

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

**Luke 9:1–9**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: ‘Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.’ So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere. Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed, because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, ‘I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?’ And he tried to see him” (Luke 9:1–9, NIV).

The title of my message today is “Is Your Vision Small Enough?” Most of us live with some kind of a vision or an ideal for our life. If you’re a young person, perhaps your vision is that someday you’re going to meet Mr. Right or Miss Right and you’re going to have a happy marriage and home. Maybe your ideal is to be a success, whatever that means. Maybe it’s simply to get out of debt. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? For others, perhaps their burning vision right now is to lose weight. For others, it might be to repair and restore their marriage and family life. For some it would be to be more spiritual, whatever that means. I’m getting so I like the term “godly” more than spiritual, since spiritual is such a loose word and godly means having the attributes and the character of the Lord. But whatever. To be more spiritual—that’s a worthy

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

### **Luke 9:1–9**

ideal. Maybe if you think in world terms you say, “Above all things, I wish the world had peace.” And maybe if you think in terms of justice you could say, “I wish there was a just social and economic order in the world so that children would not go to bed at night crying.”

Ask Jesus what His vision or ideal is, and perhaps He might say it is to make disciples of the entire world. That certainly is the big vision of Jesus which in the Gospels He will later lay on His disciples. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew He says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (28:19). The end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, before He ascends to heaven, He says, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). That was His great vision.

But great visions, even the Lord’s great vision, never come to pass unless they are preceded by smaller and more manageable visions. Someday, the disciples will go to all nations throughout all the earth. But in Luke 9, they are not yet ready for that. What we have in Luke 9:1–9, therefore, is the smaller vision. It is their first training mission. The first time they have been sent out by Jesus, to be away from Him and to minister in His name. If they are ever to succeed in fulfilling the big vision, they have to begin by fulfilling the smaller vision.

Whenever I talk about big and small visions, my mind goes back to the kind of churches I was raised in. I can still see the Sunday School attendance board at the front of the church. I can remember, as a twelve-year-old kid, sitting excitedly in the early part of the morning worship service after Sunday School, waiting for the Sunday School secretary to finish her count to put the new numbers up, usually as we were singing the second hymn. I may not be dead exact in my numbers, but on a typical Sunday, it would read something like this: “Attendance Today: 53, Attendance Last Sunday: 48, Attendance a Year Ago Today: 61.” I don’t know why it always seemed that we were losing ground. Then came the clincher—“Record Attendance: 149.”

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

**Luke 9:1–9**

Everybody knew that had happened years ago at Easter, when we had an evangelist. He had a great gimmick to give away, something to get people out there. They'd all come out. Not only did we break the Sunday School record, but we broke the record over his head. We had 149.

Then the last thing on the Sunday School board was the “Attendance Goal: 150.” We set our goal for one more than our record. But our attendance today? “53.”

I sat there as a twelve-year-old and said, “We’re never going to break that goal!” The goal was too big. And because it was so big, no one ever took it seriously. No one ever worked at getting 150 people in the church. It was easier for the saints to pray for revival than to go out and work. It was easier to dismiss church growth with, “Let the Lord move!” than to take literature in hand and go put it on a door and invite somebody to come.

Our goal was big. I look back now and think, “Our goal should have been smaller. We should have had “Attendance goal: 65.” That should have been our goal. Then when we hit it regularly four Sundays in a row, we should have moved it up to 70 or 75. We should have done that until we incrementally got to 150. Nobody takes goals seriously if they are so out of sight that there doesn’t appear to be any strategy to reach them.

How do we know if our vision, our goal, is too large? How do we know if it’s unmanageable?

There are some things right out of this story that tell us that. There are three ways to test a goal or vision.

### **I. One: A vision is too large if it focuses on something far away instead of something near.**

Jesus, in Luke 9, is dealing with ministry in Galilee, not the larger world. Every year, this church is blessed with young people who volunteer themselves for a summer of missionary service, either high school students or college students—we thank the Lord for what they’re doing—and for the quality of these young people. One of the things we’re always looking for in the young

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

**Luke 9:1–9**

people, in putting our approval behind them and raising support for them, is, “Are you involved *now* in the ministry of the church? Have you been involved this year and the year before that? Are you involved in Sunday School? Are you involved in giving yourself in ministry in a practical way?” It’s so glamorous to look at the far away and think that ministry is over there and neglect the fact that ministry is here before it can be there.

Jesus puts the stress upon the near before He puts the stress upon the far. Ethiopia is an example of how our eyes can be riveted to the plight of children and families that are in need. And well we ought to support—and we are—that effort of famine relief. But there are also children and families in our own community who are in great danger, physically and spiritually, and in great need. And we have a ministry here as well. It’s not simply there but it’s here and it’s there.

### **II. A vision is too large, secondly, if it focuses on the big things but not the small things.**

A big thing might be to get out of debt. But I found, when I first listened to Malcolm McGregor and he told me how to get out of debt, that the toughest thing was not the concept “get out of debt.” What was really tough was tracking all my nickels, dimes, quarters, and dollar bills, and writing down where they are going. Because I discovered that I had a leaky pocket. If I was going to solve the big problem of getting out of debt, I had to—for years—go through this detail of getting a handle on what I was doing and making decisions to defer pleasure and forego credit.

### **III. A vision, thirdly, is too large if it focuses on the future but not upon the present.**

If we live in this dream world of “someday I will...” Maybe a young person here is saying, “Someday I’m going to be a doctor.” That’s a great occupation to have. A helping profession. I hope you make it. But right now, you need to get an A in chemistry. Don’t focus on the future to the exclusion of the present.

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

### **Luke 9:1–9**

Break your vision down into more limited objectives. That’s exactly what the Lord does. He breaks the vision down into limited objectives. He puts three restrictions on the disciples as they go out. He limits their geography, He limits their baggage, and He limits their language.

**A.** He first limits their geography. We don’t find that in the Gospel of Luke. We have to cross reference, correlate the passage with Matthew’s Gospel and Mark’s Gospel. In Matthew’s Gospel, in the parallel passage to this event—Matthew 10:5–6—we find Jesus telling the Twelve, as He’s sending them out, “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” Some people look at that and say, “It sounds like Jesus was a little racially prejudiced—don’t go to anybody but Israel.”

But it didn’t have anything to do with prejudice. It had everything to do with cross-cultural communication. It had everything to do with the fact that Jesus understood His men. And He knew that they were prejudiced and He knew that they didn’t think Gentiles were worth anything. And that, in their better and finer moments, their highest description for a Gentile might be to compare them to a dog. And they would never sit down and have a meal with a Gentile because a Gentile didn’t eat the way they ate.

And Samaritans. Everybody can write off Samaritans. In fact, two of the disciples, when Jesus later, in the Gospel of Luke, is going through a Samaritan village that is inhospitable to the Lord, the two disciples come to Jesus and their advice to Jesus is to burn the place down. They were the first “Nuke ’em for Jesus,” group. We’d call them the “jihad for Jesus” today.

Jesus said, “I can’t use you yet among the Samaritans. You’re too racially prejudiced. But I can start you somewhere. I’ll start you among people you know, who speak your language, who have your ways. Start there in Galilee.” What tremendous ways Jesus helps us, by showing us that there are limitations He allows us to have.

## IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?

Luke 9:1–9

My mother proved to be a great spiritual beacon for my life, and I wanted to be a person of prayer like my mother, who spent several hours of every day of her life in prayer. I thought, “I’ve got to be a man of prayer.” I said to myself, “I’m going to begin by praying two hours a day.” I knelt down and I prayed and I prayed. My two hours went by and I stood up and I thought, “I prayed two hours.” Then I looked at my watch, and not quite five minutes had gone by. I realized that I was never going to begin at two hours a day.

The problem is, many times we set such high goals and we don’t achieve them spiritually, then we wash everything out. To pray five minutes a day is better than to pray no minutes a day. Or say, “I can never be a prayer giant, therefore I won’t pray at all.” Why not be a little prayer midget? Spiritual disciplines are just like physical disciplines. You don’t suddenly run a mile. You work up to it. Often, because we have this guilt feeling instilled in us that we’ve got to be a spiritual giant overnight, we don’t take things in bite-sized steps.

So if we’re not in the Word on a daily basis, take a daily walk at the back of the sanctuary and start. Don’t worry that you missed the first six months of the year. Forget it. It’s gone. You can’t bring it back. The fact is, you’ve got six months ahead. Start one day at a time. Take 5, 10, 15 minutes a day, and read the Bible. And 2 minutes in prayer is better than no time in prayer. But begin somewhere. Begin with manageable time units. And be effective within those limitations. Jesus knew what He was doing when He limited their geography.

**B.** He also limited their baggage. I shouldn’t ask this question. I’m not asking for verbal responses. But when you know you’re going on a trip, what’s your first concern? I know what the first concern of my wife is: *What am I going to take?* And that was probably the disciples’ first concern when Jesus said, “You’re going to go out.” And they were saying, “What are we going to take?” and Jesus said, “I’ll tell you what you’re going to take. Don’t take anything. No

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

### **Luke 9:1–9**

staff, no bag, no bread, no money.” Fortunately, Jesus didn’t tell them they couldn’t take their American Express card. They probably took it. And no extra tunic. The tunic was the overcoat you wore when it got cool, at night or in the early morning, or used as a blanket at night—it doubled as a blanket. Then He said, “Stay in whatever home...” When you got to a town, they didn’t have Motel 6’s or Holiday Inn’s. They had to stay with anybody who opened the door to them. “When you go into a town and a home opens to you, stay there until you leave the town.” That’s what He tried to teach them here. He tried to teach them the limitation of their baggage and, through the lesson on hospitality, that they must learn to trust Him and they must learn to be very gracious people.

Let’s talk for a moment about graciousness. If there’s a quality that we need to develop, Christians, what we need to develop is graciousness. Graciousness when standing in a line. Graciousness when being served in a restaurant. Graciousness when being served by a clerk. Graciousness when waiting for the teller at the bank. Graciousness. It’s a crying and critical need that the body of Christ be gracious.

How would this relate to hospitality? Let’s say a disciple goes into a town for the first time. There’s a little family that has one room. They have three preschoolers and one bedroom. That would be very typical of a Near Eastern setting. And they say, “Oh, brother Thomas! Come stay in our home!” So brother Thomas comes. It’s not easy to stay in a one-bedroom home with three preschoolers. Up the street, about three days later, the banker of the town takes an interest in what the town is saying about Jesus and he says to brother Thomas, “I’ve got a four-bedroom villa with a nice open porch and it has a Jacuzzi. I’d sure love it for you to come up and stay at my place.” So brother Thomas goes and says to his present host, “Would you excuse me, but the Lord is seemingly directing me to stay somewhere else.” It’s amazing how the Lord always

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

### **Luke 9:1–9**

directs us upward. Jesus says, “Don’t you dare do that! Don’t you dare make the family who first invited you feel put down when you go to a house that’s better in the same town.” So to avoid you getting all locked up trying to climb the ladder while you’re in a town, you stay at that place. They probably looked twice before they stayed the first time. Be gracious.

And don’t take anything with you. Later on, in the Book of Acts, I’m sure they were taking things on journeys, on more extended trips they had. But for now, Jesus was teaching them the lesson of trust and faith. He was saying that, even later, when they’d have to pack up stuff to take on a journey to share the good news of Jesus Christ, even then, they would have to trust Him. Always, they must trust Him. But right now, He was teaching them trust in a radical measure. The Christian life is so exciting because we’re forever learning to trust Him and His Word. An area where many of you, this year, have learned to trust Him, for the first time, is the area of tithing and giving of the first of your income to the Lord. It was a struggle in our life when we began to trust the Lord in that area. Then, a later struggle in our church building program. And when our missions emphasis came along, trusting the Lord for even more, to commit to His Word. What a thrill to find that when you trust the Lord, He does not fail.

Our discipleship grows whenever we trust the Lord more in any area. Jesus limited their geography and their baggage and...

**C.** He limited their words. He said “If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town” (Luke 9:5). Notice, He said, to avoid argumentation. If they don’t receive you, what’s the tendency? To try to engage people: “Why aren’t you receiving me?”

Their missionary strategy is totally different than the missionary strategy we read of in the Book of Acts. The strategy of the apostle Paul was to engage people in logical disputation. I want to say “debate,” but that word is sort of loaded. The style of Paul’s ministry in the synagogues was

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

### **Luke 9:1–9**

to prove, from the Old Testament, that Jesus was the Messiah. He would do that in the context of debate with the rabbis—back and forth and back and forth. It wasn't simply a matter of hearing your testimony and if people don't receive you, move on. He would keep on, pushing the discussion until somebody threw him out of town or everybody in the place got saved, one of the two.

Why does Jesus let Paul have disputation and tell the disciples that if people don't receive their testimony, to move on, not argue with them—move on? Why did He do this? Because He knows that they don't know enough to tell anything more than their testimony. They don't have any fallback positions. All they know is that Jesus did good things and taught wonderful things and He appeared to be a prophet. You know, at this time of the disciples' experience with the Lord, they had not yet even come to that moment when they had confessed Him as the Messiah. That's at Caesarea-Philippi—that comes later. It makes me wonder what kind of gospel they were preaching. Which brings you back to the first definition of the gospel—the gospel simply means “good news.” The disciples were going and saying, “Jesus has got wonderful things to say and He's doing wonderful things for people and we're authorized to speak what He is speaking and do what He is doing,” and that's all that they were doing.

If you were to ask me, “Pastor, what's the single greatest area in the church where it's hardest to recruit workers?” I could answer that without even thinking: It is in the areas of visitation and evangelism. That's where it's hardest. That's exactly the area where Jesus is sending the Twelve out in chapter nine—visitation and evangelism.

Why is it hard? For two reasons. We fear men. We fear unknown situations. We fear what people are going to do to us. We fear, what if someone slams the door in our face? We fear men. And often, as well, we fear that we are unprepared, and therefore, we don't know enough.

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

### **Luke 9:1–9**

Can you believe that Jesus sent the Twelve out and they didn't even know the Four Spiritual Laws? Let alone knowing who He was! But the principle was: Go tell! Whatever you know, go tell it! And if that's all you know, that's all you have to tell. You don't have to answer anybody's question. You just say, "I don't know the answer. Receive what I've told you or I have to leave." That's what they did. And the Lord went with them.

This month, with Billy Graham in town, is our chance to live out personally Luke 9 in a tremendous way. How thrillingly different this month can be for each of us, if we will let the Lord thrust us into our communities and into our network of friends who do not know the Lord and bring them to hear the gospel. You cannot lose if you will step out. That's the bottom line on this passage.

Jesus says, "I'm not going to just limit you"—we talked about the limitations—but let's talk a minute about the authority that Jesus gave them.

"Go out," He says, and gives them authority to cast out demons and heal the sick. Sure enough, verse 6 says, "They set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere." What this is telling us is that the Lord is serious about His word. Perhaps you don't feel like He's told you to go out and heal anybody. But maybe He's told you something else. We find that when we go and do it, the Lord goes with us.

The enemy is trying to block our progress in the gospel all the time in one of two ways. He's trying to paint our vision black, the color of hopelessness, and saying to us, "That will never come to pass. The restoration you want in your family and your marriage will never come to pass. The idea of you being a godly person? You can't live the Christian life. You know you can't. The idea of you being disciplined, or the idea of being out of debt, or the idea of giving

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

**Luke 9:1-9**

chunks of your time to serve the Lord and His body? You can't do that. You don't have any talent. You don't have any ability." The enemy, all the time, is telling us, "You can't."

And along with that, Satan is painting our vision with hopelessness. He then tries to keep us from taking any forward steps. He'll block us. I'm convinced that the enemy is most active any given week every time we come to a moment, especially in the service, where we ask people to make a decision. The enemy, at that point, is trying to cut that nerve so that we don't respond to what the Lord is asking us to respond to. Maybe your need is in your marriage or your home. Maybe it's hard for you to get the big vision of everything being made well at this point. Perhaps the Lord is helping you back off this great load of responsibility by saying, "Don't worry about the whole thing right now." What's the first step? The first step may be talking with a pastor or a counselor. The first step may be just beginning to pray about it. Don't try to solve everything at once.

What's the first step? If you're into drug or alcohol abuse and you say, "This thing has got a choke hold on me. I'll never be free," what's the first step? Admit your need. Look for someone who can begin helping you. In Christian service, what's the first step? Offer yourself. When an opportunity presents itself, offer your body to God, as acceptable to Him.

So often we don't try because we're afraid of failing. And the Lord just sort of spoke to me this week. I believe this is a valid biblical principle. I would rather fail in attempting to do what is right than to succeed at doing nothing. I would rather fail in attempting to do what is right than succeed in doing what is wrong.

So give me a choice. I have three. To try to do something, and if I fail, I would rather fail doing what is right than succeed at doing nothing or succeed at doing the wrong thing.

The Scripture helps us focus on life and helps us realize that the word "now" is a great biblical word. "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). It's not getting everything together and

## **IS YOUR VISION SMALL ENOUGH?**

**Luke 9:1-9**

having the whole picture suddenly drop in our lap. Life comes to us in minutes and hours and days and, rather than trying to do everything all at once, the Spirit says to us, “Do what is possible with My help now.” Start now and it will open the doors to the later goals.

Could I invite you to join me in a moment of prayer? As your heads are bowed, I’d like to give a “little” altar call. Many times we ask people to come and give their everything to the Lord.

Today, I’d like to ask you for a little thing. What little thing, what small vision has the Lord impressed upon you during this message that He would want you to do? Does anything come to your mind? Does the Spirit bring anything to impress upon you? Something in your personal life? In your spiritual walk? In your family? That the Lord would have you make an attempt to go out and begin to do? Could I ask that if the Lord has so impressed you with something, if something has come to your heart, just as an acknowledgment of that small vision, would you simply raise your hand before the Lord?

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord, there are so many small, practical things we need to get our hands on. Give us the power of the Spirit. You have, through this message today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, enlivened our vision to go for it, to do something about something. Now, Lord Jesus, empower our will, by the Holy Spirit, and fill our mind with the picture of going out and being empowered by the Spirit to do exactly what You’re calling us to do, so that we may go from victory to victory. Bring this whole congregation to new levels of strength and power in the Holy Spirit. Bring us to new levels of love for You and for one another. Help us to do that one thing, in Jesus’ name. Amen.