

Life-Shifting Words and Moments in Due Season

There are many ways God leads us by His Holy Spirit, and one is through the gift of prophecy, where the Spirit shows us something that will happen or gives us direction or a warning. Prophecy is among the most misunderstood spiritual gifts but one of the most worthwhile. In the Old Testament the prophet represented God and spoke for God to the people. And they'd better not get it wrong because the penalty was death. False prophecy was and is judged harshly by the Lord. In the New Testament, only the 12 apostles carried the same authority as the Old Testament prophets to speak the very words of God.

Over the years, I've reported on many prophetic people and those who claim to be prophets. One of the significant honors of my life was knowing Oral Roberts. In my home growing up, we saw his ministry on television and always spoke of him in almost reverential tones. When we named the great evangelists of the day, they were Oral Roberts and Billy Graham, and always in that order.

I was invited to a leaders meeting at Oral Roberts University in 1981 when Oral Roberts was still president of ORU. He hosted a banquet on the top floor of what was then called the City of Faith. After the meal we stood next to our seats for a time of worship. President Roberts moved around the room, laying hands on and praying for everyone as we worshipped.

I was nervous as he approached me, wondering what he'd say. He laid hands on me and whispered in my ear, "Never doubt the gift that's within you."

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That word has come to mind many times over the years, and I

believe it was a prophetic word—as short as it was—to me. I was still in my 20s. Charisma magazine was beginning to be known nationally, but I was operating beyond my league, as we were gaining a national audience and covering the Christian community.

I came from a family that believed small was better than big and preferred the status quo over taking a risk. As a result, an inbred uncertainty hounded almost every decision I made.

Jamie Buckingham, who was Roberts' good friend, is the one who introduced me to this great man of God. But he also had a prophetic word for me when I first got to know him in 1977. Someone had asked him to pitch a project to me—one many young journalists would have jumped at. But I knew it wasn't God's will for my life, so I said thanks, but no thanks.

Buckingham said he had hoped I'd say no, and then asked how he could get involved with my fledgling magazine. I needed a mentor at that point in my life, and Buckingham was that and more—he was a friend, a spiritual leader and a confidant, and his wit and wisdom were guiding lights to me. I recently found a copy of his book "Look Out, World—I'm Me!" and enjoyed rereading many of his insights.

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Buckingham was one of the most spiritual men I knew, yet he was down-to-earth. He had keen insight, saw through the hype of many ministries and loved to poke a pin into the prideful balloons of buffoons that make a laughingstock of all those who call themselves Pentecostal. He was also the most open person I knew. He lived a life that was vulnerable and transparent. He was a great man in my eyes, even though I saw his weaknesses as well as his strengths. But when I met him, I didn't think too much of myself. If anything, I was timid and

overwhelmed by the challenges of starting Charisma. I didn't need a pin in my balloon—I needed an encouraging word.

And here's where he gave what sounds like secular advice, but I believe it was a word prompted by the Holy Spirit. He asked me one day over lunch what I would do if I knew I could not fail. The key was *"knew you could not fail."* I never allowed myself to dream in those terms, and his word that day changed the course of my life.

In his book *"Where Eagles Soar,"* Buckingham wrote: "Most of us dream dreams, however then put them aside as impossible. Yet God never puts a desire in our heart or beckons us to walk on water unless He intends for us to step out on faith and at least make the attempt. Whether we achieve or not is almost immaterial; the passing of the test lies in whether we try, in whether we're willing to be obedient to the inner call to greatness—the onward call to spiritual adventure."

Unfortunately, most Christians never learn this. Or after one attempt, they give up. They never learn that there is a price to be paid. I'm grateful for people like Buckingham, whom God put in my life to give me a prophetic "word spoken in due season."

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