

Session 6 Praying in the Spirit (1 Cor. 14)

I. INTRODUCTION

This is session six in our second semester series on growing in prayer. We did ten parts in semester one; we are doing ten parts here in semester two. In this session we are talking about praying in the spirit, and we are focusing on 1 Corinthians 14. Of course there is quite a bit in the book of Acts on this, quite a few good examples. We are not going to have time to cover those, but they are pretty easy to locate. With just a casual read through the book of Acts you will find them, quite a few important passages.

- A. For about five years in my early ministry I taught against speaking in tongues. But I was perplexed by one verse related to this subject—Paul claimed that he spoke in tongues more than all the other believers who lived in Corinth (1 Cor. 14:18). Why did he value this gift so much that he engaged in it more than anyone? He was a busy man, so why did he invest so much time speaking in tongues?

¹⁸I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all. (1 Cor. 14:18)

I want to share just a little bit of my journey as I give this teaching. In my early ministry I was very energetic in teaching against the gift of tongues. I had a ministry at the University of Missouri; I led a Bible study there. A number of my friends had Bible studies in other campuses like KU, K State, places like that. We were all a part of the Presbyterian church down the road, Colonial Presbyterian. I was a part of that for about five years and was on the youth staff for a season. We would go and be guest speakers for each other at different university Bible studies, and I was going to MU. Whenever I would go to KU or the other places, they always had me come to teach on one subject: why the gift of tongues was not from God. That was my specialty subject. Everyone who knew me knew that was what I was going to talk on. The charismatic movement was just exploding across America, and people were laying hands on people. I went to lay hands “off” people.

I was really convinced that it was a troublesome, non-biblical distraction to really loving Jesus, so I taught on this energetically for five years. Now when I meet a pastor who has all the arguments against speaking in tongues, sometimes they are a little surprised that I can finish their argument for them and give them the Bible verses. I studied the arguments against it quite in-depth. I presented it quite a number of times, so I know what the main arguments are from the main Bible teachers who were writing on that subject in the 1970s. For example, John Stott being one of the premiere teachers in the Body of Christ from England was teaching why the Charismatic movement was wrong, etc.

There was one verse I could never make sense of, and it bothered me. I never said it to anybody else, but I would stare at it and think, “Hmm, how can I get rid of that verse?”

It was in 1 Corinthians 14:18. We are going to be mostly in 1 Corinthians 14 tonight. Paul said, “I thank God I speak in tongues more than everyone else.”

I thought, “What? Why would Paul speak in tongues more than everybody?” He meant all the believers in the city of Corinth. I figured there were thousands of believers potentially. Paul was building tents, so he was working full-time—working a substantial amount of time, I will say it that way—yet preaching. He had a lot of people coming to him for ministry. I thought, “When did this most busy man in Corinth have time to pray in tongues more than everybody else?” I wondered, “Now when was that happening?” Because he was making tents, and again he was ministering to so many individual needs.

So the part that bothered me was that Paul so valued this that he could say he did it more than everyone else, and say that confidently without any question. I thought, “What did he know about this gift? This is after the day of Pentecost. It is some decades later, a couple of decades later. So it is not the day of Pentecost thing; it is something else going on.” I was wondering, “Why is he doing this?”

- B. If Paul valued praying in tongues as much as he seemed to, then I had to rethink my position. This verse gives us a glimpse into Paul’s personal prayer life and his view on the gift of tongues.

II. TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES

- A. Paul described two different types of the gift of tongues—two expressions with two different purposes. This helps us to better understand two statements that seem contradictory, that “not all” have the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:30), yet “all” can receive it (1 Cor. 14:5; cf. Mk. 16:17).

⁷The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each for the profit of all: ⁸for to one is given the word of wisdom...¹⁰to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues...

³⁰Do all speak with tongues? (1 Cor. 12:7-10, 30)

²For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him...

⁴He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...⁵I wish you all spoke with tongues. (1 Cor. 14:2-5)

This really began to clear it up for me because I was in a lot of turmoil. At first I was just really fiery against it, then I became a little bit in turmoil. I started thinking that maybe I was wrong if Paul prayed in tongues more than everybody. That was the number one part I could not get a good answer for.

Paul described two different types of the gift of tongues. When I saw this, at first it created a lot of confusion for me because he makes two statements in 1 Corinthians that seemingly contradict each other. He says in 1 Corinthians 12:30 that not all speak in tongues. He says in 1 Corinthians 14:5 that all could speak in tongues; that was the implication. The implication in 1 Corinthians 12 is that not everyone does, while the implication in 1 Corinthians 14 is that everyone does. I thought, “Hmm. Which is it? Do they or do they not?”

Let’s read here in 1 Corinthians 12:7, “For the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one”—here is the key phrase—“for the profit of all.” We are going to find out in a minute he is going to talk about speaking in tongues for personal profit, not for the profit of others. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12 that if you speak in tongues publicly at a meeting, God gives that gift for the profit of everybody that is at the meeting.

Then he goes on in verse 30 and asks, “Do all speak in tongues?” A rhetorical question and the obvious answer is intended to be no. All do not speak in tongues. What he meant is all do not have the gift of tongues for the corporate worship service, which would be a benefit to the majority or to all that is in the service. Only a few people have the gift that is for the corporate gathering and is for the benefit of all.

Then in 1 Corinthians 14 he describes an entirely different dimension of this thing called the gift of tongues, a very different expression. 1 Corinthians 14:2 it says, “He that speaks in tongues”—it says—“he does not speak to men but to God. For no one understands...but he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.” So here he says that you edify yourself. So I would say, “Which is it? Do you edify yourself, 1 Corinthians 14? Do you edify the corporate body, 1 Corinthians 12? Which one is right, because this seemingly contradicts itself.”

Then he goes on in 1 Corinthians 14:5 and he says, “I wish you all spoke in tongues.” He goes on that his desire is that they would all enter into this.

I thought, “All?” Now this was the first hint to me as I began to study this more in depth with an open mind. Because I mostly studied it for five years just to present the argument against it, then I was troubled by the fact Paul prayed in tongues more than anybody, and I really liked Paul. I figured he was so busy, and I thought that he was a lot more anointed than I am, so I thought I needed to pay attention to what he did in his prayer life.

- B. In 1 Corinthians 12:30, Paul asked a rhetorical question, signifying that not every believer has the gift of tongues to profit the corporate body: “Do all speak with tongues?”
- C. In 1 Corinthians 12, the gift of tongues that Paul referred to was “for the profit of all,” yet he wrote in 1 Corinthians 14 about tongues that bring personal edification to the one speaking in tongues.

Here is the summary. In 1 Corinthians 12, it is the gift of tongues for the corporate body the profit of all, and then in 1 Corinthians 14 it is for the personal edification for the profit of the individual.

- D. There is a difference between the gift of tongues given to a few for the profit of the corporate body (1 Cor. 12:7) when the speaker speaks to men, and the gift of tongues given to all as a devotional prayer language for the profit of the individual who speaks privately to God (1 Cor. 14:2, 4).

So there is a difference. Notice three points where there is a difference between the gift of tongues: given to a few; for the corporate body or the corporate services; speaks to men. 1 Corinthians 14 is for everyone not a few; it is not for the corporate body, but is for the individual edification; and you are speaking to God, not speaking to people. It is a very different description of the gift of tongues. Here are two expressions of the gift of tongues that are quite different from one another. They are not contradictory, but they are not the same.

- E. Paul indicated that all can have the gift of tongues for their personal lives (1 Cor. 14:5, 39). Jesus included speaking in tongues as one of the signs that would follow those who believe (Mk. 16:17).

⁵I wish you all spoke with tongues...³⁹and do not forbid to speak with tongues. (1 Cor. 14:5, 39)

¹⁷“These signs will follow those who believe...they will speak with new tongues.” (Mk. 16:17)

*Paul indicated that all can have the gift of tongues. He said again in verse 5, “I wish you all did.” Then he says in verse 39, “Do not forbid anybody to speak with tongues.” Do not bring a resistance against this dimension of the grace of God. Well, Jesus was the first one to speak about this subject in the Bible. In Mark 16, Jesus said, “These signs will follow those who believe. They will cast out devils. They will speak with new tongues.” He said that these signs **will** follow believers.*

I always had trouble with that one. I read one commentary that said that this verse was put in later. I thought, “Oh, that is it!” You know that translates to: let us get our razor blade and cut it out.

- F. When Paul wrote of “speaking in tongues more than anyone” (1 Cor. 14:18), he was referring to using his personal prayer language, not to giving an utterance in tongues in a public church service. Thus, in my early ministry I taught against tongues based on one aspect of Paul’s teaching—that all do not have the gift of tongues to speak out in a public worship service (1 Cor. 12:30).

Here is the conclusion I came to after some real turmoil. First I was boldly against it with no turmoil, and then starting to get open about it and reading all the passages, and then getting in turmoil on the subject. Then I concluded that when Paul said he spoke in tongues more than everybody he was talking about his personal, private, devotional prayer language. He did not mean, “I use the gift of tongues in the public services more

than everybody else does”. You know, the gift where he spoke in tongues and gave an interpretation. I mean he might have done that some, but when he said, “I did it more than everybody,” he meant the private, personal use of the gift of tongues.

So in my early ministry I taught against tongues based on the idea there was only one kind, that there was only the gift of tongues to the body that everybody did not have. I did not know there was a gift of tongues for the individual edification that everybody could have. So my confusion was based on mixing up those two. I found over the years that when people are really open to what the Bible says on this subject—it took me a while to get open to it—it is really clear in the Scripture that they are two different realities.

There was another thing that bothered me back in those days when the charismatic movement was just breaking out across America. Once I met the Lord, I had a really strong personal conversion. I was a total heathen and got radically saved one day, June 9th, 1971. I mean it was heathen one day, and the next day I was born again and telling people about Jesus and getting out of hell and repenting of sin. I mean it really got a hold of me, and right after that I got in the midst of some fiery believers who were older than me.

I was fifteen at the time, and I met with some “old” believers who were eighteen and nineteen and were reading revival books. We got right into revival books and missionary stories, and I mean I was in. I was a part of a Presbyterian group right down the road about five miles from here that is still going strong. I have so much honor and so much gratitude for what that church gave me.

We had a youth group of maybe a 1,000 young people of junior high, high school, and young adults. It was a lot of young people making disciples and getting disciplined in small groups. There were a lot of us reading missionary books and biographies and wanting to go to the mission field. That kind of culture was in the youth ministry there.

Down the road the charismatic movement in America—this is 1971—was just beginning to really increase. You know 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1974, meaning this new phenomenon of people speaking in tongues. This new thing called “non-denominational churches” where people would gather a couple hundred people and start a church. I thought, “You cannot just start a church.” To me, it was like a guy just deciding, “I am going to start a medical practice without going to medical school.” It just seemed like bizarre to me that these people were starting churches; I was a teenager watching that.

The group down the road, this new charismatic church, was about 1,000 young people. We had about 1,000 in our group; they had about a 1,000, and they were all charismatic. They were getting everybody speaking in tongues, and they were infiltrating our youth group. Our people were speaking in tongues and then were confused. Then I was getting them to renounce tongues.

The thing that bothered me was that some of the charismatic guys that I saw did not read the Bible. They did not read the Bible, they did not live holy lives, they were not into evangelism, and they were into feeling good by the Holy Spirit. They lived in sin and compromise, yet they talked about how much power they had. It was like gross to me. I said, “Is that power? You don’t read the Bible? You don’t witness to people? You don’t live holy? You do goofy stuff and you call it the Holy Spirit. That is what you mean by power?”

So I was bothered by my first experiences with the people who quote “had the power.” Their lifestyles, the ones I saw, were very opposite of the folks I was with, who did not have “the power” but were reading the Bible, evangelizing, making disciples, going to the mission field. I thought that this was a total aberration down the road, that it was just a confused group of people. Again there were a few confused people in them, but there was something real going on, too, that took me a little while to figure out.

III. THREE BENEFITS OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES

- A. Paul identified three specific benefits of speaking in tongues: speaking mysteries (v. 2); edifying oneself (v. 4); and blessing and giving thanks to God (v. 17).

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul identified three specific benefits of speaking in tongues. Number one he said, speaking in tongues you speak mysteries; that is verse 2. Second, you edify yourself; your spiritual battery is charged so to speak, and that is verse 4. Third, you bless and give thanks to God; that is verse 17. Let's look at each one of them for just a moment. We will spend more time on the speaking of mysteries.

- B. **Speaking mysteries:** When we speak in tongues in a devotional way, we commune with the Spirit who gives information that helps us to understand God's will and heart for us. Speaking mysteries is not about receiving "special truths" that are available to only a few. Paul was not referring to secret, elite information some might gain about spiritual things as the Gnostics claimed to have.

²For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. (1 Cor. 14:2)

In 1 Corinthians 14:2, Paul said, "For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men." Right now we know this is not the same thing as two chapters earlier. 1 Corinthians 12 he was talking about speaking in tongues so that people would be blessed. Here he says that you are not even talking to men, but you are talking to God. He is referring to the personal prayer language.

He continues, "...for no one understands him." No one else is edified when you pray in tongues yourself. The guy next to you is not edified; you are, but he is not. So this is very different from 1 Corinthians 12. Here it is, "...but in the spirit he speaks mysteries." That is the key phrase. Now when Paul talks about speaking mysteries, he is not talking about receiving some special truth that only a few elite believers have. Anytime somebody thinks they have a special body of truth that nobody else has, do not believe it. What the Lord is saying, He is saying to groups all over the earth. It does not have to be the majority of the groups, but there are thousands of groups around the earth that are hearing what the Lord is saying. The Lord may be saying different things, but there are always some thousands of groups around the earth that are hearing it and obeying it. There is not just one group here and one group there.

1. As our spirit communes with the Spirit of God, we may receive faint and subtle impressions from the Lord in the way that words of knowledge come to us. These impressions may give us insight as to how God wants to touch us or someone else through our prayers. They may be insights about our calling, life, or areas of brokenness and pain where our heart needs healing.

So he was not referring to mysteries as in some elite special information that only a few of the elite would have. He was talking about the Holy Spirit communicating information to our hearts. When he speaks of mysteries, he did not mean something mysterious, but he was saying that it is something that you did not know until the Holy Spirit gave you an impression. It was a piece of information the Holy Spirit gave you. When He gave it to you, you thought, "Oh, that makes sense!" It is not that the information was mysterious itself; it was simply hidden from you until the Holy Spirit gave it to you.

This mystery is this: when you pray in the Spirit, pray in tongues, the Holy Spirit will give you faint impressions and mental pictures about your own heart, about your own life, to unlock your heart where you have been in pain or in bondage or there is a block in your life. You think, "Oh, I never connected this with that." The Lord shows you an area of bitterness in your life or an area of how to pray for somebody else. So the information

itself is not mysterious; it is just information you did not have until the Holy Spirit gave you the impression about it.

Praying in the Spirit is a very important part of positioning yourself in your relationship with God where you receive information to be a blessing to pray for other people. You pray in the spirit; maybe the Lord will give you an impression of how to encourage your wife. Maybe something that is painful to one of your children or to a good friend, and the point of the pain will just come to you like an impression or a picture. You will go and you will pray for the person following the Holy Spirit's leadership.

You do not have to go to the person and say, "God showed me this." Just say, "I just want to pray for the pain in your heart about this..."

Many times they will say, "Wow, that is the Lord." So through speaking in tongues we receive information that is helpful for the Holy Spirit to use to minister to us or to minister through us.

2. We may receive a mental picture of someone or see their pain or discouragement or a need they have. We may receive direction about how to pray for or serve God's plans for other people, cities, and nations. Or the Spirit may show us something in our lives, such as the need to humble ourselves to someone or reach out in relationship. Often the mysteries that the Spirit highlights are practical issues in which He wants to minister to us or through us.

We may get a mental picture, see the pain or discouragement or a need that somebody has, maybe a friend or a stranger, a family member. Maybe the Lord will show us something in our own lives. You are praying in the spirit, and you get a picture of how you need to go to that brother and ask him to forgive you for saying that unkind word yesterday. You think, "Ah." It just comes to you, and you say, "Thank You, Lord, I never even thought about it. It did not occur to me that might be painful to him." So you go to him and you say, "Hey, you know yesterday da-da-da..."

The guy says, "Well, I appreciate that."

The Holy Spirit says, "I will just give you lots of information, just little fragments of information, just faint simple impressions, kind of a mental picture." That is the simple way He does it. He can do it more dramatically than that, but that is normally how it happens.

3. Before ministering to a group, I seek to pray in the Spirit to position myself to receive impressions, mental pictures, phrases, and direction from the Spirit to guide and help me. It is good to pray for the interpretation of what you are praying for (1 Cor. 14:13). As you do, the Holy Spirit may give you insight into what is on His heart for a particular situation.

¹³Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. (1 Cor. 14:13)

Before I minister to a group of people, whether it is a group of ten or twenty or a 1,000 or a conference or before I come to these services like tonight, I will go in my office or I will do it in the prayer room as well, and I will just pray in the spirit for a while. I do not necessarily get the information right then, though sometimes I do. I will get an impression or something will come like an emotion that the Holy Spirit heightens. I pay attention to that as I minister to people; I speak in concordance with that heightened emotion or that mental picture. I almost never point it out to anybody or to you when I am speaking on Friday or Saturday night. It is something the Holy Spirit gives me, directions, just little hints before the meeting. Then I just follow that, and that is how many, many, many people do this.

So Paul said in verse 13, “Let him who speaks in tongues pray that he may interpret.” So I will pray in tongues, and I will say, “Lord, show me the burden. Show me the thing that is on Your heart that You are highlighting.” It is not just always a burden in the negative, heavy sense, though it can be. “Show me what is on Your heart. Let me interpret the burden or the passion or the theme that is on Your heart for this person or this group I am going to minister to.”

Now when some people read the words, “let them interpret”, they read the words, “let them translate.” I remember in our early days, again somebody would pray in tongues and somebody would interpret it. We would say, “Hey, that was not a translation!”

You know somebody said something like, “Dupadeedo, dupadeedo, dupadeedo.”

Then this guy gave some great message afterwards: Yea, says the Lord, I will send you to the nations.

I said, “Wait a second, the first guy said the same thing over and over.” So we thought it was suppose to be a translation. Well, an interpretation of the burden or the theme on God’s heart is not the same thing as a translation of every syllable. So when I pray in tongues, I pray in the spirit, I will say, “Lord let me interpret what was going on. I do not understand what I am saying to you, but you know. Let a faint impression—or a not-so faint one is even better—let it touch my heart.”

4. Paul spoke of the Spirit as searching the depths of God to reveal them to us. He is our glorious escort into the deep things of God’s heart, Word, and will (1 Cor. 2:10-12). The Spirit possesses full knowledge of the Father and Son—one preacher spoke of Him as the ultimate “search engine” of God’s heart. He gives us a portion of what He searches out as we engage more with Him by speaking to Him with our minds and by praying with our spirit.

¹⁰For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God...¹²We have received...the Spirit... that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Cor. 2:10-12)

Here is a very powerful aspect of praying in the spirit: the Holy Spirit searches the deep things of God. I pray in the spirit while I am studying the Bible. I pray in the spirit when I am studying the Bible, after I study it, before I am getting ready to study. Praying in the spirit and reading the Word and meditating and writing, journaling it—they all flow together.

If I did not have the “praying in the spirit dimension” to my Bible study, I would have much to lose. Meaning I believe that you are in this communion interaction with the Holy Spirit. Your mind is reading the passage, you are praying in the spirit—not that you always have to be praying in the spirit when you read it, that is not what I am saying but I just do it intermittently through it—your spirit is communing with God’s spirit and more understanding will come to you. I do not mean secret information—that is not what I mean—or some eccentric new insight about the names of angels in a realm, you know eight realms higher in heaven or something. Some folks focus on trying to get stuff like that. I say, “I do not even care about that stuff. The only two angels I care about by their name are Michael and Gabriel, the ones in the Bible. Then when I get to the age to come, I will learn all the other names.”

The Holy Spirit is our escort into the deep things of God’s heart. I mean the Holy Spirit knows everything about the Father and the Son. He knows everything about the Bible, and He is our escort. He would say, “I will give you impressions. I will lead you and guide you.” Praying in the spirit is not the only key to that, but it is a component of being led by the Spirit in Bible study.

So the first benefit is that you receive mysteries. It is a very practical thing, information that the Holy Spirit will minister to you or through you or give you living understanding of the Word or His perspective on an issue—not the whole perspective, but just a little portion of it.

- C. **Edifying oneself:** Edifying oneself means being strengthened, or built up. Paul was encouraging them to “charge their spiritual batteries.” Praying in the Spirit results in our hearts becoming more sensitive to the things of the Spirit (Jude 20). We may not feel anything when we pray in the Spirit, but we should not seek to measure what is happening by what we feel in that moment.

⁴***He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself. (1 Cor. 14:4)***

²⁰***...building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. (Jude 20)***

The next benefit is edifying yourself. Again look at verse 4. Paul says, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.” One Bible commentator used the phrase: charges their spiritual batteries. That is what the phrase edifies yourself is like; charging your spiritual batteries is a practical interpretation or kind of giving the sense of what that passage means.

Now in Jude 20, the apostle Jude wrote, “Building yourself up in your most holy faith.” The idea is to do this by praying in the Holy Spirit. The “by” is implied there; you build up or you edify yourself by praying in the spirit. Now someone might say, “Well, I prayed in the spirit, and I did not feel anything.” Don’t get into measuring how much you feel or how much ground you gained that day or that week. You take what the Word says, and you pray in the spirit as much as you can, just in the coming and the going of life. You can pray in the spirit when you are going somewhere or when you are walking down the hallway. You pray in the spirit yourself, just when you are out and about. Pray in the spirit and do not measure it. You will look back over the months and years and there will be a clear distinct increase of the Holy Spirit’s activity in your life.

- D. **Blessing and thanking God:** We bless and thank God when we pray or sing in tongues. Paul wrote that he who speaks in a tongue speaks to God (1 Cor. 14:2). Speaking in tongues is a gift that we use to bless, praise, and worship God in a way that differs from giving thanks only with our minds.

²***For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God...¹⁶If you bless with the spirit, how will he [others] ...say “Amen” at your giving of thanks...?¹⁷You indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. (1 Cor. 14:2, 16-17)***

The third benefit is blessing and thanking God. In 1 Corinthians 14:2, 16, 17, Paul says, “He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but he speaks to God. If you bless with the spirit, how will others in the congregation say ‘Amen’ at your giving of thanks? For indeed you give thanks well, but the other is not edified.” Paul is saying that if you are using your devotional prayer language in the congregation, and you are speaking in tongues in that devotional way, the guy next to you is not edified, but you are blessing and giving thanks. His argument here is that you are still doing that—giving thanks—but it doesn’t edify the guy next to you, that is.

The point not to lose is that when you are praying in tongues, you are blessing and giving thanks. Now the question is, whom are you blessing? To whom are you giving thanks? Verse 2 tells you that when you speak in tongues, devotional tongues, you are talking to God, so that is who you are talking to. You are blessing and you are giving thanks to God. He interprets it in this way.

You can have a mindset and attitude of gratitude and just, “Lord, You are so kind to me. You are so good to me.” You are praying in tongues and you are thanking Him so you don’t have to find out 500 new ways to say, “I really love You. Thank You, thank You! Oh, I just really bless You. Thank You, God.” I mean you can say it ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty ways but Paul said that when you pray in tongues, your spirit is engaged in that spirit of blessing and thanksgiving without always having a new term or a new phrase to express it. I really do believe in expressing thanks with words that we understand, but we do not want to limit that expression of blessing and thanksgiving just to phrases that are creative. You can enter into that devotional thanksgiving engagement with God. Look what he says in verse 17, “...for indeed you give thanks well.” You do it well. That is how the Lord interprets it.

- E. Because we speak to God when we pray in tongues, we should specifically direct our attention to Him and not just speak mindlessly into the air. When I pray in tongues, I often focus my mind on the scene centered on God’s throne in heaven (Revelation 4) and speak directly to the Father. At other times I speak to the Holy Spirit who dwells in my spirit (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 13:14).

Now when you pray in tongues, devotional tongues, do not pray into the air. It is not just mindlessly praying in tongues, but the key is actually to talk to God. I know folks that have prayed in tongues like fifteen minutes a day or a half hour a day or they try that, but they are just kind of praying to the air, which it does not hurt anything, but they do not get the benefit.

I say, “But you are not really talking to a person.”

“Well, yeah, now that you mention it, I am just kind of saying words.”

I reply, “No, this thing is about a relationship with a person.”

So talk to God when you pray in tongues, not just into the air. I focus my attention, as I mentioned before, on the throne of God in Revelation 4. Our Father who art in heaven, He sits on that throne with a rainbow around the throne and the twenty-four elders and four living creatures, etc. Sometimes when I speak in tongues, my focus is on the indwelling Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit living in me, fellowshiping and communing with the Holy Spirit.

- F. Paul referred to praying night and day, or praying without ceasing (1 Thes. 3:10; 5:17). One way he was able to pray so consistently was by praying in tongues while doing other things, such as making tents (Acts 18:3; 20:34) or walking from one city to the next.

Paul talked about praying night and day or praying without ceasing. I mean, that is a pretty heavy statement! You pray night and day? You pray without ceasing? Like, wow! I believe Paul is speaking the truth. How does a person do that? I mean, do you pray in English fourteen hours a day? Is that what Paul meant, that he prayed in Greek or whatever language he spoke? I believe that one of the ways that you can pray far more consistently is not only in your native language, but also by praying in your devotional prayer language and having that be a part. Even while Paul’s hands were busy making the tents at Corinth, I believe he was praying in the spirit when he was doing it and walking to the next city praying in the spirit. There are many different ways you can do it.

IV. PRAYING AND SINGING IN THE SPIRIT

- A. Praying “with the spirit” and praying “in the spirit” includes praying in tongues. We can pray with our understanding (our minds) and with our spirits. Both types of praying are important, but praying with our spirit impacts us in a different way than praying with our minds. God designed us so that our spirit engages with God by speaking or singing in tongues (1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

¹⁵I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. (1 Cor. 14:15)

Paul speak of praying and singing in the spirit in 1 Corinthians 14:15. Notice the term, “I pray with the spirit.” That means in tongues. “I pray with the understanding.” That is the words of a worship song. In our context, that means in English. So Paul means, “I will pray or sing with the spirit in tongues or I will pray and sing with understanding, meaning in my native language,” or for us, the language we are familiar with.

God has designed the human spirit so that, when we pray in tongues, we are actually engaging our spirit with God. That is what Paul is saying. Now we would not know that if Paul had not told us that our spirit man is actually engaging and praying in a way that is not contrary to but is distinct from our mind praying. I like this idea that my born-again spirit can pray and engage with God without my mind being fully aware of all that is going on. There is no contradiction, but there is an overlap and there is some distinction.

So when you sing in tongues, your spirit is singing. You think, “What?” Well, that is just what it is. Your spirit is singing. There you have it.

When I first read that years ago, I thought, “What do you mean my spirit is singing?” I wondered, “How do I make my spirit sing?”

Well, Paul would say, “Just sing in tongues and your spirit will sing. It will engage your spirit.”

I thought, “Okay, I believe the Bible so I am going to believe Paul’s description here.”

- B. Both singing with our spirit and with our understanding is important in our spiritual life. Paul taught that if we sing to God from our hearts, we would experience God’s grace and the Spirit’s presence.

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col. 3:16)

We can merge together singing with the spirit—singing in tongues—with singing with our understanding, singing in a known language. We can merge them together, singing with our mind and singing with our spirit. Paul mentioned this twice, once in Colossians and once in Ephesians.

Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ”—or let the Bible, the Scripture—“dwell in you richly.” In other words, spend time reading the Bible. Does the Word of God, the Bible, dwell in you richly? Do you spend time to where the Bible is more and more preoccupying the whole atmosphere of your inner man? It is not as if it will entirely, but is it growing in you? Is the Word of God dwelling and increasing richly?

He says, “...teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Here he brings the two together “singing with grace in your heart.” What a phrase! When you sing with your spirit, you are blessing and giving thanks to God. When you sing with your understanding, well, you are blessing and thanking God as well. The merging of the two is singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.

There are two points I want to highlight here. It is not just singing to the air; it is singing to the Lord, a real person. That is how this gift becomes edifying—when you sing to a Person, and you talk to a Person, not just to the air. You sing with sincerity in the heart; that is the idea.

Some folks seem to think that speaking in tongues is almost like a kind of superstitious thing, kind of a “lucky charm” type of thing. They think, “Well, I will sing in the spirit, but I am not engaging at all with God or being sincere with Him because I am doing some stuff I should not be doing. At least I am praying in the spirit! That ought to count for something, and maybe it will balance the score or something.”

The Lord is saying, “No, no! It has to come from your heart wanting connection with Me.” It is to the Lord and you are singing with grace; that is, grace is touching your heart when this comes together.

- C. One way we are filled with the Spirit is by singing spiritual songs in our heart to the Lord.

¹⁸...but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. (Eph. 5:18-19)

Paul said the same thing in Ephesians 5:18-19. It is the same idea. Be filled with the Spirit, and the idea is by—I am adding the word “by” because it is implied—by speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs and making melody in your heart. Again it is to the Lord we are doing this, not just to the air.

So being filled with the Spirit means that you are interacting with the Lord in a way where His influence is touching your mind and emotions; that is what it means practically to be filled with the Spirit. It involves positioning yourself and your relationship with the Lord where you are regularly in a place where you can be in conscious contact with the presence of God, where you are aware of it and the things you are saying and doing release—not at the highest level all the time—a sense of inspiration and awareness in your mind and emotions of God’s presence. That is a real, practical, down-to-earth definition of being filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is not just speaking in tongues. Being filled with the Spirit is that interaction with God where your mind and emotions are aware of His presence and you are being inspired and being a little bit directed by Him. I do not mean in some intense thing all time, as it can be very subtle.

Paul says that will increase if you will sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord. Make melody in English or your native tongue, and make melody with tongues. Merge these two realities together, and you will actually walk more in the Spirit; you will be filled with the Spirit. You will be consciously aware of the Spirit’s presence more, not that you will be overwhelmed and overcome by the Spirit all the time. That is not what Paul is saying. Just being aware and consciously in contact and communication with the Holy Spirit.

- D. By singing the Word and singing with our spirit, our heart becomes more sensitive to the Spirit. I have discovered the power of spontaneously singing Bible passages to God and intermittently singing in tongues, which often results in the Holy Spirit’s touching the deep chambers of my heart.
- E. Singing the Word impacts our hearts more than just speaking it or hearing others speak it. God designed our heart to be touched deeply by music and singing. As we sing the Word and sing with our spirit, we receive mysteries (impressions from the Holy Spirit) and gain insight from the Word. The Spirit will give us more and more if we will sing the Word and sing with our spirit consistently.
- F. I encourage people to start by seeking to pray in the Spirit for fifteen minutes a day.

I encourage people to start by praying in the spirit fifteen minutes a day. You know some folks will talk about an hour or two, and that is cool, but I just do not know how many people actually follow through on that. I mean

an hour or two a day is a good long-term goal that would be really good if you did it. I just do not want people to set the bar so high they don't ever actually do it. So start in a way where you know you can do this, four or five or six days a week, and I know you will be a "satisfied customer," to use that phrase. You will want to do it more if you start doing it regularly because you will sense His presence more. You will think, "Hey, I like this." Then grow beyond that. So don't limit it to fifteen minutes a day, but do not put the bar so high at first that you do not actually ever do it.

V. BEING CONSIDERATE WHEN PRAYING IN TONGUES

- A. Paul spoke of times in church services when it is best not to pray in tongues out loud, but rather to pray in tongues *to oneself and to God*. He spoke of it as a practical expression of edifying others and seeking to excel in love (1 Cor. 14:12). In a public gathering such as a church service or prayer meeting, it is important not to distract others when praying in tongues. A public prayer room is like a public living room. There are many different types of personalities sharing this "living room."

¹²...let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel...²⁸If there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. (1 Cor. 14:12, 28)

Now, being considerate when praying in tongues. Somebody give me an amen! This is an area that causes a lot of frustration in prayer ministry, in a prayer movement. In 1 Corinthians 14:12 Paul said, talking about tongues right now, "Let it be for the edification of the people in the church. Seek to excel to edify the people you are around."

Verse 28, "Therefore if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church and speak to himself and speak to God." When it says to speak to himself and speak to God, that is Paul's way of saying to pray in tongues under your breath. That is what he is talking about. He is talking about your staying engaged with God in tongues, but you are doing it for yourself and to God. Paul says that is what he recommends that you do so that you can seek to excel in edifying the people around you.

This is a very, very practical expression of loving and edifying people in a prayer gathering like this: to be conscious of not distracting the people two rows in front of you and two rows behind you. One guy might say, "Two rows? How about twenty rows in front of that guy and twenty rows behind him?" I am just having fun.

A public prayer room—and I have said this to folks over the years, as for some people it is a brand new idea—I explain is a public living room; it is not your living room only. People can feel like in the prayer room it is just them and God. I say, "Yeah, I know it is you and God, but in your house you have lots of rooms. You have bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms, kitchens, basements, and garages. You don't do everything in every room." It is a living room, and to some people that is the strangest new idea.

There are other people who love God, and there are those who are coming in burdened. They are burdened by what just happened in their family, what is happening in their marriage, what is happening with their children, what is happening in their school. They are burdened by their money situation, they are burdened by a sickness, they are burdened by a sin they are trying to get free of. They are coming in stressed out, and they are having the hardest time focusing on God. They are trying, "God, I am trying to focus on You. I am trying." The guy next to them is just really in a certain loud mood, and they are thinking, "Do not, bro. I am trying to touch God."

I love that you love Him, but let's think of one another. It is so hard to stay focused anyway. So let's just be aware that whatever you do in a public gathering should edify the people around you in the way that you

express yourself. Again, there are things you do in a living room that you do not do in other rooms and vice versa. So the principle is being sensitive to be edifying to people, not just expressive, but edifying. Because we can express our life in God in many different avenues of our life, we do not have to do everything in a public prayer meeting or in a worship service. There are things I can do alone with God that I do not do in public with God, not because it is horrible, but because it is a distraction to the people. I can still do it at other times through the day in private.

- B. We show love and consideration for others by praying in tongues quietly to avoid distracting them. If the majority of the people in the prayer meeting are singing in the Spirit or praying aloud in the Spirit together, then by all means join in. If you are one of the only people praying out loud in tongues in a meeting, then do it quietly to yourself. It does not quench the Spirit to pray in tongues quietly; in fact, it honors the Lord when we show love and consideration for His people.

So here is a principle to observe. If the majority of the people in the room or even a minority of the room plus some, it does not have to be a big majority, if they are all singing spontaneously, making melody in their heart, singing in the spirit, jump in and go hard. If you are the only one in the room doing it, do it in a volume where everyone around you is not more aware of you than they are the people leading on the platform. It is just a simple act of love; it is just a simple consideration.

So the rule is, if the volume of the room is a four, do not be six; just be 3.8. The volume of the room is six, be 5.8. Do not try to be seven. Do not do anything to draw attention to yourself, but just engage. There are plenty of opportunities in your life outside of that room for you and God to go hard. It is not like when you leave the room the Holy Spirit says, "Oh, you missed the window." No, the Holy Spirit says, "Here we are! Let's go out in the field, and let's go for it."

- C. We can pray quietly in tongues under our breath anywhere without allowing others to hear us. I do this in leadership meetings, at family meals, or when walking down the hall to my next meeting.

You can pray in tongues quietly without anybody being aware of you at all. I mean many of us do that. I pray in tongues in my staff meetings. I am talking about in the ten or twelve leadership meetings. During family dinners I am praying in the spirit, not the whole time, but many times under my breath. Even in the mall. My wife would say, "You? In the mall? Like when you went three years ago?" You know it is a good analogy. When I say it, every time she asks me, "Now what is this mall thing?"

I say, "You know what I mean." I don't really go to the mall very often.

I do walk down the hallway to the next meeting, and I pray in the spirit in my heart while I do it. I do a lot driving back and forth between the Red Bridge Center and FCF. I mean you can do it anywhere almost. I mean probably anywhere, just quietly with the Lord. You are not quenching the Holy Spirit at all.

Paul actually said this, "...pray to yourself and to God." The Spirit is actually honored when we excel in loving other people and being considerate to other folks.

VI. RECEIVING THE GIFT OF TONGUES

- A. It is significant that Jesus mentioned praying in tongues in the context of the Great Commission. I believe we will be more effective in ministry if we include both casting out devils and speaking in tongues. They go hand in hand in successfully engaging in the Great Commission.

**¹⁵“Go into all the world and preach the gospel...¹⁷These signs will follow those who believe:
In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues.” (Mk. 16:15-17)**

Let’s talk about receiving the gift of tongues. I think it is remarkable that Jesus mentioned praying in tongues in context to the Great Commission. He said in Matthew 16—we already read it, but just see it again—“Go into all the world and preach the gospel, and these signs will follow you as you go preach the gospel”—this is the Great Commission—“In My name they will cast out demons; in My name they will speak with new tongues.” Jesus is the One who introduced this idea. The idea is that we will be more effective in ministry by preaching the gospel alongside of praying for the sick, casting out devils, speaking in new tongues, etc.

You know some folks have been talking about whether we cast out devils or not. They say that they do deliverance, not really casting out devils. I say, “No, we cast out devils.” I am really into casting out devils. I am bold about it. That is what we are praying for in prayer meetings: to see the gospel go forth powerfully. I am not ashamed of casting devils out of people. That is what we do. We preach the gospel, we heal the sick, we cast out devils, we serve the poor, and we preach to the needy. That is a good thing to do. Though it is politically incorrect in part of the Body of Christ, that is between them and God. We want to excel in all of these things. We are not shy about casting devils out. Devils are real, and they need to be cast out. We need to do it in a biblical way with humility and love, but by all means do it.

- B. Being edified in our spiritual lives by praying in tongues is an essential aspect of walking in the Spirit and ministering in His power. I have never known anyone who operated in the prophetic or the healing ministry who did not speak in tongues regularly in their private prayer time.

*I have found that praying in tongues is an essential aspect of walking in the Spirit and ministering in His power. I have some good examples in my book. As you know, this whole series is coming right out of my book, **Growing in Prayer**. In the chapter “**Praying in the Spirit**”, I give the examples of a number of different people who were powerfully used in healing ministries and who made mention of speaking in tongues having a significant impact to their moving in power and healing, though it is not that they are earning it by praying in tongues.*

I gave a little bit about John G. Lake, probably the most powerful example of the healing ministry in the twentieth century. Five years in South Africa, and many, many, many witnesses to 500,000 healings in those five years. Hundreds of churches, I mean it is the most remarkable ministry.

I had an opportunity some thirty-five plus years ago to meet his daughter. She was about eighty. He died in 1935, and when I met her, she was about eighty. I got to meet her when I was pastoring in St. Louis before I came to Kansas City, about thirty-five years ago, something like that. I said, “You are John G. Lake’s daughter?”

She replied, “I always have been my whole life, yeah.”

I said, “That is cool!”

She answered, “Well, I appreciate that.” She was eighty, and she was kind of used to the idea.

We got to talk to her and her husband for hours. He, of course, knew his father-in-law really well before he died. They told me lots of stories. She said that her father prayed in tongues several hours a day and that it was a very important part.

I said, “Really?”

She said, “Yeah, that was a really key thing. He was a man of the Word, but he prayed much in the Holy Spirit.”

I have a few more examples in the book that I will not go into now, but I want to encourage you to look at them. One other in there is Paul Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the largest church in history from Seoul, Korea. You know 500,000 or more active members for year. Someone said, 700,000. I do not know. I think you just quit counting after 500,000. I know a few people who know Dr. Cho well. I have had a chance to meet him a time or two. I do not know him well or anything and did not ask him any personal questions, but I knew a few guys that who knew him well.

One man told this story. He said, “I remember we had a meeting with Pastor Cho. Then after this long meeting we said, ‘Well, let’s all break now and go to lunch.’ It was two o’clock in the afternoon. Pastor Cho said, ‘I cannot go to lunch now; the meeting went too long. It is two o’clock, and I have to preach tonight at seven.’ They said, ‘At seven? It is only two. You have time.’ He said, “No, no. I cannot preach at seven if I am not going to pray in the spirit for a few hours.’ He added, “No way. I will not go into a pulpit if I am not spending time in prayer, as a rule. I want to spend several hours before that meeting praying in tongues. It makes a big difference.’”

I am sure many times he did not have the opportunity or it did not quite work that way, but this man telling the story was very impacted by that. He said, “That was remarkable. Pastor Cho just went into his office, prayed for a couple of hours in tongues and did the meeting.” His idea is that he does not want to do meetings that he does not prepare for this way. That is a pretty powerful reality.

- C. Praying in tongues is a universal benefit for all believers. It is not a requirement or proof of salvation; rather, it is a benefit available to us through the work of Jesus and the indwelling of the Spirit. It is not reserved for those with a special calling. It does not require any special training, qualification, or preparation. It is a free gift to all as a part of the benefits of our salvation.

*⁵I wish you all spoke with tongues...¹⁸I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;
³⁹...desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. (1 Cor. 14:5, 18, 39)*

- D. If you have never received your devotional prayer language (the gift of tongues), then you can ask for it now. It is simple—just ask the Lord to release this particular aspect of His grace to you. Some say, if the Spirit wants them to speak in tongues, *then He will make them*. However, the Spirit will not “force” anyone to speak in tongues. Some wait for an *overwhelming* sense of the Spirit, but often the Spirit touches His people like a gentle breeze. Therefore, as you pray for the release of the gift of tongues, you may simply feel the presence of God lightly or just a gentle urge to speak out. I encourage you to speak out the words that come to you and see what the Holy Spirit does.

If you have not received your prayer language, you can ask for it right now. That is what we are going to do. Here is one of the number one hindrances to receiving the gift of tongues, this idea that God will just overwhelmingly make them speak in it without their taking any action. I have run into this just hundreds of times, hundreds of times. The guy thinks God is going to make him talk in tongues. So he stands there receiving, as someone prays, “Now Lord, just touch him.” Then five minutes or an hour goes by, whatever. He says, “God did not make me do it.”

I say, “No, He is never going to make you do it, ever.”

They have this idea they are going to be forced and overwhelmed with power, and it is going to be something out of their control. I mean that really might happen a few times; there are a few stories where the guy was

touched by the Spirit, and he spoke in tongues. They heard that story and assumed that was the norm, but that was the dramatic, exceptional story.

Here's what happens when I pray for people. I ask the Holy Spirit to release His presence, and they just feel the presence of the Spirit a little bit, just a little bit or a lot, but often a little bit. Sometimes they have just this very gentle urge inside just to speak out. I say, "Do it. The Holy Spirit is not going to make you do it. Just do it. That gentle urge, give yourself to it and see what the Holy Spirit does with you."

Often people have this idea that the Holy Spirit is going to come like a mighty rushing river, and He does occasionally, but He mostly comes like a very gentle stream. A little sense of His presence, just kind of a little urging nudging inside. You say what you are sensing, and that language starts off like a little stream, and it grows over time through using it. People have this wrong idea that they are going to be forced to do it.

The presence of God is resting on them. You do not earn the gift of tongues; it is for everybody, for every single person. You cannot earn it, it is not for a special calling, and you cannot prepare for it. It is for everybody and is part of the benefits of salvation. It is not a requirement of salvation, and it is not a proof of salvation. It is not a proof that you have power now. It is just a way to communicate with God, which will enrich your spiritual life and through which you will experience more of His presence.

This next part may sound negative, and I do not mean it to sound negative. I am trying to be helpful, trying to be helpful. I have prayed for people to receive what I call it their devotional prayer language or the gift of tongues. They hear the gift of tongues and they are familiar with it, but they think of the gift of tongues in the congregation where they interpret in another language and the unbeliever gets saved.

I say, "No, let's not think about that right now. Let's just think about that personal prayer language. You will start off just as a little urging, a little nudging of the Holy Spirit. You give expression to it, and it will increase as you go. It is not such a hard thing to get." Where they are gritting their teeth and trying real hard, concentrating super hard, I say, "Just relax. Dial down a little bit."

So I will pray for a person, and if that person has almost no background, no church background at all—I mean this is after forty years or whatever the number is, of praying thirty-five years of praying for people to receive their prayer language—if a person is on fire for the Lord, and they have no church background, they almost always get it in five minutes.

Now, if a person is there praying, everybody is praying, and there is one guy trying to shout it into them and shaking them, "in the name of Jesus." You know, doing it like that is not going to help anything; they are already intimidated and overwhelmed with all of their friends "helping" them to get it. So, just back away from them.

When someone is not getting it, I look at them and—okay, this sounds mean, but this is what I say and I don't intend for it to be mean—I ask, "What are you, Baptist or Nazarene?"

No, seriously, and ninety-nine percent of the time they say, "How did you know?"

I say, "I could guarantee it and here is why. I am not saying this negatively to you. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word. You have been trained in the Word against it, so you have faith against it." Those two denominations in particular teach against it. I am sure there are a hundred others that do it as well, but those two really school their people and different ministries. I say, "You were are trained how it is not right. You have heard teaching against it for a couple years."

They say, "Yeah, how did you know?"

I answer, “Well, because faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word, and you have negative faith against it. Just dial down and relax and ask the Holy Spirit to touch you. He is not going to force you, He is not going to take His hand and wag your tongue. He is not going to do that. You are going to feel a little gentle sense of His presence; you are going to feel a little stirring. Just express it and it will grow as you do it. It is not so complex.”

It is not always those two groups, but I am saying that is just what I have run into over the years. I say, “You are trying so hard.”

They say, “But what if it is wrong?” They have more confidence in the devil’s ability to deceive them than in Jesus’ ability to lead them.

I say, “You are praying in the name of Jesus to honor Him, with godly people praying for you, with a Bible in your hand, and you think the devil is more powerful? Like, no, Jesus’ leadership is far more powerful than Satan’s deception. We are praying in the name of Jesus to honor Him.” Then I pray, “Holy Spirit, we love You!” I tell them, “We are not trying to do some other religion; that is not what you are doing. You do not have to worry about that. The devil is not more powerful. We are in the name of Jesus now, with a Bible and a heart to obey God and exalt Him.”

So I encourage them, “Just relax, just relax.” Often I encourage them, “Just go home and pray by yourself.”

Because if they have their five friends around them, they get so nervous because their friends are asking, “Did you really get it? Did you fake get it? Did you sort of get it?” They become so self-conscious that they can’t even receive anything.

So I tell the friends, “You friends, go in another room.”

Then the lady or the guy says, “Thanks, thanks. I did need to get rid of them for now. Okay, thank you.”

“No problem.”

Often they will just sense the Spirit a little bit, and it will not be a real dramatic thing. They will feel just that gentle urging of the Lord. They will give themselves to it. They will express or say a few syllables. I don’t mean they make it up. I say, “Don’t stress over it. Just continue to enjoy it, and it will be very clear.”

You look back a year or two later, and this will be a source of edifying your life in the Holy Spirit that exalts Jesus. You will be glad that you began to develop this dimension of your spiritual life.

Amen and amen.