

## **“Is It Time to Take the Training Wheels Off?”**

**Luke 9: 1-17**

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It was time for the training wheels to come off. Up to this point, the twelve disciples Jesus called to follow him spent their time listening to Jesus teach and observing him as he responded to people seeking help with their problems. Now, it was time to put their faith into practice and to do what Jesus had been doing.

Before Jesus sent them out, he shared final instructions and advice: travel light and don't get distracted or become discouraged. Listen to Jesus' parting words recorded in the third gospel.

“Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money and no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.” (Luke 9:3-5)

Jesus then took off their training wheels and set them on their way. I am confident he began praying for them as he watched them walk away and prayed often for them until they returned.

Even though the details of the disciples' first mission venture are not recorded in Luke, it appears things went well. They had people talking throughout the region about all the good work they had done, which disturbed Herod. He feared a movement was afoot to overthrow him, which meant he needed to get more information about the person in charge of these disciples.

“Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” Herod asked of his advisors who were confused about Jesus’ identity. (Luke 9:9b) Based upon Herod’s paranoia and treatment of John the Baptist, whom he had arrested and beheaded, Jesus was going to be added to this ruler’s list of enemies.

I suspect while the disciples were away, Jesus was busy preparing for the retreat he wanted to have with them upon their return. He knew they would be fatigued from their travels and would need a place to talk, relax and unwind. He took them to a remote area along the coast of the Sea of Galilee near Bethsaida, the hometown of three of Jesus’ disciples, Peter, Andrew and Philip.

To Jesus and the disciples’ surprise, people found out where they were and went there. I am not talking about a small gathering of nearby neighbors. The crowd seeking Jesus and the disciples that day swelled to over five thousand, with the actual number perhaps twice that size.

Jesus welcomed them and spent the day that was meant for rest and recovery teaching the masses and healing the sick. I am sure this is one reason the crowd size increased throughout the day.

As evening approached, the tired disciples suggested that Jesus send the people home so they could eat and bed down for the night. “You give them something to eat,” Jesus told them, which met with great resistance and a lack of faith. (Luke 9:13)

What follows is a description of the only miracle found in all four gospels, the feeding of the five thousand men and probably that many more women and children. Using five loaves and two fish, Jesus made it possible for everyone that afternoon to find nourishment and strength for the journey home.

Some believe Jesus did this through the miracle of sharing. He had people sit in groups of fifty so they could share what they brought from home, as was their custom when they traveled. Others are convinced Jesus miraculously multiplied a small boy’s lunch that his mother had packed for him before he left that morning.

However this miracle occurred, hungry people were fed and the disciples learned that people of faith tackle problems and challenges others walk away from. I think this helps us understand why Jesus insisted on feeding the masses that afternoon instead of sending them home.

**What message was Luke sending his readers by weaving these stories together?** For me, it is this. The call to follow Jesus is a call to serve. It is a call to action that requires compassion, mercy, generosity, passion and patience.

Jesus made it clear that those who make hope visible are a vital part of the kingdom of God. This is why the gospel was designed to make a difference in the lives of people on the local level. Jesus' ministry was built upon ordinary people working alone and with others to respond to pleas for help others never hear or choose to ignore.

I am convinced no disciple is closer to God than when he or she is nursing and healing broken hearts, broken spirits and broken bodies. Whenever and wherever this occurs, God is directly involved.

My New York Episcopal friend, Tom Ehrich, recently wrote, "One person doing good has more impact than several thousand having a parade." I love this!

Massive displays of religiosity don't change the world. Warm hearted people who walk alongside their family members, friends and even strangers to help them carry their burdens change the world.

People who roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty in their attempts to improve the living conditions of those struggling to survive change the world.

People who take time out of their busy schedules to listen to someone's story of betrayal and disappointment change the world.

People who dig into their pockets and share their resources with those whose money has run out before the end of the month change the world.

People who tell someone struggling under a heavy load of guilt and shame about the unconditional love of God and the transformative power of forgiveness change the world.

People who have the courage to stand up to those who abuse their power and speak up for those who are being exploited change the world.

People who understand every disciple is a minister who can make hope visible in practical and tangible ways change the world.

People who know how important it is at all times and in all places to be kind, courteous, thoughtful, truthful, encouraging, generous and helpful change the world.

People who never underestimate what God can do with what they offer in service to others change the world.

People who bring neighbors together by building bridges of goodwill, understanding, reconciliation, hope and peace change the world.

People who reflect the nature of God by the way they adopt their values, arrange their priorities, handle their problems and treat their neighbors change the world.

People who stay focused on this divine mission and refuse to get distracted or to become discouraged change the world.

And may I add, churches like First Baptist that have a medical clinic, a clothes closet, a toy closet, a ministry to rescue people from Pay Day lending predators, a ministry to the local homeless shelter, a program that teaches underprivileged children to play musical instruments, a Care and Comfort Ministry to those who are grieving the loss of a loved one and a motel to house workers who come from all parts of our country to work in Owsley County, the heart of Appalachia, change the world.

These are the churches and people God uses to answer the prayers God hears from his children who are hurting.

**Are you on this list?**