

# 1 Corinthians 14:1-12

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God. For no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the spirit.

On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues unless someone interprets so that the church may be built up.

Now brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you? Unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching. If even lifeless instruments such as the flute or the harp do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?

And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves. If with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said?

[ 1 : 0 9 ] For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning. But if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker a foreigner to me.

So with yourselves. Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. So this morning we're looking at two spiritual gifts that Paul describes.

The gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy. And as we look at those gifts, we're going to consider the two commands that Paul gives. One at the beginning of this passage and one at the end. He says, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts in verse 1.

And in verse 12 he says, strive to excel in building up the church. Now this is a challenging topic. Let me say that outright. Because Christians who believe the Bible and love Jesus haven't always agreed on what these gifts are and how we should use them.

I grew up in a Pentecostal church which encouraged everyone to speak in tongues. And they said that speaking in tongues was the initial sign of being fully empowered by the Holy Spirit.

[ 2 : 1 7 ] Then for two years in college, I went to a Presbyterian church. The Presbyterian church's leaders believed that the spiritual gifts of prophecy in tongues ended after the New Testament was completed.

And then I came to Trinity. By then I wasn't quite sure what to believe. Maybe you can relate to some part or other of that. Some of you, like me, may have come to know Jesus and follow him in a Pentecostal or charismatic church.

Maybe you've benefited from tongues and prophecy and you wish that more Christians would experience and know the blessing of these gifts. On the other hand, I know that some of you have had bad experiences in Pentecostal and charismatic services.

You might have seen people who place more value on their word from the Lord than on the word of the Lord, the scriptures. Or maybe you've seen worship services that seem to just become chaotic or even emotionally manipulative.

Maybe you've been there, done that, and don't want to go back. Now for others of you, all this might seem just a bit unfamiliar. Right? Maybe you grew up in a wonderful church that just said prophecy in tongues were for the first century and that was just fine back then and we don't really need them now.

[ 3 : 3 2 ] And maybe you're just not sure what to think because you haven't seen or experienced them either one way or the other. Now whatever your church background or lack thereof, I'm

convinced that Paul's instructions in this passage can be very helpful for all of us.

Because Paul was also writing to a group of people in the church at Corinth who didn't all have the same experience of these gifts and who weren't all on the same page. It seems that some of the Corinthians loved to speak in tongues.

They felt it was a sign of how spiritually advanced they were, that they could speak in heavenly languages. And they did it frequently, especially when they gathered together. Other people, it seems, were into prophesying and some of these prophets like to go on and on and on and on. And if anyone tried to stop them, they would say, but the Holy Spirit is speaking through me. I can't stop. Other people in the church at Corinth were not so impressed. Some people felt alienated by all the tongue speaking that they couldn't understand or they felt like second class Christians because they hadn't experienced that gift.

It's possible some people were frustrated and wanted to just get rid of these things altogether. Church would be a lot simpler if we didn't have to deal with all this prophesying and tongue speaking. And so, the Christians in Corinth appealed to their beloved apostle Paul for some guidance.

[ 4 : 54 ] Now, as we've seen over the last few weeks, Paul didn't immediately launch into instructions about these particular gifts. We're in the middle of a section.

In chapter 12, Paul began by sort of painting the big picture. He says, first of all, we need to understand we're all part of the body of Christ. And in a body, there's many different parts, but we're all connected together and we're all united together.

And so, we need to recognize we'll all have different gifts and we need to use those to build each other up. And we need each other. And then, in chapter 13, he said, I'm going to show you the most excellent way.

The way of love. Love. Verse 1 to 3 of chapter 13, he said, even if you have all the spiritual gifts in the world, if you don't have love, if you don't have love for God, if you don't have love for your brothers and sisters, you're empty.

You're nothing. And then he described what love is, how it's tender and kind and patient, how it's truthful and how it's tenacious, how it holds on. And then, at the end of chapter 13, he says, spiritual gifts like prophecy and tongues and knowledge, on the day when we see Jesus face to face, we won't need those gifts anymore.

[ 6 : 10 ] But love is going to continue into eternity. And it will never cease. And so Paul says, pursue love. Notice that at the beginning of verse 1.

Before we jump into prophecy and tongues, I want you to notice that. Pursue love, Paul says. That means run hard after it. Don't miss out on it. We need to hear that command loud and clear, to be patient and kind with one another.

Not to boast or puff ourselves up with pride before we jump into these topics. Because sometimes people have either fixated on certain spiritual gifts or they have loudly proclaimed their views about them one way or the other and forgot about love.

And Paul says, remember love. So having said that, let's jump in. We're going to look at tongues first and then we'll look at prophecy. And for each of them, we're going to look at what it is, what benefits Paul says it has, and then what dangers there might be.

So the nature, the benefits, the dangers. First tongues, then prophecy. So tongues. Let's look down, verse 2. Paul talks about the nature of tongues. He says, one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to people but to God.

[ 7 : 22 ] In other words, speaking in tongues is not an encrypted message for another person. It's a form of prayer or praise or thanksgiving to God. If you look down in verse 14 to 17, Paul reaffirms that and uses some of those words.

Now verse 2 continues. Paul says, if someone speaks in tongues, no one understands him. He utters mysteries in the spirit. Paul's assumption throughout this chapter is if someone is speaking in tongues, that person won't understand what he's saying and the people around him won't understand what he's saying either unless someone has the gift of interpretation.

Now at the same time, I think Paul's saying that speaking in tongues is not just meaningless gibberish. Paul says he utters mysteries in the spirit.

That could mean he utters hidden or secret truths of God or it could simply mean he speaks to God in a mysterious way, in a way that isn't obviously understandable by others.

Now many people have wondered when Paul speaks about tongues, is he talking about speaking in another human language, is he talking about speaking in a heavenly language or something else? [ 8 : 33 ] And in answer to this question, I don't think we can be certain because Paul doesn't define what kind of tongue or languages he's talking about precisely. In fact, if you look at 1 Corinthians 12 verse 10, Paul refers to various kinds of tongues.

Now in the book of Acts, if you look in the book of Acts in chapter 2, the believers, the disciples of Jesus were praying in the upper room, the Holy Spirit came upon them, they started speaking in tongues, and people from other parts of the world who were there in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost heard them speaking in their own languages.

In that instance, God miraculously empowered believers to speak in foreign human languages that they had never learned, but other people understood perfectly.

That also seems to be what happened in Acts chapter 10 when Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, came to faith in Jesus. It says, people heard him speaking in tongues and extolling God.

So in Acts, we see that this was a sort of reversal of the confusion that resulted from the Tower of Babel when people in their pride tried to build a tower to heaven and God confused their languages and when God sent the Holy Spirit as people were praying and humbly waiting on God, there was a reversal of that curse and a sign of the gospel going to all nations.

[ 10 : 00 ] Now that seems to be what's going on with tongues primarily in the book of Acts because when people speak in tongues in the book of Acts, you don't see every single Christian speaking in tongues in the book of Acts, but you do see as the gospel moves outward in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, then to Samaria, then to the Gentiles, then to the province of Asia and Ephesus, you see groups of people who speak in tongues as an expression of the Holy Spirit's work.

So in Acts, it seems to be speaking in human languages that people haven't learned. But is that always what tongues is? And the answer would seem to be no. If you look again at 1 Corinthians 13, verse 1, Paul refers to the tongues of men and of angels.

Now that's the only reference to speaking in angelic languages in Scripture so we shouldn't build too much on one reference, but it seems to be at least a possibility in Paul's mind.

And also, in this chapter we're reading, 1 Corinthians 14, Paul's writing to a church that included people from many different languages and cultural backgrounds. But he doesn't say, sure, go ahead and speak in tongues because maybe your international neighbor will understand you speaking in their own language.

Paul assumes that if someone speaks in tongues, probably nobody's going to understand them unless somebody has what he calls a gift of interpretation. So Paul doesn't seem to be assuming that tongues are always foreign human languages.

[ 11 : 27 ] It seems like they could be human languages, they could be some kind of heavenly languages, or perhaps even something else. There's one other verse that makes a similar point in the New Testament that believers can at times communicate to God in prayer, in the power of the Holy Spirit in a way that goes beyond normal human language.

If you look at Romans chapter 8, verse 26, Paul says, likewise, the Spirit, the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Now groanings isn't exactly the same thing as tongues, but it's similar. It's the idea that in our human weakness, in our perplexity, when we don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit can prompt us to pray to God in a way that goes beyond normal human words.

Sometimes we might not understand exactly what we're praying for or what we need, but God hears and God knows. And we put it all in his hands. So I think that's what tongues is.

Speaking to God in a language that's not normally understood by the person who's speaking or the people who might be hearing. Second, the benefits of speaking in tongues. Paul describes some benefits of speaking in tongues in this chapter.

[ 12 : 52 ] Verse 4, he says, the one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself. Some people have wondered, is Paul being sarcastic there? All you people speaking in tongues, you're just building yourself up, puffing yourself up, rather than building up the church.

But I don't think that's what Paul's doing. In Jude, actually, Jude 20, says, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. And in the very next verse, verse 5, Paul says, I want you all to speak in tongues.

Now, that was a favorite verse when I was growing up in the Pentecostal church. I want you all to speak in tongues. I heard a few sermons on that one. Now, the emphasis is actually the second half of the verse where Paul says, but even more, to prophesy.

And it's also possible to translate verse 5, I'm willing or I'm happy for you all to speak in tongues. Paul isn't saying that every Christian must speak in tongues. But he is saying that speaking in tongues can be personally edifying.

In fact, in verse 18, Paul says, I speak in tongues more than you all do. He wouldn't say that if he thought that speaking in tongues was just foolish and useless. So it's true, tongues can be abused or overemphasized or wrongly made into the measure of spiritual maturity.

[14:11] That was happening in Corinth, but Paul's response was not to prohibit tongues and get rid of them. In fact, in verse 39, he says, don't forbid speaking in tongues.

So let me encourage you, if you've had bad experiences in the charismatic movement, don't react by throwing everything out, throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as they say.

All right, Paul says, don't forbid speaking in tongues. Now, some of you might say, well, but help me understand, how could it be spiritually beneficial to pray in a way that I don't even know what I'm saying?

Well, let me say this. It seems that God may and sometimes does edify individual believers in ways that transcend our rational, cognitive processes.

And that our spirits, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, can sometimes respond to God in ways that can't completely fit in our rational, cognitive processes through groanings that words can't express or tongues that our minds can't understand.

[15:22] And maybe this is meant to humble us, just to remind us that God is far greater than our minds can conceive. Sam Storms, who happens to be the new president of the Evangelical Theological Society, no scholarly lightweight, wrote about his experience of praying in tongues.

And he said, I found this gift profoundly helpful to my prayer life. It doesn't diminish one's capacity for rational thought or one's commitment to the authority of the written word of God.

It has served only to deepen my intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ and to enhance my zeal and joy in worship. Those are some benefits of speaking in tongues.

But Paul also points out some dangers of speaking in tongues. This is what Paul addresses in verses 6 to 11. Verse 6, he says, If I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you? It seems like some of the Corinthians wanted Paul to come and basically put on a show to show how spiritual he was by displaying his gift of speaking in tongues.

[16:28] And Paul had refused. Paul said back in 1 Corinthians 2, When I came to you, I didn't come proclaiming to you the mystery of God with lofty speech or wisdom.

And he didn't come and stand up front and put on a public display of all his speaking in tongues. He said, I came and I proclaim Christ and him crucified with weakness and fear and trembling.

You see, in this whole chapter, Paul places no restrictions on speaking in tongues privately. But he says, There are some things that are wonderful to do when you're alone, but aren't always so helpful when you're gathered with God's people.

Sometimes, several years ago, I used to drive up to Boston a lot. I was taking seminary classes part-time up there. And before my wife and I were married, she was living up there. And sometimes, I would be driving back late at night.

And sometimes, I would sing and pray at the top of my lungs in my car. It helped me stay awake. It helped me intercede for people. I was probably releasing all kinds of emotions to God.

[17:35] And I wasn't bothering anybody. I was edifying myself. But if I walked into church and immediately started yelling at the top of my lungs, prayer and praise to God, I wouldn't be loving you all.

Paul wants us all to ask the question that he asked in verse 6. How can I benefit you? And this is a principle that applies much more broadly than tongues.

Not, Paul's saying, the question is not, how can I display my gifts in the church and be recognized for them? The question is, how can I benefit you even if that means restraining myself in some ways?

And so, Paul's point here is that speaking in tongues without interpretation publicly isn't beneficial because the hearers won't benefit from what they can't understand. Verse 7 to 11, Paul uses three analogies to make the point.

Musical instruments only produce pleasing melodies if they're played according to some kind of orderly pattern, right? If the musicians all came up here and just started playing on their own without listening to each other, we would not have a very pleasant worship service this morning.

[ 18 : 52 ] The Corinthian church sort of sounded like that, like the sympathy orchestra when they're all tuning their instruments before the conductor comes on stage. They're all doing their own thing, making a ton of noise and nobody quite knows what's going on. Verse 8, Paul says, the military trumpet only works in rousing the troops to battle if the sounds are distinct and isn't that part of why we gather together as a church?

You know, we're fighting a spiritual battle every day of our lives and part of why we come together is to be equipped and empowered to fight that battle for Christ and know the power of the Holy Spirit being with us.

So Paul says, we need to hear a clear and distinct message in order to be equipped for that. Verse 10, 11, Paul uses the analogy of foreign languages. You know, if I suddenly start preaching in French, just because I happen to know French and I think French is a beautiful language, I'll alienate most of you right away.

Paul says, so with yourselves. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. In the world, we're foreigners and aliens. You might feel out of, I mean, we should feel out of place in this world. But Paul says, when we come together as a church, this is our home.

This is a foretaste of where our true home is in heaven. And when we come to church, we should help each other and remind each other that you belong. If you believe in Christ, you belong.

[ 20 : 16 ] So Paul says, don't alienate each other by how you're behaving. Again, this principle applies much more widely than speaking in tongues. There's all kinds of ways you can speak in ways that people can't understand even if you speak in English.

church. And Paul wants you to ask, how can I speak in a way that can benefit you, whoever you're speaking to or speaking with? That's why Paul says, strive to excel in building up the church.

You know, when we gather together here, the reason we've come together, it's not like we're all supposed to come here and sit here and get out our phones and connect to the same website and be really excited that we're connected to this really cool website.

Okay, we're not, we haven't come here to have 200 individual private experiences of the same God. We've come here to actually be together in the presence of God and build one another up.

Like, just like the deacons are looking at those walls that have had some roof leaks and they've arranged to fix the roof leaks, thankfully, so there's no, the plaster's not going to keep breaking down, but they, some of them come in on Saturday night and make sure that there isn't plaster that's going to fall down as you're walking down the right aisle on Sunday.

[ 21 : 31 ] Right, they're keeping, keeping track of the facilities and helping to build up the, keep the facilities moving well so we can meet here and Paul says, build up the church community.

Right, just as the building deacons build up, take care of the building, Paul says, we should all take care of each other. Let me give one example of this before we go on to prophecy that I experienced recently.

A few weeks ago I was at a Bible study and a few of us were praying in turn for someone who had shared a particular need with a group and one person began praying and in the middle of her prayer she launched into praying in tongues and I happen to know that this person is pretty passionate about praying in tongues but immediately she said, someone say something, someone else go ahead and pray.

This person felt the freedom to pray in tongues as she was interceding for a sister in Christ. In the context I thought that was a good thing but she was also immediately aware that it would be unhelpful for her to just go on and on praying in a way that no one else could understand and so she was immediately asking for someone else to jump in and pray in a way that everyone could understand while she continued praying in tongues quietly and unobtrusively.

I think that's an example I think it looks different in different places but I think that's an example of someone who loves speaking in tongues but who had learned and was learning to consider the others around them and be loving to them.

[ 23 : 05 ] Alright, so that's tongues now we go on to prophecy again prophecy we'll look at the nature of prophecy the benefits and the dangers so the nature of prophecy go back to verse 3 Paul says the one who prophesies speaks to people tongues is primarily directed toward God a form of prayer prophecy is primarily directed toward people verse 3 Paul explains the purpose of prophecy

for building us up as a united people of God for emboldening and equipping us for every good work and for consoling or comforting people who are grieving or depressed or hurting now I think it's likely that when Paul talks about prophecy in this chapter he's using it sort of as shorthand for various kinds of intelligible speaking gifts instead of every time saying prophecy teaching revelation or knowledge he just says prophecy but it's sort of meant to have a broader reference because if you look at verse 1 he says desire especially that you may prophesy but then in verse 6 he says how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching

I don't think Paul is saying desire especially to prophesy and not so much to teach or speak words of knowledge he's contrasting prophecy that is intelligible speech with tongues that is unintelligible speech and Jesus is pleased if we speak intelligible understandable words to one another whether they fall into the category of prophecy or teaching or knowledge or wisdom I think the reason Paul refers to those different gifts is that speaking to one another in an edifying and encouraging and comforting way takes a variety of different forms right it can be prepared you can prepare you can prepare a teaching or you might have a thought that comes to mind spontaneously that's helpful and edifying to share with somebody else it could be focused on explanation teaching seems to be focused more on explanation or could be more of an occasional exhortation having said so I think these words can apply more broadly to a variety of speaking gifts but having said that let me say a few words about prophecy in particular as compared to other speaking gifts like teaching so when the New Testament talks about teaching it mostly means preserving sound doctrine protecting the church against false and harmful ways of thinking and living and so a good teacher can explain what Christians believe and how Christians should live and where that's found in the Bible now prophecy is a little different what seems to be distinct about prophecy compared to teaching or other speaking gifts is that it's based on what Paul calls a revelation if you look down at verse 30 he talks about that and by revelation here he means an insight given by the Holy Spirit so a few examples of New Testament prophecy sometimes it's an insight into another person's spiritual condition if you read in Acts 13

Paul perceived by the power he said he was full of the Holy Spirit he perceived that this guy Elymas a magician was full of deceit and wickedness and so he gave a strong rebuke and God used that word of rebuke sometimes prophecy excuse me is an insight of an upcoming danger so the prophet Agabus in Acts 11 warned of an upcoming imminent famine and the believers responded by sending material help to the believers in Jerusalem who are going to experience that famine at other times it's an insight into what exactly the body of Christ needs to hear at a particular time in a particular place so in his commentary on 1 Corinthians John Calvin wrote this he said prophets were those who were blessed with the unique gift of dealing with scripture not only by interpreting it but by making it meet the needs of the hour they were endowed with extraordinary wisdom for recognizing the immediate need of the church and speaking the right words to meet it you see the church needs Bible teachers who can explain and expound the scriptures the church also needs prophets who can discern the particular needs of our times and speak directly and powerfully in accordance with the scripture to them some of the benefits of prophecy

Sam Storm summarizes these so he says prophetic utterances can as verse 3 says edify exhort and console they may bring conviction as the secrets of a sinner's heart are exposed verse 24 and 25 in this chapter they may teach verse 31 says we can learn from prophecies they may give direction for ministry Acts 13 1-3 they may contain warnings Acts 21 10-11 or present opportunities for ministry they may even identify and impart spiritual gifts 1 Timothy 4-14 if you want those references I can give them to you later so you see Paul is saying prophecy has many benefits and that's why he's so eager for us he says earnestly desire the spiritual gifts especially that you may prophesy earnestly desire them because God earnestly desires to bless his church with them in the Old Testament Moses longed for the day he said I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and the prophet

Joel looked forward to the day Joel said one day I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophesy both men and women and your old men will dream dreams and your young men will see visions young and old even on my servants both male and female servants were sort of the poor in that day the lowest class the least well educated Paul said I'm going to speak through all my people so that my people can be built up and my name can be praised in the world and on the day of Pentecost Peter proclaimed that prophecy has been fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church Paul wants us to desire these earnestly desire these gifts

because God has promised to give them to us for our good so let me say this let me challenge us especially if you've come from let's say a non-Pentecostal charismatic background right or in a church like Trinity that's that's not a Pentecostal church right do we earnestly desire the spiritual gifts that Paul describes here do we desire especially to prophesy that is or more broadly to speak edifying encouraging comforting words to one another do we pray that the Holy Spirit would give us insight when we see someone who needs encouragement or when we see someone a brother or sister in Christ who's falling into sin or when we are facing a difficult situation we just don't know what to do do we pray

[ 30 : 35 ] Holy Spirit give us the insight that we need of course part of how the Holy Spirit does that is pointing us to the scriptures but sometimes there are things that the Holy Spirit can sort of highlight as being particularly beneficial for us at a given moment you know if you're teaching in a Bible study pray that the Lord would not only give you insight into the scriptures but also insight into what your group needs to hear at the present time in order to more effectively glorify God James 4 says sometimes he says James 4 says you don't have because you don't ask God and that can sometimes be true of spiritual gifts yes the Lord sovereignly distributes the gifts as he pleases but he also says ask for what we need ask for what would be most beneficial so I think Richard Hayes says this the church that ponders 1 Corinthians 14 seriously will be led to pray for the gift of prophecy and to welcome it when it's given so those are some of the benefits of prophecy finally dangers of prophecy this is the last section

I know it's hot hang in there we said early I'm sweating too we said earlier that prophecy is based on a revelation that is an insight given by the Holy Spirit but here is the danger and we need to hear this danger a genuine insight given by God may be combined with erroneous human assumptions for an example of this you can look at Acts 21 now we preached on Acts 21 about a year ago I'm not going to repeat the whole sermon you can read it you can listen to it on the website but in Acts 21 verse 4 it says through the spirit the Christians Christians at Tyre were urging Paul not to go on to Jerusalem and if you read the passage what's going on is they rightly discerned I think this is the insight from the Holy Spirit that there would be danger awaiting Paul in Jerusalem they wrongly concluded that because there would be danger therefore Paul should not go and Paul rightly disregarded there what they would have thought was a word of prophecy so it's interesting the apostle Paul did not always listen to everyone who said

I have a word of prophecy for you in fact sometimes he did the opposite he used discernment there's only one place where the Holy Spirit has revealed himself through human spokespersons and without human error and that is in this book in the scriptures and the scriptures are our final authority in faith and practice and so prophecy in the sense that I'm using the word in the sense that I think Paul is using the word in 1 Corinthians 14 and in the sense that it seems to be most commonly used throughout the New Testament is not the same thing as God's word without error and infallible okay and this is why the New Testament tells us we need to test prophecies it doesn't say just listen to anyone who claims to be a prophet or even who has spoken a word of prophecy before that has come true 1 Thessalonians 5 don't despise prophecies again don't rule them out but test everything hold fast what is good and abstain from every form of evil so prophecies or more broadly any word of advice or warning or encouragement from a fellow believer must be carefully evaluated and discerned so let me speak to you briefly if you have the gift of prophecy some people have the gift of prophecy and they don't call it prophecy but perhaps the Lord seems to give you insight into spiritual dangers or ministry opportunities or even into what seems to be going on in someone's heart like we see in the book of Acts that can be a genuine and very useful gift from God but be careful because recognize that while the Holy Spirit may give you insights you might not always see the whole picture and so submit the way you can express it helpfully is submit your insights to the discernment of godly spiritual leaders and the Christian community as a whole if you are on the receiving end of a word of prophecy or a strong word of advice or warning from a fellow believer take it seriously consider if there are important insights from the Holy Spirit that you should take to heart but test it against God's word someone else's advice even someone else's prophecy is not the same thing as an absolute command from God if you look in this chapter verse 37 Paul distinguishes prophecy from what what he's from his writings which he says are a command of the Lord now let me say one other thing about prophecy before we conclude sometimes Christians experience very similar things but call them by very different names so some Christians will say I had a revelation the Lord gave me a word for you I think the Lord was speaking to me other

Christians might say I had a feeling or I had an impression I felt a conviction or an urge or a burden or a resolution or I was reading scripture and this passage just I just wanted to share this passage with you now the language seems very different but the experience is sometimes more similar than we realize right if you're in a Pentecostal coming from a Pentecostal background you might say I have a revelation right

I've got a word if you're coming from a Presbyterian or a traditional Baptist background you won't say that right but it doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit isn't doing the same things because every Christian Pentecostal Presbyterian Baptist on denomination or whatever you are has the Holy Spirit living in us and the Holy Spirit working through us well we've talked a lot about how prophecy edifies the church but one more pattern I think we can see is that gifts like prophecy and miracles and healings are often most prevalent when the gospel is moving outward when God's people are crossing cultural national and social boundaries when we're going to unfamiliar even dangerous places for the sake of Christ when we're engaging people from cultures and backgrounds that are hostile to Christianity when we get stretched to the limits of our human capacities we feel our dependence on the Lord more acutely we know that we need the Lord we need his presence we need his power we need his wisdom otherwise we know it's all going to flop and so we pray more earnestly and fervently maybe even with groans that words can't express and in those very situations the Lord tends to show up in unmistakable ways he gives us the words we need to speak he gives us the patience to endure opposition he demonstrates his glory through deeds of power because what he's doing there is he's not just building the church with the people who are already here but he's building the church by bringing people in who are going to become part of it let me close with one story about how God uses the gift of prophecy or something like it in a situation where

[ 38 : 40 ] I think people wouldn't have even called it that or realized what was happening but God used it powerfully to bring someone to himself and he even used kids let me close with this story several years ago I was a counselor at a Christian hockey camp during the summers one of the coaches was a guy named Bill Butters he had played in the NHL for a few years in the 70s and he was what is known in hockey as an enforcer which means he had far more penalty minutes for roughing and fighting than goals or assists he was a tough guy he was angry he was volatile he had no interest in religion he had some terrible experiences in churches when he was a kid but one of his buddies invited him to volunteer at this Christian hockey camp the first Christian hockey camp in the United States back in 1980 and at first he said I have no interest in this Christian stuff first he said how much are you going to pay me the guy said well it's a Christian camp the coaches all volunteer and he said you've got to be kidding the guy just kept pestering him and he came because he literally he said

I don't even know why I came I literally had nothing to do now right before he came to the camp he didn't tell anybody this at the camp except I think his close friend knew but he didn't tell anybody else at the camp this he had just got cut from his team told he wouldn't play pro hockey ever again his marriage was falling apart mostly because he had become an alcoholic and he had anger issues so he goes to the camp first he says I'm just doing the on ice staff forget the chapel stuff so that works for two or three days then one of the kids invites him to come to chapel he goes to chapel had an experience there I'll skip that part but after the evening chapel the 12 year old boys say Coach Bill would you come to our huddle group this is where they would like discuss what was shared at the chapel service and have a little bible discussion do a little prayer time they say would you come with us of course you can't refuse 12 year old kids at the end of the huddle group he said each boy began to pray for me one prayed for a job he had no idea

I had just been cut from my team one prayed for peace in my life he had no idea that my marriage was breaking apart one prayed that I might find joy and happiness he had no idea that I had turned to alcohol in my despair and finally one 12 year old boy prayed that I could know Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior that night I got down on my knees and asked Christ into my life you see how the Holy Spirit can use 12 year old boys probably don't even wouldn't even call it the gift of prophecy but he gave them insight into what to pray for and use them to lead this tough hardened NHL player to Christ and then he worked for this ministry for the last 30 years that's how I got to know him let's pray that the Lord would pour out his spirit upon us so this church would be built Holy Spirit we pray that you would pour out your presence among us and your gifts among us

Lord we want to earnestly desire them we want to earnestly desire every good gift that you give for the good of your church and for the glory of your name we pray that you would protect us and forgive us for ways that we have used gifts in selfish or self-promoting ways or unedifying ways Lord give us love give us the love that would make us strive to excel in building up your church and we pray that you would use these gifts Lord not only to build up one another who are gathered here but to bring in the people who would one day become part of your kingdom and who would worship you forever and who would join their voices in the song of praise to Jesus Christ the Lamb of God pray these things in Jesus name  
Amen Amen Amen