JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THE PROPHETIC

Prophecy Is Hard to Define, Easy to Discern, and Open to Every Believer

> Prophecy is not easily defined, but it can be easily discerned, and it is available to every believer. The key that unlocks it is not an altar moment but a life saturated in the most prophetic thing we have, the Word of God, in the secret place.

MAIN TEXT
1 Corinthians 14:5

FIRST PREACHED
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SERIES
We're Openly Spirit Filled, Week 4 of 5

BY
Pastor Jason Mayfield

AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Every time you isolate the prophetic down to something you can neatly define, you are wrong. Cessationists confine it to the writing of Scripture, Pentecostals confine it to a set of behaviors, and both are too narrow.
2. Prophecy in the Bible looks different almost every time it flows: God speaking to and through a person, a person so in tune with God's character that no fresh word is needed, and a prophet's declaration that God backs even when it seems out of step with His nature.
3. The nine gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 are an ad hoc list, not an exhaustive one, and several of them already operate in the prophetic realm. Prophecy is a large umbrella of spiritual power, not one narrow item on a list.
4. Prophecy is not easily defined, but it can be easily discerned. Paul says do not reject the prophetic, but test all of it.
5. The first and best test is: how helpful is it? A word nobody can verify, check on, or apply to either person in the conversation fails the test.
6. Most prophecy in Scripture is present tense, not future. Prophetic figures speak almost entirely to their moment, writing prophets are about 60 percent present day, and even the future material carries present day instruction.
7. You have to allow a margin of error, because the spirit of a prophet is subject to the prophet and every word is filtered through the person's paradigm the way a coffee filter changes the taste.
8. There are three levels of prophecy: canon level, which is closed, institutional prophets who speak to the church at large and to the culture, and individual prophecy, which is for yourself and your sphere and is available to everyone.
9. The key to unlocking the prophetic is not an altar call and an impartation. It is getting familiar with the most prophetic thing available, the Scripture, until you can tell what is from God and what is from you.
10. Prophecy is not a mystical thing kept out of reach. People who make it inaccessible do so to take advantage of people who will not think for themselves.
11. You get this in the secret place. Jesus, Elijah and Elisha all got alone with God, and that is where prophecy unlocks.



WATCH IT PREACHED

youtu.be/XsuGSrYpoJE



READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/the-key-to-unlocking-the-prophetic

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This is week four of a five-week series on being openly Spirit filled. The previous messages dealt with the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues; next week takes up discerning of spirits.

Two things to say up front. First, this is preached at a time when abuse in prophetic ministries is being exposed publicly. Name it honestly: people have been hurt, lost possessions and been put in harm's way by ministries that turned out to be fraudulent. Then say plainly that there is still a true prophetic power the church has access to. Second, this message carries a lot of teaching ("a ten-hour lesson in 30 minutes"). Tell the congregation it will not be tidy, and keep moving.

Introduction

We are openly Spirit filled. We are not going to be a closeted Pentecostal church. We openly express the Pentecostal experience, and we want to operate in the authentic power of God, because this is not something we mess around with. It is power for life.

So this morning: prophecy.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 14:5** ESV
>
> [5] Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

Catch the phrase: "I want you all… to prophesy." Paul says it to the whole church.

PROPHECY RESISTS DEFINITION

One of the biggest problems with the prophetic is that people think they can define it neatly. **Generally, any time you isolate the prophetic down to something you can define, you are wrong.**

Cessationists, believers who hold that the supernatural gifts are no longer for today, put prophecy in a rigid box: its only purpose was the writing of Scripture. We love them; they are part of the body of Christ. But Paul tells the Corinthian church, "I want you all… to prophesy." Read the rest of 1 Corinthians and see how messed up that church was. Paul did not think those people were going to write the Bible.

Pentecostals and charismatics often go the other way. They do not ask whether something carries prophetic authority. They ask whether it fits a style: a certain way of talking, of saying "God" or

"hallelujah," a certain kind of music, or more than three people waving flags. Some even think the harsher the preacher gets, the more prophetic it is.

Illustration: "You're the problem." I was in a "prophetic" church once where the pastor called people to the altar, walked up to one man and said, "You know, you're the problem." I was on the piano. I did a key change.

1. Prophecy Looks Different Almost Every Time

Take a 10,000-foot view of Scripture. Get out of the paradigm you were raised in or adopted into, look at every instance of the prophetic, and you will find that every time prophecy flows in the Bible, it looks different. Most people would say prophecy is "God speaking through a person." That is only sometimes the case.

Sometimes prophecy is God speaking to and through a person.

- Moses.
- Samuel: "Then the LORD said to Samuel" (1 Samuel 3:11).
- Balaam: hired to curse Israel, but "the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth" (Numbers 23:5), and every time he tried to curse, he blessed.

Sometimes prophecy is a person so in tune with God's character that they can represent Him accurately without a fresh word from the Lord.

- Daniel counsels the king: "let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness" (Daniel 4:27).
- Jeremiah writes godly instruction to the exiles under the banner "Thus says the LORD" (Jeremiah 29:4-7): build houses, plant gardens, seek the welfare of the city.

Sometimes a prophet declares something, and God simply honors it because of who the prophet is.

- Elisha and the bears (2 Kings 2:23-24). Boys jeer at him, "Go up, you baldhead!" Elisha curses them, and two bears come out of the woods. That does not seem to be what the Lord is into, but the prophet said it, and it carried authority.
- Elisha and Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27). Gehazi takes payment from Naaman for what Elisha had done freely, and Elisha pronounces Naaman's leprosy on him. It comes to pass.
- Peter and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). After Ananias falls dead for lying to the Holy Spirit, Peter tells Sapphira, "the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out" (Acts 5:9). And she dies.

That is just three. Go through the Bible and you will find almost no two instances of prophecy that are the same.

2. The Gifts List Is an Ad Hoc List

Our understanding of prophecy is further complicated by the way we teach the spiritual gifts.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10** ESV
>
> [8] For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, [9] to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, [10] to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

1. Word of wisdom 2. Word of knowledge 3. Faith 4. Gifts of healing 5. Working of miracles 6. Prophecy 7. Discerning of spirits (next week) 8. Different kinds of tongues 9. Interpretation of tongues

Preachers love lists; they are free sermons. So we have taught this passage as "here are the nine things the Spirit gives." But it is not an exhaustive list. It is an *ad hoc* list, Latin for "for this." Paul is building a cadence to make a point: there are many different gifts in the body.

Illustration: the man who prays for the deaf. I know a man in Alabama who prays for deaf people, and they get healed. Not the blind, not people in wheelchairs: the deaf. He puts his fingers in their ears, prays, pulls them out, and they can hear. You could file it under gifts of healing, but it is bizarrely specific. It exceeds the small list we say the Holy Spirit can work through.

Because prophecy appears as one item on a list, we think of it narrowly. But look again: about five things on this list operate in an obvious prophetic realm: prophecy, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, faith and discerning of spirits. If you suddenly know what is going on with someone, that looks a lot like prophecy. If you can discern a spirit on someone, that looks a lot like prophecy.

Prophecy is not a rigid, definable activity. It is a large umbrella of spiritual power you can receive from heaven.

3. Not Easily Defined, but Easily Discerned

Prophecy is not easily defined, but it can be easily discerned.

Paul says to test it: "Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). See also 1 Corinthians 14:29. Too often, if we like the style, the ministry and the atmosphere, we receive it without question. Every time you receive anything prophetic, give it the test.

THE TEST: HOW HELPFUL IS IT?

The first and best way to test prophetic ministry is one question: **How helpful is it?**

Much of what passes for prophecy in our churches is an activity with no power behind it, just people saying stuff. Words nobody can test, verify or check on. Words so far in the future, or so far outside

anyone's sphere, that they have nothing to do with either person in the conversation. Pastor Jason's observation: go to a prophetic conference, and much of what you will hear is about events in Israel, while the people in the room are worried about the price of eggs.

> **1 CORINTHIANS 14:3** ESV
>
> [3] On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

Upbuilding, encouragement, consolation. How helpful is this word to your life, right now, in this season?

MOST PROPHECY IS PRESENT TENSE

We tend to think of prophecy as a tool for the future, but most prophecy in Scripture is present tense.

- **Prophetic figures**, prophets written *about* (Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Huldah): almost entirely about what was happening in their moment.
- **Writing prophets**, whose preaching was written down (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel): by Pastor Jason's estimate, roughly 60% present-day ministry and 40% future.
- **Future prophecy** itself almost always carries instruction for the present.
- **New Testament prophecy** as described in 1 Corinthians 14 is overwhelmingly present-focused. Outside of the apostle John, future prophecy in the New Testament comes to pass within a short time. Agabus took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands, and said the man who owned the belt would be bound in Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-11). Within days of arriving in Jerusalem, Paul was arrested.

Illustration: "As you care for your hair." Before Ashleigh and I married, two things happened close together.

First, I went to Phoenix First Assembly, Pastor Tommy Barnett's church, known as "the church with a heart," and had the closest thing to an impartation I have ever experienced. The Lord showed me how to love people. Before that I did not care about people at all; I was all about getting things done, and Ashleigh had seen it. It did not happen at an altar. It happened in the foyer.

A few months later, after we were engaged, the pastor I was serving under called Ashleigh into his office, made her take off her engagement ring before he would talk to her, and told her, "You can't marry him, because he doesn't love people." That night we almost called it off.

Around that time we went to a Tuesday night revival service at a charismatic church. The evangelist, a man who had no way of knowing me, offered to prophesy over anyone who came forward. I expected nonsense. He looked me in the face and said, "As you care for your hair, so the Lord is teaching you to care for people." It was bizarrely accurate for that exact moment. Was it helpful? Absolutely. That is how you test prophecy.

4. Allow a Margin of Error

When it comes to the prophetic, you have to give a little room for a margin of error. That evangelist almost lost me at "your hair," because I do not spend much time on my hair. But I hung with him, and the next words hit me right in the chest. Sometimes you have to look past the details to what the person is actually saying.

This happens in the Bible. Agabus said the Jews in Jerusalem would bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles. Paul was seized by a crowd and then bound with chains by the Roman tribune (Acts 21:33). Agabus was right about the outcome, though the details did not unfold exactly as he described them.

"The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). We usually use that verse to say, "Don't shout out prophecies while the preacher is preaching," and we will hold that line. But it also means every prophetic word passes through a person.

Illustration: the coffee filter. The filter is small and almost unnoticeable, but it affects the taste of your coffee. The person a prophetic word passes through affects it, too, usually through their paradigm. That is one reason it is hard to get prophecy from the pulpit to the pew: preachers, musicians and church people have a different lived experience from the people in the pew.

Illustration: the quote. I once asked a contractor whether a job would be closer to five thousand dollars or fifty thousand. He blurted out a curse word, then apologized. I told him that was exactly how I wanted him to respond to fifty thousand dollars. People in church apologize for language like that; people outside do not. Different lived experience, different filter.

Nathan is another example (2 Samuel 7:1-13). David wanted to build a house for the Lord, and Nathan said, "Go, do all that is in your heart." Sometimes the apparent gets in the way of the prophetic. But "that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan" (2 Samuel 7:4), and he went back to David with a correction: not you; your offspring will build it.

Sometimes you have to eat the fish and spit out the bones.

5. Prophecy Is for Everyone: Three Levels

Prophecy, to some measure, is available to every believer. But there is a real tension in Scripture.

On one hand, "Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:5). On the other:

> **1 CORINTHIANS 12:29-30** ESV
>
> 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

The implied answer is no. Not everybody is a prophet.

You cannot read the Bible like a trifold brochure you glance at and set aside. **Sometimes you have to sit in the tension of Scripture and not try to resolve it, but let it resolve you.** I do not just study the Bible. The Bible studies me.

There are essentially three levels of prophecy:

1. **Canon-level prophecy.** Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel: prophecy that became Scripture. This level is closed. Much of the friction between Pentecostals and Reformed believers is here: when grandma stands up and says, "Thus saith the Lord, draw near to me and I'll draw near to you," they think we believe she is writing the Bible. We do not. Scripture stands above every other prophetic word. 2. **Institutional prophecy** (1 Corinthians 12). The prophet as an office or role in the church, a "big-P" Prophet, who speaks to the church at large and to the culture. This is rare. 3. **Individual prophecy** (1 Corinthians 14). Believers who speak to themselves and to individuals in their sphere. When you operate in the prophetic as an individual, it is for you and your sphere, not the nations. **Everyone has access to this.**

These are not three options; they are a hierarchy.

Illustration: a bass player vs. someone who can play the bass. I am a bass player. I think like one and hear music like one. Years ago a friend I used to travel with recorded a Christmas album, and when I heard it I called and asked who played bass. It was a great guitar player. I could tell immediately that it was not a bass player on that record, just somebody who could play the bass. There is a difference between someone who coaches the New York Yankees and someone who coaches Little League. And there is a difference between a prophet proper and an individual who prophesies. Both are helpful.

6. The Key to Unlocking the Prophetic

How do we unlock the prophetic? We tend to think it comes through an altar call: someone lays hands on you, you shake, and now you can prophesy. Here is the actual key.

Last fall, in the series We're Rooted in the Bible, we moved from the inspiration, authority and inerrancy of Scripture into how to hear from the Lord. I did not say it then, but I was teaching you how to prophesy the whole time. **Hearing from the Lord, getting a word from God: that is prophecy.**

The best way to unlock the prophetic is to get familiar with the prophetic base: the Scripture.

The Bible is "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow" (Hebrews 4:12). When the Holy Spirit takes hold of it, He "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). The more familiar you are with the Word, the more you recognize how the prophetic operates, and the more you can tell when something is from the Lord and when it is from you.

Illustration: the Torah and the minor prophets. In preparing this message, Pastor Jason asked an AI tool to look only at the Torah, the canon the prophets had, and estimate how much of what Amos, Joel and Malachi prophesied could have been drawn from the Torah alone. Its answer: about 78%, nearly four out of five statements. Present this as what the tool estimated, not as a published finding.

We let people convince us that prophecy is a mystical thing high in the clouds that nobody can touch. Scripture warns about people who "make much of you, but for no good purpose" (Galatians 4:17), and about those who take advantage of the vulnerable (2 Timothy 3:6). Prophecy is available to you, to me, and to the person next to you, if we will get familiar with God and His Word.

You cannot read the Bible five times and not have it leak out of you.

Illustration: the lady who read the Bible 17 times. Her husband told me she had read the Bible 17 times. She could not quote a verse, but godliness poured out of her.

Conclusion

It comes from the secret place. When Jesus needed a word, He got alone with the Father. Elijah got in the secret place. Elisha stayed there. Get alone with God, day after day, and you will step into a prophetic flow that is available to every person in this church.

Prophecy will unlock for you.

OPTIONAL: PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT

Pastor Jason's notes end with this verse, but it was not preached on February 15, 2026.

The notes quote Isaiah 28:13 as a picture of how the Word builds in us "precept upon precept… line upon line." Handle it with care: in context, Isaiah 28 is a word of judgment on people who mocked the prophet's simple teaching, and the verse ends "that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken." If you use it, use it as a warning: the same Word that builds up those who receive it becomes a stumbling block to those who refuse it.



ABOUT

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