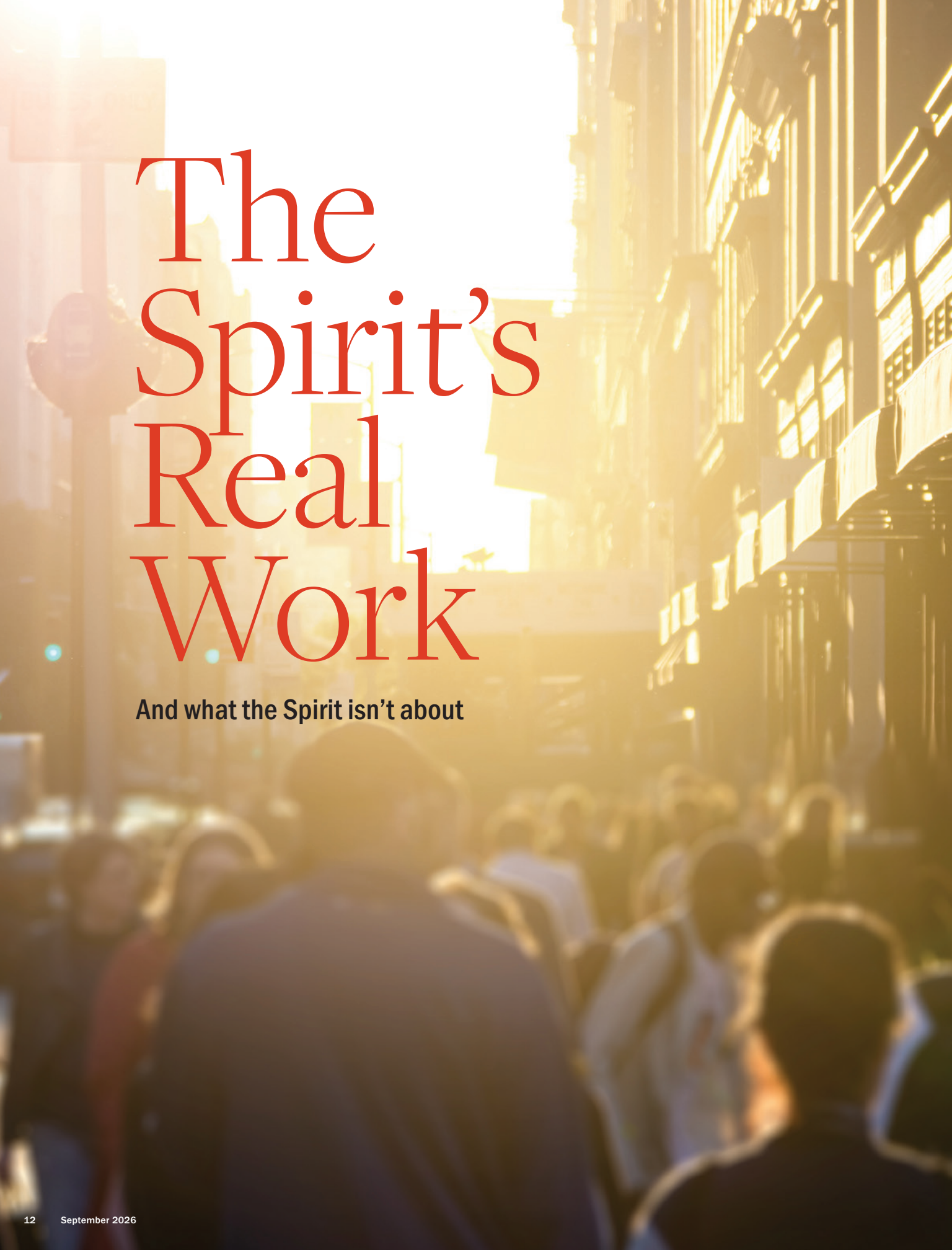




The Spirit's Real Work

And what the Spirit isn't about

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13, 14).

When I was a brand-new Adventist, a friend of mine encouraged me to visit some charismatic revival meetings that were taking place in a rented hall on the other side of the city. It occurred to me that if I wanted to share my faith with *her*, I might have to demonstrate a willingness to consider her point of view.

In hindsight, it became obvious that attending the meeting was not at all a good idea. The preacher delivered a message that surprised me. “This is where you’ll find the Holy Spirit,” he said, referring to the rented hall in which we were gathered. That was the first indication that something was terribly wrong: The Scriptures do not require you to attend a specific preacher’s meetings to find the Spirit of God—He is available wherever you happen to be. The speaker continued: “After about two or three days the blessing of the Spirit will wear off, and you’ll have to come back to get more.”

That was *another* major problem, biblically speaking: God has not appointed any individual as the sole dispenser of His blessings. The Spirit of God definitely shows up in meetings of believers; the dramatic outpouring on the gathering of believers in Acts 2 is proof of that. God *does* bless the preaching of individuals with the presence of His Spirit, but *this* particular preacher was not Peter, and *this* meeting was definitely not the day of Pentecost.

Then came the final blow, the words that caused me to pick up and quickly leave the auditorium. “To receive the Spirit,” the pastor continued, “you have to empty your mind and let it happen.” With that, people all around me started dropping to the ground, laughing uncontrollably. I had wandered into what some people called the “Toronto Blessing,” a global movement that had added the phenomenon of *holy laughter* to the more traditional charismatic belief in speaking in tongues. In time their movement would become even more dramatic, including “barking in the Spirit” while crawling around on all fours like an animal. There were even rumors of people attending the meetings in adult diapers so they could behave like babies in order to demonstrate a commitment to being “born again.” None of this, of course, can be found in the pages of the Bible.

What the Spirit Actually Does

Desperate to discover evidence that God knows them and wants them, some people fall into the trap of thinking that the so-called miracles

taking place in their meetings are evidence of salvation. You are not a complete Christian, some are told, unless you start speaking in a mysterious heavenly language.

Not only is there no biblical evidence for this—all of the incidents of tongue-speaking found in the New Testament involved real human languages—it is also a gross misunderstanding of the role of the Spirit. He does not announce His presence by meaningless tokens; His work is centered on bringing people to the foot of the cross. Jesus told His disciples:

“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. . . . He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:8-14).

The Holy Spirit is the presence of Christ in this world after His physical return to the heavenly sanctuary. His mission is Christ’s mission: “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

At His ascension Jesus told the disciples that they would conquer the world with the gospel. “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem,” He explained, “and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It would begin, He said, when the Holy Spirit granted them power. In other words, the Spirit was given to the church to empower *mission*.

On the day of Pentecost, as the crowd marveled over the miracle of hearing Peter in multiple languages, he explained what they were witnessing with these stunning words: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

We sometimes make the mistake of saying that the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples at Pentecost; this is not *quite* what happened. According to Peter, Jesus was the one who received the Spirit; it flowed over Him onto the church below. Jesus is the heart of all mission, and the Spirit serves *His* purposes in this world—not ours.

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Power for the Assignment

Centuries in advance of Pentecost, the psalmist anticipated what would happen the day that Peter led thousands to Christ. See if any of this passage seems familiar:

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the

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dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—life forevermore” (Ps. 133:1-3).

When else did brethren dwell together in unity? On the day of Pentecost, when they were all in “one accord” (Acts 2:1). Who was Aaron? The high priest. What does oil symbolize? The Holy Spirit. It is not insignificant that Peter told the crowd that Jesus had just been “exalted to the right hand of God” (verse 33). Many scholars suspect that the earthly day of Pentecost was the same day that Jesus was installed as our high priest in heaven, when He received the Spirit and shared it with His church to inaugurate its Spirit-led mission.

This means that *everything* about our work is to be led by Jesus from heaven’s sanctuary; we are in charge of almost nothing. The Spirit prompts us to follow Christ’s lead in reaching the lost, granting us gifts for the accomplishment of that mission. Nothing—absolutely nothing—is as important to Christ as saving the lost. You’ll remember that in His parable, Jesus described a shepherd who left behind 99 sheep to find just *one* that was lost. When that lost sheep was found, heaven dropped everything to celebrate.

All of heaven’s resources are devoted to reclaiming lost sinners, not to entertaining us. The Spirit of God was not given so believers can try to impress each other during a church service with apparently miraculous abilities. The Spirit was not sent to enable TV preachers to promise healing in exchange for a financial contribution. He was not sent to cause people

to giggle uncontrollably or utter nonsensical sounds. He was sent to help us accomplish the one and only thing God has given us to do.

“In a special sense,” Ellen White reminds us, “Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”¹

Nothing else. If we are focused on something else, that’s a distraction. If we’re attempting to summon the Spirit for anything else, we are asking for the wrong thing. The job we’ve been given is a monumental task—in fact, it is humanly impossible. We often find it overwhelming when God shows us His final message for the world, the three angels’ messages, and then asks us to go to the nations and preach it. It seems like a completely impossible mission—until we remember that the assignment comes with the certain promise of power. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses” (Acts 1:8).

Historically, every step forward in the cause of Christ has been powered by the Holy Spirit. He uses His church—enabling and empowering us—so that we can meaningfully align with the highest priorities of Christ.

The real proof that the Spirit is visiting a congregation? Mission. Souls. Transformed lives. Church members growing in faith because they see the way that God takes their humble efforts and multiplies them. “The only way to grow in grace,” inspired counsel tells us, “is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us—to engage, to the extent of our ability, in helping and blessing those who need the help we can give them.”²

It’s not *one* of the ways to grow; it’s the *only* way. By all means, pray for the final and glorious outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to send the latter rain; after all, it’s a promise from God that He invites us to claim. But then be ready to share Jesus, because that’s what He’s going to urge you to do, the same way He empowered the early rain in Peter’s day. **✠**

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 19.

² Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 80.