

## Genesis 13 — Generosity

**January 3, 2016**

Good morning! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. I hope you had a refreshing Christmas and New Year. My family enjoyed the holidays. I hope yours did too. The best part about January is to get back into a routine. While the holidays are fun, they throw off the schedule. Getting back into the routine is what we are doing today at CrossWinds.

In the fall we studied the book of Genesis. We pushed pause on that book for the Christmas season to study the book of Leviticus. With Christmas past, we return to Genesis, the book of beginnings. Genesis is the first book in the Bible. It is a book on the history of the world and the history of God's people. In the fall, we studied the first 10 chapters. They were about global events. We looked at the creation of the world, the fall of the world into sin, the flood that destroyed the world, and the tower of Babel which gave us different languages, ethnic groups and nations around the globe.

Beginning in chapter 12 the focus of the book switched. Instead of working globally, God began working with one man and developing a special people from that man. From that people would come Jesus, God's son. Does anyone remember the name of the man God worked with? His name was Abram. He started off as a moon-worshipping pagan from the city of Ur when God broke into his life. In November, when we last looked at him, God called him out of Ur to the Promised Land in Canaan. God promised to give this land to

Abram and his descendants forever. As we learned, Abram was a little pokey. It took him 15 years to get there.

Shortly after Abram arrived in Canaan it looked like things were really rockin' in his world. He was building altars and worshipping God. Things were comfortable. He was experiencing success. Then famine hit the land. Rather than turning to God and trusting God in that famine, when times got tough, he left the Promised Land and ran to Egypt where he knew they had a Super Wal-Mart and plenty of food.

In November we learned every crisis we face is a test from God. The famine was a test from God. Would Abram run to God in tough times or would he run from God and try to handle it on his own? Would Abram scheme, plot and manipulate to make his way through or would the famine cause him to trust God more? As we learned, Abram failed the test miserably. He ran to Egypt out of fear of the future. He tried to scheme, plot and manipulate his way to success while there. He even tried passing off his wife as his sister because he was afraid somebody would bump him off to get her, because while she was incredibly old, she was also incredibly hot.

His plans backfired. When Pharaoh heard she was beautiful and single, he scooped her up into his harem, no questions asked. If it was not for God's miraculous intervention to give Pharaoh and his household an outbreak of some kind of painful STD prior to the wedding night, Sarai would have been transformed from Abram's faithful wife to his adulterous wife all because of

Abram's pathetic worrying, scheming and plotting to try to save himself rather than trusting in God to save him.

That was where we ended, Genesis 12. This morning we pick up in Genesis 13, where Abram and Sarai have a long ride home. If any marriage needs healing, it would be theirs. If looks could kill, I am sure Sarai would have been a murderer. Guys, anytime you pawn your wife off to another man, that is a major marital mistake. Things do not return to normal after five minutes of apology. I am sure the ride home involved a lot of confessing, repenting, forgiving and healing. That brings us to our text.

**When I make a mess of life, go back to what I was doing when things were right with God.**

So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negev. Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. And he journeyed on from the Negev as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. Genesis 13:1–4 (ESV)

Abram, the great leader, disgraced his wife and almost ruined God's plan because when times got tough, he didn't trust God to take care of him. He lied, schemed and manipulated because he thought the only one that could save his life was himself.

Abram wasn't a pagan. Abram believed in God. He trusted in God. He was like a baby Christian. His faith was fresh. This is why I love him. We are just like him, especially when we are young in our faith. When times get tough, it is easy to cave into doubt and sin, just like he did. One minute we are relying on God and having a great day, the next minute, when we have no idea how to pay

the mortgage because there is not enough money at the end of the month, we think God forgot about us.

Abram didn't lose his faith, he backslid in his faith. The same thing happens to us. Under pressure and temptation, it is easy to backslide in our faith rather than trust God to carry us through. What are we to do when we mess things up? Abram is a great model for us to follow.

### **1. Go back to the beginning.**

Abram went back into the Negeb, where there was a famine and life was hard. He went back to where he was at the beginning between Bethel and Ai. He went back to the altar he built and called upon the name of the Lord, like he did at first. Abram went back to where he knew things with God were right. He repented. Repent literally means to go in reverse. It means to go back to what you were doing when things were right with God. It means to pick up the pieces and start over again. That is what Abram did.

This is incredibly instructive for us. Most of us this morning know Jesus. We are trying to walk with Jesus, but every one of us is just like Abram. Life gets hard. We are tempted. We are lonely, and just like Abram, instead of trusting in God, we take matters into our own hands. We go where we shouldn't go. We do what we shouldn't do. We make a mess of our lives. All of us can relate.

If that is you this morning, what should you do? Confess your sin to God. Repent like Abram. Go back to where you were walking with God and do what you were doing when things were right with God. Go back to church. Get back into your Life Group. Pick up your Bible and start reading again. Make it a

regular reading time. Use highlighters. Go for a prayer walk where you talk to God and listen for him to talk to you. Memorize important Bible verses. Go back to where you should be. Go back to doing what we know we should do to walk with God and trust him.

This is very important. Too many of us backslide, and we don't know what to do. I see this too frequently. People make a sinful mess of life and they just sit in their messes like they are stuck in a tar pit. They don't get on their knees and confess their sin to God. They don't confess their sin to their spouses or to the friends they hurt. They don't repent. They don't say they are sorry. They just sit there and don't say a thing. They don't go back to what they were doing when things were right with God.

If God is convicting you, do something about it. Conviction of sin is a gift from God. Repentance is a gift from God. Don't waste it. Repent and go back to what you were doing when things with God were at their closest.

## **2. Learn from my experience.**

Some of us repent, but we never learn. While we will always find ourselves giving in to temptation and sin, we want to learn from our experiences, not just repeat our experiences. We don't want to keep making the same mistakes.

In Egypt, Abram learned his lesson. He learned he could trust God to take care of him no matter how bad the adversity seemed. No matter how hopeless the situation, God would be faithful and carry him through. Even if that meant rescuing his wife from Pharaoh on her wedding night, God could do it. We don't

need to cheat, lie and take matters into our own hands; we can trust matters into God's hands and he will take care of them.

### **Prosperity is a harder test than scarcity.**

And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land. Genesis 13:5–7 (ESV)

Abram and Lot had a problem. They were rich, very rich. How did they acquire these possessions? Abram and Lot were already wealthy when they went to Egypt. In Egypt the Pharaoh gave Abram lots of extra possessions as a wedding gift. This was stuff he shouldn't have had. It was stuff God didn't want him to have. Now all this extra stuff was causing a problem between them. They had too much stuff.

There is an intentional contrast in the Hebrew with the word *rich*. In chapter 12 it says the famine was *heavy* in the land. In chapter 13 it says Abram's riches were very *heavy*. It is the same word. Just as the scarcity of the famine was a test of Abram's faith in the last chapter, then the prosperity of Abram's stuff became the test of his faith in this chapter. Most of us are familiar with tests of faith that involve scarcity. We are familiar with praying and asking God to provide our daily bread. We are familiar with not having enough. There is another kind of test from God that only a few of us experience. It is the test of prosperity.

Tests of faith that involve scarcity draw us together and they draw us to God. Tests of faith that involve prosperity are much harder because we usually

go through them alone. The temptation is not to doubt God will provide what we need, that was chapter 12. The temptation is to let our wealth lead us away from God. The temptation of prosperity is to become arrogant, conceited, greedy and condescending toward others. Tests of faith that involve prosperity are much harder because they cultivate our pride. Look what the Bible says about this.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Proverbs 16:18 (ESV)

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. Proverbs 8:13 (ESV)

For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Luke 18:25 (ESV)

Notice it doesn't say it is impossible for a rich man to be saved. Abram was richer than Lot but he is our model of faith. Riches don't keep you from being saved. They just provide us a very hard test of our faith. In a moment we will see that Abram passed this test of prosperity while Lot failed the test of prosperity. What made the difference? Abram had riches. For Lot, the riches had him. My friends, do you have riches or do your riches have you?

Some of us are struggling financially. Each week we face the test of scarcity as we walk by faith. We think that if we were rich our problems would go away. If we were rich, the tests of faith wouldn't go away. They would just become a different test, and they would become a harder test.

### **Abram's solution to conflict — Generosity**

Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." Genesis 13:8–9 (ESV)

Rather than letting the conflict simmer, Abram took the initiative. He proposed to separate and let Lot choose the portion of the Promised Land he wanted.

There is a lot of good, practical advice we can learn in these verses about solving family conflict.

### **1. Take the initiative in solving conflict.**

When there is conflict brewing between us and someone else, it is easy to ignore it. Confrontation is never easy. Many of us like to let conflict simmer until our anger boils and we explode. If you let your anger simmer, the book of Hebrews says you are allowing a root of bitterness to grow between us and the other person. Somebody needs to take the initiative in breaking the ice and addressing the conflict. Abram said, "I am going to be that man. I will not let conflict simmer between me and my nephew. I will talk about it."

You need to be that man or that woman. If you sense a simmering conflict, take the initiative to talk about it. Never make it the other person's responsibility to talk to you first. Take the initiative in solving conflict. This applies in family relationships, in marriages, and at the office. Take the initiative. Don't let it simmer. For some of you, that is your major take-away for the day.

There is one place this is especially important. The family. Notice Abram insisted there be no conflict between him and Lot because they were kinsman, that is because they were brothers. Family is often the place where we put our hair down. We do and say things in our family we wouldn't do to the rest of the world. Family is the place where the deepest and most painful conflicts take. It

is also the place we must work our hardest to solve those conflicts. In family we have even more responsibility to take the initiative to solve conflicts than any place else.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! Psalm 133:1 (ESV)

While it is really good when brothers get along, it is really bad when brothers don't get along.

And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. 1 John 4:21 (ESV)

How do you solve conflicts between you and other people or between you and members of your family? Let's look at Abram's solution.

## **2. Don't insist on my rights.**

You need to read this passage in light of the cultural background. In the ancient world, age and seniority meant everything. Abram had the seniority. He had the age. Lot had no rights. He was only freeloading on his uncle. Abram had every right to call Lot into his office and tell him to move out of town. He had every right to tell Lot that none of the Promised Land was given to him by God; it was all given to Abram. He could have told Lot that he was now a big boy. He needed to move out of town and get his own place. That was what is supposed to happen. That isn't what happened. Abram didn't insist on his rights. He didn't pull rank. He didn't leverage his position. He treated Lot like he was an equal. He showed Lot respect and kindness he didn't culturally deserve.

He told Lot to take a portion of the land. Abram would take the leftovers. Here is the lesson. In a conflict, don't insist on your rights. Don't pull rank and position. Let your rights go and treat the other person as your equal rather than

your inferior. This is important. If you pull rank, even if you rightfully have it, you will not solve the conflict. You will only stir up the conflict.

### **3. Be generous.**

Abram was incredibly generous when it came to solving this dispute by letting Lot first pick. Whenever you let someone else pick first, you know you run the risk of getting the short end of the deal. Abram was not interested in insisting he got the better end of the deal. He was interested in unity in his family so he let Lot pick first. This way Lot could never say Abram forced him into a section of the land he didn't want. In this move Abram was also saying he trusted God to take care of him. Even if he offered a portion of the land to Lot, God was in charge over all things in this conflict. Abram didn't need to scheme, plot and manipulate to protect his own interests. All he needed to do was do the right thing and the loving thing. God took care of the rest.

Let's review these three steps 1. Take initiative to solve conflict, especially in your family. 2. Don't insist on your rights in the conflict. Approach someone as an equal. 3. Be generous. Let the other party choose first.

Let's bring this to our lives. When there is fighting in your family, you take the initiative to stop it. It is not the other person's job to solve the conflict, it is yours. Second, to solve it, you do not insist on your rights as the head of the house or the older child in the family. You treat other people as your equal. You extend to them rights they don't have or don't deserve. Third, act generously and kindly and let the other person have what they want before you get what you want.

Do you know how many marital conflicts would fizzle out if people practiced this? Instead of a husband claiming he is the head of the house and bossing his wife around, he treats her as his equal. He lets her choose first and have her way on where they will go for family vacation. Try this and you will watch conflicts disappear.

Can you imagine how many relationships between brothers and sisters would be straightened out when instead of fighting over what television program to watch one said, "We will watch two programs. I will let you choose first and I will even watch your program with you. No more fighting over the television remote."

Abram's conflict resolution strategy is to give away your rights to serve somebody lesser in stature. Be generous and put the other person first.

### **The beginning of Lot's end — Greed**

And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. Genesis 13:10–13 (ESV)

There is a hill about 10 miles north of Jerusalem near Bethel from which Abram and Lot would have had a good view of the Jordan Valley. As far as scholars can tell, Abram offered the land either north or south of that hill, both of which were within the boundaries of the Promised Land. Lot didn't choose north or south, he chose land that was east. The land to the east had rivers flowing in it. It was a beautiful, lush land. It looked like the Garden of Eden. It looked like

the land of Egypt where the Nile River flowed. It was paradise on Earth. This was the prime real estate.

Lot seized on the opportunity and grabbed the lush Jordan Valley as his own. Why did he do this? Greed. Lot saw the valley and thought it would be the place to make him even more financially prosperous. The Bible wants us to notice some things Lot's greedy choice led him to do.

1. **He didn't consider the location of the land.** This land was east. Many Bible scholars believe this was outside of the boundary of the Promised Land given to Abram. When Lot chose this land, he knew he was moving outside of the land given to Abram by God. Lot willfully choose to move away from the boundaries of the land where God promised protection and provision because he thought he would become richer and more successful if he did his own thing rather than God's thing. Did Lot need more prosperity? Absolutely not. Remember he was already so rich that he couldn't get along with Abram. The reason Lot wanted the Jordan Valley was because he wanted riches more than he wanted to follow God. Lot made this choice because he was greedy for more even though he already had enough. Lot loved riches more than he loved God. Folks, we can fall into this same trap. Many times things come our way that look financially lucrative but they are not ethically right or morally right. We know we may not get caught but we know we are stepping outside of God's clearly revealed will for our lives. We rationalize it. We scheme it. We call it a good business choice. All we are doing is setting

ourselves up to be in the same position as Lot. It will end in disaster when we move outside of God's clearly revealed will for riches, pleasures and comforts.

- 2. He didn't consider the character of the people in the land.** The Bible tells us that while the Sodomites were exceedingly rich, they were also exceedingly sinful. They were sexually perverse. Lot didn't care about that. If he was going to get richer, he had no problems associating himself with the Sodomites. It says he pitched his tent next to Sodom. That means he grazed his animals next to Sodom. Fast forward the story. Later in Genesis, Lot moved from living near Sodom to living in Sodom. Later in Genesis, he moved from living in Sodom to being a leader in the city of Sodom. Lot began rationalizing to see how close he could get to sin without living in sin. How did that work? It didn't. Lot talked himself into becoming a Sodomite because he loved the riches, glitz and glamour of the city. Lot stopped caring about sexual purity and all he cared about was his status in the city and his wealth. As you know there was a major drop in real estate value when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by raining down fire and sulfur on them because of their sexual perversions. Lot didn't see that one coming. Right before God destroyed the cities of the valley God graciously sent angels to warn Lot and his family so they could escape. As Lot, his wife and daughters were running for their lives from the city, Lot's wife looked back at Sodom because she wanted the pleasures of that sinful city more than she wanted the gracious salvation of God. God judged her and she turned into a pillar of salt. Lot ended up living the rest of his life in a cave having lost all of his stuff

and his wife. His two daughters eventually got him drunk and committed incest with their father. Where did they learn incest? In the Sodom high school sex ed class because they grew up in the sexually perverse town.

Everything is not what it seems. Sodom and the Jordan Valley looked like a great opportunity to become filthy stinking rich. It seemed so smart. The problem was going to Sodom and going against God's clearly revealed will. Where did it lead? It led Lot to become a dirt poor bachelor widower with two sexually perverted daughters. The lesson is don't let our financial greed or sexual greed or greed for power seduce us to step outside of God's clearly revealed will in the Bible. Every time it will lead to disaster. Every time we will tell ourselves it wasn't worth it.

The problem is Lot only thought about things two-dimensionally. Abram had learned to think about things three-dimensionally. Most people live two-dimensionally. They believe they are masters of their own fates and all that matters is what they see at the moment. Three-dimensional living is realizing life is much more than what we see at the moment. God is intimately involved in our lives. What looks good may not be good, especially if it is against God's clearly revealed will for our lives. God is intimately involved in life. He can rescue us even when things look hopeless, and he can discipline us even when things look great.

Let me give you some practical examples of how we mess this up.

Guys, who do you date? Do you just evaluate potential dates by the way they look on the outside, in a two-dimensional way, or are you looking for a girl

that has the third dimension because she knows and loves Jesus? Are you making your dating decisions two-dimensionally or three-dimensionally?

God says to save sex for marriage. In Hebrews 13:4 God said the marriage bed is sacred and he promises to judge the sexually immoral. Guys, are you living with your girlfriend? Are you sleeping with your girlfriend? You tell me everybody is doing it. You tell me you need to try before you buy. You tell me it doesn't matter because nothing bad will happen. I tell you that you are just like Lot. You are thinking two-dimensionally. You are forgetting that God is intimately involved in life. You are willfully going against God's clearly revealed will. You are heading to lose it all and live in a cave.

When everyone in class is passing around a copy of a previous year's final exam, and the teacher usually gives the same test each year, do you look at the old final exam and cheat to get a decent grade or do you study and do your best and take the lower grade without cheating? Are you thinking two-dimensionally or three-dimensionally. What is more important, your grade on that test that you see the next week or honoring God with the integrity and purity of your life? Are you living more like Lot or Abram?

When you get a job offer or promotion, do you just take it because it will make you more money or do you pray about it and consider how the new town will affect your wife and children? Do you look at that job offer from the third dimension, spiritually? Will there be a good church? Will you have the spiritual support you need? Will your family have the spiritual encouragement they need?

Is all you can think about the higher pay and status? Are you thinking two-dimensionally or three-dimensionally?

**When I feel discouraged, remember who holds the future.**

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” Genesis 13:14–17 (ESV)

I don’t know how Abram felt after Lot left. On the surface, I am sure he was discouraged. Abram couldn’t see the future. He had no idea God would destroy that lush valley with fire and brimstone. In that moment all Abram could see was Lot’s greed and Lot benefitting from an incredibly prime piece of real estate even though he was stepping outside of God’s will.

Abram was left with his flocks in the Promised Land. While the Jordan Valley was always a lush paradise, according to Deuteronomy 11:10-12, the Promised Land was only watered by rain. They had to pray God would provide the rain. At this time, maybe the famine wasn’t over. Abram had passed the test of prosperity. He had done the right thing, but how would this pan out in the future?

Here is where it gets interesting. There is something you can’t see in the English. In the Hebrew this verse has a small Hebrew particle that isn’t usually translated. It means *please*. It is only used four times in the Bible when God talks with a human being. Each time it is God asking somebody to do something or believe something that is beyond their wildest imagination.

God told Abram to look around him in all four directions as far as his eyes can see. Even though it looked like Abram just got ripped off by Lot, God told Abram he have the entire land, as far as his eyes could see in any direction. God would give it to Abram and his offspring forever. I know this is hard to imagine. Right then, Abram was a landless nomad. Right then, Abram is a childless old man that was just promised to have more descendants than the dust of the earth. I know you can't even imagine this happening. God said, "Trust me.'

This is a great point of application for each of us. Are we just living for the way things look today or are we living with a trust in God that he holds the future and he knows what he is doing with your future. When things look hopeless, he has everything under control. I know some of you are facing incredibly tough times. Some of you are facing health adversity. Some of you are facing financial adversity. Some of you are incredibly lonely and are facing relational adversity. You feel like Abram in this moment. You are being faithful but you don't see a lot of hope for the future.

God says to you, "Are you living in a two-dimensional or three-dimensional world? Who has control of everything?" God can reverse anything. God can rescue us in ways we would never dream. Will you trust him? Will you have faith in him and follow him even when you can't see how honoring God pays off?

Even on the day when we face the ultimate adversary of death, God promises to save us and reverse the sting of death and transform the moment of our death into our greatest victory.

My friends, many times God turns things around in this life that look hopeless. That is the story of Abram. God promises to turn this around not just in this life but to do it in an even more remarkable way in the next life through Jesus. Until God transforms our circumstances or takes us home, what are we to do?

So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord. Genesis 13:18 (ESV)

Wherever you find yourself today, like Abram, keep worshipping and trusting and trusting God to carry you through, just like Abram did.

Before we go, here a few pieces of practical advice on how to kill greed in your life and build generosity.

### How do I kill greed and build generosity?

1. **Greed starts as small areas of selfishness.** It is how you treat others in traffic. It is picking up your dishes and laundry. It is not cutting people off to steal a parking spot. It is not eating every last thing you can stuff into your body in the buffet line. Greed is refusing to give up your time to serve others because you are so busy serving yourself.

2. **Generosity is cultivated by small acts of undeserved kindness.**

Generosity is letting somebody else have the largest slice of pizza.

Generosity is offering to pay for somebody's dinner. Generosity is sacrificing your time and building your schedule to serve another. Generosity is remembering birthdays and sending cards. Generosity is remembering to send an encouraging text message to people who wouldn't expect it during the week. Generosity is losing on purpose. Did you ever play a board game

against somebody not as smart as you but you let him or her win? Did you every play a game of basketball against somebody not so good but rather than pounding him or her into the ground, you kept the game even?

3. **Generosity comes from our walk with Jesus.** The closer we walk with Jesus, the more generous we become. Jesus is the ultimate in generosity.

Looks what it says:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, Philippians 2:5–9 (ESV)

Just as Abram was incredibly generous toward Lot, Jesus was incredibly generous toward us. Just as Abram didn't insist on his rights to heal the relationship with Lot, Jesus didn't insist on his rights but humbled himself to become a man to restore the relationship with us. Just as Abram took the initiative to restore the relationship with Lot, Jesus took the initiative to restore the relationship with us.

My friends, if we want to become even more generous than than Abram, walk with Jesus.



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