



# Talk 11 – How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

Duration 51 Minutes  
HTB Transcripts

## Key:

**Personal Story / Testimony** that Nicky Gumbel tells in the classic Alpha talk. These may be replaced with a live speaker's personal story or the speaker may tell the story about Nicky in the same way Nicky tells stories about others.

**Story** that Nicky tells about someone else (about a friend or a story he heard or read about).

**Quotes** are key to the talk to emphasise a point and to enable guests to engage and relate to a point made. There is now a way that people can seek permission to omit or replace quotes used in the original talks. A quote should be replaced with something equally effective to maintain the balance of teaching, story, and references to other information sources.

**Key Quotes** will need approval to change (these will be identified by a comment in the left column). Please email [publications@alpha.org](mailto:publications@alpha.org) with your request.

**Key Bible Passages** are identified and you may wish to display these visually for your guests.

**Red type** identifies a part of the key teaching text that may be removed or altered for contextualisation.

Text left untouched is the standard key message content of the Alpha talk.

NOTE: Key elements of this script are: personal stories, humour and reference to media / popular culture to draw the guests in to engage with the talk.

Parts of the talk may need to be contextualised for other contexts or cultures but make sure you maintain the key elements of humour and personal testimony. Notice how quotes, and stories are used throughout to add emphasis to the main points of the talk (theology and testimony).

**NOTE:** Testimony, humour and solid biblical teaching are key to the Holy Spirit sessions. Some of the humour and testimony in the script are quite culturally specific so you may chose to adapt this to work in your context, replace with your own stories or remove them.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

However, before removing any stories please consider that the biblical content is key to the talk and the stories you choose should help to draw the guests in to this key teaching.

*[You may adapt the text in red to your context]*

Welcome back! This **morning** we looked at the fact that every Christian has the Holy Spirit living within them. St Paul says if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to him. And yet St Paul writes to the Christians in Ephesus and he says: 'Be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And the Greek word there is in the present continuous tense – it means 'Go on being filled, over and over and over again.'

What is the difference between someone who's a Christian and a Christian who is full of the Holy Spirit?

I sometimes use this analogy. At home we have this gas boiler, and it has a little pilot light, and that's on all the time. And, if you like, that's like every Christian has the pilot light on all the time — we always have the Spirit of God living within us.

But some people are pilot-light Christians. When the heat comes on, when the water comes on, that gas boiler goes bghhhh! — not quite how it goes, but something like that! Bghhhh! And the heat and the light come on. And some Christians are pilot-light Christians and some Christians are bghhhh! Christians, firing on all cylinders, if you don't mind me mixing the metaphors!

How does this happen? In the book of Acts, which is really the history of the church, Volume One, we see a number of occasions where people are filled with the Spirit. **And I want to start with one that we looked at this morning** – Acts, chapter 2, the day of Pentecost. Because we see five different occasions in the book of Acts where people are filled with the Spirit.

And I don't know whether you fall into one of these categories, but I suspect that most people here in this room **tonight** will fall into one of these five categories.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

The first category is this: those who are longing to be filled – **rather like Nigel Skelsey that I talked about this morning**. Here was a group on the day of Pentecost who were longing to be filled. And what happened was this:

*[Acts 2:2-4]*

‘Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire, which separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.’

So here was a group who were longing to be filled with the Spirit — they’d been waiting, they’d been praying, and they were: the Spirit came on all of them. So if you’re in that category tonight, if you’re longing to be filled, you will be filled.

Second group is those who were receptive. They weren’t longing, but they were receptive. Would you like to turn to Acts chapter 8, verse 14? This was a group of Samaritans.

*[Acts 8:14-23]*

‘When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.’

Now, something amazing must have happened, because as we read on: ‘When Simon [who was a sorcerer] saw that the Spirit was given at the laying-on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money. He said, ‘Wow, that’s great, I wish I could do that! How much does it cost to be able to do that? I’m willing to pay!’ ... and said, “Give me also this ability so that everybody on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”’

‘Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought that you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”

So it's not a good idea to offer money for this particular ministry! But something amazing must have happened, that he was willing to do so.

So this is the second group: they were receptive, and they received the Holy Spirit. Third — and there may just be one person in this category tonight: the hostile. The man who became the apostle Paul was at one stage hostile.

Would you like to turn to Acts, chapter 8, verse 1? When Stephen was killed, the first martyr, Saul was there — that's Paul's other name, Saul. Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

Verse 3: 'Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.'

Chapter 9, verse 1 — just over the page:

*[Acts 9:1-2]*

'Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way' [that was the way they described Christians: 'the people who belonged to the Way' — Jesus said 'I am the way'], 'whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.'

So you couldn't get someone more hostile than Saul at that stage of his life. And then you know the story — how he was on the road to Damascus and he encountered Jesus.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

So here was somebody totally hostile who encountered Jesus, was filled with the Spirit and started to go around telling people ‘Jesus is alive! Jesus is the Son of God.’ Totally transformed by being filled with the Spirit.

*[You may tell this story in your own words or you may replace it with a story of someone who became a Christian on Alpha (at the Alpha Weekend/Day) and how the Holy Spirit made a difference – transforming their attitude and their circumstances.]*

I think of a guy called Robert Taylor, 41 years of age. He was a successful businessman, but unsuccessful in his marriage. In fact, he had left his wife and two young children. He was a complete atheist. He’d only been to church four times in his life: he went to his own wedding, his brother’s wedding and two funerals. Four occasions in 41 years!

One time, he was doing a business deal and this man said, ‘You know, Robert, have you ever thought about doing Alpha at HTB?’ And he said, ‘No, I wouldn’t dream of doing that — I’m an atheist.’

A few weeks later he was doing another deal, and the man said to him, ‘You know, Robert, have you ever thought about doing Alpha at HTB?’ He thought, ‘That’s funny, that’s what the other guy said. Maybe I’ll go along and give it a go.’

So he came along, and the first night he decided to make it absolutely clear to everybody in his small group that he was not remotely interested! So this was his opening remark the first night:

He said, ‘Look! I nearly died of cancer when I was thirty years of age. I find life pretty difficult and not a great deal of fun. As far as I’m concerned, eternal life is the last thing I want! So,’ he said, ‘I really can’t see what Christianity has to offer me.’ He said, ‘That cast a bit of a pall over the small group!’

Bruce, who was leading the small group, said, ‘Mm, that’s a very interesting point of view!’ And the course went on, and he came on the weekend — which was here. I remember it very well.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

And on the Saturday evening he gave his life to Christ. And he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said he felt this glow all over — people in small groups said he was beaming like a Cheshire cat for the rest of the weekend!

And at the end of the weekend, he went to see his wife — the wife he'd left — to tell her what had happened to him. And she said, 'Oh no, Robert, here you go again — another one of your crazes! First we had golf, then it was tennis, then it was scuba-diving, and now we've got this. You'll soon get over it.'

And he said he was determined to show her that this was different. And so she said, 'Well, look, Robert, if it's really made such a difference, why don't you come back and live with us.' And so he did. He moved back into their home.

And the children — in Samuel, the elder son's words — thought it was completely fantastic. Little Samuel was so excited he got hold of a Bible and he started reading it, and he came across the books of 1 & 2 Samuel. He said, 'Dad, it's a great book, this — I'm in it — not once, but twice!'

Now, that guy's life was radically changed. So I said to him at the end of the course, 'Robert, would you come and lead a small group on the next Alpha?' He said, 'Me, lead a small group on Alpha?' He said, 'I have been an atheist for 41 years; I've only been a Christian for three weeks! How can I lead a group?' So I said, 'No, I'd love you to lead a group.' So he said, 'Okay, if you want me to, I will.'

I'll never forget the second week of that course. I went into the bookshop, and there was Robert with this great big pile of books like this! I said, 'Robert, what are you doing with all those books?' He said, 'Well, it's like this.' He said, 'Last week they asked me all these questions.' He said, 'I didn't know what they were talking about — I didn't know the answer to any of their questions! So,' he said, 'I came into the bookshop, I bought a whole load of books and,' he said, 'I went home and I studied that night until three o'clock in the morning.' And he said, 'I did that every night throughout the week.' He said, 'The trouble is, the questions they asked me this week are totally different — now I've had to buy all these books!'

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

He had gone from being hostile to telling people Jesus is the Son of God.

That's the difference being filled with the Spirit makes.

The fourth group is the uninformed. There may be somebody here today who says, 'Well, you know, I've kind of believed, I've sort of seen myself as a Christian for a long time. I was baptised, and I'm maybe even confirmed, and I go to church from time to time, or even regularly. But I don't think I've ever heard very much about the Holy Spirit.'

Here was a group like that. Acts, chapter 19, verses 1-6:

'While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Well, what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. "Paul said, "But John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.'

The fifth category is the unlikely. Would you like to turn back a few pages to Acts, chapter 10? I want to spend a little bit longer on this occasion. There may be somebody here who says, 'Well, I don't really think this kind of thing would happen to me, because I'm not the religious type.'

In the ancient world there were the religious people, who were the Jews, and there were the non-religious people, who were the Gentiles. And in the early days of Christianity it was only the religious type who became Christians. The earliest Christians were all Jewish.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

In fact, they needed quite a lot of persuasion to believe that somebody who was not a Jew could become a Christian. And this is how it happened. What happened was Cornelius — who was a Gentile, a non-Jew — received a very clear message from God in a vision, and at the same time Peter received a very clear message from God.

And as a result of that, Peter ended up preaching the good news about Jesus in Cornelius' house. And while he was preaching, this is what happened — Acts, chapter 10, verse 44:

'While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers [that's the Jewish believers] who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles [even on the non-Jews]. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.'

And verse 47: 'Then Peter said, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptised with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have."'



## Talk Point 1

THEY EXPERIENCED THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

What happened on this occasion? Here's the first thing: they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit.

We don't know exactly what happened, but Peter says: 'They received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So presumably what happened to them was very similar to what happened on the day of Pentecost, when Peter and the others received the Holy Spirit.

And it must have been something amazing, because Peter was preaching a sermon. And he had to stop preaching. So it must have been something dramatic. Because if you know anything about preachers, it takes a lot to stop a preacher preaching!

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But something happened. In the account on the day of Pentecost the language used is like a heavy, tropical rainstorm. It's a picture like the word we looked at this morning: the *rûah*, the wind of God coming, blowing through the place. They heard a gale.

And sometimes when the Spirit of God comes there are physical manifestations. Sometimes it's literally like as if a gale has blown through a room. Sometimes literally people physically find it easier not to stand up any longer but to lie down. Sometimes you see people breathing in deeply, like they're breathing in the Spirit of God.

And then again, on the day of Pentecost 'they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them'. And fire in the Bible signifies ... Of course, fire is very powerful. It also is something that purifies. And it also itself sets on fire. So I mean, if you take a piece of damp wood and you throw it in the fire, there's a kind of sizzling noise as the dampness is extracted. That, if you like, is the purifying.

But then eventually that wood catches light itself. And when the fire of God comes on a person — Jesus said that he would baptise people with the Holy Spirit and with fire — it's like they catch on fire.

*[You may use these examples or replace with examples from your own Alpha.]*

And sometimes again there are physical manifestations of this. I've often noticed how people talk about experiencing heat. Sometimes people say they experience heat 'in my hands'. One person said 'I was glowing all over', another person said 'I experienced liquid heat burning in my arms when I wasn't hot'.

*[You may wish to reword this section according to your context, preparing guests for what they might experience and teaching them about some of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit.]*

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

Now, I'm not suggesting that any of these things will necessarily happen. I find this a very difficult balance — or sort of kind of walking a tightrope here. Because when we talk about the manifestations of the Spirit, the physical manifestations that may occur, sometimes people have said to me: 'This is autosuggestion. You're suggesting these things will happen, and that's why they happen.'

So the next time I talked about these things, I didn't talk about them at all. And then they happened. And people came to me and said, 'Why didn't you talk about these things? Because we were so surprised by them. And I wish you'd said something to warn us that they might happen, because we didn't know what was happening.'

So I'm trying to say to you ... I'm not suggesting to you that they will happen, but all I'm saying to you: if they do happen, it's perfectly normal. It's simply a little physical manifestation of something that is very important. But it's the something that's important, not the manifestations that are important.

So it really doesn't matter whether you have physical manifestations. What matters is what happens in the heart. And some people do and some people don't. It's a bit like falling in love.

When you fall in love, people are different. Some people when they fall in love, they're British and they feel nothing! Other people when they fall in love, they get all kinds of tinglings in their spine and their heart starts thumping! Now, those manifestations are not what matters; it's the falling in love that matters.

It would be absurd, wouldn't it, to say: 'Oh, you know, when I met this person I got tinglings in my spine and my heart was thumping! Now, I wonder whether there's a book on heart-thumping, tingling in the spine. I'd like to go on a course on tinglings in the spine so I can get more tingling in the spine!'

You wouldn't do that; you'd say: 'I want to pursue that relationship.' And the manifestations of the Spirit are usually simply manifestations of love. Because the supreme work of the Spirit, as we were looking at earlier today, is to pour God's love into our hearts — to give us an experience of God's love for us.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

Romans 5, verse 5: 'The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.'

And we all need to experience love.

I heard about a couple who had been married for fifty years. It was their golden wedding anniversary. And this was a very unusual couple, because they'd argued all the way through their married life. I mean, just right from the start of the time that they got married they argued day in, day out, week in, week out, month in, month out, year in, year out!

And when it got to their fiftieth wedding anniversary, the whole family got together and they thought, you know, 'What could we give this couple as a fiftieth, golden wedding anniversary present?' And they decided the best thing that they could give them was a visit to a top consultant psychiatrist, all expenses paid.

Well, the couple argued about whether or not they should accept! They argued all the way there, and as they walked into the psychiatrist's office they were still arguing. The psychiatrist asked them one question— immediately they started arguing.

And this top consultant psychiatrist, he said, 'Stop!' He said, 'Look, I'm going to do something I have never done before in my entire professional career.' He got up from behind his desk, he walked round the other side, and he took this little old lady in his arms and he kissed her on the lips for a very long time!

And then he said to the man, 'Now, that is what this woman needs — three times a week.' And the man scratched his head and he said, 'Okay, doctor, if that's what you say, I'll bring her in Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays.'

Now, what that doctor was trying to say was: 'This woman needs to experience love. This is the deepest human need.' And that's the experience of the Spirit.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

Would you like to keep a piece of paper or something in Acts, chapter 10 and turn over to Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 14. This is what the apostle Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus, and I'm sure he would be praying for us tonight.

*[Ephesians 3:14-19]*

He says: 'For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.'

'And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.'

He prays that they would know the love of Christ — how wide it is! I should think there are people here from every continent. The love of Christ reaches out to every tribe, every nation, every place in the world.

How long it is — all the way through our lives. How deep it is — doesn't matter how much ... Sometimes we feel, don't we, 'Oh, we've messed up.' We feel we're kind of — we made a mess of our lives. Doesn't matter how far we've fallen; the love of Christ can reach us right down there.

And then how high it is — it can lift us to the very highest place, to be princes and princesses, sons and daughters of God. And if you take those four things — how wide and long and high and deep — it forms the shape of a cross.

And supremely that's how we know that God loves us: because he came in the person of his Son to die for you and for me. And Paul prays that we would grasp that, that we would understand the cross, the love of Christ.

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But then he goes on to pray for something more: ‘and to know this love that surpasses knowledge’. That’s to say, you can’t simply intellectually understand this love; you have to experience it in your hearts. And that’s what the Holy Spirit does — he gives us an experience of God’s love for us. That’s why he goes on to pray ‘that you might be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God’.

To know that Jesus loves you. That’s the first thing. They experienced the power of the Holy Spirit.



## Talk Point 2

THEY WERE RELEASED IN PRAISE

Secondly, they were released in praise — back to Acts, chapter 10, verse 46:

‘For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.’

Spontaneous praise is the language of those who are excited, thrilled about their relationship with God.

St Augustine, perhaps the greatest theologian of the Christian church, said this about God: ‘The thought of you’ — the thought of God — ‘stirs a person so deeply that they cannot be content unless they praise you. Because you made us for yourself, and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.’

*[You wish to adapt this text for your context or remove text in red]*

And one of the things about worship, like the kind of worship that we’ve been doing together — singing of praise to God — is it melds a number of different voices into a single act of praise and worship. And this kind of response involves all of our beings — not just our minds but our hearts, our wills and our emotions.

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

Sometimes people are a little bit hesitant, I think, about the emotions. They say, 'Is it right to express emotion in church? Isn't there a danger of emotionalism?' And I think, again, it's worth taking that out and examining it.

*[This next section is quite specific to British culture. You may remove, amend or replace this with your own examples in order to explain to guests about the way we respond with our hearts and emotions to God.]*

To be honest, I think I do have a bit of a fear of emotionalism. I am British, and I was brought up with a — well, I was brought up to suppress emotions, basically, from quite an early age: that, you know, if your lip started to quiver, there was any sense that you might express some emotion, you were to stiffen it — the stiff upper lip.

And I think that I still find it quite difficult to express emotion in any situation and certainly in worship. I'm not the ... Some people respond very easily to the Spirit — I don't. I think I'm not a very easy person for people to pray for.

But I think a lot of it is just Britishness! And Jesus, you know, was not British! I mean, that comes as quite a shock to some people! But he wasn't. And the Hebrew culture was much more open to emotion.

A few days ago my daughter came back from her gap year — she spent five months travelling around the world. And she travelled with two of her childhood friends — one is my godson and another is the brother of my goddaughter's, and they've grown up all their life together and they went off on their five months' travelling together.

And we went to Heathrow to meet them on their return, and all the families had gathered, and they had banners that they had prepared; there were bongo-drums — everything ready for this welcome!

And we stood there. It was a very emotional occasion because the plane had arrived, and we saw all these people coming off the plane, which we knew had come from the same destination as them, but no sign.

**KEY:** Personal Story   Story   Quotes   Key Quotes   Key Bible Passages

I kept thinking that I saw her. I kept saying, 'Oh, there's — there — there she is!' and it always turned out to be someone who looked totally different!

And the excitement was building! And then we saw these three people coming through. One of them, my godson, had dressed up to look like — is it Johnny Depp in *Pirates of the Caribbean*? He looked like that. And the other guy had dressed up to look like David Beckham before he had his haircut, and he was in a three-piece silk suit.

I think they'd changed — I think the delay was they'd gone in to change for the arrival! And they came through with my daughter in the middle and the two guys on either side. And when they came through that door, the emotion was unbelievable! The cheering — and the police nearly arrested us, actually, because they said the banner was obscuring some CCTV camera or something!

But we didn't just shake their hands and say, 'Oh, how nice to see you back!' We were hugging them, and I was crying — I'm afraid I was crying when they left, and I was crying when she came back. I think she thought I was crying for the whole five months! I was practically, but not as bad as that!

**But the point is there was emotion in it.**

**Because if you love someone, we express that with emotion. Sometimes people say, 'Yeah, but not in church! That's different! Surely that's inappropriate. That's a kind of public place where we ought to be more reserved.'**

**But again, I think we need to be consistent. Because sometimes even British people express emotions in public!**

*[You may personalise this replacing it with your own examples.]*

I notice this because I'm a cricket follower, basically, and cricket's changed a bit but when I used to go and watch it, it was very unemotional.

**KEY:** Personal Story   Story   Quotes   Key Quotes   Key Bible Passages

You know, I remember when England, I think, retained or won the Ashes back in 1968 and — a long time ago! — and Colin Cowdray was the England captain. And we needed to get five wickets in the last half-hour. And it was a hugely tense scene, because there'd been a thunderstorm in the afternoon, which meant that all the crowd had been clearing the water away so that they could have this opportunity to get the last five Australian wickets. And one person, Inverarity, needed to be got out.

And at two minutes to six he was LBW'd to Underwood, and England had won the Ashes! Colin Cowdray, the England captain, was standing at the slip and he went {CLAPS HANDS POLITELY} 'Well played,' and everyone just walked off!

Now, football is slightly different! I've been watching some of the football this week, and I saw these people — and I assume they were British: they were wearing the England colours, and they were all together — they were singing, they were cheering, they were ... 'They had their arms in the air! Disgusting! In public! What emotionalism! Carried away! Disgraceful! ... No, it's all right, 'cos it's football. 'Cos football is really important! That's fine to be emotional about football! But God? Well, that's very different.'

*[Omit quote if it is not relevant to your context.]*

Bishop Cuthbert Barnsley, former Bishop of Coventry, said this: 'The chief danger in the Anglican Church is not delirious emotionalism.' Our danger is that we're a little bit cold; and that we need to be consistent. If we are the kind of person who gets excited — at rugby or football or relationships — then we ought to be able, feel free, to express that in our relationship with God.

With our whole beings— our emotions, our minds, our hearts, and our bodies! Do you know that the earliest form of worship — prayer — was always with arms raised. In the New Testament, book of Timothy speaks about 'raising holy hands in prayer'.

*[The next section is quite specific to British culture and humour. You may remove, amend or replace this with your own examples in order to explain to guests about the different ways we*

**KEY:** Personal Story Story Quotes Key Quotes Key Bible Passages

*express ourselves in worship.]*

In fact, even Jewish worship was also with hands raised. All early worship, all prayer, was with hands raised. That was the normal form of prayer. So if you go into a church and you see everybody with their arms in the air, just say: `I have come to a very traditional church going back to first-century worship!'

If you go into a church with everybody with hands by their side, that's fine. Just say `I've come to a church — modern, trendy, experimenting with new forms of worship!'

But the point is we need to feel free. We don't have to go as far as the Americans! Now, please don't misunderstand me — we love the Americans, and particularly if you're watching this in America, we love you guys!

And this doesn't apply to all Americans. Have we got any Americans here this weekend? Oh, quite a lot! This certainly doesn't apply to East Coast Americans ... Er, have we got any West Coast Americans here? Oh, hello, just one! Well, this only applies to a very small section of the West Coast! It's just the south bit — Southern California. Are you from Southern Califor- ...? You are? This only applies to a very small section of Southern California called Van Nuys. Are you from Van Nuys? Close to it, oh dear! Well, this is like a microclimate — it only applies in the exact region around Van Nuys!

*[Humour linking into above examples of worship]*

But I came across ... This was a genuine advert in the American religious press. And it was for a deodorant called Aglow. And this actually appeared in the American religious press. It's a picture of the deodorant, and then it's called `Aglow — *the holy roll-on*'. And there's a picture of a man with a beard with his arms in the air.

And what it says is this: `Roger Van Norton of Calvary Chapel, Van Nuys, California' (only Van Nuys; it says particularly he never lives anywhere else apart from Van Nuys!) `says: "I was always hesitant to raise my arms in church for fear that the person next to me wouldn't be as blessed by it as I would be. You might say the spirit was willing, but the

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flesh was — well — strong! Hey, but now I use Aglow and I can go the whole meeting, no problem.”

Attention: pastors — clergymen from across the country have confirmed significant increases in attendance since their congregations have begun using Aglow — the holy roll-on. Brackets: (Ask about our special pew-holders and quantity discounts.)’ And then it just says: ‘The extra-strength deodorant for the extra-active worshipper.’

So we don't have to go as far as that! And we're so thankful to the Americans. They've taught us so much and we're very ... all of that! So please don't misunderstand me — we love them! We do really love them! Many of my best friends are American — that's true! It's true, it's absolutely true! We have learnt so much from them, and we love them, and I love going there, and I hope they'll have me back!



## Talk Point 3

THEY RECEIVED A NEW LANGUAGE

Next, **they received a new language —moving swiftly on!** They received a new language. Back to verse 46:

**For they heard them speaking in tongues ...** We've seen this in Acts, chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost; we saw it also in Acts 19. Let me say straight away about this gift of speaking in another language, speaking in tongues.

First of all, not all Christians do speak in tongues. It's not the mark of being a Christian. Nor is it the mark of being filled with the Spirit — you can be filled with the Spirit and not speak in tongues. There's no such thing as kind of 'first-class Christians who speak in tongues and second-class Christians who don't'.

It's not the most important gift — St Paul often puts it at the bottom. In fact the list we were looking at this morning, St Paul put the gift at the bottom of the list. Sometimes people

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say, 'Well, why are you talking about it on Alpha?' The reason is this: we have found, both in the New Testament and also in our experience, that this gift is often the first of the more obviously supernatural gifts.

So what exactly is the gift? Would you like to turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 13? This is a passage which is often read at weddings, but I don't know whether people notice this opening verse:

'If I speak in human or angelic tongues, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.'

*[Use the text in red or replace it with your own example.]*

Paul talks there about two types of tongues: first of all, human — speaking in tongues in a human language; and secondly, an angelic language. Occasionally people receive the gift of tongues in a way that is recognisably a human language — **in fact, it happened last weekend. Someone was praying over somebody in what turned out to be Arabic.**

More often, it's an angelic language, which presumably we wouldn't recognise. So what exactly is it? 1 Corinthians, chapter 14, verse 2:

'For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to people but to God.' And we call speaking to God ...? Prayer, yeah. So it's a form of prayer. It's a form of prayer which transcends the language limitation.

**Even with human communication we sometimes get stuck, don't we, at least I do. Sometimes I'm trying to communicate something to someone and I just think 'I haven't got the words to express what I'm trying to say.' We're all limited. However many words we know, even Churchill, who knew perhaps more English words than anyone in recent history, he was limited by words. Everybody is limited by the language, because what we're trying to do is we feel something, we think something and we want to say it, and then we have to put it into a language which that person can understand.**

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And we have to do that in order to make ourselves understood. But not with God. That's one way of communicating with God, but God can give us another way — which is to free us from the limitations of human language.

So verse 14, he says: 'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.' In other words, he doesn't have to go through this process of putting it into a recognisable human language.

But the speaker's in full control — you can start when you want, you can stop when you want. How does this help? Well, in verse 4 he says that a person who speaks in a tongue edifies himself — builds himself up. It's a great help in the area of praise and worship.

*[You may replace text in red with your own example.]*

Again, when we're praising and worshipping God, sometimes we can run out of words, just like when we're praising or thanking someone in a human relationship — **those thank-you letters: 'Dear Aunt Edna, thank you so much for the lovely socks you sent me for Christmas. We've just come back from a lovely holiday ...' — 'Oh dear, we've got two "lovelies". Cross out one "lovely" .... "Fantastic, wonderful, brilliant, amazing, wicked, superb" ... Ten seconds, and we've run out.**

And God can give us a language to praise him that is freed from limitation. When we're under pressure, sometimes it's really hard to pray when things are closing in on us.

*[Replace this with a personal example of your own.]*

I remember when someone came to tell me that my mother had had a heart attack, and in fact it was a heart attack from which she died, but I didn't know that at the time. And I got in a taxi to get to the hospital.

And in that taxi I just didn't know how to pray. And I've never been more grateful for the gift of tongues—to be able to pour out my heart to God at that moment.

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It can help us in praying for others; it's not just a selfish thing, but sometimes praying for others is hard, particularly if we haven't seen them, and God can give us this gift to pray.

Does the New Testament approve? The context of 1 Corinthians 14 is excessive public use. Paul makes the point in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is the most important thing, and every gift has to be exercised in love.

In 1 Corinthians 14 he's making the point 'Don't constantly be using this gift in every church service.' In other words, these people were so excited about this gift of tongues that instead of having a talk in a language they could understand, someone would get up and speak in tongues. And he said, 'Look, that's hopeless! Better to speak five intelligible words that people can understand than ten thousand words in a tongue.'

But he said, 'Don't forbid it. In public there needs to be an interpretation.' That's not a translation, but someone needs to say 'This is what I think that person was saying through that message.'

But in private he encourages the use. In fact he says, 'I speak in tongues more than you all.' Singing in tongues — which is something that we'll do later — is different. He says, 'I'll pray with my spirit and I'll sing with my spirit.' Singing in tongues ... Whereas praying out loud in tongues is really, generally speaking, a private activity that should be done on our own, singing in tongues is a corporate activity — involves us all. We have to listen to one another as we sing together, and it's often a very, very beautiful sound as people are praising God together from their hearts.

How do we receive this gift? We receive, like every other gift, by asking. Because essentially we have received the Giver — that's the most important thing, the Holy Spirit. He has all the gifts.

And not everybody speaks in tongues, but Paul says 'I'd like you all to speak in tongues' — verse 5 of chapter 14. He said, 'Prophecy's even more important, but I'd love you all to speak in tongues.' It's available. It doesn't mean that everybody has to or everybody will. But we need to ask God and then cooperate. The only way to receive this gift is by starting to speak.

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*[Replace this with your reference to your own testimony or the testimony of someone you know.]*

When I first asked, I shut my mouth firmly! And then I said, 'I haven't received it.' But then someone explained to me you have to actually start to speak in a language other than English, and then the words began to come. Would you like to be filled with the Holy Spirit? You can be filled with the Spirit and not speak in tongues.

Would you like to turn to Luke 11, verse 9? In my experience, there are three barriers to people receiving. The first is doubt: 'If I asked, would I receive?' Jesus says this in Luke 11, verse 9:

'So I say to you: "Ask and it will be given to you;"'

And you can see the disciples are looking: 'Mm ...' – a bit ... not convinced. So Jesus says a second time: 'seek and you will find'; ... Still not convinced!

'Knock and the door will be opened to you.' You can see they're thinking: 'Mm, not sure. Maybe other people if they asked, but I don't think me.'

So Jesus goes on: 'For everyone who asks receives'; 'Everyone' includes you.

'Everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.'

*[Reword text in red for cultural or local contextualisation.]*

That's the first barrier — doubt. The second barrier is fear. You can see the disciples saying, 'Mm, okay, convinced — if I asked I'd receive. But help — do I want to receive? Would something terrible happen to me?'

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And so Jesus says, 'Look, some of you are fathers. Supposing your son comes to you and it's lunchtime and you say to your son, "What would you like for lunch?" And your son says, "Oh, I'd love some fish and chips." And you say, "Great, there's a good fish and chip shop down there, just on the left-hand side." And you say, "Oh, I'll just pop down and get you some."

And instead of popping down to the fish and chip shop, you go to the pet-shop and you get a snake. And you come back and you say to your son, "You know you asked for fish and chips? Here it is!" and you give him a snake.'

*[Luke 11:11-13]*

'Jesus said this: "Which of you fathers, if your children ask for a fish" — he forgot to mention the chips! — "will give him a snake instead? Or if he asked for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you're evil", — he says, 'basically you're a pretty evil bunch!' — "you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"' 'He's not going to give you something terrible — he's going to give you the Holy Spirit!'

The third barrier to receiving is inadequacy.

*[Replace this with your own experience]*

If you're anything like me, I used to often feel, 'Well, I'm not worthy, because other people don't know what I'm really like.' So I'd think, 'Well, if I asked, I'm not going to receive, because God knows what I'm like and he knows that I don't deserve it. I can understand why holy people — why vicars and people who've been Christians for a long time — why they would receive, but I don't think God would give the Holy Spirit to me.'

What Jesus says is not, 'How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to really holy people who've been Christians for a very long time.' He says: "How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" So shall we ask him?

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# Talk 11 – How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

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