

Women and the Prophetic Ministry

In 1955 a little 4-year-old girl crept up into her mother's lap. "Mama," she said, "I want a baby sister."

The young mother smiled, amused by the child's request. "Sweetheart," she chuckled, "we're not having any more children. You're the last one."

But the 4-year-old was insistent. She just knew Mama was going to have a baby girl. And as it turned out, she was right!

I was that 4-year-old child, and the next year my baby sister, Lucy, was born. That was 48 years ago, and at that time I had no idea that the "knowing" I sensed about Lucy's birth was a "prophetic word." Nor did I realize that my prophesying the birth of my sister was part of the fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from the Old Testament book of Joel: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18, NKJV).

Peter said that because of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, both sons and daughters—men and women—will prophesy. The gift of prophecy is not for men only. Women can be prophets too.

Prophetic Women in History

The truth is, women have been prophets throughout Bible history. The Holy Spirit was quite intentional about the people He included in Scripture, and He gives us many examples of women operating in the prophetic gifts in both the Old and

New Testaments.

It's true that no female prophet wrote a book of the Bible. Nevertheless, Scripture records that prophetic women have always been used in great and significant ways for the Lord.

One Old Testament prophet was Huldah, a woman who was consulted during Josiah's reign when the lost book of the Law was discovered (see 2 Kin. 22:14). A contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah, Huldah apparently was quite influential and known for her wisdom and ability to hear God.

Deborah, another Old Testament prophet, had a governmental anointing (see Judg. 4-5). And according to Isaiah 8:3, the prophet Isaiah was married to a woman who was a prophet.

The New Testament also mentions women prophets. One of those was Anna, the old widow who spent most of her time fasting and praying in the temple.

When Mary and Joseph brought their baby to the temple to present him to the Lord, Anna knew supernaturally that this child was the long-awaited Messiah. Luke 2:38 says that Anna "gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem" (NIV).

Other women prophets in the New Testament include the daughters of Philip the evangelist. Acts 21:8-9 says that all four of Philip's daughters prophesied.

Many women in our own day have become widely recognized for their prophetic gifts. Violet Kitley of Shiloh Christian Fellowship in Oakland, California, is a seasoned prophet who has operated in her gift for many decades. The same is true of Gwen Shaw, the founder of End-Time Handmaidens.

Other modern-day prophets include Barbara Wentroble, Barbara Yoder, Stacey Campbell, Jill Austin, Beth Alves and Jane Hamon. These women have prophesied in the United States and

around the world. While their ministries are quite diverse, each one has stepped forward to answer the Holy Spirit's call in Acts 2:17: "Your daughters shall prophesy" (NKJV).

Prophecy 101

What does it mean to prophesy? A woman prophesies when she is prompted by God to deliver a message to a particular individual (personal prophecy) or a group (corporate prophecy). The message comes to her by the revelatory activity of the Holy Spirit.

When prophecy happens in prayer, it's called "prophetic intercession." God moves upon the heart of a woman while she is interceding, prompting her to pray prayers about things that are far beyond her natural knowledge.

Let me give you an example of prophetic intercession. A woman I'll call Susan was asked by an elder of her church to pray for their congregation because certain people were causing problems and stirring up dissension.

Not knowing any of the specifics, Susan began to pray in a general way. Suddenly this sentence fell out of her mouth: "And Lord, those 80-year-old ladies who are gossiping and causing problems need to be touched by You and convicted of what they are doing to the church."

The elder was astonished. Susan had prayed specifically for what he knew was the root of the problem. Without realizing it, Susan had entered into prophetic intercession.

The Training Ground of Prayer

For Susan and many other women, intercession is the training ground for the prophetic gifts. Often it is the way a woman first begins to receive what she later comes to recognize as prophetic words.

A woman who has a prophetic gift tends to pray differently

than other people. She may begin by praying a simple prayer of petition. Then, all of a sudden, the tonality of her voice changes. A ring of authority comes. It is as though she has shifted gears in the Spirit as the power of the Holy Spirit energizes the words of her prayer.

When her intercession hits the mark time and time again, she begins to develop confidence that she is actually hearing from God. Eventually she may begin to step forward to share what she is sensing from God at other times.

The fact is, very few people who stand in front of others and give prophetic words on a regular basis start out in such a public way. Most begin by praying for people and having those people exclaim, "How did you know to pray like that? What you prayed fits my need exactly!"

That's how it happened for me. When I first began prophesying, I had no idea that what I was doing was prophetic. People at my church just kept asking me to pray for them, and I did.

After a while I began to notice that the things I prayed proved to be accurate, and my prayers were often fulfilled in dramatic ways. I realized that God was giving me supernatural knowledge—I was hearing the voice of God! Since then, I've come to recognize and trust His voice all the more.

Typically God doesn't give me a lengthy prophecy while I'm in prayer. Rather, a name or some other piece of information will come to me. Then, as I open my mouth to pray, I trust God to fill it with the words of intercession that He wants.

Sometimes this kind of praying involves a progressive revelation of the Lord's will. For example, I was interceding one day and kept hearing a particular man's name. I heard no other words, yet I felt great alarm for this man—whatever he was.

"Father, protect him. Encourage him," I prayed. "Don't let him

do something he shouldn't do."

The next day I received a request to pray for a well-known traveling evangelist who was suffering great discouragement. His name was the one that had come to me the day before!

From that point on I was able to pray for this man with even greater knowledge. I believe the Lord may have averted a suicide attempt through the prayers of intercessors during this critical period in the evangelist's life.

No Formula

Although it's true that many women are trained in the prophetic gifts through intercession, hearing the voice of God and responding to His prophetic call can't be reduced to a formula. For one thing, not all prophetic calls are alike.

We are unique in the gifts and abilities God has given us. As a result, God's methods for stirring up our spiritual gifts will differ from woman to woman.

The important thing is that we learn to be sensitive to God's voice and respond to His prompting when it comes. This sensitivity is often easier for women than it is for men, since women tend to be naturally more sensitive. Our innate ability to "tune in" opens our hearts to hear the voice of God in many different ways.

Sometimes what we call "women's intuition" is really the gift of prophecy at work. For example, Shirley Dobson, wife of Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, had a "prophetic intuition" one day that caused her to stop what she was doing and immediately begin praying for the protection of her daughter, Danae.

She had no reason to believe that Danae was in any danger. But later that evening she understood why God had prompted her to pray with such urgency.

At about the time Shirley began praying, Danae was driving through a rainstorm on a mountain road. All of a sudden the car began skidding on the wet gravel, and Danae lost control. The car rolled and landed upside down in the middle of the road.

Thankfully, Danae escaped with only an injury to her left hand. According to the police, the outcome could have been much worse. If the car had skidded another 30 feet, it would have reached a part of the road that had no guardrail and plunged down a 500-foot embankment.

Learning to Prophecy

I believe God wants to raise up an army of women who, like Shirley Dobson, are sensitive to His voice. He wants to use us mightily in our families, our churches, our cities and even our nations to pray and speak His prophetic word into all kinds of circumstances.

How can you become part of that army? Start by eagerly desiring the spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Allow God to stretch you in your prayer times, and trust Him to give you supernatural prayers that go beyond your natural knowledge.

Believe that God will teach you what you need to know so that you can begin to hear Him and share His word with others. It may sound strange, but we do need to learn to prophecy. By that I mean we must learn to become skilled at effectively sharing what God seems to be saying in a way that is in order and in His timing and that brings edification to all concerned.

Years ago, as my prophetic gift was beginning to emerge, I had a propensity for sticking my foot in my mouth (and in other people's mouths, too, for that matter). Among my problems were harshness, bad timing in sharing prophecies and pride over the fact that I was the one hearing from God.

Of course, God wasn't going to let me go on that way forever. When I finally cried out for help, He began sending people along my path to teach me and mentor me.

Now I like to return the favor. I often mentor young prophetic believers by taking them with me when I travel and asking them to pray with me.

"Cindy," they invariably exclaim, "I knew what you were going to pray before it came out of your mouth!" They're so excited to discover that the same Holy Spirit praying through me is also praying through them.

Here Am I, Send Me

I remember the night long ago when God made my prophetic calling crystal clear to me. He reminded me of the prophecy that Peter quoted in Acts 2: "Your sons and your daughters shall on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit" (vv. 17-18).

Then I sensed Him saying, "Cindy, if that prophecy is going to be fulfilled, I need some maidservants, and I have chosen you."

I got down on my knees. "Here am I, Lord. Send me," I responded.

Since that time, the road has not been easy. Much of my training has been difficult—even painful. And I am still learning.

Perhaps you are just starting off in the prophetic ministry, and you are wondering how you will ever make it. How will you possibly learn everything you need to know?

I believe I can boldly assure you that God will give you someone who can come alongside you to mentor you. Or, if you live in a place where there are no mentors, He will find another way to train you.

After all, it's God's desire and plan for His daughters to prophesy. If God has given you a prophetic gift, be faithful to develop it and use it for His glory. If you persevere, He will see that you receive all the training you need.

Cindy Jacobs is co-founder with her husband, Mike, of Generals of Intercession, an organization that builds prayer ministries throughout the world. Portions of this article were adapted from her book, The Voice of God. Published by Regal. Used by permission.