

Why I'm Praying God-Mockers Start Praying in Tongues

I'll admit it. The first time I saw people **praying in tongues**, it completely freaked me out. It actually scared me!

It was 1993. I was interning at a Christian television station. Before going live on the air, the producers, cameramen, on-air talent and others stood in a circle holding hands—and **praying in tongues** just as fast and hard as they could. I looked on with confusion for a few minutes; then I left and never came back. I went home and told everyone, "Those people were crazy."

I mocked this **supernatural** experience.

Fast forward 20 years, and now I **pray in tongues** for extended periods every day. I believe **praying in tongues** builds me up (1 Cor. 14:4, 18) as I speak directly to God (1 Cor. 14:2, 14). I believe praying in tongues stirs my faith (Jude 20). I believe praying in tongues assures I'm praying God's perfect will (Rom. 8:26-27). I believe there are many benefits to praying in tongues. That's why I do it as much as I can, and I encourage other believers to do the same.

So when I came upon an article in the *New York Times* titled "Why We Talk in Tongues," I was intrigued. T.M. Luhrmann, a professor of anthropology at Stanford and author of *When God Talks Back*, dived into the controversial topic in an op-ed column that drove plenty of mockers, even among those in the Christian faith.

Luhrmann starts her column discussing a recent trip to Accra, Ghana. She traveled there to learn more about charismatic Christian church growth in the region. What struck her was how much people **spoke in tongues**. She went to services that lasted three hours and reports people prayed in tongues most of the

time.

“People I interviewed spoke about praying by themselves in tongues for similar stretches of time,” Luhrmann writes. “They said they did so because it was the one language the devil could not understand, but what I found so striking was how happy it seemed to make them.”

Luhrmann goes on to write about how some of the early Christians **spoke in tongues** and how the practice, for the most part, died out until Pentecostalism emerged around the turn of the 20th century at **Azusa Street**. She also points to studies from the Pew Research Center revealing 18 percent of Americans speak in tongues at least several times a year.

“What dawned on me in Accra is that speaking in tongues might actually be a more effective way to pray than speaking in ordinary language—if by prayer one means the mental technique of detaching from the everyday world, and from everyday thought, to experience God,” she writes.

Lurhmann’s column opened the floodgates for mockers of many stripes.

Some commenters accused **tongue-talkers** of seeking to elevate their status. Others claimed tongue-talking stopped after **Pentecost**. The list of objections and mocking continued, with people claiming that praying in the Spirit is for “weak-minded believers” and insisting it is “delusional, self-induced, hallucinational gibberish,” “mass hyperactivity and imitation” and “controlled hysteria.” Others were convinced “cunning charlatans” talk us into talking in tongues for their own personal gain.

The list of mocking accusations go on and on, but I found one comment particularly interesting. A commenter named Jaja wrote, “I think that if Professor Luhrmann looked closely she would find that whiskey does the same thing ... if taken in sufficient quantities.”

Hmm. Isn't that what they said on the day of **Pentecost**?

When divided tongues, as of fire, fell upon the born-again believers in the upper room and they were all filled with the **Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:3-4), everyone was amazed and perplexed, wondering what it meant.

"Others mocking said, 'They are full of new wine'" (v. 13).

That's when Peter stood up and set the record straight, preaching from Joel 2: "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18).

Peter went on to preach the gospel, and 3,000 people got saved. But that didn't put an end to the mocking. Of course, we've seen this mocking spirit come against the things of God throughout the Bible. Some youths mocked Elisha (2 Kings 2:23). Messengers of God have been mocked (2 Chron. 36:16). Sanballat mocked Nehemiah's work to rebuild the wall (Neh. 4:1). Job's friends mocked him during his trial (Job 12:4). Jeremiah was mocked (Jer. 20:7). Jesus was mocked (Matt. 27:28-29).

With all this in mind, it's no shock that **speaking in tongues** is going to bring modern-day mockers. We shouldn't be surprised. Jude, the man the **Holy Spirit** inspired to write, "Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20), also warned us there would be mockers in the last days (v. 16).

So why do people mock **praying in tongues**?

Ultimately, because they don't understand it. It does look pretty wild when you don't know what's going on—and can look

pretty intense even when you do know what's going on. As a young woman working at a Christian television station, witnessing tongue-talkers frightened me so much that I abandoned an internship I vied hard to win. So I get it. I understand why people, especially unbelievers, think praying in the Spirit is strange.

Nevertheless, I'm praying for the **Holy Spirit** to encounter all those who don't believe in Christ—or who don't believe tongues is for today—in a mighty way so that, like me, a once-mocker can become a tongue-talker that enjoys all the benefits of a heavenly prayer language.

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