

Don't Misuse the Gift of Personal Prophecy

Twelve years ago, when I was preaching at a Brazilian congregation in Florida, the Lord directed my attention to a young teenager sitting in the back of the church. He was leaning his head against the wall and looking very bored. But God gave me a prophetic message for this curly-headed guy, so I asked him to stand; then I spoke to him about his spiritual calling.

"God says you are going to be a spiritual warrior," I told him.

The boy's name was Felipe, and we became good friends after I gave him that word of encouragement. Today, at age 27, he's a passionate follower of Christ and the youth pastor of his church.

I love the gift of prophecy because I've seen countless people like Felipe transformed by it. One prophetic message from God can break the power of discouragement. It can also launch a person into ministry or confirm God's divine direction. As Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." A personal prophetic word is like a priceless piece of heirloom jewelry. You will treasure it for life.

Some people question whether personal prophecy is biblical. Yet prophets often delivered detailed messages to people in Old Testament times. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul urged believers to "earnestly desire" prophecy above all other gifts (see 1 Cor. 14:1). He also told the Corinthians that true prophetic ministry can expose the secrets of men's hearts and bring them to repentance (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

In Colossians 4:17, Paul issued a word of prophetic

encouragement to an individual on his ministry team. He wrote: "Tell Archippus, 'Make sure that you fulfill the ministry which you have received in the Lord.'" Paul delivered this short but powerful message to Archippus to strengthen his friend. I am sure Archippus never forgot Paul's very personal words.

Personal prophetic ministry is vital today. People need to know that God is not a dry doctrine; He wants to know us intimately, and He wants to speak to us in a personal way. Yet we must be careful to avoid the abuses that have given personal prophecy a bad name. Here are some helpful guidelines that will keep it healthy.

1. **Don't chase prophecies.** I know Christians who will travel across the country to attend a conference to get a word from God, yet they haven't read the Bible in months or sat still long enough to hear from God on their own. Never treat the gift of prophecy like fortune-telling. When God needs to speak to you in an unusual way, He has faithful messengers who will deliver the message to you at the exact time you need it. Meanwhile, soak your mind in Scripture—and never elevate personal prophecy above God's Word.
2. **Never give prophets elite status.** Nowhere in the New Testament are prophets exalted to a privileged class. Paul himself said all members of the body need each other, and in his discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14, he warns against ranking spirituality by gifting. He wrote, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor. 12:21). Some people are mesmerized by prophets who claim to know people's phone numbers, addresses or Social Security numbers. Be sure to test the validity of a prophet's gift if he attempts to impress people with his exotic prophetic abilities. True prophecy does not have to be spooky; its main purpose is to encourage the hearer, not

to draw attention to the messenger.

3. **Never give harsh prophetic words.** New Testament prophecy should encourage, comfort and exhort believers (see 1 Cor. 14:3). That rules out condemnation and harsh criticism disguised as a word from God. Our heavenly Father does not speak to His children in a hateful, scolding tone. He is an encourager, even when He brings needed correction. Remember: Paul said that if you use the gift of prophecy without love, it is useless (see 1 Cor. 13:2).

I know of a church where a lady routinely gave personal words to people warning of calamities or judgments. She even claimed God wanted to kill them! Usually angry “prophets” like this woman claim to know all the unconfessed sins in a person’s life; the truth is they struggle to understand God’s love themselves, and they are seeking attention. Stay away from weird, abusive people who claim to be prophets but don’t show the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

4. **Soak in God’s Word.** Prophecy will never, ever contradict the Bible. So if you want to speak God’s prophetic message to others, you must hide the Scriptures in your heart. If you fill your well with the Word, it will spill over and refresh many when you speak under the anointing of the Spirit. I often meditate on Proverbs 10:32a, which promises: “The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable.”

If you feel called to prophesy, that’s great! God wants to speak through you to others. But don’t assume you know everything. Don’t be so eager to go until you grow to maturity. Find a mentor and learn how to minister with grace, love and biblical balance. {eo}