

5 Essential Elements to Clean Up the Prophetic Mess

If you're at all like me, you've grown frustrated and discouraged at the flood of unfulfilled prophetic words spoken and published in recent years. For the sake of God's people and the world, we *must* do better than this! Here are five elements essential to prophetic accuracy and integrity. Let's repair the damage before too many more people reject both the gift and, ultimately, the One who gives it.

Character

No one will ever prophesy accurately through the filter of a broken core character. Broken character produces broken words, just as a bad lens distorts vision. No prophetic word will ever be the real thing apart from the heart and nature of the Father imparted into us. The words themselves might be accurate, but if the spirit in which those words are delivered fails to communicate the heart of the God whose nature is love, then it will not be the word of God. Absent a wilderness experience for the shaping and refining of character, so-called prophets will be loose cannons on the Lord's deck, dangerous to others and even to themselves.

My son, my co-pastor, once said that we are looking for kingdom people to hold leadership positions in our church. He defines such people as those who are changing and being changed. He's right. Are we embracing the Father's heart, gazing so deeply into the face of Jesus that we are being transformed into His image? How willing are we to confront those parts of ourselves that have yet to be redeemed, or to embrace the pressure and pain sent to reveal those flaws? My own prayer is that He will let me have His heart, His humility and His grace so that I might accurately and fully speak in His name.

Solid Biblical Grounding

Personal revelation must never be allowed to trump the eternal Word of God, once received and never changing. Prophetic words may be sparked by spiritual inspiration but they must flow from and through Scripture, tested, bounded and refined by eternal truth. Over the years, we have suffered an avalanche of unfulfilled prophetic words that have served to discredit prophetic ministry, not only in the eyes of much of the church, but in the eyes of the world as well. Much of this has been the result of faulty understanding of Scripture and, in some cases, blatant contradictions of what the Scriptures actually say.

For example, there is no such thing as “Christian” numerology, or “Christian” astrology. Both are mocked and condemned in multiple passages that point us rather to the voice of the Lord Himself. Some protest that Genesis says the lights in the heavens are given for signs and seasons, and can therefore be taken as messages from God. True that they mark signs and seasons! By them, prior to the invention of mechanical clocks, mankind could mark time. By them, we would know when to plant, when to harvest, when to prepare for winter, and so on. In the same way that the hands of the mechanical clock indicate the hour, so predictable, repeatable astronomical events resulting from the mechanical operation of the universe mark the seasons, but they were never intended as special messages or warnings from God.

On the other hand, unpredictable signs in the heavens can certainly be taken as direct messages or warnings from God. The Star of Bethlehem moved and stopped to indicate where the baby Jesus lay. Stars don’t behave that way naturally. *That* was a sign from God, not a predictable mechanical alignment of the stars. *Shemitahs* in their biblical context do not predict seven-year cycles of economics as some have proposed. Biblically speaking, in the seventh year, the fields were to lie fallow in order to rest and regenerate. To pull that out

of its context and apply it to economic cycles is to impose upon the Scriptures a meaning neither intended nor implied. Thus, the prophecies associated with the seven-year *shemitah* cycle never materialized.

We must recommit ourselves to discerning the meaning intended by those who wrote the Scriptures and refrain from imposing our own mystical interpretations upon the text. The apostle Paul admonished us to learn not to exceed what is written (I Cor. 4:6). Should we not take that warning very seriously?

Intimacy With the Lord

I'm a thinking man, sometimes to a fault, and sometimes at the expense of sensing the Lord experientially, although as I grow older, grayer and softer, that is changing for the better. Balance is coming. In conjunction with reason, therefore, I weigh and think through my spiritual senses. I desire never to allow the reasoning part of my nature to prevent me from experiencing the Lord and allowing His heart to inform my understanding. While I will never make a quest of seeking to be supernatural, I will passionately seek intimacy with the three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—knowing his will make me supernatural. Those who focus on being supernatural will end up in shipwreck and delusion. Those who focus on intimacy with God will find themselves being solidly and reliably supernatural.

Checks and Balances

I believe the days are coming to an end when prophetic ministries can operate independently outside the checks and balances of the local church. We must establish structures in the body of Christ for testing both the character of the prophetic speaker and the content of the words spoken. In the context of the public worship service, the apostle Paul expressed a principle for local church checks and balances that transcends the confines of the public gathering: "Let two

or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment" (I Corinthians 14:29). Every prophetic voice needs relationships with people who speak truth and enforce balance, testing what comes from the prophetic speaker. Prophetic ministry thrives on healthy relationships. These must not be made up of mere followers and admirers, but people who, while respecting the gift and the office, nevertheless see the humanity of the prophet and speak fearlessly into it with love. "Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy" (Proverbs 27:6).

Humility and Brokenness

Does the following reflect your experience? When was the last time you heard a prophetic person admit to being wrong when prophecies didn't pan out as prophesied? After so many prophetic voices missed it with the Y2K prophecies of disaster 17 years ago, how many open apologies did you hear? When words spoken by a prophetic voice over your personal life or ministry failed to come to pass, how many of us were approached by that same prophetic person expressing sorrow and seeking to make amends?

Have we become full of ourselves and impressed with the gifts in which we move, or do we walk in the kind of humility that recognizes those gifts belong to Him, not to us, and that, if He felt it to be necessary, He could withdraw the anointing in a heartbeat? Do we respond to criticism with grace and mercy, or with anger and defense?

I have a list of rules of ministry I seek to live by. Here are two of them: 1) Never believe your own press. 2) Success is always and in every case toxic. Don't be put off by No. 3. God wants us to succeed. He gets no glory and takes no pleasure in our failures. Just understand that the most dangerous time in any leader's walk is the point at which success comes. It's all too easy to transition from being full of the Spirit to

being full of ourselves. The rush we experience in the glow of success and the adulation people shower upon us can lead us to fail to recognize the moment of transition from Spirit to flesh. All of us need people in our lives who remind us how wonderful we are, but these must also be free to say, "You are acting like a jerk," when we need to hear it.

We desperately need a prophetic reformation for our generation. Let it begin now and let it begin with us. {eoa}

R. Loren Sandford is an author, musician and the founder and senior pastor of New Song Church and Ministries in Denver, Colorado. He has a bachelor's degree in music and a master of divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. In addition to pastoring, Sandford has an international teaching and worship ministry. Married since 1972, he and his wife, Beth, have two daughters and one son. They live in Denver, Colorado.