

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

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Lessons

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QUARTERLY QUIZ

Use these questions as a pretest or as a review. The answers are on page iv of *This Quarter in the Word*.

Lesson 1

1. Lot fled from Sodom to _____. *Genesis 19:23*
2. Due to his promise to Jacob, God delivered Lot. T/F. *Genesis 19:29*

Lesson 2

1. Eli mistakenly thought Hannah was drunk. T/F. *1 Samuel 1:14*
2. Hannah named her son _____. *1 Samuel 1:20*

Lesson 3

1. God's people were frustrated, wishing he had killed them in Egypt. T/F. *Exodus 16:3*
2. God provided his people manna and _____ to eat in the desert. *Exodus 16:13*

Lesson 4

1. The 12 spies returned after searching out the land of Canaan for _____ days. *Numbers 13:25*
2. Joshua and Caleb were so upset with the Israelites for not trusting God that they fell on their faces. T/F. *Numbers 14:6*

Lesson 5

1. God considered destroying Israel and creating a new nation under Moses. T/F. *Numbers 14:12*
2. God guided Israel through the wilderness with miraculous signs. T/F. *Numbers 14:14*

Lesson 6

1. What did God say would set his people apart from other nations? (their armies, God's laws, their rich culture?) *Deuteronomy 4:8*
2. God revealed himself out of fire to deliver the Ten Commandments. T/F. *Deuteronomy 4:12*

Lesson 7

1. God used a wealthy matron to hide Elijah from King Ahab. T/F. *1 Kings 17:9, 12*

2. What provisions miraculously didn't run out for the impoverished family? (pick two: oil, firewood, flour?) *1 Kings 17:14*

Lesson 8

1. Jesus healed the centurion's son. T/F. *Luke 7:2*
2. Jesus said he didn't find faith as great as the centurion's in _____. *Luke 7:9*

Lesson 9

1. The sinful woman washed Jesus' feet with what? (pick two: tears, myrrh, her hair?) *Luke 7:38*
2. Jesus said, "Whoever has been forgiven little loves _____." *Luke 7:47*

Lesson 10

1. Paul stated his intent to make which visit to the church in Corinth? (second, third, fourth?) *2 Corinthians 13:1*
2. Some Corinthians doubted that _____ spoke through Paul. *2 Corinthians 13:3*

Lesson 11

1. Paul's team remembered which three characteristics of the Thessalonians? (faith, perseverance, strength, love, hope?) *1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3*
2. The Thessalonians' response to the gospel was so complete that they became _____ to those in Macedonia and Achaia. *1 Thessalonians 1:7*

Lesson 12

1. Peter told his congregation to imitate God's joy. T/F. *1 Peter 1:15, 16*
2. Christians are _____ by the precious blood of Christ. *1 Peter 1:18, 19*

Lesson 13

1. Peter said that God has given us _____ so we can participate in the divine nature. *2 Peter 1:4*
2. Peter knew that he would die soon. T/F. *2 Peter 1:13, 14*

QUARTER AT A GLANCE

by Larry Shallenberger

OUR TIMES are marked by dramatic changes in how we relate to each other, both as individuals and as communities. The days of tight-knit neighborhoods are a distant memory in many parts of the world. Families transplant themselves cross-country. A single mouse-click can dissolve an online friendship. Marriages often don't last. The new normal frequently comes at the price of loyalty and permanence, qualities the authors of the Scriptures might have referred to as "faithfulness."

A God Worth Knowing

The word faithfulness simply doesn't have much currency in our time. Before our fault cultural shifts for our fragile relationships, we should recall the opening pages of Scripture. Sin's curse disrupted all relationships, especially our relationship with God. Alienated from God, humanity hatched countless false religions throughout the world, each searching for truth about the Creator.

Against that backdrop of confusion, alienation, and idolatry, God revealed himself and his desire to enter into a faithful relationship with the people he created.

Unfaithful people struggle to trust others, so God's first task was to establish himself as worthy of humanity's confidence. God reveals himself throughout history as one whose faithfulness never fails. We see God keep a promise to Abraham by blessing his nephew (Genesis 19:29). We watch God lead his people out of slavery to the border of the promised land, only to see them prove unfaithful. God forgave their betrayal and kept his word (Numbers 14:20-25). God consistently demonstrates his loyalty to his people, no matter how many times they fail him.

Faithfulness Demands Faithfulness

God unilaterally reveals himself as true, the God to whom we can take the risk of attaching our

hopes. But the invitation requires that we begin to take steps to reciprocate that loyalty. Those steps don't make us worthy of his faithfulness, but they show that we trust his faithfulness.

God's expects his people to practice faithfulness in our relationships with him. Moses uses the metaphor of a contract between a king and his people to show what the give-and-take of a faithful relationship between God and his people looks like (Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12, 13). Later, a fugitive prophet and a starving widow are brought together by God (1 Kings 17:8-16). Together they learn to demonstrate faithfulness to God.

Faithfulness Transforms Character

We can't sustain faithfulness toward God on our own. The Old Testament witnesses to cycles of God's people violating the terms of the covenant, God's imposing judgment, people's repentance, and restoration. The prophets longed for the day when God would equip his people with a new heart that would allow them to sustain a steadfast relationship with their God. The third unit in this quarter focuses on four New Testament accounts that show this prophecy coming to pass. Christ-like character was being formed in his people.

God reveals himself throughout history as one whose faithfulness never fails.

Paul tells the people to examine themselves to see whether this transformation was actually occurring (2 Corinthians 13:1-9). Meanwhile, Paul's colleague Peter taught his congregations that a faithful relationship with God required holy living and goodness (2 Peter 1:1-15).

As we work through this quarter, may we be encouraged that our faithful God chooses to enter into a relationship with us that makes us more like him.

GET THE SETTING

by Ronald L. Nickelson

CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS suggest (or dictate) how we should respond when others are gracious to us. Whether that graciousness takes the form of extending a courtesy, offering hospitality, or overlooking an indiscretion, a response of appreciation is in order. And so it is with God. The manner and type of graciousness extended to us has a lot to do with the nature of what our response should be. God has expectations in this regard—expectations we dare not overlook!

Concepts from Contexts

Behind the translations “grace,” “gracious,” and similar renderings in the New Testament is a Greek word group whose members are also translated variously as “favor” (Luke 1:28, 30), “gift” (Romans 1:11), “commendable” (1 Peter 2:19), “benefit” (2 Corinthians 1:15), etc. This wide range of translation results rightly from the complicated grammatical rules of Greek. At the most basic level, *charis* (pronounced *kar-is*) is the Greek noun behind the English translation “grace.”

The word *charis* was not a new word to the writers of the New Testament. It is attested as far back as the poet Homer (800–701 BC?). In Greek mythology, *Charis* was one of the goddesses of charm and beauty. But words change in their range of meanings over time. For example, the English word *charisma* is easily recognized as a transliterated variation of the Greek *charis*. A modern dictionary entry for *charisma* as “a special magnetic charm or appeal” does not match how that word is used in the New Testament. There its regular translation is “gift(s)” (example: Romans 1:11).

For the word group involving *charis*, a shift in range of meaning is seen in how a Greek historian of the fourth century BC used a verb form of that word in a context of appeasing the gods by offering sacrifices. Much later, a historian of the first century BC reflected a new shade of meaning as he used a form of *charis* in a context of overlook-

ing enmity in the interest of friendship. This signaled a shift toward the idea of “to forgive.”

Much caution is therefore advised with regard to reading back modern usages of a word into Scripture, or vice versa. The writers of the Bible were much more likely to draw on the prevailing range of meanings for any given word rather than feeling bound to follow usage by, say, Homer. To have used words in ways that no longer prevailed was to risk misunderstanding.

Frequent usages of members of the *charis* word-group in the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) are in contexts of a weaker person finding favor in the eyes of a stronger person (examples: Genesis 39:4, 21). Noun, verb, and adjectival forms of *charis* occur more than 200 times in the New Testament. Contexts range from those of unique blessings bestowed on particular individuals only once in their lives for one-time earthly purposes (examples: Luke 1:11-17, 30) to the vital doctrinal fact of God’s saving grace that is available to all for eternity (examples: Romans 3:24-27; Ephesians 2:5-8). Both kinds of God’s graciousness, and every kind in between, call for a response.

Gratitude from Grace

Bestowals of grace by fictitious pagan deities called for adherents to offer sacrifices (compare Acts 14:11-13). First-century Judaism, having rejected the concept of grace available through Christ while clinging to that of Exodus 34:6, was left with a grace response based in human merit and law keeping. The ultimate result of this kind of view is self-congratulatory thankfulness such as seen in Luke 18:9-12.

We are to be grateful to God as our Creator. But a deeper reason for our thankfulness is the fact that God is also our Redeemer. In line with 2 Corinthians 4:15; Ephesians 4:32; etc., may we exhibit a thankfulness consistent with having been saved by means other than our own.

Mon, Nov. 11 God's Word Is True and Reliable Isaiah 40:6-9
 Tue, Nov. 12 Jesus Enables Victory Over Sin Romans 7:14-25
 Wed, Nov. 13 Love One Another Romans 13:8-10
 Thu, Nov. 14 New Life Through the Spirit Romans 8:1-11
 Fri, Nov. 15 Live by the Spirit Galatians 5:16-26
 Sat, Nov. 16 Rejoice in God's Actions in Christ 1 Peter 1:3-12
 Sun, Nov. 17 Call to Holy Living 1 Peter 1:13-25

 Mon, Nov. 18 The Spirit and the Bride Say, "Come" Revelation 22:14-17
 Tue, Nov. 19 Our Dwelling Place Psalm 90
 Wed, Nov. 20 One Day Like One Thousand Years 2 Peter 3:8-10
 Thu, Nov. 21 The Coming Day of the Lord 2 Peter 3:11-15a, 17, 18
 Fri, Nov. 22 This Is My Son. Listen to Him! Luke 9:28-36
 Sat, Nov. 23 Solid Reasons for Hope 2 Peter 1:16-21
 Sun, Nov. 24 Always Keep the Faith 2 Peter 1:1-15

THIS QUARTER IN THE WORD

Mon, Aug. 26 Remember Lot's Wife Luke 17:22, 26-37
 Tue, Aug. 27 Faithful at Last Genesis 18:1-15
 Wed, Aug. 28 Concerned About the Family Genesis 18:16-21
 Thu, Aug. 29 Pleading Justice for the Righteous Genesis 18:30-33
 Fri, Aug. 30 God Rescues the Godly 2 Peter 2:4-10
 Sat, Aug. 31 Sodom's Sin Revealed Genesis 19:2-14
 Sun, Sep. 1 A Successful Escape Genesis 19:1, 4, 5, 15-26, 29

 Mon, Sep. 2 The Special Vow Numbers 6:1-5, 13-15
 Tue, Sep. 3 Our God Answered Psalm 99
 Wed, Sep. 4 Hannah Is Childless and Suffering 1 Samuel 1:1-8
 Thu, Sep. 5 Sacrifice and Worship 1 Samuel 1:21-23
 Fri, Sep. 6 Samuel Is Dedicated to the Lord 1 Samuel 1:24-28
 Sat, Sep. 7 Hannah's Reward 1 Samuel 2:18-21
 Sun, Sep. 8 God Answers Hannah's Prayer 1 Samuel 1:9-20

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 2

Lesson 1—1. Zoar. 2. false. **Lesson 2**—1. true. 2. Samuel.
Lesson 3—1. true. 2. quail. **Lesson 4**—1. 40. 2. false. **Lesson 5**—1. true. 2. true. **Lesson 6**—1. God's laws. 2. true. **Lesson 7**—1. false. 2. oil, flour. **Lesson 8**—1. false. 2. Israel. **Lesson 9**—1. tears, her hair. 2. little. **Lesson 10**—1. third. 2. Christ. **Lesson 11**—1. faith, love, hope. 2. models. **Lesson 12**—1. false. 2. redeemed. **Lesson 13**—1. promises. 2. true.

Mon, Sep. 9 Striking a Fair Balance 2 Corinthians 8:9-15
 Tue, Sep. 10 One Body of Believers 1 Corinthians 12:18-26
 Wed, Sep. 11 The Lord Responds to Complaints Exodus 16:9-12
 Thu, Sep. 12 Conducting Daily Family Duties Exodus 16:16-21
 Fri, Sep. 13 Observing the Sabbath Day Exodus 16:22-30
 Sat, Sep. 14 Symbols of Remembrance Exodus 16:31-36
 Sun, Sep. 15 God Provides for the People Exodus 16:1-8, 13-15

Mon, Sep. 16 **Praise the Lord!** Psalm 106:1-12, 48
 Tue, Sep. 17 **Spying Out the Land** Numbers 13:17b-24
 Wed, Sep. 18 **Reporting Mixed Reviews** Numbers 13:30-33
 Thu, Sep. 19 **Moses Resists God's Proposal** Exodus 32:7-14
 Fri, Sep. 20 **Who Will Enter?** Deuteronomy 1:34-40
 Sat, Sep. 21 **God Forgives and Disciplines** Numbers 14:20-24
 Sun, Sep. 22 **Trust God's Promises** Numbers 13:1, 2, 17a, 25-28a;
 14:1, 2, 5-10a

Mon, Sep. 23 **Bless the Lord Who Forgives** Psalm 103:1-14
 Tue, Sep. 24 **Jesus Forgives Our Sins** Acts 10:34-43
 Wed, Sep. 25 **God's Forgiveness and My Suffering** Numbers 14:21-25
 Thu, Sep. 26 **God's Forgiveness and Judgments** Numbers 14:26-30
 Fri, Sep. 27 **Children May Suffer** Numbers 14:31-35
 Sat, Sep. 28 **Rebellion Leads to Defeat** Numbers 14:39-45
 Sun, Sep. 29 **"I Do Forgive"** Numbers 14:10b-20

Mon, Sep. 30 **Praise God's Works** Psalm 111
 Tue, Oct. 1 **Mediator of the New Covenant** Hebrews 8:1-12
 Wed, Oct. 2 **God's Covenant with Us** Deuteronomy 5:1-7
 Thu, Oct. 3 **Remember That You Were There** Deuteronomy 4:9-11
 Fri, Oct. 4 **Make No Idols** Deuteronomy 4:14-24
 Sat, Oct. 5 **God Will Not Abandon You** Deuteronomy 4:25-31
 Sun, Oct. 6 **Commit to Covenant Obedience** Deuteronomy 4:1-8, 12, 13

Mon, Oct. 7 **Keep God's Commandments** Proverbs 3:1-10
 Tue, Oct. 8 **On the Mountain with Jesus** Matthew 17:1-7
 Wed, Oct. 9 **Examples of Faithfulness** Luke 4:24-30
 Thu, Oct. 10 **"He's Alive!"** Acts 20:7-12
 Fri, Oct. 11 **God-Sent Ravens Feed Elijah** 1 Kings 17:1-7
 Sat, Oct. 12 **Elijah Restores Life to Widow's Son** 1 Kings 17:17-24
 Sun, Oct. 13 **Widow's Faithfulness Rewarded** 1 Kings 17:8-16

Mon, Oct. 14 **The Prayer of Faith Is Powerful** James 5:13-18
 Tue, Oct. 15 **Your Faith Has Made You Well** Mark 5:25-34
 Wed, Oct. 16 **Believers Are Blessed** Galatians 3:6-9
 Thu, Oct. 17 **Bartholomew Healed by Faith** Mark 10:46-52
 Fri, Oct. 18 **Faith and Actions** Luke 6:46-49
 Sat, Oct. 19 **Jesus Raises Widow's Son** Luke 7:11-17
 Sun, Oct. 20 **Jesus Heralds the Centurion's Faith** Luke 7:1-10

Mon, Oct. 21 **God's Salvation for All People** Isaiah 52:7-10
 Tue, Oct. 22 **Your Sins Are Forgiven** Luke 5:20-26
 Wed, Oct. 23 **Salvation Requires Witness** Mark 13:9-13
 Thu, Oct. 24 **All Who Call Will Be Saved** Romans 10:5-13
 Fri, Oct. 25 **Treat Each Other Like Jesus Does** John 13:12-20
 Sat, Oct. 26 **Leaders Reflect God's Messenger** Luke 7:24-30
 Sun, Oct. 27 **Her Many Sins Have Been Forgiven** Luke 7:37-48

Mon, Oct. 28 **Weigh the Evidence Carefully** Deuteronomy 19:15-20
 Tue, Oct. 29 **Building a Faith Community** 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22
 Wed, Oct. 30 **Preparing for the Lord's Supper** 1 Corinthians 11:26-29
 Thu, Oct. 31 **Honor Your Elders** 1 Timothy 5:17-22
 Fri, Nov. 1 **Test the Spirits** 1 John 4:1-8
 Sat, Nov. 2 **Give Generously to Enrich Your Life** 1 John 4:1-8
 Sun, Nov. 3 **Examine Your Faith** 2 Corinthians 9:10-15
 2 Corinthians 13:1-11

Mon, Nov. 4 **What Suffering Accomplishes** Romans 5:1-5
 Tue, Nov. 5 **Reconciliation Through Jesus Christ** Romans 5:6-11
 Wed, Nov. 6 **Be Ready for Christ's Coming** Matthew 24:36-44
 Thu, Nov. 7 **Live Christ's Character Daily** Philippians 2:5-11
 Fri, Nov. 8 **Under Persecution Proclaim Jesus** Acts 17:1-9
 Sat, Nov. 9 **Stay Loyal to Christ** 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
 Sun, Nov. 10 **Examples of Faith** 1 Thessalonians 2:1-10

LESSON CYCLE CHART

International Sunday School Lesson Cycle, September 2016–August 2022

Year	Fall Quarter (Sep, Oct, Nov)	Winter Quarter (Dec, Jan, Feb)	Spring Quarter (Mar, Apr, May)	Summer Quarter (Jun, Jul, Aug)
2016–2017	The Sovereignty of God (Isaiah, Matthew, Hebrews, Revelation)	Creation: A Divine Cycle (Psalms, Luke, Galatians)	God Loves Us (Psalms, Joel, Jonah, John, Romans, Ephesians, 1 Peter, 1 John)	God's Urgent Call (Exodus, Judges, Prophets, Acts)
2017–2018	Covenant with God (Pentateuch, 1 & 2 Samuel, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews)	Faith in Action (Daniel, Matthew, Acts, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, James)	Acknowledging God (Pentateuch, 2 Chronicles, Psalms, Luke, John, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, Revelation)	Justice in the New Testament (Matthew, Luke, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians)
2018–2019	God's World and God's People (Genesis)	Our Love for God (Deuteronomy, Joshua, Psalms, Matthew, Luke, Epistles)	Discipleship and Mission (Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans)	Covenant in God (Ruth, 1 Samuel, Matthew, Mark, Ephesians, Colossians, Hebrews)
2019–2020	Responding to God's Grace (Pentateuch, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, Luke, Epistles)	Honoring God (1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, Matthew, Luke)	Justice and the Prophets (Esther, Prophets, 1 Corinthians)	Many Faces of Wisdom (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Gospels, James)
2020–2021	Love for One Another (Genesis, 1 Samuel, Luke, John, Acts, Epistles)	Call in the New Testament (Gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews)	Prophets Faithful to God's Covenant (Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 & 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Lamentations, Prophets)	Confident Hope (Leviticus, Matthew, Luke, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Hebrews, 1 John)
2021–2022	Celebrating God (Exodus, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Mark, Acts, Revelation)	Justice, Law, History (Pentateuch, 2 Samuel, Ezra, Job, Isaiah, Nahum)	God Frees and Redeems (Deuteronomy, Ezra, Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians)	Partners in a New Creation (Isaiah, John, Revelation)

A CREATION FOUNDATION

Teacher Tips by Jim Eichenberger

MARY, MAYNARD, and Manuel are active in their church. They support ministries, pray, and read the Bible. But Mary expressed a view about abortion that was contrary to the views of most others in her class. Maynard spoke words of support for a political movement that class members saw as dangerous. Manuel announced that he and his girlfriend will be moving in together. Arguments broke out, many resting on isolated Bible verses. The question repeated over and over was, “How can you call yourself a Christian and believe *that*?”

Church members are known to share Christian practices yet still disagree on important issues. That’s because the Christian worldview they think they have in common varies in certain ways. The purpose of this article and the following three is to help clarify a Christian worldview to guide us to greater unity in our teaching.

For centuries, Christian believers have accepted four basic premises that compose a Christian worldview. These four planks have created the foundation for faithful congregations. But in past decades, these crucial ideas have been challenged, and many have accepted alternatives blindly.

The first of those premises is *creatio ex nihilo*—“creation out of nothing.” Simply said, the universe has been designed by a rational architect who did not use preexisting building materials. This first plank of a Christian worldview is the foundation for the other three.

The Uncreated God

The proposal that matter randomly evolved into a universe with rationality or morality is based in Western naturalism. This is an ancient idea that has become more prevalent in the past two centuries. The different proposal that the material universe is an illusion projected from a higher reality is from Eastern pantheism, equally ancient. The notion is that everything from poison to prime rib

is equally part of God. But what fits reality is that an uncreated God *made stuff that makes sense*.

The Creative God

The Creator is distinct from creation, which consists of both material and nonmaterial realities. An uncreated Creator is the author of the material world as well as that which has no mass and is invisible to any physical measurement. Love, courage, and goodness are just as real as a rock, a tree, or a person. Matter, spiritual values, and sentient spiritual beings all exist in fact.

The Sustaining God

Since everything that is not-God has been called into existence by a Creator who is distinct from creation, two things are true. First, the God who created the universe is powerful enough to sustain it. Second, he also has the power to destroy it. One would expect an all-powerful, rational Creator to have a plan for the universe and to be able to intervene to keep that plan on track.

Teach the principle of *creatio ex nihilo* by pointing out in nearly every lesson that this is how the God of the Bible is presented. He is the rational being who explained his plans to Abraham and Moses (lessons 1–5). He can break into the material universe to demonstrate his power—even to those outside of the ethnic group that accepted his existence—as he did with a widow in Zarephath and a Roman centurion in Galilee (lessons 7, 8). Because he created everything, even nonmaterial values such as faith, love, and hope are realities and not societal standards that change from culture to culture (lesson 11).

Making it clear that Christians affirm that the world was created and is sustained by a personal God will not solve all conflicts with your Mary, Maynard, or Manuel. But once the plank of God’s power and nature is set, we are ready to understand who we are as human beings.

FAITHFUL DURING DISTRESS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 17:22, 26-37
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 18:16-19:29

GENESIS 19:1, 4, 5, 15-26, 29

¹ The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

⁴ Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. ⁵ They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.

¹⁵ With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”

¹⁶ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. ¹⁷ As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”

¹⁸ But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please! ¹⁹ Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die. ²⁰ Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”

²¹ He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. ²² But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)

²³ By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. ²⁴ Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. ²⁵ Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. ²⁶ But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁹ So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

KEY VERSE

When God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived. —Genesis 19:29

RESPONDING TO GOD'S GRACE

Unit 1: God Is Faithful

LESSONS 1-5

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the salient points of Lot's flight from Sodom.
2. Explain how this account demonstrates both the judgment and the mercy of God.
3. Prepare an explanation (one that could be presented to an unbeliever) of how God's judgment and mercy are displayed through the message of the gospel.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. No "Fair Weather" God
- B. Lesson Context

I. God's Warnings (GENESIS 19:1, 4, 5, 15-23)

- A. Angelic Visitation (vv. 1, 4, 5, 15-17)
- B. Lot's Hesitation (vv. 18-20)

The Small-Town Ideal?

- C. Angelic Determination (vv. 21-23)

II. God's Judgment (GENESIS 19:24-26)

- A. Upon Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 24, 25)
- B. Upon Lot's Wife (v. 26)

Part of the Landscape

III. God's Mercy (GENESIS 19:29)

- A. Remembering Abraham (v. 29a)
- B. Rescuing Lot (v. 29b)

Conclusion

- A. Mercy in Judgment
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. No "Fair Weather" God

A farmer built a new barn on his property, and on the roof he placed a weather vane. Below the weather vane he attached a sign that read "God Is Love." On more than one occasion, someone passing by would see the weather vane and ask the farmer, "Are you saying that God's love changes with the wind?"

"Oh no," replied the farmer. "I'm saying that no matter which way the wind blows, God is love."

A similar statement can be made regarding many of God's qualities, including his faithfulness. He is always faithful, regardless of which way life's winds may blow. God is faithful not only in displaying his grace but also in carrying out his judgment on humanity's sin.

B. Lesson Context

Lot was a nephew of the great patriarch Abraham. Lot is first mentioned in the Bible in the genealogy of Abraham's brother (Genesis 11:27). Lot accompanied Abraham and his household when they journeyed from Ur to Canaan (11:31). Following a brief time in Egypt, the family returned to an area south of where the tribe of Judah eventually settles centuries later (13:1, 3). When land disputes broke out, Abraham allowed his nephew to choose the land he wanted for pasture (13:8, 9). Lot saw that the territory in the vicinity of Sodom and Gomorrah was especially desirable, so he settled nearby (13:10, 11).

The exact location of Sodom and Gomorrah is uncertain; some scholars place them within what later came to be the territory of Moab (Isaiah 15:5; Jeremiah 48:33, 34). Along with Zoar, Sodom and Gomorrah are listed as cities located on the Jordan plain (Genesis 13:10-12; see also 14:2, 8). Genesis 13:13 offers an ominous assessment: "The people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord."

Lot is a puzzling figure in the Bible. He perhaps understood from his uncle Abraham something of the Lord's righteous standards. Indeed, the New Testament depicts Lot as someone deeply troubled over the wickedness in Sodom. Second Peter 2:7

says that the Lord “rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless.” Verse 8 describes Lot as a “righteous man,” who “was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard.” However, Lot also seems to have become attached to life in Sodom despite the tension between his righteousness and the wickedness of the city.

Genesis 18 begins with an account of the Lord’s visit with Abraham. He was one of three “men” who came to Abraham (Genesis 18:2). After confirming the Lord’s promise that Sarah would conceive and bear a son (18:10), the three “looked down toward Sodom” (18:16). The Lord told Abraham of his intention to discover more about the extent of the sin within both Sodom and Gomorrah (18:20, 21). Verse 22 records that “the men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.” At that point the exchange between the Lord and Abraham about sparing the righteous in Sodom occurred. Because the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah became “so grievous” in the Lord’s sight (18:20), he determined that judgment must be carried out on them. Despite Abraham’s intercession and God’s willingness to relent from judgment, both cities would be destroyed for lack of 10 righteous people (18:22-33).

I. God’s Warnings

(GENESIS 19:1, 4, 5, 15-23)

A. Angelic Visitation (vv. 1, 4, 5, 15-17)

1a. The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening,

The *two angels* are generally taken to be two of the three men who had visited Abraham (Genesis 18:2). The third of those three “men” is thought to have been the Lord in temporary human form (18:33). This may imply that the Lord is not directly present with Lot in the ensuing discussion.

HOW TO SAY IT

Gomorrah	Guh- <i>more</i> -uh.
Sodom	Sod-um.
Zoar	Zo-er.

1b. and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city.

That *Lot sits in the gateway of the city* may indicate that he holds a leadership position in Sodom. The gateway or gates of a city is the place where important decisions are made (Deuteronomy 16:18; 21:18-21) and business is transacted (example: Ruth 4:1-11). Given the reaction of the men of the town (Genesis 19:9), Lot is more likely there on business.

1c. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

Lot greets his two guests in a manner similar to how Abraham greeted his three guests (Genesis 18:2). In the verses not in today’s text (19:2, 3), Lot eagerly invites the two visitors to spend the night at his house. At first they decline, saying that they will spend the night in the street. But Lot, aware of the wickedness that permeates the city (see the Lesson Context), convinces them.

4, 5. Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.

If this is what happens when innocent people are behind locked doors, imagine what would have happened if the visitors were still out in the street! Two intended sins are in view: those of homosexual behavior and rape (compare Romans 1:24-27).

In the intervening verses not in today’s lesson text (Genesis 19:6-14), Lot tries to dissuade those who surround *the house*, even offering his two daughters instead. The reply he receives promises that he too will be abused. At this, the two angelic guests pull Lot back into the house and strike the hostile crowd with blindness. The pair then plead with Lot to leave the city in order to avoid the judgment that is imminent. Lot begs his two sons-in-law to flee, but they treat his words as a joke.

15. With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.”

As dawn approaches, the urgency of the angels' appeal intensifies. Note that the terms *angels* and *men* are used interchangeably of the two individuals throughout this account (Genesis 19:1, 10, 15, 16). The likely speaks both to their appearance as men and their function as messengers, a common usage of the word in both Old and New Testaments. Note that the word translated "angels" here is rendered "messengers" in Genesis 32:3, 6; likewise in the New Testament, see Matthew 11:10 and 2 Corinthians 12:7.

16. When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.

We are not told why Lot resists leaving Sodom. Is he hesitant to leave the wealth he has accumulated? Is he unsure about where he will live next? Later he will try to negotiate with one of the angels as to where he should go (see commentary on 19:18-20).

Whatever the reason, the angels know they cannot wait any longer for Lot to act. They take the foursome by their hands and lead them out of Sodom. The reason for their deliverance is stated plainly: the Lord is being *merciful* (compare Revelation 18:4, 5). The word translated *merciful* is rare in the Old Testament, occurring only here and in Isaiah 63:9.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can we encourage and help people to escape when they're trapped in sinful or challenging environments?

Digging Deeper

What does biblical encouragement include that secular viewpoints might not?

17. As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!"

The reason for the instruction *Don't look back* isn't entirely clear. Perhaps it is meant to prevent those fleeing from getting caught in the shock wave since looking back implies slowing down

to do so. Another possibility is that looking back would signal a desire to remain in the sinful environment of Sodom (compare Luke 9:62). Another possibility is that those fleeing are not to stop to engage in any smug satisfaction or gloating that those who may have troubled Lot's family are "getting theirs" (compare Proverbs 24:17). In any case, what will be descriptive when Jeremiah 46:5 is written later is prescriptive at the moment.

The Hebrew word translated *mountains* is actually singular; but since the singular can refer to "hill country" in general (Numbers 14:45), a specific mountain may not be intended. Of primary importance is that Lot and his family move a safe distance away from the judgment that is about to be poured out on two wicked cities.

B. Lot's Hesitation (vv. 18-20)

18. But Lot said to them, "No, my lords, please!

As Lot addresses the angels, he uses the same terminology as when he first encountered them at the gate of Sodom (Genesis 19:2). It is a term of respect and does not necessarily imply an acknowledgment of divinity.

19. "Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can't flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I'll die.

Lot's response to the angels' urgent plea leaves a reader baffled. Three times he has been warned about the destruction coming on Sodom (Genesis 19:13, 15, 17), and Lot himself has urged his sons-in-law to leave the city (19:14). Lot readily admits that he has been the recipient of *favor* and *great kindness*, yet he fears going *to the mountains* (see commentary on 19:17, above) lest this disaster *overtake* him!

Consider the irony: Lot is more fearful of a disaster that *could* happen than of one that is clearly going to happen—and soon! Thus Lot reveals his lack of confidence in God's deliverance. How can Lot think God is rescuing him from Sodom only to allow him to die before reaching safety?

20. “Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”

Lot suggests an alternative as a place of refuge. The name of the town is not given yet given (see commentary on verse 22, below), but Lot twice makes a point of the fact that the town is *small*. Perhaps his attitude is that a small place cannot be a sin-filled place, or perhaps that a small sinful place can be overlooked by the Lord.

Abraham’s negotiation with God regarding Sodom has already been noted (Genesis 18:22-33; see Lesson Context). Lot is now engaging in his own brand of negotiation. But the motivation of Abraham and Lot could not be more different. Abraham was concerned that others be spared from judgment. Lot, in contrast with Genesis 19:14, seems interested only in self-preservation. He uses the pronouns *me* and *my* but says nothing about his wife or his daughters. That the three women in his life should also be spared is an afterthought, if any thought at all.

What Do You Think?

Under what circumstances, if any, is it proper to attempt to bargain with God?

Digging Deeper

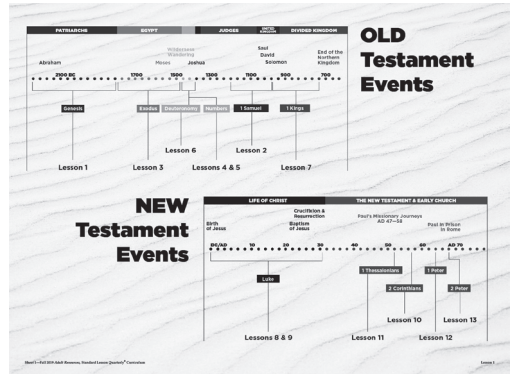
How can we ensure that our motives are pure when we are tempted to bargain with God?

✧ THE SMALL-TOWN IDEAL? ✧

Small-town America is frequently used as an image of utopia. Fictional towns like Bedford Falls, Lake Wobegon, and Mayberry evoke images of peaceful lives of communal harmony, where any problem can be resolved.

While small towns have much to offer, they are not the Edens of our dreams. Children growing up in small towns are connected to the same internet, watch the same TV shows, and listen to the same music as those in cities and suburbs. Small-town couples go through divorces. Small towns have their share of crime and injustice. Changing one’s location cannot guarantee that one will avoid the ravages of sin.

When escaping the corruption of big-city liv-



Visual for Lesson 1. *Keep this time line posted throughout the quarter to give participants a chronological perspective.*

ing in Sodom, Lot asked his angelic benefactors to allow him to relocate to a diminutive town. Tragically, Lot ended up discovering that his problems were personal, not geographical. When you’re running *from* sin, be sure you’re also running *toward* righteousness! —J. E.

C. Angelic Determination (vv. 21-23)

21. **He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of.**

The angel agrees to Lot’s request; Lot is granted permission to flee to *the town*. That the angel promises not to *overthrow* it implies that the town was intended to be included in the impending judgment. Now it will be spared so Lot and family can take refuge there.

22. **“But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)**

Once more the angel urges haste. The promised judgment will not occur until Lot has reached *the town* to which he has asked to flee. The name of the town, *Zoar*, comes from a Hebrew word that can indicate small size or insignificance (Judges 6:15; Zechariah 13:7). Perhaps today we would call it something like Smallville.

Ironically, Lot and his daughters will later leave Zoar and live “in the mountains,” where the angels had first commanded him to go (Genesis 19:30).

23. By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land.

Dawn was approaching when the angels urged Lot to leave Sodom (Genesis 19:15). Now *the sun* is fully up as Lot enters his city of refuge, *Zoar*.

II. God's Judgment

(GENESIS 19:24-26)

A. Upon Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 24, 25)

24. Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens.

The promised destruction of both *Sodom and Gomorrah* begins as *burning sulfur* rains down from the Lord on the thoroughly corrupt cities (compare Job 18:15; Psalm 11:6; Isaiah 30:33; 34:9; Ezekiel 38:22). The names of Sodom and its twin city Gomorrah became synonymous with human depravity and the outpouring of God's wrath as a result (Jeremiah 23:14; Zephaniah 2:9; Jude 7).

25. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.

When Lot first viewed Sodom and its territory, he had found “the *plain* of Jordan” to be “well watered, like the garden of the Lord” (Genesis 13:10). Now nothing is spared from the wrath of divine judgment; the *cities*, their inhabitants, and all plant life is gone.

What Do You Think?

How can we use biblical accounts like that of Sodom and Gomorrah to communicate the nature of God to unbelievers?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 11:23; Romans 9:29; 2 Peter 2:4-10; Jude 7; and Revelation 11:8 inform your answer?

B. Upon Lot's Wife (v. 26)

26. But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

To this point in the record, little has been said regarding *Lot's wife*. When she has been mentioned previously, their daughters have been included as well (Genesis 19:15, 16). Now this woman looks

back, perhaps out of a wistful longing to gaze one more time on the city where she has resided. Or, more distressingly, maybe she desires to return. The result of such disobedience of a clear command from the angel (19:17) is immediate: she is turned into *a pillar of salt*.

Some have noted the presence of salt formations found along the shores of the Dead Sea, near which Sodom and Gomorrah were likely located. Lot's wife thus becomes a kind of monument to the high price of disobeying God. Unlike other monuments, however, she blends in with the surrounding territory and is lost; not even her name is remembered.

Centuries later, Jesus will allude to this incident in warning people to be prepared for his return. The verse is short: “Remember Lot's wife!” (Luke 17:32). This suggests that Lot's wife lost her life because she was unprepared to accept the mercy extended to her (17:28-31). The folly of Lot's wife illustrates other teachings of Jesus, including trying to save one's life and losing it (Matthew 16:25; Luke 17:33) and his warning not to put one's hand to the plow and look back (Luke 9:62).

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to protect ourselves from the temptation to “look back” in unhealthy ways (Luke 9:62)?

Digging Deeper

How do Ezekiel 16:43; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:10, 25 speak to healthy ways of looking back?

✿ PART OF THE LANDSCAPE ✿

The Dead Sea earns its name. Though fed by the Jordan River, the sea has no outlet streams. Water escapes only through evaporation; any minerals swept in stay put. The high salt content—nearly nine times that of the oceans—prevents almost all organisms from surviving there. Tourists are routinely warned to seek medical attention should they accidentally swallow the water.

Like the Dead Sea, Sodom and Gomorrah became depositories for whatever “washed in.” As wickedness accumulated, the cities became

more lethal. As salts make the Dead Sea toxic to most life, so sinfulness in Sodom and Gomorrah choked out righteous living.

We surmise that Lot's wife may have been comfortable in Sodom's sinful environment. As a consequence of looking back, she received a permanent home on the shore of the Dead Sea. What sins tempt your heart to look back in longing? —J. E.

III. God's Mercy

(GENESIS 19:29)

A. Remembering Abraham (v. 29a)

29a. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham,

When God is said to remember, it signifies that he is committed to acting on a person's or group's behalf in fulfillment of his word. Previously, God remembered Noah and protected him and his family from the flood (Genesis 8:1). Later, God will remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 2:24) and provide deliverance for his suffering people. This same sense is intended when God's people are commanded to remember his acts or laws (Exodus 20:8; Numbers 15:39, 40; Deuteronomy 7:18; 16:12; etc.). Lot's deliverance is attributed not to anything he did but to Abraham.

What Do You Think?

How can we best use "God remembered" passages such as Genesis 8:1; 30:22; Exodus 2:24; and Revelation 18:5 to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable?

Digging Deeper

Considering Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34; and Hebrews 10:15-17, what are some wrong ways to use "God remembered" passages?

B. Rescuing Lot (v. 29b)

29b. and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

The implication is that Abraham's intercession in Genesis 18:16-33 results in Lot's rescue. The Lord didn't find 10 righteous people there, such as would spare the city 918:32). But he did find one.

Conclusion

A. Mercy in Judgment

On hearing the names Sodom and Gomorrah, most people think immediately of God's wrathful, fiery judgment that befell those cities. God's mercy, however, is also evident when we read of Lot's rescue. Lot acknowledged that he had been shown grace and kindness in being spared. Even so, he still wanted to negotiate regarding the place to which he could flee (Genesis 19:19). Rather than losing patience with Lot, the angel granted his request.

The flaws in Lot's character seen in this account should not draw our attention away from the strength of God's character. Lot's behavior may puzzle us, but God's behavior shouldn't. The goodness of his mercy and the terror of his judgment both stand out. We are to be genuinely grateful that on the cross Jesus took the judgment that we deserved so that God could display his mercy to us.

Like Lot, we too may be disturbed by the godless trends of our culture (compare 2 Peter 2:6-10) and the increasing contempt we see for the Bible and for Christian faith. But we can also become very attached to the pleasures of this world, which, as Jesus noted in the parable of the sower, can choke the spiritual life from us (Luke 8:14).

B. Prayer

Father, both your judgment and your mercy are revealed, not only in this account but throughout your Word. May we give thanks that in the cross of Jesus "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

What happened to Sodom illustrates God's mercy even in judgment.

VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 13) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the fall quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 1629119 from your supplier.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

On the board write these words:

Godparent / Mentor / Counselor / Guru

Ask the class to tell how these words overlap in meaning. (*Expected response:* They refer to those who advise and otherwise look out for the best interest of someone else.)

Stimulate discussion by posing one or more of these questions: 1—If you have one or more godparents, what function have they served in your life? 2—In what ways has a mentor benefitted you? 3—What qualifies a person to be considered a guru (a spiritual instructor)?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Celebrity Godparents” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have students work individually for no more than a minute or in pairs for a few minutes to complete as indicated.

After either activity say, “It is not unusual for people, even after they become adults, to have an older and wiser adult looking out for their best interests. In the Bible, we find a similar situation concerning Abraham and his nephew Lot. Let’s take a look.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups, giving each group a handout (you prepare) according to the following: **Lot Group:** Genesis 19:1, 15-22; 2 Peter 2:5-10 / **Wife and Sons-in-law Group:** Genesis 19:12-14, 23-26 / **Abraham Group:** Genesis 18:22-33; 19:29.

Ask groups to read their assigned Scripture passages and be prepared to answer the following interview questions as they take the role of the person or persons after which their groups are named.

1—What was life in Sodom like?

2—What would have been your long-term plans for living in Sodom?

3—How did you hear that disaster was about to come to Sodom? What was your reaction to that news?

4—What was your life, if any, like during and after the destruction of Sodom?

After 10–15 minutes, reassemble the class. Act as the interviewer while groups respond to your interview questions.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Surprising or Expected?” exercise from the activity page. Have students work in small groups to complete as indicated.

After either activity, make a transition to the Into Life section by saying, “Note that the people in today’s lesson had varying degrees of faith as connected with their self-interest. Let’s think about how we can use today’s lesson effectively in our interactions with those who are less mature in the faith—newer believers who need to be aware of the tension between God’s holy judgment and his gracious mercy.”

Into Life

Have learners pair up and give each a handout (you prepare) of the text of 2 Timothy 2:11-13. Instruct pairs to prepare an explanation of the tension between God’s holy judgment and his gracious mercy by summarizing the account of Sodom (Genesis 19) and comparing it with 2 Timothy 2:11-13, which is an early song of the church. After several minutes of work, encourage presentations as time permits.

Option. Include on the handout this question for deeper discussion:

1—Is *tension* the best word to use to describe how God’s divine attributes of gracious mercy and holy judgment relate to one another? Why, or why not?

2—What word might you pick instead? Why?

(Be prepared to discuss proposals such as *balance*, *symmetry*, and *correlation*.)