

The Gift of Prophecy

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Spiritual Gifts: God's Way of Building Community

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

I've been doing a series on spiritual gifts from 1 Corinthians 12, and today I want to talk about the spiritual gift of prophecy. Some of you have heard me tell this story before; many of you have not. Those of you who regularly attend the church know that my background and training was in law. I graduated from the law school at OSU and in 1982 I began teaching graduate and undergraduate classes in business law. I taught classes on governmental regulation on business and international business transactions and contracts, that kind of thing.

In any case, from the time I became a Christian in 1974 I felt a stirring in my heart to preach and pastor. But I didn't know if God wanted me to preach and pastor as my occupation or whether I would be bi-vocational for life. I would teach at OSU during the week and then preach at church on Sunday. At the time our church was led virtually entirely by bi-vocational leaders. Everyone had a job outside of the church and then we pitched in and tried to care for the needs of the church on a part-time basis.

But the needs of the church were growing, and the demands on my job were also growing. I had two little children at the time and I felt that something had to give. Either I needed to reduce the number of hours that I was giving to church activity and

to preaching here or, perhaps, leave my job at OSU and become our first full-time senior pastor. But I didn't know which way I was to go.

I began sincerely praying, "Lord, show me your will. I'm really at a fork in the road and I need to gain your mind." You know, there's a Bible promise in the book of James that says if we lack wisdom we can ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and we'll gain wisdom. Let me tell you what happened with me.

It was 1986. I went over to England to participate in a Christian conference that was led by the founder of the Vineyard movement, a man by the name of John Wimber.

I decided to ask the Lord to speak to me through a sign. I really needed to hear him. I was at a crossroads and I needed to make a decision whether I was going to change my career radically or stay put and reduce the hours that I'm devoting to church work.

It was a Sunday evening and I said to the Lord, "Lord, if you want me to leave my job at OSU and become the church's first senior pastor, then somehow speak to me before Wednesday evening when I'm to call Marlene. On the other hand, if you don't say anything to me, then I'm just going to assume that I'm currently in your will and I'll continue at my present job and continue to serve and try to negotiate the time a little better."

Well, Monday I didn't hear anything from the Lord. Tuesday, nothing. Wednesday all day there was really nothing. I was going to call Marlene at 11:00 England time. I

sat down at this large conference hall with a couple of thousand attenders. John Wimber, the main teacher of this conference, got up and spoke. He said, "I was going to teach about healing tonight, but God spoke to me about a half an hour ago and told me to change my message."

John began this way, he said, "Some of you tonight are wrestling with a decision about whether God is calling you into full-time Christian ministry. You are going to know it's the Lord when it's the last hour, when there's no more time, you will know that it is God."

Now I was gripping the arms of my chair. I thought, "Lord, is everyone here wrestling with the decision about going into full time ministry?" It was for me the last hour. John that evening said seven things that were specifically applicable to my situation. He said, "You are going to get to this point in your career where everything is going really well. You are going to be at the pinnacle of success. You are ready to receive a promotion at then just at the moment you are ready to receive a promotion God is going to say, 'Now it's time for you to leave.'"

I was just sailing through the tenure process at OSU. I had just finished writing a textbook that was about to be marketed by a major textbook publishing company. Things were going along great. John was describing my life. I thought, as I walked out of the meeting that night, "Lord, you met the sign. You did what I asked you to do. You spoke to me." I was stunned.

The next day, Thursday, I was standing against a wall, chatting with someone. A guy walked by me and then turned around and walked by again. He looked at me and walked by again. He stopped and stuck his hand out and put it on my chest. He said, "God is calling you to be a pastor."

So I was spoken to Wednesday night. I was spoken to on Thursday. On Friday morning, my friend Danny Meyer with whom I was rooming [Danny was the former associate pastor here and he left about eight months ago to plant a church up in Sunbury, Ohio] woke up in the morning and he said, "Rich, I had a dream about you last night that I believe is from the Lord."

So I said, "Really? Tell me about it."

He said, "Well, in the dream you were a hairdresser and you were combing and braiding this woman's hair."

So I started to laugh and said, "Yeah, Danny, God is not calling me to pastor. He's calling me to go to cosmetology school."

Danny got real intense and said, "No, you're going to see. It's from God. That dream was from the Lord."

I said, "Right."

That evening, Friday night, I was in a room with about 800 people. Everyone was worshipping. I was in the back worshipping. When the worship was over, a woman, who was helping to lead the meetings, stood up and took the microphone. She said, "I feel like I have a prophetic word. God is looking for a few men to prepare the hair of the Bride of Christ." She began describing in intimate detail a man who would be combing and braiding and fixing the Bride of Christ's hair.

I stood in the back and bent over and began to cry. I thought, "Lord, you've spoken to me a third time."

I came back to Columbus and shared this with the leaders of the church. They said to me, "Rich, we've known for several years that you were supposed to lead the church. We're just waiting for you to come around." They said, "Let's call a public meeting and we'll announce that you'll come on staff as our first senior pastor."

I was processing with Marlene and she said, "Hold on. You're going to have this public meeting and everyone is going to cheer. I haven't heard from God that you are supposed to leave your job at OSU."

And so we started to talk about the financial implications. My salary was going to be cut in half. We had never had a senior pastor before. Marlene wondered whether I would be happy working for the church. I began wondering, "I wonder if I really was receiving prophecies from the Lord in England. Maybe I just deceived myself." The longer we talked about the financial implications and how small the church was, the

risk involved in my taking this job, the more I began to doubt what I had heard a few weeks before.

Here's the clincher. I was at a leaders' meeting one evening. There were five of us as leaders and we were standing praying and worshipping God. In my heart I said to the Lord, "Lord, if that really was you in England, will you please speak to me one more time?"

John Cook, who is an attorney and who was one of our leaders back then and continues to be one of the leaders in this church to this day, said, "I feel like I have a prophetic word." We all stopped and said, "Well, what is it?"

He said, "I feel like the Lord is saying, 'I've spoken to you once, yes, twice,' says the Lord. 'If you won't listen to me, I won't speak to you a third time.'" And then John put up his hands and sort of went like this: Like, I don't know who it's for.

I broke up laughing. I said, "Guys, I've got to confess what I was praying to God secretly in my heart." I went home and shared with my wife what had happened at the meeting that evening. And that word from John Cook just cut her to the heart. It was the word that she needed. She said, "Richie, if we don't do this, let's go out and get hit by a train tonight."

Do you know God continues to speak today? God is real. God hasn't lost his voice. God wants to speak to you! And he has a way of getting our attention, if we want to

hear him. God employed the gift of prophecy to move me from my job at OSU to become our first senior pastor. I've watched God use the gift of prophecy on hundreds of occasions in the last 15 years to say something to an individual that he wanted them to hear.

Today, I want to talk about the gift of prophecy. Let's pray.

Now, you may remember, each week I've been asking members of our congregation, whose first language is not English, to come up and read the Bible text in their native language. Today I've asked Dawn Baumer to read the scriptures in American Sign Language. Dawn has been coming to the Vineyard for two years. She works at the School of the Deaf as an interpreter and educator. Dawn has four children and volunteers in children's ministry, teaching deaf children in our congregation on Saturday night. Please welcome Dawn Baumer.

1 Corinthians 12:8-11 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Let me offer you a shorthand definition of prophecy. Wayne Grudem, who is a theologian and dear friend of mine and of the Vineyard movement, wrote a major book several years ago titled “The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today.” In it, Wayne simply defined prophecy as “a human report of a divine revelation.”

The basis of prophecy is a divine revelation, something that God spontaneously brings to mind. Prophecy is based on a spontaneous revelation from the Lord. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:29-30, *Two or three prophets should speak and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.* In this way the gift of prophecy is to be distinguished from the gift of teaching. Teaching is based upon previously given revelation in God’s Word. Prophecy is not the result of careful study, research, and preparation. It is simply a human report of a revelation God spontaneously brings to mind. That revelation could come in the form of pictures. Revelation could come in the form of a dream. Revelation could come in the form of a vision. Revelation could come in the form of a deep impression. Words could come to mind.

But it’s these two elements of a spontaneous revelation that in words and revelation that mark the gift of prophecy.

Now, what are the purposes of prophecy? Let’s look at 1 Corinthians 14:3. The apostle Paul says, *But everyone who prophesies speaks to men [and I’ll add women] for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.* He lays out three purposes of prophecy as strengthening, encouraging and comfort. These words tend to overlap in

the Greek. When we talk about strengthening or encouragement, a prophetic word often sounds like “don’t give up,” “don’t be afraid,” “don’t fear,” “take courage,” “be bold,” “be strong,” “keep on going,” “persevere in your marriage,” “persevere through this trial,” “don’t throw in the towel,” “continue to trust in the Lord,” “with God’s help you can do it,” “you can overcome that temptation,” “you can overcome that besetting sin.”

We frequently need courage put back into us. That’s what prophecy does. It says, “Strengthen your hand. Don’t run away from that confrontation. Don’t be afraid of your boss, or that person in your family. God is with you.”

There’s a wonderful scriptural example of the prophetic purpose of encouragement in the Old Testament book of Haggai. The Jews had returned to Israel after their captivity in Babylon. In the year 538 BC, Jews had begun to rebuild their most holy place, their beloved Temple, after the Babylonians had destroyed it. In 538 BC, they began to rebuild it.

But then there was opposition from surrounding nations and other priorities began pressing in on them. They had children to take care of. They had fields to plant. They had businesses to attend to. They had their own houses to build. And so the Jews stopped working on the Temple from 538 BC to 520 BC – 18 years. They laid the foundation and that was it. They walked away from the Temple.

The prophet Haggai comes along and with his prophetic gift encourages the Jewish people to continue the work even in the face of opposition and in the face of competing priorities. And Haggai's prophecy is, to me, the classic example of the prophetic word of encouragement. It is a very short prophecy that we read in Haggai 1:13 – *Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, gave this message of the Lord to the people, "I am with you," declares the Lord.* We read that the people immediately began to rebuild the temple!

How would those four simple words be encouragement to someone? "I am with you," declares the Lord. Apply these four words to your own life. You are going in for an operation. It's a very risky bit of surgery. You are naturally afraid. A Christian friend comes in to pray for you and says, "I feel like I have a word from the Lord."

You say, "Really, what is it?"

"I am with you, declares the Lord." It would be an encouragement to know that the Lord was with you in the operating room.

You are about to start a new ministry. You've taken a major financial cut in salary to start this new ministry. It's a risk for you and it's a risk for your family. Do you think it would be an encouragement if somebody came and said, "I feel like I have a prophetic word for you. The word is 'I am with you, declares the Lord.'"

You are considering becoming a missionary. You are going off to college. Or it's your wedding day and you are about to commit your life to another person for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health, until death. You are standing on the edge of the cliff wondering if you ought to leap off. Your heart is pounding. Do you think it might be an encouragement before you exchange vows to hear a prophetic word that said to you, "I am with you, declares the Lord."

Let me ask you a personal question. Are you at a point in your life where it would be really helpful today, this week, to hear the Lord say to you "I am with you"?

Prophecy offers strengthening, encouragement, and comfort. You may be at a point in your life where you feel that God has forgotten you, that you've been abandoned by the Lord. You've cried out to God for a breakthrough in your marriage or a breakthrough regarding the health of a loved one or your own health, a breakthrough in finances, a turn around in the life of your child who has walked away from the Lord, and you are getting no answer from God. There is no breakthrough. Every follower of Christ goes through a period of time where it feels like God has forgotten them. Even our Lord Jesus Christ, when he hung on the cross, cried out to the Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The feeling of being forgotten and forsaken is a very common one for followers of Christ. In those moments of feeling forsaken, God often inspires a prophetic word of comfort through the gift of prophecy. God lets you know that he hasn't forgotten you,

that he sees you, that he's aware of your situation. The situation may not change, but just knowing that God sees you fills your heart with comfort.

Some time ago I was ministering in a very small church in Florida. There were about 35 people there on Sunday morning. At the end of the message we had ministry time. I didn't know any of the people in the church, but I felt like the Lord said, "Tell Roseanne that I see her and I love her." I looked out on this group – there were maybe 15-20 women in the congregation. I said, "Is there a Roseanne here?" This woman looked up; she had that deer-caught-in-the-headlights look – she said, "Here." People turned and looked at her.

I said, "I felt that the Lord wanted to say to you that he sees you and that he loves you." She immediately dissolved into tears. She came up after the service and said, "You know, Roseanne is my given name. Everyone in this church knows me by my middle name, which is Cindy. God has spoken to me two other times when I reached a really low point. And each previous time God has spoken to me, he has used my given name Roseanne, and he said the same thing to me. I see you and I love you."

Prophecy is for the purpose of strengthening, encouragement and comfort. But you know God is not just concerned with healing our hearts. He is also concerned about cleansing us from sin. There's another purpose for the gift of prophecy and that is to bring conviction. Look with me down to verses 24-25 of 1 Corinthians 14. We read, *But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody*

is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all.

Paul is using language from the courtroom. The word “convinced” in the New International Version translation is probably better translated “convicted.” It has to do with presenting evidence so that you are driven to the conclusion that an argument is correct. Here “judged” literally means to be “examined,” that you are put through a course of questioning or even cross-examination by a judge in a courtroom. It goes on to say, *And the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”*

As I said, God is not only interested in healing or bringing comfort to our hearts; he also wants to cleanse us from sin. One of the ways that God challenges sin in our lives is by disclosing our secrets through the gift of prophecy. You are sitting there, you have your church face on, and someone comes up to you and says, “How are you doing?” You say, “Oh, fine, praise the Lord. Isn’t God good?” And the person responds, “Yes, God is good. In fact, he’s so good that he wants to set you free from your habitual practice of embezzling money from the school that you work for.”

What do you think would happen if the gift of prophecy was stirred up in such a way that it was regularly the case in a small group meeting, or in personal prayer ministry, that your hidden sins might be disclosed to another person? What would your attitude be toward God, towards the church, if at any moment you thought that God might pull the covers off of you and bring to light things you’ve hidden in darkness? Things you

have locked away in some closet or pushed into the basement of your soul where no one could see those things? Things about your marriage? Things about your fears? Don't you think there would be an increased level of a healthy fear of God in our midst? Don't you think there would be an increased level of holiness in the church?

I know I would spend some time repenting before I got prayer. I would make sure that everything between me and God was confessed and taken to the cross.

The prophetic purpose of conviction is wonderfully illustrated in the life of the Old Testament King David. David had an adulterous affair with his neighbor, Bathsheba. She became pregnant as a result of their adultery. David tried to hide his sins by having Bathsheba's husband murdered. He thought he had covered his tracks. He thought he was safe. He thought he had taken care of everything. He's fooled everyone, except God, who sees everything. There's one person, friend, you can never fool, and that's God. And so God sends a prophet to David to let David know that the Judge of the universe has seen him.

You know, the prophetic gift of conviction is an act of God's mercy and kindness. Better that your sin would be brought to the light now than that it be covered up and then brought to the light on the Day of Judgment. Better that your sin be exposed now, than later on when Jesus says every secret will be disclosed and every hidden thing will be shouted from the housetops.

1 Corinthians 14:25 tells us another purpose of prophecy and that is to bring a sense of God's reality. We read that, as a result of this convicting word, *the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"*

The effect of a true prophetic word is to create in an individual a sense that God is alive. That God sees me. That God knows me. That God is in this place. That God has broken in. Do you believe God exists, not just far away, but God is alive and he is near to you? Do you believe God sees you? People in our secular society live with the continual sense of God's absence. God is absent from our schools. There is debate in Ohio over whether a high school biology teacher can even use the phrase "intelligent design" in speaking about the origin of the universe or the origin of life. God is absent from the media. Virtually no one on TV or in the movies incorporates faith in God as an integral part of their decision-making, their choices about sex, their choices about money, their choices about relationship. God is absent in most workplaces.

One of the ways that God shouts to us that he is alive, that he exists, that he can be trusted and believed in is through the spiritual gift of prophecy. Someone comes up to you and shares with you information that they could not have known other than that God has shown them. And by the way, the disclosure of secret information has historically been called in the Vineyard the gift of knowledge or the word of knowledge.

Along with many other people, including our own Dr. Steve Robbins, the director of our leadership school called VLI, whose Ph.D. dissertation dealt with this in part, I believe through the scripture it is far more accurate that the disclosure of secret information, which no one could know other than God, is part of the gift of prophecy. Elisha the prophet told the kingdom of Israel the words the enemy King spoke in his bedroom. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, in John 4, and told her that it was true that she was unmarried. *The fact is you've had five husbands and the man you now live with is not your husband.* You are a woman who has had a series of sexual relationships outside of marriage, the woman does not say, "I perceive you have the gift of knowledge," she says, *I perceive you are a prophet.* The Gift of knowledge deals with insight regarding a previously given revelation or deep insight into the Bible.

Finally, prophecy is often used in the Bible to provide guidance. My beginning story about being led by God from my job at OSU to become our first senior pastor is an illustration of the gift of prophecy being used to offer guidance. In the New Testament there are a number of examples of prophecy being used to offer guidance for the sending out of missionaries, or for direction regarding where to plant a church. You see this in Acts 13 and 16.

Well those who are seasoned pastors, including the founder of the Vineyard movement, John Wimber, would caution people regarding relying too heavily on prophecy for guidance and decision making. See, God wants you to walk dependently upon him. God does not want you to be dependent upon a prophetically

gifted person to gain his mind. Your Father in heaven wants to reveal his mind to you as you relate to him personally. The vast, vast majority of our guidance will come through our own personal meditation upon God's Word, through listening prayer, and through the counsel of mature Christian believers.

Prophecy ought to underline what God is already saying to you. I call it God's highlighter pen. I was already feeling internally pressed by the Lord to leave my job at OSU. I already had a track record of leading and teaching in the church. But I needed to know what I was internally feeling and what I was hearing from others was, in fact, God's will for me. And so God used prophecies to put his arm around me and say, "Rich, it's me. It's not just your good idea, it's me."

Friends, let me offer you some loving, pastoral counsel here for a moment. Do not be intimidated by a prophetically gifted person, or a prophetic word that comes to you and says, "God wants you to do such and such." I've met so many Christians who get intimidated by the prophetically gifted person, what Sam Storms, a college professor, calls "Prophetic Awe." They say, "Goodness, I don't get people's names. I don't hear that clearly. This person came along and delivered a word to me. I guess it must be God."

God wants you to develop confidence in your own ability to privately hear from God for your life. Friend, you are going to be judged for what you did with your choices and with your life. You will not be able to say, "Well, Lord, the reason why I married this person, or left that job, or entered this ministry, or went to that church was

because of a prophetic word.” God would say, “Why didn’t you come to me on your own? Why didn’t you spend time before me listening for my voice, meditating on my word, seeking counsel from other mature Christians?”

You know, as a senior pastor of a large church I have received literally hundreds of prophetic words from individuals regarding what God is telling me to do or what God wants the church to do. I receive those words and then I pray about them. And most of the time I don’t have any internal sense that God is telling me to do the things in those words. So I release the word to God and I go on doing what I know God has called me to do. I’m a Christian. I have a real relationship with the Lord.

About six years ago I received dozens of prophetic words from different sources telling me that I was supposed to leave the pastorate of this church and assume the pastorate of the Vineyard Church in Anaheim when John Wimber was planning to retire. I prayed about the words. I had absolutely no internal sense from God that the words were accurate and so I turned them over to the Lord and went on with my life.

Don’t be intimidated by prophetic people or prophetic words. It’s wonderful when God highlights for you through prophecy what he is saying to you or inclines you to pray about something new that you haven’t prayed about through a word of prophecy. But you are responsible, friends, for your own decisions before God.

Now, with this wonderful gift of prophecy that strengthens, encourages, comforts,

convicts, brings a sense of God's reality and offers guidance, why would the apostle Paul ever need to say, in 1 Thessalonians 5:20, *Do not treat prophecies with contempt*. You would think with this wonderful gift that people would be lining up and saying, "WOW, this is like a million dollars. Where can I cash the check?" Why does the apostle Paul have to tell the church at Thessalonica to be careful and not despise the gift of prophesying? Why has this been a regular temptation for the church for the last 20 centuries to despise prophesying and the gift of prophecy? Why do we read, throughout history, of churches saying, "Enough. We've had enough. No more prophecy."

I say this with all affection, but if you read the history of the church, the church has been tempted to despise prophecy for one simple reason...because of prophets. Martin Luther shut down prophecy in the church in the 16th century because of his encounter with an arrogant, an utterly uncorrectable man named Thomas Munzer.

Munzer got in a fight with virtually every church leader he encountered. Luther tried to bring correction into his life from God's Word and from the history of the church. But Munzer said, "I don't need to listen to you. I only follow my own internal leading from the Holy Spirit." Munzer believed he was getting revelations from God to establish new doctrines. Eventually, some of his followers took up arms and started to attack the government. And some of them actually ran naked in the streets.

Why has the church been tempted to despise prophesying? Because the church has encountered uncorrectable, unsubmitive prophets. Virtually every heresy in the

history of the church has been the result of someone who claimed to have a new prophetic revelation. The Mormons, the Moonies, the Jehovah's Witnesses, all their leaders started with the Christian church but were not submissive to the church's balance and correction. Prophetically gifted people try to teach doctrine when they aren't gifted to teach doctrine. They aren't teachers. Some prophetic people abuse the gift by trying to control other people's lives. It's almost like they cast a spell over folks. Some prophetically gifted people try to dominate church meetings.

Paul lays down strict guidelines for the amount of prophecy and the judgment of prophecy in a church. Often prophetic people have an arrogance about them, an elitism, like Thomas Munzer did. Because I get these spontaneous revelations, because I've had the experience of gaining secret information, I'm more spiritual than you. I am above you. People resent elitism and arrogance. Sadly, much of the charismatic church has been unwilling to challenge the practices, the silliness, the arrogance, the elitism and ambition of some prophetically gifted people.

What I would like to do in these closing minutes is share with you a few basic rules of prophesying within the Vineyard Church of Columbus. I would like to preserve this church from the temptation to despise prophesying. We've had 20 centuries of despising. I would like the atmosphere here to be that people are regularly benefiting from the good gifts that God has given. That in Vineyard Columbus people are getting encouraged, strengthened, comforted, and convicted of their sins, cleansed. People are being brought to an encounter with God. Folks are receiving confirmation of God's call on their lives.

You know, Jesus had beatitudes for life in the Kingdom:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

I'd like to offer you four of my own beatitudes for prophesying in Vineyard Columbus and for allowing prophecy to take its proper place here as an extraordinarily valuable gift of God. So here they are:

Blessed are the humble, for they promote God's name above their own. Do not claim to be 100% accurate in the prophetic revelation you receive. We all need to acknowledge our imperfections. We are limited. If something you offer as a prophetic word doesn't seem to be accurate or strike home, it is completely appropriate for you to humbly say, "Eat the meat and spit out the bone. Receive whatever benefit you can from the Lord, and the rest I guess was just me speaking, or last night's pizza."

The opposite of humility is, of course, self-promotion. This is my ministry and my great gift and I need recognition. I need a title and turf. You know, Jesus gave us wisdom regarding promotion. He said, *When you are at a party take the lowest seat. And then someone who is in authority may call you up.* It's so easy to promote the humble, those who you sense are passionate about God's kingdom and not their own. Blessed are the humble for they promote God's name above their own.

Blessed are those who love the church, for that is God's instrument to save the world. There is one indispensable requirement that we ask of everyone who does ministry in this church. That is that you love the whole church and that you speak well of the whole church. It is so easy for us to love our part of the whole church and our calling, and to despise those who don't have our passions.

I'm going to brag on a couple for a moment here. Del and Kay Wilhelm are an older couple in our congregation who worked for years simply as volunteers organizing and directing Vineyard's Free Medical Clinic. In all the years that they served in an unpaid position, I never heard Del or Kay criticize the church. They never said, "How come the rest of you guys don't care about the poor in the community as much as we do? Don't you see how often the poor are mentioned in the Bible? What's the matter with you suburban people? Take your blinders off. There are people suffering in the city."

They never viewed themselves in an adversarial position to the church. They always loved the church. And you know what happened? Del and Kay are now on staff with the church. People around the city offered thousands of dollars of equipment and services to equip our Free Medical Clinic. Dozens of health professionals have signed up to volunteer in the Clinic that Del and Kay direct. Hundreds of people have given their lives to Christ through the health clinic in the last few years. And just two weeks ago there was a front-page article in the Dispatch about Vineyard's Free Medical Clinic and an interview with Del and Kay.

Now that's the favor of God. And I believe the favor of God came to that couple because they have consistently exhibited love for the whole church. Prophetically gifted people, I would encourage you to imitate their example.

Blessed are the submissive, for they make pastors' work a joy. You know, because you are prophetically gifted doesn't mean that you get to lead the church. Church government in the Bible is given over to the church pastors and elders. If you feel like you have something from the Lord, submit it to a leader here and then leave it in their hands.

Hebrews 13:17 says, *Obey your leaders so that their work will be joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.* Let pastors' work be joyful.

Let me translate that into 21st century language. Prophetically gifted people, don't be a royal pain in the neck. Be easy to work with. God has given you a spiritual gift; make it easy for the church to receive it.

And here's my last beatitude. Blessed are the normal, for they allow guests to not be weirded out. The apostle Paul lays out some pretty strict guidelines for prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14. For the most part, prophecy in the early church and in our church was done in the small group setting in a house church. But Paul wanted it to be under control, in order, and peaceful.

One of the values we have here at Vineyard is what we call being naturally supernatural. We value not being weird. We in Vineyard Columbus believe that God is alive today, that God really exists, and that it is possible to come into a personal relationship with the God who created everything. We really believe in Vineyard Columbus that Jesus Christ died on a cross for our sins and that he rose again on Easter and is alive today.

But we want to communicate those truths in a way that is winsome, that's appealing, that's gracious, that's normal. We need prophetic gifts in this church. We need, all of us, encouragement. We need strengthening. Who wouldn't want to be comforted in a time of loss? We need to be convicted of our hidden sins. We need a reverent fear of God restored to us, a sense that God could break in at any moment, and announcement of God's mind.

Vineyard Church, will you pray for the gift of prophecy in this church and in your own life? Will you exercise the gift of prophecy in such a humble, submissive, loving way that the church doesn't despise it? Let's pray.

The Gift of Prophecy

Rich Nathan

December 6-7, 2002

Spiritual Gifts: God's Way of Building Community

1 Corinthians 12:8-11

- I. Prophecy: Experienced and Defined
- II. Prophecy's Purposes:
 - A. To Strengthen, Encourage, and Comfort (1 Cor. 14:3; Hag. 1:13)
 - B. To Convict of Sin (1 Cor. 14:24, 25; 2 Sam. 11, 12)
 - C. To Bring a Sense of God's Reality (1 Cor. 14:25)
 - D. To Offer Guidance (Acts 13:1-3; 16:6ff)
- III. Prophecy's Pitfalls (1 Thess. 5:20)
- IV. Prophecy's Practice
 - A. Blessed are the Humble for They Promote God's Name Above Their Own.
 - B. Blessed are Those Who Love the Whole Church for it is God's Instrument to Save the World.
 - C. Blessed are the Submissive for They Make Pastors' Work a Joy.
 - D. Blessed are the Normal for They Allow Guests to not be Weirded Out.