



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 9:1-17**

To understand more about Jesus sending out His twelve apostles and the feeding of the 5,000.

## Holy Hitchhikers

On March 8th of 1978, Douglas Adams transmitted to the BBC Radio 4 the first-ever radio episode of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. The story follows the last surviving man, Arthur Dent, as he explores the universe after the destruction of earth. Dent is joined in his adventures by other travelers as well. The radio broadcast was such a success that it paved the way for the next phase of the story, told through additional novels, stage shows, comic books, a 1981 TV series, a 1984 text-based computer game, and a 2005 feature film. The story continued, and with a larger cast of hitchhikers.

Up to this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has been building a reputation of a profound teacher, prophet, healer, exorciser of demons, and for some, perhaps even the Messiah. Luke has accounted for His travels to various places where He has healed the sick, cast away demons, and even raised the dead. Now, in the ninth chapter of Luke, the next phase of kingdom ministry appears to begin. Verses 1 and 2 open with Jesus sending His apostles out to "proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal" (Lk. 9:2). He vests them with "power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases," and then sends them off to go and do ministry wherever they are welcomed with very little of their own belongings. The story continues, and with a larger cast of what look like holy hitchhikers.

## The Mission (vs.1-6)

The apostles are “called” by Jesus to go and “proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Lk. 9:2). It is worth noting that Luke pivots from using the term “disciples” to “apostles.” This shift likely reflects the work they were doing, not the office they will eventually hold. The term “apostle” simply means, “one sent as a messenger, a bearer of a commission.” They have been, up to this point, considered disciples because they are learning from Jesus. Now, they are being sent by Him, and thus they are called something different to reflect that reality. This is not to confuse what is happening in this chapter with the eventual office of “Apostle” (capital “A”) that is relegated specifically to the 12, and eventually Paul after the resurrection and ascension of the Lord. They are apostles in chapter 9 because they are being sent out with the message of the kingdom. Before they are sent, a couple of crucial things happen. Below is a brief breakdown of such details.

### **EMPOWERED**

Verse 1 says, “He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases” (Lk. 9:1). The word for “power” here is the Greek term δύναμις (dynamis), and it’s a word that can mean, “power, strength, ability, or military might.” The idea here is that Jesus equipped the apostles with the appropriate capabilities to do that which He is commanding them to do. This is an important reality for Christians to understand and believe. God will never call you to a mission that He has not also equipped you for. God doesn’t send troops into battle and hope for the best. He gives the needed power and authority to do that which He calls His people to do.

The term “authority” conveys a separate concept. Power conveys the spiritual ability needed to do the mission; authority conveys the right to exercise the power given. They are similar concepts, but different. One needs to have power *and* the authority to use that power. The disciples don’t steal away power from their Lord, but are given full authority to take it up and use it for the mission they have been given.

### **EMPTIED**

After empowering them Jesus then, in a way, empties them. He tells them, “Taking for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics” (Lk. 9:3). They are given orders and then essentially told, “Pack lightly.” There are probably a couple of reasons for this, one practical and one spiritual. The practicality of the command makes sense. They are going out on the mission field to do the work of the kingdom, and they would only likely be weighed down by excess materials. In short, it’s easier to travel around with less stuff because it’s less stuff you have to carry (they didn’t have cars and suitcases, after all). The spiritual reasoning is even more important. By not taking too much, they were forced into dependence on God’s provision while they were gone. They had no choice but to be reminded regularly of their need for God to provide while they were on the mission field. This constant reminder of dependence was likely humbling, and humility is a needed disposition for the missionary.

### **ENCOURAGED**

Last, Jesus encourages them both where to stay and where not to stay. He says, “And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there, depart” (Lk. 9:4). In the ancient world, hospitality was a regularly practiced charity. Jesus instructs His disciples to embrace other strangers’ hospitality towards them. On the contrary, Jesus says: “And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them” (Lk. 9:5). This was a Jewish practice that symbolized the lack of purity of even the ground of those who are impure. We see this practice being carried out by the early believers in Acts 13:50-51 as well.

**AN EXODUS CONNECTION?**

The hurried nature of the command along with the scarcity of personal belongings they were permitted to bring conjures imagery from the Exodus. In Exodus 12:11, the Israelites were told concerning eating the Passover meal, “In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’S Passover.” The mentioning of the belt, the sandals, and the tunic, along with the urgency the people of God were to demonstrate feels similar to Jesus’ command here as well. The people were also instructed to eat the Passover in a single home (Ex. 12:46), which sort of echoes the commendation to go into the homes that welcome them.

**A Feast (vs.10-17)**

After returning from their mission, “the apostles told Him all that they had done, and Jesus took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida” (Lk. 9:10). From that point, a large group of people learned where they were and followed Jesus there in order to be healed, and Jesus “welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing” (Lk. 9:11). Apparently, this went on for a long time such that the apostles grew concerned for the people, saying, “Send them away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are in a desolate place” (Lk. 9:12). But Jesus, surprisingly responds with: “You give them something to eat” (Lk. 9:13). This is a puzzling command given the lack of supplies the apostles possessed: “five loaves and two fish” (Lk. 9:13). Jesus then gives some strange directions: “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each” (Lk. 9:14). At this point, Jesus takes the five loaves and two fishes, “looked up to heaven, and said a blessing over them” (Lk. 9:16), after which He distributed the loaves and fish around until all 5,000 “ate and were satisfied” (Lk. 9:17).

This is an interesting passage for a lot of reasons. For one, scholars assume the 5,000 number likely only reflected the men, and that the crowd was probably much larger. It’s conjecture, and really not important; 5,000 is still an impossible number to feed with such little supplies apart from the supernatural work of God. Really, the amazing part of this story is that it was wholly unnecessary. Jesus could have very easily sent the people away to go and find lodging and food for themselves. It wouldn’t have been mean or unkind, but probably expected. That Jesus demonstrates care and compassion on these people by meeting the most basic need of sustenance reveals the kind of mercy Jesus regularly exhibits. Not only does He remove the negative things from them (their sickness, maladies, demons, etc.), but He also adds to them positive things (food, love, care, concern). It’s a display of divine power that is mediated upon divine compassion.

**Garnering Attention (vs.7-9)**

Luke offers one small interruption to the apostolic story in verses 7 through 9 concerning “Herod the tetrarch” (Lk. 9:7). Likely because of the apostles’ preaching, word had gotten back to Herod concerning some of the things Jesus was doing, and it concerned him. He had already put to death John the Baptist (Mk. 6:17-29), but some were saying “John had been raised from the dead,” and others that “Elijah had appeared” and by others, “one of the prophets of old had risen” (Lk. 9:7-8). Given that Jesus and John were contemporaries, it’s strange to think that Herod thought Jesus was John. However, it’s not strange to think that perhaps the same “spirit” that drove John or the other prophets now inhabited Jesus. On the contrary, it’s the Spirit of Jesus that inhabited the prophets. Herod cut off one of many streams when he executed John, but had not yet dealt with the source.

## What About Now?

One takeaway is the reality that God will always equip and provide for those He calls into mission. If God calls you to do the work of the ministry, He will provide for you along the way. He will give you power you need to do what He calls you to do, and He will give you the authority to exercise that power. Another takeaway is the importance of compassion. Most of the miracles Jesus performs are for some larger purpose, but the feeding of the 5,000 seems to be simply an act of kindness. If the Lord finds it important enough to be compassionate to those around Him, we might find it important as well.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Luke 9:1-2. Who did Jesus call together? What did He give them? What did He send them out to do?

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2. Read Luke 9:3-5. What did Jesus instruct the apostles to not take? Why do you think that is? Where did He tell them to stay, and what did He instruct them to do to people who did not welcome them?

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 9:6. Where did the apostles go? What did they do?

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2. Read Luke 9:7-9. Who heard about what Jesus was doing? Why was Jesus so concerning to him? Who did he think Jesus was based on what others were saying?

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 9:10-11. What did the apostles do when they returned? To where did they withdraw? What did the people do when they heard where Jesus was?

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2. Read Luke 9:12. What time of day was it during this verse? What did the disciples recommend to Jesus?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 9:13-15. How did Jesus respond to them? What was the apostles' objection? How did Jesus respond to their objection? What did He ask them to do with the people?
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2. Read Luke 9:16-17. What did Jesus do with the five loaves and two fish? Who all ate? Why do you think Jesus did this?
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## Week 33 Discussion: Compassion

One of the interesting aspects of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand is the reality that it was mostly unnecessary, and yet the Lord did it anyway. This demonstrates the kindness and compassion of Christ towards other people. Talk as a group about the power of compassion, and why it still matters today.

1. Icebreaker: What's the most compassionate thing someone has ever done for you? Why did it matter?
2. Would you describe yourself as "compassionate?" Would others describe you that way?
3. How important is it for Christians to meet the basic needs of others when possible?
4. Is compassion helpful to mission? Why or why not?
5. Can meeting the basic needs of others ever be done in a bad way? If so, how so?
6. How can the church be more compassionate to other groups in practical ways?

## Takeaways:

1. Jesus sent the apostles to go and proclaim the kingdom with His power and authority.
2. Jesus, in an act of compassion, fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish.