

## Theology of the Call: Precis from Acts 26:16-20

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### *Abstract*

This paper presents the need to review the theology of God's call connected to missions and the rural church. The need for the church to observe the rural churches' connection to the call can strengthen missions work to all *ethne*. In light of the decline of young rural ministers, this summary explores the biblical call for ministry engaging God's mission (*missio Dei*) and observed calling in Acts 26:16-20; God continues to call Spirit-empowered believers to join His mission of reaching the lost from every *ethnos*. Paul's call demonstrates that God's calling includes the purpose and the empowerment that summons believers to respond.

### *Introduction to the Problem: The Need for Emphasis on God's Call in Rural Churches*

The need for leaders entering pastoral ministry has increased over the past several decades. The decreasing number of young pastors contributed to delays in rural churches filling pastoral vacancies, furthering church decline. Scott Thumma, Director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, stated that in the next 20 years, half or more of the congregations in the United States may close.<sup>1</sup> Glenn Daman further described the crisis; "Rural America is rapidly becoming a spiritual wasteland where churches are being closed because they are overlooked and cast aside by the larger church community as a place deemed too insignificant or unworthy of our attention."<sup>2</sup> Catholic, Lutheran, and Methodist-ordained ministers decreased, while the number of retired or inactive ministers increased, creating a ministry leadership dearth.<sup>3</sup> During the previous 30 years, the Assemblies of God (AG) USA followed a similar trend: the number of young ministers declined, the credentialed ministers' average age increased, students in theological training decreased, and a rural church pastoral shortage spread across the nation.<sup>4</sup>

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Steve Schaible, AG South Dakota District Superintendent, observed the challenge in his district, “Half of the pastors may retire in the next three to five years.”<sup>5</sup> When churches decline or close, the community gospel witness decreases.

A pastor of a village, with a population under 200 church that launched multi-generations of pastors, missionaries, and district leaders over the last 40 years, recently suffered a stroke. He discussed resignation with his family, but the church and the presbyter requested waiting to evaluate his improvement. They feared the challenge of finding a pastoral leader; because, during the previous pastoral searches, the church received few resumes and waited extended periods, causing a loss of members.<sup>6</sup> Variations of this repeated story affect many rural churches who have sent and supported missional leaders across the region and around the world.

The current rural church circumstances admonish leaders to heed Jesus’ commands to look at the white harvest fields and pray for the Lord of the harvest to send laborers (John 4:36; Luke 10:2; Rom. 10:14-15).<sup>7</sup> The church leadership crisis and declining rural gospel witness entreats the church to cultivate ministry leaders called to take the gospel to every community, developing opportunities for Spirit empowered *missio Dei* callings. Jeff Clark observed Jesus grew up, lived, preached, called, and trained His disciples in rural villages as an example to the church.<sup>8</sup> The urgent need summons a reconsideration of the biblical theology of the call. Barbara Cavaness-Parks noted the importance of a calling emphasis:

Pentecostals have always believed strongly in the concept of the call of God. The Bible is replete with case studies of God sovereignly calling men and women for His purposes. Often the persons of His choosing are the most unlikely candidates according to conventional wisdom...The church needs to affirm the concept of calling in order to utilize all available laborers in the harvest.<sup>9</sup>

In light of the decline of young rural ministers, this summary explores the biblical call for ministry engaging God’s mission (*missio Dei*) and observing calling in Acts 26:16-20; God continues to call Spirit-empowered believers to join His mission of reaching the lost from every *ethne*. While Paul’s call does not become the model of the method for God’s call—as Scripture demonstrates diverse methods—it does provide several key points connecting the call to mission.

Luke’s repetition of Paul’s call in three narratives demonstrated the importance of his call following Luke’s multiplex purpose of didactical, theological praxis. Jesus implied a missional call in His directives subsequent to Paul’s conversion and in His conversation with Ananias (Acts 9:15; 22:21). Luke reserved the most complete definition of the calling purpose for the

climatic third account in Acts 26:16-20a, which contains the clearest commission confirmed by Paul's personal description in Gal. 1:1, 15-16.<sup>10</sup>

But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you *for this purpose*, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God (Acts 26:16-20a).

Luke emphasized the response to God calling His servants to bring the good news of salvation, which echoed the purpose of the prophets' calling (Isa. 6:1-13; Ezek. 2:1-4) and connected his Spirit-empowered mission theme (Acts 1:8).

### *God's Call*

Acts provides ministry calling examples as a pattern for the church throughout time. Luke, as a wordsmith, integrated themes and patterns in his two-part work, Luke-Acts. Luke's *inclusio* of Paul's conversion and calling narrative occurs three times (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17), as he repeated Cornelius's vision in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-7, 22, 30-33) and in regards to Peter's vision at Joppa (Acts 10:9-21; 11:5-18; 15:7-11), where he emphasized episodes that led to salvation and outpouring of the Spirit for the expansion of the gospel. Keener<sup>11</sup> and Stronstad<sup>12</sup> noted Luke's didactical style of writing that the Spirit-empowered mission theme built upon each example. Stronstad emphasized the multiplex purpose of Luke's theological teaching, "the primary purpose of the pouring out of the Spirit of prophecy on the Day of Pentecost is to empower the disciples for witness."<sup>13</sup> Luke's theological, historical narrative emphasized the call to Spirit-empowered witness to *panta ta ethne* (all nations or people groups) (Luke 24:47).

Luke included in all three calling narratives, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). The repetition of Saul's name echoed the name repetition in the calling of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and Samuel, indicating who had indeed been called.<sup>14</sup> The normative response, *hineni*, "here am I" signified a readiness to listen and surrender to the call.<sup>15</sup> Saul's response, "Who are you Lord?" did not follow the typical Hebraic response to the call (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15). However, Saul utilized the word "Lord," which may insinuate similar implications.

Jesus' answer to Saul's question incorporated a *missio Dei* calling. Ironically, Ananias responded to the Lord calling his name, when directed to "arise and go to the street called Straight" to pray for Saul, following the Old Testament pattern, "Here I am, Lord" (Acts 9:10-11). The Old Testament word *Hineni*, "Here I am," emanates the normative response to God's call to service.

Luke connected Paul's call with the Old Testament patterns. The most distinguishing elements of Paul's conversion followed the Old Testament motif: divine encounter and calling.<sup>16</sup> Paul's calling included a theophany similar to Moses (Exod. 3:1-4:17), Samson (Judg. 6:11-24), Jeremiah (1:4-19), Isaiah (6:1-13), and Ezekiel (1:1-3, 15).<sup>17</sup> The Old and New Testament examples demonstrate that God employs diverse methods of calling believers to announce His salvific plans to the world found in small and large communities.

Jesus interrupted Saul's journey to redirect the remainder of his life from a Pharisee to an apostle. Biblical calling altered the trajectory of the recipient's life as reflected in his transformation. Reggie McNeil observed, "God shapes the heart of the leader through the call. This call is a divinely orchestrated setting apart of the leader for some special task. God's part of the call dynamic is to initiate, guide, position, and intervene. The leader's part of the call drama is to hear, respond, search, and order or reorder life."<sup>18</sup> Paul referred to this demarcation in his epistles' salutations.<sup>19</sup> Walter Bruggeman described the calling transformation as the act, "to sign on for a different narrative account of reality, one that is in profound contrast to the dominant account of reality into which we are all summarily inducted.... The call is always from ordinary life, ordinary possessions, and ordinary assumptions to a way of life that the world judges to be impossible. Thus, the call is, indeed, too an impossibility."<sup>20</sup> God's call, which comes in diverse methods, moves the recipient from a comfortable lifestyle and redirects them to attempt things thought impossible for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Classical Pentecostals believe the concept of the call derived from the biblical narrative, began in Genesis and continued throughout Scripture.<sup>21</sup> Divine interaction appealed to a surrender to God's plan and purposes.<sup>22</sup> God continues to call His people; young and old, and men and women from every ethnical, educational, and economical strata of humanity, to the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel message to reach every person in all locations.<sup>23</sup> The call to the rural church, like other missionary calls, continues throughout the ages.

*The Calling Purpose: Missio Dei*

Paul's call followed Jesus' summons to the *missio Dei* motif found in the gospels and Acts (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:4-8). Lorin Cranford insisted that God's plan comes with a *missio* purpose and responsive action.<sup>24</sup> All three Lukan accounts of Paul's call include "rise and stand" (Acts 9:6; 22:10; 26:16). The command resembles the "rise and stand" to your feet given to Moses (Exod. 8:20, 9:13) and Daniel (10:11), requiring a physical response. Keener noted that following a theophany, this command often occurred because mortals often fell to the ground (Ezek. 2:1; Matt. 17:7).<sup>25</sup> Bruggeman added, "Those called and sent in our time have a mandate not unlike that of Abraham and Moses, and not unlike that of the disciples of Jesus, because the talk and the walk are in every time and place fundamentally the same."<sup>26</sup> God's call necessitates a Spirit-empowerment missional response.

Ananias prayed for Saul to regain his sight and be filled with the Spirit before he began ministry. Saul's experience of Jesus' healing his blind eyes further demonstrated Jesus' position as the Messiah prophesied in Isaiah 35:5-6 (Isa. 9:2; 60:1-2; Matt. 13:13-16; 15:14; 23:16; Mark 4:12; 8:18). As an educated Pharisee, Saul must have known Messianic healings included healing the blind.<sup>27</sup> Saul surrendered to the correlating call, "to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18). Further, his first vision, while blind and subsequent visions guided his obedience to this call, evoked Peter's Pentecost sermon that quotes Joel's prophecy; "your young men will see visions" (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28).

Luke's inclusion of mission in the call necessitates God's participation to accomplish that purpose. Consistent with Old Testament promises, Jesus promises to go with Paul to fulfill his call (Gen. 28:15; Exod. 3:12; Deut. 31:6-8, 23; Jos. 1:5; 1 Chron. 28:20; Isa. 7:17).<sup>28</sup> The New Testament expands the reliance on God's presence through His Son, Immanuel, and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:23; John 14:16; Heb. 13:5). Like Paul, urban and rural missionaries and pastors trust Jesus' promise to partner with them, as He directs His mission for all communities with the statement, "I am with you" (Matt. 28:18-20).

Paul's emphasis on the call to all *ethne* followed the Acts 1:8 definition to take the gospel to all the world (Acts 14:1; 18:4; 19:10, 17; 20:21; Rom. 1:16; 2:10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor. 1:22-24;

10:32; 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 3:11). Paul's initial response to the calling follows the pattern of waiting for the Spirit's infilling and enduement to begin ministry that breaks barriers (Acts 1:4, 9:17). In response to the call, he preached in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, thereafter in all the region of Judea, and subsequently advanced to further regions following the Acts 1:8 pattern.<sup>29</sup> The missional purpose permeated biblical calling experiences as the Spirit provided power to accomplish this missional call.

Jesus told Paul that He had a divine objective for the bright light and the challenging words by saying, "I have appeared to you for this purpose" (Acts 26:16 cc. 28:28). The eternal purposes of life transformation extended to both the Jews and the Gentiles. Correlating passages included direction for Saul to enter Damascus for further instructions that would come through Ananias' message (Acts 9:6, 15; 22:10, 14-16). Daman described the rural church as a mission field that also needs the light of the gospel.<sup>30</sup> The rural churches' leadership crisis becomes an opportunity for Spirit-empowered mission, if missionaries like Paul respond to God's call to open the eyes of the blind (Acts 26:19, 1 Cor. 9:16).

### *The Holy Spirit's Empowerment for the Call*

Luke's literary emphasis of Paul's call built upon his initial description (Acts 9:1-20). Luke laid the foundation in the original lengthy report, which included God sending Ananias to pray for Saul's healing and assist with Paul's Spirit baptism, when he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17).<sup>31</sup> This indispensable qualification, the Spirit filling a person for prophetic and apostolic service, shepherded the Lord's work in Acts.<sup>32</sup> The Holy Spirit directed the work, not human insights or strengths (Acts 11:25, 13:1-3, 20:28).

Luke emphasized the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work married to the mission following his theme of every believer witnessing to every *ethne* (Acts 1:8; 2:39; 26:18).<sup>33</sup> The initial fulfilment of the Acts 2:4-8 promise empowered Peter and the disciples to preach to the international multitudes. The Acts 2:9-11 list of nations resembles the list of nations in Genesis 10 which indicated a universal spread of the gospel. Luke focused on the Spirit's empowerment guiding cross-culture evangelism.<sup>34</sup> Stephen Williams suggested, "adopting the identity of a community of prophets empowered for the vocation of embodying, enacting, and witnessing to God's vision, can infuse the church with vitality, mitigate the identity crisis, and remedy its lack

of missionary zeal.”<sup>35</sup> The declining rural church can again be empowered by the Holy Spirit and invigorated for missional transformation that spreads from individuals, families, and churches to neighbors and nations in rural, as well as urban communities, and around the world.

The call to witness pervades every Pentecostal ministry; necessitating obedience to Jesus’ last command in the Luke/Acts bridge, “Wait for the Promise of the Father” (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:4-8). Luke’s interpretive keys, Luke 4:18-19 and Acts 1:8, reveal that Jesus demonstrated in His own ministry and commanded believers to experience Spirit baptism for the purpose of witness. Stronstad observed that Luke confirmed the necessity of waiting for the Holy Spirit through repeated historical narratives of obeying Jesus’ final command (Acts 1:4-8; 2:4, 17; 4:31; 8:15-17; 9:17; 10:46; 11:16; 19:6-10; Luke 1:41, 67; 2:25; 24:48-49).<sup>36</sup> The Holy Spirit superintended the implementation of the missional call (Acts 13:1-3; 16:6-9; 18:5; 19:21; 21:4, 11). Gary Tyra affirmed the necessity of Spirit empowerment for “missionally faithful lives in the power of the Spirit.”<sup>37</sup> Each of Paul’s evangelistic tours or missionary journeys launched with pneumatic episodes that included references to the Holy Spirit’s activity and the believers’ individual and collective response (Acts 13:1-3; 16:6-8; 19:1-7).<sup>38</sup> Fulfilling God’s call requires dependency on the Spirit.

Paul, following Jesus’ example, summoned the Ephesian Church to be filled with the Spirit to spread the gospel message to the nations. Luke’s comprehensive example of Paul’s missionary strategy ensured that the 12 apostles received the Holy Spirit, which resulted in Paul’s greatest expanse of the gospel. Luke described the significant results, “all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks,” and “the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (Acts 19:10, 20).<sup>39</sup> Denzil Miller explained that the Spirit empowerment-witness motif flows throughout Acts as in Paul’s personal life and teaching.<sup>40</sup> The collective church and individuals must be empowered by the Spirit to witness through proclamation and demonstration for the purpose of mobilization through training and sending.<sup>41</sup> Harry Boer agreed that Jesus’ teaching and Acts reveal the power to accomplish witnessing activity comes on believers when they were filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> The fulfillment depends on the Spirit, not personal ability of followers.

Luke observed Paul’s response to Spirit empowerment; “Immediately he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). Paul supplemented the accounts about his ministering and preaching in the power of the Spirit in his epistles (i.e. Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor.

2:4). The foundation of Spirit empowerment, modeled throughout Acts, continues as essential for witness and ministry. Luke demonstrated that through Paul's calling narrative, the necessity of Holy Spirit empowerment for every generation to take the gospel to every *ethne* (Acts 2:39).<sup>43</sup>

### *The Response to the Call*

Paul proclaimed, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" in his appeal to King Agrippa (Acts 26:19). Saying "yes" to God's call initiated the essential step of obedience. The response to God's voice launched his later directed ministry (Acts 13:1-3). In this calling story, Jesus explained resisting God through an agrarian example of cattle kicking against the owner's direction and with a sharp stick, "It is hard for you to kick against the goad" (Acts 9:5, 26:14). Saul's instructor, Gamaliel, advised against persecuting Jesus' followers lest they fight against God (Acts 5:39). Hitherto, Saul may have resisted God's call or direction, yet like Jonah, God continued to pursue him. Keener explained that disobedience to the call equated rebellion against God with similar consequences for refusing to respond to biblical prophets.<sup>44</sup> Harold Netland suggested that Paul's response should become the response of today's believers,

as the Bible claims, the fundamental cause of our predicament is human rebellion against a holy and righteous God, and if the only remedy for this ailment is to be found in the salvation available through Jesus Christ, then communication of the good news of salvation through Jesus is not only a legitimate option, but an inescapable imperative. As Paul put it, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:15).<sup>45</sup>

Obedience to the vision juxtaposed his previous position of persecuting believers. In his defense at Caesarea, Paul described his obedience to the call by describing his declaration in Jerusalem, all the Judean area, and to the Gentles. He asked Agrippa if he believed the prophets, employing the opportunity to challenge the king to follow Christ (Acts 26:27).

Luke's response theme began in Luke with obedience to God's direction, which came through diverse manners—often a heavenly vision or angelic appearance—Zachariah, Mary, and Joseph and continued in Acts with Ananias, Peter, Cornelius, and Paul's Macedonian call.<sup>46</sup>

Tony Stoltzfus described this indispensable surrender to the call,

You have a commission from the one who purchased your life with a price, to go as He did: to lay down your life in service for the bigger Kingdom of God. Significance, joy, and favor are the natural by-product of giving love and service, not an objective to be pursued. If the core desire that drives you is to be wealthy or live the good life, succeed in



business, or have a fulfilling life, our Lordship commitment is lacking. A call from God is a call to serve.<sup>47</sup>

The missional call embraced surrender to the Jesus' lordship as a servant.

Paul preached that God's sends believers to preach, so that unbelievers hear the message (Rom. 10:14-17). Likewise, Paul York observed the missionary cycle requires the sending of those reached by the gospel message as missionaries.<sup>48</sup> Beth Grant encouraged leaders to surrender their personal preferences and excuses to follow the Holy Spirit's call and directives,

Be available... whenever and wherever God calls... God puts a fire in your heart for His passion. If He is nudging you by His Spirit to take steps of faith that you have never taken before, you can trust Him. Don't hold back. Step in!... When the Holy Spirit begins to stir our souls, the passion and the anointing is stronger than our timidity. He is stronger than our fears. And we will say, "Yes Lord, you lead me. You call me. You empower me. And I will step into what you have for me." The calling must be fulfilled in the power of the Spirit.<sup>49</sup>

Grant's admonishment reflects Paul's call to the rural church to depend on the work of the Spirit and pray in the Spirit for boldness to proclaim the gospel message (Gal. 3:1-5; 6:18-20). The Lausanne commitment promised to pray for harvesters going to the white fields and send labors into every corner of the world to witness in word and deed through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> Prayer for response to the call to rural fields increases preaching and opportunities to respond to the call that transforms lives and communities.

Given the response theme in Luke and Acts, Luke's narrative theology used Paul's life story to challenge the church to respond to God's call taking the gospel to *pante ta ethne* (all people groups). Luke's view of the call may revitalize and strengthen the praxis and theology of the rural church from a maintenance perspective and decline to a Spirit-empowered mission reaching both neighbors and nations.

### *Conclusion*

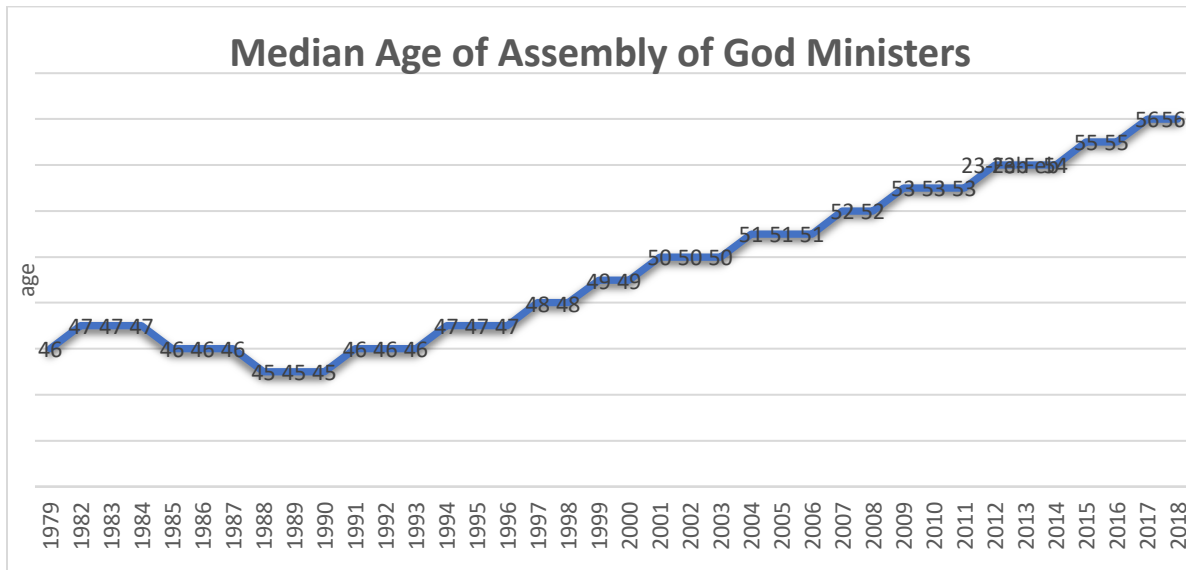
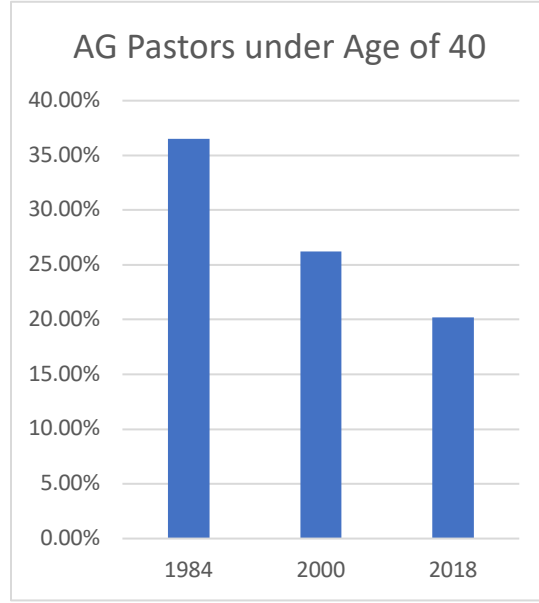
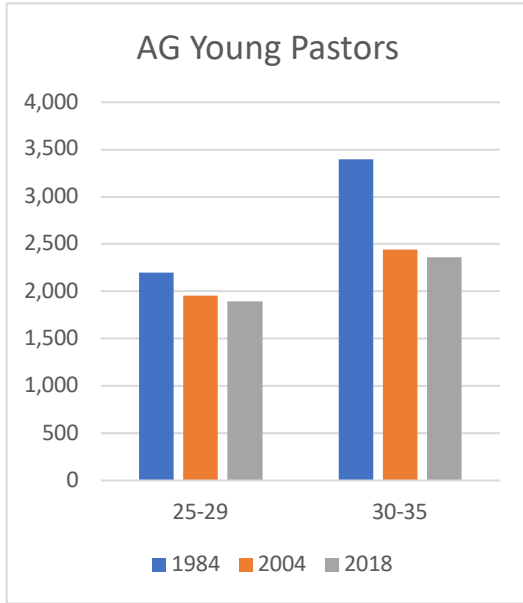
The exploration of Luke's appeal to the church, considering the example of Paul's call, strengthens the praxis of the Christ-centered call that launches Spirit empowered workers into the harvest in and from rural communities. Incorporating Luke's Spirit empowered *missio Dei* call and response theme with rural churches, accomplishing the mission of Christ for every people group, becomes a rural impetus.<sup>51</sup> Tyra promoted the pneumatic *missio Dei* imperative,

“it must be acknowledged that Luke’s message overall seems to be that all Spirit-filled believers possess the capacity, like Ananias [and Paul], to hear God’s voice, receive ministry assignments, speak and act on Christ’s behalf, make new disciples, and build up the church, offering a powerful refutation of religious relativism in the process.”<sup>52</sup> To mitigate the rural church crisis, God continues to call ministers for accomplishing His mission in the rural communities, to turn them from darkness to the glorious light.

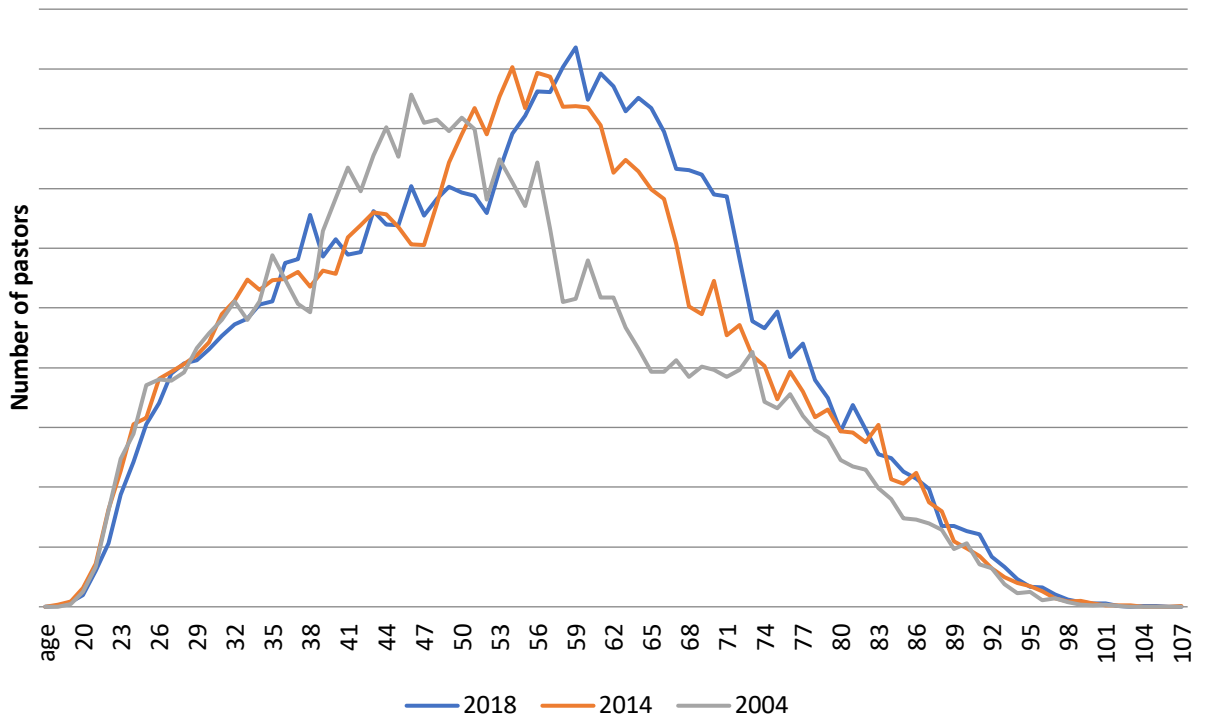
Jesus continues His universal call to invade the darkness with the gospel light in the rural and urban communities. Gene Edwards encouraged believers that God’s call leads to places large and small, as “Christians have the confidence that ‘all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose’” (Rom. 8:28). Notice that this promise is tied to vocation (being “called”) and to God’s purpose, not our own.”<sup>53</sup> The Holy Spirit works through believers to remedy a lack of missionary zeal, calling for radical transformation of people in rural and urban communities, healing blind eyes, setting free the bound, bringing the good news of sins forgiven and sanctification through faith in Christ. A biblical theology of the call, in view of Paul’s call and the rural church’s current condition, necessitates increased prayer, preaching, and teaching about responding to the Spirit-empowered missional call; encouraging people young and old, men and women, to respond to the Lord Jesus who called Saul on the road to Damascus and leaders for ministry today.

Appendices

Minister Age Charts

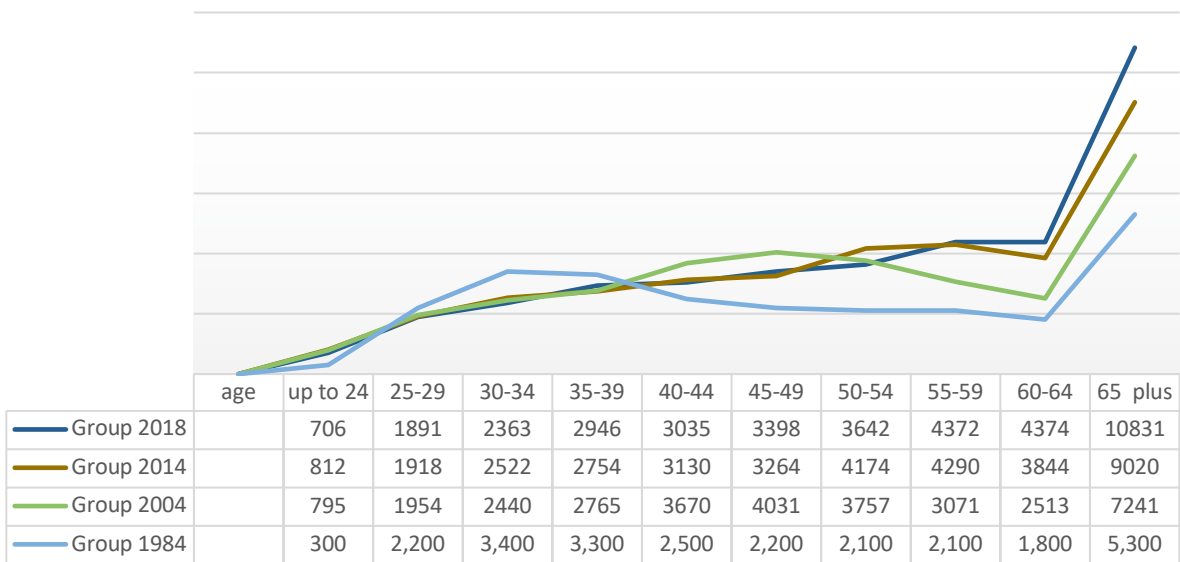


### Comparison of Age and Number of Assembly of God Ministers



— 2018 — 2014 — 2004

### Age of Assembly of God Ministers Comparison



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<sup>1</sup> Jean Hopfensperger. quoted Scott Thumma, "Test of Faith: The Unchurched of America: As Churches Close, A Way of Life Fades: Minnesota's Mainline Christian Denominations Face Unprecedented Declines, Alerting Communities and Traditions Celebrated for Generation." *StarTribune*, 1. <http://www.startribune.com/as-minnesota-churches-close-a-way-of-life-fades/486037461/>(accessed September 16, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Glenn Daman. *The Forgotten Church: Why Rural Ministry Matters for Every Church in America* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2018), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hopfensperger, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Assembly of God Statistics, 2018. “Ministers Median Ages 1979 through 2017.” Statistics <https://ag.org/-/media/AGORG/Downloads/Statistics/Ministers/Ministers-Median-Ages-1979-through-2017.pdf>. (accessed July 19, 2018). The 2,200 AG credentialed ministers, ages 25-29, in 1984, declined to 1,954 in 2004, and to 1,891 in 2018. The credentialed ministers 30-34 years old followed the same trend: 3,400 in 1984; 2,440 in 2004; and 2,363 in 2018. The average age of a credentialed AG minister changed from 45 in 1987 to 56 in 2019. The percentage of pastors under 40 has declined from 36.5% in 1984 to 26.2% in 2000 then 20.2% in 2018 (Klaus 1986, 24, Assembly of God Statistics, 2000, 2018). The average ordained AG minister age in 2018 increased to 61, including the 65 plus increasing from 5,300 in 1984 to 10,831 in 2018. See Appendix charts.

Jean Hopfensperger. “Test of Faith: The Unchurched of America, Fewer Ministers, Heavier Burdens: As Churches Close and Budgets Shrink, the New Ministers Who Hear the Call to Serve Must Adopt New Roles in Changing Communities.” *StarTribune* 2018. <http://www.startribune.com/fewer-men-and-women-are-entering-the-seminary/490381681/?refresh=true> (accessed September 16, 2019). Hopfensperger noticed, “Over the past decade, full-time enrollment in theology schools nationwide dropped 50 percent... according to the Association of Theology Schools.” Bethel Seminary, Luther Seminary, Saint John’s University School of Theology, Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity, and United Theological Seminary all combined a 39.5% loss of students since 2000. Daman noticed, “many seminaries offering programs in urban ministries, but a complete absence of schools offering even a class in rural ministries, 47.” Trinity Bible College and Graduate School launched a Master of Arts in Rural Ministry in 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Schaible. “Rural Advancement Board Meeting.” (Trinity Bible College and Graduate School, Ellendale, ND. September 10, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Daman, 47, 144. Daman observed, “Denominational leaders sometimes look down upon small rural churches as outdated and insignificant... Because, few professors in seminaries of Bible colleges have extensive experience in rural ministry the, coursed are taught from an urban perspective... Consequently, there arises an urban bias that looks down upon rural ministry.”

<sup>7</sup> All Scriptures, unless noted, will come from the English Standard Version. 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Jeff Clark. 2019. *Rural Theology: Biblical Case for Rural Ministry and Rural Church Planting*. Wheaton IL: Rural Matters Institute., <https://www.bgeruralmatters.com/rural-theology-biblical-case-for-rural-church-planting-ministry/> 11-16. Clark affirmed, “On twenty-six occasions, Jesus ministered or sent the disciples into [kome] villages to minister. His focus on village ministry was greater than on any other people group in the four Gospels. The villages were where Jesus spent most of His time, did most of His teaching, performed most of His miracles, and did most of His training with the disciples, 14.” Clark referred to kome—village, topos—place (smaller than a village), chora—open country, and agros—fields or farmland, 13-17.

<sup>9</sup> Grant McClung. *Azusa Street and Beyond: 100 Years of Commentary on the Global Pentecostal/ Charismatic Movement* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logo, 2006) 53, 55.

<sup>10</sup> Craig Keener. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 24:1-28.31*, Vol 4. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 3516; Eckhard J. Schnabel and Clinton Arnold. 2012. *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2012). 1009.

<sup>11</sup> Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 24:1-28.31*, Vol. 4, 3216.

<sup>12</sup> Roger Stronstad, *A Pentecost Biblical Theology: Turning Points in the Story of Redemption* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Stronstad. *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 114.



<sup>14</sup> F.F. Bruce. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Book of the Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Expositions and Notes* (Grand Rapids MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing CO. 1983), 195; Keener 2015, 3516. Abraham (Gen. 22:11), Jacob (Gen. 46:2), Moses (Exod. 3:4), and Samuel (Sam. 3:10). Also Luke recounts, Jesus called to Martha (Luke 10:41) and, Simon (Luke 22:31) and in Acts, Saul (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). All demonstrated redirecting of life and ministry call. Walter Bruggeman. 2004, 122, 123, wrote about the redirecting of the life of those called: “By this call Abraham is propelled into an orbit of reality that totally preempts his life and removes him completely from any purpose or agenda he may have entertained for himself before that moment.” “God calls him by name, “Moses, Moses.” “In this address God seizes the initiative in the life of Moses... Moses is thereby wrenched away from what he might have thought was the circumstance of his life and decisively relocated in a larger narrative about which he knew nothing until that moment of confrontation.” Luke may have been indicating, through *inclusio*, these events to demonstrate the call to men and women, as he demonstrated in the incarnation narrative.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Battista. “*Hineni*, Old Testament as Literature.” <https://hebrewbible.wordpress.com/2011/04/16/hineni-and-its-modern-uses/>. (accessed February 20, 2016), 1. A fitting response may have been “*hineni*,” “here I am,” “yes, Lord,” or “at Your service.” A name change indicating a change identity and life direction often followed these responses as Abraham (Gen 22:11), Jacob (Gen. 31:11; 46:2), Moses (Exod. 3:4), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), and Isaiah (Isa. 6:8).

<sup>16</sup> Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 3:1-14:28, Vol. 2*, 1609.

<sup>17</sup> Paul, like Luke, associated this calling intervention that led to his conversion (Gal. 1:12-16). Bruce (1983, 491-492) and Keener (2015, 3527) agreed that Paul’s commission to be Christ’s messenger resembled the call of prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Jesus (Jer. 1:7; Ezek. 2:1-6, 3:6; Isa. 42:6-7; Acts 26:18 cc. Exod. 3:12; Dan. 10:11; Isa. 43:10; 12; 44:8; 61:1; Luke 4:18; and Acts 13:47).

<sup>18</sup> Reggie McNeil, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders*. (San Francisco, CA: Josses-Bass Publishers. 2011), 95. McNeil further stated, “Call recipients understand that God has a very special claim on their lives for special purposes. This awareness goes beyond a general sense of feeling purposeful or significant ... The sense of being called to spiritual leadership is not to be confused with the more general sense of calling. Many people, in all walks of life, describe their life’s work or passion as a calling ... Christian theology maintains that all believers are called to serve others and to serve God. This kind of calling can be lived but in any life station. Spiritual leaders, on the other hand, describe their whole lives in terms of the call. It involves more than a vocation expression or function. It goes to the very core of one’s being. It is pivotal and a life-defining decision. It may be sudden and dramatic, or more progressively revealed. The call may come early or late. It may find expressions through traditional ministry venues, or show up in the marketplace. Recipients might be surprised, or might feel they should have anticipated the call. The call may be crystal clear or initially ambiguous (McNeil 2011, 95 cc 96-123).”

<sup>19</sup> Bruce emphasized Paul’s change, “The terms of his commission remained with him ever after,” 492. Paul’s letters expand and develop Paul’s response to call and the pervasive life change (Rom. 16:25-26; Gal. 2:2; Eph. 2:20; 3:2-9; 1 Cor. 14:37; and 2 Cor. 12:1-4, 7). The fact that God, in His mercy, called Paul, which defined him as he demonstrated in the *praescriptio* of his letters: Paul, a bondservant of Jesus, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel (Rom. 1:1); Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God (1 Cor. 1:1); Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God (2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; and Eph. 1:1); Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), (Gal. 1:1), Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope Paul, (1 Tim. 1:1 cc. vs. 12-17), an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:1 cc. 8-15), Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ (Titus 1:1)

<sup>20</sup> Walter Bruggeman. “Evangelism and Discipleship: ‘The God Who Calls, the God Who Sends.’” (Word & World, 24 no. 2 Spring: 1, 2004), 124.

<sup>21</sup> McClung, *Azusa Street and Beyond: 100 Years of Commentary on the Global Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement* 65-66. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, Saul, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the disciples, and Paul are a few of the many

stories that demonstrate young and old who can be called by God (Exod. 3:1-4:17; Judg. 6:11-24; Isa. 6:1-13; Jer. 1:4-19; Ezek. 1:1-3, 15).

<sup>22</sup> Lorin Cranford, "Paul's Calling to Ministry." *The Apostle Paul, Servant of Christ*. 2013. (Accessed August 16, 2019. [http://cranfordville.com/PaulStudyGuide/PaultheApostle\\_SG04\\_P1C03.pdf](http://cranfordville.com/PaulStudyGuide/PaultheApostle_SG04_P1C03.pdf)), 2013, 117.

<sup>23</sup> Lausanne 2011, "The Lausanne Movement: The Capetown Commitment: A Confession of Faith and Call to Action" Sect. 52-55. 2011. [http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html\\_-\\_ftn92\\_](http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/ctcommitment.html_-_ftn92_) (accessed July, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Cranford, "Paul's Calling to Ministry," 117. "What God intended was to provide understanding of Himself to His creation so that through Christ sinful humanity could gain access into His holy presence... Here is the heart of the divine calling of every Christian: we have been called by God to make this profound will of God known to all! Every believer comes under this mandate, for Paul asserted that God's intention is to work through the church to get this message out to the world. As Paul indicates in [Eph. 3:] vv. 1-6, that message was first given to the apostles and prophets by the Holy Spirit (v. 4), and now the church has the divinely appointed mission of disclosing that message to the entire world."

<sup>25</sup> Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 24:1-28. 31*, Vol. 4, 3518. Examples of those who fell on their faces: Abraham (Gen. 17:3), Moses and Aaron (Num. 20:6), Balaam (Num. 22:13), Joshua (5:14), Manoah and his wife (Jude 13:20), the people when the fire burned the offering that Elijah offered (1 King 18:39), David and the people (1 Chron. 21:16), and Ezekiel (1:8; 3:23; 44:4).

<sup>26</sup> Bruggeman, "Evangelism and Discipleship," 130.

<sup>27</sup> The healing miracles in the Old Testament included barren women having children, multitudes healed of snake bites, leprosy made clean, the dead resurrected, Jeroboam's withered hand, and Nebuchadnezzar's insanity healed; but, none of the Messianic healings happened until Jesus' ministry (Isa. 35:5-6 cc. 29:18; 42:18). Some may state that Elisha prayed for his servant to have his eyes opened and the soldiers who he prayed would be blind have their sight restored (2 Kings 6:17-20). Jesus responded to John the Baptist's question, "Go and tell John the things that you have seen and heard that the blind see" (Luke 7:20-22 cc. Mat. 11:5). The great debate over who made the blind man see in the temple in John 9 demonstrated Jesus' position as the Messiah disturbed the Pharisees.

<sup>28</sup> First, Jesus promised to make Paul a minister or servant of the gospel message, which He defined as a witness of "things seen" and "things the Spirit will reveal" (Acts 26:16). Second, Jesus promised to deliver Saul from the Jews and Gentiles to whom Jesus sent the message, reminiscent of the promise to Jeremiah, a prophet to Israel and the nations (Acts 26:17; cc. Jer. 1:8, 16; Acts 19:9-41). Third, Jesus promised transformation of lives—blindness healed, bondage broken, sins forgiven, and lives sanctified through faith in Christ (Acts 26:18). The eternal purposes of life transformation applied to all who call upon Jesus' name.

<sup>29</sup> David Garland, *Acts: Teaching the Text Commentary Series*, 235; Stronstad *A Pentecost Biblical Theology*, 170. Daman, *The Forgotten Church*: 147 also suggested that the Judean region included smaller towns, villages, and the countryside.

<sup>30</sup> Daman, *The Forgotten Church*: 49.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Book of the Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Expositions and Notes*, 201. "The apostolic commission of Saul, and the part played by Ananias in it, must now, as in New Testament times, remain as stumbling block in the path of those whose concept of the apostolic ministry is too rigidly formal." Ananias has executed his commission and laid his hands upon Saul to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be healed. Scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight, and he confronts Elymas who also became blind (Acts 13:11) may have had the implication in his letter (Eph. 1:18).

<sup>32</sup> Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Paul's experience followed Luke's embedded theme of waiting for Spirit empowerment for ministry beginning in the incarnation narrative, Jesus' baptism, His command to his disciples, and subsequent examples. The Luke/Acts bridge verses stated, "And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:48-49) and "He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5).

<sup>33</sup> A consistent theme derived from Jesus' instructions and promise in Acts 1:8 included every age and gender (Joel 2:28-29 and Acts 2:17-18).

<sup>34</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 52.

<sup>35</sup> Steven Williams, "And They Shall Prophecy: Exploring a Pentecostal Ecclesiology of the Church as a Prophetic Community in Dialogue with Luke Timothy Johnson." March 30, 2018. [https://www.academia.edu/36377525/AND\\_THEY\\_SHALL\\_PROPHECY\\_EXPLORING\\_A\\_PENTECOSTAL\\_ECCLIOLOGY\\_OF\\_THE\\_CHURCH\\_AS\\_A\\_PROPHETIC\\_COMMUNITY\\_IN\\_DIALOGUE\\_WITH\\_LUKE\\_TIMOTHY\\_JOHNSON?auto=download2018](https://www.academia.edu/36377525/AND_THEY_SHALL_PROPHECY_EXPLORING_A_PENTECOSTAL_ECCLIOLOGY_OF_THE_CHURCH_AS_A_PROPHETIC_COMMUNITY_IN_DIALOGUE_WITH_LUKE_TIMOTHY_JOHNSON?auto=download2018), (accessed Nov. 30, 2018), 2, 4. Williams indicated that growth strategies cause migratory and consumeristic congregations rather than develop engaging activities in their community with a distinctive culture that reignites missionary zeal. Growth strategies may affect rural church outreaches. See Appendix.

<sup>36</sup> Stronstad, *A Pentecost Biblical Theology: Turning Points in the Story of Redemption*, 160.

<sup>37</sup> Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 2011), 163.

<sup>38</sup> Stronstad, *A Pentecost Biblical Theology: Turning Points in the Story of Redemption*, 102. Stronstad *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke's Charismatic Theology*, 101-102.

<sup>39</sup> Cranford, "Paul's Calling to Ministry." 121. "The continuous leadership of the Holy Spirit through ministry served to give direction and spiritual strength to complete the Heavenly assignments. And—most importantly—every ministry direction centered around sharing the good news of salvation through Christ that could bring access into the very presence of the Holy God of this universe"

<sup>40</sup> Denzil Miller. *Empowered for Global Mission: A Missionary Look at the Book of Acts* (Springfield, IL: Life Publishers International, 2005), 174.

<sup>41</sup> Denzil Miller and Enson Lwesya. *Power for Mission: The Africa Assemblies of God Mobilizing to Reach the Unreached* (Springfield, MO: AIA Publications, 2014), 28-32.

<sup>42</sup> Harry Boer. *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 109-110.

<sup>43</sup> A consistent theme derived from Jesus' instructions and promise in Acts 1:8 included every age and gender should be empowered with the Holy (Joel 2:28-29 and Acts 2:17-18).

<sup>44</sup> Keener, 2015, 3517.

<sup>45</sup> Harold Netland. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 346.

<sup>46</sup> Luke 1:11-22; 26-38; 2:9-15; 2:24:23; Acts 5:19; 6:15; 7:19, 30, 35, 38; 10:3-4, 7, 9, 17, 19-22; 11:5, 13; 12:7-11, 15, 23; 16:6, 9-10; 18:9; 23:8-9; 26:19; 27:23.

<sup>47</sup> Tony Stoltzfus. *The Calling Journey: Mapping the Stages of a Leader's Life Call* (Redding, CA: Coach22 Bookstore, LLC, 2011), 31.

<sup>48</sup> York, John. *A Biblical Theology of Missions (Springfield, MO: Africa's Hope, 2008)*, 179.

<sup>49</sup> Beth Grant, "Influence Lifetime Achievement David and Beth Grant: General Council, Orland FL. August 1, 2019." (accessed August 9, 2019). <https://news.ag.org/en/News/Influence-Lifetime-Achievement-David-and-Beth-Grant>.

<sup>50</sup> Lausanne 2011, Sect. 75-81.

<sup>51</sup> Moltmann Jurgen Moltmann. *The Church in Power of the Spirit*. (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc. 1977), 10.

<sup>52</sup> Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission*, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Book.2002), 59. "Vocation is, in part, a function of the particular gifts God has given us; but we cannot know our vocation purely by looking inside ourselves. Our choices are constrained by givens that are outside our control. Neither are circumstances completely under our control. God, though, is in control of them all. While non-believers are trapped in their random, meaningless world, Christians have the confidence that 'all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose'" (Rom. 8:28). This promise follows Paul's admonition that Spirit helps us pray according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27).