

#16 Recording and Reviewing God's Prophetic Words -- Discerning

In this, the third and final teaching on journaling, we want to look at writing as a means of learning to better recognize and hear the voice of God. One question that I am often asked is, "How do I know that it is God speaking to me?" We cannot always know, but the more time we spend listening to the Word of God, the more proficient we will become in recognizing His voice when He speaks to us, or through us to others, in prophetic words.

Many years ago, in an episode of the sitcom "Night Court," the bailiff, Bull Shannon, gets struck by lightning. In his stupor he hears the janitor speaking to him, but he thinks that he is hearing God. As he repeats to others what he has heard they all reply, "Yep, sounds like God." The problem many of us have is that we think we know what God "should" sound like. But the truth is that though God speaks with a common voice (i.e. He will not contradict what He has said in Holy Scripture), He speaks to each of us in a way that is unique to us. I may hear Him in word, another person may hear Him through events of nature, others through art, another through music, etc. Writing down what we hear in our own words, and then rereading it with a discerning spirit, is a key to understanding how God speaks into our lives, and through us into the lives of others.

In his book on writing, Elmore Leonard, the novelist, says that when he writes, he puts words to the page and then goes back and reads what he has written. As he rereads what he has written, he says, "If what I have written sounds like writing, I rewrite it." What Leonard is saying is that there is no universal writing style. He wants to write something that is uniquely his. In the same way, many people moving in the prophetic want to sound like an Old Testament prophet, or one of the great preachers, or one of the modern prophetic voices we hear on radio or television. But God wants to speak His word through each of us utilizing our unique personality, our experience, our voice.

When we take the time to write down the word of God as we receive it, then go back and reread what we have written, we can often see that what we have written "sounds like writing." If what we have written does not sound like it is coming out of our mouths it may not be from the Lord. Of course, if we are recording what God said through someone else, then it will have the flavor of that speaker. But rewriting what we have heard through someone else (as I recorded in the previous teaching), and putting it into our own words is a good discipline. By rewriting in the language unique to us we can begin to own the word for ourselves and learn how God speaks directly to us.

Journaling is an art and a discipline with numerous benefits. If we want to become proficient in prophetic ministry we need to practice the discipline of journaling. It is not necessary to journal every day or keep a formal journal. But taking the time to get quiet before the Lord, and write, opens us more and more to His inspiration. Journaling clears away the clutter of extraneous voices seeking to distract us from the voice of the Lord. Writing puts the words in front of us and helps us perceive His word to us. Journaling helps teach us to recognize the voice of the Lord and His unique way of speaking to us individually.

Write, rewrite, review, discern. Journaling helps us do all of this and disciplines our spirit. There is no better time to start (or renew) the discipline than today.