

Beware the 'Facebook Prophet' Frauds

Prophecy is a powerful, much-needed spiritual gift. The apostle Paul told us prophecy provides edification, exhortation and comfort. In First Corinthians 14:1, he told believers they were to desire this gift above all others. Prophecy strengthens us, confirms God's plans, reminds us of His love and care, warns us of dangers and propels us into our callings.

When I was a young man just out of college, a humble minister from Mississippi prayed over me and shared a prophetic word that captured my attention. He said: "You will not hide behind your pen, but you will preach the gospel to nations." At the time I was timid; I was content to pursue my journalism career. But by the Holy Spirit, this man's prophetic word confirmed that I would one day step out of my comfort zone.

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Years later, I sensed it might be time for me to enter full-time ministry. But because the decision seemed overwhelming, I asked the Lord to confirm His direction. I then met a prophetic minister from Canada during a mission trip. He knew nothing about my situation, but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he told me: "The Lord says that as Elisha burned his plow and followed Elijah, the time has come for the transition. It's time to burn your plow."

I know prophecy is a valid and priceless gift because of the way it has encouraged and blessed me. But I also know that it can be abused and misused. Satan has a counterfeit for every good gift. Since New Testament times, charlatans and shysters

have deceived and manipulated people by pretending to prophesy in the Lord's name. I have seen tragic examples of this during my years of ministry:

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– In the 1990s, ABC News exposed Texas-based evangelist W.V. Grant for spiritual fraud. Before his services, Grant's staff members would mill around in the congregation asking for information about prayer requests, health problems or wayward children. The staff members would then inform Grant of the situations through a small earphone, and from the stage he pretended to know the information solely by the Spirit. The people were impressed—until he went to jail in 1996 for income tax evasion.

– I watched charismatic prophet Paul Cain manipulate an audience in Texas in 1989. In front of 5,000 people, he pretended to know the street addresses of several individuals. I was familiar with the ministry that hosted the conference, and I had access to a phone list that contained names and addresses of all the pastors in the group. I got a sick feeling in my gut as I realized that Cain was using this same phone list to make his declarations. I was shocked that a man who was considered a powerful man of the Spirit would stoop so low as to make people think he got information from God.

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