

Understanding the Ministry Microphone at Covenant Life Church

This paper is written for Covenant Life Church to explain why and how we use the ministry microphone on Sunday mornings. To understand the ministry microphone we must first examine God's design for the church's gathering and the use of spiritual gifts in the church. This paper thus has the following parts:

1. The Purpose of Sunday Mornings
2. What We Believe About Spiritual Gifts
3. What We Believe About Prophecy
4. What Should the Use of Spiritual Gifts Look Like at Covenant Life Church?
5. Answers to Common Questions
6. Ministry Mic Checklist
7. Resources for Further Study
8. Appendix: A Defense of the Continuation of the Gifts

1. The Purpose of Sunday Mornings

Our purpose on Sunday mornings is to worship God and edify one another as God works through his word, Spirit, and people.

First, we gather to worship God together. We were created by God and for God (Gen. 1:27, Col. 1:16). He is worthy of our worship (1 Chron. 16:25-30). Knowing, enjoying and exalting him with our lives is our ultimate purpose as humans and our greatest good (1 Cor. 10:31). Though we were lost in our sin and cut off from him, God loved us and purposed to redeem a people for his glory (Eph. 2:1-7). By grace, he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him and to participate in the mission of spreading his gospel (Eph. 2:8-10, Matt. 28:18-20). The God who gave up his perfect Son to pay for our sins, who raised Jesus from the dead, who will judge the world in righteousness and who will make all things new is worthy of our love, reverence, awe, and total devotion (Acts 17:30-31). His glory and praise is the driving purpose and goal of everything we do as a local church (Rom. 11:36, Rev. 4:11). Worship takes place through our entire lives (1 Cor. 10:31), but occurs in a special way when God's people gather together to magnify him (Heb. 12:18-24, 28-29).

Second, we gather to edify one another. The New Testament never actually uses the word “worship” to describe Christian gatherings.¹ It instead frames it in the language of edification (“building up”) and encouragement. “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Let all all things be done for building up” (1 Cor. 14:26). If we prophesy, it is to be for others’ “upbuilding and encouragement” (1 Cor. 14:3). Our goal with all the gifts is to “strive to excel in building up the church” (1 Cor. 14:12). Church leaders are to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11). In Hebrews 13:10 we are told to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

God gives us a broad variety of things he wants us to do in corporate worship, all of which edify us and bring glory to Him: the reading of the Word (1 Tim. 4:13), preaching

¹ The words which are used in the Old Testament for worship are applied in the New Testament to worshiping with all of our lives (Heb. 13:15-16, Rom. 12:1, 15:16, Phil. 2:17, 4:18, 2 Tim. 4:6). The transposition of “worship” language is stunning, showing that God is concerned with the entirety of our lives and not merely our ritual. The entire sacrificial system ended with Christ’s once for all sacrifice, and we now offer spiritual sacrifices with our entire lives. Some have argued that because Scripture does not use a word meaning “worship” to describe the Christian gatherings, neither should we. But if Christians live lives of worship, then certainly Christian gatherings are not less than worship.

(2 Tim. 4:2), prayer (1 Tim. 2:1), singing (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16), baptism (Matt. 28:19), the celebration of the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:24-25), and the use of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14). Each of these must be done according to the patterns set forth in the Scriptures.

Everything in the church meeting must be done in an intelligible way so that it can edify (1 Cor. 14:6-19). Edification and intelligibility must be some of the primary criteria we use to evaluate the practical issues that are a part of corporate worship. Vaughan Roberts puts it this way: "Edification was so central to Paul's understanding of the purpose of Christian meetings that it provided the test as to whether something should be included in them nor not. The question he wants us to ask about every aspect of our meeting is: 'Is it edifying?' 'Does it build people up as believers?'"² These criteria are to be employed in every aspect of the church meeting, especially the spiritual gifts.

² Vaughan Roberts, *True Worship*, 45.

2. What We Believe about the Spiritual Gifts

We believe that the gifts described in the New Testament continue today. Our statement of faith describes the empowering of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life in this way:

In addition to effecting regeneration and sanctification, the Holy Spirit also empowers believers for Christian witness and service (Acts 1:8). While the Holy Spirit indwells all believers at conversion (1 Corinthians 12:13), the New Testament indicates that each believer should seek the ongoing, empowering work of the Spirit subsequent to conversion (Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit imparts gifts for the edification of the Body and for various works of ministry (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are available today for the building up of the Church and the advancement of Christ's mission. We are to earnestly desire and employ them, in accordance with God's Word (1 Corinthians 12:31, 14:1-5, 12, 26, 40).³

What are the gifts which the Spirit gives? The New Testament contains lists of different kinds of gifts, which include prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leadership, acts of mercy, the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:8-11).

Several observations can be made about the gifts. First, Scripture puts a higher priority on certain gifts than on others. For example, prophecy is more valuable in the church meeting than tongues (without interpretation) because of its ability to build up the church (1 Cor. 14:1-5). Second, the New Testament never distinguishes between "miraculous" gifts and non-miraculous gifts. Service and teaching are gifts just as much as the distinguishing between spirits is (Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:8-10). Third, some of these gifts are gifts of speech, while others are gifts of service (1 Pet. 4:10). Fourth, some of these gifts work well in the context of a church meeting while others may occur primarily outside of the church gathering. Teaching, for example, may happen primarily when Christians are gathered, but acts of service and acts of mercy may occur at a variety of times. Fifth, while some of the gifts are easier for us to understand (such as service and mercy), others are more difficult for us to interpret (such as the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge) because they are not spoken of elsewhere in Scripture.

³ Covenant Life Church Statement of Faith.

God gives these gifts for the edification, or building up, of the church (1 Cor. 14:12, 26). “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). We must use them in love for the good of one another (1 Cor. 13). If we speak, we are to speak as those speaking “the oracles of God,” and if we serve, we are to do it in God’s strength (1 Pet. 4:10). The ultimate goal of all gifts is that “God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:11).

Of these varieties of gifts, the ones we will focus on in the remainder of this paper are the speech gifts. In addition to less dramatic gifts like teaching and exhortation, Scripture describes a cluster of speech gifts which involve supernatural knowledge from God: prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues, and revelations (1 Cor. 12:8-10, 14:26). Dreams and visions, while not listed as “gifts,” appear to be in a similar category (Matt. 2:13, Acts 16:9-10).

Of these gifts, the one which we are told to most desire is prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1). Because of its biblical priority and because understanding it helps us understand the other verbal gifts, we will examine it in greater detail.

3. What We Believe About Prophecy

What is prophecy? What distinguishes it from other forms of speech or revelation? From 1 Corinthians 14 we can make several observations. Prophecy seems to be:

1. *Revelatory* (*1 Cor. 14:30-31*).⁴ It does not appear to be simply what someone has been meditating on or noticing. D.A. Carson notes that the text presupposes that “that the informational base of prophecy is not study but revelation.”⁵ In other words, the information or insight does not seem to originate with the prophet but it is something instead that God reveals. It is “reporting in one’s own words something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”⁶ In 1 Corinthians 14:29-32, this revelation is made to prophets during the church gathering, such that one prophet sits when a revelation is made to another.⁷
2. *Edifying* (*1 Cor. 14:12*). The aim of prophecy is the church’s “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (*1 Cor 14:3*).
3. *Clear* (*1 Cor. 14:7-12*). Others must be able to understand what is being said, for without understanding they cannot be edified.
4. *Contextual* (*1 Cor. 14:24*). Prophecy seems to be local and situational, in contrast to Scripture, which is normative and universal. The unbeliever described in 1 Cor. 14:24-25 recognizes God’s presence among the church as “the secrets of his heart are disclosed,” implying that something was spoken specifically about him or his life. This leads us to believe that prophecy seems to be about a specific person, group of people, or situation (Agabus’ prophecy in Acts 11:28 would be a unique counterexample.)

⁴ By “revelatory,” we do not mean that a person is sharing revelation akin to Scripture, but rather that God has revealed something to a person. The text refers to “a revelation” which a prophet receives (*1 Cor. 14:30*).

⁵ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 119.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1052.

⁷ “Teaching or preaching is the teacher’s prepared explanation of a revelation already given in Scripture or tradition. Prophecy is the relating of a revelation given directly by God, and its content and organization is typically regarded as more directly and situationally inspired by God.” – Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 187.

5. “Weighed” or “Tested” (*1 Cor. 14:29, 14:37-38; 1 Thess. 5:20-21; 1 John 4:1*).
What is shared is to be offered in subservience to God’s word, and weighed and tested by others according to God’s word.

Prophecy can have various effects, including upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation (*1 Cor. 14:3*), instruction (*1 Cor. 14:31*), the revealing the secrets of the heart (*1 Cor. 14:24-25*), conviction (*1 Cor. 14:24-25*), and knowledge of the future (*Acts 11:27-30, 21:10-14*).

What prophecy is not

Prophecy is not the primary way God leads us or speaks to us today; the Bible is. Scripture is always authoritative. While “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (*2 Tim. 3:16*), prophecy in contrast must be weighed by others (*1 Cor. 14:29*) and tested so that we can hold onto what is good (*1 Thess. 5:20-21*).

“In our daily lives, it is the words of Scripture alone that must have first place in our hearts and our minds. We must read them, believe them, memorize them, love them, and cherish them as the very words of our Creator speaking to us. All other gifts and teachings today are to be subject to the words of Scripture and are to be judged by them. No other gift or teaching or writing should be allowed to compete with them for absolute priority in our lives.” - Wayne Grudem⁸

“I have been the subject of such impressions, myself, and have seen very singular results. But to live by impressions is oftentimes to live the life of a fool and even to fall into downright rebellion against the revealed Word of God. Not your impressions, but that which is in this Bible must always guide you.” - Charles Spurgeon.⁹

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, 49.

⁹ Charles Spurgeon, “A Well-Ordered Life,” sermon #878.

4. What Should the Use of Spiritual Gifts Look Like at Covenant Life Church?

God has given us his Holy Spirit to enable us to worship Him, love one another, and make disciples of Jesus Christ. He gives us spiritual gifts in part for our own benefit (1 Cor. 14:4), but he gives them to us primarily for the good of one another (1 Cor. 12:7). Each one of us is meant to use our gifts to benefit others as well as to benefit from the gifts of others (1 Cor. 12:12-28). We're to use them throughout the week in a variety of ways as well as in our small groups and on Sunday mornings.

Small Groups and Other Gatherings

Small groups are ideal contexts for developing one's spiritual gifts, because we are able to pray for and address one another more in more particular ways than in a large congregation. It is often when we are praying, fasting, or seeking God specifically with our petitions that he will grant gifts, whether that be at home, at a prayer meeting, in our family, or in a group of friends.

Smaller contexts like small groups are ideal situations to reflect the diversity of gifts brought by each member in 1 Corinthians 14:26: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." There are greater opportunities for each member to share his or her gifts in a smaller context than a larger one. We should come not only to receive, but to bring something to edify our fellow believers (1 Cor. 14:12).

Sunday Mornings

In the Sunday meeting, we do something similar to what is described above in 1 Corinthians 14:26 but on a larger scale. The musicians come with hymns and songs. The preacher comes with a lesson. The pastor and worship leader read lessons of Scripture. The congregation brings edifying words for one another.

Not everyone can share in a congregational meeting of several hundred people in the same way they would in a small group. But the ministry microphone is our attempt to provide an opportunity for people to share gifts such as prophecy, tongues, interpretation and other verbal manifestations of the Spirit with the entire congregation.

All of the elements of the meeting are to be conducted "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). That means prophecy and other unplanned elements are to be included but with

a sense of order and for the purpose of edification. The reason for this is that our God is “not a God of confusion but peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

5. Answers to Common Questions

Should we pursue the use of these gifts outside of the Sunday meeting?

Yes! Each one of us should seek to use and develop our gifts, whether it be personal conversation and counseling, small groups, prayer meetings, ministry teams, Sunday mornings, or other contexts. We should come to prayer meetings and our small group meetings not only to receive, but also to bring something for others.

On Sundays, there are also many opportunities. We should encourage one another when we talk in the lobby and auditorium (Rom. 12:8). We can ask God that unbelievers would be greeted by someone who shares with them the secrets of their hearts (1 Cor. 14:24-25). Each of us can bring many non-verbal gifts as well, including helping, mercy, administration, and giving (1 Cor. 12:28, Rom. 12:7-8).

Are we quenching the Spirit if we don't allow someone to share their gift in a church meeting?

There are times on a Sunday morning when there are many who believe they have a gift to be shared. The principle provided by the apostle Paul is that two or three people may speak in a tongue at most (1 Cor. 14:27), and that two or three prophets may speak (1 Cor. 14:29), so it appears that he employed limits on how much was shared. The spirit of prophets is subject to the prophets (1 Cor. 14:32).

Sometimes the elders may opt to give more time to the reading and preaching of God's word, singing biblically-based songs, and scripturally-rich prayers than to the use of miraculous gifts. God's Word is not opposed to the Spirit; rather Scripture is breathed out by God's Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16). The gifts allow us to see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12); God's Word is light (Ps. 119:105). Prophecy and tongues will fade away, but God's word will never pass away, even though the entire earth is destroyed (Matt. 5:18). Prophecy is fallible, but God's word is never wrong (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

In the time of the writing of the epistles, the canon of Scripture was not completed, and there was a greater dependence on the revelatory gifts. The church now has the completed canon. We are still to pursue the gifts and we long for a resurgence of them in our day.¹⁰ At the same time, we must view the gift of prophecy as subordinate to the written Word of God.

¹⁰ See the appendix, "A Defense of the Continuation of the Gifts," for a rationale of why the gifts are still available to the church today.

We normally have plenty of time to include spontaneous gifts. When we plan Sunday services, we plan in “unplanned” time to make sure we leave room for God to speak through these gifts and for us to respond. However, we must occasionally make practical choices about what will be most edifying to God’s people when we cannot accomplish everything in one service. In such cases we seek to make sure that adequate time is given to the reading and preaching of God’s written word.

God guides both in the moment and in advance. Those who plan the Sunday services ask the Holy Spirit to guide them during the week as they prepare Scripture readings, the sermon, songs, and prayers. But we always want to be open to God redirecting our plans, and the pastors seek to make decisions during the meeting about what will be most edifying and profitable for God’s people.

Who tests what is shared at the microphone?

In 1 Corinthians 14:29, we are told that those leading a church meeting should “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” “The others” in this context appears to be the congregation, and the entire congregation should weigh what is said.¹¹

Because our gathering is larger than a New Testament house church, we have chosen to have public contributions weighed by a few before they are weighed by many. This is why we have pastors at the microphone with whom the members share before they share with the entire congregation. These pastors are not infallible, but seek to discern what will edify the church.

The pastors at the microphone judge contributions by whether they are faithful to Scripture, edifying, revelatory, and clear (see section 6 of this document for the “checklist.”).

How should congregation members test what they hear shared from the microphone?

¹¹ Some commentators believe “the others” in 1 Corinthians 14:29 are other prophets, but this is a minority view.

We are told to “not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:20-21) and to “weigh what is said” (1 Cor. 14:29). We should test what is shared by the Bible and theological doctrine which summarizes the Bible.

Isn’t some of what is shared just “encouragement” rather than prophecy or other miraculous gifts?

In reality, yes. One of the ways of growing in these gifts is to exercise them. Sometimes the difference between encouragement and more specific manifestations is difficult to ascertain in the moment. When it is difficult to distinguish between the two, the pastors at the microphone often permit it to be shared because it is as an individual shares that he or she has opportunity for what they are sharing to be tested and to grow in discerning the Lord’s voice.

If what is brought accords with Scripture but does not appear to have a degree of Spirit-driven urgency, the pastors may at times not have that person share it. This is because while it may be true, it might not be more pertinent than what has already been prepared for the meeting. Many other “hymns,” “lessons,” and other edifying content and activities have been planned (1 Cor. 14:26).

What if I do want to bring something to the microphone?

Members who wish to share can speak with a pastor during the meeting or immediately prior to the meeting (pastors are normally there 5-10 minutes before the meeting starts).

What if I’m not sure if I should bring something to the microphone?

First, pray to the Lord for clarity. He may help you to know more clearly.

If you’re still not sure, we encourage you to bring it to the pastors at the microphone; they may be able to help discern whether it is a verbal, revelatory gift which should be shared. We would rather that people come to the microphone and be turned away than to not come forward because of fear. There is no shame in coming to the microphone and being turned away. It may instead be an indicator of faithfulness in the pursuit of the gifts.

Sometimes what is shared seems strange!

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19-20 we are instructed, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good.” Beneath the instruction not to despise prophecy is an assumption that prophecy will in fact sometimes be despised.

Similarly, when tongues were practiced in the church, there was concern that unbelievers would think that believers were out of their minds (1 Cor. 14:23). Nevertheless, Paul allowed for there to be tongues with interpretation (1 Cor. 14:13).

We should test what is shared by the Word and sound biblical doctrine based on the Word. What is shared should be understandable and edifying (1 Cor. 14:26, 33).

How can I develop my gifts?

Spiritual gifts can be developed with practice. Some people may have greater gifts because they have earnestly desired them as God has commanded (1 Cor. 14:1). We do not know what gift Timothy was given, but we do know that he was told to develop it. Paul told Timothy, “I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6). Likewise, “Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching” (1 Tim. 4:14-16a).

We must grow in holiness, for God’s Spirit is holy, and operates most fully in hearts which are conformed to his holiness. We must also grow in our knowledge of his Word, so that we can recognize thoughts which conform to God’s revelation and those which do not. The more we understand Scripture, the better we can make sure that the way we use it reflects the author’s intent.

We should pray that God would develop these gifts both in ourselves and in others in the church. We should pray for situations, events, individuals, and groups, developing God’s heart for them within our own hearts. We should pray to God with expectation, and then step out in faith when we believe that the Spirit is prompting us. When first beginning to explore these gifts, we can share the gifts in conversation, without even necessarily saying “I believe God told me to tell you this.” Through experience, we can learn how to discern more readily what are our own thoughts and what are the Lord’s thoughts.

If contributions are shared on Sundays, in prayer meetings, or in other official church meetings, the pastors occasionally provide feedback afterwards to encourage the refinement of the gifts God has given and their fanning into flame (2 Tim. 1:6).

How does context affect the use of our gifts?

When the Lord grants a gift of prophecy, a word of wisdom, or another gift, it will sometimes be obvious with whom it is to be shared, but at other times not. We should lean forward to share in the situations in which it seems right, asking the Lord for

wisdom and help. Some thoughts that the Lord brings to someone's mind are the Spirit's illumination of Scripture in our own hearts, intended to build ourselves up (1 Cor. 2:12, Ps. 119:18). Other thoughts may be spiritual gifts to be used for our family, our friends, our small group, or the entire church.

The Lord also grants various degrees of gifts. The way Scripture describes teaching abilities is illustrative of this principle. All fathers are to teach their children God's word (Eph. 6:4); some men become elders because they are able to not only teach their family, but also others (1 Tim. 3:2); of those elders, some become those who labor especially in preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). In the same way, some of us may have gifts that are suitable for private conversations, others have gifts suitable in a larger gathering, while others may have pronounced abilities to reveal mysteries through prophetic powers (1 Cor. 13:2).

We are not to envy one another, but instead give thanks for the variety of gifts God has put in the church for the common good (1 Cor. 12:21-26). As in other areas of the Christian life, we accept both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. We are responsible to earnestly desire the greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:31, 14:1), while at the same time acknowledging that the Spirit "apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11, cf. Rom. 12:3).

What categories should I keep in mind when sharing with others?¹²

1. **Don't elaborate.** Share what you believe God has prompted you to share, but don't elaborate and add more of your own thoughts. Just share what you believe God gave you to share.¹³ Be faithful and leave the results to the Lord.
2. **The Bible, prophecy, and commentary.** In the way you speak, make sure that the congregation can easily distinguish between 1) the Bible's words, 2) what you believe the Lord has given you, and 3) any comments you are making to clarify. If you read Scripture, it helps to share the reference so people can refer to it later, and it also distinguishes it from your words.
3. **Definitive Statements.** Because you see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12), don't make definitive statements about the future, but instead simply state what you believe God has shown you will happen. Instead of "The Lord will [fill in the blank]!" you can say "I believe that the Lord may [fill in the blank]."
4. **First Person.** While Old Testament prophets spoke in the first person for the Lord ("Thus says the Lord, 'I will...,'" there is little evidence of this in the New Testament (with the exception of Agabus in Acts 11:28). You can express the same thought in the 3rd person ("I believe that God wants to...") and still communicate the same ideas, without it appearing to be invested with the same authority because of 1st person language.
5. **Normal English.** Share using normal, everyday English and appropriate biblical terms. We want our speech to be easily intelligible, so that it can be edifying (1 Cor. 14:26).
6. **Share What You Shared with the Pastors at the Mic.** Don't change what you are sharing at the mic to something different than what you shared with the pastors beforehand. Doing so circumvents their ability to screen what is shared.

¹² Many of these principles are judgment calls which we have made rather than explicit commands in the Word. In the book of Acts we have a few examples to follow, which give us some small cues (Acts 11:27-28, 15:32, 21:10-11).

¹³ Romans 12:6 says, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith..." The ESV Study Bible helpfully comments on this verse, "Paul instructs prophets to speak only when they have faith or confidence that the Holy Spirit is truly revealing something to them, and not to exceed the faith that God has given them by trying to impress others" (p. 2179).

It may also indicate a lack of clarity in what you believe the Lord has revealed to you.

6. Ministry Mic Checklist¹⁴

Below are practical criteria that will be used when considering what is shared at the ministry microphone. We pray that it will be useful for those who are considering bringing contributions to the microphone.

1. Faithful to Scripture

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God...” ¹
Peter 4:10-11a

Whether from the pulpit, in prayer or song, or from the ministry mic, we must base everything said and sung in our church services on the truths of Scripture.

Prophecy and other gifts should never contradict what God has spoken in Scripture. The same God who gave us the Bible is the one who gives gifts, and he does not contradict himself (Num. 23:19).

Verbal gifts should not promise what Scripture does not promise. We must exercise caution in presuming upon God’s future work (e.g. communicating to someone that their family will be saved or that they will certainly be healed in this life). It is vital for those wanting to grow in the gift of prophecy and encouragement to grow in their knowledge of Scripture.

When Scripture is used, it should

- Be used in a way that reflects the author’s original intent.
- Be directly connected to the rest of what is said.
- Be shared in such a way that the congregation knows what is Scripture and what is not.

¹⁴ This list is similar to section 3 above, but is offered separately here because it is not specific to the gift of prophecy alone, but a broader variety of spiritual gifts. It is intended to take some of the conclusions drawn earlier in this paper and put them in an easily usable checklist.

2. Edifying

“The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” – 1 Corinthians 14:3

*“Since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in building up the church.”
- 1 Corinthians 14:12*

We should use our spiritual gifts for the edification or “building up” of the church. Our speech should reflect God’s heart of love for his people. Prophecy is not normally corrective, though when it is it always reflects God’s purposes for his people. It involves encouragement and consolation (1 Cor. 14:3).

3. Revelatory

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent.” – 1 Corinthians 14:29-30

By “revelatory,” we mean something that is revealed by God to a person. It is an impression, thought, or other communication which does not originate in the individual, but is rather given to that person by God.

It should not just be a good thought we had during our devotional time, a Scripture that seems to relate to what is happening now, or a pet topic we want to share with others. It should not be something we reasoned our way toward. It should instead originate with an impression or thought which does not seem to be from us.

We should seek to share what God has revealed, and not expand beyond that. We must resist the temptation to expand upon what we’ve received, fearing that others might think we’re unspiritual or that we’re not eloquent.

4. Clear

“For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” – 1 Corinthians 14:33

“If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?” – 1 Corinthians 14:23

Our church gatherings should reflect the nature of the God we worship. He is a God of order and of peace. People speaking at the ministry microphone should be able to articulate what God has revealed to them with reasonable clarity.

5. Specific

“But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” - 1 Corinthians 14:24-25

When God uses prophecy to reveal to an unbeliever that he knows the secrets of his heart, it causes him to believe that God really is present in the church. While not every contribution at the microphone is required to have this degree of specificity, we can pray that God would increasingly grant us gifts of such a clear, penetrating nature that those present will acknowledge that God is undeniably at work among us.

6. In Order

“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.” – 1 Corinthians 14:40

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. - 1 Corinthians 14:29

Prophets are to speak in order, give the floor to one another, and only two or three at a time (1 Cor. 14:29-32). We are not to quench the Spirit nor despise prophecy (1 Thess. 5:19), while at the same time recognizing that the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets, to make way for others to speak (1 Cor. 14:32). Those who bring contributions should submit to the leadership of the pastors in the church meeting, for they are responsible for the oversight of souls and will give an account to God (Heb. 13:17).

7. Resources for Further Study

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8. Appendix: A Defense of the Continuation of the Gifts

While we believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are available to the church today, we recognize that many people who come to our church may not have that same conviction. For this reason we want to give a brief explanation for why we believe the gifts of the Spirit still exist and have not ceased.

The primary argument for the cessation of the gifts comes from 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. This passage says “As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away” (v. 8-10). Some say that the perfection to which this passage refers is the completion of the Scriptures in the first century. This explanation does not account for the context of the verses, however. Paul says that “now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12). It is clear from the context that Paul is talking about seeing Christ face to face upon His return. The partial will pass away when Christ returns, not at the completion of the canon. We now see the Lord dimly and we prophesy in part, but then we will see him face to face and will no longer need the partial revelation of prophecy.

Another argument for the cessation of the gifts is that God used the gifts to authenticate the apostles’ testimony and role, but the gifts ceased to function when the apostles died. While the gifts did indeed accredit the apostles (Acts 14:3) in the same way miraculous gifts accredited the testimony of Jesus (Acts 2:22), it is incorrect to conclude that such gifts were not given to non-apostolic people. Non-apostolic people ministering in the gifts of the Holy Spirit include Agabus (Acts 11:28, 21:10) and the prophets at the church of Antioch (Acts 13:1). The Corinthian church was said to lack no spiritual gift (1 Cor. 1:7) and it clearly was not a church of apostles only. Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). The New Testament testifies clearly that the gifts of the Spirit extend beyond corroborating the New Testament apostles. We must be careful not to make arguments from silence. While the presence of the Spirit was unique with the apostles, Christians today should live with the expectation that the same Spirit testifying to the message of Jesus in the early church is the same Spirit at work in their lives.

Another common position is to be “open but cautious” about the spiritual gifts. This view is advocated by those who realize that a cessationist position is difficult to defend biblically or are genuinely convinced the gifts are for today, but do not earnestly pursue their use. This may be because of a lack of experience with the gifts, genuine concerns about their misuse, or a concern about undermining the centrality of God’s word. We are told, however, to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may

prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). We must not “quench the Spirit” nor “despise prophecies, but test everything” and “hold fast to what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19-21). He wants us to earnestly desire them so that we can exercise them to build up the church.