

Before You Ask God for a Word, Be Willing to Say Yes

God loves to speak to us. Psalm 85:8 (NASB) says: “I will hear what God the Lord will say; for He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones.” At the right time, the Lord offers a fresh word for us that can bring strength, guidance, confirmation or correction. There have been countless times when I was famished for a word from God, and when He spoke it came like a drink of cold water in the desert.

But there’s a right way and a wrong way to seek God for His direction. I’ve seen Christians line up in front of prophets, hoping for a quick solution to their problems. I’ve also seen those same Christians stand in line a second time in front of the same prophets because they didn’t like the word they received the first time.

Prophecy is a legitimate spiritual gift, and we are instructed to desire it earnestly in 1 Corinthians 14:1. But we should never abuse or misuse this precious gift. Here are some guidelines that will help you:

Read the Bible regularly. Many Christians crave a direct word from God, yet they refuse to spend time reading Scripture. They may even consider reading the Bible boring—yet they love the thrill of getting a prophetic word in a public meeting. Carnal Christians aren’t willing to be disciplined students; they want their prophetic words handed to them on a silver platter.

You will never become a mature Christian if you don’t learn to hear from God on your own through His Word. And if you don’t read Scripture regularly you won’t know the difference between a true prophecy and a fake one—because prophecy never contradicts the Bible.

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Look to God for direction, not man. I don't chase prophets so they can tell me what to do or to show me my spiritual purpose. True prophets are gifts to the body of Christ—but my focus is on God, not on the men or women He uses. If you ever start looking to a human being as your source of divine guidance, you are heading toward unhealthy idolatry.

People who have the gift of prophecy must be careful they don't allow people to put them on pedestals. We are not mediums who read people's fortunes, and prophets should never allow themselves to be put in such a position.

Stop looking for the sensational. We've all heard of charismatic prophets who provide phone numbers or addresses in their prophetic words. It's true that God has the power to reveal such personal information, but in some such cases the "prophets" were actually con artists who preyed on the gullible. Beware of prophets who use sensational means to bring a word to you. In all my years of ministry, I have observed that the most solid prophets were humble men and women who never drew attention to themselves.

The apostle Paul told us that true prophecy is about three things: encouragement, comfort and exhortation (see 1 Cor. 14:3). True prophecy strengthens us, confirms God's promises and propels us into our divine destiny. Beware of words that draw people's attention to the messenger.

Don't be impatient when seeking prophetic guidance. I've talked with Christians who were desperate for a word from God, but they informed me they were on a deadline. They needed instant spiritual gratification. Sometimes they seemed to be threatening God—as in, "If I don't hear from God by tomorrow, I quit!"

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God moves according to His sovereign calendar, not yours. Don't allow impatience to derail your Christian journey. Don't throw a tantrum; mature disciples must learn to wait for God's word, and for the fulfillment of it. Waiting will require you to adjust your timetable to God's.

Sometimes God deliberately pushes the mute button. If His voice is not clear right now, it may be because He's leading you into a quiet wilderness season. The quiet can be painful, but you must learn to trust Him in the dark. Wait on the Lord, and let your roots grow deep.

Make sure your heart is willing to obey. Many people are eager to hear from God, especially if the prophecy tells them they will have a worldwide ministry or that they are going to become independently wealthy. But God's word is never sent to puff us up, flatter us or stroke our egos. A true word from God cuts deep to our core; it requires surrender and demands holiness.

Make sure you are willing to embrace a true word from God before you ask for it. Henry Blackaby once wrote: "Our difficulty is not that we don't know God's will. Our discomfort comes from the fact that we do know His will, but we do not want to do it."

God gave Jonah a clear word: "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it" (Jon. 1:2). Yet Jonah ran in the opposite direction because of his unwillingness. Before you seek a word from God, lift your hands and yield to what He says. The best way to welcome God's prophetic message is with an attitude of unconditional surrender.

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