

Was the Flowing Oil in Dalton a Hoax?

For three years the team at Flowing Oil Ministries in Dalton, Georgia, said oil was supernaturally flowing from a Bible owned by a man named Jerry Pearce. People traveled to the north Georgia city from all over the country to see the Bible, receive prayer and take home a small vial of the clear oil. More than 350,000 vials of the oil have been given away since the miracle reportedly began in early 2017.

But today, 400 gallons of oil later, leaders of the ministry say the miracle stopped on Jan. 10. On Feb. 11 they canceled regular worship services, which were being held in the Wink Theater in Dalton. And the ministry's website says revival meetings scheduled in Arizona, North Carolina, California and other states have all been canceled. What happened?

The abrupt announcement came around the time that the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* published an investigative article claiming that Pearce had been seen regularly buying mineral oil at a local Tractor Supply store in Dalton. Two store managers told the *Times* they saw Pearce making the purchases. And when the newspaper ran chemical tests on the oil, they reportedly found the substance exactly matched the oil sold at the store.

Leaders of the ministry reject the idea that they were fabricating the miracle. They have maintained from the beginning that the oil first appeared as a small smudge in Psalm 39 and that it eventually soaked the entire book. Leaders then put the Bible in a plastic bag, and later in a glass container, and claimed that the oil kept flowing.

As reports spread, people began flocking to Dalton to be anointed by the oil. Sometimes ministry leaders would lay the

dripping Bible on people's heads at the altar. Some visitors claimed to be healed, while others said they sensed God's presence in a special way.

Now, the ministry has shut down, at least temporarily. In a statement posted on Flowing Oil's website, leaders said that Pearce's purchase of oil at the local store "was made without the knowledge or approval of anyone else in the ministry and we are seeking the full truth of these accusations." The statement also says Pearce has expressed remorse "for having caused the integrity of the work of God to be questioned because of his action."

Pearce later admitted in a Feb. 18 interview with the *Times* that he did in fact buy eight gallons of mineral oil from Tractor Supply on one occasion to pour on the Bible. "I was going to pour that oil on the Bible when the Bible quit producing oil," he told the newspaper. "But the Lord checked my spirit on it."

I've seen it all when it comes to the ups, downs and embarrassing quirks of the charismatic movement. It wasn't that long ago when a small church in Illinois claimed that diamonds, rubies and emeralds were falling from their ceiling during worship services. People flocked to that place to see the "miracle"—though smarter folks could tell the "gems" looked like they came from a Michael's craft store.

As it turned out, within months the church's married pastor ran away with another woman, and locals learned that someone was dropping fake jewels through the church's ceiling tiles. Busted!

I understand why we are vulnerable to these scenarios. We charismatics believe in the power of God, and we know He does miracles. In a world gone crazy, we want people to experience New Testament-style wonders. But how can we avoid the kind of embarrassment we just experienced in Dalton? Here are three

simple rules:

1. **Pray for discernment.** When Jesus warned us about false prophets, he said we would “know them by their fruit” (Matt. 7:16). If we have God’s wisdom we will be able to distinguish the real from the fake. But it has become obvious that many Christians are lacking in discernment today. True miracles are never fabricated. When a blind man sees, that’s all the proof we need. True healings can be documented. And we don’t have to “help God” perform a miracle.
2. **Test the spirits.** Back in the early 2000s, a charismatic Brazilian woman claimed that supernatural gold dust was pouring from her Bible and from her head. John Arnott, leader of the Toronto Blessing revival movement, suspected that the woman was a fraud. So he had the gold tested in a lab, and the results showed it was plastic glitter. Arnott refused to allow the woman in his pulpit. And 1 John 4:1 tells us to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” It isn’t a lack of faith to ask questions; in fact, we are commanded to ask questions!
3. **Look to see who is being glorified.** My experience has been that questionable movements and weird manifestations are usually associated with independent groups that lack accountability. In fact, renegade ministries sometimes resort to “funny business” in order to prove they have a special connection to God. Beware of lone rangers who claim special revelation. Churches that use gimmicks to say, “Look at us!” always implode.

In the case of the Dalton ministry, there were some very sweet, Bible-believing, Jesus-loving people who got caught up in the excitement of the oil-soaked Bible. Many visited out of curiosity. I believe some people who went to Flowing Oil for a touch from God probably got it because they went in genuine

faith. I don't condemn them.

But I pray we learn our lesson and raise the bar, because our credibility is at stake here. Skeptics are watching, and right now they are having a field day.

Pastor Matt Evans of Rock Bridge Community Church in Dalton had been allowing Flowing Oil Ministries to rent the Wink Theater facility, but now the church has asked Pearce and his team to stop meeting there. Evans wrote in a blog this week that this is a time to seek God, not to point fingers. He wrote: "Perhaps the wisest position for us to adopt at this time is one of caution, not cynicism; and prayer, not pessimism."