

Exploring the prophetic experience

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God is raising up prophets and prophetic voices all over the world, and we rejoice at this new blessing. At the same time, He must also raise up the teaching material, and the training, so that these new voices can run in biblical channels, and not human ones.

Prophet Jim Smith has been teaching prophets and prophecy for over 20 years, and he is slowly establishing schools and networks in West Africa, where those called into this ministry can receive the training and equipping they need to serve God's African Church. Much of this material speaks of the personal life of the prophet. Young prophets ask me, "How do I do this work?" More important is the question "What sort of person do I have to be to do this work?" Once we get that question right, the "how" becomes fairly easy to explain.

The material in this handbook is ideal for God's people anywhere. Simple and clear, it covers a wide range of topics, as well as access to websites which offer further help. **It isn't necessary to read it all! Pick the sections which seem most interesting to you, and start there.**

The call of a prophet

About 15 years ago, I was just going off to sleep, when I knew God wanted to speak with me. So I opened my spiritual ears, and this is what happened:-

"Son, I have a job for you."
"Lord" I replied, "I already have a job."
"I know, but I am calling you to a new one. I want you to be a prophet to the Nations"
"O.K. Lord, if that is what you want, that is what I will do."

This wasn't the end of the story. The next day I began to try as hard as possible to say "No!" I didn't understand this call, and I didn't want it. A long struggle followed, which lasted years, but that story is for another day. The thing we need to understand at the beginning of this book is that **prophets receive their calling from God**. We also need our recognition from the Church, but I will come back to that later. This call comes in many different ways. Here are some calls to think about:-

- The call of Isaiah. (Isaiah 6: 1-8)**
- The call of Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 1:4-8)**
- The call of Amos. (Amos 7:14-16)**
- The call of Jonah (Jonah 1)**
- The call of Peter. (Luke 5:1-11)**
- The call of Paul. (Acts 9:1-19)**

If God has called you to be a prophet, you will have a testimony of your calling. It may not be spectacular, like Isaiah or Jonah. It may be quite simple and ordinary, but it is necessary to have some calling experience. This calling experience has some common features, which we can see in the biblical prophets:-

The Lord made the call, and they all knew that he was speaking to them. (Jeremiah)
They became aware of their humanity - their sinfulness, (Peter, Isaiah) their unsuitableness, (Jeremiah) their fear. (Jonah.)
Their call had a powerful emotional impact on them. (Ezekiel)
The Lord make it clear what it was that he wanted from them, sometimes in words, but often in pictures. (Jeremiah, Amos)

For each, the way ahead was to prove very difficult. Amos came up against severe criticism, Paul didn't know what to do next, Isaiah received a tough commission, Jonah finished up in a fish, and Jeremiah passed through a series of very hard emotional experiences. This last experience needs careful reflection by anyone called to prophecy. It reflects the deep inner turmoil and pain which this call places on the human spirit. Jeremiah experienced a great inner struggle and turmoil in his work. Fortunately for all prophets that followed him, he left these feelings clearly exposed for us to study. These passages, known as his "confessions" need careful study by any prophet. This will be our experience:

- 11:18-23 "I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter"**
- 12:1-6 "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"**
- 15:10-21 "Alas my mother, that you gave me birth."**
- 17:14-18 "Where is the word of the Lord?"**
- 18:18-23 "Let's make plans against Jeremiah."**
- 20:7-13 "O Lord you deceived me.."**
- 20:14-18 "Cursed be the day I was born."**

Our call exposes our weaknesses and inadequacies. This is necessary, because as we are going to see later in this book, these things are part of our daily experience. But our call is also the source of our courage and strength. Again and again I have said to the Lord "I didn't ask for this call. Now you have a responsibility to help me in it." I think he thinks this is a fair comment, and he has come to my aid again and again. Without a call, when things get difficult, we cannot cry out to him in this way. It would be good to think about your prophetic call here. Think about these questions:-

1. How did I know God wanted to call me?
2. How did that call take place?
3. How do I feel about the call?
4. Do others who know me well recognise that God has spoken to me?

The heart of the Prophet

When God called me to be a prophet, I thought the calling was all about the words I would speak. I was often saying to God:- "What happens if one day I don't have a word?" Then one day I had a very disturbing experience. While I was praying, the Lord said to me "Come up here and I will show you the things which are to come." I was very afraid, but said "O.K." Immediately I was in the heavenly places, and I looked around, expecting to see all sorts of powerful earth-changing events. But all I saw was the Lord. While I was thinking about this, he showed me his broken heart. I was shocked. "Who has done this Lord?" I asked. He said to me "My creation has broken my heart again and again." I didn't know what to say. "What can I do Lord?" I asked. He replied "Stay and share it with me"

From that moment on, I came to realise that my calling is not about the words I speak, but about the relationship I have with him. Once that relationship is right, then all the words, prophecies and pictures can flow. I also realised that I would have to have the kind of heart which would be acceptable to him in this relationship. I would have to be changed. **What kind of heart should a prophet have?** Think about these areas:-

The surrendered heart (Luke 18: 9-14)

In this passage we meet two men with very different hearts. The one is so sure of himself, and he prays, "I thank you father that I am not like other men." (v11) The sad thing is that he doesn't see the true nature of his own heart. The other man is a very different story. He prays, "Lord have mercy on me a sinner." (v13) He knows he has little to offer, but he surrenders what he has - he surrenders his heart to Jesus. Prophets must have hearts which are surrendered to Jesus - hearts which realise their own emptiness, their own worthlessness and their own inadequacy. Only then can Jesus fill that heart with his power. It's a constant battle to surrender, and keep surrendering. **What does the surrendered heart look like?**

It is obedient (Acts 13:22)

The surrendered heart puts God first:- "I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do."

It endures (Habakkuk 3:18)

The surrendered heart does not give up:- "yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour." From our point of view, there can only be one outcome of God's will - it will be done.

It doesn't compromise (1 Kings 22:17)

Once we have started on a course of caution, there is no turning back. Micaiah ben Imlah had an uncompromising heart. Instead of giving sweet words, which would have made his life easy, he said:- "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the Lord said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'" I once made a decision, and someone said to a friend of mine "I am sure when we talk, prophet Jim will see the better path and be willing to change." Someone else replied "I don't think you understand the nature of a prophet's heart. Prophet Jim will never change his mind!"

It doesn't argue (Exodus 3-4:17)

Moses took a big chance by arguing with God. The man with the surrendered heart does not argue, but just does what God tells him to do.

We have to be very clear here - we are not to be arrogant in our serving. I don't have all the answers, and I am glad of the advice of friends when I am thinking and planning for my work. God has made the Church my covering and my help. But fundamentally, I have surrendered my heart to Jesus, and I will do what he asks, when he asks, whatever he asks, and in the way he asks for it to be done. This is the basic heart of the prophet. It is our strength.

The Servant heart Mark 8:34

Of the many problems which affect God's leaders in Africa, there is one which stands out above all the rest - the absence of the servant heart. So many leaders want position, power, respect, and honour. They go out of their way to be seen with powerful leaders, to take the seats of honour in the fellowship, and to be seen to be great in the eyes of God's people. This lack of the servant nature is destructive of themselves and the work they do. Prophets can suffer from this problem very acutely. Many want to be thought of as "great men of God." Many want to be looked up to for their ministries, and to be honoured for what they do. The true man or woman of God wants none of these things. He or she is seeking something far more precious - the heart which is in Jesus, which is the servant heart. Jesus said "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."

Any other desire will destroy the prophet., So what is the servant heart which we are seeking after?

It denies self: Victory over self was what Jesus gained in Gethsemane. It is the hardest battle to win. We are the centre of our own world. When we surrender to Jesus, he becomes the centre. We have to battle away to ensure that he stays there. Areas of conflict include:- Position: (Luke 18:9-14) Power: (Acts 8:9-25) Sex: (Matthew 5:27-30) Control: (Mark 8:33) Money: (Acts 5:1-2) deceit: (2 Samuel 11:14-15)

It takes up the cross: This is the way the servant walks:-The hard road: (Jeremiah 20:7) the lonely road: (Gethsemane. Mark 14:39) the suffering road: (Paul at Philippi. Acts 16:16-24) the servant road. (Jesus. John 13; Isa 53:1-3) The servant does whatever it takes to fulfil the will of the Lord.

It follows: The servant follows obediently and willingly.

The servant heart is a commitment to a lifestyle of repentance and faith, obedience and sacrifice. It is a commitment to walking in the way of Jesus in full knowledge of what it might mean. Like Bartimaeus, (Mark 10:52) we follow him: like the man at Gate Beautiful, (Acts 3:8) we rejoice: like the woman bent double (Luke 13:13) we praise God.

If a prophet is having a problem with service, here is the perfect answer:-

“Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to his servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat?’ Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper. Get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink?’ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are only unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” (Luke 17:7-10)

This little parable keeps our feet firmly on the ground. We are to serve, not when it is convenient to us, or when we feel like it, but when the Master says so. Some people find this parable hard, but that is because they have short memories! Jesus went to Calvary for us, serving the will of his Father up to the very end, so that we could be free. He has earned our love, our trust and our service. Strangely, when we adopt this attitude, we find ourselves more loved, more cared for and closer to Jesus than we were before. This is one of the miracles of service. Still struggling with this concept? Then read John 13: 1-5 The message for prophets is quite simple. We must do as he has done.

The Pure heart which won't let sin cling on

The writer to the Hebrews teaches:- “Let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. (Hebrews 12:1) Sin clings to us, like chains, and if we do not get rid of these chains daily, we will trip up! The Bible tells us clearly that God forgives, (1 John 1:8-9) but prophets have to be very aware of what kind of sin clings, and how. Look at Matthew chapters 5 to 7 to help identify the areas of sin. This needs to be a regular personal study. Note in particular:-

Anger (5:21-26) This must play no part in the life of the prophet, or it will dilute his word.

Lust (5:27-30) The prophet is a powerful character, and can attract people of the opposite sex for the wrong reasons.

Enemies. (5:43-48) A prophet will make enemies. It's vital we know how to behave. Otherwise we will easily allow our attitude to affect our ministry.

Giving. (6:1-4) The temptation is to take. This can be overcome by having the opposite gift - the desire to give.

Worry. (6:25-34) There are so many pressures in this calling. We have to have a clear mind, not a worried one.

Criticism. (7: 1-5) We are daily being criticised. How we handle it is key to the growth of our ministry.

Spend some time examining your life in the light of what Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel. Let the Holy Spirit show you areas of impurity, and allow Him to begin to cleanse you. Repeat this process often – it is the path to a pure heart.

The suffering heart

The prophet Hosea was called on to live out both the love and the suffering which he found in the heart of God. His message was simple - God loved his people, even though they kept prostituting themselves to other gods and other nations. No matter what, God could not give them up. To live out this message, Hosea had to marry a prostitute, and keep buying her back from her prostitution, to which she returned again and again. Even his precious children became symbols of despair and hope.

(1:4, 1:6-7, 1:8)

It is not hard to imagine what this meant for him, as a father and a husband. He must have felt betrayed again and again – but he never gave up. He just suffered for the One who had called him into His service. His reward was to prophecy one of the most moving verses of scripture, giving us a precious glimpse into the loving heart of God:- “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel?” (Hosea 11:8)

We must be willing to suffer for our calling. We must share the sufferings of God, and the sufferings of his creation. We must be willing to suffer without com-

plaint, without yielding to personal feelings or personal needs. It is really tough, but it is essential.

The loving heart

There is a real contradiction in the loving prophetic heart, and it is one which causes us much sorrow. On the one hand, we have to love God, and love his people. This is what all leaders are called on to do. But at the same time, we have to love deeply enough to be able to speak hard words, even judgmental words. Unlike other faiths, our God judges out of love. He loves us so much, that he will not stop until he has made the relationship between us so strong that he can release the fullness of his love into us. So if we have strayed, and won't return, then he has to judge, in order to restore. He clearly expresses this in the days of Josiah. Despite all the religious reformation which that king carried through we read: "Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah..." (2 Kings 23:26) Jesus says much the same thing: "Oh Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." (Luke 14:34) A prophet has to love enough to be able to move in this judgmental love. He has to love enough not to speak in anger, and to continue to believe, as Jeremiah did, that judgment will lead to better things. This is a really tough love to experience, and requires a deep relationship with God to endure it.

That is a great deal of material about the heart of the prophet, but as I have already said, it is essential that we have the kind of heart which God desires us to have. As we seek this, so our prophetic calling and ministry will flourish. And we will be able not just to speak words, but we will be able to deliver the whole counsel of God. Isn't this what you really want in your calling?

The prophet's relationship with God

Why must we struggle so much to get the right heart? It is because, standing in the presence of God, we have to be changed into His likeness, or we cannot do our work. We are called on to have a deep and powerful relationship with God, which is very intense. We are called on to share his heart. Here are some of the ways this works out:-

Feeling his pain

I learnt something about God's pain when I was travelling once by train. I was enjoying the view out of the window, and as we came to one village, an intense pain and sorrow came into my spirit. It stayed there until the train had pulled away from the village. "What

was that?" I asked the Lord. "It was my pain and sorrow for that village," he replied. "But what can I do about it?" I asked. "Nothing," he said. "I just needed to share it with someone." I have had this experience many times since. It is part of my calling.

Knowing his love

God just doesn't give up on his people. Hosea has already taught us: "How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel?" (Hosea 11:8) God loves his people so much, and sometimes this love can hurt us, because we are not able to love with the intensity of His love.

Sharing his frustration

We get frustrated as prophets. We can't get the opportunity to share, we don't have enough recourses, and nothing seems to be happening. I was so frustrated once, that I cried out to the Lord "Why don't you do something?" He didn't answer me, and then I began to realise that frustration is part of God's experience. He makes plans, and then his human agents don't listen, won't respond, or misunderstand. Sometimes I shout out "Make them do it. After all, you are God!" But I have had to learn that it doesn't work that way. When I am frustrated, sometimes I am feeling His frustration. It is hard to bear this feeling.

Entering his suffering

I once went to God for a word. As I waited on him, I saw such pain and sorrow in his heart, that I was bowed down in agony. When I could hardly bear it anymore, he said "Tell them 'will you crucify me again?'" To enter into this suffering of God is so costly for the prophet. But how else can we work? If we sit on the outside, then how can we deliver what we see and hear? Only by entering into the suffering, can we speak with authority about the sufferings of God. Young prophets do not want to read these things! They just want their "words." It doesn't work like that.

Sharing his ridicule and rejection

I preached in a theatre, to an audience of Christians from a large Church. I spoke about the need for national repentance, so that God could bless the Nation. As I was preaching, I became aware that people were not liking the message, and I wanted to stop. "Carry on" said the Lord. "But Lord," I replied, "they are rejecting this message, and that doesn't matter for me, but it does matter for you." I felt the great sadness in his heart, but he said "Never mind. Carry on."

It was so hard for me, to feel this rejection of the One I love so much. But I had to do as I was told. In the end, they rejected me as well. They never invited me back to speak to them, although we had a relationship which went back for many years. They also got

in touch with other churches which had supported me, telling them not to support me anymore. They even contacted some Churches in Africa, telling them to have no further involvement with me. I just had to take this rejection. It was hard for me, but so much harder for the Lord.

Sharing his grief over people

The prophet Samuel saw much good in King Saul. So how he must have grieved Saul's failure. But how much more must the Lord have grieved it. (1 Samuel 13: 1-15. 1 Samuel 16:1) As prophets, we will see the grief of the Lord over people, as Churches and events fail, and sheep are lost. We have to learn not to react badly when we see these things, but be available to share the Lord's sufferings.

These are just a few of the many experiences we will have to share, as we enter into a prophetic relationship with the Lord. There are many joys, and I haven't written of those here. Joys are easy to bear! But for most of us, it is entering into the suffering and pain which is so hard and unexpected. Is it worth it? That is a question that each prophet has to answer for himself or herself. If we can bear this relationship, then we enter into a very special relationship with the Lord, which enables us to know what he would say in any given circumstance. We all long for this ability. It comes as we allow the relationship to deepen. Prophets must concentrate on the relationship, not the words. If we do, then our words will always have depth and power. Isn't this what we most want?

The quality of his life

Once we know what kind of person we have to be in the inside, then the inside has to touch and change the outside! The two belong together, but many prophets seem to have overlooked this truth. I have found that in Africa, some, maybe many, think that they can do and live in any way they choose. "After all," they tell me "it doesn't affect my ability to minister." YES IT DOES! **The experience of the prophet is that his ministry is poured into his humanity.** Hosea teaches us this to the utmost. So it is vital that inside and outside match up. So let's turn now to the outside. Don't panic! None of us is perfect, and to be moulded into the type of person God wants us to be takes a lifetime – or longer! As long as we desire to be changed, then we will be slowly changed from one degree of glory to another. It takes time, but God can do it – not quickly, but he can and will do it. So what kind of qualities must we be asking God to develop in us? Take a look at these men and women of God:-

Moses	Humility.(Numbers 12:3)
Paul	Tough. (2 Cor:11:16-33)
Joseph	Integrity.(Genesis 41:37)
Micaiah	No compromise.(1 Kings 22: 17)
Hannah	Prayerful (1 Samuel 1:12-17)
Mary	Obedient (Luke1:38)

In addition to these, we have to seek a pure quality in the areas of marriage, family life, finances and our dealings with others.

All of these areas of life need to be touched by the call we have received. We must show gentleness, politeness, and have a willingness to help find the way through difficulties and struggles. We must be known as men and women of grace not of demanding rights, of sympathy, not of anger and aggression, of love and patience, not of hate and frustration. Where do we start? Rather than giving a long list of questions, I just have one for you to consider. Take a careful look at your life, and in prayer, ask this question:-

Does my life reflect the quality of the life of Jesus?

Then let the Holy Spirit lead you forward. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) is a very useful place in the Bible to give you guidance and help. Don't settle for the quality of life you already have. Long to grow more pure and more Christ-like. If we approach our lives in this way, the Lord will raise the quality of who we are, to his glory. This will also allow him to release more power into us.

Quality of life – his character

Here is some material on the character of a prophet. It is useful for study and reflection, as well as a means of testing how far you have come, and how far you have to go.

Getting close

"You are my son, who I love." In this verse, (Mark 1:11) the Father is speaking about Jesus. It's a lovely thing for Him to say. We all want the character which will cause Father to say of us "This prophet is my beloved." But there is a high cost to having this closeness to the Father, which many prophets want to ignore. They want to be close, but they won't pay the price. Look what Jesus had to experience.

First, there is Gethsemane. (Luke 22:39-46) (See further on in this material.) Second, just in case we didn't get the message, we have to come to the cross. Here in agony of spirit, Jesus, crushed by the burden of sin, by isolation and loneliness, and by separation, cries out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) Gethsemane was very painful, but it was not enough. Jesus had to go further, and so must we. For us the message is clear - this deep personal relationship in which we stand is going to hurt us, damage us, cost us everything, AND we still have to go on standing in it, even if we seem to be losing.

Incarnation of the word in our lives

When God was planning to save us, he could have just sent a book, and said “Do what it says here, and you will live.” But he understood us too well. He knew we would never get the message. So he went down a different route. He became flesh in the womb of Mary. He incarnated himself into his creation, and then lived the message he had come to bring, even to the point of death. That’s why the message of Jesus is so clear to us. The same principle applies to those who prophesy in his name. ***We must live the word in our hearts and lives.*** Many young prophets fail to grasp this message. They think the word comes from their mouths. But they have to learn that not only does the word come from the heart, it also has to touch and shape that heart, before it can be shared.

Compassion

It’s so easy to be a prophet! Receive a word, share a word, and move on. What could be easier? This way looks good, but it is not the character of Jesus. When he looked at the crowds, the Bible says “He had compassion on them.” (Matthew 9:36) The word “compassion” doesn’t come across well in English. In the original Greek, the word means emotion so strong that the bowels are moved. Jesus cared about the people, and the ministry he brought to them flowed from that deep compassion. The word we bring cannot be separated from the feelings we have for those who receive it. This is a very heavy burden to bear, but if we cannot bear it, we become the kind of prophet I described above – get a word, give a word, and move on. This shallow character denies us access to the heart and nature of Jesus, and denies the people access to that heart as well.

Uncompromising out of love

One day, a very earnest young man came to Jesus “Lord?” he said “what must I do to gain eternal life?” Jesus replied “You know all the commandments. Keep them and you will live.” The young man replied “But Lord, I have kept them all!” What a saint he must have been!! But Jesus loved him – loved him for his youth, his foolish statement, his desire for truth. But he did not invite him to become a disciple. Instead he said “One thing is missing. Go home, sell all you have and give to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Mark 10:17-22)

Would you have done that? I want people to give their lives to Jesus, and to follow him. I do all I can to help them. But here Jesus seems to say something which drives the man away. The Bible says “At this, the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.” And it gets worse! Jesus made no attempt to stop him, to follow him, to get his name and address, or to send him books to read. No! He just lets him go. Jesus never compromises his message, because he truly loves people. In this story he is showing his great love for this man. He shows him

the truth about himself, gives him a chance to put things right, and then invites him to follow. Sadly, the man did not want the truth, and he went away. I’ve always hoped that at a latter date, he did come back.

The character of Jesus is so loving, that he does not compromise. He loves us too much to give us anything but the whole truth, and he loves us so much that he lets us make the decisions, and let’s us live with them. This is a key element of the character of the Christian prophet. We speak the uncompromised truth, because we truly love the body. Then we let the body accept, ignore or reject our message.

Commitment to the ways of God, whatever the cost

For a prophet, everything has to be done God’s way, whatever the cost. This brought Nathan into conflict with David; (2 Samuel 12:1-14) Jeremiah in conflict with Israel’s leaders: (Jeremiah 26) Amos in conflict with Amaziah; (Amos 7:10-17) Micaiah ben Imlah in conflict with Ahab, (1 Kings 22:1-28) Jonah in conflict with God, (Jonah 1) and Jesus in conflict with the world, the flesh and the devil. Prophets are constantly getting into trouble with the people of God because of the way we work and the things we say and do. We wish it did not have to be so, but we have to do things God’s way. We cannot help ourselves. Things have to be done His way, and for us that’s all there is to it.

We have inherited this characteristic from Jesus. On three separate occasions, Jesus told his followers that he was on his way to Jerusalem and certain death. (Mark 8:31-32: Mark 9: 30-32: Mark 10:32-34) They didn’t understand, they didn’t like it and they tried to make him change his mind. But for Jesus, it had to be this way. It wasn’t easy for him, as we see clearly in Gethsemane:- “Father everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.”(Mark 14:36) But there was no other way but God’s way, so it had to be that way.

Rejection, suffering, pain, and death

No one likes being laughed at, ridiculed, rejected, abandoned or killed. Unfortunately, enduring these things has to be part of the character of the prophet. How do we handle them, so that they do form our character, and do not destroy us?

1. Jesus knows all about it. Opposed (Mark 3:6) insulted (Mark 6:3) and ultimately rejected (John 19:12) he knows all about these feelings. He warned us that the world would reject us, as it rejected him. So when we are exposed to rejection because of our ministry, we are in good company

2. Rejection can guarantee the truth of our calling. Jesus said “ Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way

they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12) Many prophets have never thought in this way. If we are totally accepted, then we are in danger of being a false prophet. I’m not suggesting that we should go around wanting to be rejected. And we must be careful that people don’t reject us because we are behaving in a bad way. But a true prophet must expect to stir up opposition, and this will result in rejection.

3. Don’t take it personally. It is Jesus who is being rejected, not us. (John 15:18)

Quality of life: – his discipline.

In Africa, poor discipline rules! Everyone seems to do what he thinks is right in his or her own eyes. But prophets have to be highly disciplined – this is what God expects of us. What areas do we need to consider?

1. Close walk with God.

To share the heart of God.

To hear from God. To test what is heard.

To speak for God.

To be in the watchtower, waiting for God’s command.

To be prepared to be ridiculed, abused, ignored, rejected, ejected, silenced, or killed.

For a lesson in disobedience, see 1 Samuel 13:1-15. This disobedience lost Saul his anointing. Prophets – be warned.

2. Obedience.

Isaiah’s commission was born in a discipline of obedience – “Who will go for us...here am I. Send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

Esther took the risk of obedience – “And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

Mary followed the same path – “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said.” (Lk1:38) For a study in obedience, read John 13:1-5: Phil 2:6-8

3. Worship.

Prophets must understand worship in this way:-

Awe Isaiah 6:3 “Holy, holy, holy...”

Majesty Mark 9:2 “He was transfigured before them...”

Glory 2 Chron 7:2 “The glory of the Lord filled the Temple..”

Power 1 Sam 7:10 “The Lord thundered..”

Fulfillment Rev 22:1-5 “They will reign forever...”

Silence 1 Kings 19:12 “A gentle whisper..”

A prophet should:-

Be in a worshipping family of God’s people.

Expect to hear and receive from God while he is in the gathering.

Expect to open the channels for other people during worship.

4. Dependence & provision

Elijah depended on God for what he needed. (1 Kings 17) God replied with His provision. This discipline is very necessary for a number of reasons:

Jesus commanded it. “Your heavenly Father knows.” (Matt 7:32)

It is part of our faith as prophets that we live in this way. We have to trust him for whom we speak. (Habakkuk 3:17-18) This keeps us clear of the “deceitfulness of wealth” (Mark 4:19) which destroys ministries. We are not tempted to use the word of God for personnel gain. (Titus 1:7)

5. The body of Christ

Prophets and the body of Christ have never had an easy relationship. There are large areas where misunderstanding can occur. We need bible principles:-

1. Belonging to the body. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

2. Loving the body. (Ephesians 5:25)

3. Respect the leadership of the body. (1 Tim 5:17)

4. Helping the body test prophecy. (1 John 4:1)

5. Knowing how to speak, and when to say it. (Habakkuk 2:3)

6. Relationships with other prophets.(1Cor 11:29-32)

6. Being human

It’s really important for the prophet or prophetic voice to recognise his humanity. This means that he can make mistakes, get angry, can speak from his own heart, can mishear or misunderstand, and can get tired.

Being human is not a discipline! But it does need to be so for the prophet. He has to have a firm understanding of his humanity, because of the intense spiritual nature of his life and work.

7. Endurance

How can we endure?

We must understand it is part of the cost of faith. (Phil 1:21)

We must discipline our lives in prayer and Bible. (2 Tim 3:16)

We must keep our armour bright. (Eph 6: 10-18)

We must never give up. (Daniel 3:16-17)

Quality of life – his growth

Hosea is a good example of a prophet who had to grow into understanding his ministry and his message. Have a look at these passages, and see how slowly he came to understand what he was doing. (The point of deepest understanding comes in chapter 11, and I have already referred to it – can you spot it?)

He marries his prostitute wife. (1:2-3)

The children are named with a clear link to his call and message. (1:4-11)

The message of punishment and restoration. (Ch: 2.)

Reconciliation with his wife. (Ch: 3)

Israel's sinfulness. (Ch: 4-50)

God's longing for the return of his beloved. (Ch: 6)

Israel's continued sin. (Ch: 7-10)

God shows his love, as Hosea has had to show it to his wife. (Ch: 11)

More rebellion. (Ch: 11-13)

The homeward call and blessing. (Ch: 14)

A similar pattern can be seen in the life of St. Peter, who began by being wayward and foolish, and finished up by being one of the most significant leaders in the Early Church. Prophets grow slowly. From our initial call, it takes many years to develop our understandings of God, of our call and of our ministry. Young prophets want to take a short cut! But the world knows better. My football club bought a very young player recently. He keeps missing his passes, getting caught in tackles, and misses goals. But we are being patient as supporters. We can see his enormous potential, and we realise that he has got to learn. It will take time. Brother and sister prophets – sometimes the sons of this world are wiser than the sons of light. Take time to allow for growth. Then you will mature into a true man or woman of God, able to deliver your message. Why don't you keep a record of the things you are learning month by month. Then you can look back over the years, and see how you are growing and learning.

Moving in the Spirit

All prophets know that their inspiration comes from the activity of the Holy Spirit, and that they need the anointing of the Spirit and daily filling of the same Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18) These are basic truths, which I am not going to expand on in this book.

The prophet is moving in the Spirit, and is being moved by the Spirit. This is not so easy to understand, or to do. Jesus was driven out into the wilderness by the Spirit. (Matthew 4:1) Philip was lifted out of the wilderness, (Acts 8:39) and Elijah was lifted up to heaven! (2 Kings 2:11) We are ordinary Christians, living the ordinary Christian life, We are no different from our brothers and sisters, and yet we can be powerfully affected by the moving of the Holy Spirit.

Let's study Elijah, who gives us some hint of the kind of experience we are in for:-

1. Prophesied drought. (1 Kings 17:1)
2. Told to go to Kerith ravine. (17:2)
3. Told to go to Zarepath. (17:9)
4. Told to go to Carmel. (18:19)
5. Told to go to Horeb. (19:8)

Each step of the way, he had to face the uncertainty of moving in the Spirit. This is one of our basic lessons – life in the spirit is uncertain with, from our point of view, an unpredictable outcome. (Ananias. Acts 9:11) We might not be moved around in quite the same way as Elijah, but we are being propelled into our calling by the same Spirit. It could be a bumpy ride for us! But fundamentally, we have no choice but to move. We are like a boat with the sails up – we have to go where the wind sends us (John 3:8) Before you say "Alleluia," we have to understand that life in the Spirit can cause us many problems. Study these passages:-

Being ridiculed (Mark 15:31)

Apparent failure (Jeremiah chapter 37)

Great risk (Acts 9:17)

Death (Luke 13:34)

So be ready, and beware. Be ready to be moved by the Spirit, and beware of the consequences. (I have included my ministry to Tamale in the "Additions" at the end of this book. Study it, and see how I was being moved by the Spirit of God.)

The prophet and the heavenly places

A prophet must know how to seek the face of God in the heavenly places. This is where he belongs, and where he receives his ministry. Before we can enter, we must conquer the strong man. Jesus taught us:- "No one can enter a strong man's house, and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man." (Mark 3:27) If we are going to seek the face of God in the heavenly places, we will have to learn how to bind Satan, the "strong man." Many who seek the face of God fail to bind the strong man, and then find it difficult to gain access to God, or to hear clearly in his presence. The experienced Christian worker should bind the strong man. This is how we do it:-

1. We confess our sins and repent.

2. We claim the victory of the blood, using the Bible. For example:- "He forgave our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them by the cross." (Col 2:14-15)

3. We take the armour of God (Ephesians 6:13-18) and then we go forward in strength to the heavenly places, to seek the face of God.

Once we have made our way to the heavenly places, what can we expect to experience?

1. The absolute authority and rule of God & Jesus.

“The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.” (Rev 22:3) God rules here, and this is a feeling we seldom experience so strongly in the earthly places.

2. The worship. (Rev 5:12-14)

“Worthy is the lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and on the sea, and all that is in them singing “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever.” The four living creatures said “A-men” and the elders fell down and worshipped.” The heavenly places are full of the sound of worship. Worship in the heavenly places is like the air we breathe here on earth. It is everywhere, and vital to us.

3. The battle. (Rev 13:5-6)

“The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies...He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.” We experience the spiritual battle very vividly in the heavenly places. Here we learn the strategy and plans of God, and the plans of the enemy are revealed to us.

4. The prayers of the saints. (Rev 7:9-10)

“After this I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.” This is a wonderful experience for the prophet. We hear the prayers of the earthly Church rising up to the throne of God. This is both moving and powerful.

5. The triumph of the cross. (Rev 5:5-6)

“See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” Then I saw a Lamb, looking like he had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne.” In heaven, there is a great triumphal arch. It is the victory of the cross of Jesus. This great cross stands in heaven, reminding sinners of their salvation, and Satan of his defeat. In my prayers, I am often drawn to

this cross again and again. Under its shadow, I feel the peace and consolation which heaven brings to the human spirit.

6. The angels. (Hebrews 12:22-23)

“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.” Everywhere in the heavenly places, we meet angels – those messengers of God, which live only to serve his purposes. They are beautiful beyond description, a blessing to us, and a sign of the beauty and wonder of their Creator.

There is so much more to see, feel and learn. Prophets need to be very familiar with the heavenly places. Are you? Begin in prayer and by the power of the Holy Spirit to explore and enjoy.

The intercessory spirit of the prophet

One of the many unusual experiences of a prophet is found in Amos 7:1-3

“This is what the sovereign Lord showed me. He was preparing a swarms of locusts, after the king’s share had been harvested and just as the second crop was coming up. When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out “Sovereign Lord, forgive. How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” So the Lord relented. “This will not happen” the Lord said.”

In this passage, it is the intercession of the prophet which changes the direction of the Lord’s will. It seems incredible, but Moses had the same experience. (Numbers 13:13-20) Prophets have to have a heart for intercession. But what are the characteristics of the intercessory heart? Take a look at these suggestions:- heart?

Mary: Totally surrendered. (Luke 1:38)

Hannah: It’s an experience not a list of rules. (1 Samuel 1)

Jesus: It’s a struggle of the will. (Mark 14:36)

Daniel: Something is happening. (Daniel 10: 12-13)

Widow: Don’t give up. (Luke 18:1-8)

Shadrach: No surrender. (Daniel 3: 17-18)

Habakkuk: Be positive. (Hab 3:16-19)

Mary: It hurts. (Luke 2:35)

Caleb: We overcome. (Numbers 134:9)

Nehemiah: Fighting to win. (Nehemiah 4:20)

Spend some time studying these passages and examining your own heart. Ask God to increase in you the heart of intercession.

The prophet and the spiritual battle

A prophet stands on the front line of the spiritual battle. It not only focuses on him, but as it moves, he must move too, to be in the right place to speak his message. The enemy attacks again and again. How does he defend himself? Before we look at the spiritual armour of Ephesians 6, let's look at our most powerful weapons:-

The power of the sacrifice

In John's gospel, John the Baptist says this about Jesus:- "Look, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) It is the sacrifice of Jesus which breaks the power of the enemy. Prophets have to learn to draw on the strength of that sacrifice. We have to know how to release the power of the blood of Jesus, and how to take our stand on the lamb who was slain.(1 Peter 1:19: Revelation 5:6) How do we do this? We need to share in the Lord's Supper regularly, and we need to know the Scriptures, and how to apply them to ourselves and to the battle we are fighting. Here are some which we must know and apply:-

John 1:29
Mark 14 – 16:8
1 Peter 1: 18-19
Hebrews 9:14
Colossians 2:13-15
1 John 1:8-9

Teaching about the blood of Jesus is not so common these days. But our forefathers spoke of "calling down the power of the blood." This is something every prophet must know how to do. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you about the blood of Jesus, and how to apply it to your life. This is vital to your survival.

Crucified to the world

The Bible says "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20) The enemy will use everything worldly to trap and defeat us. But what can he do against the man who has crucified everything in the world, and lives only for Christ? We have to crucify self, (Mark 8:34) our love of money, (1 Timothy 6:10) our desire for security in the flesh, (Matthew 6:19-21) our longing for recognition, (Matthew 5:11-12) our physical needs, (Matthew 6:28-33) and our sexual needs (Matthew 5:27-28). Learn to crucify the world in your life daily.

The power of the word

The Bible says "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16) And again "At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2: 10-11) Our strength is in the word of God. We need it so much in times of crisis. But in times of crisis, we sometimes cannot read it. When I was in hospital, I was too ill to read. That's why every prophet must be very familiar with the Bible, knowing some of it by heart, and using it daily in his life. Then when the crisis comes, he will not be unarmed.

The victory of the cross

The Bible says "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Romans 8:37) We have won! If you have been to one of my teaching schools, you might have heard me sing this chorus:- "I am the winner and you are the loser!" It's true! When the enemy comes against us, don't hesitate to remind him of his defeat. He won't like it, and you will grow in confidence

Now let's turn to the spiritual armour of Ephesians chapter 6: 1-11, and examine each item carefully.

The belt of truth

The belt of the Roman soldier was where he carried his weapon, and his supplies. It was very important to him, and it is also important to us. Our belt is biblical truth - knowing the truths about Jesus, and having a life firmly built on those truths. To do this, we have to know them in our heads, know where to find them in the Bible, and apply them to our hearts, so that we can live by them.

The breastplate of righteousness

The Roman soldier's breastplate was a kind of iron coat. It protected his heart. We stand clothed in the righteousness of Jesus – this protects our heart. We face no condemnation and no judgment, because the righteousness of Jesus has dealt with these things. His blood has sanctified and cleansed us. We are seen by the Father as righteous. And our enemy has also to see us and accept us as righteous. He will hate this – but that's just his bad luck. He lost, and we won. We are the victors through the righteousness of Jesus.

The gospel shoes

The Roman soldier had strong sandals, so that he could march, and could stand firm in battle. We have gospel shoes. We will not be pushed over, or pushed backward. Our feet are standing on the rock of the Good news of Jesus. We own the ground on which we stand. We are not thieves – our enemy is the thief. The good news of Jesus is our title deed. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Alleluia!

The shield of faith

The shield of the Roman soldier was a defensive and an attacking weapon. It protected the soldier from the blows of his enemy, but it could also be used to push his enemy down, so that he could be stabbed to death. By our faith, we are protected, and by our faith we advance. It is worth knowing that Roman soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, so their shields looked like a steel wall to the enemy. Let's make sure we fight together, and not separately.

The helmet of salvation

The helmet protected the soldier's head and neck. Our heads must be protected in combat because if it is hurt, we are unable to fight. In the spiritual realm, our spirit must be protected in the same way. The enemy will seek to attack our spirit, but with the helmet of salvation, none of his attacks can work. By our salvation, we belong to Jesus. No attack can succeed, although sometimes the battle may be hard and long. In the end we will overcome.

The sword of the Spirit

The Roman soldier carried a short sword, which could cut, stab and slash in the heart of battle, without damaging his comrades on either side of him. Our short sword is the word of God, which we must know how to use to stab, cut and slash against our enemy. We must know the Bible, and how to use it. This experience does not come quickly, but by daily practice and exercise. The older we get in faith, the stronger we should be, because we know more of the word of God, and how to use it.

Attacks on the prophetic ministry

Our enemy has had thousands of years to plan his attacks on the prophetic ministry. By God's grace he hasn't succeeded, and now we know his plans well. In the teaching which follows, I have outlined passages which you need to study for yourself, as you sort out the attacks you can expect, and the defence you need.

1. The spirit of fear

This is a very typical means of attack. In these passages, we can see the spirit of fear in action:-

Saul & Israel	(1 Samuel 17)
Gideon	(Judges 6)
Nehemiah	(Neh. 4:1)

Elijah	(1 Kings 19)
Disciples	(Mark 4:38)

Jesus knew how to deal with the spirit of fear.

When the disciples had been completely overcome by the spirit of fear, they woke him up in panic. (Mark 4:38) Jesus taught them the main defence against to the spirit of fear:- **"He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves 'Quiet! Be still!'" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.**" (4:39) This spirit has to be recognised and rebuked.

Know the methods of the spirit of fear.

They are:-

- To overwhelm faith. (Mark 4: 35-41)
- To destroy our will. (Mark 5: 35-41)
- To rule. (Revelation 13: 14-17)

How do we fight this spirit?

- Rebuke it. (Mark 4:39)
- Recognise that defilement is not allowed. (1 Sam 17:36)
- The Lord delivers. (1 Samuel 17:37)
- The battle is the Lord's. (1 Samuel 17: 47)

Rebuking prayer

Here is a simple prayer which can be used to rebuke the spirit of fear. Not only does it rebuke the spirit, but it sends it away, and fills the empty space with something positive. This is vital, or else the spirit may return with other more powerful spirits to fill the empty space.

"Spirit of fear, we rebuke you in Jesus' name. The Bible says that all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus. So we command you to go from this place, and we commit you to the spiritual prison. There you will remain until Jesus comes to judge you."

Every prophet must know the danger of the spirit of fear. Any prophet who says "I am not afraid" is in great danger. Better to say "I have known what it is to be afraid, but I am conquering that fear."

2. Failure

Every prophet has to face the feeling of failure. We try to be faithful to our ministry, and it doesn't work out, and the enemy invades us with a spirit of failure. He says:- "You are useless. You have let your faith down. You will never be forgiven. You will never make

a prophet.” We have to have a plan for dealing with these feelings. Here are some things to consider:-

1. Failure is common to our human experience, and it will be common to our spiritual experience. Read Jeremiah in the pit (Jeremiah 38) Elijah in the desert, (1 Kings 19:1-9) and Peter in Gethsemane.(Mark 14:66-72). So we do not need to be surprised when it happens to us! (See also Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:12)

2. Jesus has a way of using failure. (Read Joseph’s words in Gen 45:5-8 and Jesus’ response to Peter’s failure. John 21:15-19)

3. We must not let the enemy have room to manoeuvre. After every failure, there is a chance for restoration, and new beginnings. Every failure, sad though it is, opens the possibility of Jesus using the failure to his glory, and the defeat of our enemy. Don’t try to continue your ministry carrying your failures, like large stones on your back. It isn’t necessary. Jesus dies for all our sins and failures. Let him have them, and continue on your way thankful and strong.

3. Rejection

Again, this is a common experience of prophetic ministry. The enemy loves to say to us –“They don’t want you. You are useless as a prophet. Give up now!”

Our reply is simple:-

1. Rejection is a common experience of the prophet. Jeremiah ,Micaiah ben Imlah and Jesus have all gone before us into this experience.

2. It is not us who are being rejected but Jesus.

3. It still hurts, but that is part of our calling as a prophet. We suffer for Jesus, and we suffer with him.

Some years ago, I was preaching in a very large and prosperous Church. But they did not like my message, and at the end, I was very quickly shown the door. I had to walk back to my hotel, because I had no money, and I felt very low. Then the Lord spoke to me: “Son, which do you prefer? To be in there with them, or out here with me?” I preferred to be “out here with him,” but it still hurt.

Prophets be careful here. Sometimes we are rejected because our message is wrong. Churches shouldn’t reject us because of this. All they have to say is “Sorry, we have tested it and we don’t believe it is of God.” But sometimes they reject us as well. But if our message was wrong, or our behaviour, or our manner of delivery, they we really can’t complain. Don’t use the excuse of being rejected to cover bad ministry. The Lord will

show you the difference. At the end of every day, I ask him “How was it?” If he says “O.K.” then I have nothing to fear from men. I fear him and his judgments much more!

4. Depression

The enemy loves to use this experience against us. It usually builds up over a period of time, and he can really get to work to beat us down. Take note of these thing:-

1. Elijah and Paul both knew depression. We are not the first ones to feel this way. This is really important to know. The enemy tries to isolate us, telling us that we are the only prophet ever to feel like this. He is lying as usual.

2. Elijah and Paul found their way out of the situation. It is not hopeless. That’s another lie.

3. At times of depression, prophets need the help and support for their friends. We need to read the story of the upholding of Moses’ hands (Exodus 18:12) to understand our need of help and support. If Moses needed help, so will we. In our lonely calling, we need help.

4. Erect your guard. A very experienced evangelist once said “The thing we have to guard against is the spiritual depression which sweeps over us.” Recognise the signs of depression, and recognise the things which open you to this experience – stress, family problems, too much ministry, financial distress.

4. Power

Power is a big thing in Africa. The whole of our lives function on knowing someone who can help us with daily life. The traditional religions make a big thing of power – by their sacrifices and rituals, they seek to control those elemental forces of the universe which touch our lives. But when we come to Jesus, we are free of all that – or are we? A prophet has great power. Elijah could hold the rain back and Moses could part the sea. We stand in this stream, and it is so easy, when entrusted with such power, to revert to the old ways, and use the power for our own benefit, to impress others, to gain ourselves prestige, money or sexual favours. The enemy knows this very well, which is why he tried to get Jesus to use his power for himself.

(Matthew 4: 1-11) How do we cope with the pressure of power? We have to maintain our servant heart and our servant position. We are His servants, using His power as and when he releases it in us. It is for his glory. We are only servants. We should say this regularly every day, and especially when the power of God begins to move in our ministries. As servants, we are safe. As anything else, we are in great danger.

The 3 “L’s”

Living in Gethsemane (Mark 14: 32-42)

A prophet has to go regularly to Gethsemane. It is part of our regular experience. We may not like it, but we have to do it. How can we survive such a place, why should we go there, and what do we gain? Let's learn the lessons of Gethsemane, and these questions will answer themselves.

1. Do not trust men.

It's a natural human desire to want friends. We cannot survive long in Africa without friends and family. We need each other - it is a natural human instinct. But in Gethsemane this human emotion must be laid aside, and replaced by this spiritual principle:- "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2-3) We have to put our trust in God, and God alone for our survival in this place. No human agent can help us. Jesus knew this. Knowing what was in the hearts of men and knowing God, he trusted in God alone for his help and strength. He had to leave his friends at the gate. We have to face Gethsemane alone, trusting alone in God to sustain and save us. It's such a lonely experience, that you might be thinking "Well, as a prophet, I will stay away from such a place!" If you do, you will have no power in your ministry. For it is in the loneliness of Gethsemane that we fully realise the power and humanity of Jesus. Drawing on this strength will change us out of all recognition.

2. Embrace the loneliness

Being alone with God has a long prophetic tradition:-

Elijah knew it. (1 Kings 17:2-6)

Habakkuk knew it. (Habakkuk 3:17-18)

Paul knew it. (2 Corinthians 11:23-33)

None of these people liked the loneliness, but each knew that it was their appointed path, and found the strength to walk in it. Prophets who are in Gethsemane have to be encouraged to welcome and embrace the loneliness. This is very hard, because it goes against our need for personal friendship and advice. Let's be clear - we still need our friends and their support. We cannot hope to survive without them in the world. But we have to survive without them in Gethsemane, otherwise our longing for human company will pull us backward and out of Gethsemane. We don't want this, because that means being out of the intimate presence of Jesus, and we do need that. We have to make a choice. If we want to be God's men and women,

filled with prophetic power, we have to walk into Gethsemane, and welcome it. If we don't want to be God's men and women, then we should not be in this call in the first place.

3. Understand the nature of the battle

In Gethsemane, the battle is always the same, even if it takes many forms. It can be summed up in this way:- God says to us "go!" The enemy says "no!" Once this battle line has been drawn, then the old battle of self versus God is fought out again in the heart and life of the prophet. The enemy does all he can to stop us, and we have to have a strong enough character to resist him, and obey the voice of the Lord. This looks so easy to read, but in practice it is very painful.

4. Know your spiritual weapons

A soldier is only as good as his weapons, and he has to know them intimately. For prophets, called again and again to Gethsemane, knowing the weapons is vital to survival. I have already written about this in a previous section.

5. His strength, his mercy and our courage

It can be very tough going in Gethsemane. Even with all the weapons deployed, we can still feel very desperate. What do we do then? When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, (Matthew 14:22-32) he wanted to do the same. His faith was strong, and at the command of Jesus, he began his walk. But after a while, his faith sank, and so did he! Then he used one of the strongest and most passionate weapons which we have - he cried out "Lord save me!" (v 30)

The heart of our God is so loving that he will never fail to answer such a cry. When we throw ourselves on his mercy, we can be sure that he will answer. (Luke 15:20) But here is the problem - many prophets fail to do this. We either think that throwing ourselves on God is a sign of weakness, or we fail to see the danger we are in, and our need to throw ourselves on His mercy. We have to lay aside our human feelings of pride, and have the courage to jump blindly into the arms of Jesus. The joy of serving Jesus is that he is fully human as well as fully divine. We don't have to explain to him how we feel. We don't have to say "Lord, I am at the end of my strength. Of course you would not understand what it is like for a human being to feel like this. Perhaps I had better explain!" The Lord understands fully what it is like to be human, to be lonely, to be desperate, afraid and exhausted. He understands, and his arms are ready. We need the courage to jump.

But we also need the courage to know those arms are there, and be willing to endure to the very end of our strength until we jump, As we mature as prophets

in Gethsemane, we have to be able to say “Lord it’s tough. I know your arms are there. But I can endure a little more before I jump.” This is the kind of courage which only Gethsemane can teach. It is so precious, because it allows Jesus to open the way for us into many deep, dangerous and fulfilling opportunities of service. As I have said many times, Gethsemane is a hard place, but it is also a place of fantastic opportunity to serve.

Receive your ministry

Why does the Lord lead us into Gethsemane? Partly because he wants us to be with him, partly because here we grow in strength, and partly because here he wants to give us our ministry. Too many prophets spend their time crying because they are in such a hard place. Brother and sister prophets, stop complaining, and start receiving your ministry. Don’t be like Peter, who found stepping out of the boat easy, (Matthew 14:29) but when the Gethsemane time came, failed in faith. (Mark 14:71) Don’t be like Demas, who, facing the choice between Gethsemane and world, was dazzled by the rubbish and fell away. (2 Timothy 4:10) Don’t be like Jonah, who exchanged Gethsemane for the inside of a fish and the judgment of God. (Jonah 2)

Do be like Micaiah, who in his Gethsemane found the courage to speak the word with boldness. (1 Kings 22:17) Do be like Habakkuk, who refused to look back and down, waiting in confidence and courage for the revelation to come to pass. (Habakkuk 3:17-18) Do be like Daniel, who ignoring the pressure of powerful people, refused to compromise, and found his Gethsemane strength sharing a night with a pack of lions. (Daniel 6:1-23) Do be like Paul, who, being more than a conqueror, (Romans 8:37) despised the shame and pain of beating, (Acts 16:22) and went on to establish church after church.

Living in victory

Our calling is a tough one, as I hope you are beginning to see as you study this material. And it gets tougher, not easier. If we study the first eleven chapters of Joshua, we can see this process in action. The battles and challenges got harder and harder. But Joshua was never defeated. However hard the battle, and however hard he was pressed back, he managed to live in victory. On one occasion (Joshua 10:16-24) he captured five kings, but being heavily involved in fighting, he shut them up in a cave. When the battle was over, he had them brought out, and the Bible says: “When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, “Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings.” So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks. Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies you are going to

fight.” Then Joshua struck and killed the kings, and hung them on five trees, and they were left hanging on the trees until evening.”

Joshua suffered the pain and the struggle, but in his heart he lived in victory. We must follow his example. We will often feel low, helpless, afraid and defeated. But we are not defeated. We are more than conquerors. (Romans 8:37) We are on the victory side. This does not make us proud or arrogant, but it does make us winners. Why have I written this to prophets? We need to have a “victory attitude” because we are so often alone, helpless and apparently defeated. The Church often leaves us isolated and frustrated. Our words seem to count for nothing, and the future looks uncertain. But despite all, we will not be defeated. We will press on towards the goal. (Phil 3:14) This attitude gives us comfort, rejoices the angels in heaven and drives the enemy mad! Alleluia.

Learning to wait

God’s creatures are not designed for waiting! We like things to happen, and in Africa, we want them to happen now! The prophet Isaiah must have felt exactly the same. After his great prophecy in chapter 7, (“A virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel”) I expect he was looking around every day for the fulfilling of this word. I wonder how he would have felt if he had known that he was to wait hundreds of years for this word to come to pass?

Prophets have to learn to wait. God will give the word at His appointed time, and will bring that word to fulfilment at the appropriate time. We might see this process covering a few minutes, or a few centuries. Whichever way, we have to learn to wait. If we do not have a waiting heart, then how can God use us? How can he trust us with ministry when he knows that if we do not see immediate action, we will start getting frustrated? Revelations wait their appointed time (Hab 2:3), and we must do the same. Study the book of Habakkuk. This prophet had a fantastic vision, and could well have got frustrated when its fulfilment did not come to pass. But he had a waiting heart. Read his final words, and ask God to make them part of your experience:-

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.” (Hab3:17-18)

Why do I say this to prophets? Frustration with the apparent ineffectiveness of our work can cause us deep pain. Like Isaiah, we have to speak, and leave the fulfilling of what we speak to God. If it happens today, then that’s fine, and if it happens in two hundred years time, that’s fine as well. Remember prophets, it is God’s revealed word, and he has the divine right to fulfil it when he is ready.

The prophet and the Church - the FIVE FOLD MINISTRY

The prophetic office does not stand alone. It is part of the five fold ministry pattern, as outlined in Ephesians 4:11-12.

Here is an outline of the 5 foundation gifts:-

Apostle Releaser of gifts and appointer of ministries. Must have a wide and deep view of Church.

Prophet Interpreter of times and indicator of ways. His integrity must never be compromised.

Evangelist Keeper of the door and voice of the Gospel. Must have passion and force. But often cannot understand wider implications of ministry.

Pastor Shepherd of the sheep. Keeps open the bridge of love. Will be trodden down.

Teacher Equipper of ministries and guardian of truth. A passion for teaching. Often pushed to the edge of Church life.

Why do we need to know about this pattern? The reasons are clear:

1. This is the way God planned the ministry of his Church.
2. It prevents any one office claiming to have the entire truth. We have to work as a team
3. It gives balance to the ministry which God wants us to offer to his Church.
4. It prevents any one of the foundation gifts throwing out any other foundation ministry. This is particularly precious to prophets, who often find themselves being pushed to the edge of Church life, and even out of it. The Church may not like us, but it needs us. For without us, the ministry would be out of balance.

Can these gifts come in combination? I think that some of them fit well together. Pastor and teacher have always been linked. A pastor can have a prophetic voice. An Apostle can have an evangelistic side to his nature. But there is one combination which is particularly difficult – Pastor/Prophet. I am not saying that the Bible rejects this combination, but I am saying that it is a difficult combination to make work, for the following reasons:-

1. Who is the Pastor/prophet going to submit his ministry to? He can't submit it to himself. Who is going to accredit his ministry? He can't accredit himself.

2. It needs to be done by the leadership, of which he is part.
3. Who is going to test his word?
4. Pastors have to be involved in the day to day running of the body, and with all the detail of Church building. Prophets are seldom interested in this.
5. It's hard for the body when one man combines these two offices. The prophet must be free to say hard things. It is the Pastor's job to minister the words to the people in love and tenderness. The sheep are sometimes confused by this combination.

I was called to be a Pastor before I was called to be a prophet. When the second call came, I realised that I had to lay aside the Pastor's role, and this I did. A Pastor can have a prophetic edge to his work. He can give prophecy, both in its own right and in his teaching. But to hold the two offices side by side – it is not impossible, but it is very difficult.

The prophet and the Church – Recognition. (Acts 13: 1-4)

A prophet has his call from God. But in New Testament prophecy, that call has to be recognised by the Church.

In Acts 13, we see one of the ways in which that can be done:-

1. **The leaders pray.** If this does not happen, then how can God direct?
2. **God speaks.** It is necessary for God to make his will known.
3. **The leaders pray** some more, to get clarification and confirmation that what they are hearing is from God.
4. **The Church recognises** the call, by the laying on of hands. In this way, the Church is identified with the call, as well as confirming it.
5. **The ministry begins** to flow. Without some recognition and accreditation process, our foundation ministries will not be in line with biblical truth.

I want to repeat here what I have said already, because I believe it is of central importance to the growth of biblical prophecy in Africa:

The prophet has his call from God, but his recognition from men. If we do not have the recognition of a local Church – and that means recognition by the leadership – then we may still be a prophet, but we are not a biblical prophet.

The prophet and the Church – The Pastor/ Prophet relationship.

The relationship between the Pastors and the prophets is the key to the development of good prophecy. It is a relationship filled with problems:-

- Theological conflicts.** “I believe this..”
- Authority conflicts.** “You have no right to..”
- Church order conflicts.** “You’re not doing it right.”
- Personality conflicts.** “I don’t like you!”
- Internal conflicts.** “I’m not sure about myself, so I attack you”
- Fear conflicts.** “You will upset..”
- Bad history conflicts.** “This happened in the past.”

Both Pastor and Prophet can suffer from one or more of these conflicts. It helps to know where the conflict has its root, so that we know how to handle it. So how does friction arise?

- Misunderstanding of each other’s roles and each other’s gifts.**
- A clash of authority.**
- Lack of commitment to Church order on both sides.**
- Frustration on both sides.**
- Thinking too much of ourselves.**
- Bad experiences on both sides.**
- An unforgiving spirit.**
- No ability to rebuild bridges.**

How can we put things right?

1. Preparing the heart.

Keep the servant heart in your mind. Read of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples, (John 13) and think about the parable of the servant. (Luke 17:7-10)

2. The place & time to put things right.

There has to be a right time to put things right, and a right place. Shouting at each other in the assembly is not it! But nor is an official summons to “meet the elders.” The beginning of bridge building is best done informally, in a relaxed attitude, and usually without a lot of other people present. I know that this is difficult in Africa, but when a lot of people are present, too many people put their ideas forward. One to one is ideal, but two or three people together can share without shouting. The discussion needs to be confidential, or no one will be honest and open. This is another African problem. When someone is honest and open, others look for the chance to use what they say against them on another occasion. I have been the victim of this myself, and it is very unpleasant, and totally unbiblical.

This is not a meeting to place blame, but to rebuild trust and friendship. There may be times ahead for repentance and confession, but that comes much later. First the bridge must be built and tested. What if one side will not meet? Then relax and keep praying. These things cannot be forced into a man-made timetable. There is a right time.

3. Willingness to share, not shout.

Calm tempers and gentle speaking are the right way ahead. Shouting at each other may make us feel better, and there might have to be a bit of it to clear the air. But shouting seldom solves problems. We have to have a willingness to share together, recognising that if there is fault, both sides have to accept some responsibility.

4. Honest look at the problems. (John8:32)

Amazing things happen when two people look honestly at a problem. Usually, it gets smaller! So many of our problems are really misunderstandings, things put in the wrong way, or things said by others. When an honest sharing takes place, it is surprising how much of the problem disappears. An honest sharing will help find the root of the problem, and deal with it.

5. A decision to move forward, and plan for future conflict solving.

One bridge should lead to others, and the best bridge of all is the one which prevents friction and difficulty arising again. I often suggest that Pastors and prophets should sit down together on a regular basis, to share ministries, and pray together. In this way even if a problem does arise, it will not have very long to fester before Pastor and prophet are sitting down together, and things can be sorted out.

True and false prophecy

Pastors and prophets need to know the difference between true and false prophecy. So let’s look at the teaching of Ezekiel in chapter 13 of his book to get an understanding of the false.

1. “Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit.” (v.3)

False prophets prophesy from their own selfish hearts, saying and sharing what they feel to be right. Their ministry is built on their own needs—for power, for position, for support and love, for feeling a vital part of God’s work. The message they bring often sounds good and encouraging, but it lacks the one essential ingredient—it does not flow from the heart of God.

2. “You have not gone up to the breaks in the wall, to repair it for the house of Israel so that it will stand firm in the battle on the day of the Lord.” (v.5)

False prophets do not love the Church. They may pretend to, but they cannot hide their basic nature. Their lack of love and concern will show itself in a number of ways:-

An unwillingness to be committed to one local fellowship.

An unwillingness to be involved with the every-day life of the Church.

Speaking sweet and easy words which have no substance to them.

Speaking harsh, condemnatory and judgmental words to the Church, which lack any sign of encouragement, blessing or hope.

3. “Their visions are false and their divinations a lie.” (v.6)

If a prophet does not love the Church, then he soon loses the focus of his spirituality. For a lack of love for the Church reflects a lack of love for Jesus. It's only a short journey from this dangerous position to straying into occult practices.

4. “They say “Peace” when there is no peace”(v.10)

False prophets always tell us what we want to hear. Their words are always comfortable, encouraging and friendly. The reason for this is simple—false prophets want to be thought of as nice people. This way they get the adulation and respect which they so desperately desire. Jesus makes it clear what he thinks about this attitude— “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for this is how your fathers treated the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26)

5. “Flimsy wall” (v.10)

The true prophetic word warns of danger ahead, and helps the people of God avoid it. The true prophetic word strengthens the people of God for all that is to come. The true prophetic word cleanses the people of God, so that the Spirit of God can work more fully in them. The false prophets are the complete opposite to this. They fail to point out weaknesses, imperfections and lack of righteousness, and as a consequence they weaken and spoil the people of God. This is not always apparent at first. But when trouble comes, those who have depended on false prophecy will be revealed—and they will be washed away. What good is it then to say “If only we had known..!”

6. “Magic Charms..”

This means that there is to be no use of anything occult—no voices, manifestations, amulets, charms, spells, incantations or other occult paraphernalia.

Here is a list of the things we can expect to find in true prophet. Study them carefully.

- 1. True prophecy puts Jesus first. (Rev 19:10)**
- 2. The true prophet loves the body of Christ. (Eph. 5:25)**

- 3. A true prophet has, or is trying to live a pure life. (Ps 24: v 3-4)**
- 4. A true prophet loves and uses the Bible for his ministry. (Ps 119: 105)**
- 5. A true prophet respects the leadership.(1 Thess. 5:12)**
- 6. A true prophet has a humble heart. (Phil 2: 5-11)**
- 7. A true prophet wants the testing of the Church. (1 Theses. 5:21)**
- 8. A true prophet is willing to serve. (Mark 10: 45)**
- 9. A true prophet wants to belong to the body. (Heb. 10:25)**

Practical things for a prophet to know

You may be surprised to find that this is a short section. Surely these are the things at the heart of a prophet's ministry. Yes they are, but I have written a great deal about them elsewhere, and you can get these books from the website www.serving-africa.org. But as I have said many times, what really matters is who we are, and our relationship to God. If we have that right, then we will know how to exercise our ministry. Here are just a few basic things for you to consider.

1. Hearing from God.

The prophet expects to hear from God —this is God's covenant to the prophet. He hears God's word in many ways:-

Through prayer

God impresses his will into the heart, as the prophet waits on Him in prayer.

Through worship

God makes his will known to individual people, as they worship him, privately and in the fellowship of God's people.

Through the Bible

As a prophet studies and meditates on the Bible, God will impress things in the prophet's heart.

Through dreams and visions

God also speaks in dreams and visions. The problem is that in some cultures, and this includes Africa, dreams and visions are given the top place in revelation, and God's people do not give them the serious testing which they need. Study Deuteronomy 18:9-13 and Deuteronomy 4:16, which teach what is not per-

mitted — no witchcraft, no trances, no spells or incantations, no amulets or charms. Nothing from the occult must be included in biblical prophecy.

Through incidents in life

God often speaks through the experiences of our daily lives. Everyday events become vehicles to explain his purposes, and revelations of his will.

2. How does a prophet deliver his word?

Very few prophets have ever been taught how to speak what they have been given. But there are some simple guidelines, which will help with the ministry:-

1. Speak with the approval of the Pastor.
2. Speak within the discipline of the body – sharing with individuals with the knowledge of the Pastor, and sharing in the worship at the appropriate time. A prophet does not break the flow of worship.
3. Speak in a normal voice.
4. Speak briefly and to the point, sharing the word but not applying it.
5. Speak with respect for the body, the leadership and under the leading of the Spirit.

3. How does a prophet test his word?

This is not a difficult thing to do, but it takes TIME! In Africa, we want everything quickly. Prophets have to take responsibility to test what they speak. It is not just the leaders and people who have to test. The first testing is our responsibility. Here is one way:-

1. Time in prayer.
2. Time in Bible study, to find the biblical roots.
3. Time to seek understanding.
4. Time to seek the right time.

If in doubt, it is best to wait, to pray, and get some advice from spiritually experienced people.

4. How does the body test a word?

It is the responsibility of the body, guided by the leadership, to test every word. (1 John 4:1) The first tests are of the prophet himself:-

Test the man

Does he belong to the body?
Does he submit his word/ministry to the leadership of the Body?

Does he submit himself to the testing of other prophets?

Does he have a desire to unlock the gift of prophecy in others within the Body?

Does he attend worship, and share in the local ministry of his local Church?

Test the word

Here are some of the basic questions which help get to the truth of a prophetic word. They have to be asked prayerfully. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal true prophecy to us, and I use these questions to give Him freedom to direct my thinking.

Is this word biblically correct? Every prophetic word from God must be rooted in the Bible and must not contradict or add to that revelation?

Do any of the words in the prophetic word remind us of particular verses/passages ?

Do any of the words in the prophetic word remind us of biblical stories or people ?

Does anything in the prophetic word remind us of anything we have come across recently in a sermon, a home group teaching, or in our own private study time ?

Does this word encourage, direct, rebuke, build up?

Find the purpose of the word

This is a central part of the testing process. The purpose of the word should reveal itself as we test it. We are faced with a simple question – what is God asking us to do, or what is he showing or telling us about our situation? For example:-

A surrender/deeper commitment.

A change of direction.

An encouragement to proceed with more/less caution.

Discovery of an error or sin in the body.

A relationship problem within the body/between bodies.

A lack of repentance.

A command to wait/listen more.

A warning of some impending event.

The uncovering of a truth that has been hidden / lost /forgotten.

Make a response to the word

The testing process comes to an end when we have understood the word, and made some decision to act on it.

5. Background

It's a good practice for a prophet to know the biblical background to any word he or she delivers. The roots of everything we say is in the Bible. So it is worth spending time in prayer establishing this biblical framework, before we speak. Then we will have confidence in our word, and God's people will know where to look for their testing. Take a look at how I prepared the word for Tamale, in the ADDITIONS section at the end of this book.

6. Tiredness

Beware tiredness! When we are tired, it is so easy to mishear from God, or to get angry and frustrated. Make sure you take time for rest. We are expected to be available 24 hours every day to the Lord, but we are not expected to minister 24 hours a day for 7 days a week every week! It is not possible to maintain quality ministry under such conditions. Take time to rest, time with your wife and family, or with your friends.

I remember once getting very tired, and as I began to pray, the Lord said "You need to rest." "But Lord, the ministry..." He replied "I am not speaking to you until you rest." I fell asleep immediately, and woke up, still kneeling by my bed! Take time to rest!!

Training others

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." (2 Tim 2:2)

Ephesians 4:11-12 makes clear that the heart of our office is to train others in the ministry, to equip the saints. In this the Apostle was following the lead of Jesus, who trained his twelve disciples, so that they in turn could train others. Why is it then that so few African Pastors, prophets and leaders give time to training others to follow them in ministry?

- *Fear – that those trained will take their calling or sheep from them.
- * Pride – they don't want anyone else to take their position.
- * Lack of understanding - that this is a central part of their function.
- * Lack of training and materials to carry out this task.

Yet it is essential, if our ministries are to be increased, and carried on down the generations. So how can we go about it?

- * Recognise our responsibility in this area.
- * Look out for younger prophets, or for those who have some kind of call on their lives and spend time with them.

* Have a pattern of teaching which we can share with them

I have included a simple training course in the ADDITIONS section. This is a modified version of "The four week course," which we released at the international Conference in Kumasi in 2003. If you have someone who you feel is beginning to show some prophetic calling, study this course with them. At the end of it, it will be clear where they stand. After this, it is necessary to invest time in them, to help them begin to grow. This is time consuming, but it is also your duty and your privilege.

There is much material to help you train others on the website.

ADDITIONS

I have included here a number of things which prophets might find useful.

Training others: The four week Course

READ THIS:- This is a teacher's guide, not a book! You need to study and think about the things you are going to teach. If you have been to 2003, you will have the extended course book, which will help you study. You can also visit www.serving-africa.org for extra material.

OUTLINE

- Week 1. What is a prophet?
The five fold ministry.**
- Week 2: Hearing from God.
Characteristics of the prophetic life.**
- Week 3. Knowing true
from false.
Testing the words
and the men.**
- Week 4. Recognising and
releasing prophets
Bible study. Psalm 51
What to do now.**

WEEK 1: Session 1 What is a prophet?

Teaching suggestion:- Study each of these passages yourself, to understand the prophetic ministry. Then explain what you have learnt to your school.

Prophets have a wide range of ministry:-

1. Watchman. (Ezekiel 33:1-11)
2. Messenger. (Isaiah 6:9)
3. Intercessor. (Amos 7:1-3)
4. A man of the Bible. (Revelation 22:18)
5. A man of the Spirit. (1 Cor.12: Eph 4: 1-16: Rev 19:10)
6. A man who accepts the hard things. (Luke 6:26)
7. A man of the Fellowship.(Eph.4:12)
8. A Man of prayer. (Philippians 4:6)

Teaching suggestion:- Encourage your school to see prophets as men and women with different emphasis in their ministries. Prophets are not just people who come and give you a personal word! Their ministry is much deeper and wider than that. We in Africa want men and women who will enter the fullness of the call.

WEEK 1: Session 2 The 5 fold ministry of God.

Teaching suggestion:- It's vital that we understand that prophets are central to God's plan for ministry. Try to explain the five fold ministries yourself. I have given you a few words to illustrate each one.

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service. " (Ephesians 4:11)

Prophets complete the totality of ministry which God intends for his people. If this ministry is missing, then the work is unbalanced. Here is an outline of the five fold ministry as taught by St Paul in Ephesians.

Apostle Releaser of gifts and appointer of ministries. Must have a wide and deep view of the Church.

Prophet Interpreter of times and indicator of ways. His integrity must never be compromised.

Evangelist Keeper of the door and voice of the Gospel. Must have passion and force. But often cannot understand wider implications of ministry.

Pastor Shepherd of the sheep. Keeps open the bridge of love. Will be trodden down.

Teacher Equipper of ministries and guardian of truth. A passion for teaching, but refuses to suffer fools gladly. Often pushed to the edge of Church life.

Teaching suggestion:- If prophets are to be part of the ministry of the Church, what benefits does this bring us? Ask your school to give you some answers.

WEEK 2 : Session 1 Hearing from God.

Teaching suggestion: This is a practical session. Through these various teaching points, try to understand how a prophet hears from God.

The prophet expects to hear from God – this is God's covenant to the prophet. He hears God's word in many ways:-

Through prayer. (Isaiah 6:1)

God impresses his will into the heart, as the prophet waits on Him in prayer. Has this ever happened to you ?

Through worship. (1 Sam 7:7-9)

God makes his will known to individual people, as they worship him, privately and in the fellowship of God's people.

Through the Bible. (2 Kings 22)

As a prophet studies and meditates on the Bible, God will impress things in the prophet's heart.

Through dreams and visions. (Revelation 1:10)

God does speak in dreams and visions. The problem is that in some cultures, and this includes Africa, dreams and visions are given the top place in revelation, and God's people do not give them the serious testing which they need. Deuteronomy 18:9-13 and Deuteronomy 4:16 teaches what is not permitted. To sum these verses up – no witchcraft, no trances, no spells, no incantations, no amulets or charms are permitted. Nothing from the occult must be included in biblical prophecy.

Through incidents in life (Jeremiah 11-15)

Teaching suggestion: Ask your school to share any ways in which they have heard from God. Suggest that next week we might share anything God has been saying during the week.

WEEK 2: Session 2 Character

The prophetic ministry cannot be separated from the life, character and behaviour of the prophet. The word he receives is spoken through his life and personality. So it is essential to know what the Bible expects of that character and life.

Teaching suggestion: There are too many characteristics listed here! You must choose which ones to teach. I always teach the crucified life material. No prophet will go far wrong if he or she leads a crucified life.

Characteristic 1 God centred. (1Sam 17:45&47)

Characteristic 2 Never takes the easy way out. (1 Kings 22: 1-38)

Characteristic 3 Crucified the world. (2 Tim 4:10)

The world loves power and success.

The crucified life of the leader loves obedience and service.

The world wants to control.

The crucified life of the leader wants to encourage and release.

The world likes to manipulate, to work in the darkness and in underhand ways.

The crucified life of the leader works in honesty and openness, rejoicing in the light.

The world loves riches.

The crucified life of the leader looks to the provision of God and his work.

The world loves laziness, poor discipline and indulgence.

The crucified life of the leader seeks to discipline his life, so he can be effective, and endure.

The world likes confusion in its thinking, diluting truth to suit its own needs.

The crucified life of the leader loves the truth of God's word, and matches this life to God's law.

The world hates the poor, despising them, or providing them with the minimum.

The crucified life of the leader looks to the needs of the poor, the oppressed and the helpless, knowing that in serving these, he is serving the Lord.

The world exploits sexuality, and pulls down family life.

The crucified leader has control of his or her sexuality, and seeks in every way to build up marriage and family life.

Characteristic 4 Obedient, whatever it costs. (Mark 10:32)

Characteristic 5 Discipline whatever it costs. (Acts 27:21)

Characteristic 6 Spirit filled. (Acts 4:8)

Characteristic 7 Servant heart. (Mark 8:34-35)

The servant denies himself. He has conquered his self will, (Luke 17:7-10) and follows in his Master's way. (Phil 2:5-8)

The servant takes up his cross, without complaining. He bears all the burdens of the cross with joy. (Hebrews 12:2)

The servant follows, without complaint. (Luke 9:51-62)

Teaching suggestion: If you have taught the crucified life, challenge your school to apply this teaching to their own lives.

WEEK 3: Session 1 Knowing true from false

Teaching suggestion: The emphasis of this teaching is TRUE prophecy. To get an understanding of that, we have to look first at the false. Take time to study this yourself, before you teach it.

The false:- Ezekiel chapter 13

1. "Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit." (v.3)

False prophets prophesy from their own selfish hearts, saying and sharing what they feel to be right. Their ministry is built on their own needs—for power, for position, for support and love, for feeling a vital part of God's work. The message they bring often sounds good and encouraging, but it lacks the one essential ingredient—it does not flow from the heart of God.

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False prophets do not love the Church. They may pretend to, but they cannot hide their basic nature. Their lack of love and concern will show itself in a number of ways:-

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An unwillingness to be involved with the everyday life of the Church.

Speaking words which are sweet and easy to receive, but which have no substance to them.

Speaking harsh, condemnatory and judgmental words to the Church, which lack

any sign of encouragement, blessing or hope.

3. “Their visions are false and their divinations a lie.” (v.6)

If a prophet does not love the Church, then he soon loses the focus of his spirituality. For a lack of love for the Church reflects a lack of love for Jesus. It’s only a short journey from this dangerous position to straying into occult practices.

4. “They say “Peace” when there is no peace”(v.10)

False prophets always tell us what we want to hear. Their words are always comfortable, encouraging and friendly. The reason for this is simple—false prophets want to be thought of as nice people. This way they get the adulation and respect which they so desperately desire. Jesus makes it clear what he thinks about this attitude— “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for this is how your fathers treated the false prophets.” (Luke 6:26)

5. “Flimsy wall” (v.10)

The true prophetic word warns of danger ahead, and helps the people of God avoid it. The true prophetic word strengthens the people of God for all that is to come. The true prophetic word cleanses the people of God, so that the Spirit of God can work more fully in them. The false prophets are the complete opposite to this. They fail to point out weaknesses, imperfections and lack of righteousness, and as a consequence they weaken and spoil the people of God. This is not always apparent at first. But when trouble comes, those who have depended on false prophecy will be revealed—and they will be washed away. What good is it then to say “If only we had known..!”

6. “Magic Charms..” (v 18)

This means that there is to be no use of anything occult—no voices, manifestations, amulets, charms, spells, incantations or other occult paraphernalia.

Signs of true prophecy

1. **True prophecy puts Jesus first. (Rev 19:10)**
2. **The true prophet loves the body of Christ. (Eph. 5:25)**
3. **A true prophet has, or is trying to live a pure life. (Ps 24: v 3-4)**
4. **A true prophet loves and uses the Bible for his ministry. (Ps 119: 105)**
5. **A true prophet respects the leadership. (1 Thess. 5:12)**
6. **A true prophet has a humble heart. (Phil 2: 5-11)**
7. **A true prophet wants the testing of the Church. (1 Thess. 5:21)**
8. **A true prophet is willing to serve. (Mark 10: 45)**
9. **A true prophet wants to belong to the body. (Heb. 10:25)**

Teaching suggestion: This list of signs of true prophecy is the heart of this session. If possible, get it copied and given out. You have permission to copy any of this material.

WEEK 3: Session 2 Testing the words & men

Teaching suggestion: This is a very practical session. It is trying to give some way by which we can test both the man and his words. At the end, I have included a short word, which you might like to test, using the suggestions here.

1. Test the man. Ask these questions. Does he:-

Belong to the Body?

Submit his word/ministry to the leadership of the Body?

Submit himself to the testing of other prophets in the Body?

Have a desire to unlock the gift of prophecy in others within the Body?

Does he attend worship, and share in the local ministry of his local Church?

2. Test the word. Ask these questions:-

Is this word Biblically correct? Every prophetic word from God must be rooted in the Bible and must not contradict or add to that revelation?

Do any of the words in the prophetic word remind us of particular verses/passages ?

Do any of the words in the prophetic word remind us of biblical stories or people ?

Does anything in the prophetic word remind us of anything we have come across recently in a sermon, a home group teaching, or in our own private study time ?

Does this word encourage, direct, rebuke, build up? **What is** this word asking us to do?

3. Plan a response.

The question is - “What does this word ask us to do?” Only when we know the answer to this question, can we work out our response. For example:-

A surrender/deeper commitment.

A change of direction.

An encouragement to proceed with more/less caution.

Discovery of an error or sin in the body.

A relationship problem within the body/between bodies.

A lack of repentance.

A command to wait/listen more.

A warning of some impending event.

The uncovering of a truth that has been hidden / lost / forgotten.

4. Make a response to the word.

There has to be some decision about what to do about what God has told us. Otherwise, we are wasting his time.

Test this word.

As a practical exercise, practice what you have learnt on this word:-

I call you to be servants – servants of me, servants of each other, servants of those who do not know me. The servant heart I value more than any other offering, because it is the heart which is closest to mine, and which I am able to use.

If I visit you, will I find this heart in you, or will I find pride, deceit, jealousy, envy ? Examine yourselves before me, and I will show you your heart.

WEEK 4: Session 1 Releasing ministries.

Teaching suggestion: The purpose of this course is to release people into their ministries. That means discovering prophets, and releasing people into prophecy. The two are not quite the same. So all we can do in this final week, is to outline some teaching. It's up to each Pastor to decide how to proceed from here.

1. Gifts and ministries.

When we are looking for release in prophecy, we are looking for two different, but related blessings.

* **We are looking for God to raise up prophets.** See Ephesians 4: 11-12. Prophets are one of the foundation ministries of the Church. They are given to embody the prophetic gift. They have their calling to build up the body, and to release gifts and ministries in others.

* **We are looking for the release of the gift of prophecy.** See 1 Corinthians 12. Here we learn that the one Spirit gives the gifts. (v4) We see that there is a great variety of gifting, and among those gifts is the gift of prophecy. (v 10) This gift is given for the blessing of the whole body. (verses 12-13)

* **1 Corinthians 14:1** "Follow the way of love, and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy."

* **1 Corinthians 14:5** "I would like everyone of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy."

2. Key principles.

As we begin to release the gift of prophecy, there are key biblical principles involved:-

- * It is the will of God. (Acts 2: 17-18)
- * It is the work of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:2)
- * There has to be individual response. (Acts 13:4)
- * There has to be a leadership response. (Acts 13:3)

3. Time to pray and act.

There is little more I can write. As this course comes to an end, it is time to seek God together, for a release of prophecy and the raising up of prophets.

Some suggestions.

* You might have a time of prayer, and invite people to prophesy, under the authority of the leader.

* You might offer to pray with laying on of hands for any who want the gift of prophecy.

* You might invite any who feel the call of prophet to speak with you after the course. Only you can decide what steps to take with these people. I can suggest:-

1. You contact us, for additional material.
2. You visit our website, where you can see what books are available, and order them free.
3. You look out for our teaching courses, which take place regularly in Ghana and Francophone countries. You can e mail me, or contact us through our Accra address. Contact details at the end of the book.

Repentance

Repentance is one of the main themes of prophetic ministry. We need to know about it:- What is repentance?

Every prophet must have a good theology of repentance. Here is a biblical foundation to study, based on Psalm 51.

1. "Against you, you only have I sinned." (Ps 51:4)

It is against God we have sinned. No amount of discussion or debate can change this basic truth. Accepting it is the starting point for true repentance. However, it is the hardest point for a Christian to find.

2. "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." (Ps 51:7)

Once we know our sin, we need the cleansing of God, which comes through the blood of Jesus — "The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:7) But in order to be washed, God will make us aware of

what we have done. How else can we know the true cleansing, if we are not made aware of the shame of the nation, the darkness of the nation, the weakness of the church, or the failure of leadership? This is a most painful experience, but it cannot be avoided if we want the fruits of repentance. This is also the step that many want to avoid, or make easy. But to know the true nature of our sin is a painful and even frightening experience. Without this, we can never know true repentance.

3. "You desire truth in the inner parts." (Ps. 51:6)

As we are praying and thinking about these things, the enemy will do all he can to spoil our repentance. He knows he must, because this is such a powerful and life giving moment for us. (See 1 Samuel 7:7) While we are repenting, we need to hear words of truth from the Bible, to counter the lies of the enemy. Words like:-

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart O God you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17)

"Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." (Psalm 51:7)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."(1 John 1: 9)

4. "Create in me a pure heart." (Ps. 51:10)

Repentance has to result in a new way of living. We cannot repent and continue in the same way as before. What does God expect?

A commitment to a new way of life. Even though we do not know the implications, we must be willing to let the Holy Spirit make the changes. Working out this new way of living is easier if we think, pray and talk with others.

A willingness to pay the price of repentance, and the changes it will bring personally, in church life, and beyond.

**God is faithful!
God's word to Tamale**

This material is included to help prophets see how as word is received, studied, developed and given.

First preaching: 1 Kings 18.42

"Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. "Go and look towards the sea" he told his servant. And he went up and looked. "There is nothing there" he said. Seven times Elijah said "Go back." The seventh time the servant reported "A cloud the size of a man's hand is rising from the sea."

" Meanwhile the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on..."

At the time of the Prophet Elijah, the people of Israel had stopped following God, and were worshipping a false god called Baal. The God of the Bible was not happy with this, and sent a drought, to wake the people up to their spiritual state. Then Elijah arrived, and challenged the false prophets of Baal to a competition on Mount Carmel. Each was to choose a sacrifice, and pray to their God for fire to come on it. The false prophets prayed all day over their sacrifice, and nothing happened. Then, at the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again." Immediately fire fell from heaven, and consumed his sacrifice, and the people cried out "the Lord he is God!" (1 Kings 18:36-37)

The heart of the message

Now we come to the heart of this experience, as far as God's people in Tamale are concerned. Elijah had brought the people back to God, but now they needed healing from the drought. They needed blessing. So he sent his servant up to the mountain to tell him what he saw. While the servant was on his way, Elijah began to pray. The Bible doesn't tell us what he said, but it is not hard to work it out. "God, you have spoken, and the people have honoured you. Now keep your promise to us. Pour down rain, so that the people will know that you are God. Send times of refreshing to your people." But when the servant returned from the mountain top, he said "I don't see anything." So Elijah prayed again. We can imagine his prayer- "God you promised to send times of refreshing. We need the refreshing of your power. We need the blessing of your peace and we need the blessing of your presence. Answer me God. Keep your promise. Do not abandon us."

The servant went up the mountain again, and returned again. "I see nothing" he said. Again Elijah prayed, and again the servant went up again, and returned with the words "I see nothing." Elijah prayed even more fervently "God, keep your promise. Send us your refreshing. You must. We cannot manage without it." Again the servant journeyed to the mountain

top, and again he returned, having seen nothing. And again he went, and again! Six times he went to the mountain top, and six times he brought back the same report— “I see nothing.” Six times Elijah cried out to God, and then the servant returned for the seventh time. This time he returned and said “I see a cloud the size of a man’s hand!” Then Elijah knew that God was going to be faithful. Soon it was raining heavily - the full blessing of God had come.

The cloud over Tamale

I believe that the “cloud the size of man’s hand” is about to appear in the heavenly places over Tamale. If this is true, God is planning something special here—not just a small cloud but the full blessing.

First vision

I saw a very large hill, and on the top of it, a tall pole, with a flag at the top of the pole. But the flag was hanging down. It was not moving at all, because there was no wind. Then far far away over the plain, I saw that the trees and bushes were beginning to move, because the wind was blowing. Slowly I saw the wind coming closer and closer. Then I looked up at the flag, and I saw that it was just beginning to move a little in the wind. I knew that soon the flag would be flying out in a very strong wind.

First word

Tamale is standing in the path of the flow of my Spirit.

Soon the Spirit will flow and times of refreshing, times of anointing and times of power will come.

Hold on to what you have. Strengthen the foundations. Your time is coming. I have not forgotten you.

Comment

It is not the call of a prophet to explain his word. The people of God must test it, and see if they think it is from God, and then the Pastors and teachers must teach the people. But I can give my own understanding to help in the testing process. If this vision and word come from God, they are suggesting to us that God has not forgotten his people. He is planning a move of the Spirit in Tamale. We must begin to prepare ourselves, let our hope and courage increase, and come together more.

Second preaching Mark 6: 25-29 and Mark 10: 46-52

The woman in our first story was in a very bad way. With her sickness, she had been worn down. She had spent all her money on doctors, and was no better. Now she was at the end of her hope, until one day she heard something about Jesus. We do not know what she heard, or how she heard it, but it caused a stirring in her spirit. She knew that because of her illness, she could not go openly to him, so she made plan. She would creep up to him through the crowd, and touch him, because she believed that if she just touched his clothes she would be healed.

One day she heard that Jesus was passing by, and there was a large crowd around him. So she began to creep through the people towards him. At first he was just a distant figure, but she crept closer. Then she could see him, and she crept closer. Then she could hear him, and she crept closer. Then she could see his face, but she crept closer, and finally she touched him, and was healed. God is faithful, and when the Holy Spirit stirs a heart, if that heart responds, God is faithful.

Jesus knew what had happened, and he called her out in front of him. She probably expected a rebuke, but he said “Daughter your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be free from your suffering.” God is faithful when the human heart responds to the stirring of the spirit of God.

Bartimaeus, like the woman was also in a bad way. Blind, he could hope for little from life, except to beg a little money. One day, he heard a disturbance around him, and sensed that a crowd of people were close. He asked what was happening, and someone told him that Jesus was passing by. At that moment, his spirit was stirred within him, and he cried out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” The people around him told him to be quiet, but his spirit had been stirred, and he shouted louder “Jesus, Son of David have mercy on me.” Jesus heard this cry, and called Bartimaeus to him. “What do you want?” Jesus asked. “I want to see” he replied. God was faithful to him, and he received his sight. The stirring of the Spirit in him had brought the faithfulness of God to him. God is faithful to those who respond to the stirring of the Spirit. And the Spirit has been stirred in Tamale. God will keep his promise.

The Bible says: “Call to me and I will answer you.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

The Bible says: “Not by might, not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord.” (Zechariah 4:6)

The Bible says: “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are all “Yes” in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:20)

The Bible says: “The One who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

God loves his people in Tamale. He has not forgotten them. The Spirit has begun to stir the hearts, and

God will be faithful to that stirring, as he was to the woman and to Bartimaeus

Second vision

I saw the Father in his workshop, making a beautiful diamond. I asked him "Father, what are you doing with this diamond?" He replied "This is for my people in Tamale." I looked closer, and I saw that there was writing on the diamond. It said "When I stir the hearts of my people, I will be faithful to them."

Second word.

There are many promises to be fulfilled in this place.

I have many gifts and blessings to give you.

Again and again the enemy has stood in the way of your promise.

I have forbidden him to do it any longer.

Call to me and I will fulfill my promise.

Comment

If these words and visions are from God, then they are a powerful sign of His love for his people in Tamale, and of his plans for blessing. We have already seen a small sign of this, as we met together in August 2001. The people of God began to lift up their heads, and remember again their special place in the heart of God. Now we must begin to seek him with all our heart, so that this small stirring of the Spirit can increase in power and strength. We must long and expect the powerful anointing which God had planned for us. He has made His intentions clear. We must begin to prepare ourselves, so that He can move in greater power on us. This is clearly his plan. Now it is our turn to strengthen what we have, so that we are ready for what is to come.

The Challenge of Jeremiah

Every prophet has to be sure of his lifestyle. Without a Godly and Biblical foundation for his life, a prophet will quickly fall away from the truth, and begin to speak lies. I have written extensively on this subject in my book "The disciplined life of a prophet." But there is nothing quite like the challenge of another prophet to help us look again at our lifestyle, our behaviour and our method of working, and in this material, I want to let the prophet Jeremiah challenge and encourage us to self examination, and correction where needed.

Jeremiah – the man.

Jeremiah was called at a young age to his work, and he had a long ministry. To him fell the responsibility of interpreting difficult times for Judah. The pressure was on the Nation from great world powers, especially Babylon, and true religion was at a very low ebb. His task was to explain to the people that the coming of Babylon was the judgment of God on the godless Nation, and that nothing could turn back the Babylonians. He encouraged the people to join the Babylonian side, prophesying that the people who did this would be safe. He encouraged those who were taken in the first exile to remain in Babylon, because this was the will of God. He criticised false religion and false prophecy, and as a consequence lived in great danger of his life. Finally the very people he had tried to warn accused him of bringing about their downfall, and forced him to run away from the Babylonians to Egypt.

One of the hardest lessons a prophet has to learn is that he has no rights. He cannot choose where to go, when to go or what to say. These things are given to him by the Lord. I'm not saying that a prophet must sit in his watchtower, until he gets a divine revelation. Such revelation as he receives comes from study of the Bible, prayer, worship and in the course of his daily life. God has given the human body a brain, and with it we must weigh and test what we see and hear, and by the grace of God try to discern the signs of the times. The prophet is actively involved with God in sharing and delivering the word he has received. But in the end, we are servants, messengers of God, available to do his will when he decides, in the way he decides and in the place he decides.

1st challenge:- We do not go to those who invite us, but to those to whom we are sent.

This is basic Christian discipline, and looks easy in writing. But it is not always so easy to do. Why?

We often want to go to those who we know will receive us.

We often go to those who we know will give us a good offering.

We often avoid those that we know will give us a hard time. We often avoid those we consider could not understand our message.

We often go for the easy and comfortable path.

It takes great discipline and determination to accept Jeremiah's challenge – to let the Lord direct our steps. Yet if we do not, our ministry will always be weak and ineffective. We can only function properly in the place of God's choosing, at the time of God's choosing.

"Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said 'We will not walk in it.'" (6:16)

The mission of the true prophet is never easy. Again and again the prophet is up against the stubborn and disobedient hearts which are often in the people of God. So when he speaks what appears to be a simple word, as did the prophet Jeremiah in this verse, the wilfulness and disobedience rise up against him. This is not easy to live with, but unless the prophet can face and endure this, he will never reach the full potential of his ministry.

When I began as a prophet, I did not expect to face so much hostility and rejection. I was, after all, merely passing on what God had said to me. But like Jeremiah, I soon discovered how wilful and how spiteful God's people can be towards the messenger. I have had to come to terms with this, and accept it. It has hurt me many times, and will many times more. One occasion, when I was put out of a Church, God said to me "remember prophet, it is me they are rejecting not you. It is me they are hurting, not you. It is my message they will not receive, not yours." I have found this helpful to remember as my ministry has progressed. But when God is hurt, the prophet is also hurt. When God is rejected, it is almost impossible for a prophet not to feel rejected. When we see the tender heart of God, and the arrogant heart of his people, it is not easy for us.

2nd challenge:- To accept the rejection, as part of our calling, and not to take it personally.

"I have made you a tester of metals, and my people are the ore, that you may observe and test their ways." (6:27)

One day I was walking around the town where I live, when a member of a Church came up to me, and we walked together for a while. "You challenge me" he said. I hadn't said a word, so I asked what he meant. "It's who you are, what you do, the way you live – these things make me uncomfortable."

I was prophesying in a meeting once, and afterwards my friend, who was travelling with me as my helper said "You make me afraid sometimes." I asked him what he meant and he replied "Can't you see? After all that you have said tonight, I'm nervous. I don't know what you know!" Mary and I were having dinner with some friends once, and they wanted to show us the plans they had for their new house. "But what's wrong with this house you live in now?" Mary asked. "Nothing. We just want a bigger and better one." Then they began to show us their plans. Every time they showed us another amazing feature of the house Mary would say "When we are in Africa..." or "Africans live very simply" or "It's tough to be ill in Africa – medicine is expensive." By the end of the evening, they were very uncomfortable. They had chosen to show their plans for their expensive new house to two people who don't have the slightest interest in houses or money –only in serving God.

A prophet is a tester of metals, and God's people are the ore. We live as God has told us to live, we see what God allows us to see and we speak as God allows us to speak. Often these things conflict with the way that the people of God are living and thinking. Our task is to be the tester of the metal – to show by our live and our ministry what God expects, and what the people are doing. Do not expect to be thanked for this! God's people do not want to be tested. They want to be comfortable, to do things their way, and they so easily convince themselves that they are right. A prophet is a man from the desert places. He can only live God's way, in purity and holiness, with no room for compromise. These two ways clash, and bring trouble to the prophet.

We must ignore the pain of this. God wants pure metal – he wants gold. We must be ready to show the quality of the ore of the people of God. If we stray from this position, because it is too uncomfortable, we are on the path which leads to false prophecy.

3rd challenge:- Is your life pure? Are you, by your lifestyle, being a tester of metals?

"Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them." (15:19)

The people of God are constantly trying to compromise a prophet. They want a prophet to be less clear cut, to be willing to compromise a little, to be easier on the people of God. Once they succeed in doing this, the prophet is useless to them - but that is what they want. They want to compromise us, so that they can get away with being impure, unholy, poorly disciplined. There is nothing worse than wanting to have an easy life, while the prophet is constantly demanding higher and higher standards.

But the Bible is clear – it is not the prophet who has to change, but God's people. There is no room for the prophet to change. His calling will not allow him to compromise, to speak easy and comfortable things and make the way easy. He cannot change, and he must not. The people of God have to come to him, and examine their lives in the light of the truth he is trying to share. Of course this does not mean that a prophet has to walk around in arrogance, expecting the people of God to bow down to him. A prophet is also called on to have a servant heart, and from this heart he speaks his message, and to this message the people come.

It's hard for the people to believe in this verse, but even harder for the prophet. He longs that the people will love and welcome him; he longs that they will hear the word of the Lord through him, and he longs to be part of them. His humanity is crying out for acceptance. In this agony, it is so easy for a prophet to loose his focus, and to go after the people of God. But he cannot, and because he cannot, he is condemned to a life of loneliness, rejection, hatred, ridicule and even death.

4th challenge:- Are you prepared for the life of loneliness which your calling will bring on you? Or are you too ready to compromise?

“I the Lord search the heart...” (17:10)

This challenge has to go with the one above, and in the first place should be directed towards the prophet himself. It might read “I the Lord search your heart.” Some prophets seem to think that the word they receive from God is independent of their own lives and attitudes. Nothing could be further from the truth. The destination of any word from God is first into the heart and mind of the prophet. That heart has to be examined first, before the word reaches out to anybody else. This is why I believe a prophet should long for the servant heart, which will allow God access without the barrier of arrogance or pride. The prophet who will not let his heart be examined is in serious trouble. He soon strays into arrogance, pride and foolishness. Those who listen to him might not know this – we are very good at disguising our own motives – and so arrogant and false prophecy begins to take root in the body of Christ.

Jeremiah challenges us to allow God to examine us, and to take away anything which is not from Him. We – God’s prophets – have to be the first to confess and repent. This is the only position from which we can challenge others with the word of God. If confession and repentance are not part of our lives, I do not believe that it is possible to be a true prophet from God. This is a hard thing to write, but I believe we must maintain the highest standards of prophecy in the body. An unconfessing and unrepenting prophet is a poor example to the body, and should not be tolerated.

5th challenge:- Is confession and repentance a part of your daily life and experience?

“Heal me O Lord and I shall be healed, save me and I shall be saved, for you are the one I praise.” (17:14)

This is a tremendous challenge to the personal life of a prophet. So often we spend so much of our time listening, praying and sharing, that we forget our own needs. Not only does God examine our hearts, that we might confess and repent, He also wants to release in us his healing power. We need to know our sicknesses, and we need to seek His healing for those sicknesses. Why? So that we can know the power of His salvation, and have the release of the spirit of praise.

Again and again I come across prophets who have faithful ministries, but they lack the sense of the pres-

ence of God. Their words are good, but I do not feel the moving of the spirit of God for healing and praise in their lives. Yet of all the ministries, ours is in desperate need of the healing, saving and praising power of God. This transforms our words from being God’s words, to being God’s living words.

Prophets must be constantly seeking their own healing, their own experience of salvation, and their own desire to worship. We must look more to God, and less to the words we bring, or the people who hear them. We must be soaked in the salvation and praise of God. We must be filled with the healing power of God. We must be longing for more and more of God’s healing in our own lives. If we accept this challenge, then our words are sparkling, power filled, joy to the hearers and ministry to the heart of God. However hard we have to be, people will recognise in our ministries the life giving power of God. Without it, we quickly become a banging gong, or a sounding cymbal. (1 Cor.13:1)

6th challenge:- Are there areas of your life which are not healed? What are you going to do about it?

“This man should be sentenced to death, because he has prophesied against this city.” (26:11)

A prophet must not take any account of men. I’m not saying that we have a licence to be rude or arrogant, or that we should not be willing to take advice. But when we come to our ministry, we are answerable to God. This is our only safe place, our only security and our only hope. Men threatened the life of Jeremiah, and they will threaten us. I have lost count of the number of times I have been ridiculed, insulted, ignored, rejected, and put out of places. I have lost count of the number of times powerful and influential men have ignored or insulted me. Men who could have forwarded my work have brushed me off as if I were rubbish. On many occasions I have been left standing outside the city wall with no help, no comfort and no food. So what? This is part of the cost of my calling. Men are able to ignore me, but if I truly speak for God, they will have to answer for what they have done. If I did not speak for God, then they have done what is right—they have protected the flock from false prophecy.

The problem is this—many prophets cannot make this distinction. They don’t like being rejected—they want to be liked. None of us like being made to look foolish or of no account. So, in order to be liked, we soften our message, or hold back when we know we should speak. This is especially difficult for those men who live by their ministry. Many of us have families to feed and cloth, and costs to pay. We know that if we say certain things, the Church will not give us the money or food we need to live. This has been a reality for me, and I share it to encourage others who are in the prophetic calling. But we serve a different mas-

ter, who expects us to say what He wants us to say, when He wants it said and in the way He wants it said, regardless of personal consequences. We have to have courage.

7th challenge:- Despised and rejected. Is this is our life? Can you stand this? If not, you must either leave the Ministry, or seek God for more strength.

“In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died.” (28:17)

It's so easy for the people of God to treat prophecy lightly. Words are given, but they are seldom recorded, not given enough prayer or testing, and are quickly forgotten. The prophet finds this very hard to bear. The prophetic word is his life, and when the word is treated in a poor way, his heart is hurt. I remember going to one Church, and sharing a prophetic word. But the leaders were not interested, and the people hardly bothered to listen. In my prayers that night, I saw the Lord, and I held out the word he had given me to share. “Here Lord” I said “ I have to return this to you. I couldn't find anyone to receive it.” The Lord took back the word, and I saw tears running down his face. I didn't know what to say.

But if a prophet speaks a true word from God, it has power to fulfil what it speaks. Hananiah thought he could take on the living word of God in the mouth of Jeremiah, and for two months he seemed to have been successful. But then the word fulfilled itself in a terrifying way. The Church of God may treat prophecy and prophets lightly, but we carry in our words a terrifying power. This is a powerful challenge to us and to the Church. To us—we must be very careful what we say and how we say it. The Church must be careful not to ignore us, or to ridicule us. To do so could have very serious consequences.

8th challenge:- Great power in prophecy – do you treat it with great care?

“I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord. “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (29:11)

Much of the ministry of a prophet can be critical of the people of God. This is natural – prophets are looking for purity in the bride of Christ, and will never rest while they can see impurity. The Church needs this constant challenge to move towards perfection. This growing maturity and purity are the preparations for the return of the bridegroom. But prophets must accept the challenge not to be too gloomy! Our task is to build up the body of Christ. God has plans to bless, to encourage, to prosper, to lead his people, whom he loves forward into his purposes. We must accept

the challenge to be positive, to look for good things and to seek opportunities to bless.

Sometimes I hear prophetic words which are all negative and totally judgmental. This is not a right biblical balance. Jeremiah knew it, and so must we. Almost all prophecy begins with a positive comment, and ends with a blessing. We must seek to copy this pattern. Our task is to rebuke, encourage and build up the body. Let's make sure we are doing just this – and all of this.

9th challenge:- “The joy of the Lord is my strength.” Is this true for you?

“This is how Jerusalem was taken..” (39:1)

In the Old Testament, a prophet was considered to be a true prophet if his words came true. In the New Testament, different tests apply. A prophet is considered to be a prophet if he shares the heart of God and allows it to be tested. If the leaders of God's people consider his word to be from God, in line with the Scriptures, and part of God's plan for his people, then he is a true prophet. I have never believed that “coming true” is the only test of a New Testament prophecy. However, it is an ingredient in a prophet's ministry. It is good and upbuilding for himself and the body of Christ if on some occasions, it is testified by others that his word has come true.

I was to speak at a Church famous for its music. During the worship, the musicians were really good, the choir excellent, and I really enjoyed what they had to offer. But as the worship proceeded, God spoke to me. “This worship is not acceptable to me. It is too full of the ways of men, not of the glory of God. Tell them this.” I was very nervous, because I knew that this would bring trouble to me, but when I stood up, I said “The worship in this Church is not acceptable to God. It is full of the things of men.” The leaders were unhappy, and after the service they called me to their office and asked me what I thought I was doing. Up to them I had been nervous, but then I became angry. “I was speaking what God said to me” I replied. “You should not be attacking me, but seeking God and testing what I have said to you.” But they were very annoyed, and I got the impression that they would never invite me again. One year later, I received a letter from the Pastor. It said quite simply “Everything you said has been proved to be true!”

10th challenge:- Do not look to words coming true. That is God's business. Rather, look to be confident that what you say is from God.

“When Jeremiah finished telling the people all the words of the Lord their God – Azariah son of Hoshai and Johanan son of Kareah and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah “You are lying!” (43:1-2)

Jeremiah had a very good record in prophecy. He had consistently told the people that Babylon would attack and destroy Jerusalem, and that is exactly what had happened. He had never wavered in his prophecy, and sadly it had come true. But this was not enough for the people. When Jeremiah warned them about the danger of going down to Egypt, despite his excellent record, they replied to him "You are lying."

Jeremiah could easily have spoken angry words, but he did not. He could have refused to go with them to Egypt, but he did not. He could have become bitter and negative, but he did not. He allowed them to criticise him, he stayed with them as they went to Egypt, and he continued to try and make them see the foolishness of disobeying the Lord their God.

Final challenge

This last challenge is one of the most painful and one of the most powerful. A true prophet does not abandon the people of God, however foolish they may be. He stays with the family of God, even though he has been rejected and beaten down. If he leaves, then they are much weaker. He doesn't want this to happen. So he pays the price, and fulfils his tough and challenging calling. His reward is never here on earth, but in heaven, where His Master sees his works, and rewards him.

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