

LORD OF LOVE

CORE PASSAGE: LUKE 6:20-23,27-36

CONTEXT

Jesus did amazing things. He healed the sick, made lame men walk, cleansed lepers, and cast out demons. He called ordinary, untrained, unlikely men to be His closest followers and told them He would use them to change the world. He confronted the religious leaders of the day, exposing their hypocrisy. When Jesus taught, He revealed things about the meaning of life, the hearts of men, and the nature of God that have echoed through history. Luke 6 contains the Beatitudes, some of Jesus's most wonderful, influential, and challenging teachings.

KEY CONCEPT

The way of Jesus is humble, sacrificial love that is countercultural.

As you examine Luke 6:20-23,27-36:

- Meditate on Jesus's message that those who are persecuted are blessed.
- Recognize that Jesus calls us to love sacrificially, even to love our enemies.



TIMELINE

Jesus Heals a Leprous Man
(Luke 5:12-16)

Jesus Forgives and Heals a
Paralyzed Man (Luke 5:17-26)

Jesus Teaches About and Heals
on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-11)

SESSION STUDY: Jesus Delivers His
Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49)

John the Baptist Seeks
Confirmation That Jesus Is the
Messiah (Luke 7:18-35)

Daily Readings

- Day 1:** Luke 6:1-16
- Day 2:** Luke 6:17-49
- Day 3:** Matthew 5:1-48
- Day 4:** Matthew 6:1-34
- Day 5:** Matthew 7:1-29
- Day 6:** Psalm 147



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

THE HUMBLE AND MEEK REJOICE IN THEIR HEAVENLY INHERITANCE (LUKE 6:20-23).

Underline the attributes of blessed people, and circle the rewards of blessed people.

20 Then looking up at his disciples, he said: Blessed are you who are poor, because the kingdom of God is yours. **21** Blessed are you who are hungry now, because you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, because you will laugh. **22** Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, insult you, and slander your name as evil because of the Son of Man. **23** Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. Take note—your reward is great in heaven, for this is the way their ancestors used to treat the prophets.

Jesus’s words in this passage likely are familiar to many. They are called “the Beatitudes,” and they appear here in Luke and in Jesus’s famous Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Many who study the Bible think these teachings were not something Jesus said once or twice but a compilation of challenging teachings that Jesus proclaimed many times. These words are at the center of the paradoxical message that Jesus shared with His disciples: In the kingdom of God, the things the world values do not matter and the things that seem like foolishness to the world bring about the blessed life.

LEADER NOTE: There is no question that many biblical values are at odds with the things our culture allows and even celebrates. The way of Jesus has always been countercultural. Therefore, Christians should seek to understand and engage with the world around them rather than hide themselves away from it. Jesus called His disciples to faithful engagement with the lost world in which they lived, not fearful isolationism. We must ask ourselves what it looks like to engage with the lostness around us while also staying separate from the temptations and traps of worldly living.

How are Jesus’s teachings about what it means to be blessed different from what the world says?

GOSPEL CONNECTION

Jesus ushered in a countercultural, upside-down kingdom that put love as the highest value. This love is shown ultimately in how He died for us that those who trust in Him might have life and not perish.

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Jesus encouraged His disciples by saying that in the midst of hardship and persecution, they are still blessed: 1) because the kingdom of God is theirs, and 2) because their reward is great in heaven (Luke 6:20,23). Those who follow Jesus live in the hope of eternal life in His kingdom and endless blessing in the presence of God. That is the promise that Jesus came to make a reality. Once you understand and put your faith in that promise, navigating the difficulties of this life becomes possible.

Christians can walk through life without stress about possessions, sustenance, or survival because our eternity is already secure. We can weather trials of persecution in Jesus's name, knowing that unending joy is on the horizon. We can endure living as outcasts and being the world's laughingstock because we know our Father is pleased with us and will vindicate us in the end. We are called and commanded to "rejoice" because we know how the story ends (v. 23).

LEADER NOTE: Sometimes the idea of persecution can feel disconnected for Western believers. Compared to many times in history and many places in the world today, most Christians in America experience very little in the way of direct danger or consequences because of their faith. It's important to remember that this reality could change in an instant and has in various places at various times. The believer must be ready to stand for Christ no matter the situation, grounded in the eternal hope we have in Christ. We also should constantly remember and pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who live in parts of the world where persecution is a daily reality.

Which blessing in this passage brings you the most comfort or joy?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"While the world imagines progress, strength, and a grand future, the disciples know about the end, judgment, and the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, for which the world is not at all ready . . . That is why the disciples are rejected as strangers in the world, bothersome guests, disturbers of the peace."¹

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)

Notes



LOVING OTHERS, INCLUDING ENEMIES, IS THE WAY OF JESUS (LUKE 6:27-36).

Highlight each imperative (command) in the passage.

27 “But I say to you who listen: Love your enemies, do what is good to those who hate you, **28** bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If anyone hits you on the cheek, offer the other also. And if anyone takes away your coat, don’t hold back your shirt either. **30** Give to everyone who asks you, and from someone who takes your things, don’t ask for them back. **31** Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them. **32** If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. **33** If you do what is good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to be repaid in full. **35** But love your enemies, do what is good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil. **36** Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.”

If you thought the passage before this was challenging, there’s much more where that came from. Everyone loves the idea of love, but few people are ready to commit to the radical definition of love that Jesus taught. Jesus escalated His countercultural call when He taught His people how they are to show love. Everyone loves the people who love them, but the way of Jesus calls people to go further—Jesus called His disciples to love their enemies. They were to respond to hate with goodness. When struck, they were not to retaliate. When robbed, they were to give even more. They were to treat even the lowest of the low with the same dignity they wanted to experience. They were to give radically with no regard for gain or return. In short, they were to stand out for their radical love in a world that loves sparingly and conditionally.

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

GOD IS LOVE: To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn’t the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

Key Concept: The way of Jesus is humble, sacrificial love that is countercultural.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus gives four examples of visible, active love in verses 29-30 that stress restraint and generosity. If struck, give the other cheek. If your coat is taken, give your shirt as well. Give to those who ask, and don't ask for things back that were taken from you. Clearly, God's way is very different from our culture's, so following His way will make us different from the world. We must exude love and mercy like God does. Despite our natural inclination to "want what's ours," Jesus calls us to be better, to be like Him.

When have you seen a Christian stand out because of his or her radical love?

How are Christians to live with such radical love, even for their enemies? The answer is rooted in our previous passage: because we know our reward in heaven is already secure (v. 23). Christians need not avenge themselves nor live with a survival mentality because Christ has already conquered every enemy, all evil, and even death itself! There is nothing that an enemy can do to Christians that can threaten them in any meaningful way. Therefore, we are free to love even our enemies, praying that one day even they become our brothers and sisters in Christ by faith. Why are Christians to love this way? It proves that we are children of the Most High. This is the way our Father loves, and when we love like Him, it brings Him glory.

LEADER NOTE: Luke stressed love for our enemies throughout his Gospel. Only Luke mentioned that Jesus said at the crucifixion, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:24). Luke recorded Stephen saying a similar phrase at his stoning (Acts 7:60). One of the greatest and most tangible evidences of our loving God is when His people love their enemies.

Whom in your life do you find hard to love? How might Christ be calling you to radical love in that situation?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"We who hated and destroyed one another, . . . now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies and endeavour to persuade those who hate us unjustly . . . that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God the ruler of all."²

—Justin Martyr (c. 100–165)

Notes

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: As the group assembles, ask: “When have you shown restraint when someone offended or harmed you?” (*Offer an example of someone cutting you off on the road or someone who gossiped about you, or you may share a real example from your own life.*)

TRANSITION: Showing restraint or holding back when people have offended us or spoken poorly about our faith is difficult to do, but Jesus tells us to love others, even our enemies, those who are against us. That’s hard to do, but with the power of the Holy Spirit, we know we are able to. It’s just a matter of whether we want to or not.

CONTEXT

SAY: Wherever Jesus went, He stirred up controversy, not because He was trying to cause trouble but because His words and actions pointed out the hypocrisy of the religious elite and His commands called for a deeper understanding of the character of God. Luke 6:17-19 records that crowds were coming to Jesus to be healed of physical diseases and to be freed from being tormented by demons. Jesus had recently called twelve men to be His apostles (Mark 3:13-19), but many more disciples were following Him to hear Him teach.

RECAP

ASK: What stood out to you this week as you prepared for this session? What statements or commands convicted you or caused you to ponder or question its meaning?

TRANSITION: Previously, we saw Jesus hold His Father’s will above conflicting human regulations regarding the Sabbath by showing compassion and healing the sick and disabled even on the Sabbath. Here Jesus taught what He exemplified in the previous session: He taught His disciples the importance of loving others like God loves them and what it means to be children of His kingdom.



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Key Concept: The way of Jesus is humble, sacrificial love that is countercultural.

Notes

GROUP ACTIVITY

CHART: Direct your group to page 82 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a chart titled “Humble Living and Loving Others.” Recreate this chart on a board in your room so you can record the group’s responses.

Humble Living and Loving Others		
Read Luke 6:20-23,27-36. Write down how the first set of verses can be connected to the second set. Then write down the blessings mentioned.		
	HOW IT'S RELATED TO LOVING OTHERS	BLESSINGS
POOR		
HUNGRY		
WEEPING		
INSULTED		

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud Luke 6:20-23,27-36.

SAY: The first set of verses may initially seem separate from the second, but a life of humble living and living through persecution results from loving others sacrificially. There is a connection there. Let’s find the connections.

ENGAGE: Direct the group to write down how the verses in the first set can be a result of the second set. For example, it is possible to become “poor” by giving generously to others. Examine verses 20-23 in this way. Then ask: “What would our world look like if more Christians lived this way?” Also lead the group to record the blessings highlighted in Jesus’s Beatitudes.

DISCUSS: Being persecuted for our faith can include persecution for sharing the gospel and for living out sacrificial love to others, even being persecuted by those in the church. Ask: “What are some real-life examples of what Christians can be doing today to show sacrificial love that might result in persecution? How do the blessings we have, as seen in these Beatitudes, help us be more motivated to love others, even our enemies?”

CONCLUDE: The apostles that Jesus was teaching here were the same ones hiding from the Jews after Jesus was crucified. But with the power of the Holy Spirit, they boldly proclaimed the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles and were persecuted for it. It can be very challenging to have love toward people who mistreat you. In some cases, the people who put the apostles to death thought they were doing God's will, as Jesus prophesied (see John 16:1-2). Yet the disciples prayed for and did good to those who hated them, knowing it would give God glory, and it did, calling still more to faith in Jesus (see Rom. 12:19-21; 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

DEBRIEF

How can the church be a place of sacrificial love for those in its community?

Where in your life do you need to show more love to your “enemies” or those who have offended you?

SUMMARIZE

We often spend time praying for opportunities to help those in need. The truth is the opportunities are always there. We need to pray that God will open our eyes to recognize those opportunities and respond to them with Christ-like love as well as show His love to those who intend us harm.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 83). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Hands** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: The great love of God secures eternal blessings for Christians who are struggling through life in this world; it also calls us to display a radical kind of love even to our enemies. We must understand how different the way of Jesus is from the way of the world in order to begin to effectively live it out.

What is a worldly standard or definition of love that you are tempted to believe?



HEART: The Christian's motivation to show radical love to others is rooted in our own experience of the mercy we have received from God the Father through His Son. If the experience of God's love has grown cold within you, then the reflection of that love will be rare outside of you. If we need a rekindling of God's love in our hearts, we need look no further than His Word, which recounts all the things God has done for us because of His great love.

What spiritual disciplines could you focus on to grow your awareness of Christ's love for you?

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HANDS: Talk can be cheap. We can study, discuss, pray, sing, write, and post about the love of God, but until we pair our words with action, we're like the clanging gong that Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 13. Our time reading God's Word, time in prayer, and our time worshiping together should fuel a radically loving lifestyle, day in and day out.

What is one specific step toward radical love that you can take this week?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Do your own study, researching those times Jesus was mistreated. Record them along with the references as well as how He responded.
- Read the following verses and keep a journal this week of opportunities you have to put their messages into practice: Romans 5:3-4; 8:28; Galatians 6:2; James 1:12.
- Speak to your pastor or others in your church to find out if they have a list of resources to help people in need that you could keep and refer to when you encounter opportunities to help others.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 83 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 147:10-11 with your group. Thank God for restoring His people, providing for those who "put their faith in his faithful love" (v. 11).

References

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Martin Kuske et al., trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, vol. 4, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 104.
2. Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 167.

Notes

