

Called to Prophecy

Shantel squeezed her hands tighter together as they lay clasped in her lap. She was sitting in her church small group, which was led by Lamont, a six-year member of the church.

For the most part, 10 people came. However, a new man had been coming for the past month. Montez was a friend of one of the men in the group. He seemed to respond negatively whenever she shared something. Or was it just when women shared? Was she possibly being overly sensitive?

“So what is Paul trying to tell us about kindness in Ephesians 4:20-32, especially verse 32?” asked Lamont. “Shantel, you always have good insight. What is the Lord saying to your heart?”

Shantel cleared her throat. She glanced over to see Montez roll his eyes. Lamont must have caught it too, because he added. “We are here as a group to fellowship and grow. Everyone is important, because God values each of us and every voice. Shantel, please tell us what is on your heart.”

“Nothing repels people faster than an unkind, mean-spirited person,” said Shantel. “How can we win people to Christ with such a spirit? The kindness of God draws people. A kind word turns away anger and deflates an argument. Kindness also speaks volumes about you as a representative of Christ.”

“Amen,” Lamont said.

1. *What does your congregation or denomination say about the role of women within your church?*

2. *How does your church value women’s voices? Explain your answer.*

3. *When could having both men’s and women’s perspectives bring spiritual wisdom to a difficult situation?*

A Prophetess Acknowledges Jesus

Luke 2:36-38, KJV

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Luke 2:36-38, NIV

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

³⁸Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

After the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph stayed for a while in Bethlehem. During that time, they traveled to the temple in nearby Jerusalem to fulfill their religious duties such as presenting Him to the Lord as required by the Law (vss. 22-24; see Exod. 13:12-15).

It was then that two elderly people—Simeon and Anna—recognized Jesus' special nature and made pronouncements concerning Him. In a sense, they served as two credible Jewish witnesses who affirmed the truthfulness of Jesus' status as the Messiah (Deut. 19:15).

Verse 36 relates that Anna was a "prophetess" (KJV). In other words, she had the gift of prophecy and was recognized for having that special God-given ability. She was also an exceptionally committed elderly woman. She worshiped God so constantly with "fasting and praying" (vs. 37, NIV) that she never left the temple. Anna may have lodged in one of the outer rooms of the sanctuary complex, or at least she spent most of her waking hours at the temple.

During Anna's lifetime, she had undoubtedly witnessed her share of war and national oppression. It's no wonder she had an intense longing for the "redemption" (vs. 38) promised through the Messiah. The Father honored Anna's faith by allowing her to see His Son at the same time as Simeon. Consequently, Anna became a grateful and continual witness to others who had been waiting for the promised King.

4. *Who was Anna?*

5. *What did Anna do when she encountered the infant Jesus?*

Sons and Daughters Will Prophecy

Acts 2:16-21, KJV

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

21 And it shall come to pass,

Acts 2:16-21, NIV

¹⁶"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ " 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

¹⁹I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great

KJV
that whosoever shall call on
the name of the Lord shall be
saved.

NIV
and glorious day of the Lord.
²¹And everyone who calls on the
name of the Lord will be saved.' "

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit empowered Peter to stand before an assembled crowd. He was "with the Eleven" (Acts 2:14), suggesting that while Peter was the primary speaker, the others affirmed what he said. Peter began by asking his fellow Jews, as well as all who lived in Jerusalem, to listen carefully to the explanation he was giving of the wonderful things God was doing in their presence.

Peter declared that his fellow disciples were not drunk, as some mistakenly thought, for it was too early in the morning for drunkenness (vs. 13-15). Instead, something far more extraordinary was occurring. To clarify further, Peter quoted from Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:16-21). Through these Scriptures, others could see that Jesus is indeed the long-awaited Messiah.

Peter noted that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' followers (being evidenced by speaking in other languages) was evidence of what Joel had said would occur at the advent of the Messiah. In the old covenant, the manifestations of the Spirit among God's people were limited to prophets and occasionally kings like David.

Joel's prophecy concerned the dramatic change in the way God's Spirit would work among people. Now, "sons and daughters" (vs. 17) would "prophesy." Similarly, while "young men" would "see visions," their older counterparts would "dream dreams." Moreover, both men and women would experience the Spirit's outpouring (vs. 18).

The above was just one evidence that the long-promised "last days" (vs. 17) were beginning. The "heavens" (vs. 19) would also be filled with "wonders," while the "earth" would be overcome with such "signs" as the presence of "blood," "fire," and clouds of "smoke." In a glimpse of the "great and glorious day" (vs. 20) of the Savior's return, the sun would be darkened and the moon red-hued. But now, all who call out to the Lord Jesus in faith will be "saved" (vs. 21).

6. *What did the Lord promise to do in the “last days” (Acts 2:17)?*

7. *What was unusual about this outpouring of the Spirit?*

8. *What other events would accompany the “last days”?*

Philip’s Four Daughters Prophecy

Acts 21:8-9, KJV

8 And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

Acts 21:8-9, NIV

⁸Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Acts 18:23—21:16 records Paul’s third missionary journey, which extended from about A.D. 52–57. During this time, the apostle made Ephesus the center of his gospel operations.

Chapter 21 focuses on Paul’s return trip to Jerusalem. Along the way, he met believers in Tyre and Ptolemais (vs. 7). The apostle and his colleagues remained in Ptolemais for one day before reboarding their ship to sail to Caesarea.

Once the missionary team arrived in Caesarea, they remained there for several days. During this time, Philip the evangelist lodged the group in his home (vs. 8).

Philip’s evangelistic activities recorded in chapter 8 were only the beginning of a long, fruitful span of ministry (21:8). He and his “four daughters” (vs. 9) eventually settled in Caesarea. The reference to them as “virgins” (KJV) indicates they were unmarried and young. The tense of the Greek participle rendered “prophesy” indicates that they did so on a recurring basis. This is one indication that the Spirit gave this gift to female believers in the early church (1 Cor. 11:5).

9. *Who was Philip?*

10. *In what way did Philip show hospitality?*

Notable Christian Women

For two millennia, Christian women have made substantial contributions to church history. Many have gone unnoticed, but some have left indelible marks that are still recognized to this day. The following three women are representatives of a vast number of Christian women whose words and deeds have inspired generations of Christians.

Susanna Wesley lived in 17th and 18th-century England, where she married an Anglican minister and became the mother of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist movement. Charles composed such beloved hymns we still sing as “Christ, the Lord Is Risen Today” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” Susanna Wesley nurtured the seeds of faith in her two sons, who would themselves inspire the faith of countless Christians.

Harriet Tubman was born a slave in Dorchester, Maryland, in 1822. She escaped from slavery and devoted her life both to Christ and guiding other slaves to freedom. Although she was whipped many times and suffered a permanent head injury as a slave, she never forsook her faith in Jesus nor silenced her declaration of the Gospel.

Lottie Moon stood only 4 feet, 3 inches tall, but she was a giant among missionaries. Beginning in 1873, she evangelized in China for nearly four decades. As a gifted teacher and prolific writer, she campaigned for women to have an equal voice among Baptist missionaries. Fluent in Chinese, she led hundreds of Chinese to commit their lives to Christ. For Christians today, she personifies the highest missionary spirit.

These three Christian women exemplify what it means to truly serve Christ.

11. *What do these three women have in common?*

12. *In what ways do you relate to these women?*

13. *How have the words or actions of Christian women touched your faith in Jesus?*

14. *Define the role of women in the church in your own words.*

Praise Jesus for Using the Voices of Women!

The Lord endowed Anna and the four daughters of Philip with the spiritual gift of prophecy, as the prophet Joel had predicted, thus conveying God’s message to His people according to His divine plan. Since that New Testament period, faithful women throughout Christian history have related God’s message in their own distinctive ways, and today Christian women continue that sacred tradition.

► *During the coming week, briefly describe in your study book a situation in which you experienced or observed the words of a Christian woman providing spiritual insight. Examples might include sharing a biblical perspective with a child, offering counsel to a youth, or speaking calm words of wisdom in a tense situation. (Note that you may be the one speaking as that woman.) Moreover, praise the Lord Jesus for what occurred!*

KEY VERSE

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. —Acts 2:17, KJV

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”

—Acts 2:17, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of February 1 through February 7

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Revelation 21:1-8—Receive the Water of Life.
- Tues.** John 8:21-30—Jesus Declares, “I Am from Above.”
- Wed.** Romans 8:12-17—God’s Children Led by the Spirit.
- Thurs.** John 1:37-42—Simon and Andrew First Disciples.
- Fri.** John 1:43-51—Galileans Philip and Nathanael Become Disciples.
- Sat.** John 4:43-54—Jesus Heals Son of Galilean Official.
- Sun.** John 4:25-42 —Samaritans Come to Jesus.