

Prophetic Activation in Small Groups:

Facilitating Prophecy in the Church Environment

By Helen Calder

Note: This article is designed to be read in conjunction with our other materials on prophetic ministry practice and guidelines. [1]

Background

‘Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. But those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.’

(1 Cor 14:1-3)

The Apostle Paul encouraged all Christian believers to have the desire to prophesy. He went on to state the broad parameters of ‘strengthening, encouragement and comfort’. A small group setting is a great place to facilitate this.

As Christian believers, we can hear God speak to us through our relationship with Him. In a group context, we can hear from God for others and ourselves at that primary level.

Depending upon the context and purpose of a group, one or more members may have a prophetic gift—but this is not essential for simple prophetic activation.

Examples of groups include church cell groups, departmental groups such as worship, youth, evangelism or prayer, or any other setting in which the number of Christians gathered is small enough for all to pray and share on a personal basis.

Benefits of Prophetic Activation in a Small Group

Prophetic activation occurs when opportunity is provided for people to receive and share messages of encouragement, exhortation or comfort from God in a group setting.

These insights may be for themselves personally, for each other, or for another purpose such as guidance for evangelism.

Prophetic activation has a number of benefits:

- It encourages all Christians (whether or not they have a specific prophetic gift) in their ability to accurately hear from God
- Members of the group receive encouragement through ministering to one another
- It can provide a safe place for those who are prophetically gifted to practice and grow in their gift
- Having the experience of hearing from God encourages individuals in their intimate relationship with Him
- It provides the opportunity for the leadership of the Holy Spirit as people listen for the Father's heart and intentions
- An overflow occurs as those in the group gain confidence in their ability to hear from God for themselves and others. They can then take this into their everyday lives.

Cautions about Prophetic Activation in Small Groups

In spite of these many benefits, there is also the possibility of things going awry. The enemy knows the power of Christians hearing from God and will use every means possible to discourage or distort it.

A small group that lacks accountability, is not submitted to oversight, or has an unhealthy focus on—or misbelief about—prophecy, can easily be drawn into deception. Some prophetic groups have even caused dissension or division.

Misguided or wrongly given words can potentially hurt individuals who have opened their hearts to receive a genuine word from God.

This is why it is vital to be aware of the things that can go wrong and to put the necessary guidelines in place.

Have an External Focus

It is possible to concentrate on prophecy to the point that it becomes an unhealthy focus.—so it is vital that we keep a balance.

In the New Testament, prophecy is portrayed as being just one gift of many operating in the church, and its context for use is within the church body as a whole. (1 Cor 12:7-12)

With this in mind, I would personally *not* recommend having a prophecy-only focus group, unless it was for a short term and instituted by church oversight for a particular purpose.

Further to this, within the life of the church, prophetic people often gather in prayer meetings. A small prayer group is healthiest when it has a focus outside of itself. Some examples of an external focus include supporting the overall church vision, evangelism, or serving a particular area or department of church life.

Guidelines for Leading Prophetic Activation in a Small Group Setting

A small group should be a safe place to hear from God; not only for individuals within the group, but also for the church, its leaders, and any newcomers that may join in.

Church leaders especially should have confidence in the prophetic activation that is taking place, as well as the leadership and general direction of the group.

Accountability

'Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good.' (1 Thess 5:19-21)

The New Testament context of prophetic ministry is one of accountability. (1 Cor 14:29)

A test for this in a small group is to ask questions like:

- ‘Are we clearly limiting our insights to encouragement, exhortation and comfort?’
- ‘What are our guidelines for receiving and sharing words from God?’
- ‘Is the group being regularly reminded of these?’
- ‘Who is our oversight—outside of our group leader, and do they have confidence in what is taking place in our group?’

Keeping a record, or journal of prophetic insights, is a great tool, not only for accountability, but also to keep a record of what God is saying for the encouragement of the group.

General Guidelines

A person who is leading a group in prophetic activation should be well-versed in general guidelines of prophecy, as well as the specific protocols relating to prophetic ministry in the church.

Here are some further guidelines related to small groups that may help:

- Avoid using the term prophecy. Keep it simple. Every Christian has the ability to hear from God, and not all that we hear (even those of us who are prophetically gifted) could be classified as prophecy. For example, someone may have a word of wisdom, insight or discernment, encouragement, a timely scripture, and so on.
- Give people the freedom not to participate if they do not feel comfortable or do not have something to share.
- Provide a means for anyone who does not feel comfortable with an insight or word shared with them to have someone to talk to about their concerns.
- Value the unique way that individuals are wired to hear from God and don't favour one means of receiving a revelation from God over another.

- Be careful not to elevate the gift or insights of someone who has a prophetic gift above others in the group—and do not allow their ability to intimidate others.
- Don't diminish the value of prophetic prayer—this can be a spiritual gift in itself.

Ideas to help Group Prophetic Activation

- Always remind the group of the most important guidelines each time you minister to each other, such as:
 - keep insights simple and encouraging
 - be careful not to communicate something that you know by natural means as a message from God
 - do not share directive words [2]
 - if you do not understand or relate to a word it is OK to weigh it up or set it aside, etc.
- Review and value the many different ways that people can hear from God—including scripture verses and stories, pictures and visions, thoughts, prompts, feelings, words, songs and so on

Some Practical ways to foster Hearing from God in a group

- Have a journaling session in which people privately journal their thoughts about what God is saying to them, e.g. through a Bible verse. Then have the opportunity to share it with each other.
- Praying for each other—in pairs or taking it in turns to pray for individuals. Try praying *without* sharing needs beforehand and see how people are encouraged by what God speaks to them through the prayers and insights given.
- Keep a journal or book in which words, prayers or insights are recorded—using this feeds the expectation that group members are going to hear from God.

- Help people to learn how to hear from God by simplifying the process. For example, ask God to give you:
 - a Bible character or story for the person you are praying for
 - a verse from scripture
 - highlight a verse from a particular passage or Psalm (e.g. Psalm 23)

Activation exercises can be of some benefit, especially in the beginning stages, to encourage people to listen to what God is saying. However, it is best to foster the practice of hearing from God in a natural way.

Notes:

[1] See the following articles:

<http://enlivenpublishing.com/blog/2011/09/13/differences-between-old-and-new-testament-prophetic-ministry/>

<http://enlivenpublishing.com/blog/2011/07/26/prophetic-ministry-in-church-life-why-have-guidelines/>

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[2] By directive words, I mean words that bring specific guidance, dates or direction. A general guide is, ‘no dates, no mates (prophesying concerning marriage or life-partners), no direction (including foresight of specific ministry roles or careers), no correction.’

About Helen Calder

Helen Calder is on the ministry team at David McCracken Ministries.

As a prophetic teacher, Helen’s passion is for spiritual renewal that leads to evangelism. “My desire is for Christians and churches to catch the vision of who they are and Whose they are—empowered sons and daughters of the King—and out of that revelation, to be supernaturally equipped to impact their communities and beyond.”



Helen has authored the books, ‘Prophetic People in a Changing Church,’ ‘How to be a Supernatural Christian in Your Everyday World’ along with other e-books and articles which can be found at her online blog.

Helen and her husband Malcolm have two young adult children, Steve and Amy. They make their home in Melbourne, Australia, and attend The Winepress Church.

For more information on Helen Calder and prophetic training opportunities:

<http://www.davidmccracken.org/About-Helen-Calder.php>

Enliven Blog—Prophetic Teaching by Helen Calder

For teaching and resources on the topics of prophetic ministry, spiritual renewal, spiritual gifts and prayer:

www.enlivenpublishing.com/blog
