

Lesson 3





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will understand what it means to love one's neighbor, reflect on ways to be compassionate and just, and pray to live lives of justice and compassion.



Get Them Going

Invite your participants to grapple with the place of rules, codes, and laws within the Christian life. Ask them about the relationship between the laws we inherit from the Jewish traditions and the Old Testament, and the traditions emerging from the New Testament. Be prepared to discuss how Jesus interacts over these matters as well.



A Reconciling Gospel

Two students approached Debra after the Racial Reconciliation Workshop. They wore sweatshirts from their university and stood out from everyone else at the church that night. Their faces had fallen into frowns. They looked like twins, but one was Black, and one was white. Debra greeted them. "We have a few questions after your presentation," said the white woman. "Tell me your names," said Debra, trying to see the tags taped to their arms. "I'm Kylene," said the Black woman.

After elbowing her friend, she said, "This is Jessica."

"What can I help you with?" Debra asked them. Jessica said, "Well, we've been friends for years, and after hearing you talk about reconciliation and justice, we're both really convicted."

"I'm glad to hear it!" said Debra.

"But we don't know what to do," said Jessica with a shrug.

"What exactly are you convicted about?"

"Our families," Kylene said. "They don't understand our relationship. They're not the most supportive of two 20-year-olds from different backgrounds being friends. My people are Southern. Hers...well, they are too." Jessica laughed and Debra smiled.

"We want to act," Kylene said. "We love Jesus. We want our families to know that the cross is what's between us and keeps us sane."

"We plan to do some of the things you mentioned when we go home," Jessica said. "Kylene's coming to my home for the summer when the quarter ends."

Debra nodded and kept listening.

"We really just want to ask that you pray for us," Kylene said, with Jessica agreeing.

Debra took Kylene and Jessica's hands, formed a small circle with them, and prayed for the girls. She asked that God give them grace, patience, and compassion for their families and for each other.



Real Talk

1. How do Jessica and Kylene embody their faith?
2. What hardships face these two friends?
3. Has the Gospel been the reason and the sustainer for any of your friendships?



The Big Picture

This passage is a part of the civic, cultural, and spiritual expectations God gives the Hebrew people. The people are reminded of their past in Egypt, and it is from that corporate memory and from obedience to God that they will "observe all my statutes and all my rules."



The Players

A Holy People. God's people have always had a special relationship with Him, one that is based on God's nature and character. When Israel agreed to be God's people and to obey His covenant—following His miraculous deliverance of them from the Egyptians—they bound themselves to ethical and religious responsibilities. These were delivered to them in the form of legal codes (i.e., the Covenant Code and the Holiness Code), which included both positive and negative injunctions. The vertical relationship of God's people was outlined



Make It Stick

“But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:34, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Leviticus 19:9 “When you harvest your crops, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop.

10 It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners who live among you, for I, the LORD, am your God.

11 “Do not steal. “Do not cheat one another. “Do not lie.

12 “Do not use my name to swear a falsehood and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

13 “Do not cheat or rob anyone. “Always pay your hired workers promptly.

14 “Show your fear of God by treating the deaf with respect and by not taking advantage of the blind. I am the LORD.

15 “Always judge your neighbors fairly, neither favoring the poor nor showing deference to the rich.

16 “Do not spread slanderous gossip among your people. “Do not try to get ahead at the cost of your neighbor’s life, for I am the LORD.

17 “Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. “Confront your neighbors directly so you will not be held guilty for their crimes.

18 “Never seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

19:33 “Do not exploit the foreigners who live in your land.

34 They should be treated like everyone else, and you must love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God.

35 “Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight, or volume.

36 Your scales and weights must be accurate. Your containers for measuring dry goods or liquids must be accurate. I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37 You must be careful to obey all of my laws and regulations, for I am the LORD.”

in the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) and was fairly simple and straightforward—they were to have no other gods, they were not to use the Lord’s name in vain, and they were to honor the Sabbath. The horizontal relationship was more complicated and came in the form of numerous specific injunctions, all provided as guiding examples and principles for how they were to govern themselves both at home and in the world.



Backstage

The Holiness Code of Leviticus 18:1–24:9 was given to the Israelites as a set of ethical and religious responsibilities, which includes both positive and negative injunctions. John Rogerson and Philip Davies write, “The basis of the regulations in 19:11–18 about fair dealing with one’s neighbours [sic] is not so much social solidarity as mutual religious responsibility” (145). A large part of Leviticus deals with priestly matters, while chapters 18 and 20 address sexual relations. Chapter 19, the focus of today’s lesson, deals primarily with Israel’s horizontal relationships with others, particularly addressing justice and fairness as examples of holiness.



Combing Through

1. Social Justice: Treating Others Right (Leviticus 19:9–16)

Jesus summarized the horizontal part of a proper relationship with God as “love thy neighbour as thyself” (see Matthew 22:38–39; Luke 10:27). Inherent in every aspect of God’s holy nature and His laws regarding holiness is His heart of love. Every injunction contained in the entire Sinai Tradition reflects God’s heart of love. Treating others right, or loving one’s neighbor, is the ultimate expression of social justice. Contained within this overriding principle are the following details:

Proper handling of the land (vv. 9–10). Inherent in treating others right is the matter of strangers (e.g., travelers), but also includes the ubiquitous poor and those who perhaps once were better off but have fallen on hard times. By generously leaving the corners of one’s fields or vines for those less fortunate, the Israelites demonstrated a godly attitude toward others. Today, one’s surplus can be shared with others in any number of ways.

Honesty with everyone (vv. 11–13). It might seem obvious at first, but the injunctions against committing perjury, stealing, and lying (which parallel the third, eighth, and ninth commandments respectively) are sometimes harder to obey when the boundaries are less clear. When the cases are obvious, the choices between right and wrong are clear. But often deception, deceit, and fraud can take very subtle and more easily justified forms. The godly person avoids all such acts, however minor, that dishonor God and harm others.

Not taking advantage of others (vv. 14–16). Much like the previous injunctions, these specify taking advantage of the disadvantaged. In particular, singling out weak or easy “marks,” such as people with disabilities or someone in a desperate situation, is injustice defined. The opposite type of person is also included—God’s holy people also are not to act dishonorably toward the privileged. An easy example would be filing unjust lawsuits against “deep pockets.” In all cases, embodying social justice excludes all forms of gossip, backstabbing, and slander, as these are harmful to others and dishonoring to God.

2. Social Justice: Starts in the Heart (vv. 17–18)

Don’t hate and don’t seek revenge. Jesus was very clear when He commanded in Matthew 5:43–44 to love even one’s enemies, which would more than encompass these verses speaking primarily about “neighbours.” Jesus knew that murder started with hate and frequently originated with a grudge that morphed into vengeance. An injunction against this evil root would preclude much trouble, grief, and heartache, not to mention it would spare lives. God is fully capable of exercising vengeance, as eloquently captured in the prayer of Psalm 94:1, “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.” In verse 3, Psalm 94 asks the timeless question, “How long shall the wicked triumph?” The answer is that however long it is, their judgment belongs to God and God alone.

Love your neighbor as yourself. The second greatest commandment is reiterated in both testaments and reinforced by Jesus and others (see More Light on the Text). This is presented as one of several positive injunctions, but it happens to capture the heart of the entire Holiness Code—in fact, all the law codes. Nothing better defines the child of God or social justice than loving one’s neighbor as oneself.

3. Social Justice: Cares for Strangers (vv. 33–34)

Strangers are sojourners (travelers). Strangers also may be newcomers or foreigners (aliens),

and God's children are to treat them as they would be treated—again invoking the second greatest commandment. This clarifies beyond question the New Testament rhetorical question, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The answer is abundantly clear—everyone! None are excluded from the injunction, as clarified by the various specific examples. Whether they are visitors just passing through, settlers from another culture, or foreign outsiders, all are to be treated like blood relatives and loved as oneself.

Israel once was a stranger in Egypt. Considering that the great Exodus from Egypt had not happened very long before the time of these injunctions, the reminder should have been a very familiar example. Nothing drives a point home better than a personal example, especially a recent one. For Christians, the parallel is with their personal deliverance from the bondage of sin, which more often than not is remembered with great fondness, no matter how many years transpire. Occasionally, however, some need to be reminded that they once had been delivered from oppression and bondage, and they should not even consider mistreating others or inflicting them with any kind of injustice.

4. Social Justice: Being Fair in Business and Law (vv. 35–37)

Just scales, righteous dealings, and fairness toward all. Occasionally, some Old Testament laws translate perfectly into modern society without the need for any kind of cultural filter. The injunction about unjust scales is preceded by a general command of not doing any unrighteousness in “judgment” or in weighing any matter, but specifically when scales determine values and deception is difficult to detect. This could find countless modern applications, such as gas stations not setting their pumps accurately; taxi drivers “running up the meter”; expense accounts or invoices being “padded”; accountants doing “creative” bookkeeping.

Obedying God's just ordinances is evidence of righteousness. Even where there is an unbridgeable cultural distance between the laws of the “Sinai Tradition” and today, God's people are still called to a standard of holiness measured against God's own holiness. Nothing demonstrates personal righteousness more than being faithful to living in a way that honors God. Nothing more explicitly defines such a life as one that is committed to loving others through practical expressions of social justice.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Leviticus 19:9–18, 19:33–37, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then, have them answer the following:

1. In this passage, is the Bible partial to the poor or the wealthy?
2. What does Scripture say about oppressing others?
3. How would this passage help you define love for God and others?
4. What does “pursuing justice in relationships” mean?



Next Steps

God's people are to be in the world but not of it. Theirs is a higher calling to the kingdom of God and to holy living as defined by Scripture—which translates to a timeless command to treat others as we

would be treated, to love others as we would be loved, and a determination to be just and fair in all one's human relationships. Surely, there are enough challenges in this one paragraph to last a lifetime.



Put It Out There

Group Application

The passages under consideration say a lot about justice for the neglected, the poor, and the sojourner. Invite your class to think aloud about what types of people around the world fall into these categories. Push them to think beyond their borders, but not ignore the people near them. Think globally with them.

B. Personal Application

Pursuing justice and compassion ensures we don't act with pity. When we act for justice, it means we act to change circumstances. When we live with compassion, it means we respond to current circumstances. Tell your class that pursuing both ensures we are balanced and we act to amend, with God's help, the current circumstances of people while working to change them.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Day 15: Genesis 43–45
Day 16: Genesis 46–47
Day 17: Genesis 48–50
Day 18: Exodus 1–3

Day 19: Exodus 4–6

Day 20: Exodus 7–9

Day 21: Exodus 10–12

B. Talk to Him

Father God, help me pursue justice in my relationships. Let me treat everyone I meet regardless of their background the way you have treated me with love, mercy, and kindness.



Say Word?

Leviticus. Lih-VI-tih-kuhs

SWAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.—Reinhold Niebuhr

Lesson 4





Where We're Going

By the end of the lesson, participants will examine the Israelites' grumbling about life in the wilderness; recognize that grumbling reflects an ungrateful heart; and give thanks for the blessings in our lives.



Get Them Going

As an icebreaker, ask the group: What are some common things most people complain about? List the answers in the comments, on a whiteboard, or a large piece of poster board. Discuss the responses. Why do people complain about these particular things?



Constant Complainer

Jayla was very particular. Her friends always pointed out how when they would go out to eat, she would complain about the way the decorations looked on the walls or the kind of plates they used. "I don't like my food on anything that's not white 10-inch plates," she said once. When they went out for fast food chicken tenders, she would send them back and ask for another batch fried harder. When they went to the movies, she would complain that the popcorn had too much butter flavor. When they drove to the beach, she would complain that the person wasn't driving fast enough or didn't go the way she normally went. One day Jayla found out her friend Gina was going to a formal gala for a non-profit she worked with. Jayla asked if she could go, saying "Girl, you know I love a chance to dress up and be fancy!"

Gina responded "I'm already having Treece be my plus one. You know I love you girl, but sometimes you can be a bit much. I need to keep things low-key at this gala. They're having a buffet and you know how you get about food."

Jayla was offended. How could Gina go with someone else?

"I can't believe it; I don't act strange when we're out."

Gina responded, "I've known you for a long time and you didn't used to when we lived out south. But ever since you moved downtown you've been complaining about everything when we're out."

Jayla felt struck. She had never noticed that her pickiness had gotten bad when she found herself surrounded by so many wealthy professionals.



Real Talk

1. Why was Jayla offended by Gina?
2. What did Gina offer as the reason for her actions?
3. Have you ever noticed a friend's behavior become worse when they are around certain people or gained a certain achievement?
4. Have you complained more because you are in a certain place or position? How can you be more aware and show gratitude?



The Big Picture

The children of Israel had been freed from slavery in Egypt, received God's Law on Mount Sinai, and seen God's miraculous protection and provision. But as they continued the journey, they began to complain about not having the food they wanted, instead desiring to return to bondage in Egypt with its predictability. They begin to complain about their situation and lose trust in Moses and in the Lord because of their short-term problems.



The Players

Moses. His name means "drawn out of the water." He was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, where they were enslaved and oppressed.

Taberah. A place near the wilderness of Paran, whose name means "burning." It is the place where God punished the Israelites for murmuring and complaining about only having manna to eat.



Make It Stick

“Then the foreign rabble who were traveling with the Israelites began to crave the good things of Egypt. And the people of Israel also began to complain. ‘Oh, for some meat!’ they exclaimed. ‘We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted. But now our appetites are gone. All we ever see is this manna!’” (Numbers 11:4–6, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Numbers 11:1 Soon the people began to complain about their hardship, and the LORD heard everything they said. Then the LORD’s anger blazed against them, and he sent a fire to rage among them, and he destroyed some of the people in the outskirts of the camp.

2 Then the people screamed to Moses for help, and when he prayed to the LORD, the fire stopped.

3 After that, the area was known as Taberah (which means “the place of burning”), because fire from the LORD had burned among them there.

4 Then the foreign rabble who were traveling with the Israelites began to crave the good things of Egypt. And the people of Israel also began to complain. “Oh, for some meat!” they exclaimed.

5 “We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted.

6 But now our appetites are gone. All we ever see is this manna!”

11:10 Moses heard all the families standing in the doorways of their tents whining, and the LORD became extremely angry. Moses was also very aggravated.

11 And Moses said to the LORD, “Why are you treating me, your servant, so harshly? Have mercy on me! What did I do to deserve the burden of all these people?”

12 Did I give birth to them? Did I bring them into the world? Why did you tell me to carry them in my arms like a mother carries a nursing baby? How can I carry them to the land you swore to give their ancestors?

13 Where am I supposed to get meat for all these people? They keep whining to me, saying, ‘Give us meat to eat!’

14 I can’t carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy!

15 If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!”

Cloud By Day and Pillar of Fire By Night. The cloud by day and pillar of fire by night were the manifestations of God’s direction and His will. When the cloud by day lifted, the people were to follow it. When the cloud settled, it was God’s will that the people stop and set up camp. The pillar of fire by night was a sign of God’s protection during the darkness of night.



Backstage

After their long enslavement, as they followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the Children of Israel left Egypt and traveled from place to place. The book of Numbers chronicles the story of the 40 years during which the Children of Israel wandered in the desert before entering the Promised Land. After two years camped in the Sinai desert, God lifted the cloud, and the Israelites left the wilderness of Sinai. They followed the cloud until it rested in the wilderness of Paran. Today’s text finds the Israelites, only three days into their journey, mumbling and complaining about the hardships they have to endure while traveling in the desert.



Combing Through

1. The People Complain (Numbers 11:1–6)

The Children of Israel began to complain only three days into their journey (10:32ff). Angered by their ungrateful attitude, God began to consume the Israelites’ camp with fire, and many people were killed. The people looked to Moses and began to cry out for help. Moses prayed for the people, and when God heard his prayers, the fire stopped. Moses then named the place Taberah, which means “burning.” The place served as a reminder of God’s burning anger against the Israelites for their ungratefulness.

After the fire of judgment was quenched, the spirit of complaining returned, as the “mixed multitude” that followed the Israelites out of Egypt grew tired of eating manna. The Israelites quickly joined in and began complaining that they, too, were tired of eating manna every day. They longed for the days back in Egypt when they freely ate fish, cucumbers, melons, etc. (v. 5).

Even though the smell of fire was still in their nostrils, the Israelites complained about their situation. How quickly they had forgotten their enslavement! They reminisced as though they had lived as princes and princesses in Egypt. When faced with hardships, they quickly forgot about God’s provisions and began to grumble and complain yet again.

God is able to provide more than we can imagine. The daily provision (manna) from heaven simply exemplified the provisions and the compassion that God had for His people. If the Israelites had prayed to God instead of murmuring, what might the result have been?

When we complain, it’s an indication that we do not trust God. Reflect on your personal experiences. During times of trials, do you forget God’s blessings? Do you complain? Are you unhappy because God has not blessed you with more? Consider all that God has done for you. God gives you life, health, strength, family, employment, and many other blessings—too numerous to count. Because we are busy focusing on things we don’t have, we appear ungrateful for God’s blessings. After just two short years in the wilderness, the Israelites had forgotten they had been enslaved for more than four hundred years when God delivered and saved them for a purpose.

Turn your complaints into praise. Consider praying instead of murmuring. Know that your wilderness experiences are moments to praise and thank God for everything He has provided in your life. By faith, ask God to provide for your needs and quietly wait for God’s answer. When we take our concerns to God, He hears us and does something about it. Do not lose sight of God’s hand in your life by focusing your attention on things that are not important. Allow God’s blessings to lead your life, as you live each moment with a grateful heart.

2. Moses Complains (11:10–15)

God’s servant, Moses, did his best for the good of the people. But when Moses heard the people complaining, he could not help but become agitated by their behavior. After all, God had blessed the nation by delivering them from slavery, directing them through the wilderness with a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, and providing them with daily food from heaven. How could the people be so ungrateful? What more could they want?

Moses did the only thing he knew how to do; he took his concerns to God. Moses knew he was God’s man and his divine commission obligated him to intercede on behalf of the Israelites. But he was so overwhelmed by the people’s complaints that he, himself, began to grumble and complain—so much so that he said he would rather God kill him than make him continue to deal with the ungrateful ramblings of the people (v. 15).

It's amazing how easy it is for someone else to make our life a living hell and cause us to forget God's divine providence. Moses was God's hand-picked servant and yet he would rather die than continue to intercede on behalf of an ungrateful people. During their time in the desert, the Children of Israel witnessed numerous miracles firsthand. Yet they readily joined the "mixture multitude" in complaining when things got a little rough. How about you? Rebellion against God is a serious offense. Because of their ungratefulness, the generation

of Israelites that rebelled against God never got to see the Promised Land; they died in the wilderness. The Bible tells us that when we are saved, we are granted full access to all the valuable resources God has to offer. God lavishes His resources on us "according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians. 1:7). As believers, it is our job to appreciate the good things God has provided and continually give Him praise for our many blessings.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have participants read Numbers 11:1–15, and the background and explanations of the scriptures. Have participants answer the following questions:

1. Why was God displeased with the Israelites (Numbers 11:1)?
2. How did God respond to the Israelites (v. 1)?
3. Why was Moses displeased (v. 10)?
4. Who was this "mixture multitude" that followed the Israelites out of Egypt (vv. 10–15)?



Next Steps

The reality is that God does not change; He is faithful, all-powerful, all-knowing, and always with us. Do you find yourself complaining about situations instead of focusing on God? Ask God to forgive your

complaining and negativity. Make a decision to focus on God, stop complaining, and begin to pray to God, who is able to answer your cries for help, according to His plans for your life.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Do a class poll: choose a few common problems and ask people to vote by show of hands or thumbs up online about which is the worst. Let them know they should only vote once. Examples could be traffic on the way somewhere, a common cold, missing a friend's event, running out of snacks, not getting enough sleep, etc. Count the votes. Note that as some people raise their hands others will slowly raise their hands for something. Then have people write down the problem they feel like is the worst from the list and count the votes. Note that the votes may be different. This shows how peer pressure can make us feel like something is worse than it is. Relate this to how the Israelites began to complain because other people were complaining.

B. Personal Application

Have participants write down something they worry about and put it in a worry box or jar. Once they have placed it inside, they can leave it behind and not think about it until they throw the box away. Encourage them to continue this practice to help eliminate complaints and worries from being carried in their minds.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Day 22: Exodus 13–15
Day 23: Exodus 16–18
Day 24: Exodus 19–21
Day 25: Exodus 22–24
Day 26: Exodus 25–27
Day 27: Exodus 28–29
Day 28: Exodus 30–32

B. Talk to Him

Dear God, help me to trust you instead of complaining when things get difficult. Help me not to go back to toxic situations because I am afraid of facing the unknown with You.

Reach out to us @urbanfaith on social media or email us at info@urbanfaith.com.



Say Word?

Taberah tab-ay-row

SWAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

If man makes himself a worm he must not complain when he is trodden on.—Immanuel Kant