

Series: The Familiar Stranger

Prophecy; The Spirit Still Speaks

First Thessalonians 5:19-22, First Corinthians 14:1-3

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First Thessalonians 5:19 to 22: Do not quench the Spirit. Don't treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all. Hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil." First Corinthians 14:1 to 3: "Follow the way of love, and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy. For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people, but to God. Indeed, no one understands them. They are mysteries by the Spirit, but the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort." The word of the Lord. You might be seated.

Thank you, Elizabeth. For Father's Day, I decided that my gift to myself was to preach for 55 minutes today, so buckle up, and no, I'm just kidding. I want to go home and take a nap, so not fifty-five minutes. No, I am excited. We are continuing our series called the Familiar Stranger. For those of you that know, we have been walking through this book, "The Familiar Stranger," by Tyler Staton. We have been preaching through scripture, but this book has been an accompaniment to this series, where we have been talking about who the Holy Spirit is, and over the last few weeks, my desire has been to draw you into a hunger for more of the Spirit in your life. The premise of the book is that the Holy Spirit is often like a familiar stranger to us, someone that we know but that we do not really know, and as we have been walking through the series, one of the images that I gave as we began this series was the image of a pool at a beach resort, and the pool is nice. It is comfortable temperature. It is the kind of pool that has a swim-up bar where you can get whatever snacks or drinks you want. It is comfortable. The water is under control. It is a great place to be, but thirty yards away is the ocean, and it is deep, and it is wild, and there is a power in it that can knock the breath out of you, and there is more life in it than you could explore in a thousand lifetimes. The image I tried to paint is that for many of us, our walk with Jesus, without the power of the Holy Spirit, is like living the Christian faith in that comfortable, nice, controlled pool, but there is an ocean of life available to us, and that is life with the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit living inside of us.

So for the last number of weeks, my desire has been to draw you out of the pool, out of a place of comfort, and invite you into a space where you can experience life with the Spirit, and I'll admit to you that as we have been walking through this series, it has been a lot more who than how. What I mean by that is most of the conversation we have been having is about who the Holy Spirit is, what scripture says the Holy Spirit is like. We have talked about the idea that the Holy Spirit is not a force, but a person. We have talked about ideas that the Holy Spirit dwells inside every believer, but there is a difference between the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you and filling you for life with the Spirit, and most of that desire has been in an effort to try to draw you in deeper, to make you have a holy longing for an experience with the Holy Spirit, but here's the reality of any type of sermon or teaching on the Holy Spirit. It is that it is so possible for so many of us to have the knowledge about who the Spirit is without ever actually experiencing what the Spirit does or how the Spirit works in our lives, and so today, my hope is to shift from who the Spirit is to how the Spirit works.

It might feel a little bit today like I am driving you out on a boat into the middle of the ocean, five miles offshore, and pushing you out, and asking you to swim back, but don't worry, I brought a life vest. I am not just going to let you drown, but it might feel a little different, and it is hopefully a little bit more practical, and my hope is that as we step into the water's edge, that we would be willing to go for a swim, to step out, and to risk the uncontrollable life of the Spirit in the ocean

What I want to start with today is a word, "prophecy," and immediately, when I say that word, there are some of you in the room who start getting pictures in your mind of like the preacher online or on TV who is like drawing charts about how the world is going to end, right? Or maybe it is the TV preacher who says, "If you give a certain amount of money, then I will prophesy over your life and bless you," and there is this word that has a lot of connotation, a lot of baggage, and especially in a cerebral environment like ours, there can be a little bit of a standoff reaction to a word like "prophecy."

A couple of months ago, I was talking to someone, and this woman had a connection with someone in my family that I cared about, and I was talking with her about what was going on there, and as the conversation went deeper, she began to say and asked me a simple question that I didn't know how to answer, and she said, "Okay, Paul, can I just ask, like, how woo-woo are you?" How woo-woo are you? Yeah, you heard that right, and I was like, "Woo-woo. Can you define that for me?" and essentially, she was asking, "How spiritual are you? How aware are you of the spiritual realities around you?" and I said, "Well, I'm a pastor, so I'm at least a little woo-woo. Like, I've got a little bit of woo-woo in my life, but tell me what you mean," and she proceeded to go on and say, "I think the reason why the person you care about is struggling is because they actually are remembering a former life that they endured, and those memories, the trauma that they endured from some past life are coming up in their current life, and I think that's why they are having a hard time right now." I said, "Wow, I'm not that woo-woo. Like, that's too much for me. Like, I don't know what to do with that. I don't think that's where I align theologically," and for some of you, when I say the word, "prophecy," you are having the exact same reaction. You are like, "No, I'm spiritual. I love Jesus. I believe the Holy Spirit is real, but prophecy? I'm not that woo-woo. That feels a little bit too far for me," and so I just want to get really practical down in the weeds and provide so much clarity about what we mean when we use the term, "prophecy," in relationship to the Holy Spirit.

This is a very simple definition. It is one that Tyler Staton has in this book and that I've heard other pastors give as well. Prophecy is simply this, to hear, so you are listening to the Spirit of God, and then speaking God's voice on behalf of an individual or a group. So, you hear something from God, and you think, "Okay, I think God is saying that this is something this person I care about needs to hear, and so I'm going to share it on their behalf, what I feel like God is saying to them and telling them." Now for some of you, you might still think, that's clear, still a little woo-woo. Like, I'm not sure I want to go there, right? So just to break it down a little bit more, because this definition might be something that you are not familiar with, you might think of prophecy as like future-telling, fortune-telling, like thinking about the future and predicting what's going to happen, and this is what Tyler Staton says about the idea of prophecy being some sort of future-telling event: "Some confuse Biblical prophecy with future-telling and divinely informed prediction, and occasionally, scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, does have examples of this, but that is not the primary function of the prophetic. Prophecy does not mean, in the first

instance, to predict, but rather to speak on behalf of another. When we understand prophecy as prediction, we are focusing on a peripheral feature of the prophetic, not its primary focus.” Prophecy is not having like a divine crystal ball that will tell you your future or predict what is going to happen with Russia or Iran or America. That is not the primary purpose of prophecy. The primary purpose of Biblical prophecy is for someone to speak God’s heart to an individual in a way that they can understand and that resonates with their soul and helps them feel seen by God. It is essentially something that helps us move our head knowledge down to our hearts. Now, you may be thinking, “Okay, Paul, this feels a little abstract. This is pretty unfamiliar to me,” and I’ll admit to you that I grew up in environments where this was not something we talked about a lot, and so I want to go slow enough to maybe catch you up to where I am today through studying the scriptures and through some of my experience.

So, a few years ago, this was part of my introduction to prophecy. I have a friend who is a pastor in a church near here, and he is someone who has grown in the ability to listen to the voice of God and speak prophetically over other people, and again, that is not woo-woo. He is essentially praying for this person, and as he is praying for them, something clicks inside, and he feels like, okay, maybe this is the Spirit of God speaking to me on behalf of them, and so it is a really practical example of this idea.

He is praying for a woman in his congregation, does not really know her. She has been coming around to the church a number of times. They have had a few conversations, but he does not really know her story. What you need to know about this woman is she has experienced some really intense abuse and psychological trauma throughout her life. Very, very broken story, and so she comes forward at the end of service for prayer, and as my friend, this pastor, is praying for her, he gets this image of a kitchen. It is a very, very specific, detailed image of a kitchen, with pots hanging on the middle island, and he sees the color, and it is just very detailed, and he thinks, “That’s weird. I have never seen this kitchen before. I am not going to do anything with that,” and he continues to pray for her, and that image, as he ignores it, gets stronger, and it begins to be something that he can’t really let go of, and he thinks, “This is really weird. I don’t know that, like, why would I tell this woman about this random kitchen I’m seeing in my mind? Maybe this is the kitchen my wife wants or something. Like, I don’t know what to do with this,” and so he pauses in the prayer, and he says, hey, he says, very humbly, “I just want to say that as I have been praying for you, this image of this particular kitchen,” he goes into detail describing everything that he saw. “I don’t know if that means anything to you. I don’t know if that would be a place you would recognize or what, but I think why I am receiving this image is because I think God wants you to know that He has seen you in this place. That is what the Spirit is laying on my heart,” and this woman just breaks down in tears, because he described the kitchen to the exact detail of one of her most severe places of trauma and abuse, and essentially it was the place where she thought God had never seen her. It was the place that she began to believe that God did not care about what happened to her as a little girl, and that she was completely on her own, and through this stranger, with this vision or this image of a place that she endured some of her most horrific life story, she was suddenly seen by God again.

That is what we mean when we talk about Biblical prophecy. It is the Spirit speaking through a fellow believer on behalf of someone so that they can see and experience the heart of God for them. Because it is one thing to read in scripture that God is close to the brokenhearted, or that God bottles up the tears of the weeping and the broken, and it is entirely another thing for God to say, “I have seen you

in the place of your deepest wound,” and through a stranger who does not know your story, God tells you that He was there, He saw, and He cares for you. That is what moves our relationship with the Father from the head to the heart, from just theory to something that can actually impact our lives.

Now, some of you might hear a story like that, and you might think, “Okay, Paul, cool, but maybe that is just a coincidence. Like maybe that is not actually God speaking. Maybe that’s just someone with a lucky guess,” and I have to say, like, yeah, I am not sure I can argue with you there, and there is a certain strand of theology that would say God does not speak like that anymore, that God has his written word and given it to us, and so we no longer need to hear from God directly, because now we have the scriptures, and that is the place that we hear from God. I want to humbly say that I grew up in an environment where that was the mindset and the ethos. The people that trained me in scripture and how to read and how to pray, they were essentially what some would call cessationists. They would believe that the gifts of the Spirit, like prophecy, were for a certain time in church history, the beginning of the church, to give it a super boost charge, to step into the world on fire for God, and that the miraculous and the things that happened through the power of the Spirit were just for this particular time, and then they ended after the first generation of followers of Jesus passed away. It was just this turbo boost for the church at the beginning, and it no longer is for believers today. I have heard the arguments, I grew up in the arguments, and I just want to humbly say that I think they are so deeply flawed, and I want to give you three reasons why I think they’re flawed, and again, some of this comes from Tyler Staton in his book, and some of this comes from my own personal experience.

Now, the argument that God no longer speaks to us, and again, this is where I just want to be so practical. I want to be so clear, because for some of you, you just feel like you are swimming in the ocean, and you are drowning in something you have never even thought about before. So the argument that God is speaking through a prophetic prayer like the one I just shared, that He doesn’t do that anymore, there is one particular passage that people who adhere to that thought would point to and say, “Yeah, this is why we would say that God doesn’t speak prophetically anymore to his people. We have scripture now. We do not need God to do that,” and it is found in First Corinthians 13. It says this, “love never fails.” So, this is the passage that is just after the one that is misread at every wedding, that love is patient, love is kind, that passage and flowing out of it, if you had that at your wedding, I’m sorry, that was a cheat. I didn’t need to say that. It is a good passage. You should love like that passage says in your marriage. So, it flows out of that, and it says, “love never fails, but where there are prophecies,” where there are prophecies, “they will cease.”

Now what does the word, “cease,” mean? End, stop, no more, right? Feels pretty conclusive. Like where people prophesy, that will stop. It won’t happen anymore. Unless you keep reading. “Where there are tongues, they will be stilled. Where there is knowledge, it will pass away.” Now listen to this. “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears,” and then he goes on to make this illustration. “When I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child, but when I became a man,” it is a good message for Father’s Day, “When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only in a reflection as in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face.”

Now pause. How many of you have seen Jesus face-to-face? My guess is not many of us, unless it was in a prophetic dream. Okay? Completeness has not come yet. We are on this side of eternity. Jesus has not come back so that we see him face-to-face. We are told that will happen at the end, and so to say that prophecies have ceased because the completeness has come, I think, is a total misunderstanding of what Paul is saying in this passage, especially because in just a few verses later, he is going to say, and we are going to look at this verse, “I pray and desire that you will long for the gift of prophecy.” Why would he say that that is ending, that that is no longer a thing that is happening, or that the completeness has already come, and then go on to say, “But I really hope that you practice that gift”? Are you tracking with me? Two people over there are. So, it doesn’t make sense if you read scripture in context, because it says, “Now I know in part, but then, in the end I shall know fully, even as I am known fully.” Right now, we are told that we see through a mirror dimly, that we can’t get a clear picture, and so it seems to me that what Paul is saying is that prophecy is something that helps clarify our understanding and our knowing of who God is. So that is the Biblical counter argument that I would give.

Now you might be saying, “Okay, Paul, that’s great. You can say that prophecy still happens in the world, but it has never happened to me. I have never experienced it,” and there’s often an experiential argument that I honestly would say for people that fall in that cessationist camp, and again, I have spent a lot of time. It is that they say, “Well, that is what this has to mean, because I haven’t experienced it,” but if you read scripture honestly, you know that we are not supposed to say that what I have experienced dictates scripture’s truth. That’s a bad place to start.

The other counterargument to that is that for anyone who says, “Well, I’ve never experienced the Spirit that way,” you have to wrestle with thousands and millions of people throughout church history who have experienced something different than you have. So, at best, that argument leaves us at a standstill, because you say, “I have never experienced the Spirit that way,” and I say, “I can’t tell you my story about Jesus without telling you about how I experienced Him that way,” and so we are at a standstill, and the last, I would say, is a little bit more philosophical in nature.

The argument goes something like this, that God spoke through prophecy because His people did not have scripture in the beginning of the church, and so prophecy was necessary for people to hear directly from God, because they could not hear directly from God in scripture, and absolutely I believe that you can hear directly from God through scripture. That is why I preach. It is because my prayer is that the Holy Spirit and God is moving through the power of these words, not my words to you directly, but to say that that is the only way that we could directly hear from God, I think is a little bit of a philosophical or logical fallacy, because any relationship is dependent on direct communication, and we know from scripture that God’s primary motivation for redemption, for the restoration of all things, is relationship. Our relationship with Him was severed, and He has been working to restore it from the very beginning, so that we can see Him face-to-face. So, I want you to think for a moment that if God essentially said like, “Hey, I have been speaking from the beginning of time. I spoke the universe into existence. I call myself the word, but now that I have given you my Spirit, now that Christ has returned and ascended on his throne, all you need is this book and never to hear from me personally or directly again.”

Now, the closest relationship I have in my life is with my wife, Stephanie, and we dated for a long time. We dated for about seven years. We met very young, and in college, we had to do the distance thing.

We would call each other just about every day, and we would talk for hours on the phone, and this was back when text messages cost ten cents a text message. So, I was also getting calls from my parents, because they were like, “Why do we have hundred-dollar bill on our phone because you have been sending so many text messages to your girlfriend?” and I was like, “I really want to hear what she has to say.” Like, I want to know her. I want to hear her voice. I want to know every thought she has. I want to hear what is going on with her life. We are separate, and I just want to hear from her.

Now imagine that after those seven years, we get to our wedding day. We say our vows, and then as we are saying our vows, I say, “Hey, babe, Steph.” I don’t really call her “babe” that much. I don’t know why I just did there, but let’s say, “Hey, Steph, this has been great. I have loved everything that we have been through in the last seven years, and I just love you so much, but I just wanted to let you know that now we are married. I will no longer be communicating with you directly, and I have compiled this really beautiful book with like, it is leather, and it has every text message I have ever sent, and every conversation I’ve had about you with anybody else, I put that in here, and from here on out, I just want you to study this book really hard, and the harder you study this book, the more you’ll know about me, and you just never have to hear from me again.” Now I have to be honest with you, there are some days my wife would probably take that bargain. Like she doesn’t want to hear my actual words, but for the most part, we would look at that and say, “That is absurd.” Like that is not how any relationship is formed. Like that’s not all that is needed. You have to have direct communication.

I love the way that Tyler Staton puts this as he has outlined this argument. He says essentially like what we assume is that God has given us scripture, and that is the only way that He would speak to us, and so the God who spoke the universe into existence, the one who calls Himself the word, the one who is constantly speaking to his people and asking other people to speak on behalf of Him, gets to a moment in history where Jesus ascends onto the throne, the Spirit of God is breathed into his people, and suddenly says, “Yeah, I am done talking now. Like I just think like muddled sermons and poorly written songs and awkward small groups will take it from here.” That doesn’t make any sense. God still speaks to his people. He still speaks, and I think if you go through scripture from beginning to end, if you look in Genesis, if you look at the life of Moses, if you look at the prophets, if you look at the New Testament church, if you look even beyond scripture, and you look at the early church and the fathers that came generations, the fathers and mothers that came generations after Jesus, they all believed and practiced that the Holy Spirit still spoke to God’s people on behalf of Him, and that if people would just listen to the Spirit, then they would be able to hear what God was telling them.

Somewhere along the way, we began to think, “That is a little too woo-woo. I am a little too rational for that. How do I know what you have said to me is actually from God and not some just like undigested pizza that has been rotting in your stomach,” right? It is just a weird feeling you have, and we have seen this abuse in a number of different ways. It is the girl who, the guy comes to her and says, “Hey, God told me that I am supposed to marry you,” and you are thinking like, “If that is God, like I am out. Like I would rather be out than marry you.” It is the person that came to you and said something really hurtful and really confidently that God was declaring something over your life, and so because of those experiences and the mishandling of God’s voice or people speaking on behalf of God in harmful ways, we are not sure if we

can trust it, and so we get to a place where we would just rather not listen and just go to what feels a little more controllable, but here is the argument, and I have said this before too.

How many times has this book been misused? How many times has this book, the word of God, been abused on behalf of God? There are some stories, personal and historical, about people using this book for their own gain, for their own manipulation, for their own power, but none of you would make the argument that I should just get up here and start giving Ted Talks, not based on scripture. This is still the foundation. We would not throw the baby out with the bathwater. So why have we said, “You know what? I am just better off without listening to the Spirit”? “It is just safer.” It is remaining in the pool when there is an ocean available to us.

So, I want to walk through two passages that Elizabeth just read that talk a little bit more in detail about how the Spirit of God speaks to us today. So, the first one, First Corinthians 14, we are just going to look at verses 1 and 3, and it says this: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially” what? “Prophecy.” Follow the way of love. Now this comes just a few verses after the one we just read about prophecy ceasing. Why would Paul request believers eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy, if he thought it was something that would not impact our lives anymore today? But notice what he says to set up that desire. “Follow the way of love.” Follow the way of love. The prophetic prayer offered on behalf of another is always supposed to be grounded and rooted in love, and wherever people use it for manipulation or for their own purpose or for their own advancement, it is not the prophetic gift that is following the way of love, following the way of Jesus. It is someone who is abusing the power of God for their own gain, and there are some horrendous stories in scripture about people who use the voice of God for their own gain. So, it is as if Paul is putting guardrails around this practice. “Follow the way of love.” Make sure that when you practice this gift, prophecy operates through love. Prophecy is absolutely a messy way to pray and be in community. It can cause harm. It is the place I just mentioned where, “God told me to tell you this.”

I remember after my mom passed away, and my family and I were in the receiving line. I have shared this story before. Someone came up to me, my younger brother, who was ten years old, after my mom had just passed away, and she said, “God wanted me to tell you that this is better for you in the long run, that she is no longer here, than if she were with you for the rest of your life.” Man, that made me so mad, and I do not think that you can back that up with scripture. It was meant to be given in love, but it caused serious harm in my brother’s life. The gift of prophecy is not something that causes harm. It draws people into the heart of God. It draws people into the gift of love, and Paul says, “Eagerly desire spiritual gifts, but especially prophecy,” and then he goes on to define what that gift does in verse three: “The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort.” Now, can you be strengthened through a confrontational word? Absolutely, but does that mean that it gives us permission to be harmful? No. Can a comforting word be convicting? Absolutely, but it should edify us to become more like Jesus, not drive us away from Him.

Paul puts very clear parameters around what this is supposed to look like, so if someone came to you, and they said in God’s name or in God’s voice something that was harmful, something that was untrue, something that did not go along with scripture, that was not God’s Spirit. That was a broken person spreading brokenness in the world. Some of you have that story. Prophecy is Spirit-prompted speech that

helps another person encounter God's heart. It is done in love, not for the advancement of the person giving the prophecy and the prophetic word.

A few years ago, I was in a worship space where I was praying, and we were opening it up to people to pray for other people and inviting people forward for prayer, something we do here at Waterstone a lot, and I will be honest, not very many of you take advantage of it, but hopefully we will keep growing in that, all right? But it was a space where we were inviting people forward for prayer, and as I was praying, I just got this sense that this person sitting behind me really wanted to come forward for prayer but was too afraid to come forward for prayer, and so I just turned around, and I said, "Hey, you do not have to come to the front, but would you mind if I just prayed for you?" and I just sat, and I listened for a moment. I just felt this sense of the weight of fatherhood upon his shoulders, that he was weighed down by feeling like he was not a good enough father, that he was not a strong enough father, that he had made too many mistakes. So, I just began praying blessing over that journey for him, praying that he would forgive himself, praying that he would allow the love of the Father to guide how he fathered his own children, and he just broke down crying. I finished praying, and I did not really know what to do, and so I turned back around and kept worshipping, but he e-mailed me later, and reached out to me and said, "I don't know how you knew, but I was wrestling with that exact thing, and everything you prayed for me, it felt like the Spirit had seen exactly where I was struggling, where I had failed, where I was flawed, where I was broken, and I feel like something healed in me in that moment."

That is just one story, but I have experienced that blessing on the receiving end and the giving end multiple times, and it is a Spirit-prompted speech that helps another person encounter God's heart. God did not want that father living under the lie that he was not good enough to father his children. It was a convicting prayer calling him out to fulfill something more, but it was a compassionate, comforting, strengthening prayer as well to encounter God's heart for him in that place. That is God's desire for us. He does not want us to believe wrong ideas about ourselves or about Him. One of the ways that He speaks directly to us is to counteract some of the lies that we believe about who we are or about who God is. He wants to speak to us, strengthening, encouraging, and comforting us, because He knows that following Him is hard, that this life is broken, and yes, absolutely, we can read about forgiveness in the pages of scripture. It is entirely another thing for someone to speak over you by the power of the Spirit that God has forgiven you for your failures. Do you see the difference?

Then Paul goes on in another passage, and this is a little bit more about how prophecy works, and then we are going to wrap up in just a moment. First Thessalonians 5:19 through 22. These are four verses that are all broken up, and it is essentially one long sentence. He begins, and he says, "Do not quench the Spirit." Do not quench the Spirit, and I want you to picture in your mind's eye for a moment that the Spirit is like a kindled flame, a flame that is burning, and the way you quench the Spirit is just throwing a bucket of water on it. The Spirit wants to burn in our lives. It wants us to experience God's voice, but we have the ability to quench the Spirit. Paul telling us not to quench the Spirit means that it is possible to quench the Spirit, so what does it mean to quench the Spirit? What are some of the ways that we can do that?

Well, I think when the Spirit speaks to us, we do not listen in one of three ways. There are probably more, but I just want to synthesize it down to this idea. I think one of the ways the Spirit speaks to us and our soul is to convict us of sin that we have been living in, and some of you know this experience, the

Spirit has convicted you. It is the guilt you feel afterwards. It is the confrontation after the sinful act, after you said that thing you should not have said, or looked at that thing you should not have looked at, or done that thing you were not supposed to do, that you knew violated God's heart for you, and you felt guilt and remorse and regret, and the Spirit spoke conviction to you, and you chose not to listen, and you continue to go back to that thing. At some point, you can quench the Spirit by refusing to listen to the Spirit.

It is like, when you are at a party, and there is a trash can, and everybody just keeps shoving the paper plates down in the trash can, and someone comes behind you, and then they shove their trash in the can. It just goes down, down, down, and it just packs in there. Nobody wants to take out the trash. They are just trying to see how much trash they can fit in there. Eventually, that trash has to go out. The more you stuff it down, the harder it is to remove that trash bag and get rid of it. It is the same with sin. Some of us have grown so accustomed to ignoring the voice of the Spirit in our lives that we just continue to push that sin down, pretend it is not there, that it is not affecting our lives, and it quenches our ability to hear the voice of God in our lives, because at some point, we are so busy listening to our inner conversation about, "It is not that big a deal. Eventually I'll deal with that. Yeah, the trash is starting to stink, but I don't want to deal with that right now," and we can quench the voice of the Spirit in our lives. Every time we neglect the conviction of sin, it gets a little harder to hear the Spirit's voice the next time He speaks.

Another way that we can quench the Spirit is through a distracted heart. So many of us live in this space where we do not hear the Spirit's voice because we are too busy listening to everything else going on in the world. It is really hard to hear the voice of the Spirit when you were listening to a basketball podcast or Joe Rogan or the next podcast or songs or whatever it might be, where you were so inundated with information on your phone that you cannot hear the voice of God speaking to you, because what you need to understand is rarely does the voice of God shout. So often He speaks in a whisper. Are we going to the voice of wisdom of the Spirit to guide our lives? Are we spending our time in prayer? This is a real question. When you are at a place of discernment and trying to hear God's voice, do you pray, or do you go to ChatGPT? Where do you go? What do you trust for the guiding wisdom of your life? Are you listening to the Spirit?

The third way that we often do not hear the Spirit in our lives is we hear it, but we do not obey. We hear God's whisper and His voice, and we do not respond, and when that happens enough, I do not believe the Spirit stops speaking to us, but we begin to lose our ability to hear the Spirit. There was a time in my life when I was feeling particularly connected to the Spirit. I was feeling filled with the Spirit. It was a season of ministry that was going really well for me as a student pastor here, and I just felt like those seasons when you just feel like everything with you and Jesus is clicking. It was one of those seasons, and I have shared part of this story before. In that season, I was going through a line at King Soopers, getting groceries for my family, and I felt the prompting of the Spirit to pray for the cashier at the register, and I thought, "No way. Like, that is insane. Like, there are people behind me. I've got like these groceries. I've got to get home. Like, what am I supposed to do? Like, in the middle of King Soopers, just say, 'Hey, I think the Holy Spirit is prompting me to pray for you. Would you be okay if I did that for you right here as you're ringing up the next person?' Like, what?" I have no idea how that was supposed to work, but I will tell you this. I did not obey, and it felt like a while before I could hear the Spirit's voice again. I think that sometimes when we do not obey, when we do not follow that prompting, the Spirit says, "I am going

to go talk to someone who will listen,” and some of that is mystery. I do not know how all of that works, but I think that is part of what Paul is talking about here. You can quench the Spirit. You can quench the Spirit in your life when He speaks, and we do not listen.

He goes on to say, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt.” I want to say that in our particular context, and when we are a cerebral church, I think this is particularly important to us, because we can quench the Spirit not only by silencing Him altogether, but we can live in a place where we just want to be so cerebral in our environment and we want to just focus on scripture that anytime something like prophecy comes up, we start rolling our eyes. Or we start saying like, “That’s great for you, but that is not something for me,” and we assume, and we make the assumption that if anyone says God might be saying something to you, they are either confused or emotionally unstable, or they are theologically unserious. They are the woo-woo people. They’re the people that we want to pass by in the greeting time, and like, “That was a little weird when I interacted with that person last time. I’m just going to stay over here where I feel a little more comfortable,” and we can stay in this place where we have this contempt. I mean, it is not like harsh rejection. It sounds reasonable. It sounds like I just want to be more careful. I think there is a reason Paul warns against holding prophecies in contempt, but at the same time, Paul doesn’t say, “Just accept everything that is coming to you.” That is the place where many of us go wrong. It is we think that, “Okay, if someone says God told them to say this to me, then it must be God.” People mishear God all the time, and I think that is why Paul says, “Do not treat prophecies with contempt.” So do not just like throw them out entirely, but test them all. Prophecy must be tested. If someone comes to you, and they say, “This is the voice of God for your life,” you should have some questions. You do not have to take everything they say whole.

A few years ago, it was after I had finished preaching, and someone from our church came up to me, and this was a long time ago. They do not go here anymore, but he said essentially like, “Hey, I was praying for you this week and I think I have a prophetic word for you,” and I said, “Great, let me hear it. Like I’m totally open,” and he said, “I think you’re holding on to a sinking ship. Does that mean anything to you?” and I thought, other than my Dallas Cowboys fandom, I’m not sure that it does. Now truly, that was actually my thought. I was like, there is not really anywhere in my life that I feel like I’m holding on to a sinking ship, and there are places where people could twist that to mean something, or that I could twist that, and I could say, “Oh, you know what? My marriage has been hard lately, and so it probably means that I need to get out of my marriage. That is what you are telling me.” No, you have to test the spirit to see if it resonates, and he offered it humbly, and he said, “I think this is something for you. Maybe not. Do with it what you will.” I don’t just accept that wholesale and then suddenly think, “You know what? Man, like stuff’s been hard with my family. I should just walk away. Or stuff’s been rough at work. Like it could be a sinking ship. Like I’ll just walk away.” You have to be discerning and interpret it, and the test is really simple. Scripture lays it out for us. Does it agree with scripture? If someone comes to you and tells you that God has told you to leave your marriage, that is contrary to scripture. That is not God speaking. That is someone speaking from a different motivation, and I can say that with confidence, not knowing any of the context of that conversation.

When he says, “Test them all,” what Paul is saying is that we need to be a place that listens for the voice of God, that wants to hear the voice of God, but we don’t just accept things blindly. There is still a

way that we can engage. Does it align with scripture? Does it strengthen, comfort, and encourage, as we just looked at? Does it honor Jesus? Does it create freedom in you or fear? Does it mature you as a believer of faith? Does your community affirm it? When that person came and said that I was on a sinking ship, I went to my friends, my closest people, and I said, “Do you see this in my life? Is there somewhere that I am missing that I need to be aware of?” We do not do it in isolation, and then Paul says to hold onto what is good, so if there is something there for you, hold onto that. That is a gift that God is speaking to you, and if not, reject it. You do not have to hold onto it. You do not have to go through life believing that.

So, here is the big idea that I want to paint for you: the Spirit still speaks today. The Spirit still speaks to build up the church, but every word of prophecy must be offered humbly, tested carefully, and practiced in love, and if it does not meet those criteria, then we are going in error. Sometimes people get a little bit afraid when we start talking about things like prophecy and the Spirit moving in certain ways, and we are like, “Man, things are just going to get out of control. Like next week, Paul’s not going to be preaching. We are just going to have an empty microphone up here, and people are going to be able to say whatever they want.” That’s not true. Paul, in all of these teachings, also calls for order for worship, but he does not make the assumption that the only person you can hear from when you gather for worship in your small group is from your small group leader, that the Spirit is going to speak through everyone who is a believer in Christ in that room.

Here is the real kicker, and I think this is where the church has gone in so many bad directions. It is Paul is not making the assumption that when we gather for worship, that the only person you can hear about the Spirit from or hear from the Spirit through is the person on stage opening the word of God. I think some of us in church today, we just come to consume, to just hear, to just receive, and part of the experience of worship is that we are supposed to come hungry to hear from God and then be willing to step out of our seat and go to someone else to pray for them.

A few years ago, I was in this room, and I felt prompted by God to pray for someone for a situation that I knew was going on in their life. Their marriage had been falling apart, the husband had left, and I just felt like I needed to go pray with the wife and say, “I see you. God sees you. He is with you in a storm, and I think God is going to restore your marriage.” I had nothing to base that on. Everything I had been walking through with that family up until that point indicated that this person was gone for good. Two days later, he texted his wife, called her and said, “I want to restore things. I want to come back to you.” That is not I. That is the Spirit working through the body of Christ for people to experience God’s heart.

So, the question then is, “How do we do this?” I want to move through these three things pretty quickly to wrap up. I am not quite at fifty-five minutes yet. I am at like forty-five. All right. I want to give you some quick swimming lessons about what it would look like to step into the water and how it might look to experience life with the Spirit in this way, three quick swimming lessons of what it looks like to step into the ocean. The first is this: start in the shallow end. Nobody just learns to swim by being tossed into the deep end, right? Start small. Don’t start praying right away that God would give you a five-year plan for someone in your life. Look for ways that you could encourage someone, that you could comfort someone, that you could strengthen someone. Just pray and listen and say, “Lord, is there anything that you want me to notice? Is there anything in this person’s life that you want me to encourage? Is there someone in this room who might need to be comforted in this moment?” and then go pray for them as the

Spirit leads you, and offer it humbly. “Does this mean anything to you?” and if it doesn’t, that’s fine. You can simply encourage. That is one of the main ways God speaks, and simply say, “I felt like God might want to remind you of this.” That is the shallow end. Sometimes when we start talking about the Spirit, it gets so sensational, and my hope is that we just normalize the everyday practice of the Spirit speaking to your soul for the good of others and for your own heart. It does not have to be weird. It does not have to be manipulative. It is just learning to pay attention to the voice of the Spirit and courageously offering encouragement to others. The first step of prophecy is not being impressive. It is being attentive. Just listen.

The second is good advice for anyone who is learning to swim or learning to pray prophetically. Swim with others. Don’t swim alone. When Landon goes to swimming lessons as a two-year-old, I don’t chuck him in the pool and say, “Figure it out for yourself, buddy. Like, just go for it.” There’s a teacher who comes alongside them, walks. There is a community that engages with them. Someone is watching, someone is working with them, and if he gets it wrong, they say, “Try again.” They do something different, and you work together in community to see. A few verses later, First Corinthians 14:29, Paul says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let others weigh carefully what is said.” Again, don’t just take it, but do it in community. This means prophecy is not above discernment. Prophecy and praying prophetically is just submitting to God’s will and to discernment. It is not saying, “God told me, therefore you obey.” It is saying, “I sense this might be something the Lord is saying to you. What would be your response?” and then test it. Does it align with scripture? Does it strengthen, encourage, and comfort? Does it bear fruit of the Spirit? Does it honor Jesus? All of those things we talked about. Prophecy and praying through the Spirit is not a solo swim. It is practiced most safely in a Spirit-filled community.

Here is the third one, and what I would say is probably the most important one. You cannot learn to swim if you are not in the water. You cannot just read books about how to swim. You cannot watch a You Tube video and suddenly become like Michael Phelps. You have to spend time in the water. You have to step into the place of risk and uncertainty and openness and listening. So many of us, the reason why we stay out of the pool is because we believe in the gifts of the Spirit, but we believe in them theoretically. We believe that the Spirit is real doctrinally, but we do not experience that personally. We have to be willing to step into the water.

Last story, and then we will close. I have a friend, and a couple of weeks ago she was driving home with her kids, and as she was driving home from school with her kids, she saw a homeless man on the side of the road, and this doesn’t happen to her often. She is someone who I would say definitely listens to the Spirit very well, but this particular instance never happens, where she felt like the Spirit was prompting her to stop and to talk to this homeless person and to provide him with some care, but she had the kids in the backseat, and she was like not quite sure how to do it. She was going to turn around, but she knew her husband was coming behind her, and so she called her husband and said, “Hey, I feel like the Spirit was just prompting me to stop and to talk to this person. Would you mind running to the store, getting them some stuff, dropping it off, and doing that for me?” He is like, “Yeah, absolutely, would love to.” He goes and picks up the stuff, and as he is praying about what to say to this person, he begins to get this prompting, this feeling that the man’s name is James, and the Lord wants James to know that He sees him and is with him. He is like, “Okay, maybe,” so he calls back his wife, and he says, “Hey, as you were wanting to stop

for this man, did anything come to your mind or anything that you feel like the Spirit was saying?" She said, "It is really weird. I don't know why, but I feel like his name is James, and the Lord wants him to see Him," and he is like, "Whoa! I didn't say that to her at all. Like, she is over there. I am over here. Like, that has to be the Spirit," and so he goes out, gets out of his car, parks it, and takes the man the stuff. He says, "Hey, I just want you to know, both my wife and I, we were praying, and we feel like we want you to know that the Lord sees you. Here's a gift of some supplies, things that can take care of you, and I don't know if this is right, but I think that God just wants you to know that He really loves you," and then at the end, he just tagged it on. He's like, "James, right?" Like, just like trying to throw it out there to be friendly. It is a risk, and he goes, "Oh, wow, man, you don't know how much that means to me, and that's awesome for James, but my name is Patrick," and he was just like, totally wrong. Total miss, but I guarantee you that obedience and the listening, even when it is wrong, it is not about batting a thousand. It is about listening and obedience, and these are two people who are the exact same two people who prayed for that woman earlier, that healed her heart from the most traumatic event in her life. Without prayer, without stepping into the water, none of it happens. Nothing happens, but when we step into the water, we can hear from the voice of God, and he can move in ways that bring reconciliation and healing and hope to the world around us. God still speaks today. Are you listening?

As we close today, I want to offer space for prayer. We are going to have a couple of songs to respond with, but I am going to invite you today, not in a manipulative way, not in a way that I think someone here has a word for you or something is going to happen, particularly when you come forward to pray, but I want to invite you to step into a space where you tiptoe into the water. There are a thousand things in every single one of your lives that you could use prayer for, a thousand. I don't need to name any of them. You know your story and where you are needing to see the heart of God in your life. What if you came forward today, and someone prayed for you, not knowing what is going on? Maybe it is not even a prophetic, miraculous type of thing, but you just feel more seen and known, because someone from the body of Christ loved you. It can be that simple, so I would just encourage you over these next two or three minutes as we respond in worship, that you would come forward to pray. We have people around the room that have prayer lanyards on, Stephen ministers, elders. If anybody is standing on the corner, even if they are not one of those people, I guarantee someone will pray with you. I will pray with you down here. Step forward and receive what Christ might have for you through the power of his Spirit. Step into the water. Let me pray for us.

Heavenly Father, God, we come before you, and we ask that we would be attentive to who you are, that we would listen for your voice, and that we would experience your presence. It is in Christ's name we pray, amen.

So, we have to close our time together today. If any of you would like prayer after service, we will still have prayer ministers available for you, Stephen ministers, elders, and the like. I want to apologize. I joked about going to fifty-five minutes. I only joke when I feel really confident that I am not going to do that, so I apologize. We went a little over. I pray that you would just have a blessed Father's Day, and let me close in a simple benediction that we have been praying throughout this series. If you feel comfortable, you can extend your hands and open them towards the Father.

Holy Spirit, come. May we listen to your voice this week. May we be attentive to who you are and what you are saying. Lord God, I pray that you would just fall like rain on this church, and that in a dry and parched land, you would fill our souls with life and goodness and beauty. It is in Christ's name that we pray, amen. You may go in peace.

54:50 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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