

## PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

**“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:14–15)**

### INTRODUCTION

Noted Pentecostal historian and theologian, Vinson Synan, professor at Regent University, stated: “When people are no longer being baptized in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, the Pentecostal Movement is over.”

**Cat tied to the bed post:** A devout Christian had a cat and every day had his devotions. Often times he prayed intensely. He came to cherish this quiet time in his bedroom each day, but the cat came to like it also. She would cozy up to him, purr loudly, and rub her furry body against him. This interrupted his prayer time so he put a collar around the cat’s neck and tied her to the bedpost whenever he wanted to be undisturbed in his praying. This didn’t seem to upset the cat and it meant the man could pray without interruption.

The daughter noticed over the years how much this time meant to her dad. After her dad was gone, she decided to establish the same routine and tied the cat to the bedpost. But, time in her generation moved fast and she didn’t spend the same amount of time in prayer.

The day came when her son grew up. He wanted to make sure the family traditions were preserved that meant so much to his mother and grandfather. But, the pace of life was even faster and there simply was no time for devotions—so he eliminated Bible reading and prayer. But, in order to carry on the family tradition, each day while dressing he tied the family cat to the bedpost.

We are now into the third, fourth and even fifth generation of Pentecostals. What will we do with what our Pentecostal forefathers and foremothers experienced? Will our Pentecostal experience become the proverbial cat tied to the bedpost?

Deeply imbedded into our Pentecostal experience is speaking in a language we do not learn. It’s called speaking in other tongues, or praying in the Spirit.

There are three different functions for speaking in tongues.

#### 1. **The public use of tongues.**

Paul writes about this in **1 Corinthians 12 and 14**. Like in Corinth, the gift of tongues has been abused and misused today—and because of that, now it is largely not used.

The problem at Corinth was speaking in other tongues within a group setting was a badge of

spirituality. There are three prudent rules for the expressions of this gift in our services from 1 Corinthians 14: (1) exalt Christ, (2) edify (instruct) believers, and (3) witness to the unsaved.

We wanted to be open and available when the Spirit give us a word we did not have as we planned this service. We must always remember the position of 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, between the two chapters that deal with spiritual gifts and their use in the church. A focus on speaking in tongues without an even-greater focus on love will damage the body of Christ.

Sidebar on speaking in tongues in the service. Acts 4, records believers being filled with the Spirit and speaking the word of God boldly, also the place they met was physically shaken. Acts 8 records that Simon the sorcerer saw that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of hands and tried to buy the ability.... Acts 10, while Peter was still sharing with Cornelius and his household the Holy Spirit fell upon them, for they heard them speaking in tongues. There are times that speaking in tongues out loud without interpretation is warranted, because of the setting, like at the altar service while you are calling for a response, or when corporately this is the desire of the Holy Spirit. What the Apostle Paul was dealing with was an abuse of the gift and disorder in the service.

## 2. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). The word, “baptism,” means to be overwhelmed.

There are three baptisms in the New Testament (Hebrews 6—elementary doctrines about Christ . . . instructions about baptisms).

- Into Christ’s body. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink” (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- Into water
- Into the Spirit

How do these three baptisms differ?

BAPTISM	CANDIDATE	ELEMENT	AGENT
Into Christ	Me	Christ	Spirit
In Water	Me	Water	Baptizer
In the Spirit	Me	Spirit	Christ

**(John 1:33)“The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who**

**will baptize with the Holy Spirit”.**

**As Pentecostals, we are familiar with the five times in the Book of Acts when persons receive the baptism in the Spirit. That Baptism is always accompanied by speaking in other tongues—either explicitly stated or implicit.**

Why doesn't Acts 2:4 say, **“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began . . .”**

- To clap their hands
- To raise their voices
- To lift their arms
- To dance with their feet
- To fall down on the ground
- To think good thoughts about God
- To rejoice greatly in their own mother tongue

But, let me frame it another way. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost:

**(Acts 2:33, 38–39) “Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. . . . Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call”.** After baptism into Christ and baptism into water, there is a powerful experience waiting—the baptism in the Spirit. But, notice the word, “all.” And this promise is one that is seen and heard—visual and auditory qualities.

**On the Day of Pentecost, they all spoke in languages they had not learned.** At Cornelius's house the Holy Spirit fell on all—and Peter and the six with him knew it because they had received the same gift for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Acts 10:46. The twelve at Ephesus all spoke in other tongues and prophesied (not some spoke in tongues and some prophesied) when Paul laid his hands on them.

The word “all” is critical in our understanding. This baptism with the initial physical evidence is not just for some. God is no respecter of persons. **When Paul says, “Do all speak in tongues?” he's not referring to the baptism in the Spirit, but to the public and vocal use of the gift of tongues, which requires interpretation.**

All the apostles and writers of the New Testament had this experience. They were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. I don't want anything less than what they experienced.

**To put a definition to this experience, we use the words “initial physical evidence.”**

- It's initial—the opening. There's much more to follow.
- It's physical—see and hear.
- It's evidence—how we know personally we have received.

What this is not:

- Someone beating you on the back
- Someone manipulating your jaw
- Going unconscious or catatonic

**The Holy Spirit gives the words you do the speaking.**

**“All of them . . . began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4).** And speaking in tongues is volitional: “I will pray with my spirit . . . I will sing with my spirit” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

**You may say, “But you’re demanding I do this.”**

Repentance is a demand; but without desire—it amounts to nothing.

Water baptism is a demand; but without desire—it amounts to nothing.

The same applies to baptism in the Spirit. Sure, it’s a demand—but it must be a desire!

**(Luke 11:11–13) “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”.**

When you give me a Klondike Ice Cream Bar, are you appealing to me by demand or desire? It’s because I desire that I will obey your demand to take the cone!

**Its God’s prescribed way!** David bringing back the Ark of God!

**1 Chron 15:12-15 (NIV) 12 He said to them, "You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. 13 It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the Lord our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way." 14 So the priests and Levites consecrated themselves in order to bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. 15 And the Levites carried the ark of God with the poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the Lord.**

**Why then do so many not receive this great blessing?** (And, let’s not minimize all the experiences that lead up to this.)

There are two reasons: (1) their experience; and (2) because they have a false idea of what it means to be baptized in the Spirit—becoming unconscious and later when they wakened someone told them they had spoken in other tongues.

**“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and *began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.*”** Once they had begun to speak, the words poured out even as the Spirit was poured out.

I love the story of the cat that fell into a pail of milk and cried out, “Oh for a capacity equal to my opportunity!” We fall into the depths of the Spirit in Spirit baptism—the element into which we are placed is the Spirit—the Spirit who brooded over the chaos that brought forth creation, the Spirit who inspired the Word of God, the Spirit who conceived in Mary, who anointed Jesus, who raised Him from the dead, the Spirit who will raise our bodies also from the dead! This same Spirit is the element into which we are placed! No wonder we cannot find enough words in our own vocabulary to express ourselves.

**If you have been to the Grand Canyon—can you describe it verbally?** You really cannot fit it all into words—because it is an experience. Speaking in other tongues gives us that ability to express the magnitude of something that goes outside our ability to use known verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Speaking in other tongues enables us to express the absolute glory of God. It declares the reality of the Spirit being poured out on us.

#### **“What’s the use of speaking in tongues?”**

At the baptism in the Spirit, out of our innermost being flow rivers of living water! Jesus put it this way, **“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive” (John 7:37–39).**

#### **What is the connection between praise, power, and purity?**

After all, Acts 1:8 says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

- “The Holy Spirit comes on you”—praise
- “You will receive”—power
- “You will be my witnesses”—purity

Persons who are not praising God have no power. Praise is the engine that drives the power. Praise is the fuel that leads us to be bold in our witness for Christ. But, I’ve found I am unable to pray in the Spirit when I have sin I have not dealt with sin. The Holy Spirit comes to purify us. And, we are poor witnesses if there is no difference in our life choices from those who do not belong to Christ.

### **3. Intercession and private prayer.**

#### **First, a focus on intercession.**

**Intercession:** The Hebrew word for intercession means to “assail with petitions” on behalf of another. The NT word for intercession is similar, meaning “a pleading with one party on behalf of another, usually with a view to obtaining help for that other.” Literally prayer on behalf of another.

#### **A Mandate**

**1 Tim 2:1-4 (NIV)** 1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

**Matt 5:43-45 (NIV)** 43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you: Love your enemies and **pray for those who persecute you**, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

**Matt 9:37-38 (NIV)** 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 **Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**"

### **Exemplified by Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Early Church**

**Heb 7:24-25 (NIV)** 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

**Romans 8:27 (NIV)** 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

**Acts 12:4-5 (NIV)** 4 After arresting him(Peter), he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, **but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.**

**Eph 1:16-18 (NIV)** 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, **remembering you in my prayers.** 17 **I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.** 18 **I pray also** that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

### **Comes from a Heart of Faith, Love, and Compassion**

**-Faith in who God is and what he has promised**

**1 Sam 1:12-15 (NIV)** " 12 As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine." 15 "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "**I am a woman who is deeply troubled.** I have not been drinking wine or beer; **I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.**"

**Isaiah 62:6-7 (NIV)** 6 I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; **they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, 7 and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.**

**O God, I'm pouring out my heart to you.** That's what David says in

**Psalms 62:8, "Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."**

**Psalms 42:4—"These things I remember as I pour out my soul."**

**Lamentations 2:19—"Arise, cry out in the night, as watches of the night begin; pour out**

**your heart like water in the presence of the Lord.”**

**Psalm 42:7—“Deep calls to deep.”**

**Intercessory prayer is the calling forth of the depths in me to the depths in God. What a privilege it is to engage in intercessory prayer in the Spirit. There are such great needs all around us—especially praying for persecuted believers, praying for difficult situations for which there seems to be no human solution.**

**-Love and Compassion for the needs of those around us.**

**John 15:12-14 (NIV)** 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command.

**John 15:17 (NIV)** 17 This is my command: Love each other.

**John 17:20-26 (NIV)** 20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. **26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."**

**The Work of the Holy Spirit: John 16:13-15 (NIV)** 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, **he will guide you into all truth.** He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. **14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.** 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

**Second, a focus on personal prayer.**

1 Corinthians 12–14 deals with Spirit-filled Christians who were using spiritual gifts as a badge of pride. Their public services were chaotic. Paul talks to them about proper spiritual order—including a limit of the number of tongues and interpretation in a service.

However, we get a glimpse of his personal prayer life when he says this: **“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding . . . I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you”** 1 Corinthians 14:14–15, 18.

Earlier in chapter 14, he states that the person who speaks in tongues speaks to God, and that the one speaking in tongues edifies (builds up) himself. Clearly though, the apostle says that all the spiritual gifts, including the public and private use of tongues, are useless unless there is love. Speaking in tongues cannot therefore be used as a badge of pride, “I’ve got it and you don’t.”

The regular private use of tongues is for prayer. That’s why Paul says, “I do it more than all of you, and I find that this type of praying builds me up.” You can say this for sure, when there is sin in your life you are not praying in the Spirit; when there is an unclean conscience, you find that you cannot pray in the Spirit.

**How can we express our love for God that goes beyond our words?** You love Jesus so much that words just don’t take you far enough. So, how do we tell the Lord that we love Him? With words—yes. With deeds—yes. But God has also provided another way—a very intimate way: speaking in other tongues. We cannot reach out and kiss the Lord, or put our arms around Him, so the Holy Spirit has given us this unique gift that helps us with intimacy with the Lord.

Back to **Romans 8:26**, “The Spirit himself intercedes [prays] for us through wordless groans”—longings, heartaches, aspirations which well up from the spiritual and psychological depths in us—longings that cannot be imprisoned within the confines of everyday words.

## CONCLUSIONS

Paul encourages us in **Ephesians 6:18**, “**Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.**” None of the armor is good without this (verses 13–17): The belt of truth around your waist

The breastplate of righteousness  
Feet fitted with readiness  
Shield of faith  
Helmet of salvation  
Sword of the Spirit

But all that is like going to a museum and seeing a metal knight. No one is in that metal—it has no living animation. So, Paul tells us to “put on the full armor” (verse 11)—and that includes the animation, what makes all the other parts work—“**pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests**” (verse 18). **Jude adds to Paul—“But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith, and praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).**