

Growing in the Gift of Prophecy:

Wisdom and Warnings

By Steve Thompson

As we recover the spirit of prophecy and grow in God's love, there are some practical points we can observe to help us navigate safely in prophetic ministry. This article contains practical advice, wisdom and warnings that can save you, and those you minister to, significant trouble.

Wisdom: Be Yourself.

In any ministry there is a danger of trying to pattern ourselves after someone who is anointed, successful, or accepted. Because of their past

rejections or current insecurities, many prophetically gifted people are especially prone to imitate someone in their ministry style.

We have all encountered people who have been influenced by

a prominent minister and adopted some of their mannerisms. But seldom is this positive. While we are all influenced by those we highly esteem, we must endeavor not to be copies of anyone.

Do not fall to imitating others. You can be a good "you," but you will probably be a mediocre someone else. If you act like someone else, people will see it and think you are only acting in your ministry as well. The world needs to experience those who are secure enough in God to be themselves and let God's glory shine through. You must be who God has made you to be.

Warning: We know in part, and we prophecy in part.

Scripture says that we know in part and we prophecy in part (I Corinthians 13:9). It is imperative not only to realize that we can be wrong, but that we are seldom completely right. None of us ever really sees the whole picture, but only in part. If we possess this humility of heart and mind, we can avoid many unnecessary errors and mistakes.

Remember that regardless of how accurate we may be in our revelation and interpretation, we are only seeing part of the picture. We must realize that there is also more wisdom and insight for a situation than what we are seeing. Be open to receiving additional insight from others and from the Lord.

Some of the most gifted prophetic ministers I know often misinterpret the revelation they receive. God allows this for several reasons: 1) to keep those who are profoundly gifted humble and teachable, 2) to keep us dependent on Him, and 3) to keep us from wrongly elevating prophetically gifted people to a place of infallibility.

Wisdom: God often speaks in many different ways at one time.

When I minister prophetically, I am not just receiving revelation from the Lord in one fashion, but several different ways at once. I may receive a simple vision and then recognize some wounds within this person through discerning of spirits at the same time. The discernment I receive dictates how I share the revelation with the person.



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Be open to all of the different ways God speaks to you when you are ministering to someone. As we grow in experience, wisdom, and sensitivity, our prophetic ministry can be a powerful tool to set people free.

Warning: The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets.

God will seldom have us interrupt a meeting to prophesy. Many people have been taught that when the Holy Spirit reveals something to them, they should immediately interrupt the meeting and prophesy “loudly” to the congregation. However, this is generally not the best case scenario.

Our spirit, the motivating influence of our life, is subject to us (I Corinthians 14:32). The Holy Spirit will not make us do something through pressuring us. Even though we may feel “an anointing” or “power to prophesy”, we still maintain control over our spirits. God does not override our freewill to make us do things. We cannot blame God for something that we are doing.

Wisdom: Practice the word of knowledge.

Generally, when we begin in the prophetic, we make some mistakes in interpretation. Over the years, I have adopted a simple way to hone my ability to understand how God speaks to me. I practice the word of knowledge. I actually did this much more in earlier years, when my opportunities to minister were limited. Practicing a spiritual gift may sound strange, but it really is not.



I practiced prophecy by silently praying for waiters or bank tellers and then testing what I received by asking them questions. This gave me an opportunity to grow in my understanding and my ability to discern

the Lord's voice. Also, many people were ministered to as I practiced. In fact, some were profoundly touched.

Warning: Don't prophesy beyond your faith.

Many people have such a passion to function in the higher levels of a word of knowledge that it causes undue trouble. After seeing someone prophesy names, birthdays, and intimate details about a person's life, some novices attempt to prophesy beyond their levels of faith.

Generally, we do not begin at higher levels, but rather progress into more clarity and accuracy as we gain experience and confidence. Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of God in agricultural terms. Likewise, we must recognize that most areas of our spiritual lives progress from the blade to the ear, to the full corn in the ear (see Mark 4:26-28). Do not despise the day of small beginnings.

Wisdom: Stretch beyond your comfort zone.

While we should not despise the day of small beginnings, we must hunger for more revelation and more accurate interpretations. Generally, God will meet us at our level of hunger. If we feel like we can live without something, we probably will.

One way to stretch beyond my comfort zone when I am ministering is always to ask the Lord for more than what He has given me. If He does and it is more specific or detailed revelation than what I have been receiving, I test it. I will minister the revelation that I have confidence in and then inform the person that I am not sure about this last one. Then I will often change from speaking confidently, to asking them if this piece of information is accurate.

If it is accurate, that it was phrased as a question generally does not lessen its impact. If it is not accurate, or is only partially accurate, we can avoid much misunderstanding by presenting it according to the measure of faith we have (Romans 12:6).

Warning: Don't try to control anyone with prophetic revelation or your reputation.

Manipulation is bad. Don't do it.

Wisdom: Honor the written Word.

The Bible is a wonderful gift from God. When we hide the Word in our hearts, we will grow in all things spiritual, not just the prophetic ministry.

During different seasons, we require all of our prophetic people to present a confirming or justifying scripture to support what they prophesy. If they have a vision that is not based on biblical symbolism, we require them to also prophesy a scripture that supports the revelation they have received. This has been a fruitful discipline for our teams.

The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.

Mark 6:28



Warning: Listen to your pastor.

Pastors generally may not see the things we do. If they did, they would not be pastors but prophetic ministers. But God made them pastors, not us. God not only gave us to help them, but God gave them to help us. They can help us if we will listen to Him.

Wisdom: Follow the Presence of the Lord.

Many times when we are seeking an interpretation, we need to look for God's presence as much as we look for understanding. Often when we get off course in our pursuit of an interpretation, we will sense confusion in our souls. This is God's way of saying, Don't look here. God often leads us by His presence or the absence of it.

Warning: Serve with your gift, but do not seek to establish yourself or your authority with it.

It is important to step out in ministry and serve others with the revelation God gives us. However, trying to rule with our prophetic gift is another matter. We must never seek to draw people to ourselves with revelation or prophecy.

Spiritual authority is given to us in God's timing. We cannot try to elevate ourselves to positions of authority. Instead, we choose the place of a servant and give ourselves to helping others. When we have learned to serve God by serving others, we have already learned leadership.

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

Proverbs 10:19

Wisdom: Find mature prophetic people to disciple you.

We can learn the lessons others have learned throughout their lifetimes, if we will seek out their friendship and wisdom. They can help you avoid the mistakes they have already made.

Warning: Prophecy what the Lord shows you and nothing else.

Many prophetic people have difficulty starting and stopping when the Lord does. Here is a good rule of thumb: When the Lord shows you something, tell the person. When He stops showing you things, stop talking. *"When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise."* (Proverbs 10:19 NIV). Be wise. Keep your prophetic words concise.

Wisdom: Ask permission before laying hands on someone.

We do not have a God-given right to lay hands on

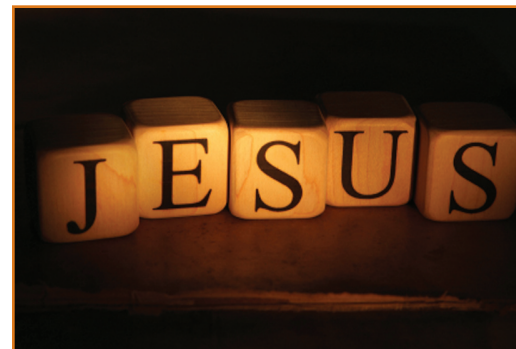
any person, and we should ask God for permission before doing so. If we do not get a check in our spirit, we are then clear to move forward and ask the person if we have their permission to lay hands on them.

Having a prophetic revelation for someone does not allow us to violate their personal sovereignty. They have the right to determine who and when someone lays hands on them for ministry, and we should never assume that we have this right.

Warning: Get healed. Your "discernment" may really be fear and suspicion.

We have to get over the wounds and rejection of the past. Now is a good time. When we are wounded, we will react in our soul and misinterpret what we feel from God. Many people receive negative words about the leadership of their congregation because of past wounds from other leaders.

James 3:17 says that "the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits". If we are wounded in our soul, our discernment is suspect. We must be healed of the past to accurately see prophetically.



Wisdom: Walk away when you are angry.

Misrepresenting God as angry when He was not disqualified Moses from leading Israel into their Promised Land (Numbers 20). Whenever we become tired or provoked, we must keep our mouths closed. Moses was provoked in his spirit and spoke unadvisedly in anger (Psalm 106:33). It is better to excuse ourselves when we feel ourselves getting angry or frustrated. If we prophesy in anger, we will curse rather than bless others, and we will bring judgment on ourselves.

Warning: Avoid prophesying "second heaven" revelations.

Many times prophetic revelation will take the form of us receiving a vision or dream of someone participating in sin. This type of revelation would seem to contradict the idea that prophecy is for encouragement, edification, and comfort. But these types of revelation really fit within that context if we consider that in the majority of these cases, the Lord is revealing to us what the enemy has planned

and not what is currently happening. What is being shown to us is the plan of the enemy, not the purpose of God. We must also realize that what we are sensing is the enemy's plan and probably not



the person's plan. We should not automatically assume that the person is desiring to walk in this sin, but rather that the enemy is laying a trap for them.

Paul said in I Corinthians 13:7 that love hopes all things and believes all things. In all ministry, we should start from the position of hoping and believing that people want to do the right thing. Most

Christians are trying with everything they have to serve God and live righteously. We can injure people if we assume their intentions are bad and accuse them accordingly.

God will often allow us to see the plan of the enemy. Some people who do not understand God's heart or purpose in giving revelation will often interpret the plan of the enemy as the purpose of God.

We cannot prophesy this kind of revelation to someone as being the plan of God. The Lord will

show us the enemy's plan so that we can nullify it, not help it come to pass by prophesying it. One of Satan's greatest tactics is to communicate his lie as God's truth. We must be discerning and know God's heart and plan.

In conclusion, one good discipline for prophetic people is to read I Corinthians 13 every day for the rest of their lives. Walking in the love of God will enable us to avoid most of the mistakes that have been commonly made by immature prophetic people. As we pursue love, let us grow in wisdom and heed these warnings. Our prophetic ministry will become more beneficial in building the church as we avoid these mistakes.

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Steve Thompson

Steve will be joining Jack Deere at the February 3-4, 2012, Equipping Conference. See enclosed brochure



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