

## **“How Great is Your Desire?”**

### **1 Corinthians 14:1-40**

God created us with desires. God actually wants us to want. Desire is part of our humanity. When we desire something, we possess a strong feeling of wanting to have something or experience something.

We begin to desire the moment we wake up. We either desire the day or the snooze button. We desire a certain style of dress. We desire specific things to eat, specific people to see, specific responsibilities to fulfill. This happens all throughout our day, every day.

Praise God 100% of us here this morning, even our people from CA, desire another Celtics win in Game 2 of the NBA Finals!

The question is not *how frequently* our desires emerge, but *what our hearts chase after*.

- Paul begins his final instructions on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14 with the command to “Pursue love and *eagerly desire* the spiritual gifts.”
- Paul wants them to want the gifts, not simply with strong feeling, but with a deep sense of earnestness or eagerness. The Greek word is *zeloute*. You can hear the word *zealous*. It can mean to be jealous for or strive after .
- When zeal motivates us, we possess intense focus, contagious enthusiasm, and a willingness to do what it takes to get what we want.

Three different times Paul tells them he wants them to “earnestly desire” spiritual gifts. (12:31, 14:1, 39)

The question I have for you is this: “HOW GREAT IS YOUR DESIRE?”

Over the past six weeks we’ve learned that God empowers us with abilities to serve people effectively through gifts like mercy, teaching, healing, administration, and leadership, so they are encouraged, strengthened, comforted, built up, and pointed to God’s glory.

The question for us is: to what degree am we doing so? To what degree do we desire to walk in the good works God has prepared for us in his kingdom purposes?

1 Corinthians 14 invites you to...

### **The Point: Earnestly desire all God wants to do through you!**

I am going to read the first 25 verses of chapter 14. As you will see, Paul spends considerable time addressing two specific gifts: tongues and prophecy. He does so because the Corinthian church were clearly elevating the gift of tongues to the point where they practiced them in unhealthy ways.

#### From our freshly written Statement on Spiritual Gifts...

“A careful reading of Scripture concerning God’s design and intended use of spiritual gifts should recognize and avoid two common errors of interpretation and practice. One position claims miraculous gifts, such as prophecy, healing, and tongues, are no longer available for today’s church. Another places an unhealthy emphasis on spiritual gifts with some claiming certain gifts, like tongues, provide evidence of a person’s salvation and maturity in Christ. Given the weight of biblical evidence and church history, we reject these positions.”

We’ll see why as we read the first 25 verses of 1 Cor. 14...

### **1 Corinthians 14:1-5 (Text Displayed)**

**1 Corinthians 14:6-12 (Text Displayed)**  
**1 Corinthians 14:13-19 (Text Displayed)**  
**1 Corinthians 14:20-25 (Text Displayed)**

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### **1. Desire to strengthen people through the gifts, especially prophecy. (14:1-25)**

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What does it look like to earnestly desire?

- Pray. Ask!
- Pray. Ask with others!
- Learn, read, listen, study...
- Step out and try to serve others in these particular ways.
- Then PERSEVERE! Earnest desire looks like the persistent widow of Luke 18. Annoy heaven with your prayers until you see it!

The underlying key note here is a life that says: "God, my life is yours. Use me as you choose! Send me wherever you want me to go!"

All of this should be motivated and characterized by LOVE, the love that he just described in chapter 13.

Paul closes verse 1 saying that as you desire the spiritual gifts, you should especially desire the gift of prophecy. In verses 2-5 he gives his reasons.

#### Tongues & Prophecy Defined.

- Tongues: speaking a language unknown to the speaker
  - Sam Storms says, "The gift of tongues is simply the Spirit-energized ability to pray, worship, give thanks or speak in a language other than your own or one you might have learned in school."
  - We know from the rest of Scripture this could be an actual known language (not to the speaker, but to the hearers). This is exactly what happened on the Day of Pentecost as Parthians, Medes, and Egyptians heard the wonders of God in their own language from men and women who had never spoken their language! That is not the kind Paul refers to here.
  - This is a language which no one understands, except God, hence the word "mysteries" in verse 2. This is why tongues can be a gift that is exercised in private prayer or singing.
  - Or, it is a gift no one understands except the person with the gift of interpretation when the message is addressed to other people.
- Prophecy: speaking a message given spontaneously from God. When prophecies are spoken, they are understandable words that address a person's life: past, present, or future. Don't reduce prophesying to a kind of "Crystal Ball" moment. Though it most certainly can be future-oriented or even predictive, that's not the most frequent focus of prophecy in the OT or NT.

#### Tongues & Prophecy Distinguished.

- Tongues are most often directed to God. This is what verse 2 says. "*Tongues, whether spoken or sung, are fundamentally worship and intercession! Even when interpreted in a public gathering, tongues-speech is God-oriented.*" (Storms) If a tongue is directed toward people, there must be an interpreter as verse 5, 13, 27, and 28 make plain. Prophecy, on the other hand, is always directed to people. Verse 3.
- Tongues primarily build up the speaker. Verse 4: "The one who speak in a tongue builds up himself, but. The one who prophesies builds up the church (for their "upbuilding" or strengthening, "encouragement and consolation or comfort"

- Now, some of you are caught off guard by Paul saying that the spiritual gift of tongues is for self- edification, for self-strengthening. But let's think about this theologically, biblically, and practically.
  - Theologically: Would anything God leads us to do fail to bring a blessing? Would we expect that God working through us/empowering us would not also strengthen us? That's right.
  - Biblically: Jude 20 makes explicit what is implied all over the Bible: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God . . ."
  - Practically: This is our experience. When I preach, I'm breathing. When I encourage someone, it brings me life.
- Paul's greatest concern and our greatest concern should be to benefit and bring life to others. That's why he talks about building others up in vv. 3-6, 12, 17, 19, and 26 (being the key verse: "Let all things be done for building up.")
- Paul is not saying tongues are unimportant. He would not demean one of God's gifts. He says prophecy is more beneficial in the gathering of the church because it is always understandable and should always build up others.

In verses 6-12, Paul provides examples to make his point.

- Verse 6 represents his main thought. He wants to bring understandable words for their benefit, not mysteries they can't understand. Then he gives the examples of...
  - A flute or harp. Instruments, if they sound good (thank you Music Team), need to hit distinct notes and chords to be harmonious and pleasing to the ear.
  - The same with the bugle on the ancient battlefield. They didn't have modern communication devices to communicate, so that blew horns to say, "It's time to advance. It's time to retreat."
  - The same is also true of human languages. To communicate with ease, we need to speak the same language. I have SO MUCH respect for those of you who speak multiple languages. It takes an immense amount of time, effort, and study to become fluent in another language. I've failed many times in the attempt.
- So Paul says in verse 12, since you want to see the Spirit move among you, "strive to excel in building up the church." In other words, focus on prophesying and teaching and encouraging one another and sharing words of wisdom and knowledge.

With verses 13-19 we learn a bit MORE about tongues:

- Again, we should pray for the gift of interpretation (whether personal or someone else). Otherwise, Paul can not affirm what we are saying or give thanks to God (vv. 16-17).
- We should not dismiss the strengthening of our spirits, even when our minds are not engaged. In other words, "Paul believed that it wasn't absolutely necessary for an experience to be rationally cognitive for it to be spiritually beneficial and glorifying to God." - Storms
- Once again, the gift of tongues is a wonderful gift from God. So wonderful that Paul says, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you," which seems to point to the measure of his gift or the measure of his gratitude. I think it's likely both!
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## **20-25 - the power of prophecy**

I am going to take more time in the Fall to explain Paul's apparent contradiction. The key is the context of the his OT quotation (Isaiah 28:11-12). In short, tongues were a sign of distance from salvation for those outside of Israel and the worship of YHWH.

But now, the most helpful sign for unbelievers is prophesy. Why? Because it will show them that God knows them, loves them, and wants them to live for him!

When sharing a prophetic word with someone yet to believe in Jesus, verses 24-25 form our prayer: “conviction” leading to “worship”!

That’s what happened on the Day of Pentecost! It is still happening today. Let’s have faith for it!

#1) Desire to strengthen people through the gifts, especially prophecy. #2...

## **2. Practice spiritual gifts according to Scripture, especially in worship. (14:26-40)**

### **1 Corinthians 14:26-35 (Text Displayed)**

### **1 Corinthians 14:36-40 (Text Displayed)**

While these principles are applicable for various contexts, Paul is addressing the gathering of God’s people in public worships. Just like what we are doing right now.

Verse 26 gives us one clearest pictures of what worship was like in the early church. Most worship gathering would have been hosted in homes. Part of this was due to persecution. Part of it was due to the progress of the gospel spreading in a grassroots way, likely without major financial backing.

**Participate. Bring something.**

**Sundays. Yes, but even more in our Small Groups.**

### Principles for Tongues (27-28)

- When Paul says, “If any speak in a tongue...” we should make two observations: 1) Paul did not assume someone would speak in a tongue in every gathering. 2) The type of tongue he is talking about is not private prayer, but speaking for others to hear. If that happens, here are the stipulations...
  - 1. Only two or at most three.
  - 2. One at a time.
  - 3. Must have an interpreter.
  - 4. If there’s not an interpreter: keep silent in church and speak to God.
- Some of you have attended churches where these principles were broken. That doesn’t mean that there weren’t some really great things about that church, but it does mean they needed to heed these words.
- No matter the context: Sunday worship, prayer nights, small groups, wherever, these are the principles that guide us. There are also
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### Principles for Prophecy (29-33)

- 29: Limit the number of prophetic revelations, especially to give space for people to weigh what is shared.
- 30-31: Speak one by one, to eliminate confusion and maximize learning and encouragement.
- 32-33: Practice humble, mutual submission, so that worship is orderly and peaceful.

### Receiving a Prophetic Word

- Prophesying starts with hearing God’s voice. I’ve preached on this a couple of times in the past year: “Tools for Hearing God’s Voice” (John 10) & “He Will Speak” (John 16).
- As we grow in discerning God’s voice, we will grow in hearing his voice for others. That’s step one.
- Develop an EAR to hear...

- Expect... I like what Jordan Seng says, in his book, *Miracle Work*: "If you're relating to a supernatural being, then you should probably expect to have supernatural conversations with him. The Bible makes this pretty clear."
- Ask... Spend time sitting with God and listening. Don't do all the talking. How does that work in your human relationships! Lol... Ask God specific questions. Wait patiently and keep your antennas up throughout the day.
- Revere... Be ready to follow through on what you hear!

### Sharing a Prophetic Word

- Share with love and humility. It's super smart to NOT SAY, "God told me to tell you." but something like: "I believe God wants me to share something with you."
- Encourage them to prayerfully consider it, to talk with others about it.
- Point them to Jesus and tell them you will be praying for them. Make yourself available as God leads.

### Weighing a word

#### Five Filters for Discerning God's Voice

- **God's Word: Does this align with Scripture? (Psalm 119:105)**
- **God's Son: Does this bring me/others closer to Jesus? (Mark 8:34)**
- **God's People: What do wise Christians say about this? (Prov. 13:20)**
- **God's Spirit: Does God's Spirit affirm this in my spirit? (Romans 8:16)**
- **God's Glory: Would this bring God glory? (1 Cor. 10:31)**

In closing, Paul gives some other instruction for women that were appropriate for their cultural context. I'll also address that fully in the Fall. Then he makes a strong appeal for them to put his words into practice! With rhetorical punch he asks, "Did the Word of God originate with you? Are you the only church following the ways of Jesus."

Then, one more time he says, "*EARNESTLY DESIRE to prophecy and DO NOT forbid speaking in tongues.* But all things should be done decently and in order."

*Conclusion:*

POWER EQUATION: Authority + Gifting + Faith + Consecration = Power

"The idea is that the amount of authority, gifting, faith and consecration you develop will combine to determine, in large part, the amount of supernatural power you have for ministry." - Seng

### WAVES OF POWER

God is doing something. The waves are coming.  
The waves are coming  
For this hour.

What do we see?  
Waves of Firepower.  
Climbing to a crest  
Through the Spirit inside our chest.

Ready to break over

And breakthrough  
Yes, ready to consume

Our ill-timed words and actions  
Replacing them with his perfections.  
Hope for anxious despair.  
Peace calming every care.  
Justice conquering our hate.  
Kindness you'd want to imitate.  
Rest for our hurry.  
Forgiveness for every time they say: "I'm sorry."  
Joy for the monotony.  
Vision for all that's blinding me.

Waves of mercy.  
Waves of grace.  
Waves of love for every race.

Can you see? Do not fear.  
Dry bones walk. Dead men here.  
The voice of life, the voice of Christ!

God is doing something. The waves are coming.

So fan the flame. Then make a toast.  
Spread the news from coast to coast,  
And everywhere throughout the land.  
This is the

EMPOWERING PRESENCE

OF THE GREAT I AM.

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