

# I THANK GOD I SPEAK IN TONGUES MORE THAN ALL OF YOU!

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Paul wasn't bragging. He had simply discovered the great benefit of tongues and wanted to urge others on. If I said to my family, "I exercise more than all of you," I would be encouraging them to do what I have found valuable. If the greatest apostle who ever lived uncovered some of the secrets of the mystery of tongues, wouldn't you want to unwrap them as well? We have yet to experience all the hidden blessings from this gift, so let's go for it.

When Clint, one of the leaders in our young adult community, spoke about purity with the guys, he finished his message with an exhortation to speak in tongues for blocks of time. I had never done that before. I repented for devaluing the gift and chose to exercise it much more. Here are some of the benefits I have observed in this season:

## **Speaking in tongues...**

**Awakens the spirit.** We can easily grow passive in prayer—and in faith. Aggressive speaking (and sometimes it is good to raise our voices) calls our spirits into action and keeps us from a debilitating paralysis. We can easily go to sleep in prayer (when quiet times get really quiet), both in a physical and spiritual way. Jesus spoke strong words close to His death about the importance of keeping alert. The gift of tongues helps us stay sober and awake.

**Bypasses the mind.** When our mind must be engaged in other duties, such as driving, we can still speak in tongues and build ourselves up. Speaking in tongues allows us to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions" (Eph. 6:18), as we are admonished to do. That exhortation was given in the context of spiritual warfare. We can fight the fight of faith, for ourselves and for others, while involved in other activities. Talk about redeeming the time!

The gift of tongues stirs the spirit. "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful" (v. 14). Our mind sometimes gets in the way of the Spirit's work. Speaking in tongues calls the spirit into service, so Paul encourages both kinds of prayer.

Paul writes, "I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind" (14:15). We face the liability as we grow up and let go of childish ways and also relinquish childlike ways. Speaking in tongues is for children, not for adults. It disarms us, reduces us, even humiliates us. It cannot be accomplished through sophisticated adult mental analysis. That, in fact, will inhibit us from ever speaking in tongues. So one way that we can "become like little children," as Jesus admonishes us, is to speak in tongues. Kids are good at simply making up sounds, and I encourage those who have trouble receiving this gift to make sounds like a little child does. And because speaking in tongues is a childlike activity, it also helps us to take a humble posture before God.

I often pray with people who want to speak in tongues. The greatest hindrance to receiving it is simply not opening one's mouth and making sounds. People fear making anything up, so they sit in paralyzed silence. I tell them as I told a pastor friend recently,

“The Bible is a divine and human book. Jesus is a divine and human Man. To emphasize one side and not the other is to move into heresy. And the gifts of the Spirit are both divine and human. We decide when to open our mouths and speak. Scripture says that they “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). We do the speaking, and the Spirit does the enabling. So I encouraged my friend to do his part and begin to speak, assuring him that he would not be out of order; in fact, he would be participating in the gift. When he did, the language came quickly. After praying for a while, he stopped and said, “For a long time I’ve been hearing the phrases in my mind that I was just speaking.” Amazing! He had truly received the gift when he asked for it years before. He simply needed to open his mouth and begin. It has been my experience that when people are willing to go for it in this way, they enter into the gift quite readily.

**Increases revelation.** I find that I am more open to hearing the Lord’s voice after I have exercised my spirit through tongues. Paul wrote, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy” (I Cor. 14:5). The fact that he encourages us to speak in tongues in private and prophesy in public suggests that the more we speak in tongues and build up our spirits, the more prepared we will be for prophesying, and the experience of many confirms this. Some think that what Paul was saying is, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, and all the more in order that you may prophesy.”

**Builds up the one speaking.** Paul wrote, “He who speaks in tongues edifies himself” (14:4), and I don’t know of anyone who is overdosing on encouragement. The more we are built up, the more we are stimulating spiritual activity. We are standing in readiness both to encourage others as well as to fight our adversary. If it is true that we are built up by speaking in tongues, then the more we engage in this activity, the stronger we are. We need to take it on faith and practice this remarkable body-building gift.

### *Some Truths about the gift of tongues.*

**It is prayer.** Paul says that “anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God” (I Cor. 14:2). This gift provides more versatility to the serious person of prayer who wants to increase the arsenal of spiritual warfare.

**We are told to desire it.** To say that we desire prophecy more than tongues does not mean that we reduce our desire for tongues. I love fruit, vegetables, salad, meat, and bread for a full evening meal. To say that I enjoy the meat more than the vegetables does not reduce their value. They go together and complement one another. Tongues and prophecy are complementary gifts. Speaking in tongues prepares us to prophesy. And according to Paul, our desire for the spiritual gifts is compatible with God’s sovereign designation of gift-giving. He “gives them to each one, just as he determines” (I Cor. 12:11), but that divine purpose works in concert with human desire. Our very desire can indicate God’s designation.

**The gift of tongues is a mystery.** “No one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit” (v. 2). Children of faith unlock the mysteries of the Spirit, and the gift of tongues is a manifestation of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:7).

**The gift of tongues is given “for the common good.”** Though it builds up the one practicing it, that action also builds the body. The stronger each marriage partner is, the

stronger the marriage. The stronger each individual part of the house, the stronger the house. You are doing the body of Christ a favor by getting as healthy as you can.

**A tongue interpreted is like a prophecy.** “He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified” (v. 5). The church is built up by prophecies that they understand. They are given for “strengthening, encouragement and comfort” (v. 3). An interpreted tongue serves the same purposes, and the net result is the same—edification. Paul is correcting the Corinthians because they were speaking in tongues but not prophesying, so he was encouraging this higher gift. Let’s not ignore the value of a tongue and interpretation in our worship life.

**The gift of tongues is more for private than for public use.** “In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (v. 19). This does not mean that speaking or singing in tongues during corporate worship is out of order. It happened when the Spirit fell at Pentecost and after.

**The gifts must be exercised with the fruit.** Tongues must cause us to go low, to consider others more important. If it creates pride, independence, or lack of concern for others, we are devaluing the gift (I Cor. 13:1-3).

**The gift of tongues is perfect.** “Every good and perfect gift is from above...” (Js. 1:17). To say that tongues is the least of the gifts does not diminish its importance. Gideon called himself the least in his family, the weakest clan in Manasseh (Judges 6:15). David was the least in his family in terms of order. God loves to choose the least to do the best, as He chose Paul, who by his own designation was the least of the apostles. The liver is less important than the brain but is absolutely essential for life.

My friend Robert Walter was speaking about the gift of tongues. He quoted from James that “no man can tame the tongue” (Js. 3:8). Quite a revealing statement. He said that God’s answer to our inability is to give us a gift in which the tongue is not only tamed but called into action to offer prayer and thanksgiving to God. Just like God to use our human weakness to bring forth perfect praise.

Could you imagine God giving a gift that is mediocre rather than perfect? God did not give us eight gifts of the Spirit that are worth going after and one gift that does not compare to the others. Everything He gives brings the mark of perfection on it. We can easily diminish any of God’s good gifts by lack of understanding. Paul writes that “those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor” (I Cor. 12:22,23). Do we dare degrade a gift of God by calling it a lesser gift? If you lost your toe, you might need to learn how to walk all over again. I say to my own shame that I am only beginning to appreciate the rich value of the gift that I received more than four decades ago. I hope that you are a better steward than I have been.

I know there are many other reasons for the gift that we have yet to unlock. It enhances our worship, strengthens our resolve to fully Christ wholeheartedly, and enables us to intercede effectively when we do not know how to pray. Recently as I was speaking in tongues in the morning, I felt the Lord saying, “This gift helps us endure suffering, build faith, and keep away sickness.” What other discoveries are we going to make as we are wise stewards of a rich gift?!