

Spirit-Empowered Teaching

INTRODUCTION

The theme of our faculty gathering this year is: “Beyond: Abundantly Empowered to Serve God’s Kingdom.”

I want to chat with you a bit this afternoon about . . .

What “beyond” might look like with respect to our pedagogy.

Or, more specifically . . .

What “beyond” might look like with respect to our lesson planning, lecturing, and personal interactions with our students both inside and outside the classroom.

In the process, I’m going to put forward a bold proposal that’s based on the fundamental insight emanating from Scripture that . . .

The Spirit of God delights in using the people of God to achieve the purposes of God in the world.

I’ll begin with a story from the NT:

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

^{11} The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ^{12} In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

^{13} "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ^{14} And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

^{15} But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ^{16} I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

^{17} Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ^{18} Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he

could see again. He got up and was baptized, ^{19} and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ^{20} At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. ^{21} All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" ^{22} Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 9:10-22)

This story strikes me as an apt illustration of something I refer to as . . .

Prophetic capacity—the Spirit imparted ability for ordinary disciples (like Ananias) to:

- hear God's voice,
- receive ministry assignments from him,
- speak and act into the lives of hurting people on his behalf . . .

. . . with the effect that . . .

- lives are changed and . . .
- God's purposes in the world are achieved.

Now, for sure, this is not the only way to be Spirit-empowered.

(And, just so you know, I'm very aware of how dangerous it would be for anyone, even a college professor, to simply presume that everything they say and do is God ordained!)

Nevertheless, because the dynamic I've just described enjoys so much scriptural support, and is most likely occurring already in our pedagogy without many of us being aware of it, I believe we can and should give it some serious consideration.

I trust that as I share some today about the "why" and "how" of this game-changing form of Spirit-empowerment, you'll sense that it's possible to experience it in a responsible, biblically-faithful, Christ-honoring manner.

My hope is that some of us might even feel "led" to "lean in" to it with a greater sense of intentionality.

So, let's get started.

At the risk of being a bit overly pedantic, I think it wise to begin with a discussion of . . .

The Scriptures, the Spirit, and the Prophetic Phenomenon

The truth is that the Bible is replete with passages which portray the Holy Spirit enabling ordinary human beings to engage in speech and action which has the effect of *honoring God* and *achieving his purposes his purposes in the world*.

But more than just a set of prooftexts, what we find in the Scriptures is a story—the story of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and God’s people vis a vis God’s missional purposes.

Lucky for you, time limitations today will only allow for an abbreviated survey.

To begin . . .



Near the beginning of the Old Testament era, we read that Moses, himself a prophet (Deut. 34:10), made a wish that all of God’s people could be filled with God’s Spirit and become involved in prophetic activity.

The book of Numbers tells us that Moses was burning himself out trying to function as the solo leader for the people of Israel.

Moses was smart enough (and spiritually mature enough) to honestly share his frustrations with God.

God responded by telling Moses to gather seventy mature men (elders) at the Tent of Meeting so they might receive the Spirit and begin functioning as a *leadership team* for the people of Israel.

This passage from Numbers 11 tells us what happened:

Numbers 11:25-29

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again.

(As a side note: our best guess is that the prophesying referred to here involved some Spirit-enabled, extemporaneously-uttered prayers to God, praises of God, and spiritual exhortations to those within earshot.

The content was, essentially, the same as what we find in the psalms, but was impromptu in its delivery.

In other words, not all biblical prophecy involved *foretelling*; it was often *forth-telling* instead.)

{26} However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp....

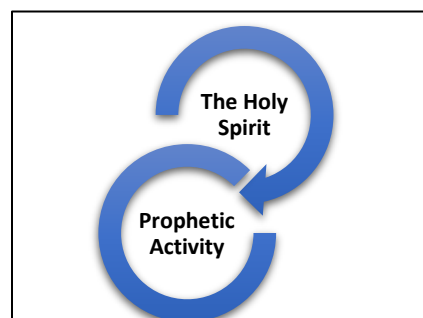
{27} A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." {28} Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"

{29} But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? ***I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!***"

I want you to notice how . . . ➡

This story as a whole, verse 29 in particular, seems to make a firm connection between the Holy Spirit and the phenomenon of prophetic activity.

Going forward in biblical history we find that . . .



Throughout the Old Testament era, we find many passages which seem to indicate that prophetic activity—both prophetic speech and action—occurred when God's Spirit came upon people who belonged to him.

I wish we had the time to look at each of these passages, but since we don't here's a list of the references in case you'd like to look them up later:

Some OT References to the Spirit Enabling <u>Prophetic Speech</u>	Some OT References to the Spirit Enabling <u>Prophetic Action</u>
1 Samuel 10:6 1 Samuel 10:9-10 1 Samuel 19:19-20 1 Samuel 19:23 Numbers 24:2-3 1 Chronicles 12:18 2 Chronicles 15:1-2 2 Chronicles 20:14-15 2 Chronicles 24:20 Isaiah 61:1 Ezekiel 2:1-8	Judges 3:10 Judges 6:34-35 Judges 11:29 Judges 14:19 Judges 15:14-15 1 Samuel 11:6-7 Isaiah 42:1

Ezekiel 11:5 Micah 3:8	
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The point is that, time and again, we read in the OT of the Holy Spirit coming upon people with the result that they are empowered to engage in *prophetic activity: speaking and acting into people's lives on God's behalf!*

Okay, now keep tracking with me.

Near the end of the Old Testament era, we find God inspiring a prophet named Joel to announce that Moses' wish (that all of God's people could be filled with God's Spirit and become involved in prophetic activity) would someday come true.

Joel 2:28-29

'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. {29} Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Once again, we see a connection between *the Spirit* and the *prophetic phenomenon*.

What's really important to note is that there's a sense in which this is how the Old Testament ends with respect to the topic of pneumatology—with *this promise of a future outpouring of the Spirit upon all of God's people regardless of traditional categories and distinctions (age, gender, socio-economic status, etc.)!*

This is what makes what we find in the New Testament so very exciting.

Because, pressing ahead in our survey we find that . . .

The New Testament Gospels also present us with passages which seem to demonstrate the connection between the Spirit and prophetic speech and action.

(Not to get too technical, but before I show you these references, I should probably make you aware of some historical/contextual realities that make these passages in the Gospels super significant:

- first, the literature of the intertestamental period (the era between the Old and New Testaments) strongly links the Holy Spirit with the phenomenon of prophetic activity;
- second, this literature also refers to a perceived dearth of prophetic activity during this long period of time (roughly 400 years);
- third, this intertestamental literature anticipated that any revival of prophetic activity would be an indication that the age of the Messiah had dawned at last!

So, what we find in the Gospels is an indication that the story of the Spirit being told in the Bible definitely doesn't end in the OT!

With all this in mind we should take note of:

- The prophetic activity in the infancy narratives of Luke 1-2.
- The prophetic activity in the inauguration narrative of Luke 3:1—4:44 (Jesus' baptism through the beginning of his ministry).
- The prophetic activity alluded to in Jesus' preparation of his disciples (Luke 12:11-12; Matthew 10:18-20).
- The manner in which Jesus, himself, functioned *prophetically* (cf. Jn. 6:63; 7:16-18, 40, 45-46; 8:26, 28-29)
- The fact that, according to Jesus, it's through the Spirit that his disciples will continue to be mentored by him (Jn. 14:16-18, 25-26; 15:26; 16:7, 12-15).

The passage in Matthew 10 is especially suggestive of the connection I'm pointing out to us today

One day Jesus instructed his disciples thusly:

Matthew 10:18-20

On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ^{19} But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ^{20} for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Over all, the Gospels make it quite clear that a revival of the prophetic phenomenon has occurred and that Jesus and his followers are at the center of it!

But that's not the end of the story!

So far, our focus has been on some passages in both the Old and New Testaments which center on Moses' wish and Joel's promise.

So, it really shouldn't surprise us that . . .

In the Book of Acts, we find an inspired apostle Peter boldly announcing that, with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, both Moses' wish and Joel's promise had finally been fulfilled!

In Acts 2:14-18 we read:

Acts 2:14-18

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. {15} These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

{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 prophecy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. {18} Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophecy.

Peter seems to be underscoring here the connection between what was happening to the 120 on the day of Pentecost and the phenomenon of prophecy!

Why do I say that?


Because, the very last phrase in verse 18 . . .

"and they will prophecy"

. . . wasn't in Joel's prophecy.

Peter has added it!

According to Peter, the immediate result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was to, as Joel promised, *impart to all of Christ's followers a new prophetic capacity to speak and act on God's behalf!*

 *This explains why the rest of the Book of Acts is literally filled with stories of ordinary Christ-followers (like Ananias) being empowered by the Holy Spirit to engage in prophetic speech and action.*

Indeed, there are 28 chapters in the Book of Acts.

In no less than 21 of the 28 chapters in the Book of Acts we seem to find some form of prophetic activity taking place.

Over and over again in the Book of Acts we find people being filled or re-filled with the Holy Spirit and, as a result:

- *praising God with prophetic (Spirit-enabled) speech;*
- *hearing personal words of encouragement directly from God;*
- *receiving special ministry assignments;*
- *speaking to others in God's name;*
- *making a difference in people's lives,*
and, in the process . . .
- *being used by the Holy Spirit to achieve God's purposes in the world!*

To be more specific . . .

A careful examination of all the prophetic activity on evidence in Acts suggests three broad types:

- **Prophetic evangelism** occurs when someone is enabled by the Spirit to speak and act (in an impromptu manner) into a person's life toward the goal of *evangelizing* them (i.e., bringing them to faith in Christ).

Here are some places in Acts where we find this going on:

- Peter's Pentecostal Sermon (Acts 2)
- The Healing of the Lame Man and Resulting Impromptu Sermons (Acts 3, 4)
- Stephen's Speech and Martyrdom (Acts 7)
- Philip's Preaching and Witnessing Endeavors (Acts 8)
- Peter's Sermon in the Home of Cornelius (Acts 10)
- Various other passages: Acts 9:32-35; 11:19-21; 13:6-12; 14:1-3; 14:8-18; 16:13-14; 19:11-20; and 28:23-21

- Prophetic edification occurs when someone is enabled by the Spirit to speak and act (in an impromptu manner) into a person's life toward the goal of edifying/encouraging them in their walk with Christ.

Here are some places in Acts where we find this going on:

- Simeon's Ministry to Mary and Joseph (Lk. 2)
- The Ananias Incident (Acts 9)
- Some Negative Examples: Ananias and Sapphira; Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 5, 8)
- Barnabas and the Church at Antioch (Acts 11)
- Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos (Acts 18)

- Prophetic equipping occurs when someone is enabled by the Spirit to speak and act (in an impromptu manner) into a person's life toward the goal of *equipping* them in, or preparing them for, their ministry for Christ.

Here are some places in Acts where we find this going on:

- Simeon Again (Lk. 2)
- Ananias (of Damascus) Again (Acts 9)
- Praying for Peter's Release from Prison (Acts 12)
- One Ministry's Support for Another (Acts 11)
- Various other passages: Acts 13:1-4; 13:6-12; 15:22-29; 16:6-10; 20: 22-23; 21:1-6; 21:10-14; 23:11; and 27:21-26.

It really is the case that throughout the book of Acts we find references to three types of Spirit-empowered ministry occurring: *prophetic evangelism*, *edification*, and *equipping*.

Of course, *the earliest Christians also engaged in these ministry activities in a manner that was carefully planned rather than impromptu and spontaneous.*

I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit also inspired and empowered these more structured and methodical ministry engagements as well.

But what we're talking about today is the possibility of a Spirit-empowerment that's "beyond" our ability to predict or control.

Mark it down, folks: there's a certain amount of ambiguity involved in Spirit-empowered ministry!

This is why, according to the apostle Paul, Christian disciples must be careful to . . .

“ . . . keep in step with the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:25)

And, speaking of the apostle Paul . . .

✚ Finally, we should also take note of how the “connection” we’ve been discussing shows up in some of Paul’s letters as well.

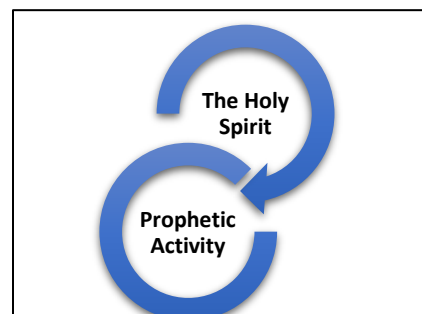
Some passages I have in mind are:

Romans 8:15-16
Galatians 4:6
Romans 8:26-27
1 Corinthians 12-14
Ephesians 5:18-21

These are just a few passages culled from the writings of the Apostle Paul which, along with those we identified in Luke-Acts and those included in our survey of the Old Testament, offer some strong support for the idea that . . .

The Bible as a whole evidences a dynamic connection between empowering encounters with God’s Holy Spirit and the phenomenon of prophetic activity.

We might even say that enabling ordinary Christians (like Ananias) to speak and act into the lives of hurting people on behalf of the risen Christ is . . . something the Spirit of Christ is especially keen to do!



So, if our understanding of Spirit-empowerment is going to be biblically informed, we simply must keep this connection between the Spirit and prophetic capacity in mind!

As I indicated earlier, prophetic capacity isn’t the only way the Spirit empowers Christ’s followers, but it really is a way that enjoys some substantial biblical support!

So, the question I want to ask at this point is this:

What are we going to do with this?

Especially since . . .

This stuff still happens!

In my book, *The Holy Spirit in Mission*, I provide some anecdotal support for the fact that all three of these types of Spirit-empowered ministry dynamics still occur.

I'll share just one story with you today—one that seems to support the idea that prophetic encouragement is something the Holy Spirit is still effecting.

— Dorothy Story —

The value of this story isn't simply that it encourages us to believe that the Holy Spirit is still willing and able to work prophetically through ordinary Christian disciples, it also dramatically illustrates . . .

The Ultimate Effect of Prophetic Activity: A Sense of Encounter with the Risen Christ!

Some of my recent scholarship has focused on the phenomenon of prophetic preaching.

In just a few weeks I'll present a paper at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society being held this year in Denver.

My paper bears the title:

“Revelation as Encounter: Karl Barth, Pneumatological Realism, and Prophetic Preaching”

In that paper I'll explain the Barth connection with prophetic preaching thusly:

As a young pastor-seminarian, I was intrigued to learn that it was a crisis in his preaching ministry which compelled Barth to eventually abandon his liberal training and move in a new direction in his theology. Bernard Ramm explains that the Enlightenment-driven liberal Christianity Barth had been trained in had “reduced preaching to a purely human performance,” its theological presuppositions preventing it from “rising above the level of human discourse.” . . .

. . . But Barth became convinced that preaching not only *could* be more than merely human discourse, it *must* be! In other words, as a young pastor, Barth understood the need for preaching that is genuinely *prophetic* in nature—not simply because the sermon focuses on the end times, or is confrontative in nature, or is based on writings of the Old Testament prophets, or even because it encourages social change, but in the sense that it creates the possibility of a personal *encounter* between the sermon's hearers and a speaking God.

Like Barth, I'm convinced that . . .

There's such a thing as prophetic preaching—Spirit-anointed sermons that are encounter-facilitating in their effect.

But you know what?

I'm also convinced that classroom lectures, well-crafted discussions, mentoring sessions, even hallway conversations can be prophetic in the sense of being encounter-facilitating as well!

So, let's think about this for just a moment: *lectures and learning activities that facilitate for students a sense of encounter with the risen Jesus, and professors occasionally being used by the Spirit to speak and act into their lives in ways that are nothing short of life-story shaping.*

How many of us think our students might benefit from this kind of educational environment?

All that I've said thus far leads me to this:

My Bold Proposal: The Possibility of Some "Prophetic Professing"!

What if, my dear colleagues?

What if the Holy Spirit is still in the business of empowering Christ's followers to speak and act into the lives of people on behalf of the risen Christ in ways that result in them being brought into the faith, encouraged in the faith, equipped to live out the faith?

I'm certainly not suggesting that all of us possess the gift of prophecy or should refer to ourselves as prophets.

To be honest, I've never had a good experience with anyone who did either of these things!

That said, what if?

What if it's possible for all of us to be more Ananias-like in the way we live out our Christian lives?

What if it's possible for us learn to take seriously those strong promptings we sometimes have to minister grace and truth into the lives of our students, trusting that it's the Spirit of Christ speaking and acting through us?

OK, But How?

Of course, you may be thinking that this is all still a bit vague.

Perhaps you're wondering how exactly one "leans in" to an Ananias-like way of living out one's life with God.

While I can't be as detailed as I'd like, I'll point out that, according to Karl Barth, the key to any kind of ministry partnership with God is prayer.

He wrote:

"It is prayer that puts us in rapport with God and permits us to collaborate with him."
– Karl Barth

Building on Barth, I want to suggest that there's a particular kind of praying that's crucial when it comes to the kind of Spirit-empowerment we're talking about today:

We must be careful to pray in . . . "in the Spirit."

According to the NT, there's a special kind of prayer that seems to involve the Holy Spirit somehow or another praying . . . through us!

We read about this type of prayer in several places:

Romans 8:26-27
Ephesians 6:18
Jude 1:20

and perhaps also in . . .

(1 Corinthians 14:15)

Of course, different theological and ecclesiastical traditions possess different takes on what praying in the Spirit involves.

I won't get into that discussion here since to do so would serve to divide rather than unite us as a faculty.

Instead, my encouragement to all of us today is this:

Just do it! However you understand what it means to pray "in the Spirit," *actually do it!*

Why is this so important?

For what it's worth, my experience over several decades of preaching, teaching, counseling has been that there's a *discernible correlation* between my spending time praying in the Spirit and: (1) an *increased degree of creativity in my ministry preparation*; as well as (2) an *increased likelihood that the Spirit of Christ might actually speak and act through me in the ministry moment*.

Now, since this encouragement for all of us to spend some time each day of our lives praying in the Spirit is purely anecdotal, you're free to *take with a grain of salt*.

On the other hand, you're also free to *experiment with it*, to, as Psalms 34:8 says, "*Taste and see*" for yourselves whether such a prayer discipline might actually result in some increased Spirit-empowerment in your life as a Christian professor.

CONCLUSION

So, was this presentation "*beyond*" enough for you?

Was it *too beyond*, or *just enough to be challenging in a good way*?

I want to get to some Q&A but will leave you with this:

- We can do this, folks, and . . . it doesn't have to be weird!
- We can go ***beyond*** just talking about Spirit-empowerment!
- ***We can experience an increased degree of creativity in our teaching prep!***
- ***We can, with the help of the Spirit, speak and act into our students' lives in evangelizing, edifying, equipping, encounter-facilitating ways!***

and, very important is the reminder that . . .

- ***We can do this, being ever mindful of our motives and of the need to always be faithful to the message and manner of Jesus as presented in sacred Scripture!***

You "feel" me today, don't you?

Thanks for listening!

Q&A