

Pastoring the Prophetic

EASTERN REGION



**2004 Fall Ministers' Retreat
Atwood Lake Resort, Ohio
Randall A. Bach, Pastor Superintendent**

We are a Spirit-filled family of ministers and churches that desire to be carried by the wind of the Spirit (John 3:8). God chooses to work through His people, in spite of our feet of clay. We do not serve Him out of our perfection. Accordingly, we need accountability with brothers and sisters to help us walk a Word-faithful, Christ-honoring path. The church needs a pastor who understands the mantle of spiritual authority that is upon his or her shoulders. That anointing should neither be looked upon lightly nor presumed. It is a holy and humbling unction. When the pastor has sought God's face and prayerfully prepared a message he or she should walk in a humble faith and realization that interpreting the Word to the people is a *prophetic declaration*.

Wisdom and discernment must also be exercised when instructing and leading God's people to be open and to flow with the move of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit must always have His way. However, the flesh does not always correctly understand or discern how to act upon hearing the voice of the Spirit. Confusion and division can enter in, a primary tool of Satan in an attempt to thwart a move of the Holy Spirit. At our 2004 retreat we discussed the challenge of pastoring the prophetic, which means pastoring *people* who either operate in a prophetic gift or claim a prophetic mantle for words and actions done in the flesh. A pastor should neither automatically defer or default to people claiming to have a prophetic utterance, and also accept possible error or excesses, nor shut down or control what the Holy Spirit truly does desire to say through imperfect vessels. In order to discuss this subject small groups of pastors and spouses looked at four typical scenarios. Those discussion notes follow.

Let's work on spelling. *Prophecy* (pronounced "profeseye") and *Prophecy* (pronounced "profesee") are very commonly misspelled, depending on usage. Try to remember the difference this way. Prophecy is an action verb: "I will prophesy that..." or "He prophesied to the people." Prophecy is a noun: "That was a prophecy from God," "She operates in the gift of prophecy," "He offered a word of prophecy," or "We received several prophecies last week." Think through how the word is being used and you will be able to select the appropriate "s" verb or "c" noun application. If we are going to instruct our people about the gifts it is advisable that we also correctly spell when we write about the subject of prophecy and how we pastor those who would prophesy.

A challenge that I see in the Spirit-filled church of today is this; we have old-time Pentecostals, many of whom, though passionate, have an understanding about operation of the gifts that is based more on handed down tradition than solid teaching. We also have an influx of new people with absolutely no previous exposure to or teaching about the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, I almost wish we could isolate the groups from one another. We need the passion of the old-timers to be

caught by the new people but want the new people to start fresh in Word-based instruction and Word-validated experience without picking up faulty biases and habits. Hopefully, we have reached a stage in our pastoral leadership where we can lovingly, but courageously, point out that how we respond to the Holy Spirit, emotionally, physically, etc. varies individually. The alternative is “Simon says” regimentation. Because the brother to the left begins to shake does not mean the sister to his right is spiritually deficient for not shaking, or vice versa. We must help people to distinguish between the presence, unction, and moving of the Spirit and how we respond to the Spirit. When our *focus* falls on a hierarchy of manifestations we then give priority to gift over Giver and don’t comprehend how we confine the Holy Spirit to predetermined tracks. Some of us who grew up in the traditional Pentecostal church remember how emphasis was often so exclusively placed on tongues (“You’ve got it!”) that we were seldom taught about the purpose for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We so focused on the initial evidence that we paid no attention to continued evidence (power and fruit).

Most of our church people truly desire for their pastor to assume leadership and walk in spiritual authority regarding how individuals respond to or speak on behalf of the Holy Spirit. While there will always be some folks who believe in license and may become upset if the pastor gives instruction that leads to correction, most people are relieved and feel protected. They want to know they are in good leadership hands that will deal with error or excess. *When leadership is not exercised, misguided folks will fill that void.* What then happens, God’s covering of authority is violated and good people are driven or kept away. What is left of the church is an isolated remnant of the “truly faithful,” who rally around each other with an “us vs. them” spiritual condescension and who are vulnerable to error like snake handlers. Maybe that sounds strong but let’s be very clear about this, the church then ceases to be the church. That body of people becomes a leaderless, aberrant, confused, intolerant, and single-dimension detriment to God’s Church.

Finally, I believe that instruction about the gifts should precede correction. Sometimes, when you have a crisis, you don’t have that luxury because you must take action. However, my observation is that we sometimes forget the importance of ongoing, systematic instruction long before “issues” arise. Here, then, is the pastor’s point of vulnerability. Because the people have not been adequately taught they may not understand when the pastor brings correction. It might sometimes seem easier to just try to deal privately with a problem of the nature we are discussing. However, the pastor can unwittingly elicit great sympathy for the person being corrected if the people perceive that the pastor is being unfair or is in error. You may be running up against tradition and great love for the person needing correction. You need a solid foundation and basis for administering loving correction. Better to do that work ahead of time than trying to run damage control because people are up in arms over the necessary action you have already taken. It is our desire to provide pastoral leadership, inviting people to responsibly walk in the gifts of the Spirit, instead of merely acting as policemen issuing tickets for incorrect or inappropriate words and deeds. Proactive over reactive. Positive over negative. Inviting over discouraging. Hungry over disinterested. Passionate over bored. Faith-filled over skeptical. Anointed over talented. Wise over flippant. Seasoned over brash. Loving over insensitive. Spirit-led over naturally decisive.

Reflections:

- The importance of guidelines and instruction regarding the prophetic and other gifts grows with the size of the church. More people mean more that you do not know; their life and character, etc. Not all prophets in a larger body can exercise their gifts in every service, unless prophecy is incorrectly given a higher priority than the proclamation of the Word.
- One approach (especially if you have several people in the prophetic category) is to invite those who operate in the prophetic, *or believe the Lord may be moving them in that*

direction, to gather with you for times of instruction and counsel. This would not be a class on learning how to be a prophet (anymore than a class to learn how to speak in tongues). It would, though, provide instruction and prayer for those who believe that gift and anointing of the Holy Spirit resides within. People who walk out this process with the pastor could be the ones also entrusted and released by the pastor to bring forth prophetic utterances, if pastor and church leaders have a witness about the gift, and as they demonstrate submission to leadership and discernment regarding timing and how they manifest that work of the Spirit. Not only does this provide guidance, it is also an avenue through which the pastor can *encourage and help* people to newly walk in the gifts. Gifts can lie dormant in the congregation if they are not stirred and released. There could be precious souls who remain silent and do not exercise a gift because they do not understand the work of the Holy Spirit or are intimidated by others who readily push themselves forward.

- Some people feel led to pen a prophetic word, instead of first speaking it, and then submit it to the pastor. Prophetic words are not limited to vocal proclamation.
- A test of prophetic character is whether the prophet is able to submit and entrust a word to spiritual authority, even if it means quietly holding onto the word.
- Prophetic anointing is not increased by how many times we use that word to describe what we have to share. If I have to keep telling you this word is prophetic, is it?
- Trustworthy prophets share what they receive from the Lord, even if and when the word seems incomplete in understanding, without presuming to fill in those blanks in the flesh. There is prophetic integrity in saying, "This is what I hear the Spirit saying, but I do not fully understand what it means or to whom it is directed." That prophet flows with the Spirit without getting in His way or going beyond the revelation that has been revealed to him or her.

Real Life Stories:

- One of our retreat discussion group participants reported sitting in a congregation where an outsider came in and offered an "off the wall" word that went against the unity of the body. When he finished, the pastor publicly said to him, "Sir, that was not from God, we do not receive it, and I want to see you in my office immediately after the service."
- Another group participant reported that a man, who had operated in the prophetic in the body, came to share with his pastor that the Lord had now given him a new language to interpret, Vulcan (Star Trek series). The pastor informed the man that he no longer had permission to bring prophetic utterances or interpretations.

"We cry out, O Lord, for a fresh and renewing move of your Holy Spirit. Help us to be the men and women you have anointed us to be, leaders who humbly, lovingly, and responsibly exercise the mantle of spiritual authority that accompanies your calling. Give us unction, discernment, and wisdom to know how to lead, encourage, instruct, and correct your people so that they walk in the fullness of all that you promise to us. Help us to be able to both judge and teach others to judge and distinguish between that which is from you and that which is of the flesh, even if in your name. We long to be leaders always in pursuit of you, your Word, and your ways. Teach us, show us, flow through us, and use us for your glory. May our church bring joy to your heart and be a sweet fragrance because of our ready eagerness to hear and follow your words. Have your way in us. We are your vessels."

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Discussion Groups

Scenario 1

It has become a regular part of worship services at the church. At some point, frequently at a time of intense worship, at a prayer time at the conclusion of the pastor's sermon, or when people come forward for prayer, Brother Willoughby trumpets a prophetic utterance. Sometimes, this happens right when the pastor is feeling led to move in a different direction. Brother Willoughby is loved and respected by all as a fervent and spiritual man. There is no question about his passion and genuine commitment to the Lord. However, the pastor has become uncomfortable with a sense that Brother Willoughby believes he is the one moved by and through whom the Spirit reserves the most important, and climactic words. This has gone on for some time, and was a pattern before the pastor came to the church. Many people believe in Brother Willoughby's "style" and would be very uneasy about stopping or limiting him. What should the pastor do?

Group A

- Understand that this is not a quick fix.
- Counsel with leaders and discuss the situation, find out how they view it. Is it disruptive? Does it line up with the pastor's instruction and direction? Don't confront without first knowing where the other leaders stand. You need your leaders to be with you.
- Instruct the congregation regarding spiritual gifts, appropriate use and empowerment of others in the use of the gifts. Many people have received no or incorrect teaching. Tradition may have been the primary teacher.
- Build relationship and trust with Brother Willoughby and then discuss concerns in the context of relationship.
- Put corrective safeguards in place to prevent perpetuation of inappropriate behavior that are more tradition-based than Spirit-directed.
- Help Brother Willoughby and others to understand and learn how spiritual authority should be respected.

Group B

- Instruct the congregation regarding proper patterns of human behavior in manifestations of the Holy Spirit.
- Teach respect for authority.
- Build rapport, then instruct Brother Willoughby.
- The pastor must teach about the prophetic.
- The buck stops with the pastor; dealing with Brother Willoughby cannot be delegated.

Scenario 2

Sister McGuillicuddy regularly enters the sanctuary with her “game face” on, ready to do business with God, intent on feeling and hearing the Holy Spirit speak. She has little time for conversations and humor strikes her as interference to a preferred spiritual intensity. Sometimes, at some point in the worship service, Sister McGuillicuddy suddenly erupts with an ear-piercing shriek as she proclaims a word from the Lord (and God is usually very angry). Children, startled by the sound, begin to cry. The people in the pew immediately in front of Sister McGuillicuddy fear for their hearing. Visitors glance at each other and then eye the door. When she concludes her message Sister McGuillicuddy sits down but continues to sob and loudly cry out in tongues for several minutes, while the pastor waits until he can proceed. What should the pastor do?

Group A

- Tell her to hold on to that word until the pastor gives her release to share it.
- Instruct her privately.
- Deal with her promptly or the body will suffer.
- Make sure your purpose and motivation are clear and not misunderstood.
- Encourage the operation of gifts but instruct the people that the scriptural standard of decently and in order must be respected.
- Trust grace to cover visitors and others.

Group B

- Meet with and instruct her in love with a caring heart. She may leave, but your greater responsibility is caring for the body.
- Unity of the body is of utmost importance.
- Prepare yourself for how she will respond.
- Explore to see if she has other, unused gifts.
- Discuss with and help her to become aware of how her messages are being received.
- Clarify that you do not want to stop operation of gifts, but refine how we exercise them, consistent with Scripture.
- Explain that there may be times more appropriate than others for practice of gifts –operation of gifts is subject to the vessel.
- Teach before, during, and after prophetic words (1 Cor. 14:33- about use of tongues, 1 Cor. 14:29 – two or three prophets speak and the other judge [we are to judge words given], 1 Cor. 14:33 – God is not author of confusion, 1 Cor 14:39-40 – decently and in order).
- Take a loving and supportive elder with you when you speak with her.
- She may be hurt, don't make her a martyr.

Scenario 3

Pastor Simmons is frustrated. He so longs for a fresh move of the Holy Spirit in the church's worship services. Instead of what feels like dryness he wants to see gifts of the Spirit in operation, including prophecy. Pastor Simmons, while prophetically proclaiming the Word of God, does not personally move in the gifts of prophetic utterance and interpretation of tongues. He would be delighted if the Holy Spirit would so move through him, and has asked the Lord but that does not seem to be how the Lord chooses to use him. Some of his people, having been baptized in the Holy Spirit, are hungry for more of the Spirit, and may have untapped gifts of the Spirit resident in them, but do not know how to proceed. Other people prefer the predictability and quiet of the status quo. They have shared with the pastor horror stories of when evangelists were brought in years ago, how they had said troubling things, tried to teach or make people speak in tongues, and offered questionable prophecies. The pastor feels caught. What can he do?

Group A

- Seek God first, there are no “canned solutions.”
- Don't fear -- you are pastor and should recognize the authority God has vested in you.
- Teach series on gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Specifically instruct about each gift, providing adequate comprehensiveness.
- Encourage the people and instruct them to administer grace and mercy when a member of the body is somewhat off the mark when operating in a prophetic gift.
- Utilize occasions when a prophetic word is offered as teaching opportunities – affirm that which is good and give instruction on that which may have strayed.
- Confirm, but instruct about when operation of gifts are for the congregation and when they are for private application.
- Teach about discernment, use gentle correction.
- Teach about the dangers of private prophecy without accountability.
- Remember that when God uses a person the flavor of the vessel will probably be included.

Group B

- The pastor needs to exercise sense of leadership.
- The congregation will look to pastor for a framework to understand and respond.
- Use proven outside ministries to help bring proper instruction, if necessary.
- The church board and leadership team must stand together to care for the flock.
- Pursue the heart of worship.
- Develop a safety net to protect the flock.

Scenario 4

Shawna began attending the church about six months ago. She had previously attended two other churches in the city before settling in at the Open Bible church. Few of the manifestation gifts have been in evidence at the Open Bible church, but the people are open. Shawna moves in the gifts. After a few months, she began to frequently bring messages in tongues, followed by the interpretation. The people have fallen in love with her sweetness and Shawna often has personal words of prophesy for individuals. The pastor only recently became aware of the fact that some people were basing important decisions upon the prophecies they receive from Shawna. She is gaining influence among the people. The pastor was initially thrilled when she came and began moving in the gifts. It was like a breath of fresh air. But he is becoming concerned, and has begun to hear rumors about Shawna's life away from the church. What should the pastor do?

Group A

- Get the facts and deal with her history.
- The pastor needs to admit that he didn't handle the situation properly from the beginning (“Shawna, we both messed up here”).
- The gifts should be under a covering for the sake of “testing the spirits” 1 John 4:1.
- All gifts should align with God's Word, Galatians 1:9 – “...if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”
- There is no mention of Shawna's husband, which raises the question, who is her covering (1 Cor. 11:5)? If her husband is not around then she needs to recognize the church leadership as her covering and walk in submission.
- Bring correction to the personal prophecy issue and teach the congregation: 1 Cor. 14; 1 Thes. 5:20-22; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-13; 1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 2 Peter 1:19-21.
- Address personal life – establish fact from fiction. Matt. 12:35 - “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings

forth evil things.” Concerns about her personal life should be addressed according to Matt. 18:15-17.

- Take other leaders with you when dealing with Shawna to provide accountability and covering.
- When personal prophecy is given, as opposed to in the presence of the body and church leaders, there may be no opportunity for the testing of the prophet or the prophecy (1 Cor. 14:28 & 32, 1 Thes. 5:19-22. When a prophet “whispers in the ear,” away from the accountability of pastor or leaders, it is improper and should be addressed.

Group B

- Develop guidelines for personal and public prophecy.
- Investigate Shawna’s background with her previous pastors.
- Teach that the operation in or the manifestation of the gifts is available to all people in the congregation, not limited to just one person.
- Remember that you pastor the person and not the gift.
- Stay balanced; you want to release the gifts while at the same time protect the sheep.