

# PROPHECY

## I WANT YOU TO PROPHECY!

Paul's message to the Corinthian church in 1 Cor.14:1-5 regarding prophecy is clear – it brings strengthening, encouragement and comfort. As leaders we all want these things for our churches!

The major prophetic 'words' spoken to us at King's Church both reinforce the importance of prophecy and give examples of prophetic words that have been instrumental in redirecting our lives and focus – individually and corporately.

The first 'prophetic word' to mention really shaped our vision of King's - what we believe God has called us to do. It was brought by Steve Nicholson and his team of prophetic guys from the Vineyard Movement who visited King's when I had been pastor for 4 weeks. We had an evening where they met with the leadership team and we received the following prophecy. It was God's word to us as a church. It has shaped what we've done - an important word!

*"I have a series of pictures. First a military snare drum, infantry division, early 19th century. The drum and some drum sticks. The sticks are slightly damaged. They are on a shelf in a basement next to a window. They are slightly illuminated. That picture was burned away by a flame of a candle. The candle is the second picture. It is in a darker, deeper basement. The candle is set down by a monk type figure, a monk's cloak, a book, an old book, very ancient and dusty."*

Having already told you that this prophetic word shaped this church - it's got the phrase 'a monk's cloak' in it! Wow. At this point the ability to weigh and interpret such words become of first importance. I'm talking about revelation here.

## INTERPRETING PROPHECY

Interpretation! After the prophetic word had been given, another member of the Vineyard team brought the following.

*"... I saw a church building which I took to be yours. Water had drained from the church into the gutter along the street and was running down into the drain down into a deeper spot and then just settling there".*

When this word was brought someone had put a pick axe through a pipe at the side of the church building and water was actually running down the outside wall of the church! This really got our attention! It was that remarkable. He went on:

*"I think that I sometimes see drums when the Lord is trying to speak to me about messages like the call to battle. Rhythms that keep the ranks going in battle. For your church there is a call, a vision that has been left aside a little bit. No one was playing it. The drums are what was taking the infantry forward and keeps the ranks together. There is a vision the Lord wants to rekindle and*

*impart to you all. I think the candle speaks of the same thing. Something in the history of this church that the Lord wants to be rediscovered. In praying it through I see it as a positive thing. Search in the history”.*

We took that as God’s word to us. We searched in the history of the church and discovered that it was planted as a part of the ministry of that great Victorian Prince of Preachers, C H Spurgeon. *As a 22 year old he planted a church in Catford in 1880 with a vision for 1,000 members!*

## ‘SEARCH IN THE HISTORY!’

When we searched in our archives we found that C H Spurgeon had planted our church in Catford in 1880 – with a vision for 1000 members! This discovery came through a prophetic word - and it was in response to that that we outlined our vision to believe for that 1000 member church in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century! For the last 14-15 years that’s exactly what we have been endeavouring to see fulfilled. We have been through a £2 million building project, a £600,000 extension, establishing two meetings, three meetings and now we’re looking towards a fourth at a second site – which involves a £5 million project. All because of a prophetic word!

We’re not just doing it because we think it would be nice! We were called to this task – we believe God has spoken. We’re 15 years in. I’ve worked it out, I’ve got about 15-20 years more and then I hand it over to a younger guy who will take it on further. We’re half way in and we’ve got a long way to go. I probably will look back over my time in ministry and this will be the defining prophetic word that has impacted my life.

*‘Eagerly desire the prophetic’* - because then when it comes it can shape you easily. What we call King’s Church actually came together out of a prophetic word – one that was given to two churches, one called Catford Hill Baptist and one called Allerford Chapel. The word came to both churches, *‘I’m calling you to be a resource church so I want both churches to close and come together’*, and that’s what happened in 1984. So the very foundation of this church is born out of a prophetic word to the point that two churches closed and died - to create something new so that a resource church would be raised up.

When prophecy comes with weight it is powerful to redirect not only an individual life but the lives of all who are connected together as His family.

## PROPHECY – ITS PURPOSE

John Wimber, who founded and led the Vineyard Movement until his death, said this: *“Prophecy is declaring the message of God to His church for the purpose of edification”.*

David Watson, who was a famous Anglican leader in the UK, defined it like this: *“Whilst the written word is God’s truth for all people at all times the prophetic word is a particular word inspired by God given to a particular person or a group or persons at a particular moment for a particular purpose”.*

I like that quote because it states right up front that we're not looking to add anything to the Bible, which is God's inspired written word. What the prophetic word does when it comes is to bring alive an aspect on which God has already spoken.

Over the years I have had moments when I have had the privilege of bringing a prophetic word over someone or I have received a prophetic word where God has spoken to me. These needed to be weighed and tested.

While we see in 1 Corinthians 14 that **prophecy is for strengthening**, for **encouragement** and for **comfort**, sometimes it will be **directional**. In Acts 16 the apostle Paul is seeking direction. He was planning to go to Ephesus and then has a vision in the night about going to Macedonia. As a result the gospel first comes to Europe because of a prophetic vision! Paul shares the vision with his team and they all agree that God is telling them to go to Macedonia... and off they go.

## RESPONDING TO PROPHECY – NOW!

When we received a directional prophecy about building a 1,000 member church with King's Church in the future - *our response was in the 'now'*. It was 'OK, let's get on with it. Let's put a new building up, let's do multiple meetings'. But the important thing is not to get stuck on the future – to but invest in the present time.

Sometimes people get prophetic words over their own life ('you'll be this, you'll be that') and I've met people who are so taken up with the future that they are neglecting the 'now'. Their head is full of 'I'm going to be this, I'm going to do that' and they need to be told to get out there and lead their small group or play their part in the youth group/worship band – or whatever. It'll be OK.

When prophecy comes, the key thing is our response now. Sometimes the word is predictive, so if we look at Act 11:27 - 30

*During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius). The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.*

Here is a recognised prophet in the New Testament who brings a prophecy which predicts a famine that actually came to pass in the reign of Claudius - but what's the response? They take up an offering at that time so it can be sent to the church in Jerusalem so they can be strengthened. *The 'now' response is key.*

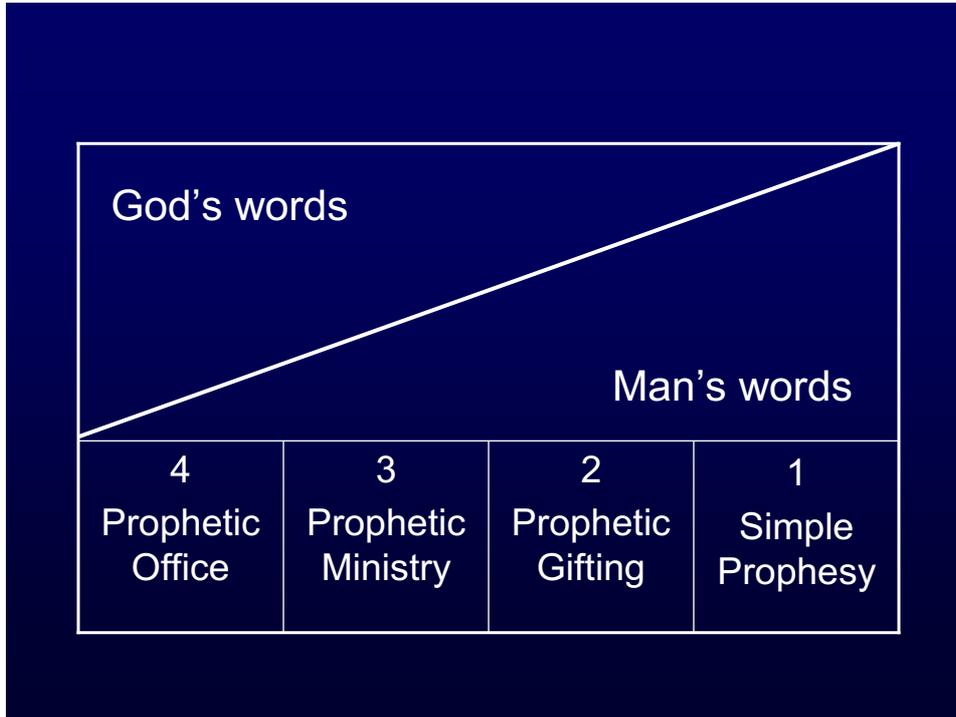
Most of the time what you get is not directional words but what I call general prophecy, if there is such a thing. An encouragement, a comfort that highlights an attribute of God, His holiness or His Spirit. Most of the time we're living in that realm. But occasionally words come which impact what people do with their money – like Agabus' prophecy that redirected that church's action.

## PROPHECY – THE MEASURE OF GIFTING

Scripture really encourages any Christian filled with the Spirit to prophesy.

*‘Everyone come with a tongue, a scripture or a prophecy.’ 1 Corinthians 14:26*

It is not just for the spiritual superstars. The New Testament teaches that it’s for all Christians. There are different measures of such a gift. This useful graph is drawn from Vineyard teaching.



I had the privilege of going to Mike Bickle’s church in Kansas a number of years ago and found it very helpful. They say that there are degrees, or measures, of the prophetic gift. The first ‘level’ is what Bickle called ‘simple prophecy’. It doesn’t put this particular gift over and above any other. It’s just simple prophecy.

Someone might have a prophetic gift. Someone else might have a prophetic ministry and then yet someone else, who’s more like the role described in Ephesians 4:11, has what could be called a prophetic office. This level of prophetic input is a rare thing. I have seen it. *It’s where the accuracy and level of revelation is amazing.* I have been in meetings where complete strangers to the speaker have been identified, asked to stand up and have been told their name. ‘This is your name and this is what you do as a job.’ That’s exciting and scary. When prophets like that come to town Christians repent before they come to the meeting! Everyone is faced with the fact that God knows that person’s name and if He knows that person’s name... He knows mine. He knows my name, He knows all about me! It brings a sense of the power and the holiness of God.

### THAT NUGGET OF GOLD...

Strengthening and encouragement come first - a prophet also reminds you that God is there and is interested in us. I find this helpful! To be used prophetically is just to say, ‘God wants to speak to me

and He wants to use me - and use me in a spiritual gift to encourage and comfort others.' That's a good place to start, rather than coming out with 'The Lord says...' We don't do that at King's. 'The Lord says that the church should do this and this...' Christians aren't generally given a big directional word for their church to start with. It's likely to be a word of encouragement first.

We probably have one or two people at King's that we would recognise as having prophetic gifting. We haven't got anyone in our church that has a prophetic ministry or prophetic office at the moment. It would be great to have someone - but at this time we haven't.

Another way of looking at this is when you're at the end of the spectrum where we are dealing with what are mainly words of exhortation and encouragement, then there are likely to be more of man's words than God's word! It says in 1 Corinthians 13 that 'we prophesy in part' and that means, in my experience, when people prophesy, *most of the time the word is, at the very least, for them.*

What I look for when anyone brings a prophetic 'word' is the little nugget of gold that makes me think 'Ah! *That leads me towards God*'. This is a useful check and it's helpful because sometimes strange things happen to people when they contribute in this way... you know, their voice changes – that dreaded 'prophetic' tone of voice! Sometimes this makes it difficult to weigh what is being said and probably within it there is something of us and something of God together.

## PROPHETIC 'BOMBS' IN MEETINGS

We prepare our meetings. It is important to prepare. I prepare at length to preach. The worship band will meet before to pray and practice but of course we don't know what the contributions 'from the body' are going to be. I actually had someone come to me once and say 'It's just all stage managed, it's coordinated' - as if I'd gone round and given cards out and said 'Look, you speak then and then give it a moment, we'll sing a song and then you say that'... We know that's not true! Anyone can contribute, pray out, read a scripture.

Now occasionally, very rarely, someone speaks out in a way that is not edifying and has content that is against what we know from Scripture. It happens in most of our churches from time to time. If that happens at King's one of the elders will step in and say something firm but gracious. We wouldn't want to expose the contributor to censure but we would want to refocus on Jesus.

I did have one occasion when someone came to the front during worship and said to me "I've got a prophetic word. God has told me that Saddam Hussein is going to drop an atomic bomb on the church" and gave me the date. I prayed quickly and then said "I don't think we'll go there today" and declined to let them contribute. I didn't think that word would build up or bring comfort to the church! So it's all done with order and with leadership. This gives security.

## ENCOURAGING STEPPING OUT

There are measures of gifting. It's a bit like Romans 12 when it says, when talking about prophecy and other spiritual gifts: '*Do it in measure of your faith.*'

Most of us operate at the end of the range where 'simple' prophecy lies. Weighing the words and the gift of discernment become critically important. That's why 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 is vital: *'Do not put out the spirit's fire and do not treat prophecies with contempt.* If you have been in a meeting where some strange picture has been given and you're leading the meeting - what do you do?

I normally just let things keep going unless it's dubious. The danger is that it is very easy to get cynical about some prophecy but if you close it down too soon, people won't take the risk of contributing. They won't step out in faith because they're worried about getting 'jumped on' and so you have to live with that level of contribution. *You live with it to have the moment when you get something that really redirects your life or the life of a community.* Even a prophet starts with 'simple' prophecy, so there needs to be space for people to grow in bringing prophecy and as leaders we need to actively encourage prophetic contributions. But it's important you test everything and hold on to the good.

### TESTING PROPHECY:

When we weigh and test personal prophecies - when someone comes up to us and says 'I've got a word for you', we generally receive it graciously but we don't necessarily act on it. We make sure that we get other guidance and confirmation first. In that way we test everything and hold on to the good.

These are the questions I ask when I test prophecy – and this would apply to prophetic words brought to the church in open worship. *Does it glorify Christ? Does it build up the body? Is it in accordance with the written word? Is the word given in love? Is Jesus Lord of the speaker's life?*

It's very important that you actually know the prophet as well as the prophecy. *Does the speaker submit to the leaders of the church?* From time to time we have had a 'roving prophet' attend on a Sunday. For some reason they find me and say things like "there's a curse on the church", or things like that. I look at them and say "Do you come to this church?", "No", "Do you go to any church?", "No". I say "Goodbye." I do. I actually say "I don't want you to prophecy and I want you to go somewhere else". I will do that.

I have done that because it is very important that any gift is in submission to the leadership of a church. Does the speaker allow other prophets or leaders to assess their contributions and their life? Sometimes what happens is that in the middle of worship someone brings something and as you weigh it in your own spirit you either go 'Yes God', or you go 'Uh umm! OK, maybe it's me, maybe it's them - but it just didn't kind of connect with me'. Other times you hear a word brought and you can feel faith rise within you. It points people to God. It doesn't point it to the man or woman who brings the word - it's God. *And, of course, the ultimate test of prophecy is to ask – is it fulfilled?*

### HOW DO WE ADMINISTER PROPHECY AT KING'S CHURCH?

We aim to follow the pattern of Acts - *Revelation, Interpretation, Application!* You know the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. Peter is a Jew. Christianity at this point had been a Jewish sect. It hadn't gone beyond Jews. Peter was troubled as to whether the gospel was also for God-fearers and Greeks - then he has a strange vision of a sheet coming down with different animals in it. *Revelation.*

Then in Acts 10:17 Peter starts wondering about the meaning of the vision. So when anyone brings any prophetic word where I'm in the room I'm thinking 'What does this mean?' Sometimes it's crystal clear but sometimes it isn't - especially when you get funny pictures about monks' cloaks!

Acts 10:19 carries on... 'While Peter was still thinking about the vision.' In a context of prayer you weigh the word/picture when it's given, or over a long period of time, praying back to God what God has said, seeing if it resonates with you.

The *interpretation* ('What does it mean?') is followed by the *application* - what you should do. Who? What? When? and Where? are the questions to ask. Peter's response in :34 is - "I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation". So he preaches the gospel, explains what Jesus has done. The Holy Spirit falls on the hearers. They get baptised in the Holy Spirit and Peter follows this by baptising them in water... All because of a vision of a sheet with animals. Revelation, interpretation, application.

## CORNERED BY GOD

Another major prophetic word for King's Church came when the church at South Lee joined us in 2002. Timing was the important thing here. On the Sunday evening we had a prayer meeting. On the Wednesday I met with one of the leaders from South Lee - Simon Linley - who's now in the church here and we talked about the possibility of working together.

Then on the Thursday, Annie Twort walks into my office and says, "*I've got a word for you... While everyone was praying together for you I was praying specifically about your role outside King's in the wider London Newfrontiers sphere. In my mind I saw a picture of a deeply planted forest*". So here comes some revelation here. "*Someone was going in amongst the trees and removing a tree here and there to allow more light into the forest as a whole. The forest had been too densely planted. Some trees, just a few here and there, need to be cut down. This will bring health and stronger growth to all the other trees*".

Now I want to tell you at this point I'm cornered by God. I'm aware that to close the South Lee church - not everyone is going to be happy with that. They've invested too much in it. But God had spoken. Revelation - trees. Interpretation - you've got to cut a tree down for the overall health of all the trees. Application - we've got a church joining us, a church you need to close.

I'm encouraged today because we can honestly say that what we did those years ago has really borne fruit and many churches have been planted in London as a result. *King's Church particularly has grown in strength through our friends from South Lee who came and joined us here.*

## THE THREE 'R'S

How do we grow in the prophetic? How do we know if God is speaking to (and through) us? Sometimes we just have to have a go!

I'll give you three R's. You've got to take **responsibility**, take a **risk** and be in **relationship**! Some of you have never brought anything of this kind in a meeting, not even 'I've got a sense that God might be

saying this...maybe!”. *Take responsibility!* You’ve got to believe what scripture teaches about God speaking to His people and you’ve got to take a risk. Ask God to give you something and then bring it in humility and accept guidance from other leaders.

I’ve told this story before, but it highlights the process well. I once was in a meeting with about 150 Newfrontiers’ leaders and I felt God said to me ‘start a song’ - “*Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*” When I started this song I thought - it’s a well known song and I’ve got my youth team with me so as I sing it they’ll join in. “...*Worship the Lord and give Him praise.*” At this point they had not joined in. I’m not feeling good at this moment. I’m annoyed they haven’t joined in because I have the first line of the song but I can’t remember the second line - at all. But I thought that if I started it other people would join in and together we would get away with it. So I carried on. “Worship the Lord in the beauty of dah dah dah... with dah dah dah and we sing Your praise.”

I took responsibility. I took a risk - and died. I stood there and thought, ‘I’m never going to be invited back to anything to do with Newfrontiers!’ Then a guy called Colin Baron, one of the senior leaders within the movement we’re a part of, walked across the room to me and he said “Great prophetic song, Steve” and walked off. It’s amazing how quickly the Holy Spirit can come back in the room!

## STEP OUT!

We’ve got to have relationship and support and allow people to muck things up from time to time! We had someone prophesy once at King’s. They got half way through and stopped and said “I’ve completely lost it. Honestly. I thought God was saying it. I got to delivering it and ...” I walked over to the person and said “That’s just really fine. Don’t worry about it”. So take responsibility. Take a risk and let others do the same. Do it in relationship and let’s eagerly desire spiritual gifts and especially the gift of prophecy.

There will be a number reading this that need to step up to contributing in prophecy for the first time. Others have done this in the past but have now become passive. You need to come to God and say “I’m going to be really open again to prophesying and making a first step. I want to be someone that brings encouragement and comfort and correction”. Or maybe you want to grow in the prophetic. Press on! We need prophetic words to direct us and lead us, don’t we? They have shaped us and our churches and we continue to need the same!

Responsibility, risk and relationship! Taking them in reverse order – since you are built into *relationship* with your church and its other leaders you can be secure in taking a *risk* and stepping out in prophecy. Then you can be *responsible* for increasing the blessing to your church as you bring strength, comfort, encouragement – and perhaps eventually, direction! Wait on God and see!

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Steve Tibbert leads King’s Church London, with sites in Catford, Downham and Lee. Over the past fifteen years the church has seen continued growth, both in size and diversity. Steve is also involved in Newfrontiers and regularly coaches other lead elders. His book, *Good to Grow*, was published in July 2011. He is married to Deb, and they have three sons.

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