



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

October 8, 2017

“Prophecy Part 2: God’s Insights” (How to Pray Series)

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We continue our series on *How to Pray*. Last week I gave part one on prayer involving prophecy. This morning is part two. To catch us all up let me define what is prophetic prayer because it is not something we are all familiar with. In the New Testament, this is how prophecy is defined.

Prophecy: God’s supernatural insight given to us to strengthen, comfort, and encourage a group or persons. This is key. Prophetic prayer is basically thoughts sent to us in our minds and hearts from God to do three things: to *strengthen, comfort and encourage others*.

The Bible speaks a lot about prophecy: Let me share a few verses:

1Cor. 14:1 Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.

1Cor. 14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged.

1Cor. 14:39 So, my friends, be eager to prophesy...

1Cor. 14:3 But those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

Again those three words: strengthen, encourage, and comfort.

Prophesying in the New Testament for a church is not like how the prophets in the Old Testament did it, which had a lot of doom and gloom. Today prophesying is getting a supernatural thought from God that you can use to strengthen,

encourage, and comfort others. That is why the Apostle Paul wrote that he wished all of us would prophesy more.

There is a great book that I encourage you to read. It’s called *Naturally Supernatural* by our church friends Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft, from whom some of my stories and thoughts come from today.

As I said last week, often times prophetic thoughts come as a gentle whisper and not in an obvious voice that says, “Hear ye, hear ye, Dan, this is God!” More often than not, you’re not even sure if it is God, or if it’s yourself making something up. Sometimes it is so quiet and subtle that you won’t be sure if it is God. In the story of Elijah in the Bible, God spoke to him in a gentle whisper and not in the earthquake or the fire or the wind that was happening around him.

There are times when I have said during our worship services that I felt God was saying that someone among us had a certain ailment – a hurt knee or elbow or a buzzing in the ear (tinnitus)—or someone who is deeply estranged from someone and it is really hard to worship. That was actually my prophesying; I just label it as such.

In all of those cases, someone always came up to receive prayer. I told them God wanted to comfort and bless them that day. It was a sign that He cares. Prophecy is all about God’s tenderness, mercy and compassion. And sometimes when you ask for a prophetic word from God for someone it comes.

Last week, in one of the services, I felt the Lord saying to me that someone with *eczema* needs to come forward for prayer after the service. The prophetic thought came to me while I was up on stage, but I didn’t say anything. During the last song and I asked Gary Toh, who heads up our Prayer Ministry, “I think God gave me a word. Did God say anything to you about what we might need to pray for at the end of the service?”

I was surprised when he said, “Eczema.” And so I mentioned that to the congregation before I did the benediction, and someone did come forward for prayer for that.

But when those godly insights come and we want to speak prophetically, we normally want to check our thoughts to see if it is really from God. Often the messages seem bizarre or incredibly against the odds, and we may not be getting the whole picture or we wonder if we’re just making it all up. Let me share an example.

Mike Pilavachi was once on stage speaking to a meeting of about 400 people. At the very start of the meeting he had a sense, a thought that there might be someone there with a “fuzzy head on the left side, like a headache. It was a headache that lasted for many years – it would ebb and flow, but on that day it was there.”

He then asked that person to come forward bec God wants that person to be prayed for an blessed.

But here is honestly how those who prophesy often think. Mike said that when he got that thought he looked around and weighed the odds. He thought to himself “Four hundred people...chances of someone with a migraine that’s more on the left hand side...maybe 50 percent. I like those odds.” (Naturally Supernatural by Mike Pilavachi and Andy Craft, David C. Cook, 2016, pp 147-148).

So Mike announced what he had been given. But at the last moment another thought fell into his thoughts and it was that it had “something to do with your sister.” Mike added that to what he said before he calculated the odds. (As you can see Mike is extremely humble, honest, and transparent of how he receives prophetic words from God. Everyone can have doubts.)

After he said “it had something to do with your sister,” he felt horrible. He thought to himself, “You idiot. You had a 50 per cent chance of getting it right and you blew it! How will anyone respond to a word like that? How can someone be getting headaches for years and it have something to do with their sister? Does that sister hit them over the head with a frying pan?” (Ibid., p. 147-148)

Mike was thinking to himself when he turned around and saw a young lady standing at the front quietly weeping. He asked, “What are you doing here? She said, “I’m responding to your word. It’s not a migraine; it’s from brain damage. I was an emergency birth and I stopped breathing as they got me out. They managed to resuscitate me but in the moments before I began to breathe, there was some brain damage. The main way it shows itself is severe headaches on the left hand side.”

Then she began to cry. She said, “The thing is, my twin sister didn’t make it. She died in the womb and I survived. For 27 years I have felt so guilty that I lived and she died. I keep thinking, ‘the wrong sister survived.’”

God wanted her to come up for prayer. He had miraculously told her that she shouldn’t feel guilty about being the lone survivor. And God slipped it in before Mike knew what he was saying.

Sometimes what God tells us to help others might seem actually bizarre. Truly, sometimes the prophetic prayer is incredibly strange, but we need to remember that prophecy is only for strengthening, encouraging, and comforting

Mike told me the story of how he once was at a prayer meeting and got to talk to a woman who was from Greece. Mike is also Greek. Pilavachi! Greek, not Italian. But when she came up to him for prayer, a word entered his head. It was a horrible word! And he really didn’t know if it was from God. The word was *skubala*, the Greek word for excrement.

He thought to himself. “There is no way I am going to share that word. How could that be from God? That’s horrifying.”

But just then someone, who teaches others about how to pray prophetically, turned to Mike and said, “Mike, I think God just told me that he’s given you a word for this woman.”

Mike couldn’t believe it! He was a deer in the headlights! So Mike took a deep breath and tried to figure out how to present it to this woman. What if he is dead wrong?

He said, “Please forgive me, but I think the Lord wants to say to you that in His eyes, you are not a *skubala*.” Suddenly, the woman broke down in tears, and kept crying and crying. Mike said it went on for half an hour! Mike must have felt terrible. The woman sobbed inconsolably.

Finally, she got herself together and said, she had been married to a Greek. He abused her. It was so bad that he never called her by her name. He would always use the word *skubala*. When people were around, he would say, “*Skubala*, go

get the drinks,” or he would introduce her in parties by saying, “This is my *skubala*.” And so to hear God saying “you are NOT a *skubala*” strengthened, encouraged and comforted her in a deep, deep healing way. God was saying I love you! (Ibid., pp. 149-150)

Why am I teaching you about prophetic prayer? For one, the Bible says that you should all be eager to do this. How I interpret that is that we all need a full quiver of arrows in how we strengthen, comfort, and encourage one another. So aim to have in your quiver of arrows, your portfolio of prayer, the ability to pray in a multitude of different ways – as we have been teaching you: healing prayer, intercessory prayer, contemplative prayer like the *Daily Examen* of St. Ignatius, *Lectio Divina*, and soon coming up is to how to pray in tongues.

I am saying make sure prophetic prayer is part of your skill set. Make it part of your portfolio of prayer. A prayer life can be so wide and deep beyond our imagination. Prayer is for ministry to others and not just for ourselves.

Not many of us may have thought that there are different ways to pray that are still relevant to us today. And today, we shall learn more, be equipped more in prophetic prayer.

If you REALLY want to increase your ability to pray, come to the *Life in the Spirit Conference* on November 10-12 here at church (www.himonline.org). Vicar Pete Greig, who leads the International 24-7 Prayer movement, and his associate pastor Bill Cahusac, who is a skilled prophetic prayer, will teach us here in this sanctuary all these disciplines of supernatural praying that will be natural and easy to learn. And it’s not just for you; you will have the ability to help others through prayer.

In a moment I am going to teach you how you can hear God’s voice and pray prophetically, but first, one more supernatural story.

I share it because it shows again the loving character of God in prophecy.

Mike Pilavachi said that he was speaking at a conference called *Momentum* for those in their 20's and 30's, and he felt that God was speaking to him during the worship. This thought came to his head: "There is someone here who is having an affair with a pastor in their church."

Mike recoiled thinking, "There is no possible way I am going to say that. It goes against every thing I have taught about prophetic prayer. It has to strengthen, comfort and encourage. How I can I say that in front of six thousand people?" He was about to overrule God when he felt the Lord say to him, "Mike, it's not my judgment. It's my mercy."

So Mike said, "There is someone here having an affair with a pastor, and if that's you, please come and see my friend Ali any time during the meeting tonight, or to go to one of our counselors tomorrow (as it was a multi-day event). We would love to pray for you that God would heal you and set you free."

At the end of the meeting a young woman came up to Ali crying. She had been having an affair with a youth pastor in her church, who was married with three children, and she didn't know how to stop. As she was driving to the conference she said to God, "I'm too ashamed to tell anyone about this Lord. If you want this relationship to end, you're going to have to tell someone on the stage about it because I can't tell anyone." (Ibid., pp 81-82.)

Members of Mike's prayer team prayed with her and she repented and stopped the relationship and went through a process of healing and restoration.

If Mike had kept his mouth shut, she would have missed the blessing and the mercy and tender love of God. God is a kind God. He was reaching out to her.

So you might be asking now, "Dan how do I get started in practicing this way of praying prophetically where I can hear God's voice?" There are three ways:

1. Have a relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The first step is obvious. If it is Jesus and the Holy Spirit who are conveying to you what God is saying, you need to commit to being a follower of Jesus. He wants to have a forever friendship with you. We need to acknowledge that we want Him to be the Lord of every area of our life – social, business, school, home etc. Everything we do, we check in with Him on what He wants us to do in those areas.

It's not, "Here is my agenda for the day, Lord, so please make my agenda happen." No it is, "What is your agenda that you want me to do today? Your are the Lord that I am dedicating my life to do YOUR will."

So first, you need to be a true follower of Jesus. He is the Lord of all, and He's saying He's choosing you to be His friend. We need to accept that so that we can be empowered by His Holy Spirit.

2) Dial down.

This is a phrase that Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft use. They both wrote the book *Naturally Supernatural*, which actually Mike was writing during the last Hawaiian Islands Ministries Conference he spoke at. (Ibid., p. 128-129). To DIAL DOWN means to focus and be still and quiet your heart. I don't mean that you have to go to a deserted place all the time. One can actually *dial down* while in a noisy bus or restaurant or an office waiting room. Oppositely one can be all by yourself and not have a still heart.

So we need to practice being focused and still before God. This is the basis of Psalm 46:10 that says, "Be still and know that I am God," or it can be like Psalm 131: 1-2 that says

Psa. 131:1 O LORD, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do

not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

Psa. 131:2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

Again if God speaks in a gentle whisper, one needs to have a still heart.

3) Practice (listening to God).

As the t-shirt slogan says, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice." The only way you can be proficient in prophetic prayer is if you practice it. If you want to practice your prophetic prayers, here's a suggestion: every day, yes EVERY DAY, find a moment to DIAL DOWN, and say, "Lord please give me a prophetic thought that I might practice hearing your voice in a gentle whisper, and maybe I can share that encouragement with someone today. So let me first practice hearing Your voice."

The Bible says the sheep, meaning us, should know the voice of the good shepherd, meaning Jesus. We need to practice hearing His voice. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27)

If you were to close you eyes and I had Pastor Tim and Pastor Steve come up here, and we took turns speaking, you would know who's speaking by simply listening. Tim sounds like Tom Hanks, Steve sounds like a Serbian Jersey boy, and I sound like well, incredible! (JK) Many of you know my voice is because you have heard my voice for quite a while now. So bad on us if we thought prayer is just talking to God for all these years. No, prayer is about being quiet and listening to God's still voice and recognizing the Shepherd's loving voice.

Faith is a muscle that only gets stronger if we exercise it. Prophetic prayer is one of the ways we practice faith and listening to God. In many disciplines, we learn best by intentional repetition and immediate feedback.

You hear the phrase muscle memory. Whether in sports or in management of any skill we need to do it over and over again and hopefully at some point get feedback if we are on the right track. Join our prayer team, led by Gary Toh and Sherri Shephard, where we are constantly training on this and getting feedback on hearing God. And if you get prophetic prayer wrong at first, again remember no one dies. Keep trying to listen, dial down, and keep listening to what God might be saying and then share it as a comfort and encouragement to someone.

The best prophetic praying people I know always humbly say before giving prophecy, "I THINK the Lord might be saying." They always say the words "I think," "maybe," or "the Lord MIGHT be saying." It is always with a humility that they could be wrong. The fake prophets, like the ones on TV, have this arrogant attitude that they are 100% right. But the true prophetic praying people always have a humble hesitancy.

Finally, I want to address this burning question: *When I think certain thoughts, how do I know it is from God?* You talk of accurate feedback, so how do I get that if I am trying to listen to God's voice every day? There are three tests any prophecy must pass.

A) The prophecy must be biblical.

Anything we say cannot contradict what the Bible says. A prophecy is given that Jesus might be glorified. It is not to glorify the person giving the prophecy. Many of the televangelists want glory for themselves. That's not right. All real prophecy will cause us to know more about Jesus and love Jesus more. So if God is speaking to you, His word cannot contradict His biblical principles of living.

B) The prophecy must strengthen, encourage and comfort someone.

It is never to be used to hurt someone. You can't say, "God just told me that you are a jerk." Bzzt! Wrong! You shouldn't say, "God told me you need to lose

weight." Bzzt! Wrong! Or "you will fail that test tomorrow." Bzzt! Wrong!

Even seemingly positive things can be wrongly used. Our prayer teams are told never to say: I know you will be pregnant and have a child; or I know whom you are going to marry; or enjoy life now because you will die in a year.

It may sound like that would be helpful, but it is not at all. That's not strengthening, encouraging, or comforting.

C) The prophecy must be confirmed by others.

Sometimes people want to say they have a word of the Lord and want to share it publicly. That has to be confirmed by others, preferably before it is said. But even if it is a word that you really are unsure about, check it out with others. Remember how I checked with Gary about the word, "eczema"? He didn't know what I had heard from God but it turned out that he got the same word from Him. Mike often checks with others on stage before he shares what he thinks is from the Lord.

The Bible says, *"Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said."* (1 Cor 14:29)

Now not to confuse you all, the Bible also speaks of a gift called word of knowledge. You often hear about this phrase. This is different from prophecy in that it is more about giving information than for solely strengthening, encouraging, and comforting. An example of a word of knowledge would be when Jesus told a woman in John 4, "You are right saying you have no husband for your have had five husbands and the one you are living with right now is not your husband." That was accurate but certainly not comforting for the woman.

Another word of knowledge example would be in Acts 9 where God tells a Christian named Ananias to go to a street called Straight and go to the

house of a man named Judas to look for a man named Saul who was known for killing Christians. That is not an encouraging or comforting word for Ananias, but that is a word from God to do something. In the long run, that message strengthened the church, but at that moment it was not a prophetic word of comfort for Ananias. Imagine having to look for someone who probably wants to kill you because you're a Christian!

So a word of knowledge is about the future, and it is to see someone, who in the end, might be strengthened but certainly not initially.

Finally, I want to say what I said last week. This needs to be understood about prophetic prayer. As Mike and Andy would say: When we pray, it is not that we are getting more of the Spirit but that He is getting more of us.

And that is what I want for our church. May the Holy Spirit would be getting more and more of us, filling us, leading us in our thoughts and actions and prayers. That we would be people of the Word and Spirit and then we move out in mission - strengthening, encouraging, and comforting others. So start practicing, dial down, and risk it.

We are going to practice now. I am going to ask you to silently pray and ask if God might have prophetic words for someone you know. If you receive something, I want you to share those thoughts of strengthening, encouraging or comforting. It might be some words or a picture of something that might have meaning. Maybe it is for a friend or a stranger - a waitress or waiter - or a colleague - a family member. And remember, you would be humbly saying, "Hey, I was praying for you the other day and I had this thought that might be from God, I could be wrong, but it is this."

So right now, dial down and pray to God to ask if there is some prophecy that the Lord might give you. Let's take a moment of silence.