

The call of a prophet



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Introduction

About 25 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 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 anyone to be a prophet, we will have a testimony of our 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 made 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 often didn't know what to do next, Isaiah received a touch 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 anyone called to prophecy. It reflects the deep inner turmoil and pain which this call places on the human spirit. 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 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 our 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?

1. 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. But how?

What kind of heart should a prophet have?

These are some of the areas I had to consider:-

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. 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 action, 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

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.

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.

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 complaint, 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 to those God loves.

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.

2. The prophets' 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 the calling of a prophet.

* 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 resources, 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, as well as mine. 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 "Ask my people '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 did not like 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 Lord 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, and greatly 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.

3. The quality of his life

Once we know what kind of person we have to be on 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.

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. 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, and what they teach us.

- * Moses teaches us about being humble. (Numbers 12:3)
- * Paul teaches us that we have to be tough. (2 Cor. 11:16-33)
- * Joseph teaches the importance of integrity. (Genesis 41:37)
- * Micaiah challenges us not to compromise. (1 Kings 22: 17)
- * Hannah teaches us to be prayerful. (1 Samuel 1:12-17)
- * Mary teaches us about obedience. (Luke 1:38)

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, or 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, think about this one in every situation: - **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 guidance and help. We must yearn 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.

The quality of his life - 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 prophecy 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.

The quality of his life - 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 describes an 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. A shallow character denies us access to the heart and nature of Jesus, and denies the people access to that heart as well.

The quality of his life - 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. 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. 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 lets 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.

The quality of his life - 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.

The quality of his life - 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?

* 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.

* 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.

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

The quality of his life - his discipline.

Prophets have to be highly disciplined - this is what God expects of us. What areas do we need to consider? There are a lot of passages to look up for yourself in this section.

1. Close walk with God.

Here are some of the areas in which we must explore closeness with God.

* **To share** the heart of God. (Amos 7:1-3)

* **To hear** from God. To test what is heard. (Jeremiah 1:4-6)

* **To speak** for God. (Acts 7:2-end)

* **To be in** the watchtower, waiting for God’s command. (Habakkuk 3:16-18)

* **To be prepared** to be ridiculed, abused, ignored, rejected, silenced, or killed. (Mark ch.14 and chapter 15)

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

2. Obedience.

Here are some tough challenges in 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 need to have an understanding of worship. Consider these areas:-

- * **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...
- * **Fulfilment** 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 personal 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. 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)

The quality of his life - 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. (Eph.5:18) 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,(Matt. 4:1) Philip was lifted out of the wilderness, (Acts 8:39) and Elijah was lifted up to heaven! (2 Kings 2:11.) Look at Elijah:-

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 which, from our point of view, has 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 have to go where the wind sends us, (John 3:8) and it 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)

4. 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:-

* We confess our sins and repent.

* We claim the victory of the blood, using the Bible - **“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)

* 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?

* **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.

* **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.

*** 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.

*** 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, who 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.

5. 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 swarm 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 people:-

- * **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.

6. 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 a prophet defend himself?

* **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. This will break the enemy’s attacks.

*** 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! The enemy hates to fight against those who know that they already have the victory. Learn to live in victory. This will break the enemy’s attacks.

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

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Eph.6: 10-19)

*** 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 soldiers' breastplate was a kind of leather or 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 soldiers head and neck. Our head 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.

7. 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 need to be studied - they will help!

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 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)

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.”

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:-

- * 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)

* 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)

* 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 died 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:-

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

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

* 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.

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 verses:-

* 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.

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

* At times of depression, prophets need the help and support from 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, in our lonely calling, we need help.

* 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, and financial distress.

5. Power

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.

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

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:12-3)

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.

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.

9. 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 everyday 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)**

10. The prophet and 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.