Prophetic and Playful: Practicing the Presence Sarah Yardley

Join us for a workshop as we explore how we develop our prophetic voice by spending time with Jesus. Sarah will explore the biblical and practical vision of what it looks like to be people of prophetic kindness, and give space for us to playfully and prayerfully explore prophetic gifting.

Opening Story: Saudi Arabia, Manal

Option 1:

What has been my journey around gifts of the Spirit?
Where have I encountered the nearness of God?
What has been a barrier for me operating in the prophetic?

Option 2:

Let's start with a really simple activity:

Imagine with me a zebra.

And now, on top of your zebra, imagine a flamingo.

What is your zebra wearing? What shoes are on his feet?

Now I want you to wonder - why is the zebra wearing this footwear? Where is he going? What is he doing? Why does he need this kind of footwear?

What is your flamingo wearing as a hat? What is on top of his head? Why does he need this?

Ask God: which one is You? Which one is me?

And now, ask God:

What does that tell me about You?

What does that tell me about me?

Where are you going this year ahead? Where is the Spirit taking you?

Space to respond.

Personal Introduction

I would compare my experience with the Spirit of God to an experience of watching the sun rise, first slowly, and then increasing in brightness.

I cannot easily recall a time when I did not have some sense of the presence of God. In my younger years, I simply knew that God was love, and God loved me. I grew up in a church surrounded by those pursuing Christ, primarily through the Word of God. In my church background, we had a separate space in which you could "practice" the gifts of the Spirit; they could never be used in a main service setting, as that would be terribly disruptive, but we regularly had afterglows; times of gathered worship, mysterious in a dark, separate room, where people practiced. I rarely joined. I do remember receiving the gift of tongues at a women's retreat, 18 years old. We didn't go to the special "receiving the gift of tongues" workshop; we just sat outside on the grass and prayed for each other, and I began to pray in the Spirit.

The fascinating interplay with gifts of the Spirit continued into my early 20s. I read books like *They Found the Secret* and *Chasing the Dragon*. I realised that whatever was happening in these books was distinctly different from my own experience. At age 25, I was driving to Carpinteria, water sparkling to my left, listening to a song called *Awakening* by Passion, and I experienced a genuine, tangible sense of God's presence with me. I spent the next three months working with Reality in Carpinteria, falling in love with Jesus. We didn't practice any spiritual gifts at set times, but I realised during that time that ministry flows from intimacy, Scripture is all about presence and relationship, that the Spirit of God reveals Jesus to us.

When I was 31 years old, I moved to the United Kingdom. This was my first significant encounter with the prophetic; I had received and given a few prophetic words, but none that had reshaped my life. I was in Cornwall from California for the summer, working with the team at Creation Fest UK. The founder had passed suddenly, and we were grieving and finishing our last year together. I took a bus to the only city accessible by public transport, and did the same thing I have for years, the thing I still do each day; I started my day reading my Bible

My daily reading was in Isaiah 49; an invitation to the coastland, an anointing from birth, a calling to carry light to the nations. I wrote in my Bible: Cornwall? And I forgot, until two weeks later at the festival when a prophetic leader came and prayed that same Scripture over me, a calling by name.

I felt strongly that God was asking me to partner with Him in Cornwall. My pastor and family blessed the same. And that prophetic moment with the Spirit shaped the past decade of my life, and invited me into a journey with the Spirit that I would not have believed if you had told me.

I have seen this play out in three key areas:

- The mystery of chasing the wild goose, learning to identify and name prophetic words.
- Learning to listen in contemplative prayer, walks with Jesus, the art of pilgrimage.
- Daily leaning into a longing for more, in the wilderness, waiting, spaces.

So today, we're thinking about what it looks like to be both prophetic *and* playful, to cultivate a sense that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us always, and ready to listen.

Ask one or two to give a short response on the way they currently operate in the prophetic in their leadership.

Biblical Foundations for the Prophetic, Playful Spirit in Scripture

The Spirit of God first appears in Genesis 1. The Hebrew word we read is ruach / ruwac, and can mean wind, breath, Spirit. We read that God's personal, energetic presence is hovering over the place of chaos, bringing order and life from what was disordered. Throughout the Old Testament we see the following examples of the Spirit:

- Gifting wisdom and creativity to Bezalel (Exodus 31:1-5)
- Interpreting dreams through Joseph (Genesis 37, 40, 41)
- Foretelling history through the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc)
- Anticipating a new heart and a new Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27)
- Enabling people in truth and power (Numbers 11:29)

In the New Testament, under the covenant of relationship with God established at the cross through Jesus Christ, we begin to see the energizing work of the Spirit of God, always ultimately pointing people back to Jesus. The revelation of the Spirit comes in the following ways:

- Teaching us all things and reminding us of Jesus (John 14)
- Adopting us into the family of God (Romans 8:15)
- Allowing us to abound in hope (Romans 15:13)
- Enabling signs and wonders (book of Acts, Romans 15:19)
- Gifting us with understanding (1 Corinthians 2:12)

Within many churches, we will pray "Come Holy Spirit". I recently did a theological reflection on these words with a dear friend Emily Jamieson, with whom I've developed this thinking:

When we say, "Come, Holy Spirit," what we are saying is less of an invitation, and more of a naming of the orientation of our hearts towards the Spirit of God who is always yearning to be with us. This language creates an openness of our own hearts and souls to the presence of the God who is already with us. This orientation or welcoming of the presence of God is threaded throughout Scripture; it is the language of the one who longs for the presence of the living God.

- We pray "Come, Holy Spirit" in our times of pain, echoing the way that David "in distress called upon the Lord" (2 Samuel 22:7).
- We pray "Come, Holy Spirit" in our times of joy, believing like the sons of Korah that "all of our springs are in You" (Psalm 87:7).
- We pray "Come, Holy Spirit" to "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6).
- We pray "Come, Holy Spirit" because we believe that when we are gathered together and filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be anointed to "speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).
- We pray "Come, Holy Spirit" because we believe that in the presence of God there are paths of life and fullness of joy (Acts 2:28).

When we pray for the Spirit of the living God to come, we read in Scripture that we begin to grow in the gifts of the Spirit. The word in Scripture for gifts is "charisma", meaning *grace*, *favor* or *to make happy*. These gifts look like:

- Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22)
- Word of knowledge, increased faith, the gifts of healing, the gift of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, exhortation/encouragement, giving, leadership, mercy, administration, helps, service, teaching, apostleship (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28; Rom. 12:6-8)
- Building up of faith through the church operating in the prophetic through apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Ephesians 4:13).

When we think about these five-fold gifting, we might find it helpful to explore with fresh language. Eric Knopf has named these five as:

• Apostle = Dream Awakener

- Prophet = Heart Revealer
- Evangelist = Story Teller
- Pastor = Soul Healer
- Teacher = Light Giver¹

Another way to look at these is the way the giftings connect us to the heart of God. Alan Hirsch describes them in this way in *The 5 Qs:*

- Apostle connected to the mission of God
- Prophet connected to the heart of God
- Evangelist connected to the message of God
- Shepherd connected to the people of God
- Teacher connected to the truth of God²

My language around these is slightly different;

- The apostle is the one most likely to start a new work. They are the ones called into new areas; geographically, culturally, spiritually. They break hard ground, carry true vision, walk with new authority.
- The prophet is the one who forthtells Scripture or at times foretells truth into a situation. They carry a specific sense of the Word of God, alive in the moment. They often speak with incisive wisdom beyond their natural understanding.
- The evangelist is the one who is always looking for the one who is missing at the table, always thinking about how to widen the welcome, extend the banquet, bring in the weary and wondering, point them to Jesus.
- The pastors and shepherds are the ones who look at those around them, care deeply for their well-being, ask about the care of the individual, and wait for an answer with love.
- The teachers are the ones who take the ideas of faith and Scripture and break them down for both communication and wider understanding. They are patient and creative in finding new ways to share old truth.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul charges the church to desire prophecy above all the other gifts:

"So in everything strive to love. Passionately seek the gifts of the Spirit, especially the gift of prophecy. You see, a person speaking in an unknown language is not addressing the church because he is really addressing God—those who overhear don't understand because he is speaking in the Spirit the depths of the mysteries of the Lord. But a

¹ https://fivefoldministry.com/pages/learn-about-the-fivefold-ministry

² https://5qcentral.com/keeping-connections/

person who has the gift of prophecy teaches in a way that builds up the community, draws them near, and comforts them. Those who speak in an unknown language only strengthen themselves, but those who prophesy strengthen the community." (1 Cor. 1-4)

I've found this simple litmus test from Joyce Huggett tremendously helpful:

"As I looked more closely at the gift of prophecy, I saw that if a prophetic word is from God, it will edify or exhort or comfort (see 1 Cor. 14:31). It will not necessarily be painless. Indeed, it will cut into a situation and cause pain, even fear. This is not unlike the incision the surgeon makes with his scalpel. It is the pain which precedes purging and healing, which is, in fact, an act of love."

-Joyce Huggett, The Joy of Listening to God

So, let's think about how we take these ideas from Scripture and begin to make them practical, real, and lived. Again, much of this content has been cultivated with my dear friend Emily Jamieson - I'll share her coaching website at the end of our time together but we want to move into a LAB format to think about these areas in practical, real-life.

We will probably only make it through 1-2 labs; might do a choose your own adventure style for the workshop.

LAB 1: How do I prophesy?

We often believe prophecy is reserved for the "extra holy". However, this is not what scripture teaches us, nor has it been my own experience. Below are a couple pointers to get us more comfortable with the practice of giving prophetic words:

Guidelines for operating in the prophetic:

- Learn from Jesus.
- No one is perfect.
- Trust / Fall.
- Avoid "Thus saith the Lord" language.

³ Joyce Huggett, The Joy of Listening to God (Westmont: IVP, 1987)

- 1. **Learn from Jesus.** Jesus wants to teach you how to operate in the prophetic in your unique, heavenly identity (Eph. 2:10). Jesus says the Holy Spirit is our teacher and will guide is into all truth (John 14:26). So don't prophesy for Jesus, practice with Him! You have your own teacher (1 John 2:27).
- 2. **No one is perfect.** We all "know in part", and we all "prophesy in part" (1 Cor. 13:9). Sometimes we might hear or interpret God's voice only to find out it didn't resonate with a person or wasn't accurate. This is okay. Continue practicing from a place of humility, freedom and joy, not performance or earning. If the goal is love, then you cannot lose. It's always nerve wracking to step out with giving a prophetic word to strangers. Start practicing in a safer place (friends, family, church), then ask God to lead you in stepping out in more challenging environments.
- 3. **Trust / Fall.** It's easy to resist sharing a word until we are absolutely sure the word is correct, which keeps us from stepping out. Even if you're not very confident in a word, you won't know its power until you try! And remember, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). If a word doesn't resonate with someone, thank them for letting you share and bless them! Don't give the enemy (or yourself!) room for accusation.
- 4. **Avoid "Thus saith the Lord" language.** Claiming to possess the infallible voice of God comes across as pretentious and off-putting. It can also be a root of spiritual abuse in some cases. No matter how confident you are in the verity of a prophetic word, share it from a place of humility and suggest the recipient confirm it with the Lord. Remember, the end goal is that each believer would learn to hear from God themselves, rather than solely seek prophetic words from others.

Receiving prophecy. It is a blessing to share prophetic words with others and it is also a blessing to receive them for ourselves. However, we must not give them infallible authority. As the Apostle John directs us, we must "test" the words received in prophecy (1 John 4:1). Talk it over with the Lord. Ask Him what He thinks about the word and what He wants you to know about it. Again, the whole purpose of prophecy is to draw us closer to Him in relationship and draw us closer to one another. When it comes to receiving prophecy, hold the words you receive loosely, but hold the Lord tightly as all Truth flows from Him.

LAB PRACTICE: Listening for Others

• Fix your mind on Jesus (Heb. 3:1, 12:2). Take a moment to acknowledge WHO he is and be reminded of His heart and mind given to you.

- We are embodied spirits! Thus we will experience in our bodies and our spirits the mind of Christ in action.
- Breathe deeply and be reminded of the "ruach" breath of life that is in you.
- Notice: What is happening in your mind and body?
- Ask: God, what do you want me to know about _____? (Perhaps someone you are about to meet for coffee, a loved one, or a new friend.
 - Notice: What comes to mind. What is first and fast is often the Holy Spirit.
 - There are a few ways one can describe the Voice of God as we experience it:
 - The still small voice of God, or the divine whisper
 - The free flow of thoughts that comes when your heart and mind are fixed upon Jesus.
 - People "hear" in various ways:
 - Scripture
 - Nature/Creation
 - Other People
 - Music/Literature/Art
 - A still small voice in their thoughts (the mind of Christ)
 - Images in their imagination
 - A sense in their bodies

• Test the Spirits

- When you sense something from God, write it down, search for it in Scripture (not just one verse; CONTEXT is King!), and bring it to your community to work out together. Ask God for confirmation through people, scripture, and circumstances!
- We are feeling beings who think... and in turn our thoughts affect our emotions!
 Both must be surrendered to the Lord.
- A simple rubric for evaluating the voices you hear:

God's Voice

ALIGNS WITH THE ARC OF SCRIPTURE

SOUNDS LIKE THE TONE
AND TEXTURE
OF JESUS' VOICE

PRODUCES THE FRUIT
OF THE SPIRIT

RESULTS IN FREEDOM (NOT FROM, BUT IN CURCUMSTANCES)

Enemy's Voice

OPPOSED TO THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS (MAY MIMIC SCRIPTURE)

ACCUSATORY/FALSE/ DIVISIVE/ HURRIED/ COMPARISON

PRODUCES FEAR, GUILT,
PRIDE AND SHAME

RESULTS IN BONDAGE

I often use the 5 Cs from Nicky Gumbel:

5cs Guidance Matrix

- 1. Commanding Scripture what does the Bible say about the course of action that I'm thinking about? Are there any verses that I'm drawn to?
- 2. Common Sense God has given us reason for a reason so that we can reason! Think through pros/cons/purpose/aptitude/interests/gifting/passions.
- 3. Counsel of the Saints what do godly people who know me think about what I'm proposing?
- 4. Circumstantial Signs are there any interesting God-incidences around the situation?
- 5. Compelling Spirit is there a sense of the breath, wind and guidance of the Holy Spirit in all this?...

The ancient and modern church have always been those who expect that a living God still speaks to and through His people. One of the great dangers of the prophetic is that it becomes "over-spiritualised". In addition to the tools outlined above, some classic historic guidelines for operating in the prophetic include:

LAB 2: Practicing the Presence of God

Brother Lawrence first wrote about this in his iconic spiritual classic. To practice the presence of God is simply to develop friendship with God, becoming aware of his loving presence with us in all things. Brother Lawrence used the iconic example of God, with us in the washing of the dishes. This kind of intentional pursuit of presence becomes the place in which our ordinary tasks and lives are transformed to become places of presence.

This reality has also been explored by Ronald Rohlheiser in his short modern classic, *The Domestic Monastery*, where he writes:

"Stay inside your vocation, inside your commitments, inside your legitimate conscriptive duties, inside your church, inside your family, and they will teach you where life is found and what love means. If you are home alone with small children whose needs give you little uninterrupted time, then you don't need an hour of private prayer daily. Raising small children, if it is done with love and generosity, will do for you exactly what private prayer does." ⁴

LAB PRACTICE:

- As you go about your daily tasks, however ordinary or mundane, call to mind the presence of Jesus.
- Every time your mind wanders, repeat.
- Consider using a short breath prayer. To write a breath prayer, I often choose a name of God paired with a short longing of my heart. For example, when my heart is feeling shallow and overcommitted, I pray:
 - o Holy Spirit, make room.
- Be kind to yourself as you cultivate a life of prayer in the ordinary moments. Repent often and return to the sense of God's love towards you in all things.
- Ask God what the prophetic "now" presence of the Spirit towards you might reveal today.

Lab 3: Ignatian Spirituality

Ignatian Spirituality draws from the prayer life and writings of Ignatius of Loyola. Praying in this way can open our imagination to hear from the Holy Spirit in new ways. Much of Ignatian prayer centres around approaching a Biblical text in prayerful conversation. A separate strand of

⁴ https://ronrolheiser.com/the-domestic-monastery/

Ignatian prayer also invites us to consider in our hearts what is bringing consolation (joy, life, hope) and what is bringing desolation (fear, pain, anger). In imaginative prayer, we invite God to reveal His love in new ways by approaching Scripture with curiosity.

LAB PRACTICE:

1. Preparation

As you enter prayer, call your mind to the presence of God. Offer God your whole self, exactly as you are, today.

2. Reading

Choose a passage of Scripture and read that text in full; read it once or twice through until you are able to call to mind the passage without the words in front of you.

3. Imagine

Imagine the whole world and then draw your attention to the particular story you have just read. Allow it to become alive to you. What would it be like to be a character in that story? What would it taste, smell, feel like?

4. Ask

Ask a question or place of desire that has sparked in you by reading this passage.

5. Conversation

Allow this time of prayer to draw you into a conversation with Jesus. What would you say to Him? What might He say to you?

If it feels comfortable to you, close your time of imaginative prayer with the Lord's Prayer, speaking to our Father about what has come to mind and heart today.

LAB 4: Favourite place

Prepare your heart: Take a cue from Habakkuk 2:1-4

"I will take my place at the watchtower.

I will stand at my post and watch.

I will watch and see what He says to me.

I need to think about how I should respond to Him

When He gets back to me with His answer.

Eternal One (to Habakkuk):

Write down this vision.

Write it clearly on tablets, so that anyone who reads it may run.

For the vision points ahead to a time I have appointed;

it testifies regarding the end, and it will not lie.

Even if there is a delay, wait for it.

It is coming and will come without delay.

- Notice your posture
- Engage your imagination "watch and see what he says"
- Write down what you sense.
- Wait on the Lord
- Ask the Lord to illuminate your imagination. Like the hand of a painter on canvas, may the Spirit co-create with you...
- ❖ Bring to mind a place of peace. As you "go there" in your imagination, notice the temperature, the time of day, how you feel. Notice as many details as you can about that space.
- Jesus has never left you or forsaken you. Ask where he is. Where do you get a sense of his presence? What is he looking at? How does that make you feel?
- Ask, what do you want me to know?
 - > Whatever comes first and fast is typically the spirit.
 - > The enemy often comes with the oldest question... "did God really say..."
 - Simply ask the risen Jesus, the one come in the flesh to speak.
- Ask, is there anything that is keeping me from receiving from you?
- Offload any burdens to him... quite literally hand off to him any people or things that come to mind. What does he do with them? What does he want you to know?
- ❖ Ask what he wants to offer you in exchange...
 - > The work of the cross is the great exchange. God takes upon himself anything that brings us death in order to give us life
- Receive from the Lord!
 - The greatest measure of our maturity in Christ is not what we know, but how much we are willing to receive.
- Thank God... return often to the secret place with him. Continue to ask him what he wants you to know... about you? About him? About people around you? About what is coming in your day. Become acquainted with his voice!

We are told many things about the voice of God in Scripture:

In Revelation 1:15, His voice is described like the roar of many waters.

In 1 Kings 19:12, His voice is a low whisper, a thin silence.

In Psalm 68:33, God sends out His voice, His mighty voice.

In Genesis 46:2, God speaks in visions of the night.

In Isaiah 30:28, His breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck.

And in 1 Samuel 3, we read the story of an inexperienced youth, learning to hear the voice of the God who loves us. God calls his name, once, twice, three times. He discerns the voice of God from the voice of another prophet. But ultimately, the prophetic voice is persistent in pursuing. So as we enter the spiritual speakeasy and hear the voice of the living God, the question we linger in is this one:

Are we listening?

Go Deeper

People to Learn From

- Emily Jamieson, https://www.jamiesoncoaching.com/
- Hannah Giddens, https://www.hannahgiddens.com/
- Pete Greig, 247 Prayer, https://www.24-7prayer.com/

Books to Read

- How to Hear God by Pete Greig
- The Joy of Listening to God by Joyce Huggett
- The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Andrew

Stay in Touch

- Sarah Yardley, <u>sarah@sarahyardley.com</u> / @sarahyardley on most socials
- Creation Fest UK, office@creationfest.org.uk, @creationfestuk on socials

Bonus Content:

Examples of Prophetic Words said over Creation Fest

- Magnifying Glass (Paul)
- Rest (Sian)
- Prophetic image of dew on plants, bringing refreshment. 'Just as you are' from parched to being nourished. Just being. (Graham Roberts)
- Creation Fest bring a bridge for people who thought they may never set foot in church again. (AC Lee)
- Open the door!
- Peacock

The Gifts of Christ by Danny Silk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3DAv2L-SZg&feature=youtu.be

Notes from Hannah Giddens:

- Sometimes in life, I feel like an unconfident, bewildered child in a crowded, noisy room. Yet, consistently, He captures my attention across the room; we catch eyes in a way that only He and I see. It stills my spirit and gives me the confidence to catch my breath.
- It's in those moments when He speaks, and I hear, and nobody else notices; that picture, moment, gift, or word that shouts loud of significance, of being known—a moment in time that was created because He wants me to know that He knows, knows what I need to hear, when and how I need to hear it—the tone of voice, the tenderness, the challenge, the nudge of rebuke... He's speaking to ME!
- Sometimes in my impatience, I have wanted formulas to find Him, but He is in a different place every time; He loves to play hide and seek not to frustrate, but to be found by those intent on seeking. Sometimes He speaks in the noise, sometimes in the quiet, in His Word, in a friend, in a dream, in a secular music song (I find Him there a lot!), in that annoying person that I struggle with yet undeniably carries Him!
- Above all that, I am in wonder and awe that the Almighty God of the Universe desires
 not just to speak to me but to partner with me to be a finding place for others. I love
 those moments when I have shared a simple picture, sent a text, given a hug that has
 been normal for me but life changing in the moment not because it's me, but because
 THAT Word, THAT text, THAT hug was given in Heaven's timing with Heaven's
 significance. To be the portal for His glory is profound yet so simple.

- I think for some, the journey of confidence in the prophetic is the realization that sometimes we prophetically sense the hopelessness or brokenness or anxiety or weight of our surroundings or in a person, and our calling is to be so immersed in the truth of Heaven's hope that we do not feel the overwhelm of the atmosphere but turn it on its head and speak the opposite of what we see or sense. The insight He gives us is for wisdom to know where the fight is, and what we speak is to ignite the opposite of what we feel, sense, or see. Our prophetic voice comes against the spiritual atmosphere we feel. I once came across a book called 'You See Bones I See an Army.' I love that phrase—God's relentless hope and vision of His church, turned reality on its head in the Spirit through the eyes of faith. Our words have power to ignite hope, bring peace, still turbulent waters, and banish fear. To speak truth is to speak life.
- It doesn't have to be complicated. Some of us have few words; some of us have one word; sometimes the words don't make sense to us! Sometimes we deem the words 'God loves you' are both simplistic and obvious yet to the person in self-condemnation, they are life. I remember being in Redruth Baptist Church as a wayward twenty-something, full of shame, hiding and broken. I absolutely despised myself and fundamentally dismissed any possibility of connection with God.... a woman gave a word from the front, she didn't understand it, it was awkward, yet for me, it was like an arrow went forth from her mouth and pierced my heart. It was God speaking. Only I knew that. It changed my life!
- He shows me because He trusts me with His heart and His will for their lives what a wild honor! I want to see it more but keep connected with His heart. The prophetic can become evidence of my authority, my relationship, and my position. I want to be like Jesus who did what He did because He was moved with compassion for those around Him who were like sheep without a shepherd. I am but the obedient vessel, all to Jesus!"