

## Developing Your Small Group: Encouraging Prophecy

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Even the word 'prophecy' is something that can put many people off for a variety of reasons including previous bad experiences and feelings of inadequacy. Small groups are an ideal setting to explore hearing from God for others in a safe and comfortable environment.

### **What is prophecy?**

Essentially, prophecy is hearing from God on someone else's or other people's behalf for their strengthening, encouraging and comforting (1 Corinthians 14:3). Prophecy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and is available to all as we seek to serve one another and those around us. Sometimes God speaks to us about the future in a predictive way but often God is speaking about a person's current situation and circumstances. That all sounds well and good but you might ask – what does that mean or what does it look like in practice?

### **In what ways does God speak to us?**

God wants to speak to us so much more than we appreciate. He speaks to us in different ways and this can be influenced by our personality and life experience. Just some of the ways that God speaks to us are:

- Reminding us of a particular verse in the Bible
- Giving us a Bible reference (chapter and verse)
- A picture in our mind's eye

- An impression/sense in our mind about something (general or specific)
- Speaking through something physical in the world around us (e.g. through something in nature, something we see in the street or something particular to the person such as their clothing)
- Dreams

### **Different Elements of Prophecy**

It might be helpful to think about the different elements of prophecy:

- Revelation – this is the initial impression/ thought that comes to you.
- Interpretation – this is the 'what does it mean' bit.
- Application – this is the 'how does it apply to the person's life' bit. This can be a little daunting but the reality is that we give to others what God has given to us. It may be that we have the revelation but someone else has the interpretation or application. When we get the revelation, it is worth asking God what the interpretation and application might be. If that comes to us, then we offer it; if not, the interpretation/ application may come from someone else.

### **How do I know whether what I've heard is from God?**

The simple answer is – you don't. The Bible tells us specifically that 'we know in part and

we prophesy in part' (1 Corinthians 13:9). In other words, when we receive a word, some of it will be from God and some of it will be mixed in with our own stuff. That could make us feel a bit unsteady but the reality is that God is gracious and has chosen to speak to us in this way. He knows what He is doing even if we're often not sure. Just like other things in life, we get better at prophecy by practice. However, there are some things to bear in mind:

- If the word that is given does not accord with the Bible, it is not God's word.
- We are called to weigh God's word – sometimes there is a general resonance/sense that the word is from God.
- If the word is from God, it will often be confirmed by words from other people. A rule of thumb is – the greater the possible impact of the word – the more someone should be looking for confirmation from others (e.g. a person would not pack their bags and head off to plant a church in Siberia, just because someone had that impression in Small Group one night).

### **How do I give a word of prophecy?**

There is no set way of communicating a word of prophecy, no magic words. 'Thus sayeth the Lord' does not add weight or give any more authority. It just sounds a bit weird. A couple of things to bear in mind:

- Be natural – if you are giving a word to someone, say it in the way you would speak generally (avoid religious language);
- Say what comes to you – no more, no less. Sometimes we can think that the thing that comes to us does not sound impressive or spiritual (or even just sounds plain daft). However, often the most simple or daft-sounding word can speak powerfully into someone's life and by dressing the word up, it can dilute what God wants to communicate;

- If a word comes to us ('revelation'), ask God whether there is also an interpretation or application that He also wants to give us;
- Offer anything that you give humbly – particularly where the word may have an element of correction or prediction (rule of thumb – if anyone is going to be embarrassed, let it be you, not the person receiving the word);
- Where the word is one of prediction (e.g. about calling), encourage the person receiving to wait and see if there are other words that confirm what has been said.

### **Ideas for Encouraging Prophecy in Small Groups**

If you are thinking of dedicating a small group evening to prophecy, it is worth talking about it before practising:

1. Go through some basic teaching about prophecy. Do not assume that everyone in your group will have a great understanding about it.
2. Take time to explore people's own understanding and experience of prophecy. It may be necessary to dispel people's myths and talk about people's previous negative experiences.

Then, have a go – this can be done in a variety of ways:

- Have one or more people sit on a chair in the middle of the room and have others gather round. Spend time in silence just listening to God and give words as and when they come (it is often worth having someone acting as a scribe, writing words down as they are given to give to the person afterwards. This can be a great encouragement to the person receiving and also something that did not mean much at the time it was given can be significant later on).
- Blind Prophecy – give everyone a pen and a piece of paper (with the name of another

person in the group on but not shown) and give them 20/30 minutes to pray/reflect and write down anything that comes to them. Then at the end of the 20/30 minutes, the pieces of paper are given out to those whose name is on the paper. This may sound a bit odd but it is amazing how God often speaks even when the person praying/listening does not know who they are praying/listening for.

- After teaching/sharing, have a time of worship and ask people to be asking God for words during the time of worship and then encourage people to share those words at the end.

When people have given words, allow time for the person who is receiving to be prayed for. It is always good to bless what God may be doing.