



Quaker Universalist Voice

Luke 6: Jesus' Instructions for Followers

by J.M. Spears

After recognizing the strong opposition of the religious and national leaders, Jesus decided to select some of his followers to be Pathfinders. Jesus then gave these followers a set of instructions about his vision for the way the people of Israel were to live together in a faithful community. Luke's Sermon on the Plain, the central piece of Luke 6, is the basic instructions given those people chosen to be leaders. Luke wrote this sermon as a set of instructions for the early church community about the way the followers of Jesus would have to act if they were to become God's Community (Kingdom of God).

Luke's Sermon on the Plain uses only 30 verses compared to Matthew's use of 107 verses in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

The context of the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount is the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees. The controversial questions included:

- a. What authority does a person have by being born human?
- b. Can humans forgive sins?
- c. What is the proper relationship between people and God?
- d. What is the definition of a "good person."
- e. What should be the relationship of good persons and bad persons?
- f. What is the relationship of the joyous nature of life and the solemn nature of rituals?
- g. What is the proper relationship of the people and the Sabbath?

Jesus spent most of his life dealing with these questions. For example, the Pharisees defined being a "good person" as keeping the religious laws. Jesus defined a "good person" as the person who had a good relationship with God and human beings.

The following Verse Notes provide insights gained in the translation of Luke 6. You can read the Verse Notes as an article, after reading the translation of Luke 6 and as you reread the translation.

Verse Notes for Luke 6:1-49

Luke 6:1 – Happened – The word translated as “happened” is a form of the verb “to be” or “to come into existence.” As Luke used the word, it is a *Septuagintism*. That is, it directly reflects the style of this oldest Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint.

The Septuagint was probably translated from Hebrew into Greek about 300 years before the life of Jesus. It was the Bible used by Jews at the time of Jesus, the early church, and the writer of Luke.

Luke uses this biblical word, “happened” so often that it becomes monotonous, similar to the way children often use a word over and over in telling stories. “and then...”

This style of the Septuagint would cause the first century hearer to associate the story with scripture, in much the same way that Americans often associate scripture when hearing the language style of the King James Version of the Bible.

Luke 6:8 – Get Up. Stand in the middle. – A simple phrase can have theological significance. “Get up. Stand in the middle,” is one example. “To stand” is also used in verse 17. “To stand” may be used to mean “to excite,” “to arouse,” “to awaken,” “to stand fast,” “to be firm,” or “to rise up into a state of higher advancement and blessedness.” The healing of the withered hand would be understood as the restoration of the community from the withering or deforming of the community by the Sabbath laws.

One of the most important goals of the Pharisees was proper observance of the Sabbath. Jesus went beyond the letter of the Sabbath law to encourage the fulfilling of the intent of the Sabbath. This story calls the people to get up, to be whole, to not be restricted by the Sabbath laws. Jesus taught that Sabbath laws were meant to restore life, not to take it away.

Children image stories concretely. They are not able to understand stories like this as an example of Jesus teaching theology. Later in life, people are able to understand stories theologically.

We should NOT emphasize the concrete aspects by asking children to recall physical details of the story. Children can hear the story without explanation. Children, as well as adults, need to be reminded frequently that, as they change and grow, their understanding of the Bible will also change and grow. As people mature physically and intellectually, they need to also grow spiritually. That growth should be reflected in the way they understand Luke’s story about the way he understood God acting in the world.

Luke 6:11 - Outrage – The Greek word, *paranoia*, translated as “outrage” has a sense of involving unreasonable outrage.

Luke 6:12 – Prayer – The Greek word translated as “prayer” is a compound word of *pros* and *euche*. *Pros* is a preposition that gives the sense of movement toward the object of the preposition. The author of Luke tells about Jesus moving into prayer. The Greek verb. *Euche* gives the ideas of “to hold,” “to have,” “to be able,” “to be affected by,” and “to be subjected to.” The combination of *pros* and *euche* is used to mean “the application of the mind to something,” “to give heed to,” “to attend to,” “to observe,” and “to consider.”

The basic concept of prayer is to have contact with the divine with the purpose of having a relationship with the divine. Jesus’ understanding of his relationship with God came to him during prayer after being baptized. Luke states this as, “You are my child. I love you. You please me greatly.” (Luke 3:22)

Jesus is shown praying at times of decision. After the controversy about the Sabbath, the central aspect of Temple Judaism, Jesus used prayer in determining the direction his future work was to take.

The night was commonly believed to be filled with evil spirits that exercise power. So, Luke shows Jesus spending whole nights wrestling in prayer.

Luke 6:13 – Names and Power – To give a name is to give power. After the controversies with the leaders of the Temple began, Jesus spent the night in prayer to decide what to do next. Then, Jesus brought the disciples into full participation in his work by naming them Pathfinders, “apostles” or “send ones.”

The number twelve is a symbolic number that is used for several different groups, always in connection with the divine plan of salvation. “Twelve” was used as a general number showing special significance. There were twelve tribes of Israel and twelve tribes of Ishmael. “The Twelve” were chosen to prepare the community for the Messianic event. Twelve is a symbol of the new Israel to be assembled from all nations.

Luke 6:17-19 – Summary Statement - Jesus’ ministry of healing the community, and the attraction of people to him as one who brought good news about God’s relationship with people, is summarized in these three verses.

Throughout the gospel of Luke, geographical terms of place and direction are used more to tell what is happening than where it is happening. The mountain is the place of prayer, the place of meeting the divine, and the place of revelation. The desert, or wilderness, is the place of retreat for decision and preparation. The plain is the place of meeting with people.

For example, “Jesus went forth into the mountain to pray” adds to the sense of direction and movement into the place of prayer.

Luke shows the whole of Jesus’ life as on a way, on a path. In Luke, Jesus’ way is related to being taken up. (See Luke 9:21-36) “Up” was a way of speaking about the spiritual.

Luke 6:18 – Community – Luke addresses the Sermon on the Plain to the community, not to individuals. In all of the sermon, except verses 41 and 42, “you” is plural. When Jesus said “To you who listen, I say...” it was the community of disciples that was listening.

This sermon about love is intended to shape the conduct of Jesus’ students and challenge them to become a community of “doers,” not just “hearers.”

Luke 6:19 – Healing Touch – The laying on of hands was seen as the way God’s Spirit was poured out, or given, to a person. In the deepest sense, healing was the forgiveness of sins. Sins can be understood as those things that separate a person from a relationship with God. Healing brings a person back into relationship with God and that relationship heals a person’s broken relationship with self, others, and all creation.

Luke 6:20-26 – Blessings and Curses – Blessings and curses deal with power and control. To bless is to bring happiness and to take away cares and worries. In the “Kingdom of God,” “God’s community,” God is the ruler. When God is ruling a community, people in that community do those things that are good for the others and bring happiness within the community.

The Greek word translated as “to curse” is a compound of two words meaning “down” and “wish” as “to wish someone a downer.” A curse brings harm and illness. Jesus forbids his disciples to curse as an act of revenge. A curse can be understood as a consequence of human sin, separation from God. The Greek word that is often translated as “sin” means “to miss the mark or goal.” The goal of people is to be in a right relationship with God. This translation uses “separated from God.”

Luke 6:20 – The Poor – To be poor was to be part of a social status: lowly, insignificant, and marginal. Luke introduced the concepts of “rich” and “poor” in the introductory infancy stories. The Hebrew word *anawim*, often translated as “poor,” means the “lowly ones” who depended on Yahweh for help. The poor were regarded as non-existent and were unseen by society. The Pharisees classified materially poor people as the dead, the lepers, the blind, and the childless.

Unlike Greek gods, Yahweh was seen as the protector of the poor. Prophets saw as inevitable that the wrong-doing of the wealthy would bring down God’s judgment on the whole people.

Luke 6:21 – Longing – Those who were hungry and longing were those who saw things, both outward and inward, as less than what God meant them to be. They were the people who longed for God’s help

Luke 6:24 – The Rich – The people who were rich in possessions, power, and prestige were included among “the rich.”

Luke 6:25 – False Prophets – The Greek word *pseudoprophets* is usually translated as “false prophets.” A prophet speaks for God. False prophets say they speak for God, but what they say does not reflect the ways of God.

Luke 6:27 – Love and Salvation – The author says that God’s mercy is available to all. Mercy is the basis of the possibility for salvation, being kept safe from anything that might hamper the development of the true life. True life is life with God. The Hebrew root word, which is translated into Greek as *agape*, “love,” reflects the concept of pity for the needy. To love is to forgive sins. Accepting love and forgiveness brings a person back into a right relationship.

Luke 6: 31 – Will – For Luke’s Jesus, to will something was to decide and to act. To do to other people as you will others to do to you, involves making a wise decision. Jesus wanted all to be safe in their relationship with God. Jesus called his followers to will, to want, and to decide to love. To act with love follows.

The love that God has for us, and requires of us, is not impulse, but will. *Agape* love is about relationship to the neighbor. For Jesus, love was a matter of will and action, not emotion. *Agape* love, which all people want to receive, brings people into that safe relationship with God.

Luke 6:35 – Most Divine – The supremacy of God is expressed in the name “Most High” or “Most Divine.”

Luke 6:37 – Prohibitions, Commands and Consequences – Luke shows Jesus as giving two prohibitions and two commands, each with a consequence. These prohibitions and commands deal with passing judgments and putting people down. Jesus addressed these issues because of the detrimental effects that the human tendency to criticize and find fault with other’s has on a community.

Luke 6:38 – Forgiveness – God’s forgiveness provides a foundation for people-to-people relationships.

Luke 6:39 – Discipleship as Leadership – Jesus called the disciples to be leaders and to recognize that they should not be blind guides. They must see the way clearly. If a person has not learned self-criticism, that person cannot lead others.

In verses 41 and 42, “you” is singular, calling on the individual disciples to take out the “log” in their individual eyes before trying to take the “speck” out of the eyes of others in the community.

Luke 6:40 – Responsibility of Discipleship – To have a clear vision, the disciples must first learn. Then, they will be able to be guides.

Luke 6:42 – Hypocrite – The Greek word *hypocrite* was used for an actor, a person who wore a mask and fine costumes and pretended to be someone else. This verse is about the contradictions between what people say and what they do.

Luke 6:44 – Heart – In the Bible, the heart designates the center of a person, the central part of one's life. The heart is where the spiritual life is rooted and moral conduct is determined.

Luke 6:45 – Evil – What brings harm or disadvantage is evil. Evil ways are contrary to God's ways. Evil results in bad conduct.

Luke 6:46-49 – Decision – True regard for God's Community, the Kingdom of God, requires serious decision and is not a matter of enthusiasm or emotion. This decision requires the consideration and planning of an architect before beginning a building. Jesus urged the disciples to build God's community. It was not enough to come to him. They would need to do what was required. Jesus told the disciples to be sure there was agreement between what they said and what they did, between their hearing what he said and their resulting actions.