

Abraham & Lot — By Jennifer Deans

The story is told of some blind men who experience (touch) an elephant. The blind men are all experiencing the same elephant. But as one blind man closes his eyes and he reaches out, he touches the side of the elephant, and he goes, "Ah, an elephant is like a barrel, because it's kind of round." And another blind man says, "No, no. An elephant is like a tree," because he's hugging the elephant's leg and feeling it. And the other one says, "No, no, an elephant is like a rope," as he's feeling the elephant's tail. And the last blind man says, "No, no! The elephant is like a piece of paper," as he's feeling the elephant's ear.

Isn't it amazing how different people can see the exact same thing but have very different experiences. You know, I tend to believe that this happens a lot. And I think it has a lot to do with our worldview. Kids in the same family, with the exact same parents, and the exact same environment, sometimes end up very differently.

So today we're looking at two different worldviews. In Matthew it tells us that we can't serve both God and money, and I tend to think that those are the two worldviews that are out there. We have a God-sufficient worldview, which is looking at life through the lens of God, and we're judging our life how God wants us to. Or, we have a money worldview, which is what I'm going to call a self-sufficient or me-sufficient worldview. We're listening to what the world says, meaning you have to get wealthier, you have to get richer, in order to succeed in life.

As we look today, our story is about Abram and Lot. Abram and Lot are two righteous rich men that go on a journey, and they start in the very same place, but their stories end very differently. And I believe it has a lot to do with their worldviews. The story starts as God calls Abram. He says, "Abram, I want you to go on this journey. I want you to go to a land that I'm going to show you, and I'm going to make you a great nation." As Abram sets out, and as he's telling his family, Lot hears about it, and there's something about Uncle Abram; God is blessing him. I think that Lot is seeing dollar signs. So Lot says, "You know what? I want to go with you, Uncle Abram. I want to be part of this God-adventure." So together they set off to a land that they don't know where they're going. They're just trusting God. Along the way it tells us very early in Genesis that both Lot and Abram become very wealthy.

A lot of us consider wealth a blessing from God. And in fact, in the Bible people often considered lack of wealth as a punishment from God. I tend to think it's a little bit different. The Bible tells us in I Corinthians 10:13, which is one of my favorite Bible passages, that God will never allow us to have anything we can't handle without His help. He won't let us go through a trial or a temptation we can't handle. Most of my life I've seen this verse as a verse that's telling us that God's not going to let me lose my mom if I can't handle it, or He's not going to let me lose my job if it would cause me to lose my salvation. But have you ever stopped to consider that God wouldn't allow you to get wealthy if you couldn't handle it?

I think that Abram and Lot make this point very well, because when Abram and Lot get wealthy, it's after an excursion where Abram had doubted God. He went to Egypt, lied about his wife, Sara, being his sister, and then Pharaoh tried to marry her, and then Pharaoh kicks Abram and Sara out. In Genesis, it tells us right after this story that both Abram and Lot were very, very wealthy. And because of their wealth, conflict started.

The herdsmen started fighting because there were too many cows, there were too many sheep, there were too many goats, and they were fighting. So Abram comes to Lot and says, "You know, Lot, we shouldn't have this—we're family. Let's separate." And he says, "Lot, I'm giving you a choice. If you want to go to the right, I'll go to the left. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right." So Lot does something which is odd, his being the younger of the two. He's not in charge of this whole adventure. God has led Abram, so Lot should have deferred to Abram. Abram, being in the God-sufficient worldview, says, "I'm giving Lot a choice." He's saying, "I want what's best, and I'll let you have first choice." Lot, being in the me-sufficient worldview, says, "All right, I'm going to look."

It tells us in Genesis that Lot looks and sees Sodom, the cities of the plain, and they're beautiful. They're watered. They're paradise! And he wants them. So Lot chooses Sodom and the cities of the plain. It tells us in Genesis that Lot moves near the city of Sodom. This is very interesting, and I want you to pay close attention, because as we go through the stories in Genesis, we find the progression of where Abram and Lot live very important to their worldview. You see, as Lot moves nearer to Sodom, he moves there. In Genesis 13:12, it tells us, "So Abram settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot moved his tents to a place near Sodom and settled among the cities of the plain. But the people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the Lord" (NLT).

Why would Lot want to move his family to an area that was extremely wicked, where people sinned against the Lord? You see, the lure of wealth draws a lot of people. And it actually tells us in 1 Timothy 6:9, 10, “But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and have pierced themselves with many sorrows” (NLT).

Lot knows that the cities of Sodom are wicked, and so he just moves *near* the cities. Instead of moving into the city, which he knows is wicked, he’s just going to get a little closer where he can get some of the benefits of the city, but he’s not in them. The problem, though, of moving near the cities is that it’s a slippery slope. How many of you have ever done this? You’ve done something you know is wrong, and the first time you did it you knew it was wrong, and you felt like as you walked into a room that everybody knew what you had done. It felt like you had this neon sign on your forehead going, “I did it, I did it, I did it, I did it.” Well, the 10th time you did that exact same thing that you knew was wrong doesn’t bother you as much. The 20th time, you don’t even feel guilty anymore. See, that’s the problem with moving near Sodom.

We find out in just a few verses later, as Lot has moved near Sodom, that all of a sudden the kings of Sodom and the cities of the plain are going to rebel against Chedorlaomer. Chedorlaomer is another king who has been taking tribute from all the kings. Chedorlaomer rallies some other kings and he marches in and attacks the cities of the plain. And when he attacks the cities of the plain, what he does is, he captures Lot and he captures all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. What is fascinating is, where does he capture Lot? In Genesis 14:12 it says, “They also captured Lot—Abram’s nephew who lived in Sodom—and carried off everything he owned” (NLT).

Do you see what happened? This worldview tells Lot that he needs to live near Sodom because Sodom was a bustling city, it was thriving, there was nothing but opportunities for wealth and for fame and for growth. He started *near* a city that he knew was sinful, but by the time the city was captured, Lot is living *in* the city.

Lot is carried away, and thankfully, one of Lot’s servants has escaped and he doesn’t know what to do. Finally he decides, *I’m going to go tell Abram, because Abram seems to have a handle on this.* So the servant runs up to the hills. He runs to the groves

where Abram is living, and he says, "Abram, you know, Lot has been captured!" And you know what? I can imagine that the servant knew what had taken place; that Lot had been selfish. He had chosen what was better. Lot had been rude to his uncle and had not allowed his uncle the first choice. So I can imagine the servant is surprised when Abram rallies his 318 men, and he says, "OK, let's go after them!" And then he goes and gets his allies and encourages them to come as well. I can imagine the servant is in his head going, *Why would you do that? That doesn't make any sense! Lot took what was better. He took what you should have had. He took the opportunity for more wealth, and God had promised you that you would be rich. And now you're willing to risk your lives and your wealth so that you can rescue him?*

But you see, Abram has a God-sufficient worldview. A God-sufficient worldview means putting others above ourselves; it means loving the way that Christ loved us. So Abram rallies everybody, and he sets out in the middle of the night. They come to the kings and Chedorlaomer, who are partying and going crazy. So it's a very easy win because God is with Abram. Abram quickly defeats the army and collects everybody who was captured from the cities in the plains, all the plunder, and all the people. If I were Lot, I would run to Abram, and I would fall in my knees, and I would say, "Uncle Abram, thank you so much for coming and rescuing me! I can't even tell you how amazing you are!" But you know what? In Genesis, Lot says nothing. There's no "thank you." There's no "I can't believe you did this for me." There's nothing.

But that doesn't deter Abram. Abram takes everybody and they head back down, and on the way home, they run into Melchizedek, whom we are told is a prince of God the most high. And Abram does this amazing thing. I can only imagine what the servant who went and told Abram that Lot was captured is thinking as he watches what Abram does. Abram goes and he praises God, and he thanks the God of heaven for what He's done. And with Melchizedek, they have a praise service.

And then Abram does the craziest thing possible. He starts counting up to 10. And there's 10 sheep, and he goes, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine," and then the 10th sheep he puts on one side. And he does that with everything! One for every 10! And then he gives it to Melchizedek. This just does not make any sense. *Why in the world is Abram giving so much money away?* But not only has Abram gone and given one out of 10 to Melchizedek, he praises God and gives Him the glory for this amazing victory that *He* obviously did, at least according to the servant.

But then the king of Sodom comes up. And the king of Sodom must have had a lot of courage, because he comes to Abram, and he says, "Here, you know what? This is what I'm going to do for you, Abram. You can keep all the stuff. But just give me my

people back." I'm sure in the servant's mind, he's going, *That guy has guts! He lost the war. He doesn't deserve anything. He doesn't have the right to ask for his people back. He doesn't have the ability to give Abram the stuff that he got as a spoil of war.*

However, what Abram says is amazing! Genesis 14:22-24 reads, "Abram replied to the king of Sodom, 'I solemnly swear to the Lord, God Most High, Ceator of heaven and earth, that I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from what belongs to you. Otherwise you might say, "I am the one who made Abram rich." I will accept only what my young warriors have already eaten, and I request that you give a fair share of the goods to my allies—Aner, Eschol, and Mamre' " (NLT).

If I were the servant, I can just imagine he is now on the floor. Not only has Abram given one in 10 to this guy, King Melchizedek, but now he is giving everything back! He doesn't keep anything! You see, that doesn't make sense in a me-sufficient worldview. It doesn't make sense when I am told that I have to take care of myself, that I have to worry about my wealth. But you see, Abram had a God-sufficient worldview, and what Abram is saying is, "God promised me that I was going to be rich. God said that. And God is also capable of doing that. And I don't want to get wealthy, I don't want to get rich, unless the name of God is going to be glorified." If Abram had kept all the money, if he had kept all those people as slaves, everybody on the plain would have seen Abram as just another king who's out for his own glory, just one other man who wants to get rich at their expense. Instead, because of what Abram does, everybody in the plain is talking about him, who praises God for the victory, and who gives back what he didn't even need to give.

What Abram does is, he pays tithe, which is 10 percent, and then he gives the biggest sacrificial offering, which is the rest of everything. It doesn't make sense. In this whole story, Lot has been watching all of this. You know, if I were Lot, I would probably, after having been captured and taken captive with my wife and my kids, want to change my ways. *You know, Sodom's a dangerous place. It's not helping me out at all.* But what does Lot end up doing? Lot doesn't say "thank you." The only thing we know is that in Genesis 19, just before God had to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, we find that Lot is living *in the city* again. He's living back in Sodom and Gomorrah.

You say, "Well, maybe he doesn't understand. Maybe he doesn't know how wicked the city is." But I'd like for you to turn with me to 2 Peter 2:7: "But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a righteous man" (NLT). I need you to understand

this—that Lot is still a righteous man. And this is why God rescues him out of the wicked city before he destroys Sodom and Gomorrah. But let’s keep reading the same verse. It says, “But God also rescued Lot out of Sodom and Gomorrah because he was a righteous man who was sick of the shameful immorality of the wicked people around him” (NLT). Lot, indeed, knows how awful this place is.

Yes, Lot was a righteous man who was tormented in his soul by the wickedness he saw and heard day after day. So if Lot is tormented, if all of this stuff is wicked, if he knows how bad Sodom is, why in the world would he go back to Sodom? It doesn’t make sense! However, when you look from a me-sufficient worldview, it does make sense, because Sodom still offered the most opportunity for wealth according to the world. The hills—they didn’t have trade, didn’t have commerce; it was just a quiet peasant life. So Lot goes back because that’s where his family is. Ezekiel tells us that Sodom’s sins were laziness, gluttony, and pride. It was one big party in Sodom! And Lot, even though he was righteous, he went right back after being captured from war.

This is a very dangerous thing. It becomes that slippery slope, and it’s so easy once we get close to sin, once we’re living near sin. We move into sin. And it’s so easy to go back even after we see how it’s messing with our lives, how it’s messing things up. With the perspective, *I have to take care of myself, I have to make money, I have to get rich*, you know what happens to Lot? Sodom and Gomorrah are such a wicked city that God comes down and He shows up to Abram, and He says, “I’m not going to hide from Abram what I’m about to do.” So God tells Abram that He’s going to destroy the cities of the plain.

Abram, because of his God-sufficient worldview, looks at God, and says, “God, would you destroy both the righteous and the wicked together?” God says—and I can imagine God has a slight smile on His face—“Well, what do you have in mind?” Abram says, “Well, what about if there’s 50 righteous people? Would you destroy it?” So God says, “Not for 50.” They negotiate back and forth all the way down to 10 righteous people. But you know something? There weren’t even five righteous in the city. And Abram—it doesn’t matter how much Lot has been rude to him, how much he has not listened to his advice, how much he has gone away from God—still worried about his nephew. Lot, on the other hand, is living in Sodom, the dangerous city. And we know that he’s righteous because when the angels show up, Lot is sitting at the city gates, and he takes the angels into his home and says, “You don’t want to stay in the street.” And he convinces them to stay. As you read through the whole story in

Genesis 19, you find that the angels eventually blind the inhabitants of the city because they're doing evil things. And the angels tell Lot, "We have to leave! God is going to destroy the city!"

Lot hesitates. The angels say, "Go get any of your kids, any of your family, anybody who will listen to you! Go tell them you've got to leave!" Lot still hesitates. He goes and he talks to his daughters and their fiancés, and they laugh at him. The angels have to grab Lot and his two daughters who are at home, and his wife, and drag them out by their hands. As they get outside the city, the angel says, "Run to the hills!" The angel says, "Go back to the hills!" The hills are where Abram is living with a God-centered worldview, and I believe the angels are telling Lot, "Go back to Abram and get your priorities back in line! Go to where it's safe!"

You know what Lot tells the angels? If you look in Genesis 19:19, it reads, " 'You have been gracious to me and saved my life, and you've shown such great kindness. But I cannot go to the mountains. Disaster would catch up to me there, and I would soon die' " (NLT). You see, when we are living with a me-sufficient worldview, when God tells us, and when we're pointed back to the safety of God, it doesn't make sense. If we look to God in the whole Bible, the stuff He tells us to do is contrary to what the world tells us to do. And Lot is so used to the culture of Sodom that he is scared to go back to the safety of God. So the angel compromises with him, and says, "Fine, just go to Zoar." Lot goes to Zoar, and he runs there, and the cities are destroyed. And Lot is so scared after he sees what happened that he eventually runs to the hills. But he doesn't go home to Abram. Instead, he goes to a cave.

Lot started out a rich, righteous man, and now he is in a cave with nothing but his two daughters. In the cave, the two girls who have grown up in Sodom too have the me-sufficient worldview. They look at themselves and they say, "We've got to make our father's name last. We don't have husbands. We've got to fix this problem." And so to them the solution is, "Let's sleep with our dad." Now, this is not normal at all. This is not a healthy God-sufficient worldview, but this is what they've learned from their father. You see, what 2 Peter tells us is that Lot was a righteous man, but in the process of moving toward Sodom, in having a me-sufficient worldview, in having the focus on money and getting wealthy, what he does is, he moves his family into a place where everyone else loses their salvation.

Lot's two girls have boys, and those boys become the leaders of the Moabites and the Ammonites, both who are warring with Israel their entire life until God has to wipe them out. You see, because of Lot's worldview, he is considered righteous, but everyone else in his family couldn't handle the temptations of living near Sodom, and then *in* Sodom.

On the other hand, if we look at Abram, if we look at his worldview, if we look at all the promises, if we look at the way that Lot treated him so wrongly and was disrespectful and rude, what's the end of Abram's story? He ends up having a son, Isaac, who's the father of the Israelites. Because of his faith and his worldview in God, we have Jesus, who came and died for us, who left heaven with this God-sufficient worldview, giving up all of His rights, letting go of all of His wealth and all of His glory so that He could come down here and give us what *we* deserve.

You see, as we talk about money, as we talk about finances, the world wants you to believe that God is blessing you if you have money. And you know what? There are tons of people in the Bible that are blessed and have money and are followers of God. But just because you don't have money doesn't mean that God is not blessing you. The most important thing you can do is to adopt a God-centered worldview, a God-sufficient worldview. Do you know how Abram did that? Everywhere Abram went, he built an altar. An altar is a place to communicate with God. I believe that before Abram made any major decisions, he would go and spend time with God, and he would talk to God, and God and him would be in dialogue.

If we are not spending time with God, we're going to spend time in the world. I don't know what your Sodom is, but Sodom is a place that's dangerous. I don't know what your danger is. Maybe it's some friends you hang out with that are constantly pushing your boundaries or your morals. Maybe it's your pride. Maybe it's your expectations of what success looks like. I don't know what your Sodom is, but too often, living near Sodom and having the me-sufficient worldview—*I've got to take care of myself*—may be a bad example to all those around you and cause them to lose their salvation. And you may lose yours, too, in the process.

My challenge for you is to adopt a God-sufficient worldview. A God-sufficient worldview is one that says, "God, it doesn't matter what I deserve, it doesn't matter what I think is better for me. I want what You want. God, I want to put other people in front of myself." And the way that we do this is, we be intentional, like Abram, and we spend time at the altar. We spend time

talking with God, and we tell God every morning, "Hey, God, show me what today looks like. Help me to make decisions the way that You would make decisions." When we spend time at the altar, and we develop that God-sufficient worldview, we can end up at the end of our life a rich, righteous person. Or, you could be like Lot.

You may be feeling a little guilty. You may be thinking, *I'm a little more like Lot than I would like to be.* You know what? That's OK. At any given point in Lot's life, he could have turned things around. He could have gone back to Abram after he was captured by King Chedorlaomer. He could have gone back to Abram and that God-centered worldview after Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed. But he never did. So it's not too late for you!

So my challenge to you is to develop a God-sufficient worldview. I want to challenge you to spend time daily with God. Let's start with the first 10 minutes of the morning to spend time with God, asking Him what your day should look like. I'd also like you to develop the habit of honoring God with the way you handle money. That starts with giving the tithes and offerings that God has called for. And I'd also like to challenge you this week to pray and ask God, "What is my Sodom? What is tempting me to pull away from a God-sufficient worldview?" Finally, I want to challenge you to write this down: *I will move out of my Sodom, whatever it is, and develop a God-sufficient worldview.* If you do, I know that God will use your life in amazing ways!