

## WHAT TO PACK

### Luke 9:1-6

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“For every rule, there is a story.”

Behind every rule, there is some experience or set of events that inspired the new instruction. Sometimes the story is obvious, like a sign that reads “Do not drive on the ice” or “No Smoking” at the gas pump. Other times, the instruction manual of a consumer device has specific instructions, such as “Do not use television in water” or “Do not put oatmeal in the CD drive.” For every rule, there is a story.

You can see it in other places, like the packing list for a youth camp. The paper says “What To Pack” but, often times, there’s a little box at the bottom: “What *Not* to Pack.” This list will have things that someone once thought were a good idea, like fireworks.

The Transportation Security Administration, TSA, has a similar list. It’s hard to recall what’s allowed in your checked and carry-on baggage, so they’ve made an exhaustive list in alphabetical order. It reads at the top: “What Can I Bring?” Things you *can* carry on include: antlers, artificial skeleton bones, bowling balls, coffee maker, live coral and fish, night vision goggles, fresh eggs, sand, rocks, tortilla press, Harry Potter wand, holiday lights, vacuum robots, cymbals, tattoo guns, and – yes – lightsabers.

TSA clarify: “Sadly, the technology doesn't currently exist to create a real lightsaber. However, you can pack a toy lightsaber in your carry-on or checked bag. May the force be with you.”<sup>i</sup>

### Luke 9:1-6

For the first time in Luke's Gospel, Jesus finally calls on his disciples to do something. Up until now, they have been observers and hearers. He has taught a hundred crowds in their hearing. Jesus has imbedded his message and methods in their minds day after day, week after week, month after month. Now it is time to send them out to learn how to minister. Jesus gives them detailed instructions, including what to pack (or *not* to pack).

Jesus does more than suggest that they travel lightly. They were commanded to “take nothing” for their journey. Nothing! In a world of overpacking and “just in case,” what sense does that make? Surely, we can ignore that part? Isn’t our world different today?

While we can’t simply take these instructions and impart them as if they must be our daily norm, neither can we simply dismiss them. By listening to Jesus’ instructions, we can learn some things about what it means to be disciples today.

The gospels tell us that the disciples have been called for 2 reasons: to be *with* him and to be *sent* out by him. Here, the sending begins. They've been with him. Now they will be sent out. These two go hand in hand. Being *sent* out is the natural result of being *with* Jesus.

It's similar to a student driver who must now get behind the wheel. Only so much can be learned from the passenger seat. He needs them to learn from the experience. He knew time was short. Soon, he'll start to explain this, though they won't understand. Jesus has begun to share his life with his closest followers. He is beginning to share his vocation with them.

This is the first of 4 commissioning, sending, scenes in Luke:

1. Sending the twelve to preach and heal (9:1-6)
2. Sending the seventy in pairs (10:1-11)
3. Jesus' preparation of the apostles for the post-Easter missions (22:35-38)
4. The commissioning of the eleven and the others at the end of the gospel (24:48-49)<sup>ii</sup>

We're told, in Luke 9:1, that the same twelve whom Jesus had called out of their ordinary lives and commanded to follow him are called/summoned to him again. Giving them power and authority, Jesus sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing.

Verse 3 reads, **"And He said to them, 'Take nothing for *your* journey...'"**

The rationale and the social context for these restrictions have been interpreted in various ways, but the restrictions are clear. Jesus forbids the disciples to take any provisions for their journey – not a traveler's staff (allowed in Mark 6:8), not a traveler's bag, which might also be interpreted as a beggar's bag, not bread, not silver coins, not two cloaks.

We don't know how long this campaign lasted, but it would seem like it lasted several weeks. This would normally require any number of provisions. Jesus not only forbade the disciples to take along extra supplies, but he also insisted that they not take along what are fair to call necessities. Surely, we are not called to be this vulnerable, right? Shouldn't we be prepared for all that life may bring?

The first thing we learn from the text is that by traveling this way the disciples would embody the urgency of their mission.

## **I. THE DISCIPLES WOULD EMBODY THE URGENCY OF THEIR MISSION.**

Off the coast of Cape Cod, Mass., on Nantucket Island, sits the Egan Maritime Institute. It is home to the Shipwreck & Lifesaving Museum. John Ortberg tells the story of the little volunteer organization formed centuries ago to which the museum is devoted.

In those days, travel by sea was extremely dangerous. In the 1800s, hundreds of ships passed by Nantucket Island each day, all navigating without the benefit of modern nautical technology. Storms often caught even the most experienced sailors off guard. Treacherous shoals and

inclement weather led to over 750 shipwrecks in the island's waters. As a result, the area was often called "a graveyard of the Atlantic."<sup>iii</sup>

*"Many of the lives would be lost within a mile or so of land. So, a group of volunteers went into the life-saving business. They banded together to form what was called the Humane Society. These people built little huts all along the shore. They had people watching the sea all the time. Whenever a ship went down, the word would go out, and these people would devote everything to save every life they could.*

*They did not put themselves at risk for money or recognition, but only because they prized human life. To remind them what was at stake, they adopted a motto: "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." This doesn't sound like a very catchy little recruiting slogan, does it? But it was. It is fascinating to read accounts of people who would risk everything - even their lives - to save people they had never met.*

*Over time, things changed. After a while, the U.S. Coast Guard began to take over the task of rescue. For a while, the Coast Guard and the life-saving society worked side-by-side. Eventually, the idea that carried the day was, "Let the professionals do it. They're better trained. They get paid for it." Volunteers stopped manning the little huts. They stopped searching the coastlines for ships in danger. They stopped sending teams out to rescue drowning people.*

*Yet, a strange thing happened: They couldn't bring themselves to disband. The life-saving society still exists today. The members meet every once in a while, to have dinners. And they hand out awards for things like community service. They sponsor programs. They get together. They enjoy one another's company. They're just not in the life-saving business anymore.*

*They don't scour the coastline anymore to see if anybody is going down. They don't know the thrill any more of what it is to risk themselves to save a life that could perish. They don't speak those words to each other anymore, "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." They are just not in the life-saving business anymore."<sup>iv</sup>*

You and I were made to be in the life-saving business. We don't always see it because we can be blinded by our self-preoccupation. We are weighed down by the baggage we've chosen or the schedules we've made. With all our provisions piled beside us and comforts close-at-hand, we forget that there is an urgency to the task before us.

With a lightened load and an unencumbered journey, the disciples would be less tempted to make a habit of moving slowly or getting too comfortable. They would be free to move as God led, open to sharing when and where necessary.

More than that, the disciples have the power to heal the sick and to preach the kingdom of God. Both their preaching and healing were part of the distinctive nature of the kingdom. Their ministry was a sign that God's kingdom was finally and freely breaking into the present moment. That's why it was so urgent. That's part of why the extra baggage couldn't come

along. They would rely on local hospitality and focus entirely on the task at hand. They were kingdom-heralds, riders warning people that something was about to happen and that everyone should get ready for it. There was no time to waste!<sup>v</sup>

Not everyone would listen. Some places would shut their ears entirely. Jesus explains what to do then, too. They would solemnly and symbolically wipe the dust from their feet and keep on going. Not out of spite or anger, but out of haste to ensure that no one misses their chance to hear the news! God's new life was now available in Jesus. The life-saving message of the disciples and the method of their travel was a witness to the urgency, significance, and power of the Messiah who sent them.

What's slowing you down? What's getting in your way? Our lives should be shaped by the urgency of the message. Carrying so little, not only would the disciples' lives be shaped by the urgency of the task, but they would declare their complete dependence on God's provision for their needs.

## **II. THE DISCIPLES WOULD BE FORMED FOR DEPENDENCY.**

Setting out into these unknown circumstances, the disciples lightened load will train them to trust God along the way. Just as Jesus had obediently and faithfully relied on the Father, they too must discover what happens when we depend solely on God. Jesus' warning to "stay wherever" cautioned them against offending hosts or pursuing their own comfort. They might look to jump from one patron to a better one, but that's not what this mission is about. It won't be used for their own comforts or gain.

Now it is true, of course, that you and I live in a much different time than Jesus and his disciples did. It is also true that perhaps 'hospitality to the stranger' played a significant role in the ancient Middle East. It was more likely that the disciples' needs were met regardless of what they neglected to pack for themselves. It is also true that the first followers didn't own nearly as much as we do and didn't overpack their suitcases for a weekend trip.

Yet, they had to learn – as we do – that God could be trusted every step of the way. Had they gone with money and extra provisions, their witness would have been undercut by such an evident lack of faith in God and trust in the hospitality of the people.

A few years ago, my friend, Trent, set out to bike across America. With a plan lasting over 100 days, he would bike the 6,792 miles from San Francisco to Boston. Along the way, he reflected on his experience in writing:

*"If you asked me what I was afraid of when I started my tour, I would have told you spending too much money on lodging. But if you looked at what was in my bags, you would find a different story. I packed too many clothes because I was afraid to be cold. I packed a collared shirt because I was afraid of what people would think of my appearance if I wore the same thing every day. I brought too*

*much sunscreen and medicines because I was afraid of sunburn and sickness, but actually these are easily accessible on the road. I was really just filling my bags with my fears, as we tend to do when we have excess space. Every morning it's been a struggle to get my bags closed."*

So it is with us. We fill our lives with so many things we don't need while Jesus calls us to leave it all behind. What are you taking with you as you trust your life to Jesus? What are you packing extra in your call to discipleship? What is your back-up plan for the mission he's sending you on?

In examining all that he was lugging around on his bike, Trent recalled receiving sage advice along the way:

*"I'm a month in now, and Mike gave me a helpful tip on the road when I met him: if you don't use it in your first month, get rid of it. So today I mailed home about 15 liters of things (almost equivalent to one pannier) I haven't touched yet. It feels good to have some empty space in my bags. What are some fears you're filling your life with that you don't actually need?"*

We fill our extra space with so many things we think we might need. Our fears, our worries, the unknown, and the unexpected leave us cramming extras into the zipper. We pack our lives in case God's plan doesn't pan out. But you can't say "yes" to Jesus and keep on saying "yes" to the things of this world. The two cannot coexist. We must believe, with Paul, that "my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

The disciples don't fully know Jesus yet. I would argue that all of us can spend a lifetime and never quite know him fully. Jesus calls them to go out in service to him carrying less with them so that along the way they might depend on him. In their dependence and trust and vulnerability they come to know who Jesus is even more. Jesus is revealed to us through the experience of obedience. It's in the challenges of life, the struggles, the hunger, and the hospitality that we come to know the Lord.

### **Luke 9:7-17**

Some days later, the disciples had come back from this excursion. They stepped aside with Jesus, but thousands had followed them. The disciples went to Jesus and suggested he send the people away so that they might get something to eat. Jesus looked back at them and said, "You give them something to eat." They must have been baffled. They all checked their pockets and, sure enough, no one brought anything. Why would they? Jesus told them to take nothing!

In that moment of uncertainty, vulnerability, and lack, Jesus takes what little they have to offer. He takes a couple of loaves and a few fish, all they could find, and he begins to bless it and break it. As they begin to pass it around, they find, one after another, that there just seems to be enough. When all had taken what they needed, Jesus told them to collect what was left. When they collect the leftovers in the end, they count twelve baskets full!

Suddenly, we realize that if even one of the disciples had tried to make a better plan or bring more with them, they would have missed the miracle. Had they not relied on Jesus, they wouldn't know that Jesus can take what little we bring and make it abundantly more.

Today, Jesus sends out those who have been with him, telling them, "Take nothing for the journey." But why? Because those who are sent and those who are receive are better prepared to receive the gifts of God when their hands aren't so full. "What will happen if I leave shaped by urgency and formed for dependency?" you might ask. You would discover that Jesus is always enough.

Leave behind what you should not take and follow Jesus. Take nothing for the journey. Trust and depend on him alone.

**"For every rule, there is a story."**

There was a day when all seemed lost and without hope, when it seemed like humankind would never get their act together. Separated from God and buried in our sin, we were dead. When the moment was just right, God had his own journey in mind. Unable to overlook his own justice, and unwilling to leave us in our despair, the Bible says that "he emptied himself."

With all the majesty and power that ever was and ever will be available to Him, he took nothing with him for the journey. He came with urgency to announce the kingdom coming. He came in dependency, being obedient to the Father even unto to death. He came and proclaimed to all that, "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

With his perfect righteousness on full display, they led him to a hill called Calvary. Though he could measure the waters of the earth in the hollow of his hands, they were nailed to an old rugged cross. When they took him down, he was buried in a borrowed tomb.

The "rule" is that dead men stay dead. The "story" is that early in the morning, when he had given up all that there was to give, he rose to new life! With all power in his hands, he said, "As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you."

Hebrews 1 tells us that "after he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" where he sits a little higher than the angels. To those who receive, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God, heirs to the promise of life with him.

Behind every rule, there is a story.

The rule is that "you have to go out," because the story is that we're in the life-saving business. The rule is that "you'll have to leave it all behind," but you will inherit far greater in return. The rule is that "you can't take much with you," but the story is that Jesus is always enough!

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.tsa.gov/travel/security-screening/whatcanibring/all-list>

<sup>ii</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible*, 162.

<sup>iii</sup> "Shipwreck & Lifesaving Museum," *Egan Maritime Institute* (accessed 15 May 2023)  
<https://eganmaritime.org/shipwreck-lifesaving-museum>

<sup>iv</sup> John Ortberg, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 88-90.

<sup>v</sup> NT Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 69.