

Luke 9 • (Part 1): 1-17 • How Big is Your God?

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Luke chapter 9 is where we are. Open your Bible there, please. We're continuing our study through the Gospel according to Luke here on Sunday morning, and we're going to cover the first several verses here. In fact, we're going to get a little bit farther, I think, than what I'm going to stop at, and pray about here to begin with. We're going to cover or read through the first 9 verses, so, follow along with me as I read, would you? It says,

“And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³ And he said to them, “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴ And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵ And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”

⁶ And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere. ⁷ Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening, and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen. ⁹ Herod said, “John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?” And he sought to see him.” (ESV)

I'm going to have you pause there. Let's pray as we get into it.

Heavenly Father, as we open up our hearts to Your Word today we recognize our need for your Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes, our spiritual ears, to make us receptive to hear what You want to say to us today, and then Lord to put it into practice. We always need to have that application aspect.

So, Lord we're looking to You to accomplish in our hearts what we need, so that we can respond appropriately and honor Your Word today for what it is, the very Word of God. Thank you, Lord, for your goodness. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

I like this passage because this is where the rubber meets the road for the disciples. Jesus has been teaching. He's been filling their spiritual tanks for quite a time now. And now He sends them out to go and do the work, and up to this point, people have come to talk to Jesus, listen to Jesus, respond to Jesus, He's the one who's been healing, touching and so forth, but now He takes His disciples. And He says, guys, I want you to go out and do the work of the ministry.

Now, before He sends them out, He confers on them authority and power. Authority over demonic spirits, power to heal all kinds of diseases and that sort of thing. What a trip that would have been. And then He sends them out and says, go do the work of the ministry, and they go out and that's what they're going to do.

Now, it's pretty clear, I think, as we look into this passage, that what Jesus is doing here with His men is He is encouraging them to go out and learn how to trust the Lord, because what does He tell them when He sends him out? Don't take money, don't take any extra clothes, don't take any food with you. I want you just to go.

Now, I don't know how, if anybody told you to go take a trip and don't pack, and don't take any money along, don't really make any preparations, just go, and just be led. Some of us don't know how to do that. Some people are such deep planners that they can't step out their door without having everything lined out.

But Jesus is purposely telling them not to plan, not to bring along any provisions because He wants them to get out of their comfort zone so that the usual resources they might otherwise reach to, to take care of problems aren't going to be there. They're just going to have to trust God. And that can be a pretty challenging situation. It can also be a pretty incredible situation.

There was a season in our fellowship here at Calvary Chapel and it was a number of years ago. Some of you who've been around a while will remember, but we used to send people on short excursions to Mexico, and it went on for a number of years where we would have a training period, then we'd pack them into one of our vans and they'd take a drive all the way down to Mexico.

And it was, some of it was usually planned as far as what they were going to do down there, but inevitably there were challenges along the way, and they would meet with things that would happen that they didn't expect. Sometimes it was the vehicle breaking down, and not running, or they get down to Mexico and find out that the accommodations they'd set up weren't going to work.

They had to figure something else out, and many times what they were forced to do along the way was just to stop and pray. I remember times when they did have vehicle trouble and here they were on some lonely road on the way down through California somewhere, the vehicle stops running and they have to, all they get out and they literally are just holding hands praying beside the road, and just asking the Lord to intervene in their time. And then when they get down and start doing ministry, things happen and now they're out of their comfort zone.

They can't lean upon the things they normally lean on, and they're forced to lean upon the Lord. And what happens in a situation like that, when you're out of your comfort zone, when you're out of your resource area, you see something, you see that, wow, God's faithful. He actually responds to prayer, and it really is amazing, and I remember these kids used to come back from those trips to Mexico, and they were just jazzed because they had witnessed firsthand along the way, as God supernaturally met their needs when they just stopped and prayed and trusted in Him, and it was a huge faith building exercise.

And this is what Jesus is doing right here by sending the disciples out to do the work of the ministry and telling them ahead of time, don't take any provisions. Don't take any money. Don't take any food. You're going to be taken care of along the way. How? You'll see, and it's going to be a faith walk, and it's going to be challenging. But it's also going to be building, faith building when you get back. In fact, when we get into the next chapter of Luke, when we get into the 10th chapter, Jesus is going to do this again.

He's going to send His disciples out a second time to do the work of the ministry. This time he's going to send 72 people of his men out to do it and we're going to read, and we'll deal with this next time, but we're going to read how they're going to come back and they're going to be jazzed, and their hearts are going to be full and just full of like, it was so cool seeing the power of God manifest as we were ministering to people and that sort of thing.

Now, when you and I read about this, when we read about Jesus sending out His disciples into a place where their faith is going to be built up because they're being taken out of their comfort zone, we think about that and we think, well, that's something they needed to do because we know from history, I mean, the disciples in the coming months and years after the cross, after the resurrection, they were going to need this whole thing of learning to trust in God. And so, we tend to look at a story like this in the Bible and go, yeah, that's really good. Jesus did that. It's cool.

But what about our lives? What about your life? How's your faith doing? How is your faith being built up? Are you experiencing the same sort of thing in your own life? Let me ask you a question. I don't know if you're the kind of person that people come to with problems, but when somebody comes to you with their problem, and it could be anything. It could be a marriage problem, or family, relational, the problem could be a financial problem or even a physical problem.

When somebody comes to you with their problem, let me ask you a question. Is their problem too big for God to handle?

Well, no. You know, there's no Christian, who knows their Bible at all, who would not know the correct answer to that question. We all know that our problems related to the enormity of God's power, are really nothing, or as Jesus said, recorded in Matthew chapter 19. Let me put this on the screen for you. It says,

Mathew 19:26 (ESV)

...with God's power, all things are possible.

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Okay? Alright, we know that. This is kind of Christianity 101. With God, all things are possible. We know, when people come to you with problems, and they're all upset, and they're all like scared and stuff, you know that the issue isn't that God can't handle it. That's not the issue, right?

So, what exactly is going on? Are they coming to you because God can't help them with their problem? Is it a situation where God, we, whoa, gee, we just found out God lost His power. Now what are we going to do, you know? That's not the problem is it?

Nothing has changed about God. His power remains the same, His ability to deal with things remains exactly as it always has been, and yet they're coming to you because of some other need, some other deficiency. What is that deficiency?

Well, the deficiency is their own faith. Listen, I've been doing this now for 35 years. I can tell you when people come and begin to talk about their problems and the things that are going on in their lives, what's happening at the root of it is there's a faith issue.

There's a faith problem. And that means essentially, they're not confident. They're not confident that God has the ability to deal with their problem. That's what's going on. And that is what's happening beneath it all. And that is why Christians need to have their faith built up, because when your faith is built up, and when your faith is strong, and what that means is when you're confident that God can do anything then there's no issue, no problem, no concern in your life that God can't handle.

Then you begin to walk in a level of confidence toward anything that happens in life, like these kids that used to come back from Mexico. They had personally witnessed the Lord doing amazing things during the course of their trip and they come back and they're just like, whoa! I mean they feel like they're bulletproof, and they're like, who can I pray with? Because I know that God can take care of it. I know that God is big enough. I know there's no problem in the world that He can't handle. So, bring it on. They just, they're built up in their faith. Well, that's a good thing, isn't it? It's exactly what Jesus is doing with His men here.

Guys, I'm going to send you out, but I'm not just going to send you out. I want to send you out with nothing but the power of God.

Now, that might make some people nervous. But the fact is, that when He sent them out with nothing but the power of God, He sent them out with everything. Everything they needed, to do the work of the ministry and so forth. I want you to think about your own life for a moment as it relates to all of this that we're talking about, and I want to ask you a simple question. And that is, when was the last time that you felt that your own faith had been strengthened?

What I mean is, when's the last time you were consciously aware of the fact that you had gotten a boost to your faith. Meaning that your confidence level had risen so significantly that you knew, that you knew, that you knew, God was able to take care of any issue, any problem, any concern that might possibly befall you.

And I do really want you to think about that for just a moment, because that's a really important question. Truth be told, I believe that the majority of Christians are living day to day in what I call a faith slump. And what I mean by that is they're living in a place where their faith is actually weak, but they may not even be aware of it.

They're just going through the motions. You know, they get up in the morning, they have their coffee, they go to work, go through their day, get done with their day, come back home, watch a little TV, do something or other until they get

tired, go to bed, and then start all over again. And before they know it, they've gone several days without any faith building going on in their lives, and they're in a weakened condition. And suddenly, they're confronted with some challenge or crisis or problem in their lives, and now they're all too painfully aware of this faith slump that they've been in.

They didn't realize it before, but now they know. And it's, I liken it to somebody who is suddenly asked to run a marathon and they've never trained, they've never conditioned. In fact, they haven't been running at all.

It's like, pastor, I've barely been walking, and you want me to run a marathon? Yeah, that's what it's going to take. You know, you've got this issue in front of you, you've got this problem going on in your life and you need to be in shape to deal with that sort of a situation.

And suddenly we find out, and it's painfully obvious that we are not in shape because instead of responding to what is happening around us with the faith that brings confidence, we're responding instead with fear that brings doubt. So, the question comes up, what can we do to strengthen our faith? What can we do if we realize I'm in a faith slump, and I've just been going through the motions of life and I know that my faith really hasn't been built up, what can I do about it? Well, here's what's interesting.

I think when God created us, He created a lot of really interesting parallels between our physical bodies, our physical lives, and our spiritual lives as well. And what I mean by that is, if you know how to get your physical body strong, then you already know how to get your spiritual life in shape and strong as well because pretty much anybody will tell you when you're dealing with physical strength there are a couple of things that are pretty critical. And this isn't all of them, but two things that are very critical are nutrition and exercise, right?

And by the way, you don't have to exercise to live, but you're not going to be strong if you don't. So, nutrition and exercise. Now, let's put those over onto the spiritual side of things. Spiritually speaking, God has given us His Word as all the nutrition that we need.

The problem is, even though we know that. We know that feeding on the Word of God is a key to being strong, I don't think I think the majority of Christians don't do it. I'm saying feeding on the Word, but what we do is we snack. We snack on the word frankly. I actually write little devotions, little daily thoughts. Some of you guys who are either getting Calvary mail or on our Facebook page, you may see these every day. I pass along just a little Scripture, and a thought,

but guys, that's just a snack. But if that's all you're getting in the day, then you're literally living on snacks, and you're not going to be very strong, in fact, you might even be sickly. I was telling everybody in first service, I was watching this video about this show back in the 70s. Anybody remember The Partridge Family? Some of you, yeah, all you guys that are old, okay.

Anyway, there was this girl that starred on The Partridge Family, Susan Dey, and she eventually developed an eating disorder, and she began to eat only carrots. It's all she ever ate. She snacked. She never ate meals, and she eventually got very gaunt and very unhealthy and believe it or not, her skin actually began to turn orange because of all these carrots she was eating. So, she was snacking all the time, but never ate a nutritious meal.

We would look at someone like that, and I was watching these interviews with these people that were on the show with her, and they were just going, man, I would look at her when she'd come in the morning and it was just scary. She was just this frail skin and bones thing. Do you know that some of us look that way in the spirit? Spiritually speaking, some of us are gaunt. Some of us hardly have the strength to stand up, let alone fight a battle, or deal with the issues of life. And one of the reasons is we've just been snacking on the Word of God, and we're thinking that's enough.

I'm going to read my daily thought or my one minute with Jesus devotion, and that's about all I can afford to give Him is about one minute, and rather than digging into the Word of God and getting the nutrients and the life altering, elements of strength out of the Word of God, we're just taking little bits and pieces here and there, or whatever the case might be. So, we need to get serious about this. I know that a lot of Christians are really frustrated about getting into the Word of God on a more serious basis.

And what I mean by that is people will express to me, sometimes it's like, I just haven't found a way that really benefits me as far as studying the Word of God. I struggle to study, and I get that I really do. It's just too easy when you get frustrated to let it fall behind the other things that seem to be more pressing in your day, and so you go and you ask somebody else, so how do you study the Bible and they tell you what they do and you try it, and it doesn't work for you because you're not the same kind of a person, and then you get frustrated, it's like, oh man, so what am I going to do?

Well, you've got to just keep pressing in. You can't give up, any more than you can stop eating. Any more than, I mean, any more than you can stop eating physically you can't stop eating spiritually. You can't stop. So, here's what I

would encourage you, and if you need some more ideas about studying the Word, come up and talk to me. I'd love to share some ideas with you, but here's a simple tip. How is it that you feel you grow the best or the easiest when you are in the Word of God?

How do you hear the Word of God the best? How do you respond to the Word of God the easiest? Whatever that is, do that more. Do that every day. Well, pastor, I can't go to church every day. Yes, you can. Maybe not physically getting together with other believers, you can be in the Word that way every day.

Good grief. We've got all 66 books of the Bible on our website. Pick a book, go through it every day. Do one every day, a chapter, a message every be in the, if that's what really helps you to grow is to hear the Word of God being taught, and that sort of thing, then do it every day, right?

Do it a couple of times a day, do whatever you have to do to get the nutrients from God's Word to be strong. But you know what, it's not just eating is it? There's also the issue of exercise. And as I said, you can live without exercise, but you can't be strong, and spiritual exercise is exactly the kind of stuff Jesus was sending out His disciples to do when He sent him out to do the work of the ministry. He's basically telling them, guys, you've been sitting and listening, you've been filling up your tanks, now go do it. Go do the ministry.

Go out and serve. Go out and give your life away, respond to the needs of other people. And it is incredible when I see people begin to serve. It's incredible what begins to happen. I've seen people over the course of the almost 30 years that I've been here who have just sat, and there's a season for sitting. Do you know that? There is, there's a season for sitting. Because I know some people have come here and they've not been fed properly, or they need to come and just fill up, and I get that there's that time.

But there's also a time to get off your duff and to begin to serve, and to begin to do something, and I've watched as people simply make the decision, I'm going to do something, and I start to see them grow, and take big steps in their faith, and it's not something huge. It's not something like getting up and teaching on a Sunday or whatever. Sometimes it's like, somebody comes and says, hey, I heard you need some people helping drive your bus, picking up people on a Sunday morning. I'd like to help with that.

And boom, there's growth begins in their lives because they're just doing something for other people, and they're putting their life in Christ into practice. I

would encourage you guys, the first Sunday of every month, we hand out this slip called, How Can I Help? And it lists a lot of the ministries around here where we need help.

And how many times have you looked at that and just went, eh. Set it down on the chair. But let me tell you something. If you're in a faith slump, and you need to get busy and start doing something, I want to encourage you maybe next time you should take a look at it, and by the way, we keep them out at the Info Center all the time.

Take a look at one of those and see what the Lord would have you to do to start getting busy, to start giving, to start doing the work of the ministry, because as you exercise, you become stronger. Okay? As you exercise. So, let's move on here now. Verse 10 and following. Let's see how much the disciples learned about faith from their little outing. Verse 10.

“On their return the apostles told him all that they had done. And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida. ¹¹ When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing. ¹² Now the day began to wear away, and the twelve came and said to him, “Send the crowd away to go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find lodging and get provisions, for we are here in a desolate place.”

¹³ But he said to them, (and please take note of what Jesus says to the men) “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” ¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” ¹⁵ And they did so and had them all sit down. ¹⁶ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷ And they all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.”

All right, stop there. Now this is pretty interesting because these men have just come from a time of ministry. They've come from a time when they had to rely completely on the power of the Lord, and now they get to the next situation, which is just, I mean, it's right next door to what just happened to them, and they're faced with another need. Here's this crowd of people, and they finally come to Jesus, and they say, hey it's getting late and these people, there's no place here to get food.

They need to go to the surrounding villages and just get some food because otherwise we're concerned about them. And Jesus says this, you give them something to eat. You do it. What? And immediately, now what is Jesus doing? He's putting them, He's putting a challenge in their court, if you will, right? If you know basketball, it's that He's inbounding the ball to the disciples essentially saying here, dribble it, right? And they're like, what are we going to do with this?

They said, there's no possible way. We have five loaves of bread and a couple of small fish, unless you want us to go to the grocery store and go pick up something for this multitude. It says there were 5,000 men. We don't know how many women and children. Obviously, they don't have the means to go and purchase enough food for all of these people, but isn't it interesting that's what they suggest. Their mind just goes to a natural sort of a solution. Jesus wants them to think supernaturally.

He wants them because they've just been depending, relying completely on the Lord in this outing of ministry. Now Jesus wants that to translate into this new need, this new concern, this new challenge. Now men, you feed them, you give them something to eat, and they're like, forget it, we don't have the means to feed a crowd. Like, what are you talking about, give them something to eat? Are you daft? Well, I guess we got a little more work to do on the faith thing here, huh?

I mean, the boys still haven't picked it up, but I just find it very interesting. Here they are in the presence of the Son of God, who has all power and all authority and all they can think to do is go to the grocery store. That's the only solution they can come up with, unless you want us to go to the store. They're like, unless you want us to go and buy food for these people. Here they are in the very presence of Almighty God, and all they can think of is a natural solution.

I want to try to tie this together, because it is quite often that I see us making the same mistake that the disciples make, and that is looking at a problem, facing a problem, and only coming up with natural solutions to it. Only coming up with natural solutions. And what we do is just exactly what the disciples did. They leave God out of the equation. They're talking to God in human flesh, and they still left Him out of the equation. But how often do we do that? Pastor, I need marriage counseling. My marriage is a wreck. And so I begin, we begin talking and stuff like that, and there's something I notice as we're talking. There's no mention of the Lord. There's no mention of God and what He can do. They've left Him out. All they're focused on is this need that is in front of them, just like

the disciples. We've got to feed these people. And Jesus could have said to them, Well, what about God, boys? Right?

Well, He is God, so He goes on to show them what God can do. But the point is, they didn't think about it. Their faith wasn't yet at a place where they were ready to move beyond simply natural solutions, and move into the realm of what can God do. And that's the thing I want to ask you. Whatever issue you're facing right now, because I know everybody's facing an issue. And if you're not now, you will be soon. So, here's the question. What can God do? What can God do in the midst of your situation?

What can God do with your circumstances? Whatever it is. You've got marriage issues? What can God do? Tell me what God can do. You see, if we start focusing on what God can do and stop focusing on what we can't do or what we're unable to do. If the disciples, they could have done that and that's what they did. We can't do this. What do we have? We've got five loaves of bread and two fish. We can't. We can't. Exactly. But what can God do?

Well, we already looked at it. God can do anything. Nothing is impossible with God, right? When you begin to shift your focus away from what you can't do and on what God can do, you begin to look with the eyes of faith to begin to see something new, see something that you hadn't looked at before. It's not a natural. It's probably not going to be a natural solution. And that might make some of us even a little bit uncomfortable because we like to keep things in a nice little neat, knowable package.

But we just can't leave God out of the solution equation. We just can't do it. And I absolutely love, what we are reminded of in the book of Ephesians about this when Paul wrote in the third chapter and he said,

Ephesians 3:20-21 (ESV)

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

What's He saying? God is able to do way more than you and I can even think. Ask or think. So, we begin to pray about things, and then we have to admit that we can't even go far enough in our prayers. Lord, you're able to do even more

than I can ask. You're able to even go beyond what I can think. So, here's the big question. This is really what it all comes down to. How big is your God? How big is your God? Can He do it or not? Right?

Whatever your issue is, whatever your problem is, whatever your concern is, whatever is threatening your life, whatever is threatening your home, your family, your marriage, your children, your livelihood, whatever you're facing, is God big enough? Well, if that's coming here this morning as a splash of cold water in the face, then perhaps you have found that you've been in one of those faith slumps that we've been talking about. And you're reminded here today, yeah, God can do anything, but I haven't been putting Him in that place.

I haven't been keeping Him in the equation, in the solution equation. I took Him out of it. I came up with my own solutions. Well, I guess all we can do is get a divorce. That's a natural solution. God has some supernatural solutions He'd like to introduce you to. Like healing, like restoration, like new hearts, new lives, new minds, new relationships. You see, we're quick to come up with a natural solution. We'll just go to the grocery store. God has some other answers for you if you and I would have the faith to trust Him.

To lay those things at His feet and say, you know Lord, I can't do this, but you can. I can't solve this, but you can. I can't make this better. I can't heal this. I can't restore this. But you can, and I'm going to put my trust in you. So, if your God hasn't been very big, or maybe he wasn't very big when you walked in the door today, then maybe some building up of your faith is necessary. So, figure out what you need to do to feed on the Word of God daily, daily on the Word of God. Figure out what you've got to do. There's a lot of resources.

If you need some suggestions, I'll give you some. Beyond that, get busy and start exercising, walk out your faith. Begin to do. Even if it's small, just start to do. Do something to walk out what you've been learning about serving and giving your life, and watch your faith grow, and watch your confidence begin to grow. And you're going to find yourself in better spiritual condition so that when the challenges of life do come along, you're ready.

You're ready to meet them. You can say, you know what? I've been working toward this. I've been getting in shape. So now that I'm needing to really run the race, I'm able to run because I've been working on this. I've been eating the Word of God. I've been getting the nutrition out of it, and I've been exercising my faith, exercising my service, walking out what I'm learning. And that doesn't mean it's going to be easy, but you're going to be ready.