

6. The Holy Spirit Gives the Gift of Tongues

Opening question

Who here uses the gift of tongues? Invite a couple of people to share how they started doing it.

Fact check: not everyone who is filled with the Spirit speaks in tongues

The gift of tongues is one of the many wonderful ways the Holy Spirit may manifest Himself. Speaking in tongues isn't mentioned every time someone is filled with the Spirit in Acts, and Paul suggests the same when writing to the Corinthians:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit... All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills... Do all speak with tongues? [This question is written with the implied answer, ‘No’.]” (1 Corinthians 12:4, 11, 30)

What's so great about speaking in tongues?

That first point shouldn't make us passive because Paul tells us to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts” and says, “I want you all to speak in tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:1, 5).

Why is he so keen? Find out what these verses say about it:

- 1 Corinthians 12:7
- 1 Corinthians 14:2
- 1 Corinthians 14:4a
- 1 Corinthians 14:14
- Romans 8:26-27
- Ephesians 6:18 (I'm assuming that Paul has tongues in mind here, among other types of prayer)
- Jude 1:20-21 (I'm assuming that Jude has tongues in mind here, among other types of prayer)

Ask some of those in the group who speak in tongues to share what benefits they have experienced.

“When I finally left all my doubts and fears behind me and poured out my praise in tongues, I felt a surge of power go right through my body. For the first time in my Christian life I experienced the intimacy of the cry, ‘Abba Father’. Suddenly I knew that He was right there with me and I loved Him in a way that I had never loved Him before. Gone was my old reluctance to speak about Jesus to others. No I wanted to tell them about Him. And I wanted to explore the other spiritual gifts available to the believer too. I had been brought into an exciting supernatural dimension and was hungry for more.” (Terry Virgo, *Receiving the Holy Spirit and His Gifts*)

What happens when we speak in tongues?

What can we learn from these verses?

- 1 Corinthians 12:7 (It's the Spirit at work)
- 1 Corinthians 13:1 (We speak a heavenly language, or an earthly one we don't know, as in Acts 2:4-11)
- 1 Corinthians 14:2 (We're speaking to God, responding to the "mysteries" of salvation He has revealed in Jesus, as in Romans 1:25-27, 1 Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 3:6, 1 Timothy 3:16)
- 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 (Our mind is "unfruitful", so we could be thinking about anything!)
- 1 Corinthians 14:16 (Thanksgiving is part of what we're saying)

Invite people to ask questions of others about their experiences of speaking in tongues.

Receiving the gift of tongues

Read Luke 11:9-13, in which Jesus assures us of God's desire to give us the gift of the Spirit, and teaches us how to ask in faith.

- Believe that this is an unearned gift from God that you should eagerly ask for.
- Ask for it. (You can acknowledge doubts and disappointments as you do this, but don't get stuck on them)
- Say something. (The only way you know you've got any gift from God is by trying. You may say a little, you might unleash a torrent of praise.)

Spend time as a group praising God with songs in English (or whatever languages are spoken in your group). This gives everyone the opportunity to worship, regardless of whether they can speak and sing in tongues.

Invite people who have the gift to pray in tongues as part of this time. Lay hands on anyone who wants to receive the gift for the first time, or for the first time in a while. The Spirit may give other gifts at the same (e.g. Acts 19:6), celebrate whatever He is doing.

To reflect on during the week

Speaking in tongues can be a powerful part of our daily prayer life. Here's an inspiring example of what can happen from Jackie Pullinger, in her book about serving God in Hong Kong's Walled City, *Chasing The Dragon*:

"By the clock I prayed fifteen minutes a day in the language of the Spirit and still felt nothing as I asked the Spirit to help me intercede for those he wanted to reach. After about six weeks of this I began to lead people to Jesus without trying. Gangsters fell to their knees sobbing in the streets, women were healed, heroin addicts were miraculously set free. And I knew it was nothing to do with me."

Let's not take this wonderful and life-giving gift for granted: why not see what God might do if you do something like this?

Recommended resources

Two-part blog post by Andrew Bunt about why our understanding of speaking tongues is biblically justifiable: [part 1](#), [part 2](#).

Tongues is dealt with in detail in Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft's book *Everyday Supernatural*, and extensively in *The Language of Heaven* by Sam Storms.

If you've found yourself puzzled by Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 14:20-25, Andrew Wilson has [an explanation](#).

On tongues being given that are human languages, from Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft, *Everyday Supernatural*:

Mike Pilavachi, pp.103-04: "A few years ago we were in an evening meeting at Soul Survivor and we prayed for people to receive the gift of tongues. Every year we get visitors from different countries and this year there happened to be a youth group from Romania. The youth leader from this group didn't believe in the gift of tongues so as we invited the Holy Spirit, he got up and began to walk out. As people were beginning to pray, the rest of us in the Big Top began to speak out praise to God, either in English or in tongues. I happened to be praying over the microphone in tongues and I noticed it seemed a little different to me. I even wondered if I was subconsciously trying to make it sound better as so many people could hear me. Afterwards a group of young people from the Romanian group ran up to me and said that as I'd started speaking in tongues their youth leader had stopped in his tracks. He had been stunned because he recognised the language I was speaking in; apparently it was ancient Romanian. According to him I was reciting an eleventh century Romanian poem called the "Prayer for Protection". To add to that, he knew the words because the poem was one that had been tattooed on his father's back."

Andy Croft, p.134: "I was speaking at a conference for young people in New Zealand. I had been speaking about being filled with the Holy Spirit and so at the end made space for people who wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to pray in tongues. As people were being prayed for and others were worshipping, I prayed in tongues. Without thinking about it I ended up praying differently from how I normally would. At the end a young guy came up to me and said, 'I'm from South Africa and my family emigrated here. Did you realise you were speaking in Afrikaans when you prayed? You were saying two phrases.' He repeated the exact phrases and then translated, 'You were praying, 'Holy Spirit' and 'onto them'.'"