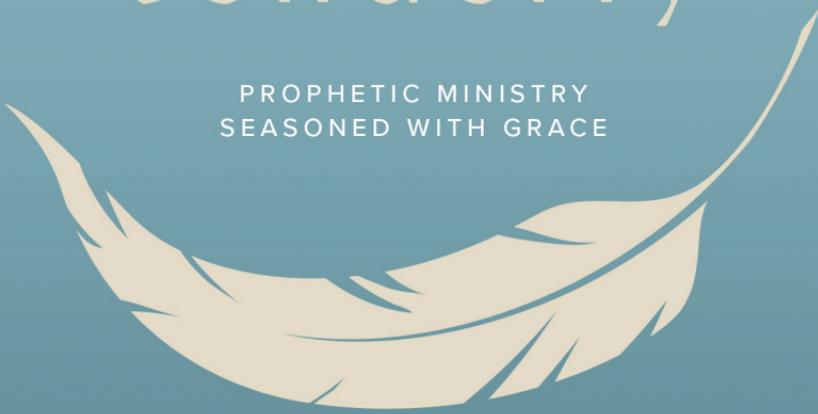


"No one could be more perfectly gifted to teach us about prophetic ministry."

—Shane L. Bishop



Speak tenderly

PROPHETIC MINISTRY
SEASONED WITH GRACE



ivan filby

Praise for *Speak Tenderly*

There is a holy winsomeness hardwired into Ivan Filby. It flows generously from his person, his writing and his ministry. No one could be more perfectly gifted to teach us about prophetic ministry.

—Shane L. Bishop, Senior Pastor
Christ Church, Fairview Heights, Illinois (USA)

Ivan's book is a little gem for Christian ministry. His passion for Christ and the church is evident throughout. His writing is humorous, insightful, practical, and, most importantly, grounded in biblical teaching. This is a book I will return to and share with friends.

—Rev. Des Curtis, St. Marks South
Dublin, Ireland

This is a just-in-time book, providing thoughtful content rooted in Scripture, reason, and substantial life experience. An easy read for individual reflection or group study that provides context for confidence that we are invited to participate with the Holy Spirit on a journey toward the Father.

—Norman D. Hall, EdD, President
Simpson University, Redding, California

Speak Tenderly is an Olympic-size swimming pool of spirituality, which Ivan invites us to dive into. Each time we prepare to jump, Ivan is there alongside us, giving us advice and encouragement. And then, when we take the plunge, we find him there in the pool to swim a few spiritual lengths with us as he mixes engaging, inspiring personal anecdotes with practical exercises and scriptural insight.

—Mike Elms, Chair Christian Publishing and Outreach
Tonbridge, Kent, United Kingdom

Many who lay aside prophetic ministry as a divisive practice should listen to the deeply moving insights of this book. The Holy Spirit is active and desires a natural connection with us. And the human heart deeply desires to be known by God. In his writing, Dr. Filby approaches this authentic work of God with tenderness and grace that is clearly consistent with the heart of God for people.

—Rev. Kevin Mannoia, PhD
Founder, Wesleyan Holiness Connection
Former Bishop, Free Methodist Church
Former President, National Association of Evangelicals, USA

Through Ivan's stories, scriptural insights, and thought-provoking questions, you will be encouraged and inspired to actively listen to the one who longs to speak to you.

—Jerry Coleman, Director of
Francis Asbury Society International
Asbury, USA

Ivan combines fascinating stories of the way God has given him prophetic words with a clear explanation of the relevant biblical passages undergirding all prophecy. The chapters unfold with gentle humour and self-effacing honesty. It is hard to imagine Christians reading this and not being excited by how God can give them prophetic words too.

—Andy Peck, host of The Leadership Show
Premier Christian Radio, United Kingdom

Biblically accurate. Theologically robust. Really practical. And exciting! Ivan has done a masterful job in providing a how-to guide for those wanting to share prophetically without producing something trite or simplistic.

—Rev Gary Gibbs, National Director, REACH,
Elim Pentecostal Churches, United Kingdom

Speak tenderly

PROPHETIC MINISTRY
SEASONED WITH GRACE



ivan filby

To Kathie, Sam, and Katie

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FOREWORD

There I was, standing in a sea of people engaged in worship, when the stranger standing next to me leaned over to say, “I have a prophetic word for you when you’re ready to hear it.”

Well, of course, I wanted to hear it! I wanted to hear every word he had to share. But the room was turned toward heaven, so I waited. As soon as the session concluded I turned and asked what this person might have heard on my behalf. His one-sentence reply rocked me. It would take pages to explain just how but suffice it to say that it was so remarkably unique to my life and relationship with God that there was no way it could have been a random guess. This word was a direct hit, and I immediately sensed myself as “seen” by God. I count it as one of the more profound and encouraging moments of my life in Christ.

The man who shared that word with me was Ivan Filby. Before that day, I had no idea who he was (sorry, Ivan!), but since then I’ve developed a deep appreciation for his spiritual sensitivity. Ivan has such humble and winsome confidence in

the power of the Holy Spirit to speak in and through him like few others I've known.

Don't you long for that same grace? Aren't you hungry to hear from God? If so, I encourage you to go exploring, believing that God shows things to people he loves (and God loves us!). Your effort will be worth it. The prophetic gift connects us with the values of heaven. It changes our perspective. It isn't always comfortable, but as we practice the prophetic voice and test it against Scripture, we discover that our thinking matures. Which I suspect is the whole point. Prophecy is one way I can practice the mind of Christ as I lean into my own sanctification.

If you have resolved to grow spiritually this year, I encourage you to eagerly desire the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 15:1). Do what it takes to learn the voice of God and trust that as he finds you faithful, you will begin to develop hungers for specific areas where God is working—in a life or maybe a whole geographic region. And you will communicate the love of God in a more compelling way than you've ever done before.

If you've picked up this book, you're on your way to that grand spiritual adventure. In Ivan Filby, you have a marvelously well-seasoned guide for this journey. Soak it all in, and trust God to use you to welcome and advance his kingdom on earth.

—Carolyn Moore

Author of *Supernatural* and *Encounter the Spirit*

INTRODUCTION

“What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived”—
the things God has prepared for those who
love him—
these are the things God has revealed to us by
his Spirit.

—1 Corinthians 2:9b–10a

Have you ever wanted to do something new, but didn't know where to start? I've felt like that many times. I vividly recall when my parents gave my brother, Alan, and me our first kites. He was a year older than I, so he got the red kite, and I settled for the green one. We couldn't wait to try them out. We ran to the playing fields near our terraced home with our parents' permission. We imagined

our kites swooping high in the sky. We shared the giddy excitement of children expecting fun and adventure.

Half an hour later, we plodded home, failures. We thought anyone could fly a kite; it said so on the packaging—"easy to fly." Despite our running, shouting, and mutual blame-throwing, our kites bounced along the ground. Not even we, rather expert fibbers, thought we could convince our parents we had a successful day.

A week later, we returned, this time with an older friend. He seemed to know what he was doing. First, he licked his fingers and held them up in the air.

"Why are you doing that?" I asked.

"So I know which way the wind is blowing," he replied.

I licked my fingers and held them up too. Sure enough, one side of my fingers felt colder than the other. I now knew the direction of the wind. I knew we needed the wind to fly our kites, but I still needed to learn why the direction of the wind was important.

"Run into the wind," my friend told me, "or you'll never get your kite into the air."

It was as simple as that: we ran into the wind, and our red and green kites whooshed into the sky. We were now kite-flyers.

Some fifty years later, as I scan the soars and crashes of my life, I see this episode as metaphorical. Manufacturers

built my kite with a singular purpose: to fly. Similarly, God lovingly created me with one goal: to love him and respond to his good plans for my life. Yet, like my first kite-flying attempts, I've often felt confused, unsure of why things are not working out as I had hoped, and in need of a word of comfort, clarity, or instruction. I'm sure you've experienced this confusion too.

Since becoming a Jesus-follower in 1980, I have never doubted God has good plans for me. Like many, I am encouraged by Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Yet, if I'm honest, I confess that there are times when I can make neither head nor tail of these plans. Try as I might, I can't figure out what God is doing or how I should respond. Theologians, ministers, and laypeople have wrestled with these thoughts throughout the ages. If we are honest, we all grapple with these questions to a greater or lesser extent. And, as much as we want simple answers, an easy-to-follow, step-by-step assembly guide to life eludes us. *What about the Bible?* I hear you say. *Isn't that our guide?* Well, yes and no. The Bible gives us great counsel and wisdom. It is a God-breathed compilation of histories, poetry, prophecy, biographies, letters, and apocalyptic revelations. And, as Paul writes, Scripture “is useful

1

Prophetic Ministry in the Life of Jesus

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

—Psalm 139:1

Prophetic ministry is a ministry in which the Holy Spirit livestreams through us one or more of the spiritual gifts of prophecy, words of knowledge, words of wisdom, or spiritual discernment. These are four of the Holy Spirit's gifts that the apostle Paul includes in his list of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10:

To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by

means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

While I will focus more on prophecy, words of wisdom, and knowledge, you will see how prophetic ministry can release other spiritual gifts such as healing, miracles, teaching, leadership, and generosity. We see this clearly in Jesus's ministry.

Prophetic Ministry in the Life of Jesus

Jesus's prophetic ministry clearly illustrates how a simple word can awaken people's hearts and make way for remarkable transformation. Take, for example, Jesus's first encounter with Nathanael in John 1:43–51:

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and

told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.”

Nathanael’s first impression of Jesus was not positive. Most biblical scholars agree that Nazareth, a region of Galilee, was held in low esteem by many first-century Jews. Nathanael clearly expresses this view: “Nazareth!

Can anything good come from there?” (v. 46). However, Nathanael’s orientation to Jesus is turned on its head when Jesus livestreams two words of knowledge. The first concerned Nathanael’s character: “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit” (v. 47). The second identifies Nathanael’s whereabouts before Philip calls him: “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you” (v. 48b).

We can learn much from Nathanael’s response. It’s interesting, for example, that Nathanael doesn’t respond by saying, “How do you know that *about* me?” Instead, he says, “How do you know me?” (v. 48a). There’s a world of difference between knowing about someone and intimately knowing them. Prophetic ministry powerfully communicates that God knows and loves us.

It’s also interesting that Nathanael doesn’t rush around town telling people the new prophet thinks he’s hot property. Not at all. Nathanael’s response is not a navel-gazing turning in on himself, but a Jesus-gazing turning to God in worship: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel” (v. 49).

Nathanael experienced what many of us know. When we feel known and loved by God, we can lower our emotional defenses, look outward, and see God in new

and profound ways. We ought not to be surprised that Nathanael responds to Jesus's word of knowledge with a recognition that Jesus is the Son of God.

It's worth noting that Jesus doesn't have to say much to Nathanael for him to feel known. Jesus doesn't need to rehearse all the critical facts of Nathanael's life, his birth date, where he lived, or the name of his first donkey. All that is needed are two short sentences about Nathanael's character and a fig tree. In prophetic ministry, words, pictures, or actions are the vehicles the Holy Spirit uses to minister deeply to us. And, because of the Holy Spirit's ministry, we feel known by God. The apostle Paul comments on this deep Spirit-to-spirit knowing in Romans 8:16 when he writes: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

We must be careful if we think prophetic ministry is only about words, pictures, or actions. What we communicate is essential, but more crucial is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. In prophetic ministry, the Holy Spirit works at a depth often hidden from the minister and the person receiving prayer. During ministry time, the Holy Spirit shakes the kaleidoscopic fragments of our lives into a beautiful mosaic with Jesus at its center. It's no wonder that a timely prophetic word or insight often results in intimate worship experiences.

Jesus's encounter with Nathanael has even more to teach us. Did you notice that Nathanael's worship leads to further revelation? Jesus responds to Nathanael's exclamation—"you are the Son of God" (v. 49)—with a proclamation that Nathanael would "see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man" (v. 51).

As you mature in prophetic ministry, you'll see this four-step pattern often repeated:

1. God livestreams a few words, maybe a picture, for you to share with someone;
2. Even though you only communicate a few words, the Holy Spirit deeply ministers to the person such that the listener feels known by God. The Holy Spirit's ministry is often beautiful and overwhelming. Tears are not uncommon;
3. Intimacy with the Holy Spirit leads us to worship; and
4. Worship leads to more revelation.

If you minister prophetically, look for additional revelation following a worshipful response. Similarly, if you have received a prophetic insight that moves you to worship, ask the Lord if he has anything else to share. He might well do.

Prophetic Ministry at the Well

A second example is helpful. Let's look at Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman beside Jacob's well at Sychar (John 4:7–42). Here's the context: Jesus passes through Samaria on his way from Judea to Galilee. He's tired and hungry, and while his disciples head into town to buy food, he sits beside Jacob's well to rest. A local woman turns up at an unusual time to draw water and carry it home in the heat of the noonday sun. He's thirsty and asks the woman for water. What follows is a fascinating conversation about living water and proper worship.

Unexpectedly, there's a dramatic shift in the conversation. Jesus asks the woman to go and call her husband and return to continue the discussion. She admits she is not married, and Jesus gives her a word of knowledge containing just three facts: (1) you are correct; you have no husband, (2) you've had five previous husbands, and (3) the man with whom you currently live is not your husband.

The conversation continues. What happens next is fascinating and instructive. Let's read John 4:28–29 together: “Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?’” Isn't it fascinating that Jesus only communicates three facts?

Still, the woman declares that Jesus told her *everything* she ever did.

After ministry time, someone occasionally says, “You read my mail.” A person communicating words of knowledge might share only one fact, sometimes two or three, but rarely more, but enough for the person to feel *known* by God. But that’s hardly reading their mail. If someone read your mail, they’d know what’s on your bank statement, the local pizza company’s special offers, and the most recent news from your local charities. People sometimes assume that the minister knows everything about them because the Holy Spirit livestreams a snippet of information. Rest assured; this is not the case. The Holy Spirit is not in the gotcha business, trying to expose or shame people. Instead, the Holy Spirit is in the I’ve-got-something-better-for-you business. The Spirit works alongside the Father and the Son on your healing, holiness, and wholeness so that you, in turn, can minister his love and power more effectively to others.

Interestingly, the prophetic livestream with the Samaritan woman flows during a random conversation; not in a synagogue, but during an everyday task. Jesus doesn’t start the conversation with, “Hey, woman, I know a ton of stuff about you.” No, he starts having a conversation with her about water. Perhaps the Holy Spirit didn’t

livestream information about her marital history until well into the conversation. We don't know for sure, but this is often how prophetic ministry works. What starts as small talk becomes supercharged with possibilities as the Holy Spirit joins in.

Jesus's encounter with the woman at the well has much more to teach us about prophetic ministry. The Samaritan woman turns up at Jacob's well at noon, an unusual time for carrying heavy water jugs. We can speculate why she comes at this time of day, but we don't know for sure. I've discovered that noticing a person's unusual word choices, actions, or even clothing sensitizes me to the possibility that the Holy Spirit might want to communicate something to them. Suppose the number of buttons on someone's coat sleeve, the color of their glasses, scuffs on shoes, or how they walk catches my eye. In that case, I'll often ask the Holy Spirit if what I see is a ministry launching point.

For example, I was ministering in Delft, a beautiful old city in the Netherlands, when the Spirit drew my attention to one woman's eyes. When I prayed with her, I had the impression that I should tell her, "God has seen how you use your eyes to attract men, and he will now use them to draw people to himself." I wanted to know how the word might be meaningful. I learned later that this woman was a prostitute working in the windows in

the Amsterdam Red Light district, where she used eye contact to attract customers. God knew how significant the woman's eyes were to her trade, and he spoke to her powerfully, offering her a way to redirect her life. Had the Spirit not drawn my attention to her eyes, I may have missed this ministry opportunity.

Jesus notices the woman drawing water at an unusual time, and begins his conversation using water as the theme. He asks, "Will you give me a drink?" (v. 7).

The conversation goes a little deeper: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water" (v. 10).

Then, deeper still: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (vv. 13-14).

These are mind-boggling revelations, but they leave the woman unchanged. Isn't that interesting? Jesus is, without question, the best teacher who has ever walked on earth. He's a better teacher than the best-selling authors we all love; better than every megachurch pastor; better than Luther, Calvin, and Wesley combined. He's certainly a better teacher than you or I. Yet, the woman doesn't

comment on his teaching at all. She remembers Jesus's prophetic insight: "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did" (v. 29).

Now let's consider the impact of Jesus's prophetic ministry to this woman on her community. John 4:39-41 is fascinating: "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers."

Jesus's words of knowledge about the woman's domestic relationships convince the woman about Jesus. Her testimony convinces many in the Samaritan community to believe in him and inspires them to invite Jesus to stay to get to know him better. Jesus stays with them for two additional days. As people listen to Jesus, many more put their faith in him.

Now, let's look at verse 42: "They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'"

All this happened because Jesus livestreamed three facts to a random woman. His prophetic insight opened the woman's heart. She told her community about her

encounter with Jesus. Because of her testimony, her community visited with Jesus and invited him to stay. It was only then that the Samaritan community listened to Jesus's teaching. Prophetic insights open conversations and ministry opportunities that otherwise would never have happened.

You might well ask what was remarkable about these insights. Jesus, after all, was the Son of God, and God, by his very nature, would know all this stuff, wouldn't he? That would be true had Jesus not voluntarily emptied himself of his God-nature and taken on the limitations of humanity (Phil. 2:6-8). We glimpse these limitations during Jesus's betrayal in the garden. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. When the crowd, armed with swords and clubs, steps forward to seize Jesus, one of Jesus's companions retaliates, cutting off the high priest's servant's ear. Jesus responds, constrained by his human limitations, setting aside what he could have done: "Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?'" (Matt. 26:52-54).

I have yet to learn how many angels are in one legion, let alone twelve. If one standard Roman legion had

approximately four thousand foot soldiers, we might speculate that there are almost fifty thousand angels in twelve. But however many there are, we know there would be enough to take down the Romans, the chief priests, elders, the armed mob, and the whole kit and caboodle. Had Jesus asked, his Father would have sent these reinforcements. But Jesus didn't ask. He lived his life constrained by the human limitations that constrain us all.

Here's the point: Jesus's divinity didn't give him any shortcuts in prophetic ministry. He had to watch what the Father was doing and listen to the Spirit's voice, just like you and I. For sure, his sinlessness would have made it easier to see and hear, but he got no other breaks. Every prophetic insight Jesus gave was livestreamed through fellowship with the Holy Spirit. He invites us to do the same.

The Cry of Your Heart

Prophetic ministry can help a person feel known by God—a reality as wonderful today as it was in New Testament times. For example, in 1985, I lived in Bourneville, a suburb of the city of Birmingham in England, best known for being the headquarters of the chocolate manufacturer Cadbury. If you are a chocolate-lover, this is a fantastic place to live, with chocolate aromas regularly wafting over the village.

One evening I was working on my PhD dissertation, when my friend David's face kept popping into my mind. I kept trying to concentrate on my academic writing, but I could not get David's face out of my mind's eye. I saved my document, put down my books, and asked the Lord how I should pray for David. Instantly, a thought popped into my mind. I had to tell David: *The Lord has heard the cry of your heart and is answering you right now.* David lived a mile or so away in the next village. I put on my shoes, grabbed my coat and Bible, and started walking to his home.

David was new to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The first time I visited his home, I came with a group of young people from his church, where he served as an elder. David knew the gang of teens and twentysomethings accompanying me; I was the only stranger. During the evening, Emily, one of the teenage girls, told the group about her chronic head and neck pains. My friend Martin asked me to pray for her healing. I had hardly begun to pray, when the Holy Spirit came on Emily so powerfully that she fell backward onto the living room carpet. None of us had expected this to happen. Emily was stunned, maybe literally, by the power of God. She quickly stood up, telling everyone that the headache and neck pain she had experienced to a greater or lesser extent for several months had instantly gone.

Emily was ecstatic, but the rest of the room went quiet. This unexpected healing put David in a difficult position. He was the elder of a cessationist church that believed the gifts of the Holy Spirit had passed away with the apostles. Many people hold this theological position. It's a much harder position to maintain when the Holy Spirit heals one of your daughter's friends three feet in front of you in your living room.

David faced a dilemma. Either he had to discount Emily's healing (which Emily, rather inconveniently, kept insisting was real), or he had to change his theological position. To his credit, he changed his theology and was soon ministering in the Spirit's power himself. David and I became good friends.

It took me twenty minutes or so to walk to his house. During that time, I asked the Lord for more information on the "cry" of David's heart. Silence. Nada. Zilch! When I knocked on his door, I still had no idea what was disturbing David.

David opened his front door, smiled, and said in his rather proper English accent, "Ivan! Jolly good to see you. Do come in." David made us two cups of tea, and we chatted in his lounge. During our catch-up conversation, I told him about the impression the Holy Spirit had given me earlier that evening.

“I have no idea what this means, David,” I said, “but I keep getting the impression I must tell you that ‘The Lord has heard the cry of your heart and is answering you right now.’ Does that mean anything to you?”

David let out a very audible sigh of relief. He beamed, “That’s a huge answer to prayer.” But my friend remained silent on the significance of those words.

A year or so later, when we were sipping tea, this time in his kitchen, David told me more. “Ivan, do you remember when you called around one evening last year to let me know the impression you had? You know, when you told me the Lord had heard the cry of my heart? Let me tell you about it. I was due to have minor surgery under a full anesthetic later that week. I’d read that when people regain consciousness after an anesthetic, they sometimes curse and say all sorts of things they regret. Before I knew Jesus, I cursed like a trooper. I was worried I’d say terrible things as the anesthetic wore off and ruin my Christian testimony. As silly as it might seem, I was more worried about what I might say in the recovery room than about the surgery itself. When you told me that ‘the Lord had heard the cry of my heart and was answering me right now,’ a huge wave of peace flooded me. I knew God had heard my prayer.”

Fast-forward five years to 1990. I was now living in Dublin, Ireland, and had only been attending Maranatha

Christian Fellowship for just a few weeks. On Easter Sunday, just as the service was closing, Pastor Mark Habgood stood up. He announced that he believed the Holy Spirit wanted to do more that day, and invited anyone who wanted prayer to remain for a time of ministry. Remarkably, most of the hundred or so church members stayed, probably leading to some burnt Sunday lunches. These people were so hungry for the Holy Spirit. To my surprise, Pastor Mark said, “I want to spend time praying with everyone who has stayed for ministry.” He paused and continued, “Ivan Filby will join me.” His invitation was unplanned. I was a recent addition to the congregation; I certainly hadn’t expected an invitation to join the pastor in a time of ministry. I walked to the front of the auditorium, and we began our ministry time.

An hour later, we must have prayed and given prophetic words to fifty or sixty people, maybe more. As our ministry time was closing, I noticed the musicians who had played quietly in the background for the last hour. I had met the guitarists before, but this was the first time I had seen the keyboard player. As I prayed for the person in front of me, the Holy Spirit livestreamed a brief message for the keyboardist. I had the strongest impression I needed to tell her: *God has heard the cry of your heart and is answering you right now.*

I gave the final guy I was praying with some post-ministry advice, then approached the now sore-fingered musician. I shared my prophetic impression with her while she continued to play, and then walked away to rejoin Pastor Mark. I didn't give this prophetic message much thought, except to wonder whether the keyboard player had some surgery scheduled soon. It was just one of many prophetic words I'd shared during the ministry time.

I didn't know that the keyboard player had just returned from six weeks in San Francisco. During that time, the Lord repeatedly told her: *Prepare for marriage*. This impression made no sense to her as she wasn't dating. During every prayer time, the Holy Spirit gave her the same notion: *Prepare for marriage*. The impression increased when she returned to Dublin and visited her prayer spot on Killiney Hill. She was confused and frustrated. "God," she pleaded, "either show me whom you are leading me to or quit bringing up the subject."

When I gave her the prophetic message, *God has heard the cry of your heart and is answering you right now*, she took one look at me and knew I would be her husband! She even went home and wrote my name in her journal, confident that God was bringing us together. I, of course, knew none of this at all.

However, a few days later, we were both invited for dinner by a group of mutual friends. We chatted and arranged to meet for coffee later in the week. Kathie and I married fifteen months later. God is good.

While these stories are very different, they share some commonalities. I had the same prophetic message for both David and Kathie: *God has heard the cry of your heart and is answering you right now.* In both instances, I was unaware of their concerns. All I knew was that God had heard the cry of each person's heart and wanted them to know he was answering them at that very moment. I left each ministry experience none the wiser about the significance of the message. David didn't tell me about his concern for a full twelve months. It took Kathie several months before she showed me her journal entry, naming me as her future husband. Yet, in both cases, God did something remarkable. A deep peace flooded David's soul when I shared my impression with him. And what can I say? Kathie fell in love with me when I gave her the same message! That was the most life-changing and expensive prophetic word I have ever given!

Interestingly, neither prophetic message included any convincing personal information. If anything, the insights seemed rather vague, a message I might have

given to anyone. Nevertheless, God used the remarkable timing of each word to convince David and Kathie that he knew them.

This Is Me

One of our deepest needs as humans is to be known. Someone who cheers us on without knowing us is a fan. And, while fans might be fun, they come and go. What we want, what we crave, is to be known, warts and all, and still loved unconditionally.

One of the consequences of sin is that we hide. As soon as Adam and Eve recognized they had rebelled from God, they hid, first from each other and then from God (Genesis 3:7–8). The mercilessness of sin is that our longing to be fully known and loved has not lessened, but our sin-derived sense that we are inadequate, or never enough, results in us hiding from the very ones we want to know and love us the very most.

Jesus is good news. He still speaks tender words of grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope to our troubled souls. He invites us to do the same.

Two of the biggest-selling songs in recent years are about our desire to be authentically known: “This Is Me” from *The Greatest Showman* and Lauren Daigle’s “You Say.”

People have downloaded these songs hundreds of millions of times. The words of an earlier, more enduring songwriter are even more helpful in our quest. Consider David's lyrics from his song about being known by God. We've lost the original melody, but we can still find the lyrics in the first few verses of Psalm 139. Read them aloud with me:

You have searched me, LORD,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you, LORD, know it completely.
You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain. (vv. 1-6)

It's worth pausing here to count the number of times words like *know*, *searched*, *perceive*, *familiar*, or *discern* are used in this passage. I counted seven. David is not referring to an "I've got eyes in the back of my head; stop messing around, class," old schoolteacher type of knowing. No, David's talking about a loving parent celebrating every

second of their child's life. Gazing lovingly into the child's face, our heavenly Father whispers, "I'm here for you, I love you, and I'll never leave you."

Only as we receive this love do we understand who we really are. Only then can we authentically say, *This is me*. Only then do we dare finish David's song:

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. (vv. 23–24)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Meditate on Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Think back over your life. How have you seen the Lord guiding you and leading you? On a scale of 1–10, how confident are you that God has good things for you in the future? Be honest. Invite God into this conversation, letting him know your hopes and fears.

2. In John 1:46, we see Nathanael stating: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" What do people say

about your city, town, or village? Sit quietly and ask the Lord what he feels about your town. Write any impressions that come to you over the next twenty-four hours and use them as a prayer focus.

3. Can you identify other examples from Scripture where Jesus used prophetic ministry to reveal God's heart? Who was Jesus talking to? What happened?

4. Read Psalm 139. What have been the times in your life when you most profoundly experienced that God knew and loved you? What happened? How did God communicate his love for you?

5. Reread Psalm 139, paying attention to your emotions as you read. What do you feel as you read this psalm? You may possibly feel overwhelmed with joy, or maybe you feel angry if, at times, it appears as if God has not been present. Perhaps you feel ashamed or hopeful. Name your emotions and tell God how you feel in a prayer.



The apostle Paul exhorts the church to “eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of prophecy” (1 Cor. 14:1). Yet many of us may not know how to discern what the Lord is saying or know how to communicate the Spirit’s insights in safe and helpful ways. Ivan Filby provides insights from more than forty years of prophetic ministry in this compelling, humorous, and valuable book. These include helpful and safe ways to begin prophesying, testing, and discerning our perceptions and strategies to effectively communicate these insights to others. God uses prophetic ministry to speak tenderly to our hearts and invites you to join him in this beautiful work.



Ivan Filby is the president and CEO of Seedbed Inc. and is an ordained minister in the Free Methodist Church in the UK and Ireland. Before his work at Seedbed, Ivan had a distinguished career in higher education, working as a professor of management, business school dean, and university president. Ivan holds a PhD in management from Aston University in England and an MA in evangelism studies from Cliff College. Ivan has taught people how to minister prophetically on five continents for forty years. He is married to Kathie and they have two grown children.



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