



Cultivating Spiritual Gifts in Your Church

by Rick Renner

Why don't we see more miracles? That's a question I hear frequently when I travel in the States. As ministers, there are five basic principles we need to understand if we're going to cultivate spiritual operations in our churches and meetings. I want to share those principles with you because I, for one, am *hungry* to see more of God's power manifested in our churches today.

No. 1 Jesus commanded His Church to go into all the world (Matthew 28:19).

The word "go" is the Greek word *poreuomai*. *Poreuomai* means *to pursue a journey; to continue on a journey one has begun; or to be an adherent of someone*. Our commission as the Church of Jesus Christ is not to simply gather in buildings on Sunday morning. On the contrary, we're supposed to assemble to train believers — who are then dispatched on a journey to extend Jesus' power and love to a lost world for the rest of the week!

We're followers of Jesus, and He should lead us throughout the week. We should have a heart that continually seeks to reach out to the world, even as Jesus did during His earthly ministry. A church that isn't active in missions and evangelism is simply being disobedient. I even know of one large, wealthy church that has absolutely no missions outreach to the world. That's absolutely unbiblical!

God left His people in the world for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel. He didn't bless and prosper that particular large church so the people could hoard up wealth. He prospered them so they could help establish His covenant on the earth. Yet instead of obeying God, they consume all His blessings according to the lusts of their own flesh. It's very

unlikely that God will move in great power in a church that chooses to go in this direction, because it is so opposite to His heart.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying here. I believe God wants to bless His people both individually and corporately, and that includes in the material realm. In fact, my church is currently involved in a building program in Moscow, and we plan on constructing our building with excellence. However, our main purpose is the proclamation of the Gospel, and we won't allow *anything* to distract us from our God-given assignment.

Jesus sent His Church into the world just as the Father sent Jesus into the world — and the local church is a manifestation of the universal Church in a specific place and time. Therefore, every local church bears the responsibility of walking out Jesus' Great Commission according to His specific instructions for that local body. So if a congregation fails to obey this divine command to go into all the world, they don't have to wonder why God isn't manifesting Himself in their midst with miracles, signs, and wonders!

No. 2 The Church is to preach and teach God's Word.

If we're not engaged in the teaching and preaching of God's Word, we won't see signs and wonders. It's often as simple as that. Signs and wonders follow the Word of God. That's why the foundational scripture for my ministry is Ecclesiastes 8:4: "Where the word of a king is, there is power...."

As Christians, we don't have any authority that's independent of God. We're never commanded, "Simply stand up against the devil, and he will flee."

Rather, the Bible tells us first to submit ourselves to God and *then* to resist the devil. Only then will the enemy flee from us (James 4:7).

Our power comes from the *Word of God* and the *Spirit of God*. In our day, far too few churches are focused on preaching the unmitigated Gospel of Jesus Christ. In fact, many American churches have come to sound more like secular motivational seminars! But motivational “self-help” talks with a few scriptures sprinkled in will *not* produce miracles. No, it’s where the Word of the King is proclaimed that His power is demonstrated!

Also, we should be teaching the *total* counsel of the Word, just as Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:27 (NKJV): “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.” Some churches preach and teach the Word, but they stick to only a few isolated principles and verses instead of the whole counsel of the Word. We should be people of *the* Word, not people of “our favorite word.”

No. 3 These signs follow “them that believe” (Mark 16:17).

Notice that this verse doesn’t say, “These signs shall follow them *that are believers*.” Many Christians are not actively exercising their faith. At some point, they believed Jesus to save them, but they’re *not* believing Him in the present to perform miracles in their midst.

Now, I want to be clear: Active faith is not a matter of our trying to go out and do miracles because we’ve worked up enough faith. The word “believe” in Mark 16:17 doesn’t refer to some form of mental gymnastics. It comes from the Greek word *pisteuo*, which means to *have confidence, faith, and trust in something or someone*, as a child trusts and believes in his parents.

The specific tense of the verb in this instance means *at a given point or now*. So it isn’t a matter of *having believed* but of *believing at the specific point and time that the sign and wonder is needed*. Thus, we are to actively believe and trust God and His continuing presence to work miracles by His Spirit at the moment of need.

In Matthew’s account of the Great Commission, Jesus proclaimed, “...Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19 NKJV). Faith is trusting, obeying, and following Jesus’ lead, for although He is physically absent from the earth, He is spiritually present with us.

Smith Wigglesworth always warned believers not to try to move a mountain with their “faith in God.” What are they supposed to do then? They are to yield to the Lord as they walk in a faith-filled relationship with Him, allowing *Him* to move the mountain *through* them. So faith involves *trusting, believing, obeying, and yielding to* God. It is this kind of active faith, built on the foundation of His Word, that witnesses the demonstration of miracles.

No. 4 The manifestation of spiritual gifts declares that “Jesus is Lord.”


Related to the principle of active faith is the principle of *God’s sovereignty* or *Lordship*. Sovereignty refers to the source of all authority, power, and honor. God is the Sovereign of all creation. “Jesus is Lord” is the bedrock of our faith, and when we come to the subject of cultivating spiritual gifts in our churches, we can’t leave this foundation. The apostle Paul gave a lengthy discourse on gifts, ministries, and manifestations in First Corinthians chapters 12, 13, and 14 — and he began with this principle of God’s sovereignty over all gifts, ministries, and operations.

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The Holy Spirit grants diversity of gifts; Jesus grants diversity of ministries; and the Father works diverse operations. These manifestations are distributed “...as he [the Holy Spirit] will” (v. 11). Furthermore, God is the One who “...set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (v. 18). The word “pleased” in Greek is *thelo*. This word is derived from a root word that means *to choose or to elect*, but *thelo* is a greatly intensified form of the word. It means *to resolve, to determine, to desire, to purpose, or to take delight in*. The verb tense used in this verse means *at a given point in time*. Thus, we can know that at each given point in time, God is actively distributing His gifts and ministries just as He has already purposed and resolved to do.

We can’t simply *will* the gifts and callings of God into existence. Even our faith doesn’t create or cause the gifts; rather, our faith actively and obediently *receives*



God's operations. Spiritual gifts don't find their source in *our* will — they flow out of *His* will. God initiates spiritual gifts, and they operate only as we are continually filled with and controlled by His Spirit.

You may say, "Rick, I teach the Word, actively believe, and submit to His Spirit. But I still don't see spiritual gifts operate in my church!" I want to share a fifth and final principle with you that complements everything I've already said.

No. 5 We must desire spiritual gifts.

Paul commanded the Corinthians (whom he had already praised for having all the gifts): "...Desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1 *NKJV*). God chooses to operate in the context of a people who *desire* His operations.

- ❖ We can't create the fire of the Holy Spirit, but we *can* quench Him.
- ❖ We can't make the Spirit speak, but we *can* harden our hearts to His voice.
- ❖ We can't make God's Spirit perform at our command, but we *can* grieve Him.

This is why we must earnestly, fervently, and continually desire the Holy Spirit and His gifts.

You've probably heard the popular saying, "Seek the Giver, not the gifts." But let me say this as boldly as I can: That statement isn't biblical!

I understand that there's an element of truth in this saying when it comes to correcting people who pursue spiritual experiences and manifestations instead of pursuing God. Nevertheless, the Bible tells us to seek God, to seek to be continually filled with His Spirit, and to *desire spiritual gifts*.

For example, I'd be very upset if Denise only spent time with me in order to obtain gifts from me. Yet at the same time, I'd also be upset with her if she didn't like or appreciate the gifts I gave her!

In the same way, we are to pursue God *and* desire His gifts. To do otherwise would be not only ungrateful, but rebellious!

In the context of the local church, this requirement of *desire* begins with the pastor. Pastors must first determine that *they* want to see spiritual gifts in operation. Then they have to cultivate that same fervent desire in the hearts of their congregation.

If you're a pulpit minister, I want you ask yourself a few questions:

- ❖ *Do I make time for the Spirit of God to operate in my services?*
- ❖ *Do I encourage people to step out in faith when they sense the Holy Spirit desiring to use them in spiritual gifts?*
- ❖ *Am I excessively harsh in judging manifestations of spiritual gifts?*
- ❖ *Do I insist on all gifts of the Spirit coming from the leadership, or do I allow the body of believers in attendance to function and develop in spiritual gifts?*

Of the churches I know that are solid in teaching the Word, I believe this is the primary reason they don't see many spiritual gifts in operation in their services. I'm a pastor, so I understand the desire for order and decency. This is a biblical desire. But we shouldn't be so afraid of a little "wildfire" that we blow out every little flame that tries to flicker in our midst!

God isn't the God of confusion, but neither is He the God of an orderly graveyard. The local church should be both ordered *and* alive, just like the human body. And even as the life of a person's physical body is sustained by his spirit, so the Body of Christ receives its life from God's indwelling Spirit. Without the work of God's Spirit, the Church resorts to mere dead form. Christians become like the carnal Corinthians — who argued over which gifts were best and which group was the most correct — rather than experiencing God's life-giving presence.

I realize that in our day, it's popular to focus on methods and techniques for church growth, and I certainly favor good methods over bad ones. However, true spiritual growth is not the byproduct of new and better methods. It is the work of God's Spirit in and through His people as believers earnestly desire more of God and learn how to more fully yield to Him. This is the only truly effective means by which God's power will be manifested more and more in our midst.

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