

4 Benefits of a Personal Prayer Language

My life was transformed many years ago when I was filled with the Holy Spirit as a young man. I had read in the book of Acts about people who were baptized in the Spirit, and I noticed that they always spoke in tongues—whether it was the disciples in the upper room on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the Gentile believers who met in the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 or the 12 Ephesian disciples who prayed with the apostle Paul in Acts 19.

It intrigued me that Paul, an intellectual guy who was trained as a rabbi, told the Corinthians: “I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all” (1 Cor. 14:18). Paul himself was filled with the Holy Spirit right after his dramatic conversion—and his personal prayer language helped him throughout his ministry. Never once did Paul denigrate the gift of tongues; instead, he viewed it as a valuable *charisma*, the Greek word for “gift.”

That is not how speaking in tongues is viewed by many Christians today. Some church leaders actually teach that what New Testament believers experienced at Pentecost no longer happens—as if we don’t need the Spirit’s miraculous power anymore. Others simply ignore the gift of tongues, either because it has never been a part of their experience or because they associate it with fanaticism.

Ironically, the same people who dismiss tongues as “gibberish” or “emotionalism” forget that Paul, who wrote 25% of the New Testament, not only spoke in tongues himself but told his followers, “Do not forbid to speak in tongues,” in 1 Corinthians 14:39b. This unusual gift was one of the secrets of the apostle Paul’s power. So why wouldn’t we want what he had?

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I see in Scripture four primary benefits of speaking in tongues. If you are not enjoying all of these blessings, they can be yours if you ask Jesus to fill you with the Holy Spirit:

– Praying in tongues is spiritually edifying. Paul said, “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself” (1 Cor. 14:4a). In this modern era we fully understand the need to recharge a battery. I often compare speaking in tongues to plugging a phone into an electric charger. How much more do we need to recharge ourselves spiritually! Over the course of my life, in times when I felt weak, drained and empty, I have sensed the Spirit refilling me with boldness, zeal, joy and peace when I prayed in tongues. What sincere Christian wouldn’t want that?

– Praying in tongues releases God’s solutions. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:14: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.” Paul acknowledged that we don’t understand what we pray, and yet the unintelligible words have incredible power. You won’t understand your prayer language, and yet the Spirit knows all and understands all. I can’t count the number of times I have received ideas and plans, sermon topics, solutions to problems or direct answers to my questions while I was praying in the Holy Spirit.

– Praying in tongues enables you to express God’s perfect will when you don’t know how to pray. Paul told the Romans that the Holy Spirit helps us pray “when we do not know how to pray as we should” (Rom. 8:26b, NASB 1995). He also explained in the same verse that the Spirit prays for us “with groanings too deep for words.” When we pray in the Spirit, we connect on a deep level with Him, and we come into agreement with His perfect will for each situation.

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We are so limited by our human understanding. Yet God gives us the ability to pray with His all-knowing perspective. All we have to do is lean on Him. When you understand this, you will never want to simply pray in your own strength—you will discover the power of letting the Spirit pray through you.

– Praying in tongues enables the flow of the Holy Spirit’s power. When people were filled with the Spirit in the book of Acts, Luke says speaking in tongues was an initial manifestation of the Spirit’s power. Yet Paul makes it clear that tongues is not the greatest gift; in fact, he urges us to desire “greater gifts” in 1 Corinthians 12:31. I believe the gift of tongues is a first step into the deeper things of God; it is really a gateway to other gifts. No wonder Paul commanded the Corinthians not to forbid it!

How tragic that many Christians today view speaking in tongues as a relic of the New Testament era and as something we should avoid today. By neglecting the gift, or by outright forbidding it, we have shut off the valve of the Holy Spirit’s power and quenched the fire of revival we so desperately need.

Paul told us: “Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:1a). Don’t be a spiritual cynic or a denier of God’s power. Pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to fill you. Desire His gifts. Don’t be afraid of this spiritual blessing just because you haven’t experienced it.

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J. Lee Grady is an author, award-winning journalist and ordained minister. He served as a news writer and magazine editor for many years before launching into full-time ministry.

Lee is the author of six books, including "10 Lies the Church Tells Women," "10 Lies Men Believe" and "Fearless Daughters of the Bible." His years at Charisma magazine also gave him a unique perspective of the Spirit-filled church and led him to write "The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale" and "Set My Heart on Fire," which is a Bible study on the work of the Holy Spirit.