

Prophecy @ TPC¹

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. — 1 Corinthians 14:1

At TPC, we believe in the sufficiency of scripture. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 says, “the sacred writings . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” And it is in these scriptures that we find the command to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). Again, “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:5a). And if there is any doubt about Paul’s meaning, he closes this chapter with the exhortation, “So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39). And it is these same scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that exhort us to “not despise prophecies” (1 Thess. 5:20).

This position paper is meant to lay out, briefly, what prophecy is, how it is used, and where we might see it at work in the church.

[Spiritual gifts](#) are the concrete, tangible manifestations of divine energy in and through followers of Jesus. **The gifts are God himself working in and through us**—God going “public” among his people.

Every Christian is given at least one gift to participate in the discipleship and building up of the Body (1 Cor. 12:7). It is God the Holy Spirit who determines the gift(s) you receive (v11) and each gift is necessary for the maturity of the church (v14-26). The exercise and operation of the gifts must be done in love (chp 13). **If love for other Christians does not control and shape how you employ your spiritual gift, your gift is worse than worthless, it is dangerous.** Spiritual gifts are a wonderful blessing from God, but compared to the transcendent value of love they are but a temporary and incomplete dimension of Christian life.²

At TPC, we are continuationists who believe that all of the gifts of the Spirit are still operating in the church including prophecy, miracles, tongues, and healings. We joyfully receive whatever gifts God gives us, we earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, seek to not despise them even though some have abused them, and humbly strive to grow in the fullness of all that God has for his church **as we seek the Giver and not ultimately the gifts.**

¹ This google doc is to be used for leaders, prayer team, blog posts, etc. All or parts may be used as needed.

² Sam Storms, *Practicing the Power*, p16-17

What is prophecy?

Prophecy is the human report of a divine revelation.³ Sometimes through words, visions, or dreams, God will give insight into someone that you wouldn't be able to know if he didn't reveal it. New Testament prophecy isn't infallible but should be "weighed" (1 Cor. 14:29). It is to be used for the "upbuilding and encouragement and consolation" (v3) of the church, and it should not be "despised" (1 Thess. 5:20), but "earnestly desired" (1 Cor. 14:1).

The foundation or basis of all prophetic ministry is the revelatory work of the Spirit. In other words, prophecy is always the communication of something the Holy Spirit has "revealed" to a person. In Acts 2 this revelatory work of the Spirit is expressed in dreams and visions (Acts 2:18). In 1 Cor. 14:30 Paul makes it clear that a person prophesies only upon reception of a spontaneous revelation from the Spirit. **Prophecy, therefore, is not based on a hunch, a supposition, an inference, an educated guess, or even on sanctified wisdom.** Prophecy is not based on personal insight, intuition, or illumination. Prophecy is the human report of a divine revelation. This is what distinguishes prophecy from teaching. Teaching is always based on a text of Scripture. Prophecy is always based on a spontaneous revelation.⁴

Prophecy is a powerful gift that is much misused and abused. It should be practiced with great humility. Mature Christians with the gift of prophecy hear and see from the LORD much more than they speak.

It's important to emphasize that all the gifts of the Spirit are for the building up of the church. "The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding..." (1 Cor. 14:3. also see v4-5, 12, 17, 26) Gossip, slander, unforgiveness, and bitterness have destroyed more churches than crazy Charismatic stuff—everything we do should be to build up, encourage, comfort, help, guide, love, and teach the church in all humility, gentleness, and truth.

How does it work?

We can hear from God prophetically in multiple ways:

Scripture: We hear from God primarily through the Bible; it is sometimes called "Special Revelation." Usually it is just as simple as reading it—you read the Bible, it's living and active, and it is God's word. But sometimes, some people have experienced—through prayer, typically—a prophetic vision of the book, chapter, and verse that God wants you to see. Where the Spirit of God, in an intimate and personal way, is saying, "this text is for you [or a brother/sister in the faith] right now, go read it."

Spirit-Led Words: Sometimes it seems like in Scripture someone actually hears God's voice (audibly) and other times it seems like someone is hearing God inaudibly in their heart. These can be promptings, impressions, phrases, sentences, or just one word. (Most likely, words of

³ Sam Storms, *Practicing the Power*, p82

⁴ Sam Storms, *Building a Prophetic Ministry in the Local Church*

wisdom/knowledge are similar, if not the same thing, as prophecy. It's probably not important to make a distinction as the biblical writers don't explain any differences. The important thing to remember is that prophecy is the human report of a divine revelation—it's something that you wouldn't know about someone unless the Lord revealed it.)

Dreams: God also communicates through dreams. In particular, in the Muslim community, there have been many testimonies of a Muslim becoming a Christian through dreams where Jesus reveals himself. **Most dreams that are from the Lord, however, should lead you to pray, and probably not share with someone**, or, [if you do feel compelled to share](#), most often you should not try to interpret the dream, but just state what you dreamed to the person.

Visions: These are pictures that you “see” that offer insight into your brother or sister and what God is doing or will do. Again, they are meant for “building up” and should offer intimate, sweet revelation from God to them. Often visions are accompanied by words or a sense of what it means; but **it is usually best to state the vision and ask what it means to them, rather than interpreting the vision for them.**

Things to keep in mind:

1. *Prophecy isn't meant to be something you pursue for everyday choices.* This gets weird when you're waiting on the LORD to tell you what you should eat for dinner! Remember, **spiritual gifts are for the building up of the church—to serve other people**, not as an excuse for inaction or to be employed for your own gain or comfort.

2. *Let's be a praying church.* If you aren't spending time praying for people, God is probably not going to give you a prophetic word for them.

3. *Avoid dramatic pronouncements such as, “Thus saith the Lord,” or “This is the word of the Lord for your life,” or “God specifically told me to tell you that you should...”* Wisdom requires that we avoid any semblance of manipulation or coercion. It is far preferable to introduce prophetic utterances with statements such as:

- “I have a strong inner impression that I believe is from the Lord.”
- “I have a picture in my mind that I think may be for someone here.”
- “I had a sense from the Holy Spirit about what he wants to accomplish today.”
- “I had a dream which involved several of you, and I would like to share it.”

Charles Spurgeon

Even those who don't believe in the continuing of some of the gifts of the Spirit have been known to still receive these revelations. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892) is one of the greatest preachers in the history of the church. Ironically, he was a cessationist and didn't believe that the gift of prophecy was still in operation in the Church. And yet, he had multiple occasions where he would “prophecy”: “I could tell as many as a dozen similar cases in which I pointed at somebody in the hall without having the slightest knowledge of the person, or any idea that what I said was right, except that I believed I was moved by the Spirit to say it; and so striking has been my description, that the persons have gone away, and said to their friends, “Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did; beyond a doubt, he must have been sent of God to my soul, or else he could not have described me so exactly.”

Speaking in this way puts people at ease and reassures them that they are not disobedient if they choose to wait or to consult others regarding the truth of what was spoken. Prophetic words may be highly symbolic and require extensive prayer and investigation. People should not be made to feel guilty if they respond with less than immediate and whole-hearted affirmation.

4. *Love and Humility.* We have to do this out of love and in humility. There's a healthy fear that we should have in this. Be humble to one another whether you are sharing or receiving something that is perhaps from the Lord.

5. *Seek the Giver more than the gifts.* Intimacy with God is everything. "Love never ends. **As for prophecies, they will pass away;** as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] **For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.** Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:8–12).

How does prophecy look at TPC?

The gift of prophecy is a spiritual gift which means it's from the Spirit and a gift—we can't control or manipulate God; we can't determine when and where and how he will speak. But in wanting to create space for this gift to be used to build up the church we have intentionally created specific contexts where we seek to hear God's voice in the church.⁵

1. Sunday Gatherings - Our Prayer Team prays during the service for the congregation and is available after the service for prayer. We have seen partners and guests alike encouraged, comforted, and healed through the ministry of our Prayer Team. Sometimes, during the service as they pray, a team member will get what they think is a prophetic word or vision. It could be something that the Spirit may want to do in the gathering, someone God wants to heal or encourage. An elder or elder apprentice, who is doing the Call to Mission that day, is in the room with them, and through conversation, more prayer, and discernment, decides if that revelation is something from the Lord, and something that should be shared with the whole congregation.
2. Partner Meetings - Our partner meetings (or "summits") are made up of significant times of group prayer. During that time we welcome partners who feel they may have an encouraging word, whether prophetic or not, to address the partners. The person comes to one of the elders and shares what they think might bless the church as a whole, or even just offers it to them for their consideration, and the elder humbly and discerningly decides if it should be shared to all the partners, or perhaps was just meant for the elders, or a specific person in the congregation.

⁵ Obviously you can and should seek to hear his voice for your Christian brothers and sisters as you pray for them—whether in your home, or in the service at church, or wherever you might be with fellow believers. The list that follows is where we, as church leadership, have tried to create a safe, humble, healthy context for the prophetic gift to operate.

3. Prayer Meetings - Occasionally we set aside a day, a few weeks, or season of prayer. With elder or deacon led group prayer, we create space and encourage the attendees to consider if God is speaking to them for someone or the group.
4. City Groups - Just as we encourage and allow teaching, mercy, encouragement, and other spiritual gifts to operate in the City Group context, we also encourage and allow prophecy. We trust our leaders to communicate with the elders any questions or issues that might come up with any misuse or unwise use of any of the gifts of the Spirit.

Stories & Sermons

- [Scott receiving a prophetic dream from a sister in the church](#)
- [Coleman sharing about his excitement of the spiritual gifts in the church](#)
- [The Christians' sharing their story of healing](#)
- [Pastor Jim preaches on prophecy](#)
- [Sam Storms on Hearing the Voice of God](#)
- Basic Training in Practice of Prophetic Ministry [Part 1](#) and [2](#)

Index of Texts

1 Corinthians 14:24–25

[24] But if all **prophecy**, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. (ESV)

Acts 13:1-2

[1] Now there were in the church at Antioch **prophets** and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. [2] While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” (ESV)

Acts 21:8–9

[8] On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. [9] He had four unmarried daughters, who **prophesied**. (ESV)

Romans 12:6

[6] Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith; (ESV)

1 Corinthians 14:22

[22] Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while **prophecy** is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 13:9–10

[9] For we know in part and we **prophecy** in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 14:5

[5] Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to **prophecy**. The one who **prophesies** is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 14:3

[3] On the other hand, the one who **prophesies** speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 11:4–5

[4] Every man who prays or **prophesies** with his head covered dishonors his head, [5] but every wife who prays or **prophesies** with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. (ESV)

Acts 2:17–18

[17] “And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall **prophecy**,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;

[18] even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall **prophecy**. (ESV)

Acts 19:6

[6] And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and **prophesying**. (ESV)

Acts 15:32

[32] And Judas and Silas, who were themselves **prophets**, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words. (ESV)

1 Timothy 4:14

[14] Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by **prophecy** when the council of elders laid their hands on you. (ESV)

1 Timothy 1:18–19

[18] This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the **prophecies** previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, [19] holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, (ESV)

1 Thessalonians 5:20–21

[20] Do not despise **prophecies**, [21] but test everything; hold fast what is good. (ESV)

1 Corinthians 14:6

[6] Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or **prophecy** or teaching? (ESV)