

How to Handle a Prophetic Word

Our generation is hungry for the paranormal. People everywhere are looking for answers, and their search has led to an obsession with various forms of spirituality that are devoid of God's light and full of the lies of the enemy—witchcraft, astrology, necromancy, sorcery, spiritism and so on. Many have come to depend on psychics for the answers they seek.

We live in a time when the lost, often unwittingly, “[exchange] the truth of God for the lie” (Rom. 1:25). Scripture foretold of this time: “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mark 13:22).

To lure the unsuspecting into their web of deceit, psychics often market themselves with such titles as “accredited psychic,” “proven psychic” or “registered psychic.” They sometimes gain prominence because well-known celebrities who claim to have been helped by a psychic empathetically tell TV viewers they, too, can be helped. A few psychics even proclaim that the gift they display comes from God.

People who are at a low point in their lives are generally the most vulnerable to this deception. But surprisingly, the same hunger is portrayed in the church.

I am not talking about Christians who consult with fortune-tellers, although it may shock you to learn that hordes of God's people do so. What I am addressing is the temptation of Christians to make “fortune-tellers” out of those in the church who have a prophetic gift.

Prophets, Not Psychics

For some reason, the church has begun to view revelatory people in the same way the world views psychics. They believe

that prophetic people should have an answer for everything the inquirer wants to know. They treat prophetic individuals as if they were "Christian psychics."

On several occasions earlier in my life, I experienced this type of feeding frenzy. In my immaturity, I succumbed to the demand of hungry inquirers who were a part of the body of Christ or who sat in the pew next to me. However, I have learned that we as prophetic people do not need to be driven by this demand.

We are not in competition with occult practitioners. Nor are we to take the place of God, who longs to speak individually to each believer through His Holy Spirit. The Lord gives all of us the assurance that if we call on Him, He will answer us in ways that will astound us (Jer. 33:3; Matt. 7:7).

At the same time, God gives some individuals prophetic words and insight that we need to hear, just as He gave His word to Ananias to deliver to Saul before he was known as the apostle Paul (Acts 9:17). To everything, however, there is a time and a season (Eccl. 3:1, 7).

In the midst of the feeding frenzy for prophetic words, some people gifted with revelation may wonder how to respond to the demands facing them. They may ask, "If I 'know' the answer to someone's question, should I feign ignorance or lie?"

On various occasions, I have watched a friend of mine, who is very mature in his prophetic gift, exhibit great humility. Although God has revealed many things about future events, and the economy in particular, to him, my friend has felt impressed by the Holy Spirit not to reveal publicly everything God shared with him.

Instead, he committed what the Lord showed him to prayer. When he was asked publicly about the economy, I watched with amazement as he responded with godly wisdom to the hungry demands of others. Although my friend had a clear word from

God, he wisely said to eager inquisitors: “The economy is a very complex thing and has confused even the most educated men. What do you think God is saying?”

With his reply, my friend did not lie or violate God’s confidence. Instead, he responded as Jesus often did—by answering a question with a question.

From God’s perspective, everything has a proper time or cycle. Though God may reveal future events or the answer to a problem to a prophetic person, He may not release the person to share the information at that time. We must walk in the spirit of wisdom and discern the proper times and seasons.

God, who does know all, has granted to us as prophetic people a sliver of revelation. Therefore, we do not need to appear as prophetic know-it-alls. We do not always have to have “the” answer to a question or issue that is posed to us.

In fact, one sign of spiritual immaturity is attempting to answer everything that is asked of us. Remember, “even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive” (Prov. 17:28). Usually, it is insecurity and a need for recognition that cause a person with a prophetic gift to respond prematurely and with presumption.

Prophetic Tips

I’ve learned a few lessons in my last 20 years of prophetic ministry. Here are some tips to help you avoid mistakes:

- Don’t allow another person’s insistence and impatience to force you to produce revelation. If you do, you will be offering the person your soulish speculation or personal opinion.
- Don’t allow yourself to feel pressured into telling others everything you know about an issue. Be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. You must believe God

will promote you and raise you up, if that is His purpose for you.

- Don't spend time seeking God for an answer to another person's dilemma unless he has spent more time in prayer concerning the issue than you have. Another person will value what you have to say only if he has exhausted his own strength.
- Don't feel obligated to generate a prophetic answer for every question posed to you. You are not God. You know only as much as He tells you. Furthermore, you were not given a revelatory gift to be a "prophetic 7-Eleven convenience store." We are all called to know God and to listen to His voice.
- Don't be compelled to give a direct answer. In your dialogue with others, practice asking questions rather than making statements.

This exercise of restraint will develop your listening skills and cultivate the fruit of patience. It will also help foster humility in your soul. In this way, you will practice allowing your spirit to rule over your soul.

As time goes on, psychics and occult practitioners will become more visible. Increased instability in our country will create an increased demand to know what lies ahead. Consequently, people will look either to the occult or to God for answers.

We need to be careful not to look to prophetic individuals as non-Christians would look to psychics and astrologers. Remember, God is faithful to tell us what He wants us to know. We simply need to seek His face and listen to Him.

As the church, we need to listen to God individually and corporately. This is not to say we don't need prophetic gifts. I am convinced there will come a day when the "prophets of God" will openly challenge the "prophets of Satan," much as Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:1-40).

In fact, I believe the highest use of the prophetic gifts is outside the walls of the church. I am expecting prophetic evangelism to flourish in the near future as never before. When it does, God will pour out His power in unprecedented measure.

I look forward with you to that glorious day!

How to Respond to a Prophetic Word

If you receive a prophetic word, pray about it. Ask yourself: Does the prophetic word “feel” right to my spirit? Does it line up with Scripture?

If you receive a “directional word” (a prophetic word that gives some direction for your life such as a job, geographic move or whom to marry), consider the source. Is the individual spiritually mature?

Share the word with those who have authority in your life—your pastor, your home group leader, your spouse—and request their input. Get confirmations from independent sources as well as from the Lord. “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established” (2 Cor. 13:1).

Beware of a spirit of impatience, presumption and ambition, which will cause you to leap too quickly in response to the word. Wisdom will urge you to lay your word down on the altar. You will discover that when the time is right, God will give it back to you.

Sometimes you will see the opposite of the word begin to happen in your life. Remain aware, but turn what the enemy has meant for harm into good by discovering what still needs to die in your life (pride or ambition, for example).

Meanwhile, abide in God, remain attentive to the Holy Spirit and maintain a posture of prayer. Cultivate a mindset of internal stillness and rest. Remember, nothing is wrong with

pondering a prophetic word or experience in your heart as Mary, the mother of Jesus did (Luke 2:19).

Read a companion devotional.

John Paul Jackson is the founder of Streams Ministries International, a prophetic teaching ministry headquartered in North Sutton, N.H. A popular teacher and conference speaker, Jackson travels around the world teaching on the art of hearing God, on dreams and visions, and on the realm of the supernatural. He is the author of several books, including Moments With God Dream Journal and Unmasking the Jezebel Spirit, both from Streams Ministries.