

The Role and Practice of Praying in the Spirit:

General guidelines for the effective use of the spiritual gift of tongues within various gatherings.

Evident Life Church recognizes the important role that praying in the Spirit has in the life of the New Testament church. Praying in the Spirit, also referred to as tongues, is encouraged and demonstrated as a vital practice throughout the biblical text. Therefore, Evident Life Church is committed to making room for this biblical practice in our daily Christian living and within our corporate gatherings.

We must start with an understanding that there are different ways we pray in the Spirit and there are different purposes for the use of tongues within the church. We must also understand that the church should both encourage the use of this gift while at the same time ensuring that this gift is being used in the proper manner based on the setting. Following are some biblical guidelines we follow at Evident Life Church in order to accomplish this calling. We will present these guidelines within the context of our different types of church gatherings.

SUNDAY MORNING CORPORATE WORSHIP GATHERINGS

Tongues is a gift that has its place when the whole church comes together.

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. – 1 Corinthians 14:26a

However, the role of tongues in these large corporate gatherings also has its special guidelines.

^{26b} Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God. – 1 Corinthians 14:26b-28

Furthermore,

²³ So if **the whole church comes together** and **everyone speaks in tongues**, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? – 1 Corinthians 14:23

Based on the context and instruction found in the entirety of 1 Corinthians 14, what is the primary benefit of tongues in these large gathering of the church? The primary use of tongues in the large gathering of the saints, such as on Sunday mornings, is to **deliver prophetic words** to the entire congregation so that the whole church is built up. We understand that the church is built up when it receives the prophetic word of the Lord. But we also see that the Holy Spirit uses tongues as a method of ushering in a prophetic word. We discover that the tongue, as presented in 1 Corinthians 14, is the prophetic word of the Lord and the interpretation is what allows the whole church to understand the word. Therefore, room should be made for an interpretation when a tongue is given while the “whole church comes together.” And if no one is bringing an interpretation, then the use of tongues should be reserved for private and personal edification for the remainder of the gathering.

²⁶ 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**. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and **someone must interpret**. ²⁸ **If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.** – 1 Corinthians 14:26-28

So, if someone publicly brings a tongue to the congregation from the microphone on a Sunday morning, we should invite and expect an interpretation. Again, Scripture gives clear encouragement for the practice of this gift within our meetings and Scripture also gives us guidelines.

¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. – 1 Corinthians 14:18-19

Finally, the use of tongues within the corporate gathering of the saints definitely has its place and it is encouraged by Scripture. However, we also discover that tongues, within these larger corporate gatherings like on Sunday mornings, is not a primary gift that is supposed to occupy a significant space within the meeting. Other gifts, such as prophesy, should have more prominence and be expected more often.

CORPORATE PRAYER GATHERINGS

Prayer is often tied directly to spiritual warfare. In fact, nearly every time we engage in prayer we are actually engaging in spiritual warfare. We understand that spiritual warfare is real, and we must fight these battles God's way.

For **our struggle** is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and **against the spiritual forces of evil** in the heavenly realms. – Ephesians 6:12

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. **4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.** On the contrary, they have **divine power** to demolish strongholds. – 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

One of the divinely powerful weapons that God has given us is the act of praying in the Spirit.

16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. **18** And **pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.** With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. – Ephesians 6:16-18

Therefore, when we come together in prayer, we understand that the act of praying in the Spirit, which is often expressed through tongues, may be one of the forms of prayer released in that gathering. This form of tongues is not for the purpose of delivering a prophetic word; rather, it is for the purpose of prayer, specifically spiritual warfare prayer. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to direct the prayer dialogue and to release divine power that demolishes strongholds.

And so, both praying in the Spirit and bringing a prophetic tongue may both be experienced in our corporate prayer gatherings at Evident Life Church.

Furthermore, the Bible reveals that the Lord desires His church to sing praise and give thanksgiving in the Spirit. This expression of tongues is also highlighted in 1 Corinthians 14.

15 So what shall I do? (*Use the gift of prophesy or tongues?*) **I will pray with my spirit (tongues)**, but I will also pray with my mind; I will **sing with my spirit (tongues)**, but I will also sing with my mind. **16** If you are **praising God with your spirit (tongues)**, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? **17** You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. – 1 Corinthians 14:15-17

The gift of tongues opens up a whole new realm of praise and thanksgiving. Tongues helps us praise God, not just with our minds, but with our spirit. Notice, this use of tongues is not designed to edify others; rather, it is for personal edification, and personal prayer and worship. Therefore, if we are engaging in praying or singing with the spirit, we should be sensitive to not allow it to become a distraction to others around us. Thus, this act of praying or singing in the spirit is appropriate in a prayer gathering, assuming it is not becoming a distraction.

SMALL GROUP GATHERINGS

Just as Jesus went deeper when gathered with His small group of twelve disciples, so we are able to go deeper and become more vulnerable when we are gathered together with a small group of like-minded believers.

¹² One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. ¹³ When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles – Luke 6:12-13

In general, within a small group gathering of like-minded Jesus followers, there is freedom to pray or sing in tongues as the leader leads and permits. However, leaders must understand that they are accountable to stewarding the effective use of these gifts within their gatherings – ensuring that space is made for the gifts, but also ensuring that the gifts are being used in a manner that is edifying those in attendance. If a small group or bible study leader has a question about how or when tongues should be released or allowed in their gathering, they are encouraged to seek counsel from church elders or pastors. Generally speaking, a leader must know that those in attendance understand biblically what is taking place.

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

From the beginning of the church, we discover the benefit of tongues being released outside church gatherings. In fact, there is a clear biblical precedent and example of the use of tongues in conjunction with public evangelism. Looking back to the Day of Pentecost, we see that “all the saints were filled with the Holy Spirit, they began speaking in tongues, people in Jerusalem could understand in their own languages, then Peter preached so that all could understand.”

And here is the result:

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

38 Peter replied, “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. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.**”

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” **41** Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about **three thousand were added to their number that day.** – Acts 2:37-41

The gift of tongues was released by the Holy Spirit through the early church on that Day of Pentecost, and is still used, usually in conjunction with other gifts, as a tool for evangelism.

For more biblical guidance and understanding, you are encouraged you to listen to Pastor Eric’s teaching titled, “Untangling Tongues: Removing the Mystery by Looking Biblically.” Here is the link: https://www.evidentlife.org/home/sermons-2/?enmse=1&enmse_sid=13&enmse_mid=93