

Ask Jeff – Snake Handling & Tongues

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Bible Text: Mark 16:15-18; 1 Corinthians 14:1-33

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Without further ado, we will mix it up to some chagrins. Now, I'm going to read the question just as it is written: what do you think about the pastor who died recently from the snakebite other than he's obviously crazy? I just read it as it's written. Now, for those of you who may not be familiar with what this question is asking, there are certain groups of people, they tend to be concentrated in places like East Texas, Arkansas and the Appalachian Mountains but there are groups of people who in their, for lack of better terms, their practice of the Christian faith, practice what we know as snake handling, okay? Now, let me share with you in the text where this comes from and then will go to the specific question. So go to the Gospel of Mark 16. The Gospel of Mark 16 not only contains what we know as Mark's rendition of the Great Commission but there is a promise, there is a statement given by Jesus Christ himself and what I want to do tonight is this: I want to look at this passage in verse 18 of Mark 16, what we need to try to understand is what was Jesus actually saying? Then when we discern what Jesus was actually trying to communicate and to teach us, then I think we can answer the question that was asked. I'll go ahead and begin in verse 15 for context,

15 And he [being Jesus] said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. 17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Wow, what a passage. I mean, Jesus is saying, I mean, this is right before his ascension. He's literally about to go up into the clouds as Acts 1 records and on his departure, on his way out, this is what he says about those who believe on him.

Now, I want to bring up particular things in this passage before we even get to the serpents. I want you to notice what verse 17 says, "And these," what? "Signs." Now, those of you who have been with us on Wednesday nights know that when God uses a sign in the Bible it is a very specific supernatural event. Walking on water was not even called a sign. Healing a lame man was not even called a sign. The signs are used very periodically and very particularly in the Bible for something that only God can do. The

rainbow is called a sign from God. Remember the fleece that had the dew on it and the ground was dry around it and it reversed the next night? That was called a sign from God. The prophet Isaiah when speaking the fact that Jesus would be born of a virgin, that is a sign by God. In fact, Jesus even referenced that his resurrection from the dead was a sign from God. Why is that significant? Because signs weren't mentioned much and when they were they were supernatural.

Everything listed here is supernatural. The casting out of devils, pretty supernatural. Speaking with new tongues, pretty supernatural. Taking up serpents, we'll get to that in just a moment, pretty supernatural. If they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them, lay hands on the sick and recover. Every single one of these things is a God-directed infusion of his supernatural power into our earthly world. Every single one of these. But before we get to the serpent part, I want you to turn to the book of 1 Corinthians 1. This is very relevant to our discussion of the serpents. 1 Corinthians 1, I'm going to begin in verse 18 because it's one of my favorite verses in the Bible but it gives us a little context here. 1 Corinthians 1:18, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." Folks, you can chew on that verse for weeks at a time. Verse 19, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Have you noticed what preaching is called twice in those verses? Foolishness, and y'all know what my job description is now, right? Foolishness.

Alright, here we go, this is the key verse that I wanted you to see, verse 22, "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom." Why is that so important to Mark chapter 16? What did Jesus or what did Jesus communicate to the apostles upon his departure? What did he tell them to do? "Stay here in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit is come upon you." They were to stay in Jerusalem, then they would go to Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. Why is that so important? I believe it's important because when you get to Mark 16, those who are hearing Jesus speak are the apostles. Those who will receive the Holy Spirit and preach that first sermon and go out in those first weeks are the apostles. Where are they located? Jerusalem, Judea. Who are they going to be ministering to? Jews. What do Jews require? A sign. And it just so happens that one of those signs is that a serpent will be taken up, it will bite them and it will not harm them.

Now, this is kind of a different question but I know people today who will advocate that they have the role or the job or the calling of what Ephesians 4:11 calls an apostle. Sometimes if you watch "Christian television" it says apostle So-and-so. There are several things that you can do to see if somebody is really an apostle: give them a deadly snake; give them something deadly to drink and see how they make it. I'm serious about this. Did any of the apostles die because of any of these things? Did any of the apostles experience any of these things? Yes. The Apostle Paul in Acts 26 was bitten by a snake on an island, pulled the teeth out of his arm, shook it off, threw it in the forest and said,

"That's no big deal." Now, I don't know about you but I would have believed at that moment. What happened? Was Paul an apostle? Absolutely and so I think with the issue of snake handling, I think what we have in the Bible is to the apostles, primarily to the Jews in the early days of the faith, it was a sign to those who required a sign that the person and the message of Jesus Christ was exactly who and what he said he was.

Now, the question becomes today when individuals claim that you must "take up serpents" to demonstrate your faith. Let me say I think sometimes taking up serpents is questioning your sanity at that point because there is, I don't find any biblical record that for somehow, somehow it is a demonstration of faith. It is a sign of an apostle, is what it is. Now, what was an apostle or was an apostle in the biblical days? An apostle was somebody who witnessed the ministry of Jesus, who witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and who was specifically called to preach that message to the world. That was an apostle. Now, there are some people who would debate with me on the subject matter but I don't believe that anybody living today is an apostle. Why? Because you didn't walk with Jesus, you didn't see him raised from the dead and so therefore these strict explicit demonstrations of what we read in these passages did occur in time, there is evidence in the book of Acts that all of these things occurred, the apostles survived them all and I think that's the great testimony here is that Jesus said it would happen, the Bible records it did, they didn't die and the message continued.

Today there are those who claim that you must do this activity in order for you to demonstrate your faith. There are several good jokes that go along with this. There is the joke of the traveling evangelist who came into a church, didn't know a whole lot about the church and midway through the service the pastor of the church broke out the box and they were going to handle the snakes. He goes up to the associate pastor and he says, "Sir, I've got a quick question." He said, "What is it?" He said, "Where's the back door of the church?" He said, "We don't have a backdoor." He said, "Where do you want it?" So, I mean, little questions like that. I mean, we say that jokingly but I want to approach this from a very serious manner. Did Jesus Christ really die on a cross so we can sling snakes around a sanctuary? I mean, think about that for a moment. Jesus Christ in his crucifixion, in his resurrection, was so that our sin, our transgressions and our trespasses could be absolved, we could be delivered from them, we could be forgiven and we could be cleansed. You do not have to handle a snake for that occur.

The next thing I would add is these individuals who handle the snakes, do they attract people to the Gospel or do they turn them away? I've never stopped in. I'm just being honest with you and I've seen places throughout time that have advertised this. I do not think there's a biblical ground for the continuation of this ministry and, honestly, I don't think it's very effective grounds for reaching the world. I mean, can you imagine for you to meet Jesus we need you to come and pick up some snakes. King snakes, maybe. That's not what it said, did it? It said poisonous snakes. So, I have a little challenge. Next time somebody claims that they're an apostle, we just get something very deadly to drink, a poisonous snake and let's see how we're doing. Do you know, nobody has taken me up on that challenge before? I don't know why but they haven't.

Questions, comments, thoughts, rude remarks, go for it. And going once, going twice. We've got nothing on this? Nobody cares about snake handling? That's actually a good thing. Okay, I can promise you it will not be practiced by me. The only good snake is a dead one. Except for a king snake, okay, I got that one, or some other ones. But in general, I'm going to be honest with you: I'm not going to check and see if it's a king snake or not, okay? I mean, well, I won't tell you how I'm going to take care of that.

Any other questions about snake handling? Oh. Yes. Yes. The question is, I'm glad you brought that up. Yes ma'am. What she asked was: is there not a passage in the Bible where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees for seeking a sign? Go to Matthew 12. It's in various Gospels but Matthew 12. I'm glad you brought that up, ma'am, that's a great question because these things are called signs. We'll begin in verse 38 of Matthew 12, "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee." Now, to my previous comments, Jesus has already healed the lame. He has already performed miracles. The water has been turned into wine so they are seeking something even beyond that. "But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

To your point, ma'am, he pretty much rebuked them for the seeking of a sign the one time but he had already told them they were going to receive this sign. He had already told them that he was going to the cross. He had already told them that the atonement was necessary and they wanted something more. I'm glad you went in that direction because how many times do we get caught up in, "Salvation is not enough, we need something more, we need something extra." Let me just share with you and it's a crass illustration but anything beyond the forgiveness of our sins is icing on the proverbial cake. If he grants healing, it is a blessing. If he grants deliverance, it is a blessing. If he grants fill in the blank, it is a blessing. But any of that stuff apart from salvation doesn't mean anything when we breathe our last breath and Jesus chastised these guys. Notice the illustration he brought up: the people of Nineveh. You realize that when Jonah went to Nineveh, that's the only Old Testament prophet that was called to go to a Gentile people. I mean, in the world back then, that was the pagans of the pagans, the heathen of the heathens and Jesus said, "They will even rise up and judge you because at least they listened but you are not listening to the one who is right in front of you." It reminds me of the man in Luke 16, do you remember the rich man who dies and he's in hell and he says, "What about my brothers? Will you send somebody to them?" Remember what Abraham say? He says, "They had the prophets. They had the law. They will not even hear whether one comes back from the dead."

So I'm glad you brought that up because Jesus did not advocate seeking a sign. Now, that does not mean we should not desire the supernatural but understand that definition of a sign is very different, sign and supernatural. A sign is supernatural but something supernatural does not have to be a sign. Does that make sense? Jesus walking on water is pretty supernatural but it wasn't called a sign. You do recognize only 2 people in the world ever walked on water, right? Jesus and Peter and Peter sunk for a while. But I'm glad you brought that up.

Any other signs, supernatural snake handling? Oh yes, ma'am, I'm sorry. That's okay, it's Wednesday night. It never has to necessarily have to do with anything we're doing. They will speak with new tongues. Right. The question she's bringing up, she's going back to Mark 16, one of the things that is mentioned is they will speak with new tongues. Did you get into Acts 2? Acts 2 is the famous Pentecost event to which she was referring to. Let's go ahead and turn to Acts 2 real quick because, ma'am, what I believe you're stating or asking is good for us all to hear. Jesus made this statement, "they would speak in new tongues." The last time I checked "new" is something that you didn't have before but now you have, correct? In Acts 2, beginning in verse 1, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews," remember the sign part, "devout men, out of every nation under heaven."

Now, that's the key phrase in that passage because there is a lot of discussion and debate about Acts 2. Let me state from the beginning: I don't think the miracle of Acts 2 is the speaking, I think the miracle is the hearing because these individuals, the Peters, James and Johns. Peter is the one who does the preaching. He would have spoken multiple languages, okay? Most likely, obviously growing up Jewish he would have spoken Hebrew. Probably in the culture he was in, probably Aramaic. Good chance because of the Roman influence, maybe even some Latin and some Greek. We'll give him those 4 languages. Not bad for a fisherman, huh? But he would not have spoken every language and dialect of the world and yet it said there were Jews there from every nation and they heard what was said. I believe the miracle that happens here is they spoke, I'm just going to say Aramaic, I don't know, but yet it was heard in all these other languages and all these other dialects. Can you imagine, y'allt know about, every meeting has 3 meetings, you know that, right? There's the meeting before the meeting, the meeting and the meeting after the meeting. Y'all know exactly what I'm talking about, right? And those of you that go to a lot of meetings know that's true. Can you imagine the meeting after the meeting? Can you imagine there is Peter, James and John the apostles amazed at what God did, they're sitting around the campfire that night, can you imagine the conversation? "Peter, every person heard what you said."

Now, if you've never been to a foreign country, you don't understand the magnitude of this passage. If you've never been in a train station or a bus station where nobody speaks English, it is a desperate situation because you cannot communicate and yet here are

these individuals that are there from every nation and they said they heard in their tongue. In fact, you go on and I believe verse 6, "Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language." Wow. That's pretty incredible. And so when the Lord said, "You will speak in new tongues," I'm just going to make this up, I bet the apostle Peter had no idea that meant Portuguese, French, Italian, fill in the blank. I mean, I don't think they understood the magnitude of what he was saying. They were probably, "Oh great, we'll speak in new tongues," but then when the Lord actually did it and it occurred, wow. It says that every nation on the earth. Y'all know what the word "every" means, right? Every.

So I'm glad you brought that point up. Does that help with that? Correct. The question she asked was: in Acts 2 was the language one of which they could understand? According to verse 6, they heard them speak in his own language. So imagine now, what we know as the English language even in this most crude form has only been around for about a thousand years, okay? I hate to tell y'all but the apostles did not speak English, okay? They didn't but imagine if we were in those days with our context, imagine being over there in that part of the world and he is speaking in a language you don't recognize but you're hearing it in English. That's amazing. I don't know, maybe I'm kind of like a kid at a candy store but I can almost imagine him going, "Wow. He said it and it actually happened. It actually happened the way he said it," because it did. They heard it in their own languages. That's what verse 6 says.

Does that help somewhat, somehow, maybe? Correct. There are some, there are individuals out there who make a statement that if you do not have the evidence of "speaking in tongues" then you have not experienced the salvation experience. Though those individuals may have a pure heart, I would go back to Acts 2 of which the majority of those individuals go back to make that claim and ask these questions: 1. What's the miracle, speaking or hearing? Question 2. If it is hearing, which is what it says, was it something that was of a known language or was it something of an unknown language and verse 6 clearly says known language. So again, this is why I love Wednesday night and why this is so important: it's not what we want to believe, it's not what we've been told to believe, it's what the Bible says we must believe. Every one of us, and I'm glad you brought that up, every one of us even if you don't come from that tradition. Alright, some of y'all are like me, you've been a Baptist nine months longer than you've been alive. we've got problems too, by the way, and the problem is we come with whatever our background is and we put glasses on and we oftentimes read the Bible through those glasses and sometimes that limits the power of God and sometimes that speaks in excess of what the Bible says does and can and did occur.

So I think that's an important study that no matter who advocates what, no matter how much you respect them, no matter how much you admire them, no matter how close you are to them, it is the Bible that is our final authority, not that individual. And oftentimes I have people say, "But God told me." I understand that but God is not going to say something contrary to what he has told us already. Let me give you a good example. It happens at my house all the time and those of you that have children and grandchildren in

home and every one of us did it at some point in life, is I will have one of my children come up to me and say, "Dad, can I," and then they'll ask the question. Do you know what I ask? Do you know what the first thing I ask them is? "What did your mother say?" because I know that if they are coming to me, they've already gone to her and they haven't heard what they want to hear and they think that I'm dumber than I look and so I'm like, "What did your mother say?" To which they will typically say, "I don't know." I'll say, "Well, I'll go and ask her." "Oh," and all of a sudden they remember. It's incredible how that works.

But the reason I bring up that illustration is that when it comes to those matters of life and discipline in our home, my wife and I are not going to catch ourselves contradicting each other. Why would God contradict himself? Why would God give you one story and somebody else a different story that completely contradict each other? He's not going to. In fact, over and over and over, beginning in Genesis even through the crucifixion of Jesus, what does the Lord say? "In the mouth of 2 witnesses." Y'all remember the night of Jesus' illegal trial? They could not even get 2 witnesses to agree on what he had done wrong and so, again, it goes back to the importance of not what you think or what you perceive or what somebody you respect perceives, what does the Bible say? And the great thing about that is that as a lifelong Baptist, it will mess you up because sometimes the Lord advocates things and promotes things and says things that I grew up saying he didn't do but guess what? It's in there, isn't it? And if it's in there, we've got to deal with it.

I'm glad you went down that road. Any other signs, snakes? Yes. Uh-oh. Here she goes. Remember, you're limited to 2 questions. I'm kidding, you can ask one, go for it. That story. That's a great question. What she asked was: in this passage in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they speak, did God give them, the ones who were speaking, an understanding of what they were saying? Again, just the way I read Acts 2, I get the idea they were speaking in their language but it was heard in a multitude of languages. When I speak in English I know what I'm saying in English but if you hear it in Portuguese, that's a miracle of God. Does that make sense? I know what I've said, the question is do you know what you've heard? You see, there's an old rule of thumb about communication, as a preacher, boy, you live and die by this one: it's not what you say, it's what they hear. They heard, to your point, ma'am, their own language. I don't think, I honestly don't believe Peter turned around and said, "Hey boys, did you see that? Italian, Portuguese, Chinese all in one spot." I don't think he said that. I think he said, "Boys, you don't see that? They all understood what I said." Again, it goes back to the miracle here is the hearing, not the speaking. But I do believe he knows what he said because he spoke his language but they heard it in there's.

Do you know the amazing thing about this? And I want to make this, I guess, relevant to today: y'all ever watch any, for lack of better terms, the video or the television coverage of the UN, the United Nations? What do they have to do to understand each other? They have to wear earpieces, don't they? There are translators all around that room helping everybody to understand. Isn't that amazing that all the world and all the technology that we have and all the power that is represented in that building in New York City and they

can't even have a conversation with each other? But God shows up in Acts 2, somebody speaks and everybody in the room understands without an interpreter.

Yes ma'am. Absolutely. Her question, again, if what we know as the expression of the gift of tongues which for you lifelong Baptists, it's in the list, if it is done so, it is done so with an interpreter. You're absolutely correct. 1 Corinthians 12, in fact, let's just go ahead and go there. Let's take care of business. Go to 1 Corinthians 12. I'm glad you brought it up. By the way, my biscuit, my roll was excellent. For those of you who don't know what we're talking about, forgive me but she helps in our kitchen ministry and she fortifies me every Wednesday night. 1 Corinthians 12, talking about the different gifts that are given. Verse 10, "To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues." One of the spiritual gifts listed is the ability to interpret the tongue gift.

Now, fast forward to chapter 14, verse 28. Don't you love a verse that starts with "but"? "But," and the whole chapter is on tongues, "But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God." There it is. You know, and that's one of the things that I love about the word of God. We don't have to question how this is supposed to be done. God just laid it out, you know. It says also right above that in verses 26 and 27 that if you are in a public setting where this gift is demonstrated, it says, no more than 2 or 3 speaking and one interpreting. That's just the rules of engagement, you know. So you put all those pieces together.

Yes ma'am, back to you. That condemns babbling? Oh, mindless babbling. Well, I don't know. It doesn't quite use the phrase "mindless babbling." For lack of better terms, yes, yes, yes. Well, what I would say to that is, okay, I'm going back to which passage it is in here where he says, "If I speak 10,000 words of tongues and you don't understand it, what good is that? But if I speak 2 to 3 words in something you can understand, it profits you." Does that make sense? And I wouldn't call that, I know you were joking about the mindless babbling but you're saying...now, do you realize how much 10,000 words are? You may say, "What's 10,000 words?" The average sermon I preach on Sunday morning is 6,000 words so imagine putting up with me for 45 minutes straight and not understanding a thing I've said. Some of you may be thinking, "We do that even normally." But that is what the Apostle Paul is saying.

Yes ma'am. Okay. Right. Okay. Right. Now, she's saying that before she moved to Louisiana, she had a neighbor who was a passer that would teach the kids in the neighborhood how to "speak in tongues." Alright, go back to chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians. This is important. I'm going to begin in verse 4, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." In other words, not everybody is going to have the same gift but they all come from the Lord. "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. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom." I believe what that passage is saying is: I cannot teach anybody the gift that they have from God no matter what that gift is. I cannot teach you a word of wisdom. I cannot teach you the gift of healing. I cannot teach you

knowledge because it says it comes from God, distributed by God at God's will, you know. And I think one of the problems, I'm going to go on the other side of the desk here, I think one of the problems of a lot of Christians is they don't like the gift God gave them. Isn't the grass always greener on the other side? I mean it is, right? We see somebody else's gift and we say, "Man, my life would be great if I had that gift." Let me give you some advice about the grass on the other side of the fence: it looks green but it's brown and burnt because God gave you what he wanted you to have, he gave me what he wanted me to have and etc. So if God gives you the gift of tongues and you the gift of interpreting tongues, great but you and you cannot teach somebody how to exercise that gift. I would say this though: if you have a gift and somebody else has the same gift, I think you can discuss how God uses those gifts in your life and learn from one another.

Does that make sense? Does that help you out? We're glad you live here, by the way. She gave me a half smile, not a full one but that's okay. I got a full one then. Anything? Oh boy, here we go. I almost had the second card pulled a while ago, I was almost there. Yes sir and then we'll go to her. Well, according, well, here's the deal: according to chapter 14, that's interesting you bring that up because if you begin in verse 22, "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." So very clearly in verse 14, the purpose of the sign or the gift of the tongue is not so that you and I as believers can put another notch in our Christian belt, bad phrase, I know. But back to 1 Corinthians 1, back to Mark 16, the Lord said he would give them signs. The Jews require a sign and in the case that when it is used it is so that nonbelievers literally will see the supernatural movement of God. I'm just going to be honest with you: I've been in airports of multiple international venues and when you've ever been in an airport and you could pick an airport, whether it is in Frankfurt, Germany, you could be in Amsterdam, you could be in Bombay, India, some of these places all over the world, big, massive, huge airports and every now and then you find yourself in a situation that's not comfortable, either you're late for your flight, the connection or whatever, and when you just shout out what you need, do you know how many people do not know what you've said? Now, English is a pretty well-known language in the world. Can you imagine going to a location like that where there's 100 languages represented and saying, "Hey, can somebody help me?" and every person turn around and say, "Yes, I can," and they don't speak English. It would make me a believer real quick.

It's different in this room. You all, to the best of my knowledge, can understand English. When I communicate something to y'all or to those of you from up north, you guys, but y'all down here, I'm not surprised when you understand it but to one who is on the outside as you pointed out, sir, a nonbeliever, that's what it says the purpose is because then it says later on in verse 23, "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues," now, y'all know what "all" means, right? All, "and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?" You see, here's the thing that's so important about this discussion: it's not that tongues are good or bad, it's not that it should be yes or no but it's God put them in place for a specific reason and you and I or anybody else are in violation of that if we use them in any manner contrary to the way God said to use them because when they are used God's

way, they glorify and honor God. When they are used our way, they just glorify ourselves. That's my point.

Ma'am? Sure. Right. Again, alright, she brought up a great question: why do you see this particular thing or particular gift in some churches versus others? I've had the privilege in my life, I have not seen it all but I've seen a lot. I've had the privilege of being in almost every type of denominational style worship service church that you can imagine. Understand that, you know, when I was in college being the major I was, one of my assignments and one of my courses throughout the course of the semester was to visit as many different styles of denominations of churches I could humanly go to. I'll never forget on Wednesday, I went to Ash Wednesday in a Lutheran church, alright? Now, if you've never been to Ash Wednesday in a Lutheran church, you go down the front, you kneel, they do everything they do, right? Well, I was there on assignment from my professor so they called everybody to go forward, well, what did I do? I went forward. I'm doing research, right? So I go up to the front, I get on the kneeling bench, I lean down there and the priest looks down at me and says, "You're not one of us," and moves on. I was like, "Okay." So afterwards I go to him and say, "How am I going to prove to my professor I was here?" He wrote me a note. I'm not kidding. You can't make that stuff up, okay?

But the reason I say that is: it's not just in this area. Styles of worship vary across the board and here is how I want to answer that question: it is my desire, there's an old rule of thumb, pastor the church you'd want to be a member of. I want to be a part of a church that has as its goal to line up with the Bible as closely as humanly possible and to live it out the best it says to do so. Does that make sense? So to that point, I don't see an advocacy of needing ashes on my head at a certain time of the year. It's not advocated in Scripture. I don't see an over-extenuating usage of the gift that we spoke of earlier so why would we do so here? In other words, what I want you to hear is: not everybody has as their goal to do it like the Bible says, oftentimes it's what our forefathers did, what tradition is, what makes us feel good, what makes people happy. Does that make sense? I think the goal should be to do it the way God said to do it in the word. Leave it at that. Go down that road, he'll take care of us. So in some cases things are not participated in, in other cases they are.

Does that help out at all? Not really? Somewhat, sorta? I didn't just come out and answer like you wanted and I know that. Sure and that's fine. Sure. Right. I got that. Correct. Just say it. You're in friendly territory here, I promise. Some can be but I didn't say it was in that tradition. Okay, let's just say it as we say it. In the Pentecostal tradition, their expression of faith, that's not much tradition because what we know as Pentecostalism today has really only been around a little over 100 years. It started in 1904 over in the Welsh Revival, came here with Azusa Street. I could go through all that history. No need to do so but currently we're on the third wave of modern Pentecostalism. You see, I'm not even Pentecostal and I know all that.

So, that being said, understand that when I meant tradition, there are others of expression. Like you said, when you're in a service of that nature, there's all kinds of hoopla at times

and there's a lot of people expressing themselves, right? According to the word of God, the Bible, God said in that arena no more than 2 or 3. That's not what I said. That's not what Baptists say. That's what God said. So when we get in a group of people and 100 people are expressing this gift, you cannot get up and say, "Look what God is doing," because according to his word, that's not how it works. Does that make a little more sense?

I didn't want to be that but I had to go that way. Understand, I've got friends that are going to watch this and I'm going to get phone calls now but it is what it is, you know, and so, again, it goes back to the whether you get caught up in the emotion, whether you get caught up in tradition, whether you get caught up because that's the way your grandparents did it or whether you get caught up in the moment, so to speak. What we're supposed to get caught up in is the Spirit of God moving according to the word of God and when that happens, God, he does what he wants to do how he wants to do it within the framework he has given it. Does that communicate?

Let me take the same illustration, okay, the same illustration, a completely different road. What I'm about to say is not your question. It's not related to your question. It has nothing to do with this lovely young lady here, okay? Because what she's saying is: well, I came from a tradition or I come from a background where the expression of this gift is greater than the number that God gave, correct? Okay, a dear friend of mine several years ago takes me to lunch one day, this is back when we lived in Texas, and he sat me down and his name is Bill, a great friend for many years and he said, "Jeff, I just want you to know. I struggle." I said, "What do you mean you struggle?" I said, "What are you struggling with?" He said, "I just struggle with Jesus being the only way to heaven." I said, "Why do you struggle?" He says, "Well, I have a niece that's a Buddhist," and he said, "she's so sincere. She's so sweet. She's so kind. She's so loving. I just don't see God as excluding her." Now, almost everybody in the room goes, "Whoa," but what did he just do? He went beyond what the Bible makes allowances for. The Bible says Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, nobody comes to the Father but by me." We're not allowed to add Buddha to that. We're not allowed to add Mohammed. We're not allowed to add that. When the word of God says no more than 2 or 3, we're not able to add, "Yeah, but in my home church..." Do you see what I'm saying? We don't have the freedom to add to. We also, let's we pick on Baptists, we don't have the freedom to subtract from. We don't have the freedom to say, "Nope. None." That's not what the word of God says.

Does that make sense? The what? Oh, fainting. Oh, falling and slain in the spirit, all those? Again, what does the Bible give...by the way, the Bible gives great allowance for lots of expression of faith, you know. Again, also, it goes, you know, it goes back to: what is our goal? What is our desire? In any type of worship experience whether, now, whether that worship experience is in your shower in the morning, hey, the Lord and I have some prayer meetings in the shower. I just want y'all to know. That may sound weird to y'all but it's one of the few times in life it's just me and the Lord. That's a great moment when the hot water runs out, the prayer meeting is over. Alright, end of story. Whether that is in the shower by yourself or whether that's in a church with 1,400 people in it, whether alone or together, our expression should never be what we want, what feels

good or what we like. It should be what is going to honor him. What honors him is to be and to do what he said to be and do. You know that song we sang and I love the song but every time we sing the song we always add an extra phrase to it. Do you know the song, "I'm a friend of God"? I would sing it but I can't sing but, "I'm a friend of God, I'm a friend of God." It comes from the Gospel of John 13 but do you know what the phrase in the next part of the verse is? Jesus says "You are my friends if you do what I command you to do." I'm not a friend of God just to do whatever I want to do, if I do what he says to do. So, to my Pentecostal brother, the word of God does not eliminate tongues, it regulates. The word of God does not eliminate salvation, it regulates salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

Does that help, that analogy there? Are we good? Alright. Anything else? Oh, come on, why not? That's a great question. Going back to the snakes where we started out, would not handling the snakes be tempting God? According to those who practice this, I want you to know I've never done so though I have met those who do, they claim that they are demonstrating their faith in God, their trust in him. To which my natural response is this: what takes more faith, picking a snake out of a box and dancing around in church or being presented with an opportunity of temptation and walking away and saying no? What takes greater faith? Now, think about that for a moment because when the world or life offers you something that in your flesh you'd really like to be a part of but you know God doesn't want you to be a part of it, to resist that and to say no, that is an act of trusting God. I wouldn't call the snake handling a greater but your question was: is that a temptation to God? I think you could couch it that way that I'm tempting God by this exercise of faith.

Don't you ever wonder what's going on in the mind of the snake? I know you're going, "Not really." At some point he's getting out of the box going, "Is this guy serious? I mean, really, is he serious?" Now, maybe, you know, I'm just weird, I don't know, because that's what I think of in moments like this. You know, he's dancing around with the snake above his head and I'm thinking, "What's that snake thinking?" You know, is he thinking, "You know what, I'll let him do this 3 more Sundays and then I'm nailing him." I don't know. I know I'm weird but I think like this. Or, "Do you know what? He gave me a good meal last night, I'll give him a pass tonight." I don't know but I think you could say, you could couch it as a form of temptation. It's almost, let me use a different phrase, it's almost as if you're daring God, you know. I don't know. Does that help at all? You're almost daring him to act on that.

Yes ma'am. Oh, yes ma'am. Oh, those babblings. Okay. The mindless babbling question. In 1 Timothy 6:10, I'm glad you brought that up, I'm sorry, 6:20, forgive me, it says, "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called." I think you could look at that as what we've been discussing in the expression of just unintelligible language but I want you to notice the context here, "vain babblings and opposition of science falsely so called." There are a lot of folks who are really intelligent that are full of nothing but hot air and it's just vain babblings. Don't believe me? Turn on the news. Half the time that's all it is. It's just talking heads. Vain, you know, what we know with Solomon in the book of Proverbs, in

the book of Ecclesiastes in particular when he says, "Vanity of vanities, always vanity." It literally means empty air. There is no weight to it. There's nothing to it. It's just worthless, you know, and he says one thing you need to avoid are people who just babble about nothing that means anything and have no importance. Could it include what she was saying? Absolutely. But I think what's even more frightening is the intelligible language which means nothing. Have you ever been around somebody who talks for 30 minutes and you don't know a thing they said for 30 minutes? Like, what was that? Don't reference Sunday morning. Okay, so, and science so falsely call. But I'm glad you brought that up but that's right there, 1 Timothy 6:20.

Yes ma'am. That's a great question. The question she asked was: how do you know what your gift is? Go back to 1 Corinthians 12. Now, I will go ahead and tell you that you can go home tonight and because of the wonderful wide world web, you can go to Google, Bing, Yahoo and all these search engines and you can go find a spiritual gifts test. Let me give air to caution on spiritual gifts test. I've seen spiritual gifts test that have 120 spiritual gifts listed. There are not 120 spiritual gifts in the Bible, okay? I would, if you were to go and take one of those tests, I would advocate picking or choosing one that limits itself to the ones that are mentioned here in 1 Corinthians 12. Also, the book of Romans 12 lists the same list with just a little variation on the words.

Now, it says that God gives these gifts and then in verse 11 it says, "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." Then it talks about the body being one but I want you to know or I want you to look at verse, let's go ahead and begin at verse 29, "Are all apostles?" obviously no, "are all prophets?" obviously no, "are all teachers?" obviously no, "are all workers of miracles?" obviously no, "Have all the gifts of healing?" obviously no, "do all speak with tongues?" obviously not, "do all interpret?" obviously not, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way." Let me tell you what I believe is being said there: I believe that as a believer in Jesus Christ, the day that you are saved, at that point, you are for lack of better terms, you are eligible for the "gift" that God gives you. Now, I do believe that you can receive more than one gift. I do not believe you're going to get them all because it just says, "do all have this? Do all have that?" So you, ma'am, may have one. You may have 2. I don't know but I believe the last verse of that chapter talks about earnestly seeking the best gifts. I think at least in my own personal experience, it is a matter of your time with the Lord saying, "Okay God, how did you wire me? And how are you working through me?"

Now, how does that work out in every day life? Let's just say you've been a believer for 10 years. You were saved 10 years ago yet in this discussion you would honestly say, "I don't have a clue what my spiritual gift is." First question I would ask you is this: do you even know what the options are? Because I'm being serious because 1 Corinthians 12 is where they list the various options. Then what I would do is I would do what the last verse said, I would earnestly seek the Lord and say, "God, how are you desiring to move through me? How do you want me to exercise my faith in you?" Then alongside of that obviously this is a long answer given short, there is evidence from others of your gift.

Let's go ahead and use the one we've described tonight: someone comes up and says, "I have been praying about it, God has told me that I have the gift of speaking in tongues." We have a worship service, you get up and you do your deal and nobody interprets. That might be a sign you don't. There's an old story way back about 200 years ago in the plains of Kansas and Missouri, there was a young man in kind of a hellfire, brimstone old Baptist Church. One day the preacher is up preaching and boy, he just felt under conviction. I mean, he was convicted. So that afternoon he didn't even go to lunch. He went out into the fields of his house and he just stayed there and he laid on his back and he said, "Oh God, please speak to me. Speak to me. Speak to me." He looked up in the clouds and he saw a G, a P and a C. he said, "That's it, go preach Christ." So he went back to the service that night and he said, "Pastor, God has called me to the ministry. I'm supposed to preach the Gospel." He said, "Great, next Sunday morning, you're preaching." He got up the next Sunday morning, the pastor introduced him, told the story of what had happened and he preached. After the service, a wise old farmer came up to him and said, "Son, it might have meant go pick cotton."

I say that to say: a lot of times the gift we want is not necessarily the gift God has given and when it says that the body operates as one, I believe that we seek God, "How are you working through me?" And then if that is how God is working through us, it will be recognized by the rest of the body of how that operates. But the best advice I can give and I know, I know, I know this sounds so unscientific: get on your knees, get in front of God and say, "God, what is it you want to do through me? How do you want me to live? How do you want me to express my relationship with you?" You cannot learn your spiritual gift from your pastor. You cannot learn it from necessarily your Sunday school class or any, the only way to get it, it says the Spirit gives it to you. It's God that gives it to you, you know. To your point, ma'am, you can't be taught it, if that makes sense.

I'm going to tell you, I know, this is going to sound so weird because it talks about the gift of prophecy, the gift of administration, the gift of exhortation, I have had and I don't want to discourage anybody so listen carefully because if you have a young man in your life, son, grandson, nephew, whomever it is, if God is working on their life with a call to ministry, I will gladly spend time with him. I gladly would love the opportunity to encourage them but here's the question a lot of young men come to me and say, "Teach me how to preach." Do you know what I say to them? "I can't." And they say, "What do you mean you can't teach me how?" I say, "You have to understand, young man, this is God's gift to me and it just happens. I can tell you how I kind of work things out but I really can't tell you how I do it." Now, I know you're thinking, "What do you mean, you can't tell us how you?" There's the gift of exhortation, the gift of speaking, the gift of communication, that's God's gift to me. That's what he gave me. I've got to live with what he gave me and so do y'all. But, sorry.

But I say that to say: there was a time in my life I didn't want that gift. I didn't want it. I wanted what somebody else had. God said, "Too bad, that's you," and I dealt with God and I fought with God and I argued with God and guess what? God won, you know, and so I say that to say that it is the Spirit that gives it, it is the Spirit that shows it and so we

must seek God and say, "What is it or how is it?" But I would restrict yourself to the word of God.

Now, there are spiritual gifts tests out there. Let me give you the pros and the cons. The cons are some of them list gifts that aren't even in the Bible. So ignore that part. The other con is or the other negative, is sometimes you take those tests and they can be really personally deflating because you wanted the answer you didn't get. The pro is they ask you questions to help you diagnose how God is moving in your life even if you haven't recognized it. Let me give you an example. Sometimes on these spiritual gift tests they'll ask you questions like this: on occasion somebody asks you to pray for their health and you discover that God heals them in spite of the doctor. Can you answer yes or no to that? Well, one of the gifts is the gift of healings and so it's one of these things to let you know, "Oh, maybe that's how God is working in my life." One of the questions may say: occasionally when given the opportunity, do you speak or comment on what the word of God says and others learn from it? The gift of exhortation. Sometimes you have insight to events that others don't have, the gift of prophecy. Does that make sense what I'm saying? Those tests that are out there can be very helpful but be careful because I took one when I was in my mid-20s and I was a vocational evangelist, I traveled the world just sharing the Gospel. I was on various continents, states, youth camps, whatever and I remember I looked at the test and the number of gifts listed was more than what the Bible says and it was really deflating when it told me that I did not have the spiritual gift of evangelism and I was an evangelist. Evangelism isn't a gift. It's not listed. So I got over it pretty quickly because, I mean, it's not even an option biblically. But yet there were individuals in that context that were highly disappointed with the way God made them that they were being told they weren't made for something that not even God makes which goes back to your point, ma'am, we have to keep it within what God said, not make it what we want to.

Have I helped you at all? I have, good. I'm being honest. I really do want to help but I get real nervous when people talk about spiritual gifts because to your point, ma'am, it can't be taught, it's got to be caught. Does that make sense? The Lord gives it to us and oftentimes it's not what we expected. I'll be honest with y'all: this is not what I signed up for. I'm serious. When I got saved, it wasn't to preach but this is how God works through my life and I've got to be content and excited about that and that's one of the struggles because a lot of times our spiritual gifts are not what we would sign up for and I think to our discussion 30 minutes ago, a lot of times there is a spiritual gift that a lot of people want, they don't have it and so they manufacture it. I know a lot of people manufacturing preaching who can't preach their self out of a wet sack. I'm not going to go off on that. Okay.

Anything else? Yes ma'am. There's a box here that we don't... Okay. Go ahead. To her point, don't you have to know what the word of God says? Absolutely, which is why 1 Corinthians 12 is so important, it's all about spiritual gifts. Read it. Read it again. Keep reading it. Pray through it. Pray over it. Ask questions to the Lord. You know, I think one of the things, the Bible says 2 Timothy says study the word of God, be a workman that need not be ashamed. Do you know the Awana verse? It doesn't say read the word of God, what does it say? Study the word of God. There were years ago, there was a passage

I was struggling with years ago. It was about 2 1/2, 3 chapters worth of a certain section of Scripture. I read it every day for almost 2 months. Is that because I'm dumb? I don't think it's because I'm dumb, I think it's the Lord was saying, "I want you to pour your life into this so I can pour it into you." And I think when it comes to the spiritual gift passage, I would encourage someone, "Hey, when it comes to spiritual gifts, go to 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14 and read it, read it, read it, study it, learn it, pray over it, see what God does." But again, back to a previous discussion, don't come to 1 Corinthians 12 with, "These are my glasses and this is what it's going to be." You've got to come to it and say, "Okay God, here I am. What's it going to be?" because then we are able to operate in the fullness of our gift because it's him doing it not us. Does that make sense? I agree with you, what does the word of God say our gift is and how it's to be expressed.

Now, the other thing about spiritual gifts, you didn't ask this but I'm going to go here, is because it talks about the body being one, never is a gift to harm another gift. We are one body. The illustration is, you never take your hand and injure your foot because we're a body. You don't do that to yourself so one gift should not harm another gift or cut the legs off of another one. They should work together, not in opposition which is another one of those litmus tests. I believe this is from God, others have received that it is from God and it's edifying the body, not harming the body. You get through that litmus test, you'll be okay.

The last thing I would say, ma'am, to your question is: you cannot put a specific timeframe on this. Some people literally get saved, get called and know their spiritual gift within 24 hours. Some people spend a decade struggling with God to see what it is and I think that's just sometimes that's how God works in some people's lives. I know personally speaking my spiritual gift wasn't known instantaneously. In fact, it took years and it wasn't God's fault, it was mine because I wanted something else. You're guilty of that too sometimes, right? Please tell me it's not just me. I mean, I was like, "Hey God, I'd like this one." And God said, "I don't think so."

So, anything else on this, that, other? There's no reason to pull another question with 4 minutes left so speak now or forever hold your peace or we're going to do something really...oh boy, here we go. You've got 4 minutes. Right. The question was asked and this is a good one to tie it all together. The question he asked is: with the experience we see in Acts 2, the filling of the Holy Spirit, the speaking with new tongues, the hearing of it in their own language, is that ever duplicated today? Interesting and this is a 3 minute answer here so we could go for an hour, is in Acts 2 you see this experience with Jews. In Acts 8 you see it with the Samaritans. And in Acts 10 you see it with Gentiles. None of them are exactly the same but they produce the same results. That was on a what I like to call a global scale.

So let's go back to the conditions of Acts 2. First off, you have believers who are full of the Holy Ghost. Hopefully that missionary would be one. Second of all, you have an individual who is ignorant to the truth of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Issue 3 is their receptivity is of a supernatural desire. There are stories upon stories upon stories whether it's somebody "in the Amazon," what we often call someone in the bush, someone in

these remote cultures that their language base in that culture is nothing even close to what we would call a contemporary language, that individuals have gone in there and somehow supernaturally they have understood what that person has said. I would call that an individual demonstration of Acts 2. Does that make sense? I know of individuals who, missionaries, that have gone into countries such as either Brazil or Peru, particularly in South America, having no concept of any language of the region except English and have been met with people who had no knowledge of English and they've had conversations with people on the street not even realizing what was happening. I think that's the critical nature is when you see it happening today in the environment that you described, it's as if the person, I'm going to be the missionary and you're going to be the individual wherever else. You perceive, it's almost as if you perceive me speaking your language and I perceive you hearing my language. It's not like we both went, "Wow! Look at that!" It's the presentation of the Gospel, the receiving of the Gospel and the moving on with the Gospel because in that case God gets the glory and not the missionary.

Does that help at all? Oh yeah. Now, I've never had that experience but I will tell you why I love preaching with an interpreter. I love it for multiple reasons. The first reason I like it is my humorous side coming out. I love the fact that I get up in front of a group of people who don't speak any English and don't know any English and this has happened many times in my life and I get up and I say, "Hello, my name is Jeff," and the interpreter goes, "da da da da da da," and I'm just sitting there going, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." He ends and then I quote John 3:16, "For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son. Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." "da dad." Done. Okay. In other words, I find it humorous, I talk for 5 minutes and he talks for 10 seconds and says the same thing. I talk for 10 seconds and he goes on for 5 minutes. I find that fun, okay? I know I'm weird. And it's really fun when you have 3 different interpreters. I've been in an environment with 3 different interpreters at one time, okay? where you have language A, B and C. You say something and they all take their turn and it comes back. That's my humorous side. But let me tell you the real reason I love preaching with interpreters: you have an audience that does not know English, you have a preacher who does not know Hindi, I'll take that language, I say something, I don't have a clue what this guy next to me said. I know they can't understand me, I can't understand him and at the end somebody gets saved? God moved because I couldn't have pulled that one off. That's one of the things I love about preaching overseas is because at the end of the night when you go back to the hotel, I can't take credit, that interpreter can't take credit. Nobody on that team can take credit because only God can make all that work and people come to know Jesus. Does that make sense?