

How Do You Know If a Message Is Prophetic?

My father's family helped to start the first Pentecostal church in Western New York.

My family attended the local Methodist church every Sunday morning when I was growing up. My mom played the organ and my dad taught the adult Sunday school class. Church life was in our blood and in our very DNA.

When I was 7, my father decided that he wanted his family to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in the church setting. So, although we continued to attend the Methodist church every Sunday morning and serve there, we also began to attend Sunday evening services at the Assembly of God church in a neighboring community.

Instead of staying at home and watching *Lassie* or *The Wonderful World of Walt Disney* on Sunday evenings, we went to a church where the power of the Holy Spirit was moving and alive.

We drove to this Pentecostal house of God through blizzards and through thunderstorms. Weather didn't keep us home ... weariness didn't keep us home ... homework didn't keep us home ... and holidays didn't keep us home.

We went to church! It was who we were and what we did with our lives. There was no whining involved ... no questions asked ... no excuses given.

The Sunday night service began at 7 p.m. with a lively song service, but that was only the beginning! The evening wasn't complete without vibrant testimonies, a Bible-based sermon, and then it was time for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to move. I remember that most Sunday nights, we lingered at the altar

until 10:30 or later. God was there ... He was real ... He spoke even to children!

I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit when I was 8 at that precious Pentecostal altar.

No matter how late we arrived home from Sunday night service, all three Burton children went to school on time on Monday mornings. The call to honor God with our lives went beyond the altar and into the everyday.

When it was time for college, God made it abundantly clear that I was to attend Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. ORU was a place where the Holy Spirit was recognized as a vital and life-giving force.

ORU was a place of worship, of prayer, of hearing God's voice and of dynamic and Spirit-led challenge! And I was there!

I met the man of my dreams at ORU, and we have served the Lord in charismatic churches across the country for 38 incredible years! What a rich honor to be chosen to love the people of God who are simply hungry and thirsty for more of Jesus.

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that has impacted my life greatly not only as a child, but also as a college student and throughout my adult life has been the gift of prophecy.

Have you ever received a prophetic word that just seemed crazy to you? Has anyone ever prophesied gloom, doom and sin over your life?

Have you ever cringed at the proclamation of a self-described prophet and wondered where God was in all of the charismania?

I have. I have wondered, and I have shaken my head in disbelief, and I have asked God to protect unsuspecting victims from the verbal abuse of an overly eager and zealous prophet or prophetess.

I believe in the gift of the prophetic. I believe that God is still speaking today and that one of the ways in which He speaks is by giving words of knowledge and wisdom to men and women who have been called and anointed for such a ministry.

I have often received such words that have resonated in my spirit with fervor and a heartfelt agreement that the God of creation was speaking to me! Imagine that!

However, I have also heard hollow words of condemnation and misplaced authority that a man or woman of God has no business speaking!

So what do we do? Where do we go from here? If we are to be the people of God in this generation who believe in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, how do we exercise such gifts in a healthy and godly manner?

I believe that we approach this in the identical manner as we approach anything else that requires God's heart and God's oversight. We must go to the Word of God for instruction and boundaries.

"But he who prophesies speaks to men for their edification and exhortation and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3).

Edification. Exhortation. Consolation.

Those three words determine the boundaries of the prophetic.

Edification. Exhortation. Consolation.

If a word edifies the listener to whom you are speaking ... give it!

If a word exhorts or brings refreshment to the listener ... give it!

If a word consoles or calms the listener ... give it!

Otherwise ... don't give it!

As I minister to women all across America through the written and spoken word, this is how I view the gift of the prophetic in my ministry:

I go mining for gold in the heart of God concerning a person or a situation and then I place that valuable and beautiful gem found in the heart of God into the life of the listener.

The New Testament prophet was given the extraordinary role of edifying people, exhorting people and consoling people! What an honor! {eoa}

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical, biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books: No More Ordinary, Holy Estrogen!, The Rooms of a Woman's Heart and Defiant Joy! Her most recent book, Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire, was released on Aug. 1. Her teaching DVD The Rooms of a Woman's Heart won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming.