

# “THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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## LUKE 6

In 1891 James Naismith invented the game of basketball. Naismith was a professor at Kansas University, and he wanted an activity to preoccupy his athletes in the winter months - between football and baseball season. When Naismith invented basketball he compiled a list of just 13 rules.

Today the official basketball rule book contains 50 articles – each with multiple sub-points. The International basketball rule book is 81 pages.

The expansion of the rules of basketball is a testimony to the human tendency to complicate whatever we touch. We gravitate from simple toward complex. We love to add rules, and restrictions, and explanations.

And this is especially true with religion. Take for example the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy...” The Law of Moses gave broad, general instructions to observe one day in seven as a day of rest and worship. Work was forbidden on the Sabbath Day, but the Jews felt compelled to define what constituted work.

You couldn't wear dentures, or strap on a wooden leg, or lift a child – or you would be carrying a load. A man could spit on the Sabbath, as long as he didn't scuff it with his shoe or he'd be watering and cultivating the soil.

In reality, *one man's work is another man's relaxation*. Some folks see gardening or yard work as therapeutic. It's a healthy diversion, a way to unwind... I think I'd rather sign up for a chain gang than pull weeds. And this is why God gave a general command concerning the Sabbath - that left the details of observance up to each person's own conscience.

Tragically, the Jews couldn't leave it that... they went to great effort to define what constituted work. Page, after page, after page in the Jewish Mishnah and Talmud are devoted to the subject of Sabbath observance. It's been said of the American legal system, “We have 35 million laws trying to enforce 10 commandments.” This also describes Judaism.

Yet Jesus came to simplify. The Jews smothered the intent of God's Law under a thick blanket of their own interpretations. Jesus wanted to restore the spirit of the Law. That's what He attempts to do in chapter 6...

“Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands. And some of the Pharisees said to them, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”

According to legalistic Jews, the Pharisees, there were four things you couldn't do with grain on the Sabbath – *reap, thresh, winnow, or cook*... There could be *no plucking, no shucking, no separating, no eating*... Thus, when the disciples rubbed the grain between their hands, blew off the chaff, and then ate the dry cereal they were guilty of all four forbidden stipulations. *Can you believe eating your Wheaties was considered a sin?*

It's interesting the traditions of the Pharisees also prohibited a Jew from traveling more than 3000 feet from his own home on the Sabbath Day. Makes you wonder what these cats were doing in a field, scrutinizing the breakfast habits of Jesus and His disciples? It was so hypocritical – to catch Jesus breaking the rules, they violated their own rules themselves.

Verse 3 “But Jesus answering them said, “Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?”

Of course, David was their champion. All Jews respected David's heart for God. Yet when David fled from Saul he stopped by the sanctuary on his way out of dodge. He and his men were tired and famished...

The priest wanted to strengthen David's troops, but the only food on hand was *the sacred shewbread*. According to God's Law, only the priest could eat this bread. Yet David didn't hesitate. Like Jesus' disciples on the Sabbath, David also ate his Wheaties. It was “*the breakfast of champions.*”

David and Jesus broke a ceremonial law to keep a higher, moral law...

Normally, 80 mph violates the law, unless you're rushing a person in critical condition to the hospital. A *higher law* supersedes a *lower law*...

Jesus was trying to showcase a basic principle the Jews had failed to recognize. “*Human need always takes precedence over religious ritual.*” In God's eyes *compassion* is more important than *tradition*. At times the *letter of the law* needs to be violated in order to keep the *spirit of the law*.

And Jesus adds a kicker, “*The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.*” Jesus is the Lawgiver. He was the voice on Sinai. Jesus is Lord of the Law. And if He gave it - He can change it or suspend it - at His prerogative. Jesus isn't bound by His own Law... *and this infuriated the Pharisees.*

Verse 6, “*Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered. So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him.*” Another Jewish prohibition on the Sabbath was healing. You could stop someone from dying, but it was work to improve their condition.

By this time everyone knew Jesus loved people, and if there was a needy man in the house, Jesus would probably heal him. The Pharisees may've planted the fellow with the arthritic hand in the room to trap Jesus.

Verse 8 “*But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, “Arise and stand here.” And he arose and stood.”* Jesus is about to teach a lesson. “*Then Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?”* Jesus springs the trap. *How can a good deed ever be unlawful?* What's more important, *maintaining a tradition* or *saving a life*...?

“*And when He had looked around at them all...*” Mark 3:5 adds “*with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts...*” Jesus was mad.

“*He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.*”

I haven't had a withered hand, but over the last few months I've had a withered thumb. I cut my tendon back in May and I still can't bend my thumb. It's odd. I'm use to telling my thumb to bend and watching it bend. But I no longer have that capacity.

This man's whole hand was an arthritic ball. He couldn't stretch his fingers. And Jesus gives an impossible command. *"Stretch out your hand."*

Do you realize, all faith is *the willingness to act on an impossible command?* You were born in sin. You've been a sinner your whole life. There's nothing you can do about your sin. Yet Romans 6:11 commands you, *"Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God."*

The word *"reckon"* means *"to consider it so."* Thus, the moment you believe, and act as if God's Word is true in you, then it becomes true! This is what happened to the man with the withered hand. The moment he believed he could stretch out his hand, God made him abundantly able.

Here's how faith works... God calls you to *be this*, or *do that*, yet you say, *"I can't. It's not in me."* And it's not, but if you act as if it is – if you believe - and provide God the willingness, He makes you able. He works a miracle. Jesus told the man, *"Stretch out your hand,"* and amazingly he did.

*And the Jews rejoiced and praised God* - whoops! No! *"They were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."* Here's what angered the Pharisees... they could tell everyone else what to do on the Sabbath, except God. God wouldn't keep their commands.

We say the Pharisees rejected Jesus because He claimed to be God, and that's true... But the opposite is also true, they weren't ready for God, and so they rejected Jesus... They worshipped a god in a box. A god they could control – who bowed to their own terms – and played by their rules.

The true God is wild and wooly. He blows up our traditions. He does what He pleases and expects us to follow. *Are you ready for the real God?*

Verse 12, *"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."* At the time Jesus is on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee - near Capernaum. And just south of Capernaum there's a mountain that towers over the lake. Its steep face rises out of the water. It's known as *Mount Arbel*.

To me, a trip to Israel isn't complete without climbing the Arbel. The view is panoramic. It's remote, quiet, majestic. It's a perfect spot for prayer and meditation. It may've been here that Jesus spent this night in prayer.

*"And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles..."* The word *"disciple"* means *"learner or follower."* The word *"apostle"* means *"one who is sent out, an ambassador."* The two words combined indicate a progression. Christians begin as learners, but we don't just learn forever. Jesus has marching orders for us all. The time comes to act on what we've learned.

The 12 apostles were the men who took the Gospel to the world, and established the church. Choosing them wisely was extremely important. This is why it's no surprise Jesus spent the night before in prayer.

And if it was important for Jesus to pray before making His decisions how much more should we follow in His footsteps. Hey, taking a few minutes to pray can save you hours trying to straighten out a bad decision.

In the next three verses Luke names the twelve. “Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John (also brothers - there were two sets of brothers.); Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot...”

The zealots were a radical paramilitary unit bent on using violence to drive the Romans out of Judea. They were Jewish freedom fighters. Whereas tax-collectors were just the opposite - they were Roman collaborators - sell-outs... Imagine, Matthew and Simon on the same team.

That’s not to mention an *impulsive Peter* and a *cautious Thomas*. What a diverse band of personalities and priorities. Obviously, Jesus wanted to show the world that allegiance to Him could transcend major differences.

He finishes the list in verse 16, “Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.” Here’s a provocative point – if Jesus prayed the night before, then Judas Iscariot was an answer to His prayer.

I would’ve asked the Lord to weed out the troublemakers and betrayers. But God’s ways are not our ways. Sometimes He has a purpose for putting difficult people in our lives. He can *use them* to help *shape us*.

“And He came down with them and stood on a level place...” Arbel’s eastern slope is a sheer drop-off. But west of the summit is level ground. Perhaps it was here Jesus met “with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all.” Notice “ALL” were healed. No one went home that day untouched by God’s love and power!

Verse 20 “Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” The rest of Luke 6 is similar to Matthew 5-7, [the Sermon on the Mount](#). And there are scholars who are quick to point out their discrepancies. They assume Luke 6 and Matthew 5 are the same sermon. I don’t think so. The sermon in Matthew as delivered on a mountainside. Here the people assemble in a flat area.

There are no discrepancies here because it was a different sermon, delivered at a different time, in a different place, to different people. There is some repeated content and similar structure, but it was two sermons. Matthew 5-7, ["Sermon on the Mount."](#) Luke 6, ["Sermon on the Plain."](#)

Jesus begins His sermon, verse 20, “Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”

One of the misconceptions humans make is to assume wealth, health, happiness are indicators of God’s blessing. Whereas poverty, sickness, and sorrow are signs of God’s curse. This was the source of Job’s confusion. He was innocent of any wrongdoing, yet calamity still struck. Job’s troubles threw a wrench in the prevailing theology of his day.

Likewise, Jesus rebuffed this kind of kindergarten theology. He taught a person's physical situation had nothing to do with his spiritual status. A rich man is not necessarily blessed, and a poor man is not necessarily cursed.

In fact, Jesus says, "*blessed*" or "*happy*" are those who "*hunger now,*" and "*weep now*" since God sees to it they'll eventually laugh and be full. According to Jesus the Kingdom of God is not about the here and now. The tables will be turned in eternity. "*The haves*" on Earth will be Eternity's "*have nots*" - and today's "*have nots*" will be Heaven's "*haves.*"

*"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake."*

Jesus promises us in John 16:33, "*In the world you will have tribulation.*" God's kingdom and this world's system are locked in mortal combat. If you live for Jesus you'll inevitably draw fire from the people of this world.

It reminds me of the guy in heaven who was asked by an angel if he'd done a kind deed on Earth. He replied, "*Sure, once a Hell's Angel jumped off his motorcycle and started picking on this little old lady. I grabbed the guy, kicked him in the shins, and told the old lady to run for help.*" The angel asked him, "*Wow, how brave! When did this happen?*" The fellow responded, "*Oh, about 30 seconds ago!*"

There may come a time when we're attacked physically, but here Jesus is talking about social persecution – "*hate,*" "*exclusion,*" "*revile,*" "*slander.*" You'll be mistreated by coworkers, or slighted, or scorned, or left out, or slandered. When it happens, "*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.*" When you're treated unfairly for Jesus' sake, take heart. Consider yourself blessed. You're doing something right. Its one proof your life is pleasing God.

*"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation..."* This is the rich man who's satisfied with this world's riches. He doesn't have time to lay up treasure in heaven. He's being extremely shortsighted.

*"Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."* Live for a stuffed stomach or bank account – and you'll lack forever. Waste your life partying - and you'll cry for eternity. Life is more than fun and games. Serious issues are at stake.

*"Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets..."* Try to be everybody's friend, and you won't be God's friend. We all offend somebody. *Will you offend your fellow man or God?*

*"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." It's hard to love those who love us. It's impossible to love an enemy!*

Like the man with a withered hand, here Jesus gives us an impossible command, "*love your enemies..."* I don't have it in me to love my enemies, but the moment I supply the willingness, God makes me able.

I like what CS Lewis once said, "*Do not waste time bothering about whether you love your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. But if you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.*" God works a miracle.

Always remember, *God loved His enemies*. He doesn't ask us to do what He hasn't done. And who are His enemies? Romans 5:10, "*When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.*" When God loves us, He loves His enemies... *Let's return the favor.*

And notice how Jesus tells us to love our enemies... *pray for them*. You can't pray for someone without looking at them through Jesus' eyes, and once we see them as He sees them love begins to grow.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, "*If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all our hostilities.*" Pray for your enemy...

Then Jesus says, "*To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also.*" A slap on the cheek was an insult, not a physical assault.

Jesus isn't teaching nonviolence or pacifism. You can't infer from this passage that war is always wrong, or the death penalty doesn't have a place in God's plan. There are occasions when the loving act may be to forcibly stop someone else from inflicting harm on you or society at large.

Jesus is saying if you're insulted slough it off – turn the other cheek. But if a guy breaks into your house at night to harm your family, then you should defend yourself and blow him to smithereens with a shot-gun.

*"And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back."* Jesus isn't saying be a doormat – a victim. He's talking about our priorities and rights. *My priority is to love people not demand my rights*. Here's the challenging question Jesus is asking, "*Am I willing to give up my rights, in order to show you love?*"

*My right to dignity* – you can slap me, but your insult won't stop my love.

*My right to possessions* - take my coat, but your soul means more to me than my shirt... Jesus is teaching us to make a radical commitment. Let's repay hatred with love. Let's fight back, but let's overcome evil with good.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "*The best way to destroy your enemy is by making him your friend.*" This needs to be the Christian's goal in the world.

Verse 31 is also called "*The Golden Rule.*" Here's how to treat people... "*And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.*"

*"But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back.*

*But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High.*

*For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.*" What an amazing verse. God is still kind to ingrates and rebels. He's obviously rich in mercy and grace.

J Oswald Sanders once wrote, "*The Master expects from His disciples such conduct as can be explained only in terms of the supernatural.*" And this is true here. Anyone can love a person who loves them. But the kind of love Jesus describes is impossible. It takes a miracle to love the unlovable.



It's said, "To injure an enemy puts you below him. To take revenge on an enemy makes you even. Its only when you forgive your enemy that you rise above him." Jesus wants His followers to aspire to a higher standard.

Verse 36 "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

I like what Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "I have decided to stick to love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." Hatred quickly turns to bitterness.

We could rationalize the first half of this verse "*be merciful*" and still justify harshness toward some people, if it were not for the phrase, "*As your Father also is merciful.*" The mercy we *know* is the mercy we *show*...

Then Jesus says, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

Once, a man was summoned for jury duty. He didn't want to be there. He was hoping to get himself disqualified. He approached the judge and pointed at the man in the courtroom, "I know this guy is guilty. To me he looks like a crook, walks like a crook, even smells like a crook. I know it, there's no way I could give this man a fair hearing." The judge responded, "Go back to the jury box. That's not the defendant, it's the district attorney."

When Jesus says don't judge He's not talking about biblical judgments. When I call homosexuality sinful - Mormonism heretical - or Allah a false god - I'm not making a personal judgment. It's not my preference or opinion at stake. I'm simply pointing out what the Bible has already determined.

What Jesus prohibits are judgments based on someone's prejudice, or preference, or tradition - arbitrary judgments not grounded in God's Word.

Verse 38, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

The phrase "put into your bosom" makes sense once you've seen an ancient Hebrew tunic. It had a fold at the waste that served as a pocket. Jesus says *give* and God will fill your pockets! You can't out-give God.

"And He spoke a parable to them: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher." In other words, *be careful who you follow!* You can follow the wrong person straight to hell. I tell folks, *never follow anyone until you know who they're following.*

"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the plank in your own eye?" This is comical. A hypocrite makes a big deal out of the toothpick in your eye, while ignoring the 2x4 in his eye.

Once, a lady was critical of her neighbor. She looked out the window at her laundry on the clothesline, and sneered, "My neighbor is such a sloppy housekeeper. Look at the streaks in her wash." Her friend responded, "Pardon me, but those streaks aren't in her wash, they're on your window." A hypocrite focuses on your problems while ignoring his major issues.

"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother's eye."

Speck removal is a delicate procedure. I'm certainly not going to allow anyone to touch my eye, until the speck in their own eye is removed first.

Verse 43 "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush."

Jesus condemns hypocritical judgments, *but not all judging is bad*. There're times when we need size a person up, but when its necessary don't just look at the outward appearance. You never judge a tree by its leaves. You look deeper, at its fruit. The same is true with another person.

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil.

For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

In winter a tree has no leaves, but don't write it off as dead until the sap has had time to rise. Likewise, don't judge a person until you get to know their heart. Take the time to listen to them. Allow what's inside them to rise to the surface. In time, what's down deep eventually becomes evident.

This is what Jesus does in verse 46 "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" You can *talk the talk*, and not *walk the walk*. A person can *profess* a loyalty, they don't really *possess*.

Jesus continues, "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock." Notice, the man with the solid foundation isn't just a hearer of Jesus' sayings, but a doer. He applies...

"But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great." Implied is that the only difference between these two houses was their foundation. But you didn't know it until the floods came and beat on the houses.

So it is in life. It's the hard times that reveal a person's true allegiance. The storm exposes the foundation. I like the old adage, "Christians are like tea bags. You don't know what's inside until you put them in hot water."