

## “TONGUES SURVEY”

A small sample of friends with the gift of tongues were asked questions related to their experiences. While the questions varied some from person to person, they were generally along these lines:

1. *When did you start speaking in tongues?*
2. *How often do you speak in tongues?*
3. *What does tongues bring to your spiritual life?*
4. *Is there any other advice you'd like to offer?*

A smaller group of friends without this gift, but who had some experience with the charismatic or Pentecostal communities, were also asked a series of questions. These are below, after the “tongues survey.”

### **Mark**

[Systems scientist]

*Mark seemed to prefer an in-person interview, so his answers come in the form of notes from our conversation.*

1. *When did you start speaking in tongues?*

Mark grew up Catholic. He recalls that a book used in his class referred to tongues as “speaking nicely to people.” In his church there was no particular encouragement to read the Bible. He even felt that when he cracked the family Bible at home he had to hide the fact—not because his parents had told him not to, but because it felt odd.

As Mark went through confirmation class he had a real longing to know the Lord better. The class itself didn't provide much in that direction. The teacher, Bonnie, tried to give the class exposure to something new by taking them to a charismatic Catholic prayer meeting. There they heard speaking in tongues, and perhaps other related phenomena.

Not much happened spiritually for Mark for several years, until he was 21. After college he attended graduate school. He notes that as a commuter, he tended to work by himself, which gave him plenty of time alone. During this period of his life he felt stirred to call Bonnie, whom he hadn't been in contact with for many years. Though he didn't have much if any “walk” with the Lord, he prayed that God would not draw him without providing something *real*.

Bonnie again invited him to a charismatic prayer meeting. During the meeting there was worship. Almost as soon as the singing began, Mark started weeping. In his own words, he “was a mess.” He stresses that his life was not particularly bad, yet he felt moved to tears all the same.

Later in the meeting there was an invitation to any for wanted to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Mark came forward. Hands were laid on him and he was prayed over, with one or more standing by speaking in tongues. Mark was praying as well, telling God of his longing for him, when someone standing next to him whispered in his ear, “Stop speaking English.” For perhaps five seconds Mark haltingly mouthed some nonsense syllables, and it was as if a dam broke, and he poured forth, actually shouting in tongues. He says it’s as if someone had taken control of his tongue. During this time, he felt an amazing sense of God’s presence. This was the single pivotal turning point of his life.

The following week he found himself filled with joy and prone to laughter. (As an aside, this brought to mind for him the “laughing revival” of the mid 90s, perhaps a reference to or similar to the “Toronto blessing.”)

### *2. How often do you speak in tongues?*

Speaking in tongues is a regular part of Mark’s spiritual life, though he may go for a month at a time without feeling the need or desire to do so.

### *3. What does tongues bring to your spiritual life?*

Mark gives the analogy of eating a lemon. You can look at the lemon and study it, but until you bite into the lemon your experience is necessarily incomplete. That’s how he felt in his experience of God. Mark says he wanted something beyond “head knowledge” of God. He wanted a connection in his heart, and he received that.

He says tongues provides communication and communion. Tongues sustains him in prayer. He says he doesn’t know that his spiritual life would be *worse* without this gift, but it’s helpful for him in maintaining a connection to God. He is reminded of one who is grieving, who feels great sorrow but struggles to express these emotions, which calls to mind for him Rom 8:26, “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express”. He says tongues allows him to communicate raw emotion to God, and is most valuable to him when he has no words left.

He says he hasn’t received any particular prophecies by means of tongues. (It sounds as if he exercises the gift as a “prayer language” rather than a mode of prophecy.)

Mark doesn’t believe that everyone needs to speak in tongues. He recounts how his kids go off to Pentecostal church camps where there’s a great emphasis on speaking in tongues, and they’ve even come back and claimed to have done so—yet he sees no particular change in their lives. He asks them what they learned about *Jesus* and receives less response than he would like!

He frowns upon those who try to “teach” speaking in tongues, by helping people begin to make nonsense noises or repeat syllables. He says he has heard in Pentecostal circles the

phrase, "God isn't going to grab you by the tongue," implying that one has to begin the process one's self when learning. While he acknowledges that someone had to tell him to stop speaking English, he still feels his experience wasn't simply learning to generate nonsense speech..

## **Wendy**

[Housewife, writer]

### *1. What spiritual gifts do you have?*

Hi there. I have received the gift of tongues and the word of knowledge. I experience the word of knowledge mostly when I'm praying for someone. God shows me something about them that I wouldn't otherwise know (like perhaps something that happened in their past...) and I'll share it with them. If I'm right, then praise God! If not, then it was a just a hunch that was wrong.

I have experienced supernatural physical healing. Years ago I went up for prayer after a service because of an issue and was healed almost instantly (it was a bit of a private "female" physical issue...). I've also received many prophetic words spoken by others over me that have come to pass. (Some have not, and either they were wrong, or they are yet to come to pass). Particularly in our church in NH, we had preachers visit that had a prophetic gift and they prayed over me some really powerful things that were encouraging! As I said, many have come to pass.

### *2. When did you start speaking in tongues?*

I got baptized in the Holy Spirit at a charismatic Episcopal church in Brooklyn when I was 16. The church was "hit" by the Anglican/Catholic charismatic movement of the 70s. Ours was a sister church of a church in Darien CT, where Father Bennett presided resided. He wrote a book about the charismatic experience.

Any, I went up for prayer and nothing happened. (I didn't pray in tongues.) But then later that night in my bedroom I "let it out." I think I was just too self conscious to open my mouth and let this strange stuff come out in front of others.

### *3. How often do you speak in tongues?*

To be honest, I don't pray in tongues much but it's always a goal to use the gift more. When I'm around people who pray in tongues a lot I tend to also. But in my day to day left, it is often a neglected gift.

### *4. What does tongues bring to your spiritual life?*

I DO pray in tongues when I don't know how to pray. I'm overwhelmed for some reason. Or when start my quiet time and just want to settle my spirit and focus on the Lord. It

does encourage and strengthen me and I believe by faith that I am communicating with the Lord.

*5. Is there any other advice you'd like to offer?*

I also wanted to add that I believe you can be baptized in the HS without receiving tongues, but I think a believer should continue to ask for it until he gets it. I just see in Acts that every time Peter or Paul prayed for someone to get the HS, they spoke in tongues and/or prophesied. And Paul encourages every believer to speak in tongues. I just figure, if it was important then, it is important now! After Pentecost, we see 2 baptisms for new converts :water and baptism in the HS and I think they're both important, though our salvation doesn't depend on either of them...

### **Phil**

[In charge of communications for the Pittsburgh University department of music; composer in his off hours.]

*Phil used to be an active member of a Pentecostal church, but isn't any longer. Following that, he was involved in a charismatic Episcopal community. He still attends an Episcopal church, though does not appear to be part of a charismatic group.*

First..., I want to say what I do believe about the work of the Holy Spirit, which is that the Spirit leads us INTO creation, not out of it. I think the biggest failures with how people treat the work of the Spirit, especially in charismatic/renewal circles, come from an inadequate theology of creation. Your CRC friends should be able to groove on this idea, but too often Dutch Calvinists are all, "Creation? Check. Now let's talk about being good Republicans." OK.

*1. How did you start speaking in tongues--through a church experience, experience with an individual, or on your own?*

The first time I had the experience of praying in tongues was with my campus ministers in their apartment at Oberlin.

*2. How often did you speak in tongues when you did so regularly, and what you got out of it.*

Tongues was a pretty routine part of my devotional and prayer life when I was in college, which was when I first experienced praying in that way. So I would say daily.

*3. What motivated you to shy away from the practice?*

I started to shy away from the whole renewal thing because there were just too many times when I was absolutely sure that the Spirit was leading me to do X or Y and I was dead wrong. Later on, a mentor, who was a leader in what I would call a pentecostal

community, went on a real head trip with the community and demanded absolute authority. The community told him to take a hike, which was a sign of health, but after that I really lost any interest in renewal movement. I also got deeply involved in reading neo-calvinist philosophy, in particular Herman Dooyeweerd, Cal Seerveld, Brian Walsh, etc., and felt very nurtured by the passion for life in God's world as God's servants. I realized that none of the charismatic renewal people in the Episcopal world that I'd become a part of had much of an idea of how to integrate their understanding of the Spirit into a full-bodied theology of creation, so I felt like they were always nibbling around the edges when they talked about God's work in the world.

*4. Does your experience make you suggest others avoid it as well?*

That's a really good question. I wouldn't necessarily discourage anyone from exploring praying in tongues or what not, but I wouldn't encourage it either. I'm much more inclined to encourage people to pursue their gifts and abilities passionately as a way of experiencing God's presence. It's Eric Liddell's notion that "when I run I feel God's pleasure." I think we should fill in the blank and say when I compose I feel God's pleasure, or when I grasp some aspect of particle physics I feel God's pleasure. When I teach, craft legislation, manufacture a windmill...I feel God's pleasure. I suspect that the purpose of any extraordinary expressions of the Spirit's presence is to lead us into a more integral experience of God's presence in daily, continual, image-bearing vocation any how.

*5. Is there anything else you'd like to share on the topic?*

If it doesn't help you in the overarching task of loving God, neighbor, and self, it's for s\*\*\* anyway.

## **Rich**

[Research scientist, Kodak]

*1. When did you start speaking in tongues?*

I had been praying for the gift of tongues systematically and nearly daily for about 3 months. I think I got inspired by a teaching tape I listened to (in correlation with a study in small group). [Some graduate-school friends] were visiting and our entire small group decided to go to the same church (as you know, ordinarily we all went to separate ones). [Two other friends] suggested their church, the Word of Life Church. I would say that their church is a little more Pentecostal than [the non-denominational church I attend] (but not grossly so). Anyway, they sung a praise song with the words on an overhead projector. Then they had a sermon. After the sermon they had everyone stand up and sing the praise song again but chose not to put the words up again (I guess they assumed that we all knew the song). Anyway, I didn't remember the words, but wanted to sing. I remember saying in my heart "Lord, I want to sing, but you will have to give me the words." Then I sang, and they came out in another language. I stopped singing, said,

“Jesus is Lord”, and sang again in this same strange language. When we got to the chorus I sang in English. I sang the verses in tongues. I quickly learned that I could control when I spoke in tongues. Afterward I told you about it.

*2. How often do you speak in tongues?*

Honestly, it depends a lot on my spiritual health. Probably on average it is a weekly or biweekly thing, not a daily thing. But if I lead prayer meetings, or am preparing to lead worship it will tend to be more. I often use tongues quietly while I am worshipping at church or in the car singing with praise music. It is one of those gifts that is easy to lose sight of for a while, and then to be reminded to use. I would say that it is not central to my daily prayer life, but probably should be. At times in the past it has been a more daily thing than a weekly thing. Let’s just say that the amount that I use the gift of tongues is a good barometer for my spiritual life and is, I believe, an active area in which I experience spiritual warfare.

*3. What does tongues bring to your spiritual life?*

Generally it is useful to help set aside all of the “type A” directed prayer mentality. It is easy to come to God with an agenda, or a series of requests, rather than to just be in his presence. I think tongues is a way to set that “stuff” aside for a time and just be in his presence letting Him speak. It fulfills a different purpose from reading the Bible to hear from God, because it is not really about God speaking to me. It is more like allowing myself to be used by God to speak. I find that authentic worship will often lead to me speaking in tongues. So there is definitely a dimension of personal worship.

I find tongues generally also to be “centering”, meaning that it helps me to allow the Spirit to have precedence over my thoughts. It is strange because I can’t understand what He is saying, and yet speaking in tongues does seem to redirect my thoughts toward His thoughts. To say it another way, speaking in tongues before I pray helps my prayers to flow. So one time I use tongues is when I am acting as a prayer minister and not sure what to pray for. I will sometimes speak in tongues quietly before I begin to pray in English (perhaps it might be so low in volume that it would sound like mumbling, while the person is giving me their prayer request). I guess I use tongues as a sort of Spirit “prep” for intercessory prayer. I have also found that sometimes when I am praying with someone else their prayers will trigger me to begin praying in tongues (quietly) along with them. Often, when the person finishes I then jump in and pray in English.

*3. Does your experience would make you suggest others pray for the gift as well?*

I think it is a valuable and wonderful gift. It is not the “flashy” gift that I think one might imagine when one first reads about it (in the context of Peter and the Apostles using it to witness to those in Jerusalem, for instance). I have used it once or twice with non-believers (for instance I asked my Indian friend Sri what language he thought it was – because I knew that he know Hindi - but he couldn’t tell – he thought it did sound sort of

Arabic). It may have peaked his interest, but it certainly didn't have a dramatic impact on its own for evangelizing him (that I am aware of).

Generally though, I would say it is the Spiritual gift of worship. Worship is a personal thing, between you and God, so it is not really a public gift at all. However, if one wants to lead worship, I think it is the right gift to pray for. It also helps an individual avoid pride because there is the humbling realization that you are NOT in control. This is critical for worship leaders. If people desire for public gifts to build up the body they should probably pray for prophesy (as Paul suggests).

*4. I have heard people say that the mind is generally disengaged during the experience, and the benefit is in the form of spiritual encouragement or empowerment. Do you find this?*

Disengaged is a little too strong a way of saying it. My mind may be engaged in worshipping God (focused on Him, his character, etc), or I may be thinking about something specific (say if I am preparing to pray for someone or something). I do not know for sure that the prayers in tongues correlate to the topic I am thinking about, but my intuition is that they often do. For instance, I do not find that my mind wanders to sinful thoughts when I am praying in tongues. Sometimes it does wander to people or topics that I proceed to pray about when I stop praying in tongues. I guess that is what I mean by the gift of tongues being used by the Spirit to guide my thoughts. I do think that tongues brings encouragement and peace because of the tangible reminder of God's presence in me.

*5. Finally, anything you'd like to add?*

Like most gifts of the Spirit in the Christian life, tongues is a gift that requires development. What I mean is that using it is a spiritual discipline. As you use it more, you become more comfortable with it and you reap more benefit from it. It definitely requires some time invested. Satan tries to distract me from using the gift because he doesn't like prayer, he doesn't like worship and he certainly doesn't like the Spirit directing my thoughts and praying directly. After all, His words have power.

**Andrew**

[Professor of biotech engineering]

*1. How did you first start speaking in tongues?*

I was driving along listening to a tape from the alpha course on speaking in tongues. It just seemed to come naturally at that time. That was probably seven or eight years ago.

*2. What, if anything, did you get out of it?*

Very little. I seem very little affected by the praying aspect of speaking in tongues. It could be a way of showing God's glory. I find little occasion for this. It could be a way of worship. I worship in other ways.

*3. How often did you engage in this practice? (Both how frequently and for how long.)*

Once a year (?) for less than a minute.

*4. Why did you shy away from the practice?*

It must be that I told you I shied a way from it. It seldom occurs to me.

*5. Would you recommend this practice to others?*

Sure, if they get something out of it.

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*The following responses are from those who have had interaction with the Pentecostal/charismatic community but whose gifting doesn't include tongues.*

### **Mary**

[Library services professional]

*1. What interactions have you had with charismatic/Pentecostal [c/p] communities?*

I was in a c/p church for about two years.

*2. How would you characterize these interactions? (Negative, positive, etc.)*

Well, positive, for the most part. I enjoyed myself hugely and did manage to learn more Bible than I had learned in the Episcopal church. I could have done without the baptismal experience though (see blog). And I am embarrassed to say that I actually thought I spoke prophetically on at least one occasion. You never know. One of the joys of my life was the number of praise songs that I wrote while attending.

*3. In what ways, if any, did they influence your current spiritual practices?*

One of the highlights of c/p churches is their total lack of inhibition when praising God, and the fact that they really do praise! I think my prayers are much richer for having that example. I learned to talk to God as though He was sitting across from me, and I could pour out whatever was in my heart--good or bad. I still do this, and I'm so glad I learned it. My tendency is to be, as your wife puts it, reserved, and thank heaven that church knocked some of that out of me. They were an extremely joyous, faith-filled lot, and deeply sincere in their faith. My current church is not exactly the Frozen Chosen, but they



certainly get there some days. And I learned to sing! I mean, I was always capable of it, but I learned how to use it to express my very heart, in ways that mere words frequently fail to do. I still sing many of those songs, especially as most of them were just scripture put to music. Whenever I run across those verses as I am reading, I sing them in my head, and find that I sing them for some time after. That's a wonderful legacy, and how I learned the amount of scripture there that I did.

*4. Are there other thoughts or experiences you'd like to share on this topic?*

Despite the verses put to music that I learned, I can't say that the c/p church I went to put a lot of focus on deep Bible study. I may have learned a good handful of verses there, but it is in my current church that I've learned what they mean, and the context in which they fit, and whole gospel. Although I am not completely a cessationist, I do think a lot of the tongues, prophecies, etc., came from pure enthusiasm and good intentions, as opposed to a work of the Spirit. I could be wrong, but that's my opinion as I look back. (The topic of spiritual gifting in the developing nations is a topic for another day...)

*5. What spiritual gifts have you identified in yourself? Are they in any way tied to your time with the c/p'ers?*

Discernment of spirits (although I realize definitions of this vary from church to church) and possibly knowledge, although many days I doubt that one. Several have said teaching, but I chalk that up to a combination of knowledge, willingness to spend a great deal of time in preparation, and theater training from high school. Who knows?

*6. Did you ever feel a distance (imposed by self or others) either because you don't speak in tongues or because you didn't grow up c/p?*

Never. At that point nobody had grown up in that church--we were the first generation.

*7. Did you ever experience being filled by the Holy Spirit in a new or unexpected or dramatic way?*

Oh yes, and it still happens from time to time. Generally related to extended and deeply honest prayer time.

**Steve**

[Research scientist]

*1. What interactions have you had with charismatic/Pentecostal [c/p] communities?*

Back in college I was on the leadership group for my IV chapter. At the start of the year I took the other leaders to a renewal conference, not knowing exactly what "renewal" meant. There we got to see healing and speaking in tongues and prophecy first-hand. I

was prayed over, hands laid on, but didn't experience anything beyond feeling energized by the Spirit.

After that I organized a small group in our fellowship for charismatics. I felt a real kinship with them because of the heart-felt worship, the emphasis on prayer and the sense of immediacy and expectation.

After that conference I prayed over someone with a badly twisted ankle (by which I mean he couldn't put any weight on it without pain) and saw him immediately healed. That has strengthened my faith ever since.

*2. How would you characterize these interactions? (Negative, positive, etc.)*

It was disappointing not to experience the gifts typically found only in the c/p community (tongues, prophecy, etc.). Aside from that I found the experience very enriching. It showed me that the full range of gifts is being exercised in parts of the Church. I know that these gifts are prone to their own challenges and errors, but I think it's important not to throw the baby out with the bath water and reject what the Spirit is doing because the humans through which he works don't always serve him as well as they should.

*3. In what ways, if any, did they influence your current spiritual practices?*

They have given me a greater appreciation for the working of the Spirit and a greater awareness of spiritual warfare. And they have strengthened my faith. Having been on the receiving end of a word of knowledge which was eerily on the mark, having seen healing first-hand, and having seen the gifts of the Spirit modeled responsibly, has at times kept my faith from wavering.

*4. Are there other thoughts or experiences you'd like to share on this topic?*

The non-c/p parts of the Church regularly ignore 1 Cor 12:31a, "But eagerly desire the greater gifts" and 1 Cor 14:5, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy." How can this be important to Paul but so completely ignored by us? Rather than investigate these gifts we either turn a blind eye or use abuses as an excuse not to pursue them. Even the simple step of praying long-term for these gifts—even this, we fail to do. This must frustrate the Holy Spirit.

*5. What spiritual gifts have you identified in yourself? Are they in any way tied to your time with the c/p'ers?*

Teaching? No gift which I think wouldn't be present if I weren't a Christian.

*6. Did you ever feel a distance (imposed by self or others) either because you don't speak in tongues or because you didn't grow up c/p?*

Yes and no. A close friend who joined a Pentecostal church expressed his confusion about why I was just sitting by the side of the pool rather than jumping in the water—which felt a little like a doctor asking why I am not curing myself of cancer. But this was the exception, not the rule.

*7. Did you ever experience being filled by the Holy Spirit in a new or unexpected or dramatic way?*

I have experienced what I interpret as the movement of the Spirit at various times, but not in a my-life-was-black-and-white-but-now-it's-color sort of way.