in these opening Scriptures: God speaks into our hearts.

It is God’s desire to have heart-to-heart conversations with His people.

EXERCISE

Read Ezekiel 36:26–27.

How does this promise from Scripture make you feel? Does it give you confidence that God wants to speak to you, or do you find other thoughts and emotions are stronger? Reflect for a few minutes and write down your thoughts. Remember, you only need share with the group what you are comfortable with.

HOW GOD SPEAKS

God speaks in a variety of ways. The following is a list of the many ways that God can speak to us. Take turns in the group looking up the many Scriptures quoted, considering each of these examples and how you might feel about experiencing them yourself or as a group.

- 1 The Bible.** First and foremost God speaks through the Scriptures. Just as Jesus studied the Scriptures from the age of twelve, so must we, for what we have read the Holy Spirit can bring to mind when we need it, from specific verses to longer passages. Initially these ‘spontaneous verses’ may seem strange or irrelevant to us but we must be obedient and give them as they may be key for a person or situation.
- 2 Dreams.** See Job 33:14–16 for example: ‘For God does speak – now one way, now another – though no one perceives it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears.’
- 3 Visions and pictures.** Numbers 12:6 says, ‘When there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams.’ God may use pictures or visions that will speak to some people more clearly than words.

- 4 **The audible voice of God.** This is not something that seems to happen so often today, but was common in accounts in the Old Testament.
- 5 **Angels.** Angels appear frequently in the Bible with important messages that are often prophetic. Perhaps the clearest example is found in Luke 1:26–27, 30–31: ‘God sent the angel Gabriel ... to a virgin ... The virgin’s name was Mary. “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus.”’
- 6 **Through creation.** Jesus Himself taught His disciples about the end times and prophesied what those signs would be. In Luke Jesus says, ‘There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars ... the heavenly bodies will be shaken’ (Luke 21:25–26). (This is not the same as astrology, which is a spiritual deception from the devil.)
- 7 **Through a prophetic tongue.** In 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul says, ‘When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up’ (1 Cor. 14:26).
- 8 **Through outward visible signs.** There are many examples throughout the Bible. For example:
 - a) Moses saw a burning bush and God spoke from within it. See Exodus 3:1–4.
 - b) Amos saw a swarm of locusts, a plumb-line, a basket of fruit, all with prophetic meaning. See Amos 7:1,8; 8:2.
 - c) Wind and flames of fire at Pentecost. See Acts 2:2–3.

EXERCISE

Which of the examples have you personally witnessed, if any? With which of these examples would you find it easiest to be receptive to hearing God?

REMEMBER

God is sovereign and can choose to communicate in any way He wishes, so He may use other people, circumstances, answers to prayer, sensations, prophetic acts, prophetic pictures. It is not for us to analyse how God speaks but to have an expectation that He is speaking. We just need to learn to listen.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES TO HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD

As long as we are the sheep of His flock, the Good Shepherd, Jesus, will speak to us through the Holy Spirit: ‘He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out ... his sheep follow him because they know his voice’ (John 10:3–4).

The Holy Spirit is the one who leads us into God’s truth. The more we understand who He is and His personality, the more clearly we will be able to discern God’s word to us.

Here are some practical guidelines to hearing the voice of God. There are a lot of Scriptures here, but maybe spend a short time as a group looking at one or two Scriptures from each guideline. Feel free to spend as long or short a time as needed as a group to make sure you understand each point.

- 1 Bind the voice of the enemy.** Bind the enemy's voice in the name of Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you into all truth. See John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:13–15; James 4:7–8; 1 Peter 5:8–9.
- 2 Submit your own will and reasoning to the Holy Spirit.** 'Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding' (Prov. 3:5). See also Psalm 119:104; 119:125; Proverbs 16:3; 1 Corinthians 2:14–16.
- 3 Deal with any known sin and lay down your own issues or problems so they don't get in the way.** See Psalm 37:5; 42:5; Proverbs 3:5; 14:30; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 2:4; 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7.
- 4 Give your undivided attention to God's word.** Hearing is passive but focused listening is active and attentive. See Psalm 37:7; Proverbs 4:20–23; 1 Corinthians 2:10–12; 2 Corinthians 10:5.
- 5 Limit your own talking, be still, and wait.** See Numbers 9:8; Psalm 18:28; 27:14; 31:24; 37:5; Song of Songs 2:14.
- 6 Write down what you see or hear.** This can be an accurate record and reminder of what God has already told you. See Exodus 17:14; Psalm 16:7; 36:8–9; 37:5; 77:6; Proverbs 9:10; 16:3; 16:9; 1 Corinthians 2:9–16.
- 7 Don't argue mentally – God speaks into our hearts.** God will always give confirmation if it is from Him. See Isaiah 46:10–11; John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; Philippians 2:5.

- 8 Wait upon the Lord for the interpretation.** Wait for the Spirit to guide and bring wisdom. See Psalm 27:14; Proverbs 2:6; 16:3; Daniel 2:22–30; John 10:4; Ephesians 1:17; Colossians 1:9.
- 9 Don't get ahead or lag behind the Holy Spirit.** Don't try to make things happen by your own effort: 'In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps' (Prov. 16:9). See also Proverbs 20:24; Jeremiah 10:23; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Peter 3:9.
- 10 Be trustworthy.** The Lord shares with us as a trustworthy friend; the more He can trust you the more He will entrust to you. See Genesis 18:17–19; Numbers 12:7–8; Psalm 25:14; Isaiah 45:3.
- 11 Pay attention to your dreams.** God speaks in dreams and visions but not all dreams and visions are from Him. Ask for discernment and write down those from the Lord. See Job 33:14–16; Daniel 2:19–23; 4:18; 9:21–22; 10:14–21; Matthew 1:20; 2:13.
- 12 Do not be afraid of silence.** Sometimes the Lord is silent, but don't be anxious. Sometimes God just wants us to be in His presence to praise and worship Him. See Psalm 45:11; 46:10; 96:9; Song of Songs 1:14; Isaiah 12:2–3; 30:15; 50:10.

EXERCISE

As a group, spend some time quietly in God's presence asking Him to open your hearts to hear what He has to say. You could play some suitable worship music in the background if this helps. If the group is comfortable, you could spend time praying for one another, but only if people feel comfortable doing this. If someone isn't comfortable, allow them to quietly spend time with God.

SESSION FOUR

EXERCISING AND DEVELOPING THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. (1 Cor. 14:1)

EXERCISE

Read 2 Timothy 1:6–7.

How does ‘laying on of ... hands’ and asking God to ‘fan into flame’ the gifts He has for you make you feel? Excited, nervous, hesitant, expectant? As a group, share your thoughts.

EXERCISING THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Once we have recognised the blessings of prophecy to strengthen, encourage, build up, and edify Christians, and to reach not-yet-Christians with the good news, we need to do the following:

- 1 Seek God’s will and ask for this gift.** This may be given through the laying on of hands, or directly from God by the Holy Spirit.
- 2 Be expectant to hear and see God speaking to you.** Listen carefully, be obedient, give the word in love.
- 3 Wait on the Lord for His timing.** Wait for His prompting, with patience and discernment, that you may understand the true destination of the word given. No one can prophesy at any time they choose.
- 4 Be ‘teachable’ by others with this gift and study the prophets in the Bible.** Today’s prophecies will never supersede those in Scripture and they should always reflect the mind of Christ and the nature and character of God.
- 5 Submit prophetic words with humility to those in spiritual authority in the church.** Prophecy is given to build up and strengthen, not divide and weaken.
- 6 Speak it out.** Resolve to faithfully report what you hear or see, whatever it is God gives you. Do not judge, add to, or subtract from the word, but pass on accurately what you have been entrusted with, and if possible record it.
- 7 Expect the unexpected.** Become familiar with the variety of ways that God can communicate with and through His people in both the Old and New Testaments.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO PROPHECY

- 1 Prophetic song. In Psalm 40:3 we find the psalmist saying, ‘He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God,’ and then says prophetically, ‘Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him.’
- 2 You, or others, may prophesy in tongues, but this should always be accompanied by an interpretation. See 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- 3 You can paint, draw, or sketch a prophetic vision which can help people see what God is saying more clearly than words might do. Often more will be revealed than the prophetic artist was even aware of.
- 4 You may speak, read, or recite a verse or passage from Scripture given to you by the Holy Spirit, for a prophetic purpose, which may give a clear insight, direction, or revelation, for a specific purpose.
- 5 You may perform a prophetic action. See, for example:
 - a) Jeremiah 13:1–11 – the prophet was called to buy a linen belt and do various things with it to demonstrate visibly and practically how God would judge His people.
 - b) Hosea was called to marry an adulterous wife as a reflection of God’s people being guilty of unfaithfulness in departing from the Lord (Hosea 1:2).
 - c) A prophet called Agabus did a prophetic act with Paul’s belt, binding himself and saying to Paul, ‘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”’ (Acts 21:10–11), so warning and preparing Paul for what was to come.

EXERCISE

Think of a time when you may have experienced one of these ways of prophecy, even if you didn’t think of it as such at the time. For example, have you ever read a passage of Scripture that felt just right for that moment, or seen a work of art that spoke to your situation? Share some examples as you feel comfortable – you may be surprised how often you have heard God’s voice!

DEVELOPING YOUR PROPHEPIC GIFT

If you want your muscles to grow, you need to exercise them. If you want the gift of prophecy to grow, you need to exercise it.

Here are some practical suggestions to help us grow in the prophetic. Take turns in reading out the examples and any Scriptures that may be quoted.

- 1 **Learn to recognise the gentle urging of the Holy Spirit within our spirit.** Paul says, ‘The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit’ (Rom. 8:16).
- 2 **Obedience.** Though we can choose whether we speak out or stay silent, we still have a responsibility to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we may lack confidence and so need to ask God to give us faith and courage to take away our fears or anxieties.

- 3 Peace and quiet.** Consciously seek to remove the common obstacles to listening and hearing God’s word in a busy, noisy world.
- 4 Importance of the Bible.** This gift requires a readiness to read, study, and inwardly digest the Scriptures. We need to love both the author, the Lord, and His word. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy we read, ‘Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth’ (2 Tim. 2:15).
- 5 Stay close to God.** ‘Come ... come ... listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live’ (Isa. 55:1–3).
- 6 Allow mistakes.** We will all make mistakes along the way, but these do not disqualify us from growing in the prophetic. Submit your prophetic words cheerfully and trustingly to leaders, and remain humble, and God will keep us on track, guiding us by the Holy Spirit.
- 7 Be expectant.** Not only give words of prophecy but also be open to receive them. Keep in touch with other people exercising this gift and encourage one another.
- 8 Allow God to promote you.** All prophecy is a gift from God and the role of prophet is no exception. No one can claim to be a prophet or presume that office, if they do, it is almost certain they are not a prophet! There is no room for any sense of superiority.
- 9 Be passionate about Jesus.** Care about things that He is passionate about, honour Him, and always give Him the glory. Prophecy should not draw attention to the one who speaks it but to Jesus.

- 10 Stay natural, stay normal, stay humble.** Exercising this gift does not make you a ‘special’ Christian. Persevere in seeking the gift and in submitting your life to continued godly revelations for you personally, as well as others.

EXERCISE

Read Acts 2:14–18.

How do you feel about this passage today? Do you get excited at the thought that God could speak like that? Sceptical that it still happens? Worried about how it might be misused? Conscious that it seems very different to your own experience? All of these are normal reactions.

Spend some time quietly before God with this passage and ask Him to show you what this means for you, your group, and your church. You could play some suitable worship music in the background if this helps. If the group is comfortable, you could spend time praying for one another, but only if people feel comfortable doing this. If someone isn’t comfortable, allow them to quietly spend time with God.

SESSION FIVE

FALSE PROPHETS AND COUNTERFEIT PROPHECIES

When Jesus prophesied about the signs of the end of the age, He continually warned His disciples about deception, particularly by false prophets. In Matthew we find these warnings:

- 1 'Watch out that no one deceives you' (24:4).
- 2 'For many will come in my name ... and will deceive many' (24:5).
- 3 'Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people' (24:11).
- 4 'For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you in advance' (24:24-25).
- 5 'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves' (7:15).

Jesus was not alone in giving these warnings about false prophets. For example, see Ezekiel 13:1-7; Jeremiah 23:25-26, 30-32; Galatians 5:12.

Because prophesy is such a powerful gift of blessing to the church,

the devil will do all he can to bring a demonic counterfeit, a deception, to lead God's people astray. Deception works only when it is nearly true; a forged banknote would not deceive anyone unless it was as close as possible to a genuine banknote. It is the same with spiritual gifts, the enemy seeks to deceive people by imitating the genuine God-given gift with imitations that are close to the original design but tainted by evil.

EXERCISE

Have you ever been aware of a 'prophetic' word or picture that seemed false or dubious to you? How did it make you feel? How was it spoken – with love or with judgement?

Discuss your answer, if you have one to share, and listen to the experience of others. This can help you be attuned to prophecy that should be treated with caution.

It is often because of counterfeit prophecy that the church has shunned genuine prophecy, which of course is the devil's intention. Nowhere in the Bible is there any suggestion that we should reject the prophetic because of the danger of false prophecy. In fact, Paul clarifies the situation for us and teaches that the church must exercise the Holy Spirit's gift of discernment, the ability to judge between spirits: 'Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil' (1 Thess. 5:19-22).

A prophetic utterance can have three possible sources:

- 1 The Holy Spirit
- 2 The human spirit
- 3 An unholy spirit of deception

EXERCISE

Read Acts 16:16–18.

Why did Paul wait for a while before confronting this unholy spirit?
Write down your answer and discuss as a group.

What else can we learn from Paul's mission?

The most dangerous counterfeit to prophecy in Paul's time, and ours, is 'divination.' This is essentially the 'art of acquiring secret knowledge, especially about the future, by supernatural means.'

The Bible encourages prophecy but condemns divination and is unequivocal that it is detestable to the Lord. God makes this clear in Deuteronomy 18:9–12: 'When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.'

How can we tell the difference between a prophet and a false prophet, or what is prophecy and what is divination?

By the Holy Spirit's gift of discerning, which may often be intuitive rather than logical. We need our spiritual radar switched on and tuned in! There are also some more objective tests to help our discernment:

- 1 The nature of the revelation. Is it scriptural and in line with the character of God and the mind of Christ?
- 2 Genuine prophecy can be weighed against the Bible; divination will be unbiblical.
- 3 Prophecy will always point to Jesus; divination leads people away from Jesus.
- 4 Genuine prophecy is non-manipulative and gives guidance; divination is manipulative and seeks to control.
- 5 Prophecy may result in reverent awe; divination will bring unholy fear, a fatalistic view of what has been said, often promising peace when there is no peace and is, in effect, a curse.

- 6 True prophecy is a free gift, freely given as Jesus taught his disciples: 'Freely you have received; freely give' (Matt. 10:8). With divination there is usually a cost involved, a fee payable to the practitioner (see Acts 16:6).
- 7 The nature of the speaker. A true prophet will clearly be full of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).
- 8 Genuine prophecy will bear good fruit in a person's life, leading to a greater closeness to Jesus and a greater dependence upon God. Divination, on the other hand, will lead us away from God and a dependency on the diviner.
- 9 Finally, the sign that a person is a godly prophet, with a true prophecy, is that the prophecy comes true and, as already mentioned, bears godly fruit by the Lord.

EXERCISE

How would you discern what is a true prophetic word and not a counterfeit?

Finally, remember: we have the victory in Jesus Christ!

We are given some excellent advice in 1 John 4:1–3 to 'test the spirits': 'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.'

The genuine will swallow up the false. Miracles will triumph over magic. Jesus has already won the victory for us. As John continues to encourage us: 'You, dear children, are from God and have overcome [false spirits], because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world' (1 John 4:4).

SESSION SIX

A PROPHET'S HEART

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. (1 John 4:16)

Anyone who seeks to prophesy needs to have the heart of God for His people, and the most important thing for them is their relationship with God, their love for Him, intimacy with Him, and knowing His deep love. This is the foundation for all ministry, otherwise we can fall into the temptation of being more excited about our gifts and ministry than we are about the gift giver Himself. Our constant prayer should be that the Lord Jesus will fill our hearts with His precious love for us and also those to whom we minister.

EXERCISE

Read 1 John 4:7–21.

What does this passage teach us about how we should exercise the gift of prophecy? Take some time to reflect on the passage before writing your thoughts and sharing as a group.

WHAT SORT OF HEART DOES A PROPHET NEED?

Take turns in reading each of these qualities and the associated Scripture.

An anointed heart

Isaiah 6:1–8.

Before Isaiah can function as a prophet he is taken into the throne room of heaven and becomes aware of his sin and ‘unclean’ lips. How does God give Isaiah atonement for his sin? By touching his mouth with a live coal; it is only as his guilt is taken away that when God says, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ Isaiah is able to say, ‘Here am I. Send me!’

Prophets must be appointed by God and anointed by the Holy Spirit, revealing the love of God and the power and authority delegated by Jesus. They also need an anointed mouth, to speak out the words of God.

A humble heart

Philippians 2:5–11.

The point of being a Christian prophet is to represent faithfully the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and we cannot do that without humility. To be humble means conducting ourselves without arrogance or superiority, never treating others with contempt, being willing to listen to others and to God, and accepting correction when appropriate. It means giving the glory to God and keeping the focus on Jesus.

A teachable heart

Ezekiel 36:26–27.

In Ezekiel God promises to give us two special blessings: a new heart, and to put a new spirit in us. Why? To ‘move you to follow

my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.’ To stay on track, as Paul reminds us: ‘Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of ... how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:14–17).

A bold and courageous heart

Joshua 1:1–9.

When Joshua was appointed by God and anointed by Moses to lead God’s people into the Promised Land he was given his commission, which includes:

- 1 I will be with you (v. 5)
- 2 Be strong and courageous (v. 6)
- 3 Be strong and very courageous (v. 7)
- 4 Be careful to obey all the law (v. 7)
- 5 Do not turn from it to the right or left (v. 7)
- 6 Meditate on God’s word day and night (v. 8)
- 7 Be careful to do everything written in it (v. 8)
- 8 Do not be afraid or discouraged (v. 9)
- 9 The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (v. 9)

This list also applies to prophets and those exercising the gift of prophecy.

The heart of a watchman

Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1.

The prophet Habakkuk describes his receptivity to God speaking not as a passive state but as an eager and active state of anticipation or expectation. He says, ‘I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.’ What complaint? We find out in chapter 1: ‘How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?’ Watching and waiting are mandatory activities for a prophet otherwise they will miss the new things that God is doing and bringing to birth.

A heart for the wilderness

Song of Songs 8:5.

In the Song of Songs, under the heading ‘Friends,’ there is this beautiful picture of God’s love and intimacy with those who have spent time alone in the wilderness with Him. Prophets often emerge from a time in the wilderness. It is a place where God can meet, teach, and train the prophet to rely on nothing else but God Himself and His provision.

Here are some other examples:

SAMUEL is called at a time when ‘the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions’ (1 Sam. 3:1); a time of dryness, aridity without the water of God’s word.

ELIJAH begins his ministry by declaring a God-ordained drought (1 Kings 17:1). Later, after doing battle with the prophets of Baal, he flees into the desert and the Lord appears to him and speaks to him in a gentle whisper and recommissions him (1 Kings 19).

HABAKKUK expresses his experience of the wilderness and lack of fruitfulness, but also his personal joy in his deep relationship with God: ‘Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the sheepfold and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign LORD is my strength’ (Hab. 3:17–19).

JESUS Himself was led by the Spirit to spend forty days fasting in the wilderness and doing battle with the devil in preparation to begin His God-given mission. He returned full of the power of the Holy Spirit and immediately started His ministry (Matt. 4:1–11).

The heart of an intercessor

Daniel 9:2–4.

The prophet is not only called to speak out the anointed word of God but also to pray into those revelations or into other people’s prophetic words. In the book of Daniel we find Daniel describing such an instance: ‘I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.’ What was Daniel’s response to Jeremiah’s prophecy? ‘So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed.’ Daniel’s immediate response is to cry out to God for forgiveness, for mercy, and for God’s favour, not judgement.

The heart of a servant

1 Kings 17:1–6.

A prophet must be ready to serve God and those to whom he is sent, and one way of serving others is to be a good role model and mentor, looking to pass on what God has given them, not looking for success but for succession in others. In the Old Testament the best example of this call is Elijah.

- 1** He was appointed and anointed by God to challenge the corruption of the day and to heal the rift between parents and their children (Mal. 4:5–6).
- 2** His faith and trust in God resulted in miracles (1 Kings 17:5–6).
- 3** King Ahab calls him Israel’s troublemaker, and, like Jesus, he was countercultural, more concerned to honour God and not offend Him than to offend people (Acts 4:19).
- 4** He was a bold protector of moral, physical, and spiritual health, a provider and healer (1 Kings 17:7–23).
- 5** He demonstrated compassionate love but also exercised godly power and authority to transform situations (1 Kings 18:1–39).
- 6** He was a role model and mentor; God called him to anoint Elisha to succeed him as a prophet and to prepare and train him (1 Kings 19:16).

EXERCISE

Having looked through these qualities for people who exercise the gift of prophecy, which of these do you find most challenging, and why?

In the New Testament we find Jesus, prophet, role model, and mentor. In each gospel we find Him demonstrating the prophet's call, teaching, affirming, encouraging, and then sending out His disciples to do 'more' than He had done in the power of the Holy Spirit: 'Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father' (John 14:12).

Jesus was passing on the baton of prophecy to His disciples and the church until He returns.

EXERCISE

Spend some time in prayer together asking the Father to stir the servant heart of a prophet in everyone in the group. If people are comfortable, lay hands on each other and ask for God's blessing and anointing, but respect those who may not be ready or comfortable with this. Allow space for quiet meditation and time with God before ending the session.

***'The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. The one who prophesies edifies the church.'* (1 Cor 14: 3,4)**

