

# How To Be An Effective Prophet

It's that time of year when we think about our nation and how to create "a more perfect union." So on Sunday, we talked about how we can be effective change agents in America.

1. Warm-up Question: What's something you deeply appreciate about our country?
2. The events of the past couple months have emphasized how the legacy of slavery and racism still deeply affect our nation and have caused many of us to say, "We need change now!" Historically, God has created change by raising up prophets. By definition, a prophet is someone who delivers a message from God that's uncomfortable to hear in hopes of creating positive change.
  - a. In the Old Testament, prophets were often hated. They spent a lot of time criticizing their nation. Why? Were they unpatriotic? What motivated them?
  - b. Do you think God wants to raise up prophets to challenge our nation? Why or why not?
3. On Sunday we explored three biblical lessons for how we can be effective prophets in our own nation. **Lesson No. 1: Prophets choose to feel the pain of those who suffer, rather than living in denial.** We all have strong pain-avoidance instincts. Jeff told about a time he came across a photo of a starving Ethiopian child while reading the newspaper at lunch. His first impulse was to quickly turn the page. His attitude was, "I don't want to think about that now." In reply, Jeff heard God saying, "When will you find time to think about it?"
  - a. Can you think of a time in your life when God grabbed your attention and awakened you to suffering that you had previously been oblivious to?
  - b. What keeps us from empathetically feeling the suffering of others?
  - c. The video of George Floyd's death impacted many of us the same way the photo of the starving child impacted Jeff. Witnessing such raw suffering penetrated our hearts and awakened outrage. How did the George Floyd video affect you?
  - d. Amos was a farmer who lived at a time of great prosperity in Israel. As Israel prospered, the rich kept getting richer and the poor kept getting poorer. Amos couldn't keep looking away. He became a champion for the poor. Read Amos 8:1-6, then discuss the following questions: How do you imagine Amos became so passionate about the poor? What may have motivated him? How do you think prosperous Israelites viewed Amos?
  - e. The Bible says, "Wisdom that is from above is . . . easy to be entreated." James 3:17. Racism is a raw issue in America. It's hard to discuss it without becoming defensive. What do you think it means to be "easy to be entreated"? What does it look like to discuss racism in a way that's "easy to be entreated"?

- f. Jeff shared the following statistics: Black Americans are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by the police than white Americans. Black Americans are 3 times more likely to die of COVID than white Americans. People of color represent half of all uninsured Americans. Black babies are twice as likely to die in their first year as white babies. The average white family has 10 times the net worth of the average Black family. America has a greater wealth gap than South Africa did during apartheid. When you hear these statistics, what thoughts or feelings arise within you?
4. Being an effective prophet always begins with empathy. Empathy, in turn, creates an urgency for action. So we do something – maybe march in a protest or contact our elected leaders to demand change or send money to a candidate who’s saying the right things. But then nothing much happens, and we get discouraged. That brings us to the next great lesson for being an effective prophet. **Lesson No. 2 – Prophets must understand the concept of “iterative change.”**
- a. SmartSheet.com defines “iterative change” as “a process of continuous improvement. The goal of iteration is to get closer to the solution with each repetition. The end of each iteration becomes the starting point for the next. The iterative process relies on repeated cycles of adjustments.” Can you think of an example from your own life when you’ve experienced iterative change?
- b. What insights does the concept of “iterative change” offer when we are seeking to root out something like systemic racism from American culture?
- c. Jeff reminded us that the prophet Elijah was transported to heaven without dying. His spirit lived on in his understudy Elisha, then eventually Elijah himself returned in the form of John the Baptist (Matthew. 11:14). Elijah also appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, and Elijah will appear again at the end of the age (Revelation 11:4-6). As Jeff said, “Poor Elijah gets no rest.” Everything in the Bible is meant to teach us something. What do you think we’re supposed to learn from the repeated incarnations of Elijah the prophet?
- d. How long do you think it will take to eradicate racism from American culture?
5. As discussed above, being a prophet requires an openness to empathetic pain and a willingness to patiently endure through the long process of intergenerational change. So, where does a prophet find the strength to endure? **Lesson No. 3 – Prophets are fueled by a compelling vision of the future.**
- a. See two speech excerpts on p. 3 and discuss the questions there.
- b. Read Isaiah 11:6-10. How is King’s vision similar to Isaiah’s? Do you find this vision compelling? Why or why not? Do you think the vision is achievable? If so, when and how?
- c. How hopeful are you that we can take a real leap forward in the struggle against racism at this particular moment in time? How are you helping make it happen?

## **Excerpt from Dr. King's speech at the 1963 March on Washington**

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair . . . .

Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It's a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a *dream* today!

**Discussion:** When King spoke these words, how long do you think he thought it would take for his dream to be realized?

## **Excerpt from Dr. King's Speech on April 3, 1968 (the night before his assassination)**

"We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. . . . I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land."

**Discussion:** Why do you think King said this? What do you think was going on in his heart and mind?