

## CBTB Prophecy series

### Week 1. Reality Check; getting our bearings: the bigger picture.

That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Cor. 2:9 NLT

#### Opening activity

Read together Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3: 14-20  
(Read it in a variety of versions or paraphrase).

Discuss: What this passage seems to say about the nature of God, and about God’s children?

#### Read and discuss: the nature of God and the prophetic

Prophecy springs from the nature of God. Prophetic consciousness and experience begin with God and are grounded and sourced in him. God is a relational God of covenantal love who is absolutely committed to the restoration of relationship with humanity. His love requires his self-disclosure (Phil 1:9; “I continue to pray for your love to grow and increase beyond measure, bringing you into the rich revelation of spiritual insight into all things.”). From Genesis to Revelation the Bible reveals a God who is intent on communicating with the people he has created; a God with a voice that ranges from ‘roaring waters’ to a ‘gentle whisper.’ The Old Testament shows how God regularly appointed individuals to speak on his behalf who saw and understood their context from God’s perspective and called people to repentance as well as holding out hope. Jesus, the Word of God is the ultimate prophetic revelation who sees God, speaks life and disrupts the status quo like no one else. Finally, we have the outpouring of God’s Spirit upon the church, making the gift of prophecy available to every believer – the Spirit of Truth who searches the deep things of God and makes them known to his people. By definition, “the prophetic is about the faithful holding out of God’s reality, so that it can be clearly seen and responded to, so that transformation can take place and so that relationship can be restored” (2022, p. 9).

#### Question

Considering that many find the prophetic an intriguing and puzzling concept, how do you relate to the above explanation and definition?

#### Reflection

Different approaches to the prophetic include a *social justice* understanding, *charismatic* understanding, and a *conservative* understanding. How does your understanding line up? What experiences and traditions have shaped your views? How do you see the prophetic ministry at CBTB and what role do you envisage for the prophetic ministry in fulfilling the vision Jesus has for his church?

## Read and Discuss

When God makes himself known, it is inevitably disruptive of our human experience and way of life. You cannot receive the knowledge of the reality of God and imagine you can remain the same. To quote from the introduction of Holy Disruption, “We are living in a world that longs for God. In a post-Christian society, we may have lost our sense of the divine, but people are still yearning and searching for transcendence. They are hungry for an authentic spiritual experience, particularly one that speaks to their sense of identity. Into this context comes the prophetic! An essential function of the prophetic is to show us who God truly is and then, considering this, to show us who we truly are. The prophetic church can speak to people’s true identity and facilitate an encounter with the God who knows and loves them. God speaks for the purpose of transformation. He speaks in order that he might reshape us and thus conform us to the image of his Son; he speaks in order to transform our neighbourhoods for the sake of his justice and righteousness. We cannot avoid the disruptive nature of the prophetic. Once we start listening to God’s voice, we realise that God is a holy Disruptor, and no part of our lives is exempt from his activity. Mindsets are challenged, agendas surrendered, indifferences shattered, behaviours changed, powers opposed, chains broken and strongholds demolished. The wind blows wherever it pleases, so the Spirit of truth requires ‘access to all areas’. If we are serious about exploring the prophetic, we need to ask ourselves whether we are prepared to leave behind our settled existence and be blown by the wind of the Spirit wherever he determine.” (Livesay, 2022, p 11.)

## Question

*What thoughts do these ideas from Holy Disruption bring to the fore?*

*Do group members have experiences of holy disruption to share? What was the fruit?*

*Is there anything you would need to “leave behind” to see this definition of the prophetic grow in you?*

## Concluding exercise

Spend about 5 minutes listening to God together. Ask God to show you how he wants you to approach the series of the coming weeks on CBTB discovering our corporate prophetic identity.

Reference: Cath Livesay. (2022). Holy Disruption, Introduction & chapter 1

## CBTB Prophecy series

### Week 2. Reality check. Getting our bearings: a Jesus shaped church

**KEY SCRIPTURE.** Ephesians 4: 1-16

#### Opening discussion

What do you make of the assessment of the contemporary church that by and large, the prophetic is off the map, that we are lacking something incredibly significant, and that we have no idea of what we are missing?

What do you imagine we could be missing out on and what do you think might be some of the reasons for this dire situation?

#### APEST

Consider and discuss the fivefold ministry in terms of the roles of APEST (Apostle; Prophet; Evangelist; Shepherd; Teacher). In Ephesians 4:1–16, Paul lays out how, as the church, we are to 'live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received' and practically fulfil our shared calling to be the fullness of Jesus in the world. At the heart of his argument is the direct link between a mature, Jesus-shaped church and the embrace of the five roles described in verse 11. Hence the five roles Christ has embedded in his church are not optional functions.

The five ministries encapsulate the ministry of Jesus himself, and Jesus is the ultimate apostle, the ultimate prophet, the ultimate evangelist, ultimate shepherd, and ultimate teacher. They are given to the church to fulfil a glorious purpose of being the body of Christ in every corner of the globe. Each are necessary, and under Christ and complement the others perfectly.

The beauty of using the fivefold framework to understand the purposes of the church is that it is centred on Jesus. These five roles are given by Jesus, they reveal Jesus and extend the ministry of Jesus.

A Jesus-shaped church is one where all five ministries are released and work together in harmony and unity of purpose, with each one finding its true value in being part of the whole.

#### Discuss

Discuss the 5 roles in the light of Ephesians 4: 7, & 12-13.

What is the purpose of the five callings?

How do you understand the relationship between the integrated operation of the fivefold ministry and the healing and restoration of a broken or incomplete church in moving towards the fullness of Christ?

### Individuals or church culture?

Part of the purpose of the five roles is not just about individuals, but to create and shape the culture of the church at a corporate level. Each of the five roles builds a particular type of capacity or intelligence within the church so that the five identities are embraced collectively, illustrated in the table below.

Role	Function
<i>Apostle</i> : wired to catalyse, mobilise and pioneer; motivated to make an impact and extend into new territory.	The <i>apostolic</i> church: a community able to be visionary, mobile, innovative and risk-taking.
<i>Prophet</i> : wired for worship and a pursuit of justice; focused on God's voice and God's concerns.	The <i>prophetic</i> church: a community able to stay faithful to God, hear his voice and bring God's shalom to the neighbourhood
<i>Evangelist</i> : wired to build connections outside the church and spread the good news.	The evangelistic church: a community able to be outward-focused, invitational and culturally relevant.
<i>Shepherd</i> : wired to build a healthy, reconciled community and to protect the vulnerable.	The <i>shepherding</i> church: a community able to care, heal, reconcile and disciple.
<i>Teacher</i> : wired to research, study and understand; committed to making complex truth accessible.	The <i>teaching</i> church: a community able to learn, understand and apply the truth of Scripture.

### Reflection and affirmation

Consider your own gifts in terms of the five roles and functions above and the reality that these are distributed throughout the entire body, including yourself, and not just to the leaders of the church. Share with one another any signs you notice of at least one role and function in each of the members of your group. Listen to God for words of encouragement for one another in your gifting.

### Concluding discussion and prayer

To what extent do we as a local church embody the ministry of Jesus the supreme Apostle, the perfect Prophet, the greatest Evangelist, the good Shepherd and the master Teacher? Jesus never intended us to imagine a church without the prophets and the flavour of culture and intelligence ministry brings. If it is true that to be the church we need to look like Jesus and that we cannot do so without the prophetic, will you pray and ask God now and during the week about how we can integrate prophecy back into every part of the body of Christ?

Reference: Cath Livesay. (2022). Holy Disruption, chapter 3.

## CBTB Prophecy series

### Week 3 (11 May). Reality check. Getting our bearings: the Old Testament tradition

#### KEY SCRIPTURES

Then by a prophet the Lord brought Jacob's descendants out of Egypt; and by that prophet they were protected. Hosea 12: 13

Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror,' declares the Lord. My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. JEREMIAH 2:12-13

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour ... . Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you." ISAIAH 43:2-4

#### Opening activity

Read and ponder the passage paraphrased from Livesay's (2021) book Holy Disruption below:

#### Reading

The Hebrew prophets provide a foretaste of the coming perfect Prophet (Jesus) and there is also a connection between the ministry of the OT prophets and the ministry of fivefold prophets in the church today. Throughout the Old Testament, God made himself known to his prophets through visions, dreams or encounters. He shared his reality with them and commissioned them to faithfully hold out that reality to his people. They had a particular role as mouthpieces and intermediaries: God's representatives delivering his will, law, direction and judgements. Whether by words, actions or challenging social norms, the prophets constantly called people back to covenant faithfulness and spoke sternly against the relentless pull of idolatry. At the heart of the prophets' message was the reminder to God's people of who they were: a people defined by their covenantal relationship with Yahweh, the one true God. The prophets reminded the people that they were an alternative community to every other culture around them, shaped by God's incomparable alternative reality. The prophets of old knew that when we lose our sense of identity, we become especially vulnerable to idolatry.

#### Discuss

What was at the heart of the message of the OT prophets?

What was the reality of God that they held out to the people of God that remains relevant?

## Prophets & prophecy

Prophets are people who have a role in embodying or speaking out God's reality. In the light of the perspective that the New Testament brings us, it would be a mistake to understand the prophetic role simply through the lens of the prophetic gift and therefore define a prophet as someone who speaks out prophecy on a regular basis. We can therefore differentiate prophet from prophecy as follows:

	<b>What</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
<b>Prophet role (person)</b>	An individual's identity, calling and way of seeing the world	Given by Jesus	One of five	Developing the overall health of the body
<b>Prophecy Gift (charism)</b>	The experience and process of hearing God for others	Given by the holy Spirit	Available to all	Strengthening, encouraging, comforting people

### Discuss

What is the significance of separating out the role of the individual prophet in terms of his/her identity, calling and way of seeing the world from the gift of prophecy on the other hand?

What can we learn from the OT prophetic tradition about engaging the realities of the church today, not only from their speaking prophetic words but also their engaging in prophetic action and challenging social norms?

Can you illustrate prophetic actions other than speaking prophetic words?

Do you have any experience in the prophetic challenge of social norms? What might that look like in our day and our church?

### Reading

Throughout the Old Testament, God made himself known to his prophets through visions, dreams or encounters. He shared his reality with them and commissioned them to faithfully hold out that reality to his people. They had a particular role as mouthpieces and intermediaries: God's representatives delivering his will, law, direction and judgements. They constantly called people back to covenant faithfulness and spoke sternly against the relentless pull of idolatry. At the heart of the prophets' message was the reminder to God's people of who they were: a people defined by their covenantal relationship with Yahweh, the one true God. The prophets reminded the people that they were an alternative community to every other culture around them, shaped by God's incomparable alternative reality. The prophets of old knew that when we lose our sense of identity, we become especially vulnerable to idolatry. (Livesey, p. 71. Kindle Edition).

The idols the Israelites turned to held out a false promise and a quick fix. The prophets knew that these idols appealed to a distorted sense of identity, which still has resonance today: If I bow to this idol, my life will be better, my social status will

be raised, and other people will affirm my value. In succumbing to idolatry, the Israelites were renouncing their true God-given identity as the beloved people of God and living out of a false one (p. 73, Kindle edition).

### **Discuss**

What are some of the prevalent idols in our society that interfere with the exclusive covenant relationship with God and make us forget who we are?

Which idols have caused you the most trouble? Which have the most social appeal?

Are there stories of how God has helped you to resist other powers and competing claims on your allegiance to God?

“Have you ever thought that the prophetic is a way to guard us against idolatry?” How could it do this?”

### **Closing**

Even in the midst of relationship breakdown, the prophets held out hope to God’s people by reminding them that, at the end of the day, they belonged to Yahweh and that redemption is the heart of prophecy:

As we seek God for expanding our understanding and development of a prophetic consciousness in our lives and church today, spend the closing moments listening to God and praying into those things that the Holy Spirit is highlighting in becoming a prophetic people. Ask God to increase our desire for the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1)

## CBTB Prophecy series

### Week 4 (18 May). Reality check. Getting our bearings: New Covenant Prophets.

#### KEY SCRIPTURES

'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. ... and they will prophesy' (Acts 2:17–18). See also Eph. 4: 12-13

#### Introduction

The Old Testament model of the prophet was never God's ultimate plan for this ministry. The restoration of relationship between God and people, mediated through Jesus, means that every Christian can experience the presence and voice of God. We are no longer reliant on old-school prophets to pass on God's messages to us. We now have a new and greater covenant – one of grace, not judgement. And it's a new age – the age of salvation and the Spirit (Livesey, p. 81. Kindle Edition).

With the Holy Spirit poured out on the whole church, certain elements of the prophet's job description have changed. Their role of embodying and speaking out aspects of God's reality now takes place within a Spirit-filled community, where everyone else has access to the voice of God and can learn to hear God's voice. Rather than being the sole conduits of revelation, the prophets' responsibility is more about shaping prophetic culture and curating a fertile environment for listening to and responding to God (Livesey, p. 84). Kindle).

#### Ponder and discuss

I've longed to see how God sees, to see beyond my limited perceptions that repeat the same old views, blinded by my prejudices. Here you and I are introduced to John's prophetic 'seeing', fuelled by his relationship with Jesus, his understanding and experience of the love of the incarnate God and the fulfilment of the promises.

- What is your experience, in the light of John's experience of knowing Jesus as man and friend?
- What are your hopes and longings for seeing Jesus?
- How does prophecy play a part in bringing this revelation to you, and to the individual person?

#### Bridging the gap

The prophetic impulse is aware of and seeks to *bridge the gap* between what is beautiful, sacred, loving, righteous and life-giving in God's presence, and all that is broken, messed-up, unjust, sinful and dying apart from God's presence. Prophecy is fuelled by the desire to connect God's reality or the ideal, with the actual, or our reality and longs for whatever words, imagery or action will bring the much-needed realignment of created with the Creator. Sensitive to idolatry, injustice and unrighteousness, and longing for the renewal of all things, the prophetic impulse contains a holy discontent that desires to confront the powers that oppress people, whether spiritual or cultural, and therefore goes against the grain of popular consensus (p. 87). The list below represents a number of key characteristics of a prophetic consciousness in which fivefold prophets function in the church to close the gap between God's reality and our church and society and bring the church to



maturity. These key ways reflect the prophetic consciousness we seek to encourage and facilitate in our church.

### **Ponder and discuss**

Read the list of Key characteristics below and discuss any of the following:

- Which of these characteristics do you identify with more and why?
- Which characteristics would you like to see grow in your own life and experience?
- Which of these aspects of a prophetic consciousness seem especially important in our day and age for becoming a Jesus-shaped church at CbtB, the Bellarine, and in the church in general?

### **Key characteristics of a prophetic consciousness**

1. Listening and perceiving God's reality when others may be short-sighted or distracted, helping people to understand their situations through the eyes of God
2. Equipping others to hear God, promoting a culture of active listening and seeking to multiply their own gifts onto others.
3. Showing sensitivity to complacency and idolatry and search God's heart for words or imagery that will draw people back to him and so that the world can reorient itself towards him and be reconciled.
4. Promoting spiritual health in the church, focusing on depth more than breadth and preventing faith from becoming lukewarm
5. Challenging the status quo by questioning whatever it is that does not seem to honour God and fails to reflect Kingdom values. They offer an alternative consciousness.
6. Maintaining sensitivity to spiritual warfare and recognise where spiritual strongholds need tearing down.
7. Speaking against the politics of oppression and exploitation and call society to change. They champion social justice, righteousness and the pursuit of God's *shalom* for all.
8. Energising God's people by their pioneering kingdom breakthroughs in our life situations to come into alignment with the kingdom of God.

### **Conclusion**

Pray for the restoration of a the five-fold prophet and a prophetic consciousness across the church.

Pray for each other that we would hear the voice of the Spirit more clearly.

Listen to God for any words or insights about responding to the discussion you've had in your group.