

How to Have Prophetic Integrity in an Age of Fake Encounters

When I first began walking with the Lord, I didn't understand how He speaks. I would listen to people talk about their experiences with Him—how He came to them and answered their questions while they were praying. Right away I began to build up this picture in my head of God physically walking into the room and starting an audible conversation.

Their stories inspired my prayer life—but not necessarily in a healthy way. I started asking God, “Why don't You love me like You love them? Why don't You come and visit me? I want to sit down and have a conversation with You! Is there something wrong with me that I can't hear You like they do?”

It wasn't until later that I realized what was happening. The stories I was hearing weren't the exact truth.

What Really Happened?

I know they didn't intend to mislead the rest of us. Maybe they wanted to look spiritual. Perhaps they desired to inspire trust in God's willingness to speak, or they wanted to help people believe what they were saying. The problem was, God *didn't* walk into the room in physical form and have an audible conversation with them. They simply meant they'd felt His presence. While they were praying, they sensed answers to their questions, and because of their history with the Lord, they recognized God was speaking to them. But that was not what they communicated.

The Danger of Exaggerating a Spiritual Experience

There are times when God really does walk into people's rooms

and speak to them face to face. These encounters are life changing and precious, but when we exaggerate our everyday experiences with God, people will have trouble knowing what is real. An exaggerated spiritual experience has a similar effect as crying wolf.

I spent years thinking I couldn't hear from God very well because I rarely heard Him say specific words—I would just know things or feel them. Sometimes I would get a sense of a picture in my mind, but seldom would I see anything in the physical realm. Feeling like a failure spiritually didn't help my already painful issue with rejection that needed to be healed.

What the Prophetic Really Needs

In both Hebrew and Greek, the root of the word “integrity” basically means that something is the same on the inside as it is on the outside, that it really is what it appears to be. When we have integrity, what we believe and value is the same as what we do and say. We are trustworthy; people know the persona we present to them is who we are when we're alone.

When it comes to the prophetic, the principle of integrity is essential. We need to be honest about our spiritual experiences. If we feel we have to “blow up” our experiences to get people to believe we had them, we need to take a step back and examine our hearts.

Imagination vs. Revelation

I was in a meeting once where someone was teaching about hearing from God and having encounters with Him. The person explained how the imagination is important in hearing from Him, and if you just *imagine* you're in Heaven or face to face with God, you can tell everyone it really happened. If you imagine seeing an angel, you really did. The teacher used Romans 12:6 as justification for this concept: “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use

them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith.” Their point was that prophesying requires faith.

It is true that faith is vital, but what the teacher described was not faith—it was actually lying. According to *The Oxford Dictionary*, one definition of lying is to “present a false impression.” I have a conviction I cannot shake—I don’t believe the Spirit of truth requires deception for someone to be “in faith.” It would be contrary to the Spirit’s nature to bear witness to spin, exaggeration or falsehood.

Another time we can discuss the role imagination plays in revelation, but one thing is sure: Imagination and revelation are not the same thing! Yes, God will speak to us through our imaginations, but integrity requires that we are honest about what we did and did not experience. When it comes to telling others what we’ve heard from God, all we have to do is explain how we received the revelation and trust His Spirit of Truth to witness to the experience’s validity in people’s hearts.

If we think God might have spoken to us in our thoughts, we could say, “I had this thought I believe may be from God.” If we saw a picture, we could say something like, “I just saw this in my mind’s eye.” If an angel stands in front of us in the physical realm, we can say boldly, “An angel came to me.” We need to communicate what really happened and let God determine whether people believe it. If we have to convince them the experience was real, we’re relying on our powers of persuasion and it won’t last.

Integrity in the prophetic requires a high level of honesty. It is not faith to pretend something was more than what it was or to make one thing look like another. Our “yes” should be “yes” and our “no” should be “no” (Matt. 5:37).

We Don’t Have to Prove the Revelation

The funny thing is, when we are simply honest with the revelation God gives us, people will believe our words. We

don't even have to tell them something was from God—we just put it out there, and they will tell us it was from God. When we speak honestly, the Spirit of truth bears witness to what we say and people respond. We no longer need to persuade people to believe we hear from God, because He does it for us.

We Can Expect People to Take Action

When people believe us, they are much more likely to act on what we say. The probability of a life being changed is greater—because the change doesn't come from what we're saying but from the activity of the Holy Spirit.

We're Role Models

Integrity in the prophetic has another benefit: People learn to hear from God! People who may not be as “studied” in their ability to hear from Him are watching us. Thoughts go through their heads and they aren't sure if they're from God, or they see things and hear things and want to know how to respond.

When we talk about our victories *and* failures, hope begins to grow in their hearts that they, too, can hear from God. When they find out that our sense of God's answer during prayer changed the direction of our lives and we are now convinced God spoke to us, faith washes through them. They become willing to take a risk with the little thing they're sensing and trust it could be from God, too.

Integrity Leads to Breakthrough

Right now, many people are disillusioned by prophetic words that don't seem to have substance or that are partially correct to not accurate at all. They don't want inflated stories of encounters that do more to puff up the ministry of the person speaking than they do to build up the body of Christ. But we don't need to point a finger at these people. We just need to be the change ourselves.

Let's do our part to practice integrity in the prophetic. Then when God really does walk into the room, people will believe us when we talk about it! {eoa}

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To learn more about how God is purifying the prophetic, check out *Prophetic Reformation—Maturing Prophetic Communities* as well as other resources from John E. Thomas and John Paul Jackson at [http://www.streamsministries.com](#).