

# Ministry in the Spirit - 5. the Gift of Tongues and Prayer Language

by Michael Flowers

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of love and the gifts of the Spirit, particularly the gift of prophecy, in corporate worship.*

**Duration:** 33:22

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, 1 Corinthians 14:1, 1 Corinthians 14:3, 1 Corinthians 14:12, 1 Corinthians 14:22, 1 Corinthians 14:26

**Topics:** "Tongues"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of exercising spiritual gifts in the context of the corporate gathering. They emphasize the need for order and understanding in the manifestation of these gifts. The speaker acknowledges that their interpretation and theology are not foolproof, but they draw from their experiences in the charismatic renewal movement and teaching on this topic globally. They also mention the concept of seeing things dimly in the present, but having faith in what will be fully known when Jesus returns.

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## Transcript

Well, our first announcement today is that we have a new little one who is coming to this crazy world that Jesus is redeeming, but we don't know her name yet because only Nate and Tessa would do this, right? No, they're being biblical. They're being biblical. They are wanting to look at this beautiful little one for just a little while.

Before she leaves the hospital, she will be named, and they do have a list of names, and so they're just trying to get a word, right? Isn't that great? That's great care of just like, Lord, what is her name? You know, we want you to name her because every name has a meaning, right? Everybody know the meaning of your name? Yeah, very good. That's important. If you don't find it out, you can Google it, right? Right.

Michael, Michael's a Hebrew name, and he is an archangel, and it means who is like God. Wow, you know, I know. And so if you've got a name with L on the end of it, it's going to be about God, right? Really? Yeah, that's right.

It's a high bar. I know. Yeah, that's why.

Grace, grace, grace, Lord, grace. Yeah. Well, turn with me if you're following in your Bibles.

I want to begin talking a bit today about a topic called we call this several things. And so I'm going to give you some categories here. We're going to we're going to deal with the difference between the gift of corporate tongues and private tongues.

Or you could say when I say prayer language, I mean private tongues. The gift of praying in the spirit. That's another word.

Prayer language or praying in the spirit is called prayer language or private tongues. And we're going to show you how Paul talks about this today in this passage. All right, because what's happening here is that the concern is not one's private devotion.

The concern is the corporate gathering, right? There's two two elements of our prayer and worship and all of that. And so here we are together. And so Paul is that's his key concern in how the gifts manifest.

He said, let all things be done, but decently in order. Right. We want certainly all things to be done and not neglected and all things to be understood.

That's why we have to teach on these things, because there's so many different ways of looking at this topic today. And I'm just going to give you my spin. And my spin is sort of marinating in the charismatic renewal and traveling the world, really teaching stuff like this, Vietnam and Asia, Europe, everywhere.

So this is not some sort of regional understanding, but this is a global understanding. It would be a global understanding coming out of the global South, 70 percent of the Anglican world. This is not some sort of small subcategory of Christianity that I'm going to present today.

It's majority. It really is of the Anglican world. And so, hey, you know, sometimes we just don't know what's normal because we are regionalized.

We're Americans or we live in Kansas City. We don't get out. We don't travel.

But when you do, you know, I was in Southampton, Liz and I, you know, years ago and we were staying with a family and we were getting ready to take the barge over to to France. Right. We were just like, yeah, let's do this.

And and and so the family we were staying with, I said, well, what's your favorite city in France? And they said, we've never been. How sad, you know, you're right there, you can get on the barge and go and they've never been. OK, so where's your spirit of adventure? OK, and so you're going to need that with this teaching today to where have you been? All right.

I'm going to begin, though, with some context. We heard first Corinthians 14 today and we're going to land there, but I just kind of want to walk through some of the things that we've skipped over, because Lord knows we can't cover everything. And this is a homily, not a, you know, a seminar on spiritual gifts.

And we've got that. I mean, we've done these things again all over the world. Pat and Joy have done the same thing.

They've traveled throughout Ireland and taught on prophetic worship. And, you know, so what we're talking about today in terms of singing in the spirit or singing in tongues, this is commonplace. It's

commonplace all over the world.

You may not agree with my biblical exegesis in practice. That's OK. But here it is.

I'm not saying I'm totally right. I'm just global. The globalization of exegesis.

No. OK, I'm going to begin with chapter 12, first Corinthians 12, and I'm going to begin with verse 27 in first Corinthians 12. I'm just going to kind of read through some of these things to give some context.

Now, you are the body of Christ, Paul is saying to the Corinthian church, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church, God has appointed, first of all, apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing gifts, plural healing like that, those able to help others, the gift of administration and those speaking in different kinds of tongues are all apostles. Are all prophets, no, are all teachers, do all work miracles, no, that I mean, that's the imputation.

That's a rhetorical question here, and I'm reading that as, no, do all have gifts of healing, do all speak in tongues, do all interpret, but even though he's asked all of these rhetorical questions, which imply no, he's saying, but there's hope. OK, here it is, eagerly, zealously is the word here, zealously desire. Even though you may not be operating in these gifts, but eagerly desire what the greater gives.

And now I will show you the most excellent way. And he goes into the chapter on love. And if you'll recall back in, we didn't cover this, but when they were at the Eucharist, they weren't waiting for one another and the rich were getting drunk and they weren't acting in love.

And so Paul is saying, yeah, you're full of spiritual gifts and you're great charismatics, but your character, your charisma is fine. It's not being applied properly, but you need character, you need love because love and the gifts must go together. Right.

Otherwise, you're operating as an independent entity doing your thing on the other person. And we're not here to do our thing on other people. We're here to integrate and to reciprocate towards one another.

Love one another. That's not a one way love. That's a reciprocal pronoun.

That's expecting love in return. If I love you, I'm going to expect some love in return. And it's OK to do that.

That's love one another. That's what Jesus said. It's reciprocal pronoun.

It's not like I'm just going to love you. Now, sometimes we have to love people and we don't get they don't reciprocate. That's fine.

Yeah. But now we're here in the body and we we want to we want to anticipate like feedback and, you know, splashback through each other. It's really great.

And in this body, you know, I'm preaching to the choir right now. So that's what that's all about. Now, a lot of times this is used like, OK, now he's talked on gifts, but I'm going to show you a more excellent way.

In other words, this is going to X out the gifts because love is better and therefore we don't have to do the gifts. That's not what he's saying at all. Right.

If you read 12, 13, 14 and look at the rest of Paul's life, he's just saying that faith works through love. And through love, serve one another, and so the gifts and serving and love all are together, they can't be just

chopped up to where I'm going to do my thing on you that I don't care about you. But I've got the gift.

Here it is. I'm going to show up with a gift and there's people that travel. I generally like that.

You know, I'm sorry they don't know how to be in church. Brothers and sisters, we need to learn how to be in church, to be with one another. And and that's great diversity of even opinions and theology.

We can love each other, even if you don't if you don't agree with the thing I'm saying today, that's OK with me. I love you anyway. Right.

I really do, because I have to. I'm commanded to. Darn it.

Right. The way it works. All right, here he is.

Now I'll show you a more excellent way. I would say now I'm going to show you a more excellent way to exercise the gifts. That's what he means.

That's what he means, because look at it coming out of this. Now, let's go into 13. I'm not going to do that because we'll cover this the last message on the gifts.

We'll go back to 13. But I just want to show you eight, verse eight in chapter 13. Why? A more excellent way, because love never fails.

You know, it's always reliable. And where there are prophecies, they will cease. Where there are tongues, they will be stilled.

Where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we all know in part and we prophesy in part. And that is so important as we we even pray in tongues in part.

I mean, we're doing all of this, exercising our gifts in faith. Right. We do it.

We step out in faith and exercise our gifts. It takes faith to step out and initiate and say, may I pray for you? You know, just leading someone to Christ. Right, to praying for healing for someone, knowing that that healing may or may not happen, but we're commanded to heal.

Right. It's a command. Jesus commanded the apostles to heal.

It's in the imperative mood in the Greek, so it's a command. So I just have to do it and trust the Lord for the results and to get some really good pastoral care going when things are not met the way we want them to. Because, you know, a lot of times people don't get healed, but we we're going to pray anyway with a follow up with good pastoral care on that.

We know in part, verse nine, and we prophesy in part, that is, it's not 100 percent God. And it's OK. That's why we discern and test prophecies.

If they were 100 percent God, we wouldn't have to test, we wouldn't have we'd need to get the discernment and the prophet would need to be humble and submit himself under the scrutiny of the church. And if you get people who come in and do the prophecy and they don't want to be tested, then don't listen to them, right, because that's not biblical at all. It's dangerous.

You got you got this person out there who is doing his thing. Or her thing on you without any kind of accountability. OK, so this is a congregation.

We all have accountability. I have accountability. I'm submitted to you, you're submitted to me.

I'm submitted to my bishop. You know, he submitted to the archbishop and all of the clergy. I mean, even Stuart, he would submit himself to me in that kind of reciprocal mutual submission.

So, you know, that provides some safety. It doesn't. But even in authority, being under authority doesn't guarantee that everything will go right.

Right. But it is a safety mechanism that a lot of people don't have. But it's not nothing's foolproof.

Right. We're all frail human beings. And so everything's in part.

This sermon is in part my exegesis is in part my opinions, my theology. It's all in part. I'm doing the best I can.

And when a person steps out and prophesies, we saw last week, don't despise prophetic utterances, test everything and hold fast to that, which is good. OK, so that's that's the way we do it. And we'll talk more on that next week.

And this says in verse 12, this is now we're seeing but a poor reflection as in a mirror. But we shall see face to face when Jesus returns. Right.

Right now we see dimly is another translation. We we just see things dimly even. And so everything we do is sort of dim, but we walk by faith and not by dim and by sight.

Right. We walk by faith and not by sight. Even though, you know, because our sight is dim and we don't see what we what we shall see.

Now, I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. Verse 13. And now these three remain faith, hope and love.

But the greatest of these is love. Verse 14. Next, no chapter break here in Paul's teaching.

Right. We broke it up. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts.

The two must go together. You can't separate them. So follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts.

OK. Now, I want you to ask yourself this morning, am I eagerly desiring spiritual gifts and maybe what is that gift or what are those gifts? I want you to get in touch with maybe latent desire. I think if you're not in touch with that desire, it's there because spiritual gifts are like tools that we use to build.

God's working on a building. I will build my church and we need tools and the spiritual gifts are those tools which build up the body of Christ. OK, this is biblical teaching.

Right. And so we need spiritual gifts or otherwise we won't have the tools to really edify one another and build them up and see them come forth and to be fully alive. You see, our greatest passion is to see one another become fully alive in Jesus.

There it is. Eagerly desire spiritual gifts. They don't make you special.

You know what I'm saying? It doesn't make you more holy or, you know, if you're flowing spiritual gifts, you're not like, you know, I don't know if you will remember Catherine Kuhlman, but the days of the drama, you know, she had an amazing gift. I'm not making fun of her, but it was very dramatic. And, you know, not everybody can be that dramatic.

Right. You don't have drama is not the gift. Right.

I mean, I mean, just that personality flowing with the gift. We all do that. Right.

I've got my own. You know, you're laughing at me because there I am. I'm a little drama queen myself, I guess.

Little Richard's the queen of rock and roll, so, you know, OK. And just because we don't necessarily have a gift, I just want you to get this doesn't mean you can't have it. Right.

If you eagerly desire means ask, seek and knock for it. And sometimes it may not happen. I mean, you know, Paul asked three times that his thorn in the flesh be taken away and it was not.

He says, no, my grace is sufficient for you. So no is an answer. You know, no is an answer to prayer, just like, yes.

Right. So we need to accept how God sovereignly distributes those gifts. There's a sovereign distribution policy, but he's saying eagerly desire them and the greater gifts.

And why are they greater? OK, do you think tongues has less inherent value than prophecy? Out of context, just the gift of itself, if it were to put tongues in a jar and you can visualize that and we've got and then we've got prophecy over here, you can't visualize that in a jar, right? That's an empty jar, but you can see a bunch of tongues. OK, but the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy, if you put those in a jar, you can't inherently give greater value to one or the other because they all come from the Holy Spirit and they're all grace gifts. Right.

So what does Paul mean by eagerly desire the greater gifts? The context is corporate worship, intelligibility. And he's saying I'd rather speak, right, five words of intelligibility than thousands of words in a tongue in the corporate gathering without interpretation. That's all that means.

So it's not greater because it's better than or it's more inherently valuable, but it's greater because intelligibility builds up and edifies the body in public worship. That's all that's referring to. Let me go 14, 1 through 6, follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy for anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God.

Nothing wrong with speaking to God, right, so he's not saying this is not really the best gift. No, it's addressing another audience. Prophecy addresses the corporate body, it's horizontal tongues and prayer language and singing in the spirit goes vertical.

Right, and we need both. We need this vertical dimension and to be plugged in so that we can minister horizontally, right, the anointed, anointed people generally are connected vertically. They have they're just connected in prayer and they've got a freedom there in prayer so that they can actually come out of that place of glory down on them, you know, coming down from the transfiguration down the mountain to

where they're trying to cast the demon out.

Why couldn't we cast it out? Right, because they were on the mountain. That's why he said, how long am I going to stay like, well, you didn't take us up there, Jesus, I know, but you're going to go someday. And all those disciples went up on the mountain eventually when the Holy Spirit came.

And they didn't have a problem casting out demons anymore. Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. Indeed, no one understands him, he utters mysteries with his spirit, not a bad thing, but everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.

There's three effects of prophecy. We'll get into this next week. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself.

OK, but he prophesies, edifies the church. Now, he who speaks in a tongue, even without an interpretation, he's not including interpretation here. There's edification going on in the private devotional life of the one who does.

And Paul says, hey, I speak in tongues more than all. He was competitive. He was competitive, right? I mean, to be an apostle to the Gentiles, you'd have to be competitive.

You'd have to be a hard guy to live with, man. That's why Mark just he bagged out. I can't I can't handle traveling with Paul.

It's too it's too intense. But he got the job done. OK, so it takes Barnabas to get Mark, the son of encouragement.

And hey, come on back in, man. I'm going to heal you up from being with this crazy guy. And that's kind of what happened, I believe.

OK, and then they got together at the end. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he prophesies, edifies the church. Verse five.

I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, period. OK, that's Paul. I would like all of you to speak.

And if you eagerly desire, he's saying, in a sense, I think he's saying you can, you get to, you can receive it if you eagerly desire it. I want all of you to do it, but I would rather you prophesy in the corporate gathering. He who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues in the corporate gathering, unless he interprets so that the church may be edified.

OK, now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will it be to you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? OK, let's go into verse 12. So it is with you, since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church when you're gathered together. OK, because there is a gift called your prayer language that's not meant to edify the church corporate.

It's meant to edify the church in your individual private devotions. OK, it's prayer language, praying in the spirit. Verse 13.

For this reason, anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says corporately in a corporate gathering. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? And here's what we want to look at.

What am I going to do? And now he gets autobiographical. This is what I do. What shall I do? This is I'm going to pray.

I'm going to pray with my spirit and I'm going to pray with my understanding. I'm going to do both. I'm going to pray liturgical prayers and I'm still trying to understand.

Sometimes our liturgy is like tongues, right? To some people. Right. I'm going to pray liturgical prayers.

I'm going to pray the Psalms. I'm going to pray spontaneous prayers. And in Greek, in this case, right, in English.

And then I'm going to pray with my spirit. I'm going to pray with my spirit. I'm going to pray in tongues.

I will sing with my spirit, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. Pull out those Anglican hymns and rewrite them, Derek, because we want to keep singing.

So what shall I do? I'll pray with my spirit. I'll pray with my mind. I'll sing with my spirit.

I'll sing with my mind. If you are praising God with your spirit corporately, how can anyone who finds himself among those who do not understand say amen to your thanksgiving? So praying with your spirit is an unintelligible thanksgiving to God there again. Remember, tongues is always vertical.

Prophecy is always horizontal. And you can receive prophecy in private, but you can't give it, can you? You have to have someone else, but you don't need someone else to pray in the spirit because that's your private devotional life. You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you, but in the church here it is. But in the church, see, he's saying that's not in the church. That's in my travels.

That's in my private life. That's when I'm going from church to church. I'm just going down the road, praying in the spirit, right, singing in the spirit, giving thanks to God.

It's one way to just stop, you know, stop thinking about all the persecutions that had come upon him. Right. And all the hardship and all of that.

Paul needed this more than any of the Corinthians. I need to do this because I get so buffeted all the time and I'm rejected all the time and I'm being resisted all the time. Thank you, God.

Thank you, God. He goes off into another language. I think that's the context.

It's like warfare at that point. So that he can endure his apostleship. So thank you, God.

Thank you, God. But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. I wanted to check exegetically with some high level scholars about all of this.

Right. Just some people are concerned, like, is that just your interpretation, Michael? Well, for the last 42 years, it has been. But the thing is, is that I also pulled out this massive commentary on First Corinthians by Gordon Fee, who used to be the New Testament professor at Gordon Conwell and Bennett Regent in Vancouver.

He's charismatic as well. I mean, praise in tongues and but but he's this revered New Testament scholar. Right.

So he comes to the text with experience. OK, so you can either come to the text with a bias that these things don't exist or you can come to the text as a scholar with these things to exist. OK, and that both of those will influence your interpretation.

OK, so I'm going to be over here with those who still believe that they do exist. Because I personally know through my experience that they do. I've seen too much to deny it.

And our bishop would say the same thing, our archbishop would say the same thing. Countless scholars I've met in Oxford and throughout England would say the same thing. I mean, this is not some backwoods interpretation.

You know, this is Gordon Fee. This is Craig Keener, the New Testament professor at Asbury Seminary, the president of Asbury Seminary. Praise him, spirit, because he was my roommate in college.

And we stayed in touch and he's going to a Anglican church, even though it's Methodist seminary. It's going to an AC&A church in Kentucky. Asbury is a great seminary.

Right. It's for Father David. God is the man.

Craig Keener is the New Testament professor there. We've got James K.A. Smith, who teaches at Calvin Seminary and Reforms Seminary. He's got his first book is called Thinking in Tongues.

And it was his dissertation on the philosophy of glossolalia. So this is happening in the academic world as well as the practical world. Right.

So we've got good guys. Richard Hayes, charismatic. Richard Hayes, his brother, Wyss Hayes, is in the Diocese of Pittsburgh and he is an AC&A priest.

Richard Hayes is one of the most respected scholars who stands within T. Wright and all of those guys who travel together. And he's the president of Duke Seminary. He's just stepped down because of illness.

But I've got tons of Richard Hayes's books and he's a massive scholar. And Rod is shaking his head. He knows Richard Hayes and some of you some of you do.

But again, he's on this side of interpretation. OK, so we've got good scholarly background. I've got my own experience as a background.

Watching John Wimber growing up, who was the leader of the Vineyard Movement, would always, when he did ministry time, begin to pray under his breath in the Holy Spirit before he would begin to do ministry time. Because he said, the reason why I do that is it opens me up so that I can listen and hear better because I get my own thoughts out of my head that way. I'm clearing my head so that I can receive revelation and illumination from the Lord when I'm doing ministry time.

Jackie Pullinger, her book, Chasing the Dragon, she went off to Hong Kong and she's like a little Mother Teresa in Hong Kong there in the walled city where she's gone after all of the drug addicts in the walled city of Hong Kong. And she has all of her people going through healing from drug addiction to pray in tongues an hour a day. And she sees them set free.

So how did I receive it? I was baptized in water when I was 16. I came to Christ. I had this, I would call it, I see it's a radical conversion because when the Lord gripped me, I was running away, playing music.

You know the story. And I wasn't I wasn't raised in church. And so when I received this sense of being just grabbed by the word, a conversion began to happen in my heart.

And I knew that I was supposed to leave that whole scene and go back to school and just change the whole direction of my life. And I didn't know what I was doing, you know, and then got a lot of prayer from my pastor and discipleship. And then I went into water baptism, was baptized at age 16.

And then coming up out of the water, there were several baptisms, about five baptisms that day. And then everyone lined up and he came and just laid hands on everybody like you'll see in the book of Acts. Right.

Receive the Holy Spirit more, Lord. You know, and that and this was back in the day when, wow, this was just happening all over the world in the Charismatic Renewal, which was more denomination. So this was a Southern Baptist church and some people would fall down.

It wasn't sensational at all, but some people would like fall down and other people began to speak in tongues. When he came to me, nothing happened like that. I just stood there going like, oh, no, you know, and maybe you've had that experience.

Like, oh, wow, I'm one of those hard to receive dudes, you know, and you're going to have to like get the pickaxe and do this for years. Go like, OK, yeah. And so I had a book that I had by my bed that night.

So when I went home to go back to my house and I went home and I went in my bedroom and I was reading this book and it's not the poet Robert Frost, but he was he was a scientist who had received the Holy Spirit. Robert Frost was saying in this passage that if you're expecting the Holy Spirit to coerce you in the receiving of tongues, it will never happen. The Holy Spirit never coerces anybody.

Right. You know, I shouldn't say never, never, but God can do anything he wants to. OK, so it's rare.

Let's say it's really, really rare if you're here, you know, like Paul was knocked down. OK, that was kind of like you're coming, whether you like it or not. But that doesn't always happen.

Right. And so when I read that, it was unpacking Acts two, it says they spoke as the spirit gave them utterance. They spoke as they heard the spirit give them utterance.

And so in faith, they stepped out on the day of Pentecost and began to speak in tongues and pray in tongues. When I read that, that just took the blinders off for me. And I got down on my knees and I started praying in tongues and a 16 year old kid didn't know hardly anything, but it was just began to flow.

And I found that gift for me as an indispensable tool in my intercessory prayer life and in spiritual warfare. And when I was I mean, I was praying and singing in tongues, the whole worship service up here. You just don't hear it.

I'm doing it under my breath, but it's always going right. It's just under my breath and it's let all things be done, but decently in order. Right.

You probably never know that I'm doing it. And so it's for my personal at that moment. It's for my personal opening because I'm trying to always break through to deeper levels of God.

Right. Always. So even in the singing of the hymns, you can do that.

So that's what happened with me. And then, you know, I canvassed probably 12 to 15 of you this week through a survey. And the vast majority of you who have the prayer language said that you received it in private.

There's only a few people that received it in public in front of everybody when their hands were laid on. And I say, like, yeah, that's great, whatever it takes. For me, it took being in a private setting where I wasn't performing because I was a performer.

Right, I was raised to be a performer, and so I wanted it to be real and I wanted it to be sincere and I wanted to make that connection. And so when I read a credible witness, right, here's here's a scientist who is has received the Holy Spirit. And he's saying this is how he received it and understands it.

It just opened me up. It just really opened me up. So I hope that helps some of you who may have a blockage there.

Some of your testimonies were saying, like, I had a blockage for months, sometimes for years, and then all of a sudden it opened up. So eagerly desire. I pray that you all speak in tongues, Paul said.

And so I just want to leave us with that today because it's time to stop. But we'll pick this up with prophecy next week and spend a couple of weeks on prophecy. So, Father, we just thank you for the teaching of scripture and for just your desire for us to to go deeper in you and to have an intimate prayer life where we can break through the muck and the mire of this life.

And so you've given us their prayer language and our singing in the spirit, Lord, to to break through that, to go beyond that zone where you are. Lord, and I just thank you for that. Thank you.

And I just pray that that would or that we would all enter into a greater freedom in prayer. The way you want to lead us, those who are led by the spirit are the sons and daughters of God. So thank you.

I just pray, Holy Spirit, come and lead us all into deeper waters in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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