

REVIVALIST MINISTRIES

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

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A Bible study series designed
to cultivate revival
and to grow stronger, together.



John Rutler and his wife, Amy, serve as youth leaders at their local church in North Carolina. Together, they are passionate about mentoring the next generation, encouraging them to grow in their faith, and equipping them to walk boldly in their God-given purpose.





WEEK 1

ONE WITH THE SPIRIT

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26

Earlier this year, I was invited to speak at a youth conference hosted by the church I grew up in. One of my assignments was to lead a workshop on how to hear the Holy Spirit speak. Somehow, amid the busyness of life, I had failed to prepare anything for the session until I was already en-route to the conference. Resigned to the fact that I might have to tell the pastor we'd need to cancel, I prayed, asking God to give me a lesson as I drove. He then plopped a lesson right in my lap, using a picture of water.

There are several common misconceptions when it comes to hearing from God.

1. I speak to God, but He doesn't really hear me.
2. God hears me, but He rarely—if ever—responds.
3. God does respond, but He only convicts me or points out what I need to change in my life.

For much of my Christian life, I didn't hear God speak because I didn't know how He speaks. Yes, the Word of God is His primary voice, but the idea that He would speak personally to me about my life—or even about someone else's life—felt almost too wonderful to imagine. When Jesus described the Holy Spirit, He used the image of water flowing out of us: “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.”— John 7:37-39

The Holy Spirit doesn't merely accompany us when we're born again—He becomes a part of us. Imagine two cups of water: one representing you and the other representing the Holy Spirit. If you pour one cup into the other, the water becomes one. You can no longer distinguish between the two, as they have become inseparably one body. This is exactly what Paul means when he says: “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.” — 1 Corinthians 6:17

This truth should radically transform how we approach hearing from God: we have be-

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come one spirit with Christ. Yet too often, I've expected God to speak to me from outside the cup. I've looked for something dramatic—a ripple, a “shake,” an audible voice, or even an undeniable takeover of my mouth when speaking in tongues or interpreting. While God can operate this way, He often chooses to speak far more subtly: from within the cup. Instead of outward disruptions, He speaks directly to the heart—a still, small voice that causes us to ask, “Was that me, or was that God?”

Because we are one spirit with Him, the Spirit flows from within us, bringing gifts, fruits, and guidance into our everyday lives. But if we misunderstand how God speaks, we'll assume that everything flowing from within us must be fleshly or self-generated. John 7 makes it clear: for the born-again believer, this is not the case.

Understanding this changes how we approach spiritual gifts—particularly tongues, interpretation of tongues, and encouragement. These gifts are not about proving spirituality, achieving “elite Christian” status, or looking impressive to others. They are a beautiful invitation to let the rivers of living water flow through us to serve others.

Will it be awkward sometimes? Absolutely. Will we experience doubt, questioning if what we're saying is truly from God? Without a doubt. But these moments teach us humility and dependence on the Spirit. Receiving, rather than taking, prevents us from becoming prideful or boastful about the gifts. No one has a monopoly on the Spirit. The gifts are not about us— they're about loving the body of Christ and building one another up, even if it requires looking a little foolish by speaking in tongues or sharing a word of encouragement that may not unfold the way we hope.

The only requirement for a born-again believer to properly use these gifts is love—love for God, for the body of Christ, and for building others up. “What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.” — 1 Corinthians 14:26 “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit.” — 1 Corinthians 13:13–14:1

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Let us eagerly desire the gifts—not for ourselves, but as a means to allow the Spirit to flow through us, like water, to edify, encourage, and strengthen the body of Christ.

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Look over the misconceptions to hearing God's voice. Have you believed any of these misconceptions and how have they affected the Spirit's voice in your life?____

Read John 7:37-39 again. Ask yourself, have I experienced the rivers of living water described here? If not, why?_____

Take a few minutes to pray and ask God to reveal any false beliefs you may have about His voice and His desire to speak with you._____





WEEK 2

UTTERANCE OF TONGUES

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

ACTS 2:4

When I was growing up, the topic of tongues was rarely, if ever, discussed. I believed they were a genuine gift from God, but since I didn't know anyone who practiced the gift, I assumed it must be reserved for "elite Christians"—those who fast for 40 days, pray without ceasing, and live seemingly sinless lives. I misunderstood the very nature of the gift, thinking it was something earned by the "exceptionally holy," rather than what it truly is: a gift given to build up both the individual believer and the body of Christ. Perhaps you've felt this same way.

I'll never forget the first time I heard tongues—and the first time I spoke in tongues. I had met a pastor of an apostolic church at a local coffee shop, and he had warmly invited me to visit the church he was planting. Not knowing anything about their theology, I happily went to a service. Everything was going fine—the singing was beautiful, and although the preaching was loud and impassioned (if you've ever heard apostolic preaching, you know what I'm talking about), it seemed biblically sound. Then it happened.

The congregation moved to the front for worship, and before I knew it, people began shouting, wailing, speaking in tongues, and even falling to the floor as they were "slain in the Spirit." I stood there awkwardly, not sure what to do with my hands. Then it got even more awkward. A group of people noticed that I wasn't engaging in the excitement and gathered around me to pray that I would receive the Holy Spirit. I certainly longed for the Holy Spirit, but the shouting, the fainting—was it genuine? I wasn't about to fake an experience to please those praying over me. So I stood there, as stiff as a dried-out 2x4, waiting for something to happen. It didn't. Eventually, the group slowly dispersed, leaving

me standing there, puzzled and unsure of what to make of the whole experience.

One thing I did know was that I would never pretend to have a spiritual encounter just to convince myself (or anyone else) that it was real. If God wanted to give me the gift of tongues—something I was cautiously open to—it would have to be undeniably from Him. At the time, I was walking through a season of deep grief and loneliness. Many nights, I found myself pacing the quiet, forested streets of my neighborhood, praying for God’s comfort and mercy.

One restless night, I experienced the gift of tongues for the first time. I was walking and praying as I often did, pouring out my sorrow before the Lord. But that night, I made a conscious decision to shift my posture. Despite my emotional pain, I chose to worship—deliberately and sincerely. I began praising God for who He is: good, righteous, and loving. I thanked Him for being sovereign, for ruling over all things, and for being seated at the right hand of the Father. I’m not sure how long I continued in worship, but suddenly, I felt the joy of the Lord descend on me—an uncontrollable, overwhelming joy I started leaping and dancing down the street, hands lifted high, praising God. I can only imagine what I must have looked like to anyone watching. Who dances in the street alone at 1:00AM? But I couldn’t help it—joy bubbled up inside me and burst forth in an unknown language.

Now, let me clarify: my mouth wasn’t “possessed” or taken over by some unseen force. I had full control over myself, but the words flowed out naturally, almost like they were bubbling up from the joy I felt. I stopped, startled. “No,” I thought, “I’m not going to be one of those Christians.” I was determined not to manufacture an experience or trick myself into thinking it was God. So, I rebuked the tongues and continued walking—this time more calmly, in what I considered a more “mature” and “respectable” way. That worked for a little while. Then it happened again. The same joy, the same bubbling over. I rebuked it once more, more firmly this time, and continued on my way.

Nearly nine years have passed since that night, and I've had a lot of time to reflect and learn about the gift of tongues. I now understand it as something we receive by faith—a way for the Holy Spirit to give us utterance as we have need (Acts 2:4). It isn't about losing control; it's about yielding to God and letting Him build us up.

I eventually repented of resisting this gift, and since then, I've experienced profound spiritual edification as I've allowed the Holy Spirit to pray through me. Whether in moments of deep sorrow, intercession, praise, or joy, the gift of tongues has become a way for the Holy Spirit to move beyond the limitations of my human language and meet my heart needs.

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It's not about being "elite" or "exceptionally holy." It's about God's grace and His desire to build us up—both individually and corporately. When it is used in a corporate setting, Paul urges that an interpreter must be present, which we will discuss next.

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Have you dealt with any fear or misconceptions with the gift of tongues? What are they?_____

If you've been hesitant about receiving tongues, take a moment to invite the Holy Spirit to fill the spaces of fear and to give you this gift if He desires. _____





WEEK 3

INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:27

Among all the gifts of the Spirit, the gift of tongues seems to receive the most criticism. I've even met people actively pursuing spiritual gifts who specifically ask not to receive tongues, feeling no desire for it. To me, this is profoundly sad.

Tongues feels uncomfortable or even awkward to receive, and once we do receive the gift, it requires faith to believe we're not just babbling nonsensically. Perhaps this is why it is viewed skeptically; or maybe it's because of the apparent misuse of the gift in the hyper-charismatic groups. Whatever the reasons for hesitancy, the bottom line is that in His perfect wisdom, God saw that the church needed tongues for growth, strength, and spiritual edification—and this is especially poignant when interpretation comes into the picture.

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Interpretation reveals openly the hidden message the Spirit is uttering through tongues. The beautiful aspect of this gift is the interpretation of a tongue can result in a prophetic word, words of knowledge, or direct exhortation. It can give a direct word of wisdom or direction for a difficult decision, or it can reveal songs of worship and praise to God that the Holy Spirit is singing from within. When someone rejects the gift of tongues, they are also rejecting the possibility for prophecy, words of wisdom, or encouragement—gifts they presumably aspire for. Interpretation of tongues elevates the gift from personal edification to the edification of the whole body. That is why Paul commands that there be an inter-

preter if a tongue is spoken at a public gathering. (1 Corinthians 14:27)

Or maybe those that are hesitant about tongues are so because Paul describes it as a lower gift. Once again, this categorization changes if interpretation is brought into the picture. “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.” (1 Corinthians 14:5) The gauge of value for the gifts, according to Paul, is directly correlated with how edifying it is to the body. His statement, “unless someone interprets”, speaks volumes as it puts interpretation on the same level of importance as prophecy. Why? The gifts are not meant to be used selfishly, to be hoarded and spent in our own little worlds. Rather, they are given to us so that we can in turn lovingly use them to give what we receive to others. A personal tongue edifies oneself but interpreta-

A personal tongue edifies oneself but interpretation elevates it for its true purpose—building up others.

tion elevates it for its true purpose— building up others. (1 Corinthians 14:13-19) Have you received the gift of tongues? When used in a corporate setting, you can be assured that God desires to use that gift for the sake of other people. Therefore, we ought to pray for, and earnestly desire that you might be given the gift to interpret so that other people might hear what the Spirit is saying.

Like the other gifts, interpretation of tongues comes with many misconceptions. At one point, I believed it could only be expressed through word-for-word interpretation. While word for word is certainly a valid and wonderful avenue interpretation is given, there are others. It can come in impressions, pictures, statements, or a single word. One time, when I was praying over someone in tongues, I thought I heard the words, “father” and “daddy”. I thought the Lord might be saying that this individual might need a change in the way he views our Father God, potentially because of a difficult relationship with his earthly father. When I said this to him, he was instantly touched and acknowledged that it was true. God

was revealing the pain in his heart so that He could heal it.

Another time, when a tongue was given in our church, two different people strongly had the impression of Psalm 23 while it was being spoken. It wasn't word for word interpretation, but the Spirit was highlighting through impressions what the interpretation was.

That being said, word for word interpretation is absolutely legitimate. A friend of mine once shared an experience he had as he prayed in tongues over someone in church. He felt his prayer was no different than usual, and his prayer language sounded every bit as typical for him as usual. But afterward, someone told him they had heard him speaking in fluent Swahili— something he himself didn't know! This type of story I hear time and time again. It is also the mode of interpretation that was used when tongues was first given to the church. "And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language." (Acts 2:6)

Remember, the Holy Spirit is described like living water flowing from within (John 7:38). Interpretation will also flow like water. Are pictures coming to mind? Words? Impressions? Are you hearing an actual language? Allow the Spirit to give you an interpretation, but posture yourself in love for others and a desire to build them up.

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Ask yourself if there is any part of you that looks down on the gift of tongues and ask the Lord to enter that space. _____

Have you ever experienced the interpretation of tongues? What did it look like? _____





WEEK 4

EXHORTATION

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in
all things into Him who is the head—Christ.

HEBREWS 4:15

A few years ago, I found myself pacing in my backyard, praying earnestly for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I longed to speak in tongues in a way that left no doubt—no lingering question of, “Was that me, or was that God?” I wanted to hear prophetic words that undeniably confirmed I was hearing from Him, proof that I was truly close to Him.

In the middle of my prayers, the Lord gently asked me, “John, if I never gave you these gifts, would you be okay with that?” I immediately understood what He was revealing. My focus had shifted. I was so intent on receiving the gifts of the Spirit that I had lost sight of the Giver Himself. I paused to recenter my heart on what truly matters: intimacy with God.

Closeness with Him far outweighs the ability to speak in tongues of men or angels, or even to deliver powerful prophetic words. When the gifts become about us, we inevitably hinder our relationship with Christ—the most selfless Being in the universe. His gifts are not given to inflate our egos or to prove to others that we are close to Him. They are expressions of His love, meant to equip us to serve others with a heart of genuine care and compassion. The gifts are not about us—they’re about Him, and His love for other people.

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ship with Christ

When it comes to the gift of encouragement, it’s important to approach it with this mindset, as exercising this gift can sometimes feel challenging to ourselves. The Greek word

often translated as “exhort” is *parakalon*, which conveys a sense of speaking to someone with the intent to beg, entreat, comfort, console, or even instruct them. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 it appears nine times, and the ESV translates it as “comfort.” This word carries the idea of communicating with gentleness and compassion, driven by a genuine desire to help and uplift the person being ministered to. Fascinatingly, it comes from the same root word as *parakletos*, which is used of the Holy Spirit in John 14—the Comforter.

The Holy Spirit’s desire is for us to be transformed into the image of Christ, and His comfort equips us to move toward that goal. As Galatians 5:24-26 teaches, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

Encouragement plays a vital role in this transformation. At times, it may even involve

The purpose of a rebuke is never to humiliate, but to instruct and restore.

rebuking someone—but such correction must always be delivered with love, compassion, and a desire to bring comfort. The purpose of a rebuke is never to humiliate, but to instruct and restore. In fact, a truly encouraging rebuke often doesn’t feel like a rebuke at all. If done in the spirit of the Comforter, it can actually work to strengthen relationships rather than bring division.

True exhortation, even in a form of correction, comes from a desire to help others grow, not to elevate ourselves. Encouragement that builds others up must flow from humility, love, and a genuine longing for their good. It’s also important to note that exhortation is not the same as flattery. Flattery may sound like, “That shirt looks great on you,” or “You’re the best baseball player I’ve ever seen.” While encouragement can lift someone’s spirits, its purpose goes deeper. As Tim Pietz wisely puts it, encouragement, “incites people to ac-

tion.” It is a timely word from the Lord that brings transformation, whether by renewing strength, inspiring change, or confronting sin.

True encouragement is never passive about sin. It addresses sin with kindness and compassion, urging the person toward repentance—not out of judgment, but from a longing to see them flourish. As Ephesians 4:15 says, “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”

Paul understood that the Christian life can, at times, feel exhausting. In a world marred by brokenness and sin, where so much seems wrong in the world, we desperately need one another—the body of Christ—to spur us onward. Our actions matter, our faith has purpose, and the hope we cling to will yield abundant rewards. A word of encouragement, then, is often a Spirit-led reminder of these truths and the glorious future that awaits us.

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Have you ever received a word of exhortation? What feelings did it evoke?_____

What are some characteristics that distinguish between a fleshly and Spirit led exhortation?_____



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