

PROPHETIC PEOPLE IN A CHANGING CHURCH

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1. THE CHALLENGE OF CHANGE (*Excerpt*)

A Story Against Myself

A friend of ours chuckles, as he pauses mid-sermon. “I am going to tell you a story against myself,” he says and goes on to share a humorous anecdote that exposes his weakness and neatly proves a point to the congregation.

What follows in this book is a story ‘against myself’. It is also a book that is unashamedly ‘pro’ the local church and its leadership. Let me say at the outset that I am outspoken in my passion for the local church, its vision, pastors and leaders. However—I have not always been this way.

Wherever I go, I meet genuine and gifted prophetic Christians who are struggling with issues concerning their church and church leadership. I’ve been there: I’ve questioned, struggled, failed, repented, and—I’ve changed. At one time, I resisted strong, visionary leadership in the church. Now, my great passion is to lead others to serve the very vision and leadership that I once opposed.

I exhort you, earnestly, to read these pages with an open heart and in submission to the Holy Spirit. I will not always be right, but *He* is never wrong.

2. DISCERN DISCOURAGEMENT (*Excerpt*)

Trials rarely come one at a time, and we were experiencing trouble on two levels. My husband and I were becoming increasingly disheartened concerning our relationship with our pastors and with modifications at our church. At the same time, members of our staff were also discouraged with leadership decisions that we had made in the Christian organisation we were heading up...

Discouragement—What Is It?

Discouragement happens to all of us, for various reasons. It is a natural, human reaction to disappointments and to unkind people or events.

The Lord exhorts us, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Prov 4:23). Discouragement is a heart-condition. When we are discouraged, we lose heart. Our courage fails, our passion is cooled, we lose inner motivation and we feel pain. Does this sound familiar?

Potentially discouraging events, words, trials and disappointments happen regularly in the life of the local church. However, in times of transition the likelihood of these things occurring increases. When trials or disappointments happen, Satan shoots fiery darts of discouragement our way. The question is not, “Will I face discouragement when my local church is experiencing change?” but, “How do I respond when discouragement strikes, during seasons of change?”

Discouragement was the first warning sign that all was not going well in my response to the restructuring within my church. Initial adjustments concerning the identity of our church, such as change of name and location and new multicultural emphasis, caused me only minor discomfort. I cheered them on, wholeheartedly supporting the vision of future growth that they represented. However, when ministry that I led was restructured against my will, I felt that my freedom and leadership had been violated. When changes impacted upon values that I held dear, relating to our services and ministry of the Spirit, disappointment crushed me. This, with an accompanying strained relationship with my pastor, resulted in a debilitating wave of discouragement...

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. What are some dangers of discouragement with regard to the church fulfilling its mission?
2. Why should discouragement be an orange flashing light that something in our hearts is amiss?
3. How does discouragement lead to verbal criticism?
4. Which potential doorways to discouragement do you most relate to? What steps can you take to protect yourself in these areas?

3. DEFEAT DIVISION (Excerpt)

Division And Change In The Local Church

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor 1:10-11).

Unwittingly, I had fallen into a subtle trap. Division came during the season that our pastor had been leading the church through change. On my part, division was never intentional. My desire was for church unity, as it had always been. However, I now found myself hurting and facing a deep divide between my leadership and myself. What had gone wrong?

Division can occur very easily during adjustments in a local church or in a movement of churches. The difficulty arises, when one or more people oppose change. Now, you have the vision for change, and the vision for 'un-change'. Two visions are now operating within the church!

Another person or group may have yet a different opinion again on how the changes should be implemented, or on what changes should take place. Now, there are three or more visions operating in the local church! A splintering, or division results. In my case, I had a vision for 'un-change'. I wanted to hold on to what we'd had as a church, not move to something new...

6. BANISH BONDAGE (*Excerpt*)

The Taste Of Freedom

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1).

Gradually, revelation began to dawn on me about the pride, independence, judgments and religious sin that had rooted in my life and ministry. I went through a time of deep repentance and brokenness over sin. I received counselling, along with prayer for deliverance. For the first time in my life, people who were in leadership in my own church and who were under my pastor's leadership ministered to me in this way.

My mind cleared of the criticisms and the judgments that had tormented me. My heart was set free to serve the vision of my church and to respect my pastors and leaders. I am grateful that repentance and brokenness, in a healthy sense, continues to this day, but it exists now in the context of great joy. I love my church!

Prayer

Father, I acknowledge any judgments that I have made against my pastors and leaders (name and renounce these).

Father I ask that You would set me free from the power that these judgments have had over my mind, my attitudes and my spirit. I speak blessing over my pastors and my leaders and I thank You for placing them in my life.

Lord, show me where religious thinking and attitudes have become entrenched in my life. I give You permission to expose and deal with them. I renounce religion and all of its effects and fruits: performance, pride, disapproval, idealism and false spirituality. I release my pastors and leaders from all religious expectation.

Father I repent where I have attempted to exert influence in my church in any way that has not been of You. I repent of projecting any agenda of my own or joining with others to bring an agenda that is heading in a different direction from the vision of my church leadership. Tear down any strongholds of witchcraft in my life. I renounce ungodly control and influence where I have participated in it.

I choose to submit in humility and grace in the Spirit of God to those that You have placed around my life in leadership. Help me to respond to difficult changes and events in a way that glorifies You.

Amen.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. What is a judgment, and how is it expressed in our everyday life?
2. What is the relationship between judgments and criticism?
3. What are some signs that a religious spirit may be operating when change is occurring in the church?
4. What fruit should we be on the lookout for when staying clean of witchcraft in the church? Do you agree that there are degrees of influence and bondage? What examples can you think of at both ends of the scale?

11. LOVE THE LOST (*Excerpt*)

*“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost”
(Luke 19:10).*

Signs Of Life

“**A** friend brought me to the last baptism service. I gave my life to Jesus that day and since then, I can’t keep away!” The teenage girl’s face was alight with joy as she spoke to me. It was the second baptismal service in a matter of weeks at our church. It was also eighteen months after the difficult time in which many of my prophetic friends had left the church.

Six years prior, our church had been a small, predominantly ‘white, middle class’ church, meeting in a school hall in the suburbs. Now, we were a flourishing, multi-cultural church, meeting in the centre of our small city. The difficulties we had experienced two years earlier had only served to strengthen the church. There were fresh signs of life, with altar calls resulting in regular conversions and re-dedications.

Our pastor was preaching regularly, with increasing urgency, on the need for each of us to be soul-winners; *Christians who had a passion to bring lost and unchurched people to Jesus*. His preaching was hitting the mark and the altar area of our church was frequently filled with church members whose hearts were being stirred for the lost.

Evangelistic Emphasis

We have already discussed our response to two of the most uncomfortable visionary changes that are taking place in churches:

1. The growing emphasis on the unique vision of the local church
2. Strengthening governmental leadership and the value of being 'sons and daughters in the house'.

I would now like to address another major change that is currently affecting prophetic people in churches: the growing emphasis on evangelism in the local church.