

Traveling light: Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

by [Jennifer L. Lord](#) in the [June 29, 2010](#) issue

Members of my household are preparing for a journey that will involve both regular and light backpacks. Regular hiking backpacks are made to hold a vast amount of gear—you strap them on when you go to the woods for a week or more. They hold food (in a bear-proof canister if you are heading into the wilderness), emergency supplies, clothing, water, sleeping bag, a tarp or tent, cookware and any additional personal supplies. This adds up to a lot of weight, and seasoned backpackers know that they only want to carry one-quarter or so of their body weight on their backs—less if possible.

The light backpacks are different. They don't have as many cubic inches of packing space and hold only 20–25 pounds of gear. They are made for a different type of trip, for a day hike that requires fewer items.

Each kind of backpack has a different purpose. Yet one truth cuts across the backpacking cultures—there are always accoutrements to purchase. There is always more gear to research, try and buy. There are fancy coffee-making devices that will give you the comfort of the never-left-home cup of brew in the high wilderness. There are odd-shaped gizmos that combine mirror, knife, compass, altimeter and whistle. There are basic supplies made of unpronounceable technical materials that shave ounces off your pack weight (we backpackers know that every ounce adds up). The incessant unveiling of new, better and specialized gear always tempts those of us who wander gear aisles or peruse online shopping sites. There is always more gear available.

But Luke's preaching-mission account is a travel-light account. It's the sending of the 70 (or 72, depending on the manuscript). Two by two these sent ones go ahead to the places where Jesus will go. There are many descriptions of them: they go ahead of the Lord; the harvest is plentiful; the sent ones are lambs among wolves; the greeting of peace will either be reciprocated or denied the journeying ones; they travel with the power of God; their names are written in heaven. Then there are the instructions: they are to travel with no sandals, bag or purse; greet no one on the road; enter homes with the greeting of peace and announce the nearness of the

kingdom of God no matter what. They must remove the dust of nonwelcoming towns from their sandals but not forget to announce the kingdom anyway, and not to rejoice in power over demons.

That's a lot to remember. But even with all the descriptions and instructions, there is a central standout insistence on traveling light: "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road." This is traveling light, even ultralight. This is an anti-accoutrements account. There will be no gear shopping. The early church knew what this meant. In *Paedagogus*, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) wrote, "'Carry not,' said the Lord, 'purse, nor scrip, nor shoes.' . . . We must, then, cast away the multitude of vessels, silver and gold drinking cups, and the crowd of domestics, receiving as we have done from the Instructor the fair and grave attendants, Self-help and Simplicity."

In those early homes where residents welcome the sent ones, we get a glimpse of how little we need for this journey. We see what works in the mission field: a community sharing a greeting of peace that is returned, gathering around a meal, healing, listening to the gospel announcement and departing to continue the work. The list of items is not too different from the liturgy of the Sunday assembly with its gathering, word, meal and sending. The Sunday gathering is a place of greetings and peace sharing and healing on many levels, with repeated announcement of the gospel and with meal-making—all things that grant kingdom-of-God identity in the midst of all the world's identifications. We are sent out with words of peace and a declaration of the kingdom and told this will be sufficient. We are sent out with instructions to greet and eat and heal and leave and told that this is sufficient for the work of the harvest of the Lord. Those who hear the sent ones will hear Jesus, while those who rebuke the sent ones will rebuke Jesus and the One who sent him.

According to the text, traveling light means at least one other thing. It is recorded that "the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'" Yet Jesus' response counters this enthusiasm: "Do not rejoice at this." This caution adds a twist to the details of the sending and the instructions for the journeying ones. With such missional details defining our work, aren't we entitled to enthusiasm when harvests happen? But here the enthusiasm over outcomes is tamped down. Jesus cautions us against excitement over tangibles, over a demon-submission success rate, over personal power. He truncates the self-congratulatory eagerness, however innocent, and makes it clear that the power bestowed on us is not our power: "See, I have given you authority . . . Nevertheless,

do not rejoice at this.” We are not to rejoice in our conquests on behalf of the Lord or because our names are written in heaven. The dialectic is that although power is put in *our* hands, that power is *put* in our hands. We travel light. We travel with peace, with healing, with meal sharing, with kingdom declaration, with community—and it is enough. We are members of the perpetual journeying household.