(Lot’s Wife Turns to Salt)

BIBLE STORY: GENESIS 18:16-33

THEME: THE PERFECT CHARACTER OF GOD
Subtopics: Obedience, Justice, Perseverance, Following Through, Family

Students will learn how God did what he said he would do when Lot’s wife disobeyed, but also how God rescued Lot and his children. Students will discover that God graciously rescues and justly does what he says he will do. They’ll also be challenged to obey God fully, even when they don’t understand his plan.

SUPPLIES NEEDED:
• a new toothbrush for everyone  
• a can of vegetable shortening  
• a foam cup for everyone  
• water  
• paper towels  
• a small prize for everyone (piece of candy, soda, dollar bill, etc.)  
• pencils  
• Bibles  
• 10 pieces of paper  
• mirror (the biggest you can find)  
• glass cleaner  
• (optional) salty snacks  
• (optional) computer(s) with an Internet connection

PREPARATION AND SETUP:
• Fill a big bowl with the prizes you’ve designated. Label it “The Big Bowl of Fabulous Prizes.”  
• Photocopy a “Mad Lib” handout (p. 8) for every two or three students.
Scary, Gross & Weird STORIES from the Bible

Greet everybody as they arrive. Start with an ultimate challenge.

SAY Anyone who competes in this toothbrushing contest will receive an awesome prize from The Big Bowl of Fabulous Prizes. Everybody participating will load their brushes up with some of this shortening and brush their teeth as long as they can. The person lasting the longest can choose two prizes out of the Big Bowl of Fabulous Prizes and will be considered to be double fabulous. Let’s do it!

Help volunteers load their brushes (or fingers) up with the lardy goop, give the signal to start, and see who can last the longest. Distribute foam cups everyone can spit into when they are done. When it comes time to reward those who participated and proclaim a winner, do something surprising: award the fabulous prizes to those who didn’t participate. Cheerfully grant the top prize to the biggest no-funner of the bunch. Give students a moment to protest, and then:

ASK • How mad are you that I didn’t follow through with what I promised?
• Why is it a big deal to be trustworthy?
• What would the world be like without justice?

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

In Oregon, a seventh grade long-distance runner was chased by a deer who began using him as a human salt lick. Kevin Cox told reporters that the incident was “funny...but a little scary,” too.

At this point, you might want to distribute prizes to everyone before full-on anarchy erupts.

SAY I can’t begin to imagine what it would be like if God didn’t do the stuff he said he would do—good stuff and punishment stuff. We couldn’t trust anything in the Bible. We’d be left to guess about everything—could we trust him to save us when we die? It’s a great thing to see his mercy woven through the pages of the Bible, but it’s also pretty comforting to see how he kept his promises time and again, and did what he said he would, even at times when it must have grieved him. Today’s story is a good example of both God’s mercy and his justice.
Bizarre Bonus

Here’s a crazy idea to do together after the study. Load up a table in the room with all kinds of salty junk food. Have everyone partner up. While one person keeps their eyes shut, the other one should chew a mouthful of food, then see if their partner can identify it by looking at the mush in their partner’s mouth. Take it a step further with two- or three-food-combo challenges. Use the goofy self-connection to segue into a discussion about what it means to follow Jesus.

The Guts...

Distribute the photocopies of the “Mad Lib” handout (p. 8). Have everybody form pairs or trios. One person in the group should fill in the mad lib using their partners’ suggestions. Then, when all the blanks have been filled, groups can read the goofy story together.

Once everyone has finished, ask the groups to find Genesis 18:16-33. Give them enough time to read the verses among themselves, then prompt them with these questions to talk about in their groups.

ASK
- What surprised you most when you read this?
- What did you learn about God’s mercy in these verses?

SAY
Unfortunately, there weren’t even ten good people in the town of Sodom. Instead, God found only Lot and his family. He told them he would lead them out of the city so they wouldn’t get barbecued with the others. Let’s pick up the story there. Keep reading at Genesis 19:15-29.

→ Give students a few minutes to finish reading the Bible story. Then:

MEDIA INFUSION (optional)

Search news Web sites, magazines, or newspapers for examples of famous people who faced indictment or were sentenced for breaking the law. Discuss the punishment they received or didn’t receive, and talk about whether or not it was fair. (If you need ideas, here are some names your teenagers might be familiar with: Paris Hilton, O.J. Simpson, Martha Stewart, Scooter Libby.)
ASK  • What do you think caused Lot’s wife to turn back?
    • How would you label her punishment: appropriate, too harsh, just plain weird, or something else?
    Explain your answer.
    • What can you know about God based on this story’s ending?

Use your can of vegetable shortening from earlier to smear up a large mirror. Spread it evenly until the whole surface is covered. This can be done quickly, right in front of students as you talk.

Say Mercy is a great thing when we are the ones getting off easy. But something inside us stirs when justice isn’t served. It is that quality of justice within God that required a punishment for sin: we all mess up and disobey him—a capital offense punishable by death. The mercy of God came by way of his perfect son, Jesus, who made payment on our behalf by dying a terrible death to save us from hell. If you don’t fully understand what Jesus did for you on the cross, please come and talk with me after our study.

Say I want you guys to think about God’s perfect character. Write some qualities that describe him with your finger onto this glass. Let’s start by writing two we’ve talked about today.

Use your finger to write “just” and “merciful” into the grease, then give students a chance to crowd around the mirror and write their thoughts in the shortening. Provide paper towels for clean-up.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:12 aloud:

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”
SAY It is a challenge to love and serve God when we can’t see him, hear him, or touch him. We can only see bits and glimpses of his character in Scripture and in the things around us. God’s faithfulness and consistency are crucial to our understanding of who he is. He has to do what he promises, even if it breaks his heart and ours. It is also obvious through Scripture and his plan for saving us that he has tremendous mercy and compassion on us. This verse we read has a neat promise. One day, we are going to see God face to face and know him the way he knows us, through and through.

(At this point, use the glass cleaner to clean the mirror off, showing a distinction between making out only a fuzzy description of God, to seeing clearly.)

SAY Until that time, it is important to read his Word and learn what we can about who he is. Just think about these questions silently—you don’t need to answer them out loud.

ASK • How does God’s character differ from your own?  
  • In what ways has God been merciful to you?  
  • How has he proved to you that he means what he says?  
  • How does this change the way you think, feel, and connect with Jesus?

The Gel...

Offer your teenagers three challenges to help them better know and understand God’s character:

• Keep a running list of every example you find in your Bible reading of God’s justice and of his mercy.
- Identify one God-like characteristic you will focus on every day of the coming week.
- Spend five minutes before bed just being quiet with God, and see if you learn anything about him during that time.

Ask students to pray with a partner by simply naming aloud different aspects of God’s character and thanking him for who he is. Here are a few to get them started: God is merciful. God is just. God is kind. God is holy. God is good...

After several moments, close your meeting with a prayer.

SAY God, thank you for taking the guesswork out of things. Because you consistently do what you say, we know we can trust your words to be true. That gives us hope because we are counting on your mercy and holding onto your promise of help and salvation. Thanks for being faithful and reliable and, above all, merciful toward us. Amen.
CLEANING UP

Here are some additional open-ended, thought-provoking questions. Use all or some of them to complement—or even replace—the debriefing questions for any of the activities in this study. You can guide students through this section all together, or form smaller discussion groups for more intimate dialogue.

- How would you rate today’s story on a weirdness scale of 1 to 10?
- Sum today’s Bible story up in one sentence.
- How would you define justice?
- How would you define mercy?
- Why is it frustrating when someone doesn’t get what they deserve?
- Name a time you were relieved that you didn’t get something you deserved.
- How would the world be different if God wasn’t merciful?
- How would the world be different if God wasn’t just?
- Name one thing you can do, starting today, to be a more merciful person.
- Tell God thanks, in your own words, for his flawless character.

Consider writing the “Cleaning Up” questions onto pieces of paper, one question per page. Beforehand, tape the pages to the wall or onto the table. At this point in the study, distribute pencils and have teenagers walk around to all the different questions and write their answers on the paper.

For huge groups, write the questions onto ten pieces of poster board so there is more room for writing. For really huge groups, make two or three posters for every question so students aren’t all bunched up trying to write on the same ten boards.

Mixing It Up

Judges 11:21-40
( Jepthah makes a vow)

1 Samuel 24:1-10
( Saul uses a public potty)

2 Kings 2:23-25
( bears eat bullies)
The town of Sodom was a [WORD FOR BAD], [WORD FOR REALLY BAD] town. People there were [A SIN]-ing constantly. They ignored God and broke the most important rule: [A RULE]. God was fed up.

Abraham pleaded with God to spare Sodom. If God could find some good guys there, perhaps he could rain down [SOMETHING FLUFFY AND NICE] instead of fire and brimstone.

“God, if you find 50, or 40, or 30, or 20, or 10 guys half as good as [A NICE PERSON IN YOUR GROUP], would you please not wipe out Sodom with a big fireball?” God agreed. Unfortunately, God only found one good guy there. Only Lot and his family would be spared.

They were given special instructions: Pack the [A NECESSITY ITEM] and the [A BREAKFAST CEREAL]. Don’t forget the [SOMETHING YOU’D WISH YOU HAD IF YOU WERE ON THE SHOW LOST].

They would be led out of their hometown by angels, and then,

“[A LOUD SOUND]!” Total destruction! “[AN EXCLAMATION]!”

“Whatever you do, don’t turn back,” Lot’s family was sternly warned. But Lot’s wife didn’t listen. Did she go back to turn off the [AN ELECTRICAL APPLIANCE]? Only God knows. The moment she looked back, she was turned to a pile of salt. God keeps his promises—the ones we want kept, and those we choose to ignore.