

CALLED, EMPOWERED, AND SENT, KNOWN AND UNKNOWN

A REFLECTION ON MISSIONAL LEADERSHIP

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Spiritus 7.2 (2022) 271–78

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Introduction

This issue of *Spiritus* focuses on Spirit-empowered mission and leadership, dedicated to the work and life of countless Spirit-filled “soldiers” of the kingdom. The movement has produced a host of dedicated leaders whose work is significant. Many publications introduce these figures.¹ While Pentecostal-Charismatic “stars” receive both good and bad attention, the real heroes of empowered witnessing are often forgotten. They are the nameless “ordinary” believers who are in the same way called, Spirit-empowered, and sent by the same Lord.

Theologically Speaking

What makes them—the known and unknown—so motivated to reach every sphere of human society with boldness and courage? The crux of this extraordinary “empowerment” and mobilization lies fully in the Holy Spirit. Called “baptism in the Spirit” by modern Pentecostals, this crisis experience results in two distinct and revolutionary outcomes.

The first is the “empowerment” effect. Christ’s promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit before his ascension has a strong emphasis on power: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8).² Their Bible (what we call the “Old Testament”) was full of Spirit-empowered heroes. The Spirit of God came upon the selected leaders, ranging from Joseph to the future king. In Joseph’s case, it was the Pharaoh who attributed Joseph’s ability to interpret the dreams to the presence of God’s Spirit: “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God(s)?” (Gen 41:37). Gideon was also given supernatural wisdom and courage as the Spirit came upon him to muster an inter-tribal army (Judg 6:34–35). And the subsequent decisive victory over the “Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern people” with a small contingent of soldiers is also attributed to Gideon’s Spirit-empowered military

leadership. This empowering function of the Spirit in the Old Testament reaches a climax in the predictions of the ideal king. Isaiah 11 portrays that “the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him” with three sets of manifested qualities: wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, and knowledge and fear of the Lord (v. 2). “Fear of the Lord” is the recurring virtue (also in v. 3). These qualities (or empowerment) through the presence of the Spirit will cause him to establish righteousness and justice, measured by the protection of the powerless and punishment of the wicked (v. 4). His just and righteous reign will usher in peace and harmony throughout creation (vv. 6–9)—Paradise restored! This historically unfulfilled but long-awaited expectation is the root of the New Testament promise of “power.”

The book of Acts is rightly the Acts of the Holy Spirit as his empowered servants shook Jerusalem, and spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the world. The book shows several features of empowered witnessing. Strangely, the first is the presence of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was a powerful event, drawing thousands of inquirers and witnesses. Acts 8 is another occasion. Philip’s surprising and successful evangelistic work drew a large Samaritan crowd, both his message of the Messiah and the signs he performed (vv. 5–6). This news reached Jerusalem, and Peter and John came to Samaria. They specifically prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit (v. 15). When people received it, the event was extraordinary enough that Simon, a newly converted sorcerer, craved the power and offered the apostles money (vv. 18–20). Second, the Spirit gives boldness and courage to proclaim Christ. It comes with such a conviction to challenge the audience and commitment even to the cost of one’s life. Perhaps one outstanding example was Stephen. Among the seven, he has the most number of references to the Holy Spirit associated with him, including at his last moment: “Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God” (7:55). His long historical and apologetic sermon to the Sanhedrin displays extraordinary boldness, charging them for the death of Christ and their rebellious ancestors for killing many prophets (v. 52). Third, Spirit-empowered ministries often include God’s supernatural work, including healing and miraculous experiences. Again, the book of Acts is full of them, such as Paul’s preservation from the viper’s bite after the shipwreck near Malta (28:3–5). All these characteristics are always linked to the proclamation of Christ as the Lord and Savior. And modern Spirit-empowered faith exhibits identical traits and, thus, is rightly called the apostolic faith. Its exponential growth is credited to this unique spiritual and theological belief and experience.

The second is the universalizing extent of this empowering experience, which some scholars call the “prophethood of all believers.” This is what the Old Testament eagerly anticipated for the new age of full restoration. As observed above, the coming of God’s empowering Spirit in the Old Testament was highly exclusive, only upon selected

leaders and prophets. Perhaps the most “massive” experience of the Spirit’s coming was upon the seventy elders (Num 11:17, 25). Despite the impressive number, their experience with the Spirit had restrictions, as the literary clues suggest. God “took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him” (or literally, “took Spirit from on him”), unmistakably indicating their subordinate role to Moses’ leadership. The “quantity” of the Spirit also reinforces their relationship with Moses. As a result of the Spirit’s coming, “they prophesied—but did not do so again” (v. 25). While the text suggests the perpetual presence of the Spirit upon Moses, the seventy had only a temporary manifestation of the Spirit’s coming. Whether the Spirit continued its presence upon the seventy is another question, the literary impression sets Moses apart from them. However, two (among the seventy) did not join the others in the Tent of Meeting (or the designated holy place). Yet, the Spirit also “rested on them, and also prophesied in [their] camp” (v. 27). To Joshua’s objection, Moses expressed his deep desire: “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them” (v. 29). Thus, throughout the Old Testament, this expectation was engraved in the vision of the restored age. Joel’s prophecy picked up this ancient faith and elaborated the liberal endowment of the Spirit upon God’s people in the age of God’s full reign:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28–29).

It is no wonder that Peter quoted this passage on the day of Pentecost to respond to boiling questions of the bewildered crowd: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” (Acts 2:7); “Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?” (v. 8); and “What does this mean?” (v. 12). He declared that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the 120 was the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (vv. 16–21). God is to “pour out” his Spirit, already suggesting the abundance of his endowment. The cataloging of the prophetic words also enhances the abundance: “prophesy,” “dream dreams,” and “see visions.” However, the most fundamental element here (both in Joel and Acts) is the “democratization” of the Spirit, from exclusive to universal. It is to break all societal barriers: race, status, age, and gender. On the day of Pentecost, the writer of Acts highlights this aspect of the Spirit’s coming. They were “all together” in one place (v. 1), and “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 4). The scripture identifies the members of the group as the apostles (1:12–13), “women,” “Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (v. 14). The 120 were simply called the “believers” (v.

15). And they were ALL filled with the Holy Spirit: the apostles, the family of Jesus, women, and men.

In today's Spirit-empowered faith, every believer is called, Spirit-empowered, and sent to proclaim God's good news. Some are sent to far regions of the world, but many others to their workplaces, homes, and classrooms. It is a Messianic commission that we continue today with the crucial empowerment of the Holy Spirit: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21–22).

Learning from the Early Church

The book of Acts presents every believer's crucial role in spreading the gospel. Two examples may suffice to support this argument. The first is the nameless "some" (Acts 11:20), who fled the persecution in Jerusalem and moved northward, perhaps homebound. As they traveled "as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch," they "spread the word" to fellow Jews (v. 19). However, the next verse reveals that their paths, which may have begun to save their lives, were intentional in two different ways. The first is the "men from Cyprus and Cyrene," indicating that some were heading to their homes, but others were moving in the opposite direction from home (that is, Cyrene in Northern Africa). The second is their intentional crossing of the cultural and language boundaries by "telling [Greeks as well] the good news about the Lord Jesus" in Antioch. We assume them Spirit-empowered early believers as "the Lord's hand was with them," often referring to supernatural healing and miracles. As the result of their proclamation and demonstration of God's wonder, "a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (v. 21). This proclamation-manifestation-evangelism pattern first appeared in the record of the apostles (e.g., chs. 2 and 3), and then among the "deacons" (e.g., ch. 8). This is now widely shared among the "unknown" heroes. The significance of the church in Antioch cannot be unnoticed as the launch pad for the Christian faith from a Jewish sect to a world religion. Despite the continuing leadership of the Jerusalem church, the second half of Acts finds Antioch as the center of the expanding Christian faith to the broader world. Christ's mandate to reach out to the "ends of the world" with the gospel may have been transferred from Jerusalem to Antioch. While the apostles founded the former through the coming of the Holy Spirit, the unknown Spirit-empowered runaways established the latter.

The second example is the evangelism of "Asia," as recorded in Acts 19. During Paul's two-year stay in Ephesus, he preached Christ's good news and discipled (or "had discussions" with) new believers daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (v. 9). Through these intense and sustained efforts, "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (v. 10). In this case, the report presents the primary

role of the nameless mass in this splendid achievement more subtly than the case of the “some” above. The role of Paul and other leaders, such as Priscilla and Aquilla (18:26), was decisive. The church also began with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon twelve men with tongue-speaking (19:6–7). As Paul spoke boldly (v. 8, “proclamation”) and God did extraordinary miracles through him (v. 11, “manifestation”), the outcome was a great harvest (“conversion”), completing the paradigm set throughout the book. Luke recorded the impact: “They [the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus] were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor” (v. 17). As this went on for two whole years—“the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (v. 20)—until everyone in Asia heard the word of the Lord. It must have been an ideal partnership between the center (Ephesus) and peripheries (all the provinces of Asia). As Paul and his leaders preached, evangelized, and disciplined new believers, the rest of this faith community took the call to witness to Christ as their vocation as they continued their daily activities. Although not recorded, many could be organically fulfilling God’s call, but others took more intentional steps to reach out to many areas of Asia. As expected, the latter, massive in size, remain unknown or unnamed. But as with Paul in Ephesus, they were the heroes who spoke about the new Lord in every corner of the region.

Today’s Examples

Throughout church history, millions of Spirit-empowered heroes, both known and unknown, have turned the Christian faith into a global movement. I selected three contemporary examples close to my own workplace: Oral Roberts University (ORU), Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA. They lived their lives differently, but all were empowered by the Holy Spirit and took their lives as God’s unique gift to those who came into contact with them. Each section is written by a member of the ORU community, identified in the endnote.

John Chau (1991–2018)³

The phrase “Soli Deo Gloria” is widely regarded as a tenant of the Christian evangelical faith since the coining of the Five Solas during the Protestant Reformation. Most recently, the phrase is connected to the life and legacy of John Chau, a young missionary and beloved member of the ORU community who was martyred in 2018 when he felt called to the unreachable North Sentinel Island in the Bay of Bengal. In copious journal entries and letters, John concluded his thoughts with “Soli Deo Gloria, John Chau.” As the world learned of his preparation and journey to the island, the words have reverberated through the evangelical community, sparking a new

conversation about what it means to be a Spirit-empowered believer in the twenty-first century.

John believed the measure of success in the kingdom was obedience, and his life was marked by radical submission to the Lord long before he reached the island. During his time as a student and beyond, John lived out “Glory to God alone” through local outreach, short-term mission trips, and practical preparation. With a passion for soccer and a heart for serving youth, John poured his time into the Burmese community and an after-school ministry in Tulsa for many years. He also took the gospel to several countries while living missionally in daily life. John embodied the kindness and gentleness of the Spirit, the love of Christ for everyone he met, and had the Father’s heart for the world. His preparation for his mission was unparalleled, from anthropology and church planting training, becoming a wilderness emergency medical technician, to physical preparation with eye surgery and cold showers. Although considered young in many eyes, John had an eternal perspective. His journal reveals his goal in reaching the island: “The eternal lives of this tribe are at hand, and I can’t wait to see them around the throne of God worshipping in their own language, as Revelation 7:9–10 states.”

The life and death of John Chau were marked with grief, hope, and glory. Grief for his passing, but hope that God continues being glorified through the salvation of the Sentinelese. John prayed for others to continue the work, so may the church embrace living “Soli Deo Gloria.”

Ben Chrisostom (1960–2021)⁴

Ben Chrisostom, originally from India, lived a life that was totally committed to serving Christ and helping others. His passion was ministry to the international students he met at ORU through his thirty-two years with Sodexo food services, for many years as a retail manager. Ben helped these students find places to live and jobs, taught them how to drive, and provided food and clothing when needed—with his own money. He mentored these students, taking them with him when he ministered. Ben founded and pastored the Tulsa International Fellowship, which ministers spiritually to recently-arrived international students. Shortly before he died, he was booking speakers for upcoming fellowship meetings from his hospital bed.

Ben was often at his church at 4 or 5 a.m., praying before work. He always took time to comfort and pray for others. Ben once drove from Tulsa to Tennessee (more than fourteen-hour non-stop round-trip driving) to pray for someone in person. Once, a member of the ORU community commented that he wished his mother-in-law had accepted Christ before her passing. Ben told him that he had visited her in the hospital

and had led her to Christ. He cooked breakfast and shared a devotional with the homeless on Sundays at the Salvation Army.

Ben spent twenty-four summers preaching in Hindu villages in northern India. He did this at considerable risk to his own life. He and the pastors with him would take a jeep as far as the roads went and then walk to isolated villages where they preached the gospel in the open air. Sometimes, large groups, even entire villages, came to Christ and were baptized. As a result, many churches were planted. Ben organized conferences to encourage and equip these Indian pastors. He raised support and helped plant orphanages across northern India. A number of boys from these orphanages went on to become pastors and missionaries. Ben was self-supporting and donated any funds he was given to his Indian coworkers or the orphanages he helped plant.

Shortly before he died, Ben ministered in Egypt under a COVID lockdown. He reached out to underground churches with daily broadcasts. Often, Ben did not go to bed till 2:30 a.m. He helped establish a vocational training program in Egypt for COVID widows. Ben was an empowered Christian soldier who empowered many others! And his wife, Maggie, was a close partner in his extraordinary service to the kingdom.

Eugene Quaynor (1999–2022)⁵

Eugene, a Ghanaian international student at ORU, may not have been known by many, but those fortunate enough to meet him could not forget him. Eugene was a walking manifestation of joy and love. His fruit was always on display for anyone and everyone to see. John 13:35 tells us that our pursuit of Jesus will be visible in how we love each other. Everyone knew that Eugene Quaynor loved Jesus.

Eugene perpetually served joyfully. A glowing smile shining across his face, he was always ready and willing to serve: his family, his friends, his teammates, his coaches, and strangers who dropped their bags in the street, always seeking to put others first. Eugene's soccer teammates and coaches have countless stories of being met at a doorway by Eugene, waiting to carry their bags. Even the positions Eugene played on the soccer field were positions of service. One of his coaches characterized Eugene as the best counter-attack defender he has coached. Eugene's commitment to service made him one of his team's hardest-working and most willing competitors, but he never sought praise. He was uncomfortable when his teammates elected him captain. He was uncomfortable winning conference awards. These things were not a part of Eugene's plan. His plan focused on loving others well and supporting his family in any way possible. He was always seeking ways to do those things better. Eugene put his plans on tablets, documenting his walk with Jesus and his spiritual growth. He saw every day as a chance to create opportunities for others: his brothers, his teammates, and those he

casually met throughout the day. Everyone who met Eugene encountered two things: a bright smile and the love of Jesus.

Conclusion

As we receive Spirit-empowerment as a special mission gift from the Lord, we honor “named” as well as “nameless” millions of Spirit-empowered heroes in God’s mission of the past, present, and future. And we commit ourselves to this cause as God’s servants, fully known to him: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations” (Isa 42:1).



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Notes:

¹ For example, Dean Merrill, *50 Pentecostal and Charismatic Leaders Every Christian Should Know* (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen Books, 2021).

² Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

³ By Allie Mendoza, Associate Director of Spiritual Life, Oral Roberts University, October 18, 2022. The source is John Chau and Warren and Donna Pett, “Who Will Take My Place?” *The Voice of Martyrs* 55:6 (June 2022), 4–11, <https://www.persecution.com/stories/john-chau/> (18 October 2022).

⁴ By Robert Leland, Senior Professor of Engineering and Physics, Oral Roberts University on October 18, 2022.

⁵ By Curtis Ellis, Dean of the College of Arts and Cultural Studies, Oral Roberts University on October 18, 2022.