

4 Guidelines for Accurately Weighing Your Personal Prophecies

My church was birthed during the Jesus Movement of the early 1970s. At the time, we were comprised mostly of college and high school students. Appointed as an elder at 20 years old, I was one of the older members of our group! We were passionate about Jesus and saw many wonderful miracles of salvation and healing. Worship, baptism of the Holy Spirit and sharing the Good News of Jesus were our primary areas of emphasis.

Although we had great zeal, we didn't have much wisdom. There were few Bible scholars among us, if any—which means we had a steep learning curve to negotiate as we aggressively served God and loved people. But God was good and poured out His grace and mercy on us in abundance.

One of my first challenges as an elder and pastor over this group was to figure out what to do with a personal prophecy given in one of our meetings. In that meeting, a beautiful young girl decided to prophesy over herself. She stood up, put her hand on her head and said something like this: "Be encouraged, daughter of the Lord! For the one I have chosen to be your husband is near you ... even now! He is wearing a red-checkered shirt and has long sideburns. He has not listened to Me, as you have, My daughter. But soon, he will receive My word and ask for your hand in marriage."

She sat back down, wearing a particularly blissful expression on her face. I noticed a young man sitting next to her, wearing a red-checkered shirt and sporting long sideburns. He was sweating bullets with a fearful look on his face.

I didn't know a lot about prophecy at the time, other than it was something they did in the book of Acts, which we had just

been reading. But in my “knower,” I knew this was, most likely, more “knowing in part” than “prophesying in part”!

I waited until the meeting was over and asked if I could talk to the two of them privately. I remember saying, “Now, this could be the word of God, but I suspect it was the word of Julie [not her real name].” I told the young man I didn’t feel he necessarily had to obey the word she’d spoken, since it might not be completely pure. I suggested that he seek the Lord and counsel from others he trusted, and make sure he examined it carefully.

The young girl looked a little disappointed. The young man looked very relieved! What I learned that day is that mistakes can be made in the name of prophecy, especially when we let our desires or emotions become the motivating factor.

Wanted: Discernment

In those days, we heard several budding young prophets trying to spread their wings with words like, “Thus saith the Lord: ‘Yea, Yea, Yea!’” One guy actually said, “Thus saith the Lord ... I forgetteth thy name!”

It was easy to discern that while that particular word may have been coming from a sincere servant, it wasn’t from God, as I was pretty sure an all-knowing God wouldn’t forget a name!

However, we also heard some prophecies and words of knowledge I knew were absolutely accurate from people I knew didn’t have any insider information. Therefore, I felt I needed to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

But how was I to handle judging prophecy? What was I to do with prophetic words that weren’t as clearly discernible?

As the leader of this church, I had to judge something I didn’t know much about. I quickly learned there’s a potential

danger in personal prophecy gone goofy if it goes unchecked by wise and discerning leaders.

But through the years, I've also learned there's an equal danger when the church reacts to poorly led and mismanaged extremes by rejecting or discouraging personal prophecy altogether.

Due to false teachings they've received or the potential confusion that can sometimes accompany prophecy, many church leaders choose to avoid dealing with the prophetic altogether by banning its practice in their churches.

I've discovered over the years, however, that people are hungry for genuine prophetic gifts. One word from God regarding situations in our lives changes everything. In fact, there have been times when I've seen unbelievers who were totally unaware of prophecy come to the Lord in salvation directly due to a prophetic word.

4 Guidelines to Light the Way

In his book *2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity*, Eddie Hyatt writes, "For prophecy to be used for its greatest benefit, we must avoid the extremes of a too-controlled or an uncontrolled prophetic ministry. A too-controlled approach will quench the gift altogether, while the uncontrolled approach will inevitably lead to misuse, abuse and disaster." As a pastor and worship leader, I can tell you this balance isn't always easy to achieve.

Having discovered early on the need for God's wisdom in this matter, I decided to read any passage of Scripture I could find about judging or weighing prophecy. What I discovered is that Paul said, in sum, "Prophecy should be judged."

In other words, we are to check prophetic words. But how are we to do that?

A few principles in 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 (NIV) helped me develop guidelines for examining prophecies: “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.” Here, Paul is saying that if we are to judge prophecy in a way that embraces the good and brings redemptive correction wherever the mark has been missed, we need to be open without being naive, and we need to discern without being judgmental.

I don’t want to be overly simplistic about what can sometimes be complicated situations, but I’ve since incorporated four guidelines into my ministry that I pray will help you bring forth the precious while identifying and letting the worthless go when it comes to weighing personal prophecy.

Guideline 1: It conforms to the will of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word encourages us to desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy (see 1 Cor. 14:1), but we don’t get to choose which gift we’re given. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12:11 tells us that prophecy is given as the Spirit determines—as He wills. The gifts of the Spirit don’t come from a human spirit; they come from the Holy Spirit. So, a person can’t carry or operate them in his or her own will.

For example, I once prophesied over a young man who was dating one of my daughters. It wasn’t my plan to give a prophetic word to this guy. As a dad, I saw it as my job to instill fear in him, not encouragement! I can honestly say it wasn’t something I had willed myself to do—quite the opposite, in fact. However, I felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to give the word, and so I did. And despite my lack of desire to give this young man a word from the Lord, I was extremely encouraged when he later told me he felt the Lord’s presence in it all. (Full disclosure: This young man is now my son-in-law.)

Guideline 2: It glorifies Jesus above all else. Revelation 19:10 (NLT) says, “For the essence of prophecy is to give a

clear witness for Jesus.” This also coincides with Jesus’ statement that the Holy Spirit would arrive and “glorify [Him]” (John 16:14a, MEV).

Prophecy should never become too human-centered. By that I mean prophecy shouldn’t ever glorify or benefit an individual more than it does Jesus. An example of this would be using prophecy to enhance someone’s status or to manipulate people to give money or accept certain teachings. The Holy Spirit comes to lift up Jesus, and true prophecy will always bring Him glory.

*To read the rest of this article, **click here to purchase How to Discern a Word From God for only \$**. You will also receive two extra full-length features on how to increase your prophetic discernment. {eoa}*

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