

The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit:

What are they & how do we practice them at Two Rivers Church?

By The Elders of Two Rivers Church

All Christians have been given spiritual gifts. A spiritual gift is *an ability empowered by the Holy Spirit to be used in the service of God*. There are a variety of spiritual gifts.

When Were Spiritual Gifts First Given?

When the New Covenant of the Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, Peter declared the gifts of the Holy Spirit would now be present in the life of all believers. [Acts 2:16-21](#)

Paul provided several listings of the gifts of the Spirit in his pastoral letters:

“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

[Romans 12:6-8](#)

“I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.” (Paul here was referencing his gift of celibacy.) [1 Corinthians 7:7](#)

“For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.” [1 Corinthians 12:8-10](#)

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. [1 Corinthians 12:28](#)

...And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers... [Ephesians 4:11](#)

How Many Spiritual Gifts Are There?

Following are the gifts listed in the New Testament:

ROMANS 12:6-8

1. Prophecy
2. Serving
3. Teaching
4. Encouraging
5. Contributing
6. Leadership
7. Mercy

1 CORINTHIANS 7:7

1. Marriage
2. Celibacy

1 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10

1. Word of Wisdom
2. Word of Knowledge
3. Faith
4. Gifts of Healing
5. Miracles

6. Prophecy
7. Distinguishing Between Spirits
8. Tongues
9. Interpretation of Tongues

1 CORINTHIANS 12:28

1. Apostle
2. Prophet
3. Teacher
4. Miracles
5. Kinds of Healings
6. Helps
7. Administration
8. Tongues

Ephesians 4:11

1. Apostle
2. Prophet
3. Evangelist
4. Pastor/Teacher

Because each list of spiritual gifts in the New Testament varies, it does not appear these lists were intended to be exhaustive catalogues of the gifts of the Spirit.

How Do We Discover Our Spiritual Gifts?

The Apostle Paul assumed people living in response to the Spirit would quickly see patterns of 'giftedness' emerge as they served God.

In [Romans 12:6](#), Paul writes, *"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them..."*

Paul assumes that as we serve God obediently, the spiritual gifts present in us will be revealed. Discovering spiritual gifts then, occurs as we obey the Lord and serve Him. As we serve with others, the way the Spirit of God has chosen to work in and through our life will become increasingly apparent.

What Are We To Do With The Gifts God Gives Us?

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord." [Romans 12:6-11](#)

We are given gifts from God to equip us to serve the mission of Jesus Christ. It is good stewardship to use our spiritual gifts. It is dishonoring of the One who has gifted us to not use our spiritual gifts.

Are Spiritual Gifts An Evidence Of Greater Spiritual Maturity?

Spiritual gifts are given to every believer. [1 Corinthians 12:7](#); [1 Peter 4:10](#) Even immature Christians receive spiritual gifts. This was evident in the Corinthian Church. The Corinthian Church was 'not lacking' in any spiritual gift. [1 Corinthians 1:7](#) But gifts notwithstanding, Paul wrote to them saying, "...brethren, I could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ..." [1 Corinthians 3:1](#)

There should never be a correlation established that the 'more gifted' a person is, the more spiritual they are. Jesus warned that some will even prophesy and cast out demons, but at the final day of reckoning He will be unable to call them His own. [Matthew 7:22-23](#)

Therefore, we must never evaluate spiritual maturity based upon giftedness. Spiritual maturity is the result of living a life yielded to, and in fellowship with God daily.

Is It Appropriate To Ask For Certain Spiritual Gifts From God?

We are commanded in [1 Corinthians 12:31](#) to “earnestly desire the higher gifts.” The ‘higher gifts’ are those effective in building up the body of Christ, not merely ourselves.

Paul describes on such gift in [1 Corinthians 14:1-3](#), “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their up-building and encouragement and consolation.”

Paul’s objective is to reinforce the principle that love for others will always call us to seek gifts that have a value beyond self-edification only, to the encouragement and strengthening of others.

In [1 Corinthians 12:11](#), Paul also revealed that the Spirit “apportions to each one individually as He wills” granting the spiritual gift or gifts He chooses. We are to ask God, and then be thankful as He sovereignly chooses the gift or gifts best suited to our calling.

Do Spiritual Gifts Differ In Strength And Effectiveness?

The Apostle Paul, in [Romans 12:6](#), explained that gifts vary in strength, “in proportion to our faith.”

As we increase in our responsiveness to God in the use of the gifts, the effectiveness and power of the gift entrusted to us will increase as our faith increases.

Some individuals function so effectively in their gifting, over time an established role or ‘office’ becomes associated with the expression of their spiritual gift. “...and He gave apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...” [Ephesians 4:11](#)

Can An Individual Possess All Spiritual Gifts?

In [Romans 12:3-5](#) Paul wrote, “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

This passage infers that no one possesses all the gifts, and therefore, we are called to live with a deference and interdependence upon one another as we share our gifts in the service of God.

Have Any Spiritual Gifts Ceased?

It is the conviction of Two Rivers Church that the gifts of the Spirit will not cease until the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the New Heaven and the New Earth, “when the perfect comes.” [1 Corinthians 13:10](#)

How Do Spiritual Gifts Differ From Natural Abilities?

Natural abilities are given to every individual by God and can be developed over time apart from God’s ongoing involvement.

Spiritual gifts, however, are given only to those born again by the Spirit of God. Spiritual gifts are given as a portion of God’s New Covenant promise. Unlike natural abilities, spiritual gifts require a measure of faith to function in our lives. For this reason, Christians who do not exercise faith may not see the gifts God has given them being revealed in their life. All gifts are given by God to advance the growth and effectiveness of His purposes.

Are Spiritual Gifts Permanent?

Since spiritual gifts are “distributed to each one individually just as He (the Spirit) wills,” ([1 Corinthians 12:7, 11](#)) they may be given for a season or for a specific situation. For example, gifts of prophecy, wisdom, and knowledge are given for specific circumstances as God wills, and not always as we request them.

ABOUT SPECIFIC SPIRITUAL GIFTS: DESCRIPTIONS & PRACTICES

How spiritual gifts are to be practiced within the church has long been a subject of passionate debate.

Following are descriptions of selected gifts that are most often the subject of discussion or confusion. Where deemed appropriate, detailed explanations of how we will govern the use of these spiritual gifts at Two Rivers Church are provided.

The Gift Of Prophecy

In the New Testament era, prophecy is *telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind*.

It is important to distinguish prophecy as it functions today from prophecy in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament prophets spoke with absolute authority declaring, "Thus says the Lord." The words that followed were the words of God. Therefore, to disbelieve or disobey an Old Testament prophet was to disbelieve or disobey God. For the prophet to misrepresent God's words was to seriously mislead God's people under penalty of death.

In the New Testament there were also people who spoke and wrote God's very words. Some are known as Apostles, men uniquely appointed by Jesus Christ. Their words today are Scripture.

Prophecy is different today than prophecy of the Old Testament or the words of New Testament Scripture. God-given prophecy today will always be in alignment with the principles of Scripture. Prophecy is regulated by the instructions and doctrines of Scripture, and is to be submitted to its truths.

Submitting what we believe God has brought to our minds is to be done with a spirit of gentleness, humility, honoring and affirmation for the abilities of others to exercise discernment, weighing and testing what we have presented.

Paul illustrated the importance of receiving a prophetic word within the larger context of God's guidance in his life in [Acts 21:8-14](#):

"Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we had been there a number of days a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "the Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

A prophet warned Paul that danger awaited him in Jerusalem, and warned him not to go there. Paul however, assessed the message within the larger context of God's previous guidance in his life. He considered the prophetic word, but prayerfully determined he was to go to Jerusalem anyway.

But in this instance, Paul, responding to New Testament prophecy was responsible to weigh the words of the prophet and discern how he was to respond in accordance to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his own life also.

Prophecy, then, is a two party experience. The one who shares the message they have received from God has one part and must be careful to speak only what is in keeping with the Bible's directives. The one receiving the prophecy has a responsibility to 'test' the prophecy.

TESTING PROPHECY

In [1 Thessalonians 5:19-21](#), Paul tells the church, "...do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast to what is good."

Clearly New Testament prophecy is different than Old Testament prophecy because the recipient is to 'test' what is said.

Spirit-led prophecy will always be in keeping with the directives found in [1 Corinthians 14:3](#), "...the one who prophesies speaks to people for their up-building and encouragement and consolation."

Any prophetic message that is not 'up-building, encouraging, or comforting' should be rejected as false. In [1 Corinthians 14:29](#) Paul wrote, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said."

The word 'weigh' refers to the use of discernment regarding what is spoken. When a prophecy is spoken, others are to 'test' and 'weigh' the message.

Spiritual gifts are practiced by imperfect people. Even the best-intentioned person can, and will make mistakes, therefore all prophecy must be 'weighed' and 'tested.'

In [1 Corinthians 13:9](#) Paul wrote, "We know in part and we prophesy in part..." Therefore, saying authoritatively, "Thus says the Lord" would be a misrepresentation of our authority within the body of Christ today.

More appropriate would be a declaration like, "I believe I have something to say that is from the Lord, but you too have the Holy Spirit. Please weigh and test what I share with you as I submit this to you for your consideration."

PURPOSE OF PROPHECY

The purpose of prophecy for believers today is found in [1 Corinthians 14:3](#), "...the one who prophecies speaks to people for their up-building and encouragement and consolation."

PURPOSE OF PROPHECY IN EVANGELISM

In [1 Corinthians 14:25](#) we read, "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you."

Prophecy is a powerful tool that shows God's knowledge of those to whom He speaks, and His pursuing nature, calling them to Him.

USING PROPHECY FOR PERSONAL GUIDANCE

The Bible directs every Christian to seek guidance by the Scriptures ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)), through the godly counsel of others ([Proverbs 11:14](#)), and through personal prayer ([James 1:5](#)).

Prophecy serves as a supplemental resource for confirmation of these previously mentioned resources.

GOVERNANCE OF PROPHECY AT TWO RIVERS CHURCH IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

At Two Rivers Church we welcome the expression of prophecy when utilized in accordance with the following guidelines.

If a person believes they have heard from the Lord, the following steps outline how they are to obey the Lord in the use of their gift "properly and in order." [1 Corinthians 14:40](#)

1. Ask God if what you have heard is given for the purposes of private prayer, or to be spoken to others.
2. If you believe you have been given a prophetic message by the Spirit that is for the "up-building, encouragement, or consolation" of the whole church ([1 Corinthians 14:3](#)), you should approach an elder, pastoral staff member, or whoever is designated to lead the gathering you are attending and submit this message to them, ideally in writing, and defer to their determination in how it should be utilized.
3. If a prophetic word comes in a smaller environment such as a Group, ask the person leading the group for direction then honor their guidance.
4. Always honor those in authority and make love your chief objective.

Are There Apostles Today?

The word 'apostle' technically means 'a sent one.'

The role of the apostle is **one sent by God and uniquely gifted to establish a church or churches.**

In the early church the first 'sent ones' were commissioned by Jesus personally. The qualifications of an original Apostle was two-fold:

1. Having seen the resurrected Jesus.
2. Having been personally commissioned by Jesus.

The early Apostles were twelve men ([Acts 1:26](#)), however Paul later testified he too was an Apostle in [1 Corinthians 15:7-9](#), “Then He appeared to James, then to all the Apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the Apostles...”

The Apostle Paul, in [Ephesians 4:11](#), seems to indicate that ‘sent ones’ will always be essential in the church: “And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...”

There are still those who are ‘sent out’ today to establish new churches. In some traditions these leaders are called ‘apostles.’ More commonly they are known as ‘church planters’ or ‘missionaries.’

At Two Rivers Church, to avoid confusion between the Apostles who ministered in a unique way at a unique time, from the ‘sent ones’ called today, we speak of ‘apostle-like’ leaders verses ‘Apostles.’

The Gift Of Miracles

In [1 Corinthians 12:10 & 28](#), Paul lists among other gifts, “miracles.”

This word ‘miracles’ literally translated means ‘power.’ It seems Paul is describing a category of powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit, not just one expression of God’s power.

A Miracle is an **act of God superseding or suspending a natural law**. Therefore, a person with the gift of miracles is one through whom God demonstrates His power by superseding or suspending a natural law.

This can occur by their declaration of command, their prayer, in obedience to God’s prompting.

Miracles point to the nearness and attentiveness of God. We learn from the Scriptures the purpose of a miracle is two-fold: First, to cause men to believe in the Lord ([John 14:11](#)) and second, to confirm His word ([John 20:30-31](#)).

The Gift Of Healing

Healing is **the obedient response of a Christian to pray for or declare healing in response to the Holy Spirit’s prompting, resulting in a physical recovery of the sick**. We live in a fallen world in which one of the ravages of sin is sickness. We will not have bodies free of sin and sickness until the New Heaven and New Earth are established.

Men of great faith who were used by God to heal others were sometimes not healed themselves. For example, the apostle Paul described a “thorn in his flesh” that he recognized as a tool to keep Paul aware of God’s power at work in him, though he was weak ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). Paul was led by the Spirit to heal many, but he was required to live with this affliction.

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IN HEALING

Jesus reveals an important principle regarding healing in [John 5:19-20](#). After healing a man, Jesus explained the healing had occurred as a response to God’s sovereign prompting. Jesus said to Jewish officials who questioned His practices,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He Himself is doing.”

[James 5:14-15](#) gives this instruction about praying for healing, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

The type of ‘prayer’ referenced in this passage is akin to a ‘vow’. A vow is a statement made following the leading of another. The ‘prayer of faith’ spoken of by James, and illustrated by Jesus in John 5 is a prayer initiated by the Spirit, and declared by a person following to the leading of the Holy Spirit. People are not ‘healers.’ God is the healer. God sovereignly chooses to enlist the prayers and obedient actions of His people in bringing healing. Healing was administered in the New Testament, and is today, by “touch” ([Luke 4:40](#)), “anointing with oil” ([Mark](#)

6:13) or by a declaration of God-prompted faith. ([James 5:14-15](#)) A gift of healing then is a response of faith to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to pray for healing as directed by God.

SHOULD WE PRAY FOR HEALING IF WE HAVE NO CLEAR DIRECTION FROM GOD?

Because we hear the Holy Spirit imperfectly, and since Paul has instructed us in [Philippians 4:6](#) to “not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” when we are concerned for those who are ill it is always appropriate to pray for healing.

However, to command healing should only be done in response to a very clear directive from the Holy Spirit.

WHY AREN'T ALL HEALED?

We know that Jesus did not heal all who were ill. Many were ill at the pool, but Jesus healed only one man. ([John 5:1-18](#))

According to [2 Corinthians 12:1-10](#) Paul requested healing three times from the Lord. Three times he heard: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” God answered Paul’s prayer of faith with a ‘no’ answer. Did Paul lack of faith? Given his life’s witness it is unlikely.

This simple truth is clear: Sometimes God chooses not to heal.

If God intends to teach us something through an illness, He might not heal immediately. [1 Peter 2:21](#) tells us: “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.”

Jesus suffered. In His suffering He gave us an example how we are to live when our prayers go unanswered. Jesus said to His heavenly Father, “Not my will, but your will be done.” [Luke 22:42](#)

Though none of us like this truth, suffering is an integral part of life. God uses this consequence of our fallen world in the development and maturation of the Christian.

Ultimately we must all acknowledge this absolute statement found in [Hebrews 9:27](#): “...it is appointed for a man to die...”

Though God often heals, He also gives us His Spirit to comfort us even as we suffer and prepare for death.

[1 John 5:14](#) tell us, “*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.*” God hears our prayers for healing. He then exercises His wisdom that far exceeds our own. Trusting God, even if He says ‘no’ reveals that we honor Him as God.

The Gift Of Tongues

The Apostle Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 14:2](#), “... *one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.*”

Speaking in tongues is ***prayer and praise spoken in a language not understood by the speaker but edifying spiritually to them.***

The word ‘tongue’ can also be interpreted as ‘language.’

Spiritual language first appeared on the historic day when the Holy Spirit was given to Jesus’ disciples, and His New Covenant was established.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” [Acts 2:4-11](#)

DO ALL SPEAK IN TONGUES?

In 1 Corinthians, Paul begins a series of questions with a Greek particle με. When placed at the beginning of a question this Greek particle infers the answer 'no' will follow. The question here that follows this particle με is:

“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” [1 Corinthians 12:29-30](#)

The answer then is no. Just as all are not gifted to prophesy or teach, not all will speak in spiritual language.

HOW IS THE GIFT OF TONGUES TO BE USED?

The gift of tongues is always appropriate when expressed in private or when practiced silently when among others. It is given by God to assist the person so gifted in praying. The Apostle Paul wrote of his own use of this spiritual gift in [1 Corinthians 14:18](#): “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.”

However, the Apostle made a distinction between how the gift of tongues was to be used privately, and its public use: In [1 Corinthians 14:19](#) Paul continued: “Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

Paul also cautioned the church regarding expressing tongues in the presence of unbelievers. He wrote in [1 Corinthians 14:23](#): “If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?”

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SPIRITUAL LANGUAGE?

Paul describes how he utilizes his gift of spiritual language:

“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.” [1 Corinthians 14:14](#)

Paul explains that spiritual language is for personal edification. Paul didn't understand his spiritual language, but clearly it was a blessing to him in personal worship. Paul sees praying in tongues as an activity of faith. Human language can never fully express the cry of our human heart in intercession and praise.

Paul wrote:

“...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” [Romans 8:26-27](#)

Paul sees spiritual language as an empowering way to pray in which he is no longer encumbered by the limitations of words.

WHY IS THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES SO IMPORTANT WHEN IN PUBLIC SETTINGS?

When Spiritual language is spoken, if there is no interpreter present, those listening are unable to understand it. The gifts of the Spirit are given to edify and stir unity, never to divide or alienate, or create exclusion.

Paul explains that spiritual language will only edify and unify the people of God with the practice of interpretation:

“Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” [1 Corinthians 14:13-19](#)

THE EXPRESSION OF TONGUES AT TWO RIVERS CHURCH

It is the conviction that, as was true in the New Testament, not every gathering at Two Rivers Church is an appropriate setting for the expression of tongues with interpretation.

In [Acts 2:46](#) a distinction seems to be drawn between the large gatherings held in the Temple Courts led by the Apostles for the purpose of teaching, and smaller gatherings convened in homes for shared interpersonal ministry.

Because presenting a tongue and subsequent interpretation requires an interactive setting where all are invited to speak and participate, it is our determination the gift of public tongues and interpretation is not to be expressed in the large gatherings of Two Rivers Church, such as weekend services. Smaller group settings such as Groups are where such interactive shared ministry is most fitting and allows for obedience of the apostle Paul's governance of this gift.

THE GIFT OF TONGUES AND INTERPRETATION IN SMALL GROUP SETTINGS AT TWO RIVERS CHURCH

Paul described how tongues with interpretation is to be administered in a small group setting:

“When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.” [1 Corinthians 14:26-28](#)

Applying Paul's guidance in this passage, the expression of the gift of tongues will be as follows:

1. Paul statement, 'When you come together' assumes all arriving understand they are gathering to share their gifts with one another. It should be agreed upon in advance that they are gathering anticipating shared expressions of ministry.
2. With the approval of the group facilitator, a person prompted by the Holy Spirit may speak a tongue in anticipation of a subsequent interpretation.
3. At the most, two or three should share a tongue. It seems Paul did not anticipate gatherings for the sole purpose of tongues and interpretation.
4. Only one person shall speak in tongues at a time. That person is to then wait on the subsequent interpretation of that tongue, or they are to interpret it. ([1 Corinthians 14:13](#))
5. Speaking or singing a song in tongues without interpretation is inconsistent with our understanding of the apostle's instructions.
6. If there is no one present to interpret the tongue, the person is to discontinue speaking in tongues out loud.
7. The edification of all is the objective.

SHOULD THE CHURCH FORBID SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

The Apostle Paul answers this question very directly:

“...do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.” [1 Corinthians 14:39-40](#)

We will, 'decently and in order' do all that we can to honor biblical guidance in the practice of this mysterious and sometimes controversial gift.

The Gifts Of Word of Wisdom & Word of Knowledge

Paul wrote:

“For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit...” [1 Corinthians 12:8](#)

These two gifts are mentioned only in this single passage of Scripture. These gifts are commonly thought to describe special insight given by the Holy Spirit:

- The Gift of Knowledge is believed to be *the grace to know an undisclosed truth*.
- The Gift of Wisdom is believed to be *insight in how to proceed in a complex or previously intractable situation*.

Spirit given knowledge calls forth wonder and stirs faith in God. An example of this gift is shown by Peter in [Acts 5:1-4](#).

The Gifts Of Distinguishing Between Spirits

The gift of distinguishing or discerning between Spirits is mentioned once in the New Testament:

“...the ability to distinguish between spirits...” [1 Corinthians 12:10](#)

It is believed to be the God given capacity to *discern between the influence of the Holy Spirit and the influence of a demonic spirit*.

John writes:

“...test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”
[1 John 4:1](#)

This gift is useful in the context of spiritual warfare. It equips the Christian to identify demons harming those to whom a person is called to minister. It also equips the Christian to discern when a person is motivated rightly. [Luke 13:10-11](#); [Acts 16:16](#); [Mark 9:25](#)

What Is The Most Important Spiritual Gift?

The Bible explains that the people of the church are designed to function interdependently like a human body. Each person and each gift has value even though some gifts are more prominently displayed than others. God goes so far as to declare through Paul:

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” [1 Corinthians 12: 21-26](#)

While spiritual gifts are important, God calls us to focus on an even greater blessing. In Luke, Jesus’ disciples returned after having experienced the powerful effect of spiritual gifts at work in and through them:

“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” [Luke 10:17-20](#)

The greatest gift is a relationship with the living God.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul declares emphatically that love is the ultimate priority and that gifts not exercised in love are ineffectual and empty:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#)

Jesus’ disciples returned after having experienced the powerful effect of spiritual gifts at work in and through them:

“The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” [Luke 10:17-20](#)

The greatest spiritual gift is a relationship with the living God.

TO READ FURTHER ON THIS TOPIC WE SUGGEST:

[Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine](#), by Wayne Grudem

