

# SHOULD WE EXPECT MORE FROM THE SPIRIT?

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Signs and wonders accompanied Christ's first disciples. Should we expect the same evidence of the Spirit's power today? A growing number of people are saying yes.

In the following pages, Kurt De Haan responds to those who are caught in the difficult tension of wanting to believe that "all things are possible" without being presumptuous before God or gullible before man.

It is our prayer that this booklet will help us to be ready for anything God wants to do, while alerting us to the danger of those who claim miracles that are hard to see or prove. May we not be a generation that has a sign and doesn't believe it or one that wants a sign and doesn't need it.

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Cover Photo: R. Watts/West Light

Printed in USA

## WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

Something was wrong but I couldn't figure out what it was. The family station wagon would hardly start—if at all. I had bought a new battery just a few months earlier, and a rebuilt alternator the previous year. I drove to see an auto mechanic. After checking out the car, he concluded that the problem was a slightly loose belt. He tightened it, charged the battery, and gave me a bill.

A few weeks later, though, the car again had problems starting. It just didn't have starting power. Because of a recently blown fuse, I figured that the problem was a short circuit. So I pulled fuses and checked wiring, but no obvious problem surfaced.

Back to the auto mechanic I went. This time he did a few more tests. My

guess had been wrong. And so was his first diagnosis. This time he discovered the real culprit—a defective battery. Even though it was fairly new, it wouldn't hold enough power to keep my car operating properly. It had to be replaced. And what a difference a good battery made! The power was back!

Some days we just can't seem to get started doing what we know we should do for the Lord. We may know that the Bible says the Holy Spirit indwells Christ's followers, but we may not sense the difference His presence makes. When we read the New Testament, we may conclude that we lack the kind of spiritual power that surged through the early church.

It may be that we, family, or friends are struggling with emotional, physical, or spiritual problems that just don't seem to be getting any

better. We see believers who seem to be losing the fight against the forces of evil. Our society is deteriorating. Maybe we are frustrated because our witness and service lack power. Our times of worship may be routines mired in tired traditions. Our faith may seem ineffective in relating to the real world of child-training, strained marriage relationships, temptations, addictions, injustices, debilitating illnesses, and the pressures of the workplace.

Is there more to the Christian life than what you and I are experiencing? Probably. Even the spiritually mature apostle Paul longed for a deeper and greater relationship with Jesus (Phil. 3:10). And he prayed that fellow believers would know Christ better and experience more fully the power of God's Spirit in their lives (Eph. 1:17-19).

Many individuals and groups today are telling us how to live more powerful Christian lives. But not all of them have a solid biblical basis. We need to be discerning, careful that we don't accept "quick fixes" that don't get at the root of

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*Many believers  
long for an elusive  
"something more."*

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the problem. We certainly don't need a diagnosis that harms instead of helps.

To avoid the extremes of either becoming content with an anemic, passive Christianity, or seeking a type of power and spiritual experience God never promised to give us, we need to know what the Bible says we can expect from the Holy Spirit.

## WHAT MORE DO WE NEED?

I've heard or read similar stories over and over again: Followers of Jesus tell how they came to a point in their life when they longed for a more intimate relationship with the Lord, for more meaningful worship, or for greater effectiveness in their service or evangelism. Then they found "something more." What they found has many different forms.

Some find what they are looking for in what we might consider a cult. There they may discover strong leadership, a sense of community, a unique identity, and fresh "revelations" to supplement (or even overrule) the Bible.

Even within orthodox Christianity, the search for more has led people in different directions. One new denomination promotes

traditional forms of worship they claim have been handed down from the early church. They find greater security in a very structured organization, predictable worship, and strong authority.

Still other believers desire to break free of tradition and allow greater spontaneity and individual expression. Among these people are those who seek dramatic experiences in which they mystically sense the Holy Spirit's power at work.

This is a crucial topic that we need to understand. After all, how we relate to the Holy Spirit is the heart of the Christian life. The New Testament emphasizes the importance of the Spirit's work in our lives. For example:

- "It is the Spirit who gives life" (Jn. 6:63).
- "[The Father] will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you

forever—the Spirit of truth; . . . He dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn. 14:16-17).

- “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8).
- “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).
- “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Rom. 8:9).
- “If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:13-14).
- “The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we

ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:26).

- “We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12).

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***Our relationship  
to the Spirit is  
the heart of the  
Christian life.***

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- “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you” (1 Cor. 6:19).
- “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Cor. 12:7).
- “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

- “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).
- “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).
- “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25 NIV).
- “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).
- “[Pray] in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18).
- “We know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 Jn. 3:24).
- “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:4).

As you can see, the Holy Spirit has a vital role in our lives. We need a greater appreciation of His power in us. We would be foolish not to be open and submissive

to His work in us individually and as churches.

But how does the Spirit work? Do we sometimes expect too little from Him, or more than God has clearly promised He would do? By going to either extreme we may find ourselves actually hindering the Spirit we think we are honoring.

As we examine this topic of what we should expect from the Holy Spirit, we will look at four issues that have been the focus of discussion and even controversy. We will seek to answer these four questions:

1. Do we need more signs?
2. Do we need more revelations?
3. Do we need more healings?
4. Do we need more weapons?

## MORE SIGNS?



Can you imagine the look on the faces of the 5,000-plus people who saw Jesus multiply five loaves and two fish? (Jn. 6). What an incredible sight that must have been!

It was an awesome display of the Holy Spirit's power working through Jesus, backing His claim to be the promised Messiah.

Jesus' 3-year ministry was punctuated by many miracles. He demonstrated power over nature by:

- calming a storm (Mt. 8:23-27)

- walking on water (Mt. 14:25)
- multiplying food (Mt. 14:15-21; 15:32-38)
- pulling a coin from a fish's mouth (Mt. 17:24-27)
- causing a fig tree to wither (Mt. 21:18-22)
- catching fish (Lk. 5:4-11; Jn. 21:1-11)
- turning water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11)

Jesus healed people of:

- leprosy (Mt. 8:2-4; Lk. 17:11-19)
- paralysis (Mt. 8:5-13; 9:1-8; Jn. 5:1-9)
- fever (Mt. 8:14-17; Jn. 4:46-51)
- demon possession (Mt. 8:28-34; 9:32-33; 15:21-28; 17:14-18; Mk. 1:23-26)
- chronic bleeding (Mt. 9:20-22)
- blindness (Mt. 9:27-31; 12:22; 20:29-34; Mk. 8:22-26)
- a shriveled hand (Mt. 12:10-13)

- deafness (Mk. 7:31-37)
- crippled limbs  
(Lk. 13:11-13)
- dropsy (Lk. 14:1-4)
- a severed ear  
(Lk. 22:50-51)

Jesus also brought dead people back to life (Mt. 9:18-25; Lk. 7:11-15; Jn. 11:1-44). And He Himself rose from the grave in the power of the Spirit (Mt. 28; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:19-20).

**Why did Jesus do so many miracles?** Miracles occurred throughout biblical history but mostly in clusters during times when God was revealing significant new information and authenticating the messengers. Those major periods were: (1) the Exodus and the establishment of Israel as a nation under the leadership of Moses and Joshua, (2) the time of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and (3) the coming of Jesus and the establishment of the church through the apostles.

The signs and wonders Jesus performed gave ample evidence that He was who He claimed to be. As the One who did signs and wonders, the One who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, the One who lived a perfect life, the One who rose from the grave, and the One who will return to set up His kingdom on earth, Jesus is supremely worthy of our complete trust.

John ended his Gospel with the reason why he documented Jesus' miracles. He wrote:

*Jesus did many other signs . . . ; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (Jn. 20:30-31).*

**How did the apostles duplicate Jesus' ministry?** On various occasions Jesus empowered others to carry out His ministry. He sent

out His 12 disciples on a special mission to the Jews and gave them the power to cast out demons and heal diseases (Lk. 9:1-6). Later, Jesus appointed 70 others, sending them out two by two to the cities where He was about to go (Lk. 10). They were to proclaim that the kingdom of God was near (v.9), they were to heal the sick (v.9), and they were given authority to defeat demons (vv.17-19).

The book of Acts records several instances in which the apostles were involved in healing and casting out demons (3:2-16; 5:12-16; 9:36-42; 20:6-12; 28:1-6). These miracles served to give credence to the apostles' message. Only two non-apostles were said to have performed miracles: the specially commissioned "deacons," Stephen and Philip (Acts 6:5,8; 8:5-13).

The apostles had a unique function in the

establishing of the early church. Ephesians 2:20 states that the church was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." The apostle Paul spoke of miracles as being the mark of a true apostle. As he described his own ministry, he wrote, "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12).

Some religious groups are claiming that all believers today have the same mission the apostles did. But nowhere in the New Testament do we find believers in general performing the types of dramatic miracles of the apostles. The apostles were uniquely commissioned for the founding stage of the church.

**How did the early church experience the miraculous power of God's Spirit?**

In addition to the work of the 12 disciples of Christ and the 70 special ambassadors, Christ gifted certain people in the early church to carry on special ministries. These gifts of the Spirit are included among the list of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. The ones that cause the most debate today are “gifts of healings,” “working of miracles,” “prophecy,” “tongues,” and “interpretation of tongues” (vv.9-10).

Some Christians say that these gifts are no longer active in the church today, that they died out in the first century because their purpose had been served. Others believe that these gifts fell into disuse because the church quickly became secularized and in need of revival. Those who say that

such gifts are valid today point to periods of recent history in which believers felt they had experienced a special working of the Spirit—whether healings, prophecies, or tongues-speaking.

In the middle of the second century, some believers, longing for the experiences of the apostolic church, reacted against a growing formalism that seemed to stifle church life. A man named Montanus, who lived in central Asia Minor, thought he had the answer to the church's problems.

According to historian Howard Vos, the Montanist movement emphasized special spiritual gifts, and in some areas required strict self-denial in an effort to please God. Vos states, “Though generally orthodox, its emphasis on such spiritual gifts as continuance of prophetic revelation and

its requirement of ascetic practices as if they were truths of revelation caused it to be condemned. The church declared that biblical revelation had come to an end and that special spiritual gifts were no longer operative” (*Beginnings In Church History*, Moody Press, 1977, p.39).

Some movements in the church today have much in common with Montanism. They emphasize the continuance or revival of all the gifts of the Spirit. They focus on demonstrations of God’s power—especially in physical healings and the deliverance of people from demonic influence. They tell us that to evangelize effectively we need dramatic displays. They encourage ecstatic experiences as evidences of the Spirit’s presence. They want to be more open to direct revelations and Spirit-given impressions.

**What gifts do we need today?** This is a tough question to answer because I’m sure that neither you nor I would ever want to be guilty of putting any limitations on what we think God can or wants to do. Another problem is that it’s difficult to verify the claims of those who say they possess some of the more spectacular gifts.

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***“The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.”***  
**I Corinthians 12:7**

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We also have to keep in mind that the Bible does not appear to give us a strict cataloging of all the abilities that He will bestow on believers for the good of the church. The lists of spiritual gifts are given in only three

places in the New Testament (see Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:8-10,28-30; Eph. 4:11), and the items mentioned vary a great deal. There is no indication that we should adopt any one of these lists as a once-for-all catalog of how the Spirit will work in every generation.

Among the gifts are those that had a definite purpose in the founding and establishing of the early church: apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). Tongues-speaking and prophecy also had a role in assisting the early believers before they had an established collection of New Testament writings.

Other gifts, such as teaching, helping, serving, showing mercy, exhorting, administrating, exercising wisdom or spiritual knowledge, giving, evangelizing, and pastoring seem to have a timeless application throughout

church history. And these are commonly expressed in churches today.

Some gifts, such as miracles and healings, also seemed to play a crucial role in the founding of the church, and have found only sporadic expression in the history of the church. (We will examine the topic of healing on pages 21-25.)

**What signs of the Holy Spirit's activity should we expect to see?** Before Jesus left this earth, He announced that after He was gone He would send the Spirit (Jn. 14:16-17; 16:7; Acts 1:4-8). During this period between the first and second comings of Christ, the Holy Spirit is actively working to bring conviction of sin, to give spiritual life, and to assist believers in living in a way that gives glory to Jesus. The Spirit's primary mission is to carry out Christ's orders (Jn. 16:12-15).

We don't need dramatic "signs and wonders" to mature or minister. Church services should not be a setting for out-of-control experiences under the guise of "allowing the Spirit to do His work." Our Lord is a God of order (1 Cor. 14:40), and He produces the fruit of self-control (Gal. 5:23).

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***"An evil and  
adulterous  
generation seeks  
after a sign."  
Jesus (Mt. 12:39)***

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When people asked Jesus for a sign, He told them that "an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign" (Mt. 12:39). They were curious but not ready to repent and follow Him. The same problem exists today among believers who want a show of

supernatural power but who have little desire to involve themselves in the spiritual self-discipline necessary for personal growth.

As the gospel truth is introduced into cultures dominated by demonic activity, God may display His power dramatically. Missionaries sometimes recount dramatic "power encounters" as the gospel is introduced into pagan cultures. But this is the exception, not a normal everyday experience. We would be wrong to deny the possibility that God could perform a dramatic miracle to give credence to a missionary, but we would be just as wrong to expect such situations to occur regularly.

In the days preceding Christ's return, we can expect signs from false prophets and teachers who want people to think of them as "ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor.

11:13-15). Jesus warned, “False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mt. 24:24).

**What if I don’t have a dramatic spiritual experience?** Despite all the protests to the contrary, those who promote the experiences of tongues, healings, prophetic utterances, words of knowledge, and ecstatic feelings do exert an intimidating force on those who do not share their experiences or who question their validity. I personally have felt intimidated as I have read books and listened to speakers who promote unusual experiences.

The apostle Paul warned the Corinthian believers against false teachers who were trying to force them into submission with incredible claims of

spiritual authority (2 Cor. 11:1-15). They claimed to be superior even to Paul! The apostle sarcastically called them “super-apostles” (v.5 NIV). He was concerned that the believers might be led astray from the simple truth of the gospel.

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*“I am afraid  
that . . . your minds  
may somehow be  
led astray from  
your sincere and  
pure devotion  
to Christ.”*

**Paul (2 Cor. 11:3 NIV)**

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We would be naive to think that we do not face the same threat today. That is why we must carefully examine our faith, evaluate what we are being told, and test all things by what God has said in His sure and

trustworthy Word. We would be wise to evaluate all teaching by the sure Word of God, as the Bereans did. They “searched the Scriptures” to see if what the apostle Paul preached to them was true (Acts 17:11).

## **MORE REVELATIONS?**



Have you ever tried to bake a cake without a recipe? Program a video cassette recorder (VCR) without an instruction booklet? Sew a dress without a pattern? Train children without some advice? Find an address in an unfamiliar city without a

map? Live the Christian life without being taught how?

In order to know God and to live in a way that pleases Him, we need information. Directions for knowing God don't come built-in when we are born. In fact, we wouldn't know enough about the Lord to appreciate His greatness, our need of salvation, and how to find acceptance with Him if it were not for His self-disclosure down through history through special appearances, angelic messengers, prophets, apostles, and the collection of inspired writings we call the Bible.

Is God continuing to author more Scripture? Is He speaking through modern-day Elijahs or Jeremiahs? Is He giving special impressions to some people for their own good or the good of their church? How much new information is He disclosing? When people stand up

during our meetings and give the rest of the congregation a direct “word from the Lord” concerning a vote on an annual budget or building project or calling a new pastor, should we believe them?

The answers to the above questions are not as neat and tidy as we might like them to be. But I believe the Bible gives us some guidelines by which to judge the validity of modern-day claims.

### **Does the Bible tell us enough about God?**

According to the apostle Paul, the written Word contains everything we need for knowing God and living in a way that pleases Him. Paul wrote:

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly*

*equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).*

The Bible gives us doctrinal truth, points out heresy, corrects wrong behavior, and tells us how to live in a way that pleases the Lord. Such truths, Paul said, are sufficient to bring us to spiritual maturity and thoroughly equip us for life. Our real problem today is not a lack of information but a lack of reading and obeying the clear instruction He has already given to us.

Yet from time to time throughout history, certain individuals and groups have claimed that they received additional information directly from God. One of the earliest examples of this was the sect founded by Montanus, whom we referred to earlier (p.10). As early as the second century, people felt a need for new revelation. And because the collection of New Testament Scriptures had not yet been

formally ratified and recognized, many people were unsure whether God was continuing to speak through prophets.

According to Harold O. J. Brown, Montanus “considered himself the last great prophet, who would be immediately followed by the establishment of the heavenly Jerusalem.” He thought he had a special prophetic gift, which he shared with two prophetesses, Maximilla and Prisca. Brown explains, “The Montanists . . . were orthodox with respect to their doctrine of God . . . and merely wanted to intensify it by adding their new revelation” (*Heresies*, Doubleday, 1984, pp.66-67).

Within the Christian church today, among those who profess strong faith in the orthodox truths about God, there are believers who think (as did Montanus) that they are experiencing an

outpouring of the Spirit in the last days. But Montanism was declared heretical, and the sufficiency of Scripture was emphasized. Should we do less today?

The many cultic groups that have grown up since the first century have also claimed additional special revelation from God. Though they use the Bible and talk about Christ, they add their own authoritative teachings, which often contradict the Bible.

**How can we test someone who claims to be a prophet?**

In Deuteronomy 18, the Lord gave tests of a true prophet:

*The prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, “How shall we know the word which the*

*Lord has not spoken?”—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him (Dt. 18:20-22).*

Do modern-day prophets pass this test? Do their prophecies come true? Or are they as reliable as astrologers? By their own admission, many modern-day prophets avoid the 100-percent-accuracy test by redefining prophecy for today. They say that the gift of prophecy is less authoritative, so the Old Testament test does not apply. And when a

“prophet” speaks inaccurately, his defenders say that God’s messages sometimes get garbled by the messenger. But this redefining seems to be an attempt to justify the current craving for more words from God even though modern prophets have a poor track record.

Neil Babcox was the pastor of a church in Illinois that believed that God was speaking through believers in modern-day prophecy. In fact, he sought the gift and believed that God was speaking through him and others at various times for the building up of the local group of believers. But then, Babcox writes, “What had started as a romantic

**Prophet**—one who spoke by direct inspiration on God’s behalf, communicating the Spirit-led message (2 Pet. 1:21).

**Prophecy**—the message/ words of a prophet. Depending on the situation, this message took the form of a prediction, direction, correction, or encouragement.

**Gift Of Prophecy**—In the New Testament church, this was evident in foretelling the future and a special ability to edify believers by conveying authoritative messages from the Lord.

venture, an idealistic quest for spiritual gifts, was slowly, imperceptibly changing. Into what I wasn't sure. All I knew was that the excitement and romance of prophesying was turning into an uneasy sense that the prophecies I heard, including my own, were hardly worthy of the name. The idea that they were the words of the living God was beginning to seem painfully ludicrous" (*A Search For Charismatic Reality*, Multnomah Press, 1985, p.52).

Then Babcox says, "In my case, there were four simple words that played a decisive role in changing my heart: *thus saith the Lord*. To me, these were the most unsettling words. . . . I could not help but think that if the prophecies spoken in our church were actually related to the prophecies recorded in Scripture, then they were distant relatives indeed. . . . What evidence was there

that we were not just following our own spirits instead of the Spirit of God? I could find no evidence in the Bible that prophecies were communicated by mere intuition or subjective impressions. And yet, in nearly all cases this is how ours were received. And these impressions and intuitions could not be authenticated in any kind of objective sense" (Ibid, pp.53-55).

In sharp contrast, the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel had no question that the Lord was speaking through him, and he condemned the phony prophets. He said, "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, "Hear the word of the Lord!" Thus says the Lord God: "Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow

their own spirit and have seen nothing!”” (Ezek. 13:1-3).

**Should we expect direct messages from God via audible voices or impressions?** Has God promised to speak to us in this manner? Several books have been written recently about hearing the voice of God through subjective impressions. Much of what they say is commendable when it comes to nurturing a close relationship with Christ and depending on the indwelling Spirit. What the authors have to say about the need for meditation on Scripture and heartfelt prayer is often excellent. But then they take a leap away from what the Bible says we can expect by saying that we all can experience intimate conversations with God. According to the examples some authors give, God gives instructions on such matters as how to fix leaky plumbing

and how to deal with specific child-training issues.

Undoubtedly, God can speak to us through impressions. He can guide our thoughts so that we know what to say in witnessing situations. He can help us to find solutions to knotty problems. He can guide our ministry efforts. But nowhere in the Bible are we promised the kind of impressions that give us the right to tell others, “The Lord said” you should do this or that. Let’s be careful that we do not put words in His mouth. Do we realize what an awesome claim it is to profess to speak for God?

Let’s not be intimidated into accepting every self-proclaimed prophet just because we don’t want to be guilty of silencing the Lord. When the Lord speaks, we will have no doubt about it. True prophecy welcomes examination and will stand the test (1 Th. 5:21; 1 Jn. 4:1).

## MORE HEALINGS?



I was flipping across the channels on my TV set when I noticed a heavily perspiring preacher roaming a stage in a large auditorium. I sat back and listened to what was going on.

After pausing to wipe his brow and pat his neck with a large white handkerchief, the speaker mentioned to the audience that he felt God wanted him to ask any people who had cancer to come to the front of the auditorium because God wanted to heal them. Then he turned to the camera and said that anyone in the

auditorium or watching TV who believed that God would want a person to suffer from cancer was horribly wrong. His God, he said, would never purposely send suffering into a person's life. He even said he would never serve a God who would do such a thing. His God, he bellowed, was the God who heals our sicknesses and who will heal our cancers if we just believe and ask Him to. The telecast ended as he laid his hands on each person and prayed for healing. He implied that they would be healed—no doubt about it.

What do you think? Was he acting in faith or parading in presumption? Let's examine some passages of Scripture and answer some crucial questions as we try to arrive at a perspective that above all recognizes God's power and plan for our health in this world.

## **Why do we get sick?**

**Why do we die?** Should we expect God to spare us from sickness and death because Jesus died on the cross for our sins? I find it interesting that some preachers who say God wants us to enjoy good health are able to separate sickness from death. I never hear a person say that you won't die if you simply ask God to keep you alive. Yet the same logic is applied to sickness. It is said that we need not be sick if we simply ask God for healing.

To deal with this issue, we need to step back and review why people get sick and die. In the beginnings of human history, Adam and Eve didn't have to worry about the flu or about buying life insurance. They would have lived forever in perfect health if they had not disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit of the one forbidden tree.

But when they took of the forbidden fruit, they were destined to die. The effects of their willful act of sin reverberated through every atom of the universe. Thereafter, weeds, pain, and death would be an inescapable part of human existence.

Throughout the Old Testament we find sickness and death. On occasion God miraculously healed (Num. 12:10-15; 21:6-9; 1 Ki. 13:3-6; Is. 38:21), and a few times He even raised a person from the dead (1 Ki. 17:17-23; 2 Ki. 4:32-37; 13:21).

**Why were there so many healings during the time of Jesus and the apostles?** When we come to the New Testament Gospels, we are struck by the abundance of healings that Jesus and His disciples performed. It seems that wherever Jesus went He preached the good news

of the kingdom and healed people.

Signs and wonders accompanied the ministry of Jesus and were the marks of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). They were never promised to believers at large. As the later books of the New Testament were written, we do not read much about the spectacular and miraculous. The outpouring of miracles that accompanied Jesus' ministry and the initial extension of the gospel into new lands seemed to taper off. The later books of the New Testament seem rather uneventful compared to the drama and exciting accounts of the miraculous in the early years of the church as the apostles ministered. Never again in the history of the church has any period rivaled the incredible miracles during the time of Christ and the apostles.

The contrast between the so-called healing ministries

of today and the healing ministry of Jesus and the apostles is sharp. Most healings today seem to be of the psychosomatic, hard-to-prove variety. That does not mean that God does not heal today—He certainly can and does—but we need to be cautious about the claims of healers.

We have no reason to expect that in this life we will escape all sickness or that we will not die. We are living with unglorified bodies in a world that has been devastated by the effects of sin and the work of Satan. Any physical healing that God chooses to give is merely a temporary solution, because everyone eventually dies of something.

**Can't we do something about sickness and suffering?**

Yes we can—and we should. We should pray for the sick and strive for health in all areas of personal life and in

our society. We should not hesitate to ask the Lord to grant us relief from suffering. Unfortunately, we are often too reluctant to believe that God has the power to heal. We pray for the skill of the doctors, for the effectiveness of the medicine, and for comfort for the sick person, but we tend to neglect to ask God for more direct restoration to health.

James, near the close of his short letter, has some crucial words for us to consider. He wrote:

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will*

*be forgiven (Jas. 5:13-15).*

The meaning and application of these verses have been debated by Bible scholars, but we can be confident of the following principles:

1. If you are suffering or sick, you should pray.
2. Ask trusted, mature believers to pray for you.
3. Believe that God has the power to heal you if that is what He chooses to do.
4. As you pray and talk to others about your illness, it is appropriate to evaluate your relationship to the Lord to see if your illness is due to the effects of deliberate sin and God's chastening. If so, you must confess your sin.

What do we know for sure? The RBC publication *Does God Want Me Well?* (Q0104) offers four answers (pp.7-17):

1. "God will make you

well.” Either in this life or the next, God will relieve your suffering (1 Cor. 15; 2 Cor. 4:16–5:1).

2. “God hurts when you hurt.” This truth is demonstrated powerfully in the life and death of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus endured physical pain and suffering. He knows very well what you and I are going through (Heb. 4:15-16).
3. “God knows why you’re suffering.” Even though Job didn’t understand why he had to endure incredible hardships and physical pain, God knew. Sometimes we have disobeyed basic rules of good health. Or we could be sick because we are living in sin, and God is disciplining us (1 Cor. 11:29-30; Heb. 12:6). God does not promise

anyone a suffering-free life. And if He allows pain in our lives, we can be sure He has good reasons.

4. “God is in control.” This doesn’t mean that God is the direct cause of every injury or disease. Sometimes Satan is to blame, as are natural laws that God has built into the universe.

No matter what God chooses to do—whether He chooses to heal or not—we can be sure He will give us the grace to handle whatever He decides. The apostle Paul, after praying repeatedly that the Lord would remove an ailment from him, said that the Lord reassuringly told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

## MORE WEAPONS?



The current movements that emphasize signs, new revelations, and healings also often speak a great deal about spiritual warfare. Here again we need discernment.

Satan would have us go to extremes. Either we think too little about him, or we become preoccupied with him. Either we think we are out of range of his influence, or we imagine ourselves under constant bombardment. Either we are quick to blame Satan for emotional or physical problems, or we don't see him behind any problems.

Either we think we're incapable of dealing with him, or we think he's afraid of us. Either we think we have no power against him, or we imagine that we have the power within ourselves to bad-mouth and bully him. But what does the Bible say?

### **How do human beings relate to the world of spirit beings?**

The Bible says very little about the way we interact with angels and demons. It leaves little doubt that the spirit world and our physical world are interwoven in one reality, and that what happens in one realm influences what goes on in another. But God hasn't given us much information about the unseen world.

We do get glimpses of the angelic world as we read through the Bible. In the Old Testament, angels are often mentioned as the messengers of God and the ones who do God's bidding. And again in

the New Testament we read of good angels as working invisibly to accomplish God's purposes in a world also inhabited by a host of wicked spirits under Satan's leadership.

The apostle Paul recognized the reality of the spirit world's influence on this world when he wrote,

*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).*

And on the positive side, the author of Hebrews recognized the good angels as "spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Heb. 1:14). God's holy angels work for our good.

Bestselling Christian novels have dealt imaginatively with

what the interaction might be between our world and the dark world of spirit beings. The books may be good literature, but they are not intended to be a source of good theology. And yet I have heard people talk as if those novels are accurate depictions of how the human and spirit worlds collide.

Then there are some religious leaders who suspect that demons lurk behind nearly every emotional or physical problem. They tell how they have conversed with demons and have cast out many demons from a person over several sessions.

However, except for the direct encounters that Jesus and the apostles had with demons as they cast them out of people, the Bible does not speak of such dramatic visible or audible interaction. It is significant that the letters of the New Testament do not contain instructions for

exorcising demons, nor does the New Testament ever suggest that believers can be controlled by demons.

Bible teacher R. C. Sproul discusses this issue in his book *Pleasing God*. He writes, “Within Christian circles there has arisen a new concern for ministries of deliverance. Some of these deliverance ministries have developed a bizarre and radically unbiblical view of demon possession and deliverance. . . . I have listened to tapes from well-known deliverance ministers in which they teach the signs of a departure of the demon. A sigh, for example, indicates the departure of the demon of tobacco. . . . There are demons for every conceivable sin. Not only must each one of these demons be exorcised, but there are necessary procedures to keep them from returning on a daily basis.

“I know of no polite way

to respond to this kind of teaching. It is unmitigated nonsense. Nowhere in sacred Scripture is there to be found the slightest hint of this kind of demonic diagnosis. These teachings cross the line into the sphere of magic and result in serious harm to believers who are duped by them. Sadly, too much concern with Satan and demons means that we focus less of our attention on Christ. That must please Satan, though it certainly is not pleasing to God. . . .

“All this emphasis on Satan and demons tends to distract us from another very real menace, our own sin. . . . We cannot pass the blame and responsibility for our sin to a controlling demon. . . . We can say that we are tempted or incited or seduced by Satan, but not that we are controlled or coerced by him” (*Pleasing God*, Tyndale House, 1988, pp.90-92).

## **How do Satan and his forces oppose God and His people?**

Satan is our adversary (1 Pet. 5:8).

His demons blind unbelievers to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 12:9). They influence people to make bad choices (1 Chr. 21:1; Mt. 16:22-23; Lk. 22:3-4; Acts 5:3). They take control of some people (Mt. 8:28; 17:14-21).

They somehow rule over and influence many national leaders (Dan. 10:10-21).

They sometimes produce sickness and disease (Job 2:6-8; Mt. 9:32-33; 12:22; 17:15-19; Lk. 8:27-29; 13:11-17). They are the authors of heresy (1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 11:3,14; 1 Jn. 4:1-3).

## **What can we do in the spiritual battle?**

Instead of inviting us to initiate direct confrontations with evil spirits, the Bible calls for us to choose allegiance to God and use the powerful spiritual

weapons listed in Ephesians 6.

*Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit (vv.14-18).*

The armor includes:

**The belt of truth**—We must know the truth, affirm our belief in the truth, speak the truth, and respond to life's problems and challenges with the truth.

**The breastplate of righteousness**—We must choose to do what is right in God's eyes.

***The shoes of the gospel of peace***—This may refer to the reassurance that we are at peace with God, or perhaps it refers to readiness for action in His service at any time.

***The shield of faith***—We are to live by faith, continually choosing to trust God and not believe the lies of the enemy.

***The helmet of salvation***—We need to remember that our salvation is secure.

***The sword of the Spirit***—We must know and use God's Word.

***The power of prayer***—Although not a piece of armor as such, Paul emphasized the necessity of ongoing prayer. Through prayer we show our allegiance and submission to the Lord, and we lay hold of the strength that He desires to give to us.

In addition to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6, the

apostle Peter said:

*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world (1 Pet. 5:8-9).*

Peter encouraged believers to stand firm and resist the devil. He knew all too well the powerful influence of Satan. Shortly after Jesus told Peter that Satan would "sift [him] like wheat" (Lk. 22:31), he denied the Lord three times (vv.55-63).

James gave us similar instruction in his brief letter. He said, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (4:7). James didn't give us an elaborate formula for fighting Satan's attacks. He didn't tell us to bad-mouth

Satan or engage in the recitation of some key Christian phrases. He simply said to “resist” and Satan will flee.

After Jesus had spent 40 days in the wilderness, the devil came to Him and offered several temptations (Mt. 4:1-11). Jesus didn’t do anything spectacular. He just quoted Scripture. He stated His allegiance to the will of the Father, reaffirmed the truth, and resisted Satan’s lies.

Some may say that certain methods of dealing with demons must be right because they seem to work. But pragmatism is not proof. A method is not right simply because it seems to work. Even non-Christian religions and cults apparently have had success in casting out demons. One example found in the Bible is in Acts 19:13-16.

With the power of the Holy Spirit within us, we

need to submit to God, trust in His strength, and let the devil know that we want nothing to do with him.

### **What are the basic truths to remember?**

By way of summary, here are some principles:

- Rely on the Word of God.
- Don’t derive your theology from experiences or what seems to work.
- Recognize the danger of attempting to communicate with demons.
- Recall that “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4).
- Submit to the Lord.
- Resist Satan and he will flee.
- Pray always.
- Put on the armor God has provided.

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For further study, ask for the booklet, *What In The World Is Satan Doing?* (Q1001).

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

**I**n this age of the Spirit, God wants to work powerfully in and through us. He wants to transform us and make us more like Christ. His goal is to make us into Spirit-led, Spirit-filled ambassadors, helping people to find the liberating truth of the gospel and the joy of living for Christ. Individually and as churches we need to demonstrate the reality of the Spirit's power to transform lives.

To live that kind of life, though, we first need to be connected to the One who is the source of power, through faith in Jesus as our Savior and Lord (Jn. 3). When we accept His gift of forgiveness, the Spirit comes to live within us (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9,15-16).

But that's not the end of the story. We do not live

happily ever after without struggles and effort. We must daily say no to sin and yes to God (Rom. 6:11-13), submitting to the Lord and asking for the help of the indwelling Spirit of God (Eph. 5:18).

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*We can expect  
great things  
if we are  
depending on  
the Spirit.*

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If we are daily depending on His Spirit, we will find the "something more" that we've been looking for. We can expect to experience the powerful work of the Spirit, finding joy and fulfillment as we learn from God's Word, asking in faith for both health and grace to endure, and depending on our spiritual armor to protect us from the evil one.

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