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Prophet Jim Smith. December 2004

Jim Smith's prophecy school

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Pastor's pages

“Pastor's pages” are to be found in many parts of this course. They are designed to help Pastors and leaders deal with some of the issues they will face in their fellowships.

Unit 1:What is a prophet ? Why do we need them?

Let's study some of the prophets in the Bible, to understand what it means to be a prophet.

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)

Pastor's help page number 1.

To get a good understanding of how a prophet works, and the pressures on him, I have included a brief look at Elijah. (1 Kings 18) Note how, each step of the way, he reveals a little more of the prophet's experience.

Elijah 1 Kings 18.

1. v.21 "But the people said nothing."

Elijah had held on to the truth of God, but when he laid it before the people, they did not support him.

2. v.24 "The god who answers by fire – he is God."

Elijah had the courage to let God have his way.

3. v.30 "Come to me."

Elijah was not afraid of men. He did not hide from people, but challenged them openly.

4. v.36 "At the time of sacrifice."

Elijah was in tune with the spiritual times. He knew that timing was everything.

5. v.38 "Then the fire of the Lord fell."

Vindicated, he was not overwhelmed. The job was not finished. There was no time for glorying in self achievement.

6. v.40 "Then he slaughtered them there."

The task he was called to had to be finished. No one was going to stand in his way.

7. Ch 19:2 "By this time tomorrow.."

Elijah could not keep the spirit of fear away.

8. Ch 19:9 "What are you doing here Elijah?"

God does not abandon his men.

Why do we need them?

Prophets have caused so much trouble in the Church, mostly due to poor understanding of their calling or poor discipline, that many Pastors and people say “Why do we need them anyway? We can manage quite well without them.” So what answer can we give to this question?

The gift brings assets to the body.

The prophet stands in the council of God. (Jeremiah 23:18) So he can bring insights from the heart of God. God reveals things to the prophet that he reveals to no one else. (Numbers 12:6) We need to know what these things are, and a prophet can reveal them to us. The prophet feels the intensity of the heart of God, and so he can open the heart of God to the people of God in a unique way. (Jeremiah 20:9) The prophet is a sign of God’s purpose. (See the life of Hosea—especially the naming of his children.) The prophet helps us to discern the voice of God from all the other voices which we hear. (Isaiah 30:21) The prophet watches over the work of the Church. (Ezekiel 33:1-9)

Prophecy – God’s acceptance of our weakness & fallibility.

The Churches in Revelation 2 and 3 reveal all too clearly our fallibility, and our ability to mishear, to ignore, to have unbelief, to be worldly, to be confused and to lose our way. God has given prophecy and prophets to his people as a protection against these weaknesses.

God’s ordained order for Ministry.

This is the main reason for having prophets. This is the way God wanted it to be.

“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 4:-

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.

Pastor's help page number 2.

When we look at the issue of prophets, we are trying to release two ministries. It's important to understand this fact.

*** 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 these gifts is the gift of prophecy. (v10) This gift is given for the blessing of the whole body. (Verses 12-13)

We are looking for God to release prophets, and there may only be a few of these. But we are also looking for God to release prophecy, which is His plan for everyone. Read this:-

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."

Everything we are studying can apply to both "Prophet" and "Prophecy." As Pastors, we have to keep the two areas in our minds. We probably won't release that many prophets. It seems that the body doesn't need so many of these. But all God's people can prophesy.

Unit 2: Knowing our call

I have spoken to many prophets, and found that many are unaware of the vital nature of knowing their call. Usually, when I discuss with them at length, the events and experiences which have brought them to their prophetic call become clear.

Let's study the calls of biblical prophets, to see what we can discover:-

The call of Isaiah.	(Isaiah 6:1-8)
The call of Jeremiah.	(Jeremiah 1)
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 9:1-9)

Basic elements in these calls.

There are certain basic elements in all these calls. By understanding them, we have something with which to measure our own calls as prophets, or the calls of those who claim to have a call from God.

- * **The Lord made the call**, and they all knew that he was speaking to them.
- * **They became aware** of their humanity, their sinfulness (Peter: Isaiah) and their unsuitableness.
- * **They were afraid**, or aware of the enormous call God was placing on their lives. (Jeremiah: Jonah.)
- * **It had a powerful** emotional impact on them.
- * **The Lord** made it clear what it was that he wanted from them, sometimes in words, but often in pictures.
- * **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.

Jeremiah's experience needs careful reflection by all 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!”

Pastor’s help page number 3.

It is not always easy to discern and measure the call of God in the life of someone claiming to hear the prophetic call. Pastors, trying to discern such a call in a prophet, should consider asking these questions:-

How were you called to this ministry?

A prophet should be able to answer this question. This doesn’t need to be dramatic, as it was for Jeremiah or Isaiah. Remember we know nothing of the call of many prophets in the Bible. That does not mean that they don’t have a call – it’s just that they don’t describe it. But if God has called us, then we have to have some awareness of that experience.

How have you developed this calling?

If someone has been called, there will be a desire in them to develop their call. This desire comes with the call. If they have just sat back, saying “God can do it,” then we have every right to raise a question mark against them. In the physical, growing is natural. So it should be with all our spiritual gifts and callings. A called prophet might not know how to develop the call, but the desire must be there.

Who has recognised this call in you?

In the New Testament Church, which is our Church, recognition is essential to the call. Barnabas recognised Saul, and Saul recognised Mark. (See page 12)

Can a Pastor be a prophet?

I often get asked this question, and it is not an easy one to answer. Clearly some offices fit together well. For example, Pastor and teacher. But Pastor and prophet presents a number of problems:

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.

A prophet must be recognised by the body. 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.

Unit 3. Discipline

Here are some of the disciplines which a prophet needs to consider. Ignoring them leads to weak and uncontrolled ministry. We already have too much of this in Africa.

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 Timothy 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. (1 Corinthians 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.
Can get angry.
Can speak from his own heart.
Can mishear and misunderstand.
Can get tired, frustrated and low in energy.
Can say the wrong thing at the wrong time,
and in the wrong place.

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. (Ephesians 6: 10-18)
We must never give up. (Daniel 3:16-17)

Pastor's help page number 4.

Discipline is so important to the spiritual life. When it goes wrong, it is a disaster. Study the life of Saul:-

1 Samuel 13: 1-14. Fails to keep the commands of Samuel, and loses his anointing as King.

1 Samuel 14: 24-46. Makes a foolish vow, which weakens his army, and nearly leads to the death of his son Jonathan.

1 Samuel 15: 1-33. Saul fails to obey the Lord's commands.

1 Samuel 19. Saul tries to kill David, God's anointed.

1 Samuel 21. Saul pursues David, to kill him.

1 Samuel 28. Saul consults a medium.

1 Samuel 31. Saul dies in battle.

Things started so well for Saul, but his lack of discipline destroyed his anointing. The same could happen to any of God's servants. If we are not disciplined, then our human will takes over, to our eternal loss. This applies as much to Pastors as it does to prophets.

Unit 4 The Pastor and the prophet

This is one of the most difficult areas of Church life. It is the place where many prophetic problems begin. Let's start by looking at the things which unite us:-

Unity - One Character

The things we are studying about the prophetic character apply equally to the Pastor. If we are going to get this relationship right, we need a common character. Study the characteristics,

(see page 25) this time from a Pastor's perspective.

Unity - The servant heart.

If we are going to get this relationship right, we have to remember that we are both servants, and we should seek the servant heart. (See page 27)

Unity - One foundation.

We have already looked at Ephesians 4. Our offices stand on the same foundation. God who made the foundation ministries obviously intended that we should work together in

them. They are a unity, not a disunity. They become disunity when we lose our servant heart, and think too highly of ourselves.

Unity - Blessings of a Prophet

He is a powerful spirit filled colleague.
He is very committed to the growth of the Church.
He is an extra pair of eyes—watching and warning of danger.
He is an encourager of ministry.
He gives confirmation to the Pastor’s ministry and direction.

Unity - Blessings of a Pastor

With him, we are safe and well protected.
He understands our personal needs.
He binds us together as a body.
He provides the spiritual food and direction we need.
He drives off the enemy, and guards against division.
He ensures that we receive only truth.
He encourages us in our ministries.

Against this background, let’s turn to the problem areas.

Problems

Friction can come from different sources. It’s important to recognise that there are:-

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.

The root of this problem is the inability to see each others ministry from the other person's point of view. The prophet feels he has the right to speak, and doesn't like it if the Pastor stops him. He does not appreciate that from the Pastor's point of view, it might not be a time to receive prophecy. The Pastor feels that the prophet is pushing his way into the life of the body, failing to understand the intensity of the prophetic nature, and how difficult it is to hold in that which God has given. A prophetic word is not like a sermon, it is more like a forest fire!

A clash of authority.

The prophet has a very strong will, and sometimes this can challenge the Pastor. However, the Pastor has the responsibility for the flock. The prophet would do well to remember this, and take to heart the model of David, who would not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed.(1 Samuel 24:6) At the same time, some Pastors, losing their servant nature, enjoy using their authority to stop ministry developing in the body, especially ministry which is hard to handle. The Pastor would do well to remember this scripture "Do not muzzle the Ox while he is treading corn." (Deut.25:4)

Lack of commitment to Church order on both sides.

St. Paul criticises any lack of Church order. Who is at fault when disorder comes? The Pastor? The prophet? Where should the blame be put? The Pastors will, naturally, blame the prophets, and the prophets will blame the Pastors! But the truth is that both are at fault for not respecting the principle of good Church order. For the prophets to be uncontrolled shows that they do not respect order in the body, and for the Pastor to allow it shows that he doesn't respect good order. Good Church order flows from the fact that God is a God of order. He created the world in an orderly fashion, and his plans and purposes run in an orderly way. We should expect the same in our fellowships. Otherwise, we are not behaving after the fashion of our God.

Frustration on both sides.

I have lost count of the number of times I have been told by prophets "I'm going to leave my Church, because the Pastor never lets me speak." This is always a cause of great sorrow to me. I grieve that a prophet cannot speak, and I grieve that he thinks the answer is to leave the Church. Very rarely does leaving the Church solve the problem, because it means that the Pastor/prophet relationship has broken down, and that is bad for everyone. But I feel the anguish and frustration of knowing the mind of God, and not being able to

share it. I have also lost count of the number of times Pastors have come to me and said “A prophet came to my Church. He interrupted the worship to speak, and his word has sown anger and dissent in my fellowship.” I grieve that a prophet could behave in this way, but I have seen it again and again, especially in Africa. I grieve for the Pastor who finds himself in this position, and has to try and find some way out of the mess. We have to try and see frustration from both sides, but this requires a good relationship between Pastor and prophet, and a willingness to help each other within the five fold ministry.

Thinking too much of ourselves.

“I thank you Father, that I am not like other men..” (Luke 18:11) These words from the mouth of the righteous man did not earn him any blessing. In fact the blessing was transferred to one who was apparently of little worth. Prophets and Pastors must guard against thinking that they are more worthy, more valuable, or more special than the other. It is a natural man -centered emotion, and has no place in the Kingdom of God. Each of us must examine our hearts in this matter, and be sure that this bad emotion is not causing friction between us.

Wrong motives.

It is very easy for our motives to become unclear as we progress in our ministries. Instead of being content to be the servant (Luke 17:7-10) we begin to want other things. We want to be seen, to be respected, to be honoured, to have position and authority. The problem here is twofold. First, these things are incompatible with our servant calling. Second, and this is nearer the truth for our study, we judge it in others because we really want it for ourselves! We are envious that the other is getting the things we want. Each of us must examine our hearts in this matter, to be sure that we are only seeking to be servants, and accepting nothing except the commendation of our Master.

Bad history on both sides.

Many Pastors have had bad experiences with prophets, and many prophets have had bad experiences with Pastors! This is part of the background for most of us. But the problem is that we allow this bad history to cloud our judgment today! When a baby starts to walk, it falls over many times. But it doesn't give up walking because of these painful bumps and bruises. It keeps trying until it succeeds. Pastors and prophets with bad histories, however, do not follow the example of the baby. They don't keep trying – they give up! Pastors give up trying to use prophets, and prophets give up trying to work with Pastors. This is foolish, and only weakens the body. We have to have the courage to put the past behind us, and work for a good relationship today.

Unforgiving spirit.

We all make mistakes. Everyone knows this, and yet in the Pastor/Prophet relationship, this truth seems to have been replaced by “I never make a mistake – only you do!” We have to learn to accept our mistakes, and have a forgiving spirit towards each other. Jesus clearly teaches it (Luke 7:41-43) and warns that without it, we could easily find judgment visited on us—something to be avoided. Remember these words “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive others.” (Matt 6:12)

No ability to rebuild bridges.

When bridges fall they are replaced, because without them, we cannot visit our friends, go to market, or do our work. But when the Pastor/Prophet bridge breaks, we often make no attempt to rebuild it. We take up our positions, and refuse to change.

What can we do? We just have to keep reaching out for each other. There is no other way. There is no secret code, or any quick solution. We just have to try again.

Putting 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, & 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.

Unit 5. Lifestyle, Character and Nature

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.

1. Characteristics.

Here are a number of characteristics:-

Character 1 God centered. (1 Sam17:45–47)

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

To have the heart of a servant is the key to all ministry. Jesus makes the characteristics of this heart clear:-

- 1. 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)**
- 2. The servant takes up his cross. He bears all the burdens of the cross with joy. (Hebrews 12:2)**
- 3. The servant follows, without complaint. (Luke 9:51-62)**
- 4. The servant must serve. (John 13.)**

2. Lifestyle.

Some prophets think that their lifestyle does not matter. They say "I have my call, and I exercise it, regardless of what I do or how I live." This is a major error. What we are and how we behave is the foundation on which our ministry stands. Here are the areas of lifestyle which must be considered by every prophet, and indeed by every Christian leader:-

- 1. Man of integrity. (Joseph - Genesis 41:38)**
- 2. Man of faith. (Hab 3: 16-18)**
- 3. Man of prayer. (Phil 4:6)**
- 4. Concern for family. (Eph 5: 25 - 6: 4)**
- 5. Involvement in Church (Ephesians 4:12)**
- 6. Disciplined in money. (1 Timothy 6:10. Acts 5: 1-11)**
- 7. Moral integrity. (Measure yourself using Matthew 5 - 7)**
- 8. Endure hardship. (2 Tim 2:3)**

UNIT 6: Receiving, testing, checking, delivering.

Let's turn now to some of the practical ways in which a prophet works. These are all very basic things, but very important to understand.

1. How does he hear and deliver?

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 permitted — 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 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.

- 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.

3. 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.**

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?

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.

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Testing prophecy is not always as easy as it looks. Sometimes the word is very unclear, or the prophet can't remember it clearly. Sometimes the prophet is angry, and it's difficult to hear from him in these circumstances. Sometimes he wants so much for his word to be accepted that he puts pressure on you. Sometimes he doesn't like you, and will manipulate people against you. Then there is the bad history of prophets who have divided churches, taken members away, or led them away into heresy.

All this is in the background when you come to test a word. It is so easy to say to the prophet – "O.K. What you say is true!" This is the easy way out, and the fatal way out. Ultimately it will leave your fellowship open to false prophecy.

So remember 1 John 4:1. This is your responsibility and privilege.

Don't be surprised when you are under great pressure to accept a word, and don't be surprised when the sheep don't like your decision.

Be wise – get a group of godly and experienced people to help you with the testing, then you won't feel so alone.

Be encouraged – it is not easy being the tester of metals. No Pastor who truly wants good prophecy has found it easy, but it is a great blessing when it does work out well. Don't let the occasional mistake or problem put you off.

Unit 7: Spiritual experiences

In this more advanced unit, we are going to look at the following experiences:-

The spirit of fear.
Repentance.
Seeking the face of God.
Knowing God's heart.

These are areas which every prophet must master, if he is to mature. I can only outline them briefly. Time spent in prayer and meditation will bring them more clearly into the mind and the spirit.

1. The spirit of fear

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 dealt 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 first response 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)

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. 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.

3. Seeking the face of God

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.

We bind the strong man in this way:-

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.

We must know the heavenly places:-

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)

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.”

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.”

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.”

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.

4. Knowing God’s heart

A prophet must know the heart of the One he seeks:-

Loving —“God is love” (1 John 4:8)

The story of the Lost Son (Luke chapter 15: 11-32) is a vivid example of the love of God. He allows his creation to do what it wants, but also longs for its return. This love of God overwhelms anyone that is exposed to it. It is beyond anything we can know here on earth.

Just—“All his ways are just” (Deut.32:4)

Achan’s sin (Joshua 7:1-26) is a powerful reminder of the other side of God’s nature – that he is just, and has absolute standards which cannot be ignored. Part of the struggle in the heart of God is the struggle between his love and his justice. His love wants only to forgive and to welcome home. His justice cannot ignore sin. This agony could never have been resolved, except for the miracle of Calvary.

Tender—“as a hen gathers her chicks” (Luke 13:34)

In Ezekiel, (11:19) God promises to remove the stony human heart, and replace it with a living one. Jesus spoke of the corruption of the heart (Mark 7:14-16) and the need for its restoration. God has a tender heart, which is open to the needs of his creation, and which readily responds to the cries of humanity.

We must seek to have the same heart, but it is sometimes hard to understand how such a powerful God can be so tender.

Hurting—“The sorrow in my heart is so great” (Matthew 26:38)

Any parent who has had a child go astray will understand the pain and sorrow in the heart of God. He grieves for all his lost children. He grieves for the ravages of sin. He grieves for the arrogance and pride of so many people. He grieves for those who ignore his Son, who laugh at the Gospel, who tread the path to destruction. He grieves for those deceived by other gods.

It is hard for us to grasp this truth. We forget that God has feelings too, and that His feelings are often hurting. To enter the heavenly places is to share this sorrow, but many do not want to. They think that if they have the right Bible text, everything will be OK. But God needs hearts – hearts to feel his sorrow, to share it, to minister to him as he ministers to us.

Hoping—“while he was still a long way off his father saw him.”(Luke 15:20)

There is such a positive feeling in the heart of God, which we often do not share. He “always hopes..” (1Cor 13:7) He hopes for the return of everyone to himself. He never gives up hoping, despite all circumstances, and all evidence to the contrary. God hopes. We must share his hope – now and forever.