

PROPHECY & THE BEST

Week #2 of a 3-Week Series inspired by the Catherine Ponder Book, "Open Your Mind to Receive"
With Rev. Richard Maraj
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In 1965, Dr. Robert Rosenthal led a now famous study on expectations theory. And it was held in a San Francisco school district where they had three teachers come in and shared with them that they were the top teachers in each of their grades. And, as a reward, they would get 30 of the top students in their respective grades. They were supposed to teach the same way, but they expected higher grades because they were so exceptional, and so were the students.

So, at the end of the year, it turned out that they had the highest grades ... not only in their school, but the entire school district. And so, they were celebrating. They were just overwhelmed and, at some level, not surprised.

And so, the principal brought them in and said, *"Well, there's something we just need to tell you. And that is that those 30 students -- they weren't exceptional. They were just chosen by random."*

And they were a little surprised, but they thought, *"Well, we're really good teachers, so that would explain that."*

And they said, *"Well, we've got something else we need to tell you, and that you were also chosen by random."*

And so: same students, same teachers, same curriculum, but a huge level of difference ... and all centered around the level of expectation of what the teachers expected of the students: how they saw them; how they treated them; and how they thought about themselves and treated and expected from themselves, as well. And the study really shows that higher degrees of expectations can produce higher levels of results.

And so, my question for all of us is: How well do you use the power of expectation in your life? Like, when you woke up this morning, what kind of day were you expecting to have? What kind of week are you expecting to have? What kind of life are you expecting to have? What kind of career are you expecting to have? What kind of levels of health and energy are you expecting to have?

You know, sometimes I think we unconsciously project out expectations that aren't very positive. Like, have you ever woke up and thought, *"This is going to be a hard day"*? Or, have you ever woke up and thought, *"This is going to be a rough week"*?

Expectations -- if used consciously -- can improve, can expand, and supercharge our lives with faith, enthusiasm, excitement and energy. And it can also open ourselves to a more prosperous life.

Today, we are in Week #2 of a three-week series on prosperity, looking at the book by Catherine Ponder called "Open Your Mind to Receive." We've been exploring the spiritual laws of prosperity and the importance of opening our minds to the good that life has available to us and the abundance that is within our grasp.

And so, Week #1 we looked at three of the principles of prosperity.

And the number one is giving. Jesus said, *"Give and you shall receive."* Giving is the activating force that begins the flow of movement, of abundance and goodness in our lives. And she says we need to give in three areas.

First, we need to give to God -- to tithe, 10%, to give back to our Source to keep that flow moving. And it needs to be systematic, and it needs to be a certain portion that is done on a regular basis. It's not just something we do once; it is an ongoing thing to keep that flow moving in our lives.

The second one is to give to ourselves -- that we need to give in a way that we become a greater channel of light and love. Taking care of our body temple -- good self-care -- is an important thing. Giving time for us to also nurture our soul and our spirit with meditation and prayer and spiritual study.

And also to give to others -- to be compassionate and kind; to be in service; and encouraging to others, as well.

The second thing is to be willing to be a good receiver. Sometimes we have a harder time receiving, and we need to practice. Sometimes we have a hard time taking a compliment, or someone offering to help. We don't want to accept it. And sometimes we just need to say, *"Thank you. I appreciate that."* So, if someone says, *"You are having a great hair day,"* what do you say? *"Thank you. I appreciate that."* We often push away compliments and offers for help and levels of goodness/gifts in our lives. And we need to be a better receiver to keep that flow moving in our lives.

And the last one is to release. You know, on the seventh day, it said God rested. It's the art of "allowing," as they call it. You've got to let go and allow things to unfold in the best way. The more we are able to release, the more we open space for more goodness and abundance in our lives.

So, today we're going to look at two more. And the first one is the principle of **PROPHECY**. You know, prophecy means a declaration of something to come; you know, a prediction of the future by divine guidance.

And sometimes when we hear the word "prophecy," it sounds like an old Biblical term that doesn't have anything to do with us, but it was about that gift of prophecy given to Daniel and Ezekiel and Jeremiah. And the truth is that we all have the gift of prophecy. And, in fact, we not only have that gift, we are always using that gift in the ways that we predict, and declare, and use our words, and decree ... and the way we speak for things about ourselves and others.

You know, *"Things never work out"* is a prophecy. *"Life is unfair"* is a prophecy. *"I always get hurt"* is a prophecy. *"You can't trust anyone"* is a prophecy. *"There is never enough time."*

Catherine Ponder says, *"If you are not satisfied with your life, you can begin using the gift of prophecy to improve it. As you change your words, you change your world. As you improve your words, you improve your world. As you transform your words, you transform your world. Words are a major aspect of the power of prophecy that we have been given."*

And she says we can use our words in two ways that has an impact on us. One is our casual utterances, and two is our deliberate, intentional affirmations.

Let's look at the **casual utterances** first. She tells a story about moving out of her apartment without her son. That she shared the apartment with her son, he went to the military, and this move was the first time she ever moved without him. His name was Richard. And so, she hired somebody but really wanted Richard to be there to do the little organizing for things to go smoothly. And she kept saying to herself, *"I wish Richard was here. This move would be so much easier. I wish Richard was here. I wish Richard was here."*

And so, she prayed and released him, but she still found herself saying, *"If only Richard was here."* And so, on the day of the move, the movers were starting to move. And then some of the kids in the neighborhood came and offered their help. And so, she needed a little extra help, and so she took it. And then there was a knock on the door about a couple hours later, and it was the brother of the two kids that were helping her. And he said, *"Hey, my brother and sister are helping; I'd be happy to help."*

And she said, *"Great! Why don't you come in? What's your name?"* He said, *"Richard."* [Congregants laugh] And so, that Richard did what the other Richard would do, and everything worked out.

And the point I'm trying to make here, and that she's trying to, is those casual utterances – *"I wish Richard was here. I wish Richard was here"* ... She not only attracted everything she needed done, she also attracted the very name of the individual.

And that can seem kind of silly. And if you've ever read Catherine Ponder, she has -- everything always works out perfectly. Like if somebody needs something to be done by Tuesday, it's done by Tuesday. If somebody needs a thousand dollars, it's always a thousand there. And whether it happens that way in real -- I mean, I think it does -- but I always find it interesting that all her things always work out.

But I also know the bottom line of it is: she's showing that it works. That the power of our words attract and manifest the good that we are seeking.

She tells another story about a member of her family that they said was an "old maid." And that she was taking care of the mom and the other brothers and sisters. When they got married and left, she kept taking care. And sometimes she would get mad, and she would say, *"One day I'm going to move to Florida and get married."*

It became a family joke. Everyone said, *"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know. One day you're going to move to Florida and get married."* And everybody would just say it. She would say it all the time. And then, when the mom died and there was nobody left in the house, she sold the house and moved to Florida. And she got a job and she met somebody on the job. And six months later, she married the guy. So that throwaway line of, *"One day I'm going to move to Florida and get married"* absolutely happened. And it's to make the point: do not underestimate the power of your casual words.

Sometimes we say things without even thinking or think it doesn't do any harm. Like, *"You know, I'm not really good with names."* I had a secretary; she always used to say, *"I am such a klutz."* And two or three times a year, she would fall and like skin her knee and do something really serious.

Or, *"I never get this right. I'm not good at this at all."* I bet you we say some of those in some form in our lives and don't realize what we're doing to ourselves. We are attracting things that we do not want.

So, can you think of some casual comments you make about yourself or life that really are not the highest and best for you? And are you willing to change those and begin to use them? Maybe, *"Hey, things always go well for me."* You know, *"Things always work out for the best. Even when things go wrong, they go right."* Come up with some idea of utterances to put out more positive energy into your life.

The second one is **deliberate words: affirmation**. She says this, a single bold statement declaring how you want your life to be lived is worth more than 12 dozen books and lectures. There is power in the spoken word! The spoken word clarifies and claims and calls forth the good from the invisible realm of spirit into our lives. That's how powerful words are!

A teacher was teaching her class about the power of words and told them if they said a word 21 times, it was theirs forever. And a young girl was gazing out the window saying, *"Tony, Tony, Tony."* [Congregants laugh]

So, Winston Churchill was in a battle. England was in a battle and they were losing. Nobody expected them to win. So, he got on the radio and he said, *"We will win on land. We will win on the sea. We will win!"* And him saying that and everybody hearing it was the turning point to that battle ... and they won.

The power of the spoken word is incredible. And I think we need to make sure we're utilizing it to our advantage.

In the book of Genesis, it says, *"God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."* And that's to show that we speak our experiences and situations into existence by the power of our words.

In the book of Joel, Chapter 3, Verse 10, it says, *"Let the weak say, 'I am strong.'"* And that's the thing about the power of our words. Even if we're not feeling it or experiencing it in that moment, we can speak it into existence.

"I am strong." "I am positive." "I am energetic." "I am wise." "I am peaceful." "I am prosperous." "I am kind." "I am caring." "I am loving." "I am generous." "I am resilient." "I am gentle." "I am joyful." "I am fun." "I am playful." "I am enthusiastic." "I am a problem-solver." "I am creative" ... to name a few things.

And the reason I said that is: we have access to so many words and possibilities and experiences. So many qualities. And we don't take the time. I just read off about 10 or 15. We have thousands of words. And what are the words that identify with how you want to live? How you want to be? What you want to experience? What you want to create?

And she says set a time every day just to speak the words of the kind of life you want to have; the kind of person you want to be. *"Things always work out for me." "I am a lifelong learner." "My life is getting better and better and better." "I forgive fully and freely." "I have a job that I love and that pays me well." "My relationship is fun, loving, and nurturing." "I live a life of health, wealth, and happiness."*

And so, she met this guy who was a trucker -- independent trucker -- and very, very successful. And she wanted to know his story. And he said that, only a few years before, that he had hit rock bottom. He had no money. There were no jobs coming in. And he was down. And he was in a hotel. And he saw the Bible that was in the drawer. And he opened it -- and he opened it to Ezekiel Chapter 13.

And let me just read it to you:

"The hand of the Lord was on me. And he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley. It was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw many bones on the floor of the valley; bones that were very dry.

He asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?'

I said, 'Sovereign Lord, you alone know.'

Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says to these bones. I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and skin to cover you. I will put breath in you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'

So, I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise -- a rattling sound. And the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath. Prophesy, son of man, and say to it, there, 'This is what the sovereign Lord says: 'Come, breath from the four winds. And breathe life into the slain that they may live.'

So, I prophesied as commanded and breath entered them. And they came to life and they stood up on their feet, a vast army."

And so, the trucker was inspired. So, he went and he put his hand on the bumper and said, *"I prophesy that we will have work tomorrow; that it will prosper us and pay us well; and there will be great success. And in time, we will have two trucks and things will go great for us."*

And so, he did that. And he felt so good. He went to bed and relaxed at night. He got a phone call at 5 o'clock in the morning to carry a load of butter from where he was to Los Angeles. And things started picking up and improving.

And the thing I love about that Scripture: it's saying that, even if things feel lifeless and dead in your life, you can bring it back to life by speaking the power of the word; the power of your intention; the power of the things that you want to create and bring back to life in your life.

The power of prophecy is given to us -- not just in the power of our words -- but in the power of our imagination; the power of our vision.

Catherine Ponder says, *"If you do not deliberately picture that which you want in a constructive way, you will unconsciously picture what you don't want in a constructive way. You are always picturing something, because it is the function of your mind to picture."*

And so, I want you to hear that again: If you don't picture what you want, that you will end up picturing what you don't want.

And it triggers for me from Proverbs 29:18, when it says, *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."*

If you aren't using the gifts and the abilities we have in a positive way, it will turn against us. It will block us from the very good that we are seeking. That make sense, everybody? Okay. Even if you don't agree, just that would be really ... [Congregants laugh] It'll be really, really helpful for me.

And so, she cites again another woman, another example. And this woman had several issues in her life, financial and otherwise. And so, she decided instead of feeling sorry for herself, she'll do a vision board. Anybody ever do those? Vision map? And so, she started putting up all kinds of things that represented what she wanted: a money sign, a couple that was happy, a check for \$500. She did all kinds of things. And she looked at it every single day; prayed upon it; felt what it would like to have that and be exactly what were in those pictures.

And after 10 days, three of them came together. And one of them was that she wanted/she needed \$500. And a man came that she knew, and he said that these are the monies from canceled insurance policies -- an endowment fund that got canceled -- and it adds up to \$500. And he gave it to her. And so, again, showing the power of our vision; the power of our imagination in creating and calling forth and manifesting the good that we desire.

The power of prophecy is about speaking the word and it's about seeing the success and goodness that you desire. That will open your mind to receive more prosperity.

And the second one is, she entitles it: **NOTHING BUT THE BEST.** Expect nothing but the best.

How many people know the Chicago ... Anybody a Chicago Bear fan? Okay, apparently not one in this. [Congregants laugh] Well, let me just tell you. Two years ago, they won five games. Last year, they won 11 games. And their coach, Ben Johnson, uses an affirmation. at the end of his game to celebrate. Coincidentally, it's the same affirmation that's in this book that Captain Ponder used, and you probably have heard it before: *"Good, better, best. Never let it rest 'til your good is better and your better is best."*

And so, what she is trying to say in this is: don't settle. Even if you get good, don't settle. Keep pushing for greater -- a greater and better version of yourself. A greater and better version of the experience of love; of joy; of your health. In all areas of your life, keep moving, keep expanding, keep growing. Keep expecting the best.

So, I ask you: Is there an area in your life where you've settled for good enough that you know that there's a greater version of you? That you know that there's more and deeper available to you still? So, where in your life can you raise your expectation for a higher version of the life that you'd like to live?

A widow of 52 was bored with her menial, low-paying job. And she felt really down and tired and frustrated with her life and no prospects for her life to get better. So, she learned the principle and the power of expectation and wanting the best, and she gave it a try. And so, she made a list of the things that she wanted for her life. And so she made this list, and it included a better job; a happier life; and even to be married again.

And so, she just started thinking this way every day: looking at her list; knowing that her life was going to get better; expecting that it would get better and be the best. And someone recommended to her that, *"Hey, Alaska has a lot of fabulous opportunities. You should check it out!"*

So, she called the newspaper there, asked about their jobs. And, as a stenographer, she ended up accepting a job and moving to Alaska. And there, again, she met a guy. And they ended up getting married and having a happy life.

And she says that the reason her life changed is because her mind was changed. Her attitude changed. Her outlook changed. Instead of looking at her life and complaining and thinking of the worst case scenarios and the bad breaks and all the negativity, that she shifted her mind to what was good, what was possible, what was better. And expecting the best, and expecting greater levels of joy and happiness, her life changed.

See, when we open our mind to receive more good, we stop identifying with unworthiness. We stop identifying with lack and limitation, and we begin to see improvement. We begin to see change. We begin to see transformation.

These are some of Catherine's affirmations ... and my mom used to do these all the time. So, we're going to do them together. So, what I say, just repeat after me.

"I am a rich child of a loving God."

Together: [congregants] *"I am a rich child of a loving God."*

"Prosperity and success are my heritage."

[With congregants:] *"Prosperity and success are my heritage."*

"Today and every day I expect the best."

[With congregants:] *"Today and every day I expect the best."*

"Wonderful things are happening to me now."

[With congregants:] *"Wonderful things are happening to me now."*

"Everything I do turns to good for myself and others."

[With congregants:] *"Everything I do turns to good for myself and others."*

"I expect nothing but the best."

Together: [with congregants] *"I expect nothing but the best."*

Three mothers are sitting in a lounge in their country club bragging about their sons and how they're nothing but the best. And the first mother says, *"You know, I have a Chagall painting in my living room. And it was my son, Arnold, who bought it for me for my 70th birthday. What a good boy he is. He really loves his mom."*

The second mother snorts and says, *"You call that love? You know my new Mercedes convertible? I just got it for Mother's Day. It's from my son Bernie. What a darling. He really loves me."*

The third mother shakes her head and said, *"That's nothing. Do you know my Stanley? He is in therapy and has five sessions a week. And all he wants to talk about is me."* [Congregants laugh]

You know, we are so blessed. We can lift our lives. We have such incredible spiritual tools; these laws of prosperity really, really work.

So, the two things for us to work on this week are: the power of prophecy. Speak the word and see the pictures of the things you want to create and become. And the other one is: use the power of your expectation. Believe that these good things, these positive outcomes will happen in your life.

These are the two next steps on the path to prosperity to help us open our mind to receive.
God bless you all!

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