



"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](#), it is common for us to wonder when the really exciting things are going to 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 through *quantifying* people and events. However, the things that are truly spiritually important—things like character, conversion, humility, a willingness to yield to God, and a vast number of other intangibles—are things that cannot be humanly measured. We scan [the world](#) and the church for occurrences of significance, 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 there were only about a hundred and twenty names of disciples after the entire earthly ministry of [Jesus Christ](#) Himself ([Acts 1:15](#))! Mention is made in the epistles, not of booming congregations, but of *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 hand, [Satan](#) and his demons

can also put on miraculous displays of power. What is more, while miracles may be impressive, the record of the Bible 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, and 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](#)), He is working salvation ([Psalm 74:12](#)), and He is instilling belief in those whom He has called ([John 6:29](#)). These activities are all interconnected—they are all part of the same work. They all deal with bringing about a change in 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 very 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 that God is not doing anything.

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

God had to likewise 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 is very different from the common conception of a "hell-raising" prophet—the prophet that human nature desires, the one that dazzles and impresses. Yet it is an evil and adulterous generation that seeks a sign ([Matthew 12:39](#); [16:4](#)). 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 be looking for the works and miracles, the evident manifestations of supernatural power, as a sign of where God is working. There is a time for the dramatic and the spectacular, but it seems to be primarily for the benefit of the unconverted. The church should have little or no need for such displays, for it should be walking by faith rather than sight.

Elijah's concern that "[he] alone [was] left a prophet of the Lord" ([1 Kings 18:22](#)), and that "[he had] been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts ... [he] alone [was] left" ([1 Kings 19:10](#), 14) seems to have been the point of contention between God and Elijah. Elijah was exaggerating his own importance—that God was working through him alone—and simultaneously limiting God by alleging that God did not have any other options, and there was no one else God could use. God very quickly proved him wrong by telling him to go anoint his successor. Mankind—even those servants that He uses powerfully—cannot limit where God works. As God had to remind Elijah, He had reserved—sanctified—7,000 men who were faithful to Him, about which Elijah had no knowledge.

So, where is God working? He is working in the lives of those individuals whom He has called into a relationship with Him. The evidence of such work cannot be measured, or charted on graphs. Instead it will be seen in things like unity—people united 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](#)), which he contrasts with divisive elements such as "...contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, [heresies](#)..." ([Galatians 5:20](#)). Paul then concludes this lesson by admonishing his readers to make use of that 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](#))

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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