

Discipleship Groups — Level 5

WEEK 1 The Gift of Prophecy

Hello, everyone, and welcome back to this new round of discipleship groups! In the last round, we began studying the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, also known as the “power gifts” of the Holy Spirit. We have already studied the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the words of knowledge and wisdom, the gift of faith, and the gifts of healing. Over the next four weeks, we will complete our study of the last five gifts.

These gifts of the Holy Spirit are different than the innate gifts that are hard-wired in us. People have gifts from God that are expressed in their artistic ability, administration, teaching, hospitality, and other such qualities. These are gifts from God, but those gifts are innately wired into our person. The gifts of the Holy Spirit that we are studying now are not hardwired in; these are supernatural empowerments of the Holy Spirit, and they come with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. These are above and beyond our natural human capacity to do the very works of Jesus with God’s power. We are not born with these gifts; we need to receive the Holy Spirit, and He gives them at the moment when they are needed to serve people, help others, and build up the Church.

Today, we are going to talk about the gift of prophecy. That sounds a little odd, because when we hear the word “prophecy,” we think about an ancient prophecy that has yet to be fulfilled, or we think about someone predicting the future. Now, there is certainly biblical support for certain individuals predicting the future, and there is also ancient biblical prophecy that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, as well as prophecy about the End Times that has yet to be fulfilled. As a matter of fact, as said in the last round of discipleship groups, God is the sole possessor of all wisdom and knowledge, and Amos 3:7 says, “Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.”

However, these things are reserved for the Office of “Prophet,” and less the “gift” of prophecy. The Office of a Prophet carries a distinct kind of authority, specifically a commission from God for the Church and the world, while a word of prophecy may be given to any believer for encouragement, guidance, edification, and as a testimony about Jesus Christ.

We are concerned today with the gift of prophecy that the Holy Spirit gives to His Church through His people—not as prophets, but as those who are filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesying for the encouragement of the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel.

It is no accident that one of the primary things that separates us as God’s image from the rest of creation is the ability to speak. You might say that animals and insects have their own voice. Yes. But they COMMUNICATE. We SPEAK. God speaks, and He

continues to speak today both TO His people and THROUGH His people. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit help us communicate God's message to people.

People get nervous about "prophecy" that someone might add to the Scripture, so they close off their hearts and minds to the biblical function of prophecy and say that the only way God speaks to us is through the Bible. Meanwhile, 1 Thessalonians 5:20 tells us to "not despise prophecies." The Bible is the primary way God speaks to us, but should we think it odd that God, the loving Father, would want to speak with His own children? Of course not! "God wants to talk to His children. He wants to be specific. He wants to bless His people and bring them to points of deliverance, obedience, and wholeness as He declares His counsel to them."

Prophecy has purpose...and its purpose is NOT to puff people up with pride. The nature of prophecy is to announce God's Word to people. In fact, Revelation 19:10 says that "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." Prophecy is not necessarily predicting the future, but it is declaring God's Word and His will in a given situation. Declaring Jesus and His right way of living is the spirit of prophecy. Prophecy will never contradict the Bible; of course not!... IT WILL CONFIRM IT!

Prophecy is understanding the will of God and understanding the truth of the Bible. God helps us to understand what He is doing and saying RIGHT NOW and declaring it to God's people so they can respond to Him with faith, righteousness, and repentance and not miss out on what He wants to do in us, and through us.

For example: Several years ago here at the church, we had a Christmas event where we were going to make it snow with the fake little snow blowers. Hey, we live in Southern California, we love that kind of stuff! I knew all the kids would want to see it and run around in it, but most of them were out on the church's basketball court playing. I saw one particular kid, and I told him to go out to the basketball court and tell everyone that there was going to be snow and that they should come. A couple of minutes later, the kid came back with no other kids. He said they were all still out playing. I asked if he had told them the message about the snow. He said that he did, but they didn't listen to him. I said to the kid, "Well, they got the message. I guess they'll miss the snow!" The kid was the messenger giving a "prophecy" to the other children. Because they didn't listen to the message, many of them missed out! It is important when God speaks to us!

God does not dispense tidbits of knowledge that no one has ever heard before so people can say, "Look at what I can do and what I know!" 1 Corinthians 8 says that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. 1 Corinthians 13 is very clear that if love for God and for others is not the motive in everything we do, then all that we do, even if it is supernatural, means NOTHING to God, nor does it help anyone else. God is interested in communicating with people because He loves them, He wants to build them up and grow them to be all He has purposed them to be. 1 Corinthians 14:3 says that prophecy is to exhort (or encourage), comfort, and edify God's people, and He dispenses this gift by reinforcing biblical truth, not inventing new stuff!

A word of prophecy is like a chiropractic adjustment. Sometimes things need to be adjusted, corrected, in us so that we don't get off track in our lives, and God uses this gift to help us keep walking the straight and narrow path following Jesus as His disciples.

The gifts are available. The Holy Spirit has empowered you if you have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives the gifts as necessary, and He gives the best gift in the moment they are needed. These are not turned on and off by our willpower but given by the Spirit. You can ask Him, and He will give what is needed!

In the previous discipleship group levels we have already covered, we spoke extensively about hearing God's voice, which we will not revisit right now. But learning to hear God's voice and recognize His promptings is essential to recognizing when the Holy Spirit wants to use this gift.

It is also essential to recognize that a "word of prophecy" has specific biblical stipulations to it. Let me briefly outline them for you:

First, if prophecy inspires fear, condemnation, or strife, it is not from the Lord. God does not say things to make us angry, divided, or fearful, nor does He set out to blast us with condemnation. Though a word of prophecy can bring about godly sorrow, which leads to repentance and to His right ways of living.

Second, 2 Peter 1:20 says that no prophecy is of any private interpretation but needs to be judged. 1 Corinthians 14:29 says that prophecies should be judged and evaluated by others. Just because you "felt you had a word" does not necessarily mean that it is correct. 1 Corinthians 13:9 reminds us that "we know in part and prophecy in part." Words of prophecy must be judged, and we must receive what we have from the Lord and speak it with great humility and be open to the possible need for guidance or correction by spiritual authorities.

Remember, a prophetic word is not your word; it is God's Word. We must, therefore, never take the Lord's name in vain by saying things that He never said. Judgment and evaluation of prophecies by the Church will help safeguard from error.

Third, 1 Corinthians 14:32 says that the spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets. In other words, when you give a word from the Lord, you are in complete self-control—and self-control is a fruit of the Spirit! Giving a prophecy does not mean we declare "THUS SAITH THE LORD!" Nor does it mean we enter into an ecstatic state of wild frenzy. No. We can be normal, cogent people while giving a word of prophecy. We do not give ourselves to hyper-emotionalism, neither do we ignore the move of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, prophecy will never contradict the Bible. A word of prophecy is not a "new word" and it certainly is not adding anything to the revealed Word of God; it is HIGHLIGHTING something that is already there that the Holy Spirit wants to bring to our attention that

needs to be understood by people for the purpose of edification, comfort, or correction in love.

So, how do we give a “word of prophecy” in the church? This can be done corporately or personally, and both require much maturity.

Giving a word corporately requires order. If, say, during a church service, you sense that the Lord has given you something to say to His people, you may come up to myself or one of the pastors and let us know what it is you believe the Lord has given to you. We will evaluate it and take the appropriate steps to get that word to the congregation. Sometimes that word is for right then, and other times it is not. Sometimes it is for the whole congregation, and sometimes it is just for you or for another person. This is the purpose of evaluation. But here in our church, we honor prophecy and desire that everyone grows in their ability to hear God’s voice and boldly declare what He tells you.

Giving a word to someone personally also requires great maturity that needs to be grown in. God may highlight a verse of Scripture that is for someone you know, or God may bring someone to your mind with a word of encouragement, or God may make known to you what He is doing in a given situation. Be bold to tell the person what God has placed on your heart, because you don’t know what is going on in that person’s heart, mind, or personal situation, and the word God has given you for a person may be the exact thing they needed to hear!

But, let me give a word of caution—don’t go around declaring God’s will for people’s lives; that is not ours to know or to give. For example: do not go to someone and declare to them, “God says we’re gonna get married!” If you do that, then you and I are going to have sit down for talk!

However, you may have a sense of direction that a person has been contemplating, but let that person confirm it. The moment you say, “God said...” then all evaluation and conversation immediately gets shut down. If you believe the Lord has told you something for someone, say it with humility, “I believe I have a word from the Lord for you to consider...” or something like that.

I hope this teaching has been instructive and edifying for you. Let the Lord dwell richly in your hearts. Learn to listen for His voice. Let Him dispense to you the gift of prophecy for love, edification, and to comfort the Church! Take time in your groups to talk about this and ask the Holy Spirit in these moments to give you a “word of prophecy” for someone in your group.