

For the next five weeks, I am going to begin our sermon time talking about generosity. The end of the year is a wonderful time to focus on stewardship, on trusting God with our resources, on helping others in need, and on investing for eternal returns. Each week I'll share one of five reasons why God wants us to be generous. Here's the first: *Generosity changes lives*. Every year around this time, we ask people to give a gift that is above and beyond their normal giving, if they are able. Last year, you gave generously, and because of that we have been able to do critical infrastructure improvements: replace our roof, repair our parking lot, replace our 23-year-old HVAC units, and improve our children's ministry area to make room for more kids. In 2026 we will make key improvements to our chapel, family life center, and this worship center. All of this is to make room for more people to connect with Jesus.

You were generous last year, and that generosity has helped change lives this year. So far in 2025, 285 people have been baptized. That's just a few shy of one baptism every single day of the year. Many of those baptisms have been students, young people whose families are raising them to follow Jesus and who are stepping into a faith of their own. But 200 of those baptisms have been adults. People are making radical life changes, altering their eternity, and your giving helped make that possible. This summer, over thirty of our high school students made the decision to go into vocational ministry and become pastors or missionaries and leaders in local churches. Your giving helped make that happen. So far this year, over 13,000 pounds of food has been distributed through our co-op, helping people in our community when times are tough. Whether it is people meeting Jesus for the first time, the next generation of church leaders being raised up, or helping our neighbors in need, when you give to your church, it changes lives! Giving to God is not like paying taxes—you don't really know where the money is going and don't necessarily believe in the causes. When you give to God and to the local church, lives are changed! Let's keep that in mind as we think about bringing a year end gift in 2025.

We are in a 21-week study of the book of Genesis and today we are looking at the life of a man named Lot. If you have your Bible, please turn to Genesis 13. We are going to learn about the culture in which Lot lived, about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and about how the ripple effect of choices Lot made early in life impacted him and his family later in life. Our major take away for today is *the moral decisions we make today will shape the quality of our life and the values of our family in the future*.

Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together...So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." (Genesis 13:5-6, 8-9)

Lot was Abram's nephew; they were related by blood. Lot went on the journey to the promised land with his uncle Abram, and they both became very prosperous, so much so that they had to part ways because their herds required so many resources for grazing and water. Most Bible scholars estimate each of their herds was composed of many thousands of animals, so separation made sense. Even

though Abram was the elder, the more influential, and had every right to take the first choice of the land, he let Lot choose.

Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord. (Genesis 13:10-13)

Where did Lot choose to live? He set up his camp near Sodom. Hold on to that, because it will become important later. Several context clues show that Lot did not make a good choice. First, “Lot looked around.” This is the same word that was used to describe Eve’s actions in the Garden of Eden, where she set her eyes on forbidden fruit, and once she saw it, she desired it and plotted a way to take it. Echoes of Eden and original sin are coming out. That’s accentuated by the statement that “Lot set out toward the east.” East is the direction Adam and Eve took when they left the Garden of Eden. All throughout the Bible, but especially in Genesis, when people move east, they are moving away from God’s presence, plans, and purposes. Finally, and this is unmistakable, “The people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.” Lot saw what he thought was promising, lucrative, and financially enriching, and even though it meant moving into a spiritually compromising place, he went. He decided based on surface-level, human calculation, rather than by faith.

It wasn’t long before Lot experienced severe consequences! A regional war was happening around that time, and the four kings involved “seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom” (Genesis 14:11-12). Take note of this: at first Lot had only set up his tent near Sodom, but now we see he was living in Sodom. His association with these very worldly people grew deeper, and when they were conquered, he suffered along with them. Lot became a prisoner of war. He lost all his many possessions, and he and his family were going to be sold into slavery. When his uncle Abram learned what happened, he raised an army, defeated those four kings, rescued Lot, set all the prisoners of war free, and returned the possessions to their rightful owners. That initial danger and deliverance was a foreshadowing of greater danger to come.

Let’s jump down to Genesis 18. About 20-25 years after the events of chapters 13 and 14, God told Abraham (whose name God changed in chapter 17) that he was going to walk through the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah to see up close and personal how corrupt they had become, and that he might destroy those towns. Abraham pleaded with God to have mercy on Lot, to not sweep away the righteous with the wicked. After agreeing to Abraham’s plea, God sent two angels to the city. Lot didn’t know they were angels or messengers from God; he saw them as strangers, wanderers in need of shelter. “The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom” (Genesis 19:1a). Take note that “Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom”—he went from living outside the city, to living inside the city, to sitting at the city gates, which meant he had risen to a place of leadership and prominence in the city, like a council member or representative. He became increasingly associated with sinful secularism.

“When (Lot) saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. ‘My lords,’ he said, ‘please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the

night and then go on your way early in the morning” (Genesis 19:1b-2). Lot showed extreme kindness and hospitality toward these strangers. They went to stay at Lot’s house, but then the wickedness of the city came on full display. “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 (know) them’” (Genesis 19:4-5). Recognizing that we have young ears in the room, I have specifically used a euphemism for what they really intended to do. They had a gang assault prepared; they wanted to molest and abuse these visitors in the most grotesque way imaginable.

Lot went out to try to talk them down. “‘No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing...Don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof’” (Genesis 19:7, 8b). He offered his daughters to the men to protect his guests. It seems in ancient culture a person was obligated to protect their guests even over their family, or perhaps this was a desperate diversion tactic. Regardless, the crazed men of the city want nothing to do with it: “‘Get out of our way’” (Genesis 19:9). They kept pressuring Lot and moved forward to break down the door. Right when it was about to turn even more vile and depraved, “The men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door” (Genesis 19:10-11).

God had seen all he needed to see about the wickedness of the city. He was going to destroy it, so the angels said, “‘Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here’” (Genesis 19:12). Lot tried to get the men to whom his daughters were pledged to be married to flee, but they thought he was joking, so they wouldn’t go. The angels told him to get his wife and daughters out so they wouldn’t be swept away with the rest of the city, but Lot was reluctant. He didn’t recognize the severity or the immediacy of the threat. “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” (Genesis 19:16). As they were leaving, God sent burning sulfur down from heaven, and the entire town, all the people, and even the surrounding vegetation, was destroyed. It was a decisive act of judgment against wickedness.

At the conclusion of the story, we see three critical concluding details. First, Lot only fled to a nearby town, not to the mountains as instructed. He didn’t appreciate the severity of the destruction and wasn’t willing to fully distance himself. Second, Lot’s wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Looking back was direct violation of the command she was given and it indicated that she was longing for a way of life that God was judging. Her body may have left Sodom, but her heart was still there. Because she was longing for that sinful way of life, she experienced the judgment that comes with a sinful way of life. Third, Lot’s daughters inebriated him to have children. All their prospects for husbands were gone and they didn’t know what to do, so they tricked their father into getting drunk and slept with him to have the chance to have kids. They had just fled and been rescued from Sodom, where there was grotesque wickedness and sexual immorality, but that evil, worldly, sexually perverse way of life was still in their hearts. They immediately reverted to the lowest form of wicked, sexually devious behavior possible. When you look at the lineage of their children, you can see it had a destructive ripple effect for generations.

When I realized this was family dedication weekend and then looked at this passage, I was in disbelief. I was embarrassed and thought, “I got to change this.” But the more I studied, the more I thought this was unexpectedly one of the most relevant and insightful passages on a family dedication Sunday possible! Because, as we talked about as we kicked off, this passage teaches us

the moral decisions we make today will shape the quality of our life and the values of our family in the future.

This is the central warning from God's word today: *Avoid enchantment and entanglement with evil at all possible costs.* Lot looked at all the wealth and abundance of the area, and he got enchanted. He started dreaming about prosperity and how fulfilling and rich life in that area could be. Enchantment led to entanglement. At first, he just lived near the sinful city, then he lived in the city, then he became a recognized leader over the city. He got so entangled in the city. Even after he was taken captive when he first lived there, he returned. Later, even after learning the city would be destroyed in a matter of moments, he had to be pulled out of the city by his arm by the angels. His enchantment and entanglement with evil not only cost him his safety and security, but he also lost his wife, his future sons-in-law, and his wholesome relationship with his daughters. He went from being an exceedingly wealthy man with abundant possessions to losing everything he owned and living in a cave. We can learn much from this cautionary tale, with its extreme, but powerful example.

Real blessings flow from godliness, not worldliness. When Abraham and Lot decided to part ways, Lot looked for what was most pleasing, what was most alluring, and what was most promising at the surface level. He had so much, but he wanted even more. What he should have realized is *the reason he had so much abundance was not because of the place he was living, but because of the person he was living with.* Let me say that again: the reason he had so much abundance was not because of the place he was living, but because of the person he was living with. He made a massive miscalculation. God's favor and blessing were on Abraham, so when Lot was in proximity to Abraham, he experienced abundance and favor. The blessings in his life came from the overflow of Abraham's cup, not whatever illusory carrot was being dangled by a sinful society. I can't express this strongly enough: if you want blessing in your life, if you want abundance in your life, if you want God's favor on your life, align yourself with godliness, align yourself with righteousness! Find the people you know who are undeniably experiencing God's favor and blessing, set up camp next to them, learn from them, and pattern your life after them (for example, in your marriage, in parenting, in gaining wisdom, etc.). Sin, worldliness, and evil look promising at first, but they are a deceptive Ponzi scheme with nothing of substance to offer. You will be left defrauded and destitute. Real blessings, blessings that last, come from righteousness. "For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction" (Psalm 1:6).

Your family will likely reflect the culture to which you expose them. From the time he moved to Sodom to the time it was destroyed, Lot spent 20-25 years there. Like toxic mold growing and taking over in a dark, damp room over years, that sinful, seductive culture contaminated and consumed his household. Best we can tell, even though Lot was surrounded by a sinful culture, he maintained a high level of righteousness and integrity. He didn't slide morally, *but his family did.* His wife came to love the sinful culture of Sodom and identify with its values. His daughters engaged in the same type of sinful, devious practices as those for which the city was destroyed. Many of you are mature in your faith; your values and convictions are already set, and very little, if anything, could move you. If you have that moral clarity and fortitude, praise God. But don't assume that the people in your family are going to be as impervious as you are. Your children will be influenced by their peers and their environments, so love them enough to help shape their peers and their environments to be as conducive to godliness as possible. When our family became aware of certain content on Netflix that celebrates sin and is targeted to youth, we canceled our subscription. We want to distance our family from that. There may be some events you don't attend and some friend circles you don't join because of the potential for calamitous downstream effects for your family, who you are entrusted with the

sacred task of protecting. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.” We must be so wise, so strategic, so thoughtful about the environments in which we choose to raise our families. We wouldn’t build a home next to a nuclear waste site because it would cause irreparable harm. What’s true physically is all the more true spiritually and morally.

Evil exposes you to constant danger. When the people of Sodom were attacked by those neighboring tribes, they weren’t after Lot, but because Lot decided to move into the city and associate himself with those people, he got taken captive, too. He and his family were also in harm’s way when God decided to punish the city for its wickedness. We live in the real world, not a monastery. The New Testament says we are always going to associate with people who make poor choices, because we can’t leave the world! But there is a huge difference between kind and gracious association with people who are far from God and alignment or engagement with those people. When you choose people who constantly make ungodly choices to be your best friends, or to be your boyfriend or girlfriend, or to be your business partner, you are exposing yourself to unnecessary but very real danger. It is like playing near an undetonated bomb. You never know when it might go off. Proverbs 13:20 says “A companion of fools suffers harm.” It takes an incredible amount of hubris to think you can play so closely to fire without being burned. Sooner or later, there will be consequences, and those consequences may be severe.

Evil will be punished by God—encompassingly and without warning. This is not an aspect of Scripture or God’s character that gets talked about a lot these days, and yet it is a biblical message. It’s not the only or the primary message of the Bible, but it’s nevertheless a present and important message. God will judge evil. And when judgment comes, you don’t even want to be adjacent to it. You want to be as far away from it as you possibly can. Listen to what Jesus said about this exact situation in Luke 17:28-30: “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.” In other words, people were going about their normal lives in that secular environment, and without any warning judgment came to almost all of them. Jesus said his return is going to be just like that. So don’t dabble in sin. Don’t have one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom. Don’t play around in the mud when the wedding can start at any moment. When God’s judgment against sin comes, you want to be clothed only in the righteousness of Jesus, not compromised in deeds of darkness.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have (intercourse) with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Because Jesus saved us, we want to be as far away from sin and compromise as possible!

Not only do we learn lessons from Lot in Genesis, but we also see glimpses of Jesus. As Lot was blessed by his association with a righteous man, we are blessed today, not because of our own righteousness, but because of our association with the righteous man—Jesus. When Lot was taken captive, Abraham defeated Lot’s enemies and rescued him. We were all helpless against our enemies of Satan, sin and death. Jesus came to our rescue, defeated our enemies, and set us free. Like those angels rescued Lot from the coming judgment, Jesus rescued us from eternal judgment—

not by pulling us out of the city, but by going to the cross and taking our punishment for us. He took the condemnation we deserved, he took the curse of sin, so we could be forgiven forever. “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:3-4).

The seemingly small decisions you make today will determine the sort of person you become (your character) tomorrow and the value and priorities of your family.