



"Heaven created us to love, not to contend with one another."
—Alexandre Dumas

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Where Is God Working?

During these restless days in the church of [God](#), we commonly wonder when the really exciting things will begin happening, what God is doing now, and where He is working. Because we define and measure our world with our physical senses, we try to catch glimpses of God at work by *quantifying* people and events. However, truly spiritually important things—like character, conversion, humility, a willingness to yield to God, and a vast number of other intangibles—cannot be humanly measured. We scan [the world](#) and the church for significant occurrences, yet if we do not have the proper light by which to see, we will end up groping in the dark.

How can we know where God is working? Should we be looking for numeric growth as a sure sign of God's presence? If so, the first-century church must be accounted as entirely apostate, for after the entire earthly ministry of [Jesus Christ](#) Himself, there were only about a hundred and twenty names of disciples ([Acts 1:15](#))! The epistles mention, not booming congregations, but *households* ([Romans 16:10-11](#); [I Corinthians 1:11](#); [16:15](#); [II Timothy 1:16](#); [4:19](#); [Titus 1:11](#)). How big can a church get and still be the "little flock" of which our Savior spoke ([Luke 12:32](#))? No, numbers are a poor measure of God's outworking, simply because He is not calling everybody at this time.

Would miraculous signs and wonders be an ironclad indicator? Miracles are a double-edged sword because, on the one hand, God has performed many fantastic deeds through His prophets and other servants, but on the other, [Satan](#) and his demons can also manifest miraculous displays of power. Moreover, while miracles may be impressive, the biblical record is clear that they do very little—if anything—to instill true [faith](#). The children of Israel who left Egypt witnessed more genuine miracles than any other nation, yet they still had a heart of unbelief.

Before trying to determine *where* God is working, we first need to establish *what* God is doing: In short, He is creating men in His image ([Genesis 1:26](#)), working salvation ([Psalm 74:12](#)), and instilling belief in those whom He has called ([John 6:29](#)). These activities are all interconnected, all part of the same work. They all deal with transforming the human heart through a growing relationship with God. But the exact manifestation of that work has varied widely throughout history.

Sometimes—like during the last century—God does a large and powerful external work. But, as the example of the first-century church shows, just because something humanly impressive is not occurring does not mean God is not doing anything.

During Christ's ministry, He healed multitudes—perhaps hundreds or even thousands—of people. During the latter part of Acts and the epistles, the miracles—including healing—disappear. Does that mean God was not working with them anymore? Or does it mean He was working out *far more* than just relief from physical infirmity? Does it take more faith to heal or soldier on without healing? God often allows the physical conditions to go on for the sake of *spiritual* healing—for the sake of the character and discipline such trials produce. Paul's example is worth considering in this regard. From the scriptural record, he was among the most converted men to walk the earth, yet God did not use a miraculous healing to set him apart. Instead, God told him, "*My grace* [without physical healing; without a supernatural manifestation of power] is sufficient."

God had likewise to teach Elijah that His work, in general, is not in the dramatic or the spectacular—the fire, the earthquake, the tempest—but in the

"still, small voice" ([1 Kings 19:11-12](#)). This revelation differs from the common conception of a "hell-raising" prophet—the kind human nature desires to observe, the one that dazzles and impresses. Jesus says an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign ([Matthew 12:39](#); [16:4](#)). Thus, those who belong to God will recognize His voice ([John 10:27](#)), even if at times it seems to be still and small. The carnal man will look for the works and miracles, the evident manifestations of supernatural power, as a sign of where God is working. The dramatic and spectacular have their place, but it seems to be primarily for the benefit of the unconverted. The church should have little or no need for such displays since it is to walk by faith rather than sight.

Elijah's concerns—"I alone am left a prophet of the LORD" ([1 Kings 18:22](#)) and "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts . . . I alone am left" ([1 Kings 19:10](#), 14)—seem to have been the point of contention between him and God. Elijah exaggerates his own importance—that God was working through him alone—and simultaneously limits Him by alleging that He had no other options and could use no one else. God quickly proves him wrong by telling him to anoint his successor. Mankind—even those servants He uses powerfully—cannot limit where God works. As He must inform Elijah, He had reserved—sanctified—to Himself 7,000 faithful men, about whom the prophet had no knowledge.

So, where is God working? He is working in the lives of individuals He has called into a relationship with Him. One cannot measure or chart the evidence of such work on graphs. Instead, it will be seen in things like unity with God, and because of that common unifying Source, they will be united with each other ([John 17:20-23](#)). Our unity with other Christians—or lack thereof—will be a natural outgrowth of our unity with God.

Additionally, His work in the lives of His children, to whom He has given His Spirit, will be evident by the fruit that it produces: [love](#), [joy](#), [peace](#), [longsuffering](#), [kindness](#), [goodness](#), [faithfulness](#), gentleness, [self-control](#) ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). In the same context, Paul contrasts these fruits with divisive elements like ". . . contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, [heresies](#)" ([Galatians 5:20](#)). He then concludes by admonishing his readers to make use of God's Spirit:

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. *Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.* ([Galatians 5:25-26](#); emphasis ours)

The best indicator of where God is working is where we see His mind and character being inculcated and where His children are responding by allowing that mind—heart, spirit—to transform their lives as they take off the carnal man and put on the new. This is a miracle in itself. No further proof of supernatural power is needed.

- David C. Grabbe

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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