

## The Wind of the Spirit in the Local Church



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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper describes the work of the Holy Spirit in empowering local and global missions, and asserts that this was the momentum experienced by the early church in the book of Acts (Acts 2). It examines how the Holy Spirit's presence in the early church can create the same momentum and empowering work that is needed today in both local and global missions. The paper is introduced with a brief historical review of the manifestations of the breath and wind of YHWH in both the Old and New Testaments. The next three sections describe the work of the Spirit's empowerment of the local church in three specific areas. The first area looks at the roles of the local church in enacting the commission, evaluating, and holding fast to truth in the public square. The second area connects the local church with equipping and training global workers. The third area continues the work of the Spirit in building relationships and sending out local and global workers. The disciples' momentum was impelled by the local rushing mighty wind of the Spirit, which then created a global movement. For this to happen in the local church today, there must be room for the working and manifestation of the Holy Spirit to transform lives. In conclusion, an invitation is given to the reader today, as it was when Christ was born: Is there any room for the Holy Spirit to work in the local church? The wind and power of the Spirit demonstrated in the book of Acts will empower the local church's roles, responsibilities, and relationships to be effective in missions locally and globally.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Local church, Holy Spirit, breath of YHWH, global missions, church roles, church responsibilities, church relationships*

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In the early church, the wind of the Holy Spirit created an unstoppable momentum that spread throughout the world. As Walvoord (1991) put it, the “power, invisibility, immaterial nature, and sovereign purpose of wind in creation have their counterpart in the work of the Holy Spirit” (p. 24). Wind is mentioned often in Scripture, from Genesis 8:1 to Revelation 7. However, three specific mentions that stand out are John 3:8, Acts 2:1-2, and 2 Peter 1:21, which refer to the wind driving the ship (Walvoord, 1991, p. 24). This paper examines the topic mainly through discussion of Christopher Wright's (2010) book, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission*, alongside references to Scripture and biblical scholarly reviews. How can the effects of the Holy Spirit's presence in the early church create the same momentum today in the local church and global missions? I contend that the wind and power of the Spirit demonstrated in the book of Acts will empower the local church's roles, responsibilities, and relationships to be effective in missions locally and globally.

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Lesslie Newbigin (1995) argues that mission “is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey” (p. 56). Paul the Apostle declared, “my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4-5, KJV). The work of the Holy Spirit is a matter of words or deeds empowered by the liberating presence of the Spirit (Costas, 1983, p. 92).

### **YHWH Breathes on the Church**

Wright (2010) states that the “Spirit of YHWH has a major role in the Old Testament (Ps. 104:30),” but “only once in relation to the life-giving power of God within the whole created order” (p. 208). In the Old Testament, in Psalms 104:30 (and referring to Genesis 1:2) the word for Spirit is the Hebrew word *ruach* (רוּחַ; Strong's: 7307) meaning breath, wind, or spirit. In the New Testament, in Acts 2:2 the Greek word for wind, *pnóe* (πνοή; Strong's: 4157) means blowing, wind, or breath. Another Greek word, *pnéō*, is the verb form of the same root, and means ‘to breathe hard’ (πνέω; Strong's: 4154).

When the Spirit breathed on individuals it created action: (a) Simeon “came in the Spirit (Luke 2:27, NASB) into the temple” (Menzie's, 2004, p. 141). (b) Then “Jesus was led up by the Spirit (Matt. 4:1) into the wilderness” (Menzie's, 2004, p. 141). (c) Following Acts 2:2 “Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold three men are looking for you’” (Acts 10:19-20). (d) Finally, Paul had a vision of the people from Macedonia calling him to come and help them (Acts 16:9). Menzie's (2004) notes, “whether it be John in his mother's womb, Jesus at the Jordan, or the disciples at Pentecost, the Spirit comes upon them all...and as such empower them to carry out their divinely appointed tasks” (p. 177).

For the church to experience the fullness of the Spirit's breath, the organized church must make room for the Spirit to be a participant - as it was in Acts 2:22. This is the only Scripture in the Bible that puts signs, miracles, and wonders in the same verse as an outflowing of Acts 2:2. The breath of God blew upon those gathered in the upper room and “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out” (Acts 2:1-4). Consequently, the manifested breath of the Spirit empowered the local gathered community members with the charismatic gift of other languages as a witness to other nations (Acts 2:8; 1 Cor. 14:21-25). Similarly, Wright (2010) states “the risen Jesus...commands the Spirit, breathes the Spirit, and sends the Spirit to empower his disciples for mission (Luke 24:49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:8)” (p. 208). The Word of God, as Wright (2010) states, “is the perfect missionary, bearing fruit entirely as God plans,” which is “God's purposeful sending, accomplishing God's ultimate desire” (p. 208). The gift of other tongues demonstrates the Spirit's desire and empowerment to use the local spirit-filled community to witness to foreigners and to empower those going out to global communities.

Less than six months into the Azusa Street revival, reports of what the Lord was doing had spread far and wide (Synan, 2001, pp. 71-72). Specifically, Thomas B. Barratt recalled “being overcome by a burden for global evangelism, and preaching and praying in divinely given languages after being baptized in the Holy Spirit” (Synan, 2001, pp. 71-72). His testimony revealed the prevailing spirit of “Pentecostalism to evangelize the world” (Synan, 2001, p. 71), the “most noteworthy of which was the Mukti (‘Salvation’) revival in India (1905-7)”. This revival took place at the Mukti Mission under the guidance of the famous Brahmin Christian woman Pandita Ramabai, her daughter Manoramabai, and the former Methodist Episcopal missionary Minnie Abrams (Wonsuk et al., 2014, pp. 14-15; Synan, 2001, pp. 84-85).

Wonsuk et al. (2014) observe that this move of the Holy Spirit resulted in

[a] revival lasted for a year and a half and resulted in 1,100 baptisms at Ramabai's school, confessions of sins and repentances, prolonged prayer meetings, speaking in tongues, and the witnessing of some seven hundred of these young women in teams going into the surrounding areas, about a hundred going out daily, sometimes for as long as a month at a time. (pp. 14-15)

In this way, the Spirit empowered the gathered community by the wind of his manifestation through the church in many languages, in signs and wonders as witnessed in India as it was in Acts. Peter declared the Word in Acts 2:14-47 to call all to salvation, quoting from Joel 2:28-32. In short, the book of Acts is "where you find people moving in spontaneous obedience as they are propelled by the fresh wind of the Spirit" (Cymbala, 1997, p. 150). The next section examines the role of the local church in global missions.

### **Roles of the Local Church**

The Spirit empowers the local church to "reaffirm [its] conviction of the truth of the gospel" and teach the gathered community how to "build [their] whole lives upon it" (Wright, 2010, p. 281). The truth must still go out even in this post-modern era, as it is the church's mission to declare that the Bible "makes sense of life, the universe, and everything" (Wright, 2010, p. 281). Conversely, the gospel also "tells the bad news as it really is, and it declares what God and God alone has done for the redemption of all our bad stories" (Wright, 2010, p. 281). The work of the Spirit empowers the church to declare the truth to all as part of its Great Commission to a world without any hope or knowledge of the saving power of Christ. Peter states, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The remarkable story of God's mission is stated in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life". Thus, when the local body aligns more closely in purpose, mission, and direction by the work of the Spirit, they should also become more like Christ and complete his mandate. This mandate is expressed in Luke 4:18-19: "He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (KJV). Hence, the local church is to fulfill its commission by sending disciples out, both locally and globally, who bring the manifest power of the Spirit according to Acts 2:22 to preach salvation, heal the sick, and set the captive free.

Additionally, "we are called to the role of the prophet, not just of the chaplain" (Wright, 2010, p. 271). Thus, the role of the church in the sending out is "not simply to put a veneer of uncritical blessing on whatever social or economic (or military) enterprises take place in the public arena," which "was one of the distortions Christendom generated" (Wright, 2010, p. 271). Moreover, "the people of God are called to maintain a critical distance and to speak on behalf of" the Christ and the Word (Wright, 2010, p. 271). In humility, the church must "offer the voice of evaluation, of critique or approval, according to the standards we learn in God's own revelation" (Wright, 2010, p. 271). The role of the church is to "renounce evil and hold fast to what is good," and that requires our "minds and hearts" to be able to "recognize the difference" (Wright, 2010, p. 271).

According to Acts 2:37, the Spirit empowered the disciples with boldness of speech in the midst of persecution: "Now when they heard this they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what are we to do?'" (NASB). Wright (2010) insists that "the church collectively can still perform this prophetic function in the public square," although it may

cause resistance even from some appointed chaplains of the marketplace (p. 271). In other words, the local church needs to “recover the voice of biblical engagement” in our communities and the “courage needed to go with it” (Wright, 2010, p. 271). The reaction in your community may not be as severe as Stephen’s experience in Acts 7:54, nevertheless, speaking the truth will cause a reaction.

Wright (2010) presents the following questions: (a) “Where are the saints who will actually live as saints—God’s different people, God’s counterculture—in the public square?” and (b) “Where are those who see their mission as God’s people to live and work and witness in the marketplace, and pay the cost of doing so?” (p. 236). In this way, the empowerment of the Spirit through the roles of the local church is essential for the church to fulfill its commission, which is to evaluate and speak the truth in boldness while holding fast to moral integrity and Christian distinctiveness (Wright, 2010, p. 236). Hence, according to both the book of Acts and the wind of the Spirit, the disciples went out and turned the world upside down. Let us go out like them, empowered by the Holy Spirit so the world around us will see that the local and global church has the answer to their spiritual and physical needs.

### **Responsibilities of the Local Church**

According to the Apostle Paul, God gave his church pastors and teachers “to equip the saints for works of service” (Eph. 4:12; cf. Acts 2:2 16:9). The term “works of service” does not just refer to Christian activity. Rather, Wright (2010) argues that “God did not invent the church to support the clergy,” and that “this turned right upside down is one of the commonest misconceptions of the church that sadly still cripples its effectiveness” (p. 272). In other words, “the pastor goes to church on Sunday to support the people in their ministry” which is the mission “outside the walls of the church, in the world, being salt and light in the marketplace” (Wright, 2010, p. 272). This equipping and training is not only for the local marketplace, but also beyond, in supporting and training those who are sent out by the power of the Spirit to missions locally and globally. This is shown in Acts 10:19-20: “while Peter was reflecting on the vision, the Spirit said three men are looking for you, but get up go,” and in Paul’s vision of the Macedonia call in Acts 16:9.

Menzies (2004) states, “whether it be John in his mother’s womb, Jesus at the Jordan, or the disciples at Pentecost, the Spirit comes upon them all...and as such empowers them to carry out their divinely appointed tasks” (p. 177). It is imperative for global workers sent out from the local body to maintain interconnectedness through prayer, financial support, and training. If disconnected, then they would feel like a hand or arm severed from the human body. According to Acts 4:31-32, after the place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Ghost, “all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had” (NIV). The unity described in Acts 4:31-32 follows the description of the apostles being full of power in the Spirit in Acts 4:33: “With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all.” The Spirit empowered the unity of the disciples in sharing and supporting one another.

Wright (2010) argues that support for fellow workers is part of the local church’s responsibility (p. 220), as stated in 3 John 8: “Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.” He continues, “Paul argues this strongly in 1 Corinthians 9 [pointing to] ... churches that do not adequately provide for the needs of mission partners” then claim “their missionaries are ‘living by faith’” (Wright, 2010, p. 220). This is both “hypocritical” and “a matter of ‘obedience to the gospel of Christ’ (2 Cor. 9:12-14)” (Wright, 2010, p. 220). Therefore, Wright (2010) argues for us to “work together for the truth” including “all of us, the sent and the senders” (p. 220). However, “the church that is sent into the world is ... already in the world” (Wright, 2010, p. 266) Therefore, through the work of the Spirit, the local church must see its mission “as something that happens in and for that public world” (Wright, 2010, p. 266).

On the contrary, Vanderwerf (2011) argues that if we apply sending language of mission to everything the church does in the world, “the apostolic task (what the Son was sent to accomplish, what the Spirit was sent to empower, the foundational work that the 12 and Paul were called, prepared, and sent to do) is blurred” (p. 16). The responsibility of the gathered church is to fulfill the Great Commission and reach one’s neighbour, but the context of this sending is further than your next-door neighbour (Stetzer, 2013, para. 14). In Acts 1:8 we see the people going “out” from Jerusalem, rather than bringing the nations “up” to Jerusalem (Stetzer, 2013, para. 15). Stetzer (2013) argues that, as “living agents of God’s mission,” we cannot take “John 20:21 in isolation without also remembering Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8” (para. 23).

In all this, it is contended that “Luke consistently portrays the Spirit as the source of prophetic inspiration, which ... empowers God’s people for effective service” (Menziez, 2004, p. 44). Thus, the Spirit’s empowering for mission is, in essence, empowerment for witnesses to take up the prophetic vocation to the nations to which [the disciples were] called” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Menziez, 2004, p. 174). Paul made it his ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that he would not build on someone else’s foundation (Rom. 15:20). In the same way, the church’s mission statement must include reaching people where the gospel has not been heard, both locally and globally.

### **Relationships of the Local Church**

Hastings (2012) argues that the “Spirit’s utterance” and simultaneous “breathing action” is “the relationship between the commission and the action of Jesus, [which] reveals the correspondence between ‘the sentness of Jesus and his people’ and the coming of the Spirit to dwell within and among them.” Wright also sees this illustrated in the life and ministry of both Jesus and Paul (p. 275): In Acts 10:36–38, Peter summarizes Jesus’ ministry as engaging both the telling of the good news and the doing of good acts. Similarly, in Romans 15:18-19 Paul reflects,

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done [emphasis added]— by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God.

The result of breaking this relationship between saying and doing is that, in our evangelistic efforts, we are now sometimes perceived as “those who talk a lot but whose lives do not support what they say” (Wright, 2010, p. 275). Hence, Wright (2010) notes that “lack of integrity in this area has been identified by various researchers as the major obstacle to the acceptance of the message of the gospel” p. 275). Let us now look at the relationships within the local church.

According to Vanderwerf (2011), “it is helpful to consider local churches in three dimensions of relationship. Believers in local churches, individually and corporately, relate upwardly to God, inwardly to each other, and outwardly with those who are not believers” (p. 11). Today, “many missional churches speak more of unserved peoples rather than unreached peoples” (Stetzer, 2009, para 13). As a result, they engage in delivering justice rather than focusing on the delivery of “the gospel regardless of anyone’s status in a culture” (Stetzer, 2009, para. 13). Therefore, if we are following in the steps of Jesus, we must present a “holistic (or wholistic) mission” (Wright, 2010, p. 275). On the other hand, the term “missional” has “trended toward a personal obligation to personal settings, rather than toward a global obligation to advance God’s kingdom among all the nations” (Stetzer, 2009, para. 7). James states it practically: “Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?” (Jas. 2:15-16). Thus, as representatives of Jesus Christ

who are responsible for His commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,” (Mark 12:31) let us combine our faith with action to bring a holistic message to advance the kingdom of God.

This missional impulse has resulted “in believers moved only to minister in their own Jerusalems with no mind toward their Judeas, Samarias, and uttermost parts of the earth” (Stetzer, 2009, para. 8). However, Christ “calls people from all tongues, tribes, and nations,” so we must go outside of our own tribe to avoid losing “the vital connection all believers share” and the vision “for the communion of the saints” (1 Cor. 14:26; Stetzer, 2009, para. 15). For this reason, if the church is serious about being missional and loving its neighbours, it will obey Christ’s command “to make disciples of all nations” through the Spirit’s empowerment (Stetzer, 2009, para. 19). This is one of the reasons for sending out members from the local church to global missions. Local church members need to experience the Spirit both in salvation and in God’s missionary field: the “world.” Let us be filled with the Holy Ghost fire by the wind of the Spirit, according to Acts 2:2, and be sent out to the global mission field to be changed forever.

## Conclusion

The momentum of the wind of the Spirit in the early church informs how a local church can be empowered to do missions locally and globally today. First, the breath of YHWH was the momentum of the early church in disciplining nations. It is the same wind of the Spirit in the early church that impelled both local and global missions as seen in the book of Acts. In the same manner, the Spirit empowered the disciples in the charismatic gifts of other tongues, signs, miracles, and wonders, which are imperative to the integrity of preaching the gospel. The Spirit’s work in empowering the local church’s roles, responsibilities, and relationships to missions, both locally and globally, can be examined in terms of three areas: The first area focuses on the roles of the local church in enacting the commission, evaluating, and holding fast to truth in the public square. The second area connects the local church with training and equipping global workers. The third area continues the work of the Spirit in building relationships and in sending out local and global workers.

The disciples’ momentum was impelled by the rushing, mighty wind of the Spirit locally, which then created a global movement. The active work of the Spirit is imperative to the local church. Therefore, the wind and power of the Spirit demonstrated in the book of Acts will empower the local church’s roles, responsibilities, and relationships to be effective in missions locally and globally. The local church is invited to participate in the work of the Spirit, which is essential for equipping, training, empowering, and connecting all members of the body of Christ both locally and globally. The local church is also challenged to make room for a fresh wind of the Spirit to breathe new life in its local church community and in disciplining all nations through local and global missions.

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