



The Spiritual Gifts of Healing, Tongues, Prophecy, and Discerning of Spirits

“No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

Following a brief period of refuge in Quincy, Illinois, during the early months of 1839, the Saints began moving about 50 miles north to the settlement of Commerce, Illinois. After his escape from his Missouri imprisonment, the Prophet had begun purchasing tracts of land in and around Commerce as gathering places for the thousands who had fled Missouri and now needed a place to rebuild their lives. By July 1839, hundreds of Saints were camping in tents and wagons on the east side of the Mississippi River in Commerce, while others had found shelter in abandoned military barracks on the opposite side of the river in Montrose, Iowa. In this new home, the Saints worked to clear and drain the swampy land near the river. Many Church members were bitten by mosquitoes and fell seriously ill with malaria and other diseases. Some of the Saints died, and others were near death. Joseph and Emma Smith took so many into their log home to nurse that the Prophet gave up his bed to sleep outside in a tent.

On July 22, in the midst of the sickness that afflicted so many, the Saints witnessed what Elder Wilford Woodruff would call “a day of God’s power.”¹ That morning the Prophet arose, called upon the Lord in prayer, and, being filled with the Spirit of the Lord, administered to the sick in his house, in the yard outside, and down by the river. He crossed the river and visited the home of Brigham Young in Montrose to give him a healing blessing. Then, in company with Sidney Rigdon, Brigham Young, and other



On July 22, 1839, Elijah Fordbam rose from the “sleep of death” after Joseph Smith entered his home and declared, “Elijah, I command you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to arise and be made whole!”

members of the Twelve, he continued on his mission of mercy among other Iowa Saints. Elder Woodruff recalled one of the most memorable healings of that day:

“We crossed the public square, and entered Brother [Elijah] Fordham’s house. Brother Fordham had been dying for an hour, and we expected each minute would be his last. I felt the power of God that was overwhelming his Prophet. When we entered the house, Brother Joseph walked up to Brother Fordham, and took him by the right hand. . . . He saw that Brother Fordham’s eyes were glazed, and that he was speechless and unconscious.

“After taking hold of his hand, [the Prophet] looked down into the dying man’s face and said: ‘Brother Fordham, do you not know me?’ At first he made no reply; but we could all see the effect of the Spirit of God resting upon him.

“[Joseph] again said: ‘Elijah, do you not know me?’ With a low whisper, Brother Fordham answered, ‘Yes!’ The Prophet then said, ‘Have you not faith to be healed?’

“The answer, which was a little plainer than before, was: ‘I am afraid it is too late. If you had come sooner, I think I might have been.’ He had the appearance of a man awaking from sleep. It was the sleep of death. Joseph then said: ‘Do you not believe that Jesus is the Christ?’ ‘I do, Brother Joseph,’ was the response.

“Then the Prophet of God spoke with a loud voice, as in the majesty of the Godhead: ‘Elijah, I command you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, to arise and be made whole!’

“The words of the Prophet were not like the words of man, but like the voice of God. It seemed to me that the house shook from its foundation. Elijah Fordham leaped from his bed like a man raised from the dead. A healthy color came to his face, and life was manifested in every act. His feet were done up in [corn-meal] poultices. He kicked them off his feet, scattering the contents, and then called for his clothes and put them on. He asked for a bowl of bread and milk, and ate it; then put on his hat and followed us into the street, to visit others who were sick.”²

In a time of dire need, the Saints experienced an outpouring of the gift of healing at the hands of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Teachings of Joseph Smith

The sick may be healed through faith and the exercise of priesthood power, according to the Lord's will.

“What is the sign of the healing of the sick? The laying on of hands is the sign or way marked out by James, and the custom of the ancient Saints as ordered by the Lord, and we cannot obtain the blessing by pursuing any other course except the way marked out by the Lord [see James 5:14–15].”³

In July 1839, when the Saints had recently moved to Commerce, Illinois, and there was much sickness among them, Joseph Smith recorded: “Much sickness began to manifest itself among the brethren, as well as among the inhabitants of the place, so that this week and the following were generally spent in visiting the sick and administering to them; some had faith enough and were healed; others had not. . . .

“Sunday 28.—Meeting was held as usual. . . . I spoke, and admonished the members of the Church individually to set their houses in order, to make clean the inside of the platter, and to meet on the next Sabbath to partake of the Sacrament, in order that by our obedience to the ordinances, we might be enabled to prevail with God against the destroyer, and that the sick might be healed. All this week chiefly spent among the sick, who in general are gaining strength, and recovering health.”⁴

“Many of the righteous shall fall a prey to disease, to pestilence, etc., by reason of the weakness of the flesh, and yet be saved in the Kingdom of God. So that it is an unhallowed principle to say that such and such have transgressed because they have been preyed upon by disease or death, for all flesh is subject to death; and the Savior has said, ‘Judge not, lest ye be judged.’ [See Matthew 7:1.]”⁵

The purpose of the gift of tongues is to teach the gospel to others.

The Prophet spoke at an 1834 conference of elders: “Joseph Smith then gave an explanation of the gift of tongues, that it was particularly instituted for the preaching of the Gospel to other



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nations and languages, but it was not given for the government of the Church.”⁶

“As to the gift of tongues, all we can say is, that in this place, we have received it as the ancients did: we wish you, however, to be careful lest in this you be deceived. . . . Satan will no doubt trouble you about the gift of tongues, unless you are careful; you cannot watch him too closely, nor pray too much. May the Lord give you wisdom in all things.”⁷

“I read the 13th chapter of First Corinthians [at a meeting held on December 26, 1841], also a part of the 14th chapter, and remarked that the gift of tongues was necessary in the Church; . . . the gift of tongues by the power of the Holy Ghost in the Church, is for the benefit of the servants of God to preach to unbelievers, as on the day of Pentecost.”⁸

“Tongues were given for the purpose of preaching among those whose language is not understood; as on the day of Pentecost, etc., and it is not necessary for tongues to be taught to the Church particularly, for any man that has the Holy Ghost, can speak of the things of God in his own tongue as well as to speak

in another; for faith comes not by signs, but by hearing the word of God.”⁹

“Be not so curious about tongues, do not speak in tongues except there be an interpreter present; the ultimate design of tongues is to speak to foreigners, and if persons are very anxious to display their intelligence, let them speak to such in their own tongues. The gifts of God are all useful in their place, but when they are applied to that which God does not intend, they prove an injury, a snare and a curse instead of a blessing.”¹⁰

“We have also had brethren and sisters who have had the gift of tongues falsely; they would speak in a muttering, unnatural voice, and their bodies be distorted . . . ; whereas, there is nothing unnatural in the Spirit of God.”¹¹

“Speak not in the gift of tongues without understanding it, or without interpretation. The devil can speak in tongues; the adversary will come with his work; he can tempt all classes; can speak in English or Dutch. Let no one speak in tongues unless he interpret, except by the consent of the one who is placed to preside; then he may discern or interpret, or another may.”¹²

“If you have a matter to reveal, let it be in your own tongue; do not indulge too much in the exercise of the gift of tongues, or the devil will take advantage of the innocent and unwary. You may speak in tongues for your own comfort, but I lay this down for a rule, that if anything is taught by the gift of tongues, it is not to be received for doctrine.”¹³

Though only one man speaks as the prophet of the Church, the spirit of prophecy enables all to testify of Jesus Christ.

“No man is a minister of Jesus Christ without being a Prophet. No man can be a minister of Jesus Christ except he has the testimony of Jesus; and this is the spirit of prophecy [see Revelation 19:10].”¹⁴

“John the Revelator says that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy [see Revelation 19:10]. Now if any man has the testimony of Jesus, has he not the spirit of prophecy? And if he has the spirit of prophecy, I ask, is he not a prophet? And if a prophet, will he not receive revelation? And any man that does not receive

revelation for himself must be damned, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. For Christ says, ask and you shall receive; and if he happens to receive anything, I ask, will it not be a revelation? And if any man has not the testimony of Jesus or the spirit of God, he is none of his, namely Christ's. And if not his, he must be damned."¹⁵

A visitor to Nauvoo recorded that Joseph Smith taught the following during a conversation: "The Prophet Joseph [said that] . . . to be a minister of Jesus, a man must testify of Jesus; and to testify of Jesus, a man must have the spirit of prophecy; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

"If a man professes to be a minister of Jesus and has not the spirit of prophecy, he must be a false witness, for he is not in possession of that gift which qualifies him for that office; and the difference between [Joseph Smith] and the clergy of this generation is, he claims to be in possession of that spirit of prophecy which qualifies him to testify of Jesus and the Gospel of salvation; and the clergy deny that spirit, even the spirit of prophecy, which alone could constitute them true witnesses or testators of the Lord Jesus, and yet claim to be true ministers of salvation."¹⁶

"Faith comes by hearing the word of God, through the testimony of the servants of God; that testimony is always attended by the Spirit of prophecy and revelation."¹⁷

The gift of discerning of spirits allows the faithful to distinguish between the influence of good and evil spirits.

In the early days of the restored Church, members of the Church, as well as members of other religious groups, sometimes acted upon influences from evil or false spirits, believing they were under the influence of the Holy Ghost. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "Recent occurrences that have transpired amongst us render it an imperative duty devolving upon me to say something in relation to the spirits by which men are actuated.

"It is evident from the Apostles' writings [in the New Testament], that many false spirits existed in their day, and had 'gone forth into the world,' and that it needed intelligence which God alone could impart to detect false spirits, and to prove what

spirits were of God [see 1 John 4:1–4]. The world in general have been grossly ignorant in regard to this one thing, and why should they be otherwise—‘for no man knows the things of God, but by the Spirit of God.’ [See 1 Corinthians 2:11.] . . .

“There always did, in every age, seem to be a lack of intelligence pertaining to this subject. Spirits of all kinds have been manifested, in every age, and almost amongst all people. . . . All have their spirits, all have a supernatural agency, and all contend that their spirits are of God. Who shall solve the mystery? ‘Try the spirits,’ says John [1 John 4:1], but who is to do it? The learned, the eloquent, the philosopher, the sage, the divine—all are ignorant. . . . Who can drag into daylight and develop the hidden mysteries of the false spirits that so frequently are made manifest among the Latter-day Saints? We answer that no man can do this without the Priesthood, and having a knowledge of the laws by which spirits are governed; for as ‘no man knows the things of God, but by the Spirit of God,’ so no man knows the spirit of the devil, and his power and influence, but by possessing intelligence which is more than human, and having unfolded through the medium of the Priesthood the mysterious operations of his devices. . . .

“A man must have the discerning of spirits before he can drag into daylight this hellish influence and unfold it unto the world in all its soul-destroying, diabolical, and horrid colors; for nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God. Thousands have felt the influence of its terrible power and baneful effects. . . .

“As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God; and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication, or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles; for I contend that if one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the

learned, the tongue of the eloquent, the power of the mighty. And we shall at last have to come to this conclusion, whatever we may think of revelation, that without it we can neither know nor understand anything of God, or the devil; and however unwilling the world may be to acknowledge this principle, it is evident from the multifarious creeds and notions concerning this matter that they understand nothing of this principle, and it is equally as plain that without a divine communication they must remain in ignorance. . . .

“A man must have the discerning of spirits, as we before stated, to understand these things, and how is he to obtain this gift if there are no gifts of the Spirit? And how can these gifts be obtained without revelation? ‘Christ ascended into heaven, and gave gifts to men; and He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers’ [see Ephesians 4:8, 11]. And how were Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists chosen? By prophecy (revelation) and by laying on of hands:—by a divine communication, and a divinely appointed ordinance—through the medium of the Priesthood, organized according to the order of God, by divine appointment. The Apostles in ancient times held the keys of this Priesthood—of the mysteries of the kingdom of God, and consequently were enabled to unlock and unravel all things pertaining to the government of the Church, the welfare of society, the future destiny of men, and the agency, power and influence of spirits; for they could control them at pleasure, bid them depart in the name of Jesus, and detect their mischievous and mysterious operations when trying to palm themselves upon the Church in a religious garb, and militate against the interest of the Church and spread of truth. . . .

“. . . Our Savior, the Apostles, and even the members of the Church were endowed with this gift, for, says Paul, ‘To one is given the gift of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits.’ [See 1 Corinthians 12:10.] All these proceeded from the same Spirit of God, and were the gifts of God. . . . No man nor set of men without the regularly constituted authorities, the Priesthood and discerning of spirits, can tell true from false spirits.”¹⁸

“Lying spirits are going forth in the earth. There will be great manifestations of spirits, both false and true. . . . Every spirit, or vision, or singing, is not of God. . . . The gift of discerning spirits will be given to the Presiding Elder. Pray for him that he may have this gift.”¹⁹

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review the account on pages 379–81. How can this account help Melchizedek Priesthood holders prepare to administer to the sick? How can it help us when we need a priesthood blessing? Why do you think it was important for Brother Fordham to express his faith in Jesus Christ at that time?
- Review the Prophet Joseph’s teachings on page 382. What experiences have helped you understand the power of the priesthood in the healing of the sick? What principles should guide us in sharing our experiences with healing of the sick? Why are some people not healed, even when they exercise faith and receive priesthood blessings?
- Joseph Smith said that the gift of tongues “was particularly instituted for the preaching of the Gospel to other nations and languages” (pages 382–84). How has this gift helped in spreading the gospel throughout the world? How have you or someone you know received the gift of tongues to help preach the gospel?
- Review the Prophet’s teachings about the spirit of prophecy (pages 384–85). What does it mean to you to know that each member of the Church can have the spirit of prophecy?
- Review the Prophet’s teachings about the gift of discerning of spirits (pages 385–88). What is the gift of discerning of spirits? How can we avoid being deceived by evil influences? How do our current prophet and other Church leaders help us discern evil influences?

Related Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12:1–31; 14:1–6, 22–28; James 5:14–15; Moroni 10:8–17; D&C 46:1–33; 50:1–36, 40–44; 52:14–19

Notes

1. Wilford Woodruff, Journals, 1833–98, entry for July 22, 1839, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. Wilford Woodruff, “Leaves from My Journal,” *Millennial Star*, Oct. 17, 1881, p. 670; capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered.
3. *History of the Church*, 4:555; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 20, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
4. *History of the Church*, 4:3–5; paragraph divisions altered; italics deleted; from Joseph Smith journal entries, July 8–10, 28, 1839, Commerce, Illinois.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:11; from instructions given by Joseph Smith on Sept. 29, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by James Mulholland.
6. *History of the Church*, 2:162; from the minutes of a conference of elders held on Sept. 8, 1834, in New Portage, Ohio; reported by Oliver Cowdery.
7. *History of the Church*, 1:369; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the brethren in Missouri, July 2, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio.
8. *History of the Church*, 4:485; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Dec. 26, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
9. *History of the Church*, 3:379; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 27, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
10. *History of the Church*, 5:31–32; from “Gift of the Holy Ghost,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, June 15, 1842, pp. 825–26; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
11. *History of the Church*, 4:580; punctuation modernized; from “Try the Spirits,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 1, 1842, p. 747; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
12. *History of the Church*, 3:392; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
13. *History of the Church*, 4:607; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.
14. *History of the Church*, 3:389; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
15. Quoted by James Burgess, in compilation of excerpts from Joseph Smith’s discourses; James Burgess, Journals, 1841–48, vol. 2, Church Archives.
16. *History of the Church*, 5:407–8; punctuation modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from instructions given by Joseph Smith about Jan. 1843 in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported in a letter by an unidentified *Boston Bee* correspondent, Mar. 24, 1843, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1843, p. 200.
17. *History of the Church*, 3:379; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 27, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
18. *History of the Church*, 4:571–75, 580; punctuation and grammar modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from “Try the Spirits,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 1, 1842, pp. 743–45, 747; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
19. *History of the Church*, 3:391–92; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith about July 1839 in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.