



Prophetic Ministry

Definition, Biblical Basis, and Guidelines

By Brock Bingaman

At OLCC, we are passionate about hearing the voice of God through Scripture and through the responsible use of the gift of prophecy. The following is intended to outline key aspects of prophetic ministry, including its definition and biblical basis, guidelines for giving and receiving a prophetic word, and practical ways to grow in prophetic ministry. We value open discussion around prophetic ministry (and other practices in our community), so if you have questions or concerns, please reach out to someone on our pastoral team.

What is the prophetic or prophetic ministry?

God, as Scripture conveys, has been speaking since the very beginning. God *spoke* and creation came into being (Gen. 1:3). God spoke through the Old Testament prophets, through his Son, the Lord Jesus, and through the apostles and authors of the New Testament. God continues to speak to and through his people. As Richard Foster humorously says, God has not developed laryngitis.¹ God speaks and draws his people into ever deeper friendship with himself.

Theologian Wayne Grudem explains that the New Testament gift of prophecy involves *reporting something God brings to mind*.² Prophecy is, therefore, hearing God speak and communicating what God says. The New Testament gift of prophecy functions differently than prophecy in the Old Testament. In short, the Old Testament prophets were expected to speak the very words of God, which carry unique authority. Likewise, the words of the New Testament apostles carry exceptional authority. The gift of prophecy practiced in the early church, however, was to be “tested” (1 Thess. 5:21). Therefore, today when we practice the gift of prophecy – the process of reporting something God brings to mind – it requires discernment on the part of the one sharing a prophetic word and the one receiving the word from someone else.

Further, Jesus says that his followers will be familiar with his voice: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Every Christian has experienced this “hearing” of the voice of Jesus, beginning with the call to salvation. Christians continue to hear the voice of Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit, as our relationship with God grows daily. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would continue to communicate with us: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you... When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 14:26; 16:13-14).

The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, indwells us and will guide us into all truth, including the true, biblical practice of New Testament prophecy. With the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the gift of prophecy

¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2018), 19.

² Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 71ff, 95ff.

was made more accessible than ever before. The apostle Peter, quoting a prophecy from Joel, explained that the Holy Spirit was being poured out on all of God's people, not just a few: "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18).

God speaks, and graciously pours out the Holy Spirit on all Christians, to help us hear his voice, obey him, and share his word with others. To help the church at Corinth grow in hearing and sharing the words of God in prophecy, the apostle Paul writes: "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy...the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:1, 3, NIV).

At OLCC, we value the gift of prophecy and do all we can to practice it in accordance with the teachings of Scripture: in the spirit of love, and to strengthen, encourage, and comfort one another.

Giving and receiving a prophetic word

There are a few essentials when it comes to giving and receiving prophetic words. First, we offer ongoing training for those interested in learning more about the gift of prophecy and how to practice the gift. (In the last section of this handout, you can find information along this line, as well as suggestions for growing in the gift, and reading about the gift of prophecy.)

Second, in accordance with Paul's admonition, we "eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy" (1 Cor. 14:1). And we practice the gift of prophecy in line with particular biblical principles, what we call "prophetic protocol" or "prophetic guidelines." The intent is not to clamp down on the use of the gift of prophecy, but to encourage its greater use *in reasonable and responsible ways* that are taught in Scripture. Regarding the practice of prophecy and other spiritual gifts, Paul says that "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). Further, because prophecy is "in part," like seeing dimly in a mirror (1 Cor. 13:9, 12), we are to test each prophecy and hold on to what is good (1 Thess. 5:21).

Thus, our protocol for giving a prophetic word includes the following four aspects (which can be remembered by the peculiar acronym **B-E-A-N**):

1. **Biblical.** Is the content of the prophetic word in line with the teachings of Scripture?
2. **Encouraging.** Is the word encouraging? Does it encourage and build up (1 Cor. 14:3)?
3. **Avoiding certain topics.** Does the word steer clear of addressing: romance, marriage, pregnancy/birth, leaving jobs, judgment of sin, or other particularly sensitive topics?
4. **Non-dogmatic.** Is the word delivered as a conditional invitation rather than an unconditional declaration? Our suggested way of prophesying is: "I sense the Lord saying/showing/doing this..." We do not declare: "Thus says the Lord..."

Therefore, we encourage those giving and receiving prophetic words to be thoughtful, respectful, and friendly to one another. Asking three questions can help with this:

1. Jesus says, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you" (Mt. 7:12). This applies to prophecy. **Am I: "Prophesying to others as I would have them prophesy to me"** (with grace, mercy, and encouragement)?

2. **Does this prophetic word reflect a loving embrace from the Father or a poke in the eye?** A prophetic word should leave the one receiving it feeling a sense of God's love, not judgment.

3. **Am I receiving this word with grace**, acknowledging that the person giving it is not infallible nor to be put on a pedestal. In Christian community, we learn to discern *together*, showing mercy to one another, and growing in maturity.

Cultivating prophetic ministry

We are committed to growing in the gift of prophecy, along with all the other spiritual gifts. For those interested in learning more about and cultivating the gift of prophecy, we recommend that you:

1. Earnestly desire the gift of prophecy, as Paul says (1 Cor. 14:1), and ask God to speak to you in Scripture, dreams, visions, and other ways (Acts 2:17-18; Num. 12:6).
2. Immerse your mind and heart in Scripture. The Word of God is living and active (Heb. 4:12), it is full of prophetic words that illumine us (2 Pet. 1:9), and transform our minds (Rom. 12:2).
3. Participate in the ongoing training opportunities at OLCC. Check olcc.org for ongoing training opportunities.
4. Focus on developing your friendship with Jesus. Learning to hear his voice is the natural outcome of walking with him on a daily basis.
5. Practice sharing prophetic words in various contexts: in small groups, on Sundays, in public places (where you shop, exercise, etc.). Like all spiritual gifts, practice is key to growth.
6. Pursue character over gifting. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) are more important than the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13:8, 13). Focus on growing in love, humility, and teachability.
7. Avoid prophetic weirdness: saying or doing strange things. Prophetic people can control themselves (1 Cor. 14:32). Let's do our best to "be supernatural in natural ways."
8. Give what you've got. Don't wait for something more "extraordinary" or add something to spice it up. There is power in simplicity.

Suggested resources

Wayne Grudem. *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000).

Jack Deere. *Surprised by the Voice of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

_____. *The Beginner's Guide to the Gift of Prophecy* (Bloomington: Chosen, 2001).

Graham Cooke. *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting* (Kent: Sovereign World, 1994).

Clifford Hill. *Prophecy Past and Present: An Exploration of the Prophetic Ministry in the Bible and Church Today* (New York: Vine Books, 1991).

David Hill. *New Testament Prophecy* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1979).

Storms, Sam and Matt Chandler. *Practicing the Power: Welcoming the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017).

<https://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/10-things-you-should-know-about-judging-prophetic-words>

Brock Bingaman is lead pastor at OLCC, and director of All Saints Center for Theology, Spirituality, and Leadership. Having earned an M.Div. at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a Ph.D. at Loyola University Chicago, Brock is passionate about equipping the saints in sound biblical theology and the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit.