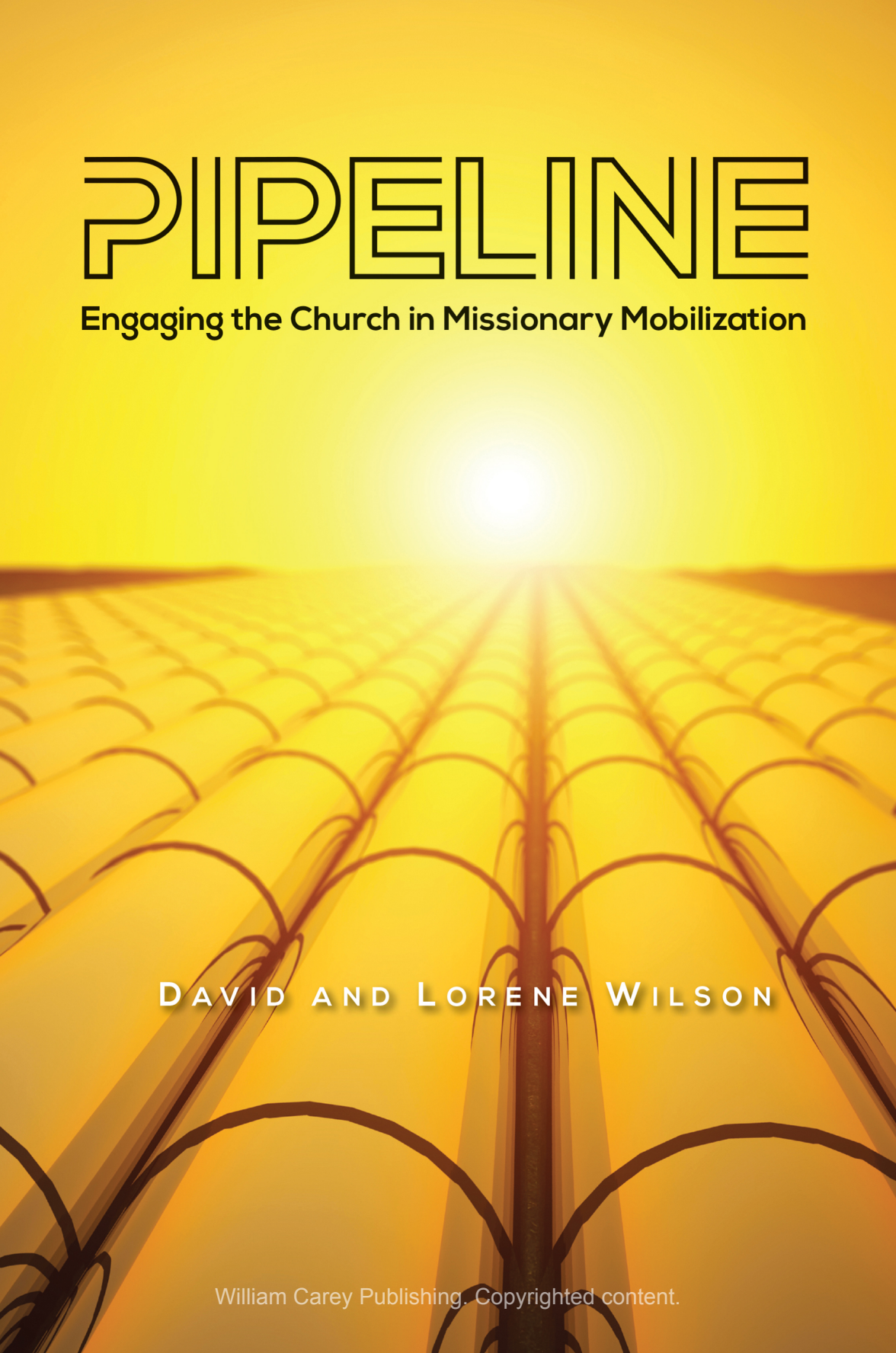
PIPELINE

Engaging the Church in Missionary Mobilization



David and Lorene Wilson

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Pipeline: Engaging the Church in Missionary Mobilization

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CHAPTER 1
Call Experiences from Scripture

God's People Answering the Call

David J. Wilson

One of my favorite movies is *The Blues Brothers*. Jake and Elwood are on a mission from God to help raise money for the orphanage in which they grew up. Several times throughout the movie, when they are facing opposition, obstacles, and hindrances to their mission, they say the classic phrase, "We're on a mission from God." They say this as an affirmation of why they cannot give up.

Even though this is just a movie tagline, it helps to illustrate the point that a clear and compelling call experience is necessary for missionaries to cling to when the work gets tough and they start to consider stepping away from the ministry. Their work will be difficult; they will experience opposition and hardship. But when they can remember their calling, the Lord brings rest to their hearts and minds, which gives them courage to continue.

While spending more than twenty years as a mission pastor in the local church, here are some of the most common questions I have heard from young people:

- "How can I know God's will for my life?"
- "How does God speak to his people?"
- "I think God wants me to serve him, but I don't feel called. What is it like to be called by God to be a pastor or missionary?"

ReMAP I and II (Reducing Missionary Attrition Project) found that of all the variables, a call experience is "vital to retention" of long-term missionaries. Most missionary sending agencies rate "a strong sense of calling" as a top priority area in their selection process when evaluating missionary candidates.[1] Without a strong sense of personal calling, there is little that will

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keep a missionary from quitting when the work gets hard. When individuals know that the Lord has called them for a purpose, has equipped them for the job ahead, and is guiding them along the way, they can endure any hardship because they know their suffering has meaning and purpose.

Both in Scripture and in modern situations, people have answered the Lord's calling to serve him in this world as ambassadors for a heavenly kingdom. While God speaks to everyone differently, according to their unique design, this chapter is an attempt to categorize the different ways people have heard from God so that a new generation of Christ-followers can hone their listening skills to hear his voice.

Just to demonstrate a stark contrast in the way God has called his people in Scripture, let's look at the callings of Moses, David, Esther, and Paul.

The Call of Moses—Exodus 3:2–10

> And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.
>
> Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians . . . Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."

Later, in Exodus 33:11, Scripture says, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."

The Call of David—1 Samuel 16:1–13

> The Lord said to Samuel, " . . . Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons…. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you…. Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature…. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." . . .

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> And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here." And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.

The Call of Esther—Esther 4:13,14

> Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

The Call of Paul—Acts 13:1–3

> Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers . . . While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

These four call experiences from Scripture highlight some of the many ways in which the Lord interacts with his people. Moses heard from God directly, with no intermediary. David was anointed through a prophet of the Lord. Esther was placed by God into a circumstance where only she could be his vessel to accomplish his purposes. And Paul (Saul) was set apart by his fellow church leaders, because they heard God's call to them as a body of believers to send these faithful missionaries on a journey as their representatives. In this instance, Paul was called out and sent by the church. However, he also had other interactions with God through visions (Acts 16:9; 18:9), through the person of Ananias (Acts 9), and by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12).

Theologians like to put the call of God into two neat and tidy categories: general revelation and special revelation.[2] For the purposes of this exercise, I have decided to broaden these terms to understand calling

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in a more practical way to help a new generation of church leaders and missionaries hear the voice of God as he calls them to serve. By taking a closer look at God's ways of calling people, we can categorize the types of call experiences to help people in churches understand that God does not work in the same way for all people. Just as we are all designed differently, to accomplish different tasks, we are also designed to hear from God differently. Let's take a look at seven different call experiences.

Types of Call Experiences

1. **Invitational.** Jesus was walking by fishermen at work and invited them to "Follow me." Those men became his "disciples," meaning followers, learners, students, protégés, or mentees. Today, there are pastors, retired missionaries, and church leaders who can look around their congregations and, through the prompting of the Holy Spirit, invite people to step up and serve alongside them in some way. They could say, "I sense God moving in your life and I would like to invite you to join me in serving the Lord together." This begins a mentoring relationship that will guide and shape the future direction of the follower.

   As Steve Harling, president of ReachBeyond (formerly HCJB), preached a sermon on mentoring, he described the "Three Gifts of a Mentor":

   a. **Affirmation:** "You are really good at this. You have a gift."
   b. **Inspiration:** "I saw you do this, and I want you to continue and grow in it."
   c. **Elevation:** "Here is your opportunity, and I'm getting out of your way."

2. **Scriptural.** Advocates of contemplative prayer, such as Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, emphasize that when people engage in spiritual disciplines like prayer, reading Scripture, meditation, and solitude, they open their hearts to hearing a message from God.

   > Specifically, in our attempts to understand how God speaks to us and guides us we must, above all, hold on to the fact that learning how to hear God is to be sought only as a part of a certain kind of life, a life of loving fellowship with the King and his other subjects within the kingdom of the heavens.[3]
   >
   > Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word.[4]

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While reading Scripture, some believers will sense God's prompting via passages like the Great Commission in Matthew 28 or Jesus' words in Luke 10:2 about praying to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers. They will accept this as God speaking directly to them, and thereby accept his call to serve.

3. **Supernatural.** I realize that by including this category I have excluded myself from many evangelical social events, having just been labeled a Pentecostal / charismatic / "strange fire" neophyte. Personally, I have not experienced the miraculous gifting of tongues, prophecy, or healing, nor have I heard the voice of God audibly; but I believe that others have. Even though I have not witnessed a miracle, I still believe that God can (and does) work in supernatural ways that are beyond human reason. Though this portion of the chapter may be unacceptable for many, my hope and intent is to give a biblical perspective of how God has called people in the past, and how he may choose to call people in the future. Yes, abuses take place in every arena of Christianity (including among both cessationists and continuationists), but I implore you to leave your mind open to the possibility that God could choose to use dreams, visions, miraculous signs, and even an occasional burning bush to call his people into his harvest.

4. **Experiential.** Early in my walk with Christ, I was exposed to Henry Blackaby's work, *Experiencing God*. After fifteen weeks of in-depth study, I walked away with the summation that we should be "reading the signs" that God is giving us. When we do this, we will see where God is working and be compelled to join him.

   This has been my favorite part of the faith journey as a pastor and as a mobilizer for missionaries. In those times of confusion when I begin to wonder what the Lord is doing, this simple yet profound teaching has always taken me to a new depth of understanding God. The gift of being able to look around with my five temporal senses and discover an eternal perspective requires intentionality, determination, and willpower, but the reward is a greater connection with our Creator.

5. **Affirmational.** On occasion someone has come to me and said, "Dave, I want to serve the Lord, but I don't know what he wants me to do or where he wants me to go." At those moments, unless I have a specific

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