

The *iFollow* Discipleship Series



Rain, Wind and Fire

Understanding the work of the Holy Spirit

by
Seth Pierce

***i*FOLLOW**

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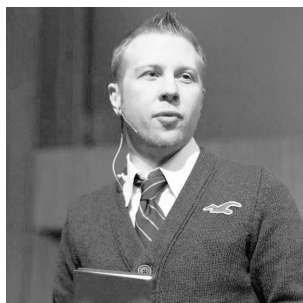
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About the Author



Seth Pierce grew up a Seventh-day Adventist preacher's kid for the first part of his life. After his parents divorced, he became spiritually indifferent and self-satisfied until he encountered Jesus at a large Charismatic megachurch during his sophomore year of high school. During the rest of his high school years, as he honed his ministry skills in drama, music, and peer ministry, he was asked to teach the youth class at a new Adventist church plant. As he taught Adventist doctrine on Sabbath, then participated in Charismatic worship on Sundays, he became conflicted.

The spiritual dissonance eventually led him away from the Charismatic church and back to the Adventist church of his childhood. He entered Union College after high school and pursued his B.A. in Theology. He graduated in 2003 and married his wife, Angela, a month later. After pastoring for two years in Wichita, Kansas, Seth attended the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University where he received his Master of Divinity in 2007—right as his first child, Madeline, was born.

The Pierces moved to Omaha, Nebraska, for nearly four years where they pastored a three-church district. During that time they welcomed their second daughter, Chloe, into the family. In 2011 the Pierces took a call to become the lead pastors of the Puyallup Adventist Church in Washington State where, as of the writing of this book, they remain. In 2014 a third little girl, Natalie, was born.

Between writing countless articles, numerous books, full-time pastoring, fathering, husbanding, and now pursuing a Ph.D. in Communication from Regent University, Seth keeps himself very busy. He has a passion for communicating spiritual truth with simplicity and clarity, and occasionally can be found risking his mortal body in obstacle course races such as Warrior Dash and Spartan Race.

Preface

My first book, *Pride and Seek*, chronicled my journey as an Adventist preacher's kid gone Charismatic/Pentecostal that eventually returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. When I began college in Lincoln, Nebraska, I remember the varied reactions about my former Pentecostal life. Once I wore an Oral Roberts University sweatshirt (I had a scholarship there before transferring to Union College) and received several rather rough verbal jabs about the kinds of people who went there.

As I made my way through the undergrad I must admit that some of my Pentecostal fire cooled as many of my Midwestern Caucasian brothers and sisters simply didn't know what to do with my prayers that frequently called for binding and losing, rebuked the enemy, claimed promises "IN JESUS' NAME," and generally expected miracles to pop out behind every bush.

Even when I successfully completed my B.A. in Theology, one of the "concerns" expressed to me by conference presidents—via my professors—was whether or not I was "Adventist." It struck me as strange since I had invested four years and tens of thousands of dollars in order to train for Adventist ministry. But there was uneasiness about my background.

When I did publish my book the response was very positive and people had all kinds of questions. Some of them I could answer and others I couldn't, since I hadn't yet received the tools to really explore the theological history of Adventism and Pentecostalism—histories that are actually intertwined. Mostly, the questions revolved around my experienced with speaking in tongues, being slain/slaying people in the Spirit, and the variety of flamboyant expressions present in Charismatic worship services attributed to the Holy Spirit.

As I progressed through pastoral ministry and graduate work I began to delve into more study on Pentecostalism, as well as the Holy Spirit and Adventism. What I found often challenged and surprised me. As I began poking around for doctoral subjects to pursue I spoke with several Adventists scholars about the idea of pursuing something on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit with the intention of comparing Adventist and Pentecostal traditions.

The response was enthusiastic.

However, God led a different direction and I was left with a lot of material from directed readings I had done under scholar Amos Yong (now at Fuller Seminary). Since *Pride and Seek* has gone out of print (you can buy it on Amazon for anywhere from one dollar to 100 dollars), I had the rights sent back to me. I have often toyed with rewriting the book under the title *Adventecostal*—though that might garner a few concerned emails.

While I will republish the book at some point, time hasn't allowed me a big enough window to do it yet. This project has allowed me to share some of my research and experiences with the Spirit, and I hope it will be a valuable tool for those wanting to know more beyond the atypical studies out there.

I have found that most of our material on the Spirit revolves around victory over sin—certainly a worthy goal. However, by focusing on what the Spirit can do for us, we miss many nuances of the Spirit's work. There is a greater depth to the ministry of the Spirit and how we can relate to Him.

This little book not only showcases the many ways in scripture and Adventist history that the Spirit has worked, but it explores the history of the Spirit—as well as some of our awkwardness in dealing with this subject. The final chapter surveys charismatic experiences within the church that we have either forgotten or are too scared to revisit in a contemporary context.

It is my prayer that our preconceived ideas about the Spirit are broken within these pages and that a whole new realm of possibility opens up in terms of developing a relationship with Him that moves beyond Bible studies into biblically based experiences in our lives and the life of our churches.

May Jesus lead you in this study and in making applications that will transform the world.

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS APPLICATION

1

Holy Scriptures

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)

5

Holy Spirit

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; Luke 1:35; 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:11, 12; Acts 1:8; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13.)

Chapter One

Forgotten God

Several years ago I pastored a church with a head elder that specialized in creative sermon titles. Often he would discover the title, derived from the biblical text, before even writing out his message. One of his memorable titles that transitioned into a full-length message was called *Kicking and Screaming Into the Kingdom of God*. It was based on Luke 14:23 where the master of the house orders his servants to compel people to come to the wedding feast.

It was a good sermon.

One title that, to my knowledge, never came to full sermonic fruition involved the personhood of God. He had the idea that two elders and the pastors should preach a three-part series entitled *God the Father, God the Son, and the Other One*.

Interesting. Every time I've mentioned this title to a group of people, smiles and nods can be seen around the room—as if we all have this inherent awkwardness around the third person of what is called the Godhead.

The Holy Spirit.

Why are we so weirded out by...it? Him? Her?

Anthropomorphism

No, that is not a made up word to impress you with my intelligence; it's a term used to refer to how we personalize things that are either not persons (naming your car Betsy) or forces beyond your control—like God. Within scripture God gives a myriad of metaphors for Himself to help us grasp His nature (i.e. lamb,



ADVENTIST VOICES PAST AND PRESENT

- If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him. How plain is this declaration of the holy Scriptures! And it is true but little of the Spirit of that Being who is holy and just in all his ways, possesses the hearts of Adam's fallen race. It has been almost extinguished. Ambition and love of the world are taking its place. Yet God has a people on the earth who are seeking for his Spirit, and the truth of his word.
—Uriah Smith, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 16, 1858
- The opinion that the Spirit is not a person is partially based on the fact that very often He is described as a power coming from God, falling on people, and enabling them to do certain tasks (e.g., Judges 3:10; Acts 2:4). Moreover, the Greek word for “spirit” (*pneuma*) is neuter, that is to say we can refer to the Spirit as “it,” implying that He is not a person. But that is a phenomenon of Greek grammar that doesn't necessarily have any theological significance.
—Angel Manuel Rodriguez¹
- The Lord's people have hesitated, and delayed to surrender themselves fully to be worked by the Holy Spirit into the complete image of the Lord Jesus. Many have delayed to have him even begin the mystery of God, the work of Christ in them, much less finish it.
—Editorial, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 13, 1898

¹ Retrieved from adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/holy-spirit/holy-spirit-and-godhead

lion, and even a mother hen). Three predominant anthropomorphisms exist in the Bible describing who God is.

First is God the Father.

Jesus says, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). Most people understand the image of a father. Whether you think of your own father, an adopted father, or a friend's father, all of us readily have images from life experiences that grasp the concept of a father. We have images of playing ball, having wounds bandaged, being lectured, being read to, and listening to cringe-worthy puns eliciting groans from everyone within earshot.

Even if your father memories are painful, sad, or terrifying, some part of the concept remains—even if it has only been a dream for a different, more understanding, more loving father. Which, perhaps, is one of the reasons God uses that imagery: to let people know who a father is supposed to be when earthly fathers fail.

The second anthropomorphism for God is easier to grasp.



INSPIRED THOUGHTS

- If God should send his Holy Spirit into our schools to mold and fashion the hearts, elevate the intellect, and give divine wisdom to the students, there are those who, in their present state, would interpose themselves between God and those who need the light. They would not understand the work of the Holy Spirit; they have never understood it; in the past it has been to them as great a mystery as were Christ's lessons to the Jews. The working of the Holy Spirit of God is not to create curiosity; it is not for men to decide whether they shall lay their hands upon the manifestations of the Spirit of God. We must let God work.
–Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies on Education*.
 - We need to reach a higher standard, but we can never do this until self is laid on the altar, until we let the Holy Spirit control us, molding and fashioning us according to the divine similitude...
–Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling*.
 - The Holy Spirit works with those who will be worked, moulds those who will be moulded, fashions those who will be fashioned. Give yourselves the culture of spiritual thoughts and holy communings.
–Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*.
-

God the Son.

In perhaps the most famous verse of the Bible, Jesus says, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). Every male is a son of someone, and unless you’ve been hermitting, you have interacted with a member of the male sex and have some concept of what a son is.

Moms, aunts, grandmas, and even babysitters have interacted with sons even if they aren’t theirs. Memories of farting noises, sports, dirt, turning sticks into guns, and general excessive movements and sounds pop into people’s brains when they think of sons. Yes that is stereotypical, and yes girls do those things too (though typically not as prone to farting noises), and not all boys do those things, but the fact we have the stereotype means there is a general familiarity with some kind of son imagery we can latch onto. When we come to the third image of God describing His nature, however, we fumble around and even try to ignore it.

God the Holy Spirit.

The... wait, what?

Speaking of the Spirit, Jesus tells a confused religious leader:

...“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8)

Spirit? What is that, exactly? It doesn’t help that some older Bible translations use the word “ghost,” either. I mean, ghosts?! As in haunted houses and cemeteries? The image is creepy, ethereal, slippery, scary, and no thank you.

The Hebrew/Greek words (thankfully) don’t mean “ghost” like we think of ghost (that’s the word *phantasma*, and you can find it in Mark 6:49). The words *nefesh* and *pneuma* mean “wind” or “breath.” Not that those words help us conceptualize “spirit” all that much better, but at least we don’t have to be pneumaphobic (scared of the Spirit). Later we’ll look further into the personhood and purpose of the Spirit, but for now we have some uncomfortable implications based on Jesus’ description to contemplate.

Uncomfortable Implications

Jesus tells the religious ruler Nicodemus that the Spirit goes where it wants, like the wind, and you don’t see it—you only see its effects—just like the people who are “born of the Spirit.” So we have this, this... *pneuma* that just does whatever it wants, goes wherever it wants, and we just get to watch the effects? This raises at least three problematic issues.

First, this suggests that the Spirit is unfamiliar. If I don’t know where the Spirit comes from or where it is going, and much less people “born of the Spirit,” it means I may have a little adventuring ahead of me. Not everyone likes adventure. I happen to, but many don’t. Those more cautious and prudent develop anxiety over traveling to foreign countries, bungee jumping, or even shopping in a new grocery store.

Secondly, the Spirit is uncontrollable. It amuses me when preachers plan for revival meetings, or create admirable themes like Reformation and Revival, as if the Spirit is not compelled to adhere to our schedule. *Look! My calendar clearly states you are to arrive at 11:30 Saturday morning! Where were you?! Can we really*



RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- From my perspective, the Holy Spirit is tragically neglected and, for all practical purposes, forgotten. While no evangelical would deny His existence, I'm willing to bet there are millions of churchgoers across America who cannot confidently say they have experienced His presence or action in their lives over the past year. And many of them do not believe they can."
-Francis Chan, *Forgotten God*
 - Given their views of God and Jesus, it's not surprising that the third person of the Trinity fares poorly as well. While about half of the unchurched either had no opinion or a weak opinion about the nature of the Holy Spirit, the prevailing view was that "the Holy Spirit is just a symbol of God's power or presence, but is not a living entity."
-George Barna, *Churchless*
 - Be sure that you leave a little room for the Holy Spirit between the plans, programs, and strategies ... It is easy to do all that we can to make things work—to make them go. And, I'm not against that, when done with wisdom. I just want you to leave some room for divine encounters.
-Ed Stetzer, "Leave a Little Room for the Holy Spirit in Your Life." *Christianity Today*, Feb. 25, 2015.
-

manufacture moves of the Spirit, or are they gifts from a living entity beyond our control?

Which brings up another question. Scores of books touting the latest method to experience what John the Baptist called the "baptism of the Spirit" (Mark 1:8) decorate bookstore shelves, with corresponding podcasts, videos, and the like. If we just pray harder, longer, or louder, the Spirit will descend. Reminds me of the pagan prophets screaming and cutting themselves to get their god's attention in 1 Kings 18. A quick contrast with a story involving the Spirit in 1 Samuel 19 reveals the Spirit does what the Spirit wants.

Finally, if the Spirit is unfamiliar, and controllable, it is also unpredictable. In his two volumes on the subject of miracles, scholar Craig Keener records scores of well documented cases of miraculous healings that challenge the assumptions of even secular academics. However, he notes in the introduction, that despite all the wonderful stories of healing, the Spirit doesn't always move that way. Keener and his wife, for example, have experienced eight miscarriages—no miracle of childbirth was given to them despite their prayers and faithfulness.¹

¹ Keener, Craig (2011). *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, vol. 1

During high school I attended a large Charismatic church where the pastor frequently lamented that despite all his best efforts at preaching, praying, and programming, revival broke out during the two weeks he was on vacation. I myself have preached sermons on one subject, but have been told at the door I was preaching on another—and the person was blessed.

Weird.

This idea of unpredictability is difficult for Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Like Nicodemus, the “ruler of the Pharisees,” Adventists have a thoroughly plotted out eschatology (end-times theology), strong prophetic identity, and carefully organized worship services. We have orders of service that are published in the bulletins—many times given stringent time allowances so people can get to lunch on time. To have a Spirit running around messing up our plans, our programs, or our preconceived ideas is a tad unnerving for even the most progressive Adventist.

Talking About the Spirit

Because we struggle to conceptualize the Spirit we also struggle to communicate about the Spirit. A close listening will reveal that believers predominantly refer to the Spirit as “It.” As in “It will bless us,” “It will fill us,” “It comes from God,” and “I am afraid of It.” It’s as though the Spirit is an impersonal force, or force field, or electrical charge, or spiritual battery.

Another popular metaphor linked with the Spirit, particularly in Pentecostal circles, is “fire.” Taken from Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, people speak of “baptism by fire”—a terrifying prospect for someone unfamiliar with biblical language.

What are they going to baptize me in?!

I have witnessed people lay hands on people’s heads and shout “Fire!” as though supernatural unseen flames will shoot out of their hands into the person’s brain and bless them with change. I have watched people pass out when this happens, only to wake up with the same issues they had before—some of them even feeling “burned” and leaving the faith.

Another popular metaphor is “rain,” taken from the concept of the “latter rain” used to water crops and produce bountiful harvests in the Ancient Near East. Joel 2:23 uses this metaphor to describe the “outpouring” of the Spirit into the lives of believers. For some this makes sense—others who are scared of water, flooding, or can’t swim may become slightly uncomfortable.

How we conceptualize, and talk about, the Spirit is important, and hopefully as we progress we will become more focused and comfortable as we do.



The Forgotten God

Personal

1. What do you think is the primary reason people struggle with the Holy Spirit?
2. Of these three categories—unfamiliar, unpredictable, and uncontrollable—which is the scariest for you and why?
3. What is the strangest thing you have ever heard regarding the Holy Spirit?
4. Without skipping ahead to other chapters in this book, how do you think early Adventists felt about the Holy Spirit?
5. How have you personally viewed the Spirit? What kinds of metaphors do you use?



BIBLE STUDY

Scriptural

1. **Read John 3** and pretend you were Nicodemus. What three questions would you have asked Jesus after hearing His description of the Spirit?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

2. **Read 1 Kings 18** and answer the following questions:
 - a. In what ways do you see people acting like the prophet's of Baal, trying to get their god's attention?

 - b. How did Elijah respond to the Baal prophets' approach of getting their god's attention?

3. **Reflect on 1 Samuel 19:**
 - a. Based on how the Spirit interacted with Saul what disturbing conclusions can you draw?

 - b. Contrasting Saul's experience with the more gentle description of inspiration found in 2 Peter 1:21. How can you reconcile these two pictures?

 - c. Can you think of other times when the Spirit came upon someone in a forceful/unexpected way?



Practical

1. When at church, count how many times the Spirit is specifically mentioned.
2. When at church, see if people refer to the Spirit as a “He” or an “It”
3. Spend a moment each day praying for a deeper revelation of, and relationship with, the Holy Spirit.

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS APPLICATION

5

Holy Spirit

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; Luke 1:35; 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Peter 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:11, 12; Acts 1:8; John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13.)