

Prophets Together

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Introduction

Prophets Together Schools are just that - schools for prophets! Discipline is very high. Lateness is not accepted; failure to do the homework assignments is not accepted; members can be asked to leave the school at any time, if it is felt that they are not suited to the intensity and thoroughness of the teaching. Is this too hard? Not for prophets, who should have a strong discipline in their faith, and in their daily lives. Other schools exist – the prophecy school, the school for prophets—which are more open and more gentle. But this one is tough. We want Africa to have the best prophets in the world, and I believe this is God’s desire as well. If we are going to fulfill that promise, then it is going to be tough. I apologise for being so blunt, but we might as well get things straight at the outset.

Consider these two things

1. We are not prophets of the Old covenant. We belong to the New Testament, where everyone has access to God. We are called to help people hear and understand God for themselves. We work within the body, under the authority of the body, with the accreditation of the body, and the testing of the body. Ultimately the leadership decide whether God has spoken to us. We can learn from Old Testament prophets, but we must not assume that we can behave like them.

2. Prophets/prophetic voices. There is a clear distinction between those who speak prophetically in an assembly, and those who have the Office of prophet. The prophet, part of the five fold foundation ministry of the Church, is a recognised position, seeking by demonstration and teaching, to equip the saints for ministry. (Ephesians 4:11-12) A prophetic voice, fulfilling the teaching in 1 Corinthians 14, exercises his or her calling occasionally, within the local assembly. They can have other gifts, and hold all sorts of positions within the body. They are not foundation office holders, as described in Ephesians 4.

1. Knowing our call

Study these verses:-

The call of Isaiah	(Isaiah 6)
The call of Jeremiah	(Jeremiah 1)
The call of Amos	(Amos 7:14-16)

The call of Jonah **(Jonah 1)**
The call of Peter **(Luke 5:1-11)**
The call of Paul **(Acts 9:1-9)**

There are basic elements in these calls:-

The Lord made the call, and they all knew that he was speaking to them.

They became aware of their humanity - there sinfulness, (Peter, Isaiah) their unsuitableness, (Jeremiah) their fear. (Jonah.)

Their call had a powerful emotional impact on them.

The Lord make it clear what it is that he wanted from them, sometimes in words, but often in pictures.

For each, the way ahead was to prove very difficult. Amos came up against severe criticism, Paul didn't know what to do next, Isaiah received a tough commission, Jonah finished up in a fish, and Jeremiah passed through a series of very hard emotional experiences.

This last experience needs careful reflection by all called to prophecy. It reflects the deep inner turmoil and pain which this call places on the human spirit.

Study Jeremiah.

Jeremiah experienced a great inner struggle and turmoil in his work. Fortunately for all prophets that followed him, he left these feelings clearly exposed for us to study. These passages, known as his "confessions" need careful study by any prophet. This will be our experience:

11:18-23: "I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter"
12:1-6: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?"
15:10-21: "Alas my mother, that you gave me birth."
17:14-18: "Where is the word of the Lord?"
18:18-23: "Let's make plans against Jeremiah."
20:7-13: "O Lord you deceived me.."
20:14-18 "Cursed be the day I was born."

Study Jonah

Another prophet who shows the inner struggle and turmoil is Jonah.

1: 1:3 Called, but afraid.
2: 1:2 Aware of his humanity and frailty.
2: 3-7 Turns again to God, in desperation.
3:1 Obeys the call, and faces the cost.

How we develop and exercise the call?

1. Hearing:-

Each of the prophets we have studied heard from God out of an intense and close relationship to him. We are called to this intense close relationship, but it brings its pressures:-

We are very aware of our sinfulness.

We are very aware of our broken humanity.

We are very aware of weakness.

We feel very deeply the rejection of what we bring.

We have to maintain this closeness, but it is hard to do so. This is not because God doesn't want it, but because often we cannot bear the pain, the agony and the intensity of the closeness of the presence of God. This is the toughest part of our calling—to remain standing in his presence, when we feel inadequate, broken, sick, defeated, *and still he continues to insist we stay and hear more.*

Many times prophets want to run away from this intensity of experience—Jonah really did—and we want to cry out “Stop! I can't bear anymore.” But this option is not open to us. We share the cry of Jesus “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,”

(Matt 26:38); and again “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” (Matt.27:46) To hear from God drives the prophet to the very edge of his existence and reason, drives him into the desert, drives him deeply into the loving and grieving heart of God. It is an awesome, overwhelming and frightening experience. But only as we accept this, can we truly hear from God, know his heart, his thoughts, his longings and his ways. Only then can we speak profound and simple truth which the body needs to hear.

Study Isaiah (Isaiah ch: 6)

In the call of this prophet, we can see the agony for him of being in the presence, the power of the call, and the agony of the message he has to proclaim.

The agony of his humanity—verse 5

The cleansing of God – verse 7

The agony of his call – verse 11

Study Moses. (Exodus chapters 3 and 4)

Sometimes our humanity stands in the way of our call. Moses tried over and over again to tell God that He had chosen the wrong man! It's easy to criticise Moses, unless you have stood there yourself. Then the difficulties are all too obvious. Here are the reasons Moses gave God for saying “No!”

3:11 “Who am I?”
3:13 “I don’t know your name.”
4:1 “What if they don’t believe me?”
4:10 “I do not speak very well.”
4:13 “Please send someone else!”

2. What do we hear?

It is not so much what we hear, as what we see and feel. Jeremiah saw a pot, Isaiah saw the glory, Elisha saw his master taken into heaven, (2 Kings 2:9) Paul saw a light and heard a voice. We have to take what we feel and see, and interpret it into words and pictures which our hearers can grasp. This is not so difficult to understand. Describing relationships is very difficult. How do we describe love, or friendship? Not usually in words but in feelings and experiences, which we then translate into words. A prophet has to go into the heavenly places with his whole being, and allow himself to be exposed to as much of God as he can stand. From these feelings and experiences, the visions, words and pictures will flow. We must grasp this truth—being a prophet is so much more than being given a “word.” That thinking is for beginners, not for the experienced mature prophet.

Study Elijah. (1 Kings 19: 9 –13)

Elijah had to learn that it was within his relationship to God that he received his anointing and his call. In this passage, he has to be reminded again of who it was that he was serving, and have restored to him his closeness to God, before he could receive his onward call. The lesson is simple—we “experience” and then we speak from that experience of the presence of God.

3. Sharing

How much of what we hear do we share? This is a personal decision, but I keep these things in mind:-

God’s people can receive only the smallest amount of what we experience. Share too much, and everything gets lost.

Much of what we experience is part of our personal relationship with God—essential for the growth and maturing of this relationship, but not necessarily available to anyone else.

A prophet’s first responsibility is to hear from God, not to speak. We are first and foremost listeners, and secondly speakers. This principle will help with the selection of what to share and when.

4. How do we share?

From the prophets we have already studied, and from others which can be studied privately, certain principles emerge, for mature prophets to take as a guide:-

Much of what is shared is in words. This makes testing so much easier for everyone. The word can be tested against the Biblical revelation.

Visions and pictures are common, but they tend to be easy to understand – a pot, a tree branch, a rope (Agabus. Acts 21:10) – and we would do well to take note of this. Complicated visions can come, (Peter in Acts 10) but these are the minority.

Prophetic actions are allowed. (Study Ezekial, Elisha and Naaman (2 Kings 5) and Agabus.) These tend to be fairly straight forward, and directly related to what the prophet is saying or trying to communicate. Even Ezekial's strange behaviour makes good sense when studied alongside what he was saying.

In New Testament terms, we speak within the authority of the body, even if we are speaking a message to the outside world. That body of leadership will test and check what we say, so it is necessary that our words, visions, pictures and action be very straight forward, and in line with biblical revelation.

5. Our practice.

Prophets do not have to scream, or adopt an unusual voice or position. Immature prophets do this, but the mature man or woman should be able to deliver a word in a calm and easy way. When we feel we have to adopt some unusual voice, it is usually a sign of a weak relationship between the prophet and God. When we are secure in that relationship, we can give our ministry in an easy and relaxed way.

6. Growing. Study the prophet Hosea.

Hosea had to live his message. It was written in his marriage and family life. But as the years went by, he grew in understanding of his message, and it's relationship to God's people. Consider these passages.

He marries his prostitute wife. (1:2-3)

The children are named with a clear link to his call and message. (1:4-11)

The message of punishment and restoration. (Ch: 2.)

Reconciliation with his wife. (Ch: 3)

Israel's sinfulness. (Ch: 4-50)

God's longing for the return of his beloved. (Ch: 6)

Israel's continued sin. (Ch: 7-10)

God shows his love, as Hosea has had to show it to his wife. (Ch: 11)

More rebellion. (Ch: 11-13)

The homeward call and blessing. (Ch: 14)

A similar pattern can be seen in the life of St. Peter, who began by being wayward and foolish, and finished up by being one of the most significant leaders in the Early Church.

Prophets grow and mature over the years. We gain a clearer insight into our own lives, and the way in which those lives are tied up with our calling and God's living word. We must not expect to get complete understanding at the beginning. We must strive to mature, to change from glory into glory, to be raised up mature in our calling after many years.

7. Courage.

Study prophet Micaiah ben Imlah. 1 Kings 22: 1-28.

A prophet needs courage to do his work. It is not always easy to be courageous, and it does not always lead to our vindication, even when we are right!

Many against him—verse 6
Pressure to conform—verse 13
Pressure from kings—verse 10
The truth—verse 17
The reaction—verse 18
Physical pain—verse 24
Prison—verse 25
Courage —verse 26

The message is very simple, and very blunt. If we cannot pay the price, we should not take up the call.

2. Our place in the body

Prophets have never been popular, or particularly liked. Jeremiah found himself in a well (Jeremiah 38) and Micaiah ben Imlam was thrown in prison, for doing just what he had been asked to do. (1 Kings 22) Jesus said “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how your fathers treated the false prophets.”(Luke 6: 26) He himself was rejected by Capernaum, and by his own people. It's so easy, when faced with this kind of rejection, to assume that we have no place in the body, and indeed we feel happier sometimes when we are not part of it! But this is not biblical. We are part of the body because we are part of the five fold ministry of the body, as laid out in Ephesians 4:11. We have no choice, and the body has no choice. We are part of each other, bound together by the will and purpose of God.

So if we are part, then what part do we take?

1. The prophet loves the body.

“Christ loved the Church, and gave his life for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5: 25-27)

Of all the ministries and gifts, I believe that the one with the greatest passion for the body is the prophet. The prophet longs for the Church to be a pure bride, because when the purity reaches that which God desires, Jesus can return. Strangely, for one who loves the body so much, he is often the one who has to rebuke and discipline, and often gets rejected and put out of the body. Jeremiah had such a passion for the people of God, and he was ultimately taken away into Egypt, and was accused of leading the people astray from their worship of the queen of heaven!! (Jer 44: 15-18) What a terrible sorrow for the man who had done nothing more than plead again and again for pure worship of the living God.

But it is this very passion which causes the conflicts. The body of Christ has a habit of settling down in comfortable places, and not wanting to move on to face new challenges and new struggles. The leaders of the body can like this settled feeling also, and don't like people who come to disturb the calm. The prophet doesn't see the Church resting in calmness, but sees it sleeping the sleep of death, and wants to wake it up! This produces the conflict, which easily results in the prophet being silenced. The Church likes to be calm— it is easy for everyone then to rest in their faith. But we have not been created to rest, but to fight, to overcome, to take possession, to triumph ! (And that's a prophet writing!)

No matter what the Church says, it needs us to stop it settling down. We have to bear the pain of this difficult position, continue to challenge, and continue to love. It's not easy. No one ever said that our call would be easy.

Study 1 Corinthians 13.

This passage describes love. Reflect on it not for yourself, but for your calling. This is the kind of love you are to have for the body. Ask the Holy Spirit to increase love for the body in you.

2. Respect for the Lord's anointed.

Responsibility for the body rests with the Pastor, and the leaders he appoints. Our attitude to the Pastor is one of the keys of our New Testament calling. When we have to speak harsh or judgmental things, they will obviously have a powerful impact on the leadership. How do we manage to live within the body, and speak things which might rebuke the body, and by implication, the leadership? There is no secret here. David clearly established a principle, and Jesus built on it to set our behaviour towards the leadership in a good biblical framework.

David:- (1 Samuel 24:1-7)

David had the opportunity to kill Saul, and he would have had many good reasons for doing so. But he refused, saying “ The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my Master, the Lord’s anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.” (v 5)

Jesus:- (Mark 10: 41-45)

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” If we respect the Lord’s anointed, and seek to have the heart of the servant, then our relationship with the leader will always be on a good biblical foundation. From this foundation, good things can grow, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

Study Mark 8:34 and John 13:1-19

These are the most famous bible passages on the servant heart. Study them for yourself, and let the Holy Spirit show you where you do not have the servant heart. Confess and ask the Lord to change your heart to be like his – then you will have a great treasure in your Spirit, which will help you in your relationship with the Pastor and leaders.

3. Helps build the Church - a positive attitude

Study Paul (Acts 15:36)

Paul and Barnabus had done great things for God together, but at this point in their work, they had a strong disagreement, which led to a temporary separation. But it is Paul’s statement in verse 36 which should hold our attention “Let us go back and visit all the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.” Paul wanted to revisit his work, to encourage the Churches and help them to grow. This is a fundamental part of a prophet’s job. He is there to encourage, and to help in the growth and development of the ministry. Even if he has hard words, he always desires in his heart that the body should grow. The prophet has to have a positive attitude. This is difficult, when so much of what we do develops a negative and cynical attitude. We have to guard against this.

Study Haggai, Chapter 1 and 2. Keeping positive

In Haggai chapter 1, the prophet has to deliver a tough and challenging message – “my house remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.” (v.9) The people responded to this message, and began to repair the house of the Lord. But the task was too much for them. They could only look at their lack of ability. Immediately, the prophet changes his approach, from criticism to encouragement “ But now be strong.” (v.4) Haggai could do this because he maintained a positive attitude to his call. His task was to help build the kingdom, and despite the original hard message, he was looking for any sign of repentance, that he might encourage growth. We need the same attitude. We can

only keep it by keeping our eyes on Jesus, and his great creative work. The positive nature of the Kingdom will then fill us, and we will be able to help the people of God move forward.

4 .Knowing about the Offices and gifts of the Spirit.

Holding spiritual office himself, the prophet needs to know about all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the way they work, and the fruit they produce. It is not enough just to say “I am a prophet. That is all I need to know.” We have to be channels of the Spirit into the body, and the Spirit may choose to release any gift through us.

Study 1 Corinthians 12.7-11: 27-31: Romans 12:5-8: 1 Peter 4: 11-12: Galatians 5: 22: Ephesians 4:11-12

Here the Bible outlines the blessings which the Spirit brings. Spend some time thinking and praying about each one. How do you think these various gifts will reveal themselves? What is the test of someone who claims a gift? What would you expect to see in their lives?

How can you encourage the flow of the gifts in the body? After all, that is part of your calling – “to equip God’s people..”
(Ephesians 4:11-12)

5. Accreditation in the body

We have our calling from God, but our recognition from the body. It’s not enough for us to proclaim “I am a prophet!” That is an Old Testament pattern, and we belong to the new covenant. In the New Testament Church, our calling has to be recognised, and we receive the accreditation of the body for our call. The pattern is simple:-

Study Acts 13:1-3

- v 1 Mature leaders begin to pray.
- v 2 The Spirit makes His will known.
- v 3 The leaders pray more, to reflect on what they have heard, and publicly recognise the calling, identifying with it by laying on of hands and sending out.

This simple process blesses the body, because we all know who has what gift, and what they have been commissioned to do. If the people of God and the Prophets do not want this accreditation, then the way is wide open for the entry of false prophets into the body. If the leaders do not want to adopt this process, they are failing in their care of the sheep. If a prophet does not want this process then we have to wonder whether he or she has a genuine call from God.

3. Knowing our walk

It is not possible to separate our prophetic calling from our daily walk with God. To use a term common in the Churches in Eastern Europe and beyond, we are “vessels” into which God pours our calling and work. The quality of the vessels is of the utmost importance. The life we lead, as a prophet, will say as much about our call as will any visionary experience or word from God. Let’s be clear here. God is not asking for perfection in us – if He did, he would have no prophets! We all sin, and have things which we are ashamed of. God is dealing with these, and will continue to do so, as long as we are aware of them. (1 John 1:8-9) The danger lies here:-

Study Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5: 1-11)

- v1-2 **Ananias and Sapphira plan their deceit.**
- v 3-4 **They act out their deceit.**
- v 5-6 **God shows how he reacts to this deliberate deceit.**
- v7-10 **The message is driven home.**

Clearly, Ananias and Sapphira had failed to grasp that their life and their confession of faith had to go together. They believed they could walk the walk and deliberately sin. Prophets have to guard against this by the quality of their daily walk. There is much to consider, but here are a few areas for thought and prayer:-

My life. Study 2 Timothy 4:10

We don’t know much about Demas. In fact we only know two things—one good and one bad. The good thing was that he was a Christian and one of those who was with St.Paul. (Colossians 4:14) The bad news was that in his walk with Jesus, he made one fatal mistake, and it destroyed everything. His mistake? He had not crucified the world in himself. So one day, the enemy came along and dangled before him all the attractions of the world. I’m sure he resisted for a time, but then, sadly, the Bible tells us “Demas, in love with the world, has left me.”(2 Tim 4:10) The New Testament prophet must have crucified the world, with all its attractions and ways, in himself. Here are some of the challenges of crucifying the world:-

The world loves power and success.

The crucified life of the leader loves obedience and service.

The world wants to control.

The crucified life of the leader wants to encourage and release.

The world likes to manipulate, to work in the darkness and in underhand ways.

The crucified life of the leader works in honesty and openness, rejoicing in the light.

The world loves riches.

The crucified life of the leader looks to the provision of God and work.

The world loves laziness, poor discipline and indulgence.

The crucified life of the leader seeks to discipline his life, so that he can serve with effectiveness and endurance.

The world likes confusion in its thinking, diluting truth to suit its own needs.

The crucified life of the leader loves the truth of God's word, and seeks to match this life to God's law.

The world hates the poor, despising them, or providing them with the minimum.

The crucified life of leader looks to the needs of the outcast, the poor, the oppressed and the helpless.

The world exploits sexuality, and pulls down family life.

The crucified leader has control of his or her sexuality, and seeks in every way to build up marriage and family life.

There is one extra dangerous area where we must apply crucified principles, and that is with our sexuality. Jesus makes the principle clear:- "You have heard it said 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27) Prophets are powerful people, and certain types of women are attracted to that power. We have to remember that we also are only human, and can find this kind of attention nice to receive. But it is extremely dangerous to us. What can we do?

Never counsel women alone.

Be careful how we let women touch us - there is a great difference between touch within the blessing of the family, and touch which has a sexual expression. (You may like to know that I never let women touch me, even in a greeting of peace, if my wife is not with me.)

Know you own human masculine fallen heart.

Be on your guard at all times.

What is not yet crucified in you? Will you bring this to the cross now, so that you can have a better character? Do you desire as a leader to live the crucified life? Is this the desire of your heart? If it is not, ask God to change your heart.

My care of my family. Study Eph. 5:25-33: Eph. 5:22-24

Here, the Apostle lays down principles for husbands and wives. Prophets have to be sure that they are fulfilling these commitments to their husband/wife. These biblical teachings are for all of us- East and West, black and white. There has to be a mutual respect, a mutual love, mutual care and attention given and received. Sadly, many in Africa seem to think that they can disregard this biblical teaching, and follow their own customs. But New Testament prophets have no such option.

Study Ephesians 6: 1-4

Here is one of the principles of our responsibility to our children. There are many others. We cannot abandon our responsibilities to our children. Prophets need to set the example in this - do you?

My provision

Prophets have to live, like everyone else! What principles should we employ when we earn our living from our ministry? We have all seen and heard of men who are too keen on the offering, and less keen on their ministry. It's an easy trap to fall into, especially when we have a powerful ministry. I have found that holding true to certain principles has helped me avoid many of the traps of provision. Here they are:-

1 Kings 17.	God must provide for me.
Matthew 10:8	I give my ministry freely, as I received it.
1 Tim 5:18	I am worthy of my reward.
1 Cor 9:12	I have the right to give up this right.

The love of money (1 Tim 6:10) can have no place in the life of the man or woman of God. It is better to go without, than to be seen to be using our gifts for money. Be on your guard!

4. Know our power

Prophets are often considered as irrelevant by God's people. We are pushed to the sidelines of Church life, ignored, ridiculed, put out and even killed. We are often deprived of resources and opportunity to fulfill our calling. This is how we are often seen from the earthly perspective. But from the heavenly perspective, we are very powerful ministries, able to reveal the mind and plans of God, to reveal the deceitfulness of the human heart, the cunning moves of the enemy, and the outworking of the purposes of God. We have to learn to live in these two different worlds at the same time. No wonder we sometimes struggle to hold our lives together!

Study the power:- Jesus: Mark 4: 35 to Ch 5:43

The power which Jesus used is the same power which flows in the ministry of the New Testament prophet. The power moves in us in word and vision, as well as in the more miraculous ways. This is our power. When the Church makes us feel small and useless, we have no choice but to accept that attitude. But we must not let it undermine our usefulness and effectiveness to the Lord. We move in his flow – “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Rev.19:10)

Study our treatment: Jesus: Mark chapters 14 and 15

His own people treated him in this way, and we can expect nothing less than the same treatment. We have to accept this, or we will never be able to exercise the power of our ministry. The power and the rejection go hand in hand. Prophets have to be able to live with this, or they will never do their work.

