

When You Live In Sodom

Rich Nathan

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Genesis: Family Mess Series

Genesis 19

Have you ever worked in an environment where the atmosphere ran totally contrary to your value system or your faith? Imagine for a moment that you had a job for the Federal Agency called The Mineral Management Service (MMS, for short). It is in Lakewood, Colorado. The MMS oversees off-shore oil and gas drilling. They're the folks responsible, by the way, for overseeing and regulating drilling operations by BP in the Gulf.

A couple of years ago the Denver Post ran a series of stories exposing the extraordinary corruption that was happening in this government office. The government office, by the way, was overseen by the Secretary of the Interior, who then after leaving government, immediately went to work for Shell Oil. The Denver Post's expose portrayed a government office that far from being a watchdog was a lapdog for oil interests and was shockingly immoral. Here's how the article begins:

"Federal workers in Lakewood, who oversee offshore oil and gas drilling had sex and used drugs with energy company employees, provided information to industry favorites, and accepted thousands of dollars in gifts while handling contracts worth billions of dollars, investigators said Wednesday."

The article goes on to detail booze-filled parties in which industry representatives were having sex with government workers overseeing the oil industry contracts. One particular supervisor in the program was the subject of a federal investigation. She initially denied having any inappropriate or personal relationship with industry representatives. She later admitted that she had sex with two industry representatives, but she didn't think that having sex with these two representatives constituted having an inappropriate or personal relationship because they were only one-night-stands. She also admitted to accepting dozens of vacations including golfing and ski trips.

So you are working at the MMS, or some really corrupt local corporation here in Central Ohio. What do you do when you feel like the entire work environment and, particularly, your supervisor is doing things that you find to be immoral or unethical? What if you are working for a church and you discover immoral or unethical behavior, what do you do?

Let me change the scene from the workplace to a university. You are an 18-year old and you've moved into a university dormitory. I recently read an article

written by a university student at one of America's private universities costing about \$40,000 a year to parents. It was titled: *College Awash In Alcohol, Drugs, Sex, Assault and Sexual Assault, and Communicable Diseases*

The university, like many universities, required students to live in the dormitories for the first few years. Parents pack their 18-year old off and here are some of the blogged comments from students living in this private university's dorm:

"Most of the parties my freshman year had the "wear the least clothing" theme - I sort of liked how liberal the college's view of sex was. A sex expert came and talked with all of us in the dorm. We received bags of candy and condoms from our RA - We often drive drunk. We love to speed up this hill on Hadley Street and feel the car fly through the air. We ran red lights on Philadelphia Street to catch this dip in the road. It felt so dangerous..."

How about this?

"I was educated by some kids on snorting stuff like Adderall".

I've been doing a series from the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, that I've titled Family Mess. In looking at the lives of the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and their wives – Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel – far from the idealized religious heroes and heroines that we expect to find in the Bible, we find really messy lives – stories of deception and betrayal, incest and infertility. Many of the patterns of the patriarchs' lives we have seen are replicated in the lives of their children generation after generation.

But we also need to remember that when we talk about Family Mess, the family is not isolated in its own cocoon. Families are impacted by the larger culture. We may have great values, but our kids are exposed to a peer culture and a media, entertainment and marketing juggernaut that is sweeps over our kids and our families like a tidal wave. How do you keep your bearings? How do you preserve anything of your values when you live in Sodom? That's the title of my message. Let's pray.

Genesis 19:1-15

1 The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 2 "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." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." 3 But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. 4 Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—

surrounded the house. 5 They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” 6 Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7 and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.” 9 “Get out of our way,” they replied. “This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them.” They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door. 10 But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. 11 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. 12 The two men said to Lot, “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, 13 because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.” 14 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, “Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy the city!” But his sons-in-law thought he was joking. 15 With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.” ...23 By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24 Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the Lord out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. 27 Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord. 28 He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah; toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. 29 So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

A few years ago Marlene and I went to a museum exhibit titled: *The Last Days of Pompeii*. The exhibit was about the final days in the city of Pompeii which was destroyed and completely buried under 8 feet of ash in the catastrophic volcanic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79AD. Excavations of Pompeii and its sister city, Herculaneum yielded an amazing snapshot of life in a 1st century Roman city. What archeologists discovered was that Pompeii was filled with brothels. One of the dominant themes of life in Pompeii was a shocking amount of erotic art and pornography. So much so that even household items had a sexual theme.

I think about Pompeii when I read the story of Sodom – prosperous, very wealthy, and thoroughly drenched with sexual immorality.

How did Lot end up in Sodom?

How did Lot end up nearly losing his life in the city of Sodom? How did Lot end up so thoroughly compromised that he had no moral authority in the lives of his sons-in-law? His wife was so attached to Sodom that she didn't want to leave. Lot himself was weak and indecisive when warned by the angels to get out of the city. And his daughters were so corrupt that they ended up having incestuous relations with their father. How did Lot end up so morally compromised?

Lot was a nephew of Abraham. They both left the ancient city of Haran in response to God's call to Abraham to go to the Promised Land. Lot grew up around a God-fearing, generally honorable, uncle. You could say Lot grew up in a church-going family with a less than perfect, but generally, decent adult model of faith. But his life ended up in total moral compromise. Lot's story ends up with him barely being saved. He has the smell of smoke on his clothes as he enters God's kingdom.

He reminds me of that lawyer in the old movie, *The Firm*, with Tom Cruise and Gene Hackman. Gene Hackman played the role of Avery, a thoroughly compromised, morally washed out, waste of a man.

Lot was barely saved from Sodom whereas his uncle, Abraham, ends his life in a warm, devoted relationship with God. What happened? Abraham and Lot had the same starting point, yet over the years they pursued widely divergent paths. One moved farther and farther from God and the other closer and closer to God.

We see this all the time in families. Two children are raised in a Christian family. One daughter pursues God and raises her children in the Christian faith. The other walks away and has only the barest attachment to the faith. How do you get such divergent paths from the same starting point?

The problem of money

Genesis 13:5-13

5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents.⁶ 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.⁷ And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and the herders of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time. 8 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. 9 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."¹⁰ Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well

watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah). 11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.

We discover in this story that having money is not always a blessing. In contrast to contemporary prosperity teaching, money is not always viewed positively in the Bible. Money can create tremendous conflict in a family. You see this very often in families after a parent or grandparent's death. The kids fight over the estate. How many of you have been in a family where there has been conflict over money or a business or an estate with a relative? How many of you have experienced conflicts over money, conflicts over property, or conflicts over an inheritance within your own families?

Now, Abraham takes the high road in this conflict.

Genesis 13:8-9

8 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. 9 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."

Literally, Abraham says in Genesis 13:8 not "we are close relatives" rather:

We are brothers

What Abraham is saying is "Listen, Lot, I am a person who values family above money. I don't want to destroy our family relationship over mom's jewelry, or over dad's house, or over grandpa's farm. You choose first."

Genesis 13:9

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."

Now, I think Abraham may have been facing east when he said this so that with his right hand he points to the south and with his left hand he points to the north. He says in essence: "Lot, let's stay in the Promised Land. You choose. You pick north or you pick south. But we'll stay here in the Promised Land." But Lot chooses a third option, east towards Sodom.

Genesis 13:10-11

10 Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)¹¹ So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company.

And here we see:

The significance of choices

Lot chose Sodom because it looked best. He is like the daughter who grabs mom's engagement ring, or the son who takes the best part of the business for himself. I want you to underline in Genesis 13:11 these words:

Genesis 13:11

So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company.

How do we end up in Sodom? We choose for ourselves. Lot is the man or woman who doesn't care about or simply dismisses family and friends' concerns about a girlfriend or boyfriend's lack of spirituality. Mom and dad say: You know, this person that you're dating has absolutely no relationship with God; he completely lacks spiritual depth. But that concern is dismissed. "Hey, he has other great qualities. He's cute and he is successful." "She's gorgeous; she's smart."

How did Lot end up in Sodom? He chose for himself. Nothing in this text suggests that Lot asked God what God's will for his life was. Nowhere do we read that Lot prayed and asked, "Lord, what choice would promote your kingdom in starting out in life. I want to end up close to you. What place should I live in, where should I work, that would best encourage my relationship with you?"

The seduction of materialism

So many Christians graduate from college or grad school and take jobs with only one consideration in mind: where will I make the most money? They are like Lot. And so many people take so many so-called promotions and move all over the country with only one aim: to chase the American dream – to land the big salary; to buy the big house; to get the big job title. It is, in my experience, the incredibly rare person who says: "Lord, there are things in my life that are more important to me than making the most money. I care about my relationship with you most of all. I care about my relationship to my church. I want to have a warm, growing relationship with you as I get old. I care about my family and my marriage."

Last week I mentioned to you a nationally-renowned infertility specialist that I talked with in Houston in preparation for my message on infertility. A number of years ago the Dean of one of the large medical schools in Texas came to this man and said: “We will create an infertility clinic around you. You can head it up. We’ll give you millions of dollars to run this clinic. The only thing is you are going to have to give us an obscene number of hours and essentially devote your life to running this clinic.”

The physician spoke to the Dean and said: “I don’t even have to think about this offer. The answer is no. My first priority is my relationship with God and my church. Every Friday I volunteer at the church’s food pantry. I’m not going to give that up. So thank you for the very flattering offer, but the answer is no.”

In my experience, that kind of response is exceptionally rare. There are few people who will take Jesus at his word when he said:

Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

God, by the way, blessed this physician beyond measure. He’s been extraordinarily successful. But at the outset, he prioritized his relationship with God and his relationship to his church above his career.

Lot, it says, chose for himself.

Genesis 13:12

Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.

In contrast, look at Abram in Genesis: 13-14, 17:

Genesis 13:13-14, 17

14 The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

Lot lifted up his own eyes; he looked at the land of Sodom and he said, “I want that.” Abraham waited on God to choose for him. And God lifted up Abraham’s eyes to look. Abraham’s choice was a spiritual choice. Abraham is saying in his heart, “Lord, what do you want for my life?”

Here’s my point. The way many of us end up in Sodom is that we choose Sodom. We deliberately put ourselves in harm’s way or we put our family in harm’s way. We send our kids off to a prestigious school because we care more about their future financial success than their spiritual success, and we trust them

at age 18 to be able to withstand the eroding pressure of life in a dormitory or a sorority or fraternity without massive spiritual preparation. We choose a barely Christian or non-Christian boyfriend or girlfriend and rationalize it away saying, “He’s a really good guy. He happens to be a lot nicer than a lot of the Christian guys I’ve dated.” “She’s got a great heart and she respects my Christian walk.”

We choose. That’s how we get in Sodom. We choose to be there. We choose to work for a company that demands 70-80 hours a week and a pound of our flesh and causes us to miss most of our kids’ sporting events because the money is great and, hey, I’m providing a really good life for my family.

What are the characteristics of Sodom?

In other texts we read that Sodom was prosperous; it was wealthy; it oppressed the poor. In Genesis 19 we could draw out several characteristics of Sodom. First of all,

Sodom was characterized by sexual immorality

Genesis 19:4-5

4 Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5 They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

Look at Lot’s response:

Genesis 19:6-8

6 Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7 and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”

Back in 1991 the Anglican Church wrote a report titled: “The Issues In Human Sexuality.” Here was the conclusion of the commission who wrote that report:

There is...in Scripture an evolving convergence on the ideal of lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual union as the setting intended by God for the proper development of men and women as sexual beings. Sexual activity of any kind outside of marriage comes to be seen as sinful, and homosexual practice is seen as dishonorable. It is also recognized that God may call some to celibacy for particular service in his cause. Only by living within these boundaries are Christians able to achieve the holiness that is pleasing to God.

As a pastor I am regularly called upon to relate the clear teaching of the Bible about human sexuality to real men and women who are living today in the 21st century. “Pastor Rich, I’m a 44-year old woman, with no marriage prospects on my immediate horizon. Are you telling me that I’ve got to swear off sex for the rest of my life?” “Rich, I’m a 25-year old guy with tons of testosterone pumping through my blood, are you saying I need to practice abstinence?” “Rich, I’m a 31-year old with strong feelings of same-sex attraction for a coworker; what’s wrong with an affair?” What do the scriptures say to real life adults living in the 21st century? What has the church said with almost complete unanimity for 20 centuries up until the last 15-20 years?

The church in the 1st century was known for two things: people said you always knew a Christian because they didn’t sleep around and they believed in the resurrection of the body.

It is regarding human sexuality that Christian teaching is absolutely unutterably opposed to, it is 180°s away from away from contemporary America says about sexuality and about humanity in general. It is regarding our sexuality that the issue of Christian discipleship comes into its clearest focus in America today. If you want to know where does Christianity really touch down in America, where does discipleship touch down in your life right now, one of the clearest places it touches down in America concerns our sexuality.

I spoke with a transgendered person the other day at a coffee shop. We talked about sexuality and I said to her, “I’m a Christian which for me means that I’m a committed follower of Jesus and my understanding of Jesus is that Jesus is humanity as God intended us to be. He is the perfect man, the perfect model of whole and healthy human living. What I find in Jesus is that in contrast to what America says right now, you do not have to have genital sex in order to be whole and healthy. You are not defective or deficient; in fact, you can be entirely self-actualized, experiencing God’s highest and best without having genital expression of sex.”

But then I assed, “Don’t just listen to me about this. I’m a heterosexual guy who’s been married since I was 19 years old. I could introduce you to dozens of singles in my church who are completely abstinent. Ask them if they are deficient or defective because they are practicing abstinence.”

Do you believe that? Do you believe as a single person or as a divorced person, as a person living in a difficult marriage, or with a marriage partner who is physically unable to have sex that you can live a completely whole life without genital expression of sex?

People in our church who practice abstinence wouldn’t say it’s easy to do in this culture, but they do because they are disciples and imitators of Jesus and they believe that there was nothing deficient about Jesus. He was as healthy and

psychologically and emotionally and physically whole as anyone who ever walked the earth. And yet, he was sexually abstinent.

What are the characteristics of Sodom?

Sodom was characterized by a loss of ability to be shocked

One thing good about Lot is that he was still disturbed by Sodom.

2 Peter 2: 7 - 8

7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—

I don't believe, by the way, that when it says that Lot was righteous that the Bible is referring to his internal state. Rather, I think it has to do with his orientation towards God. We receive righteousness as a gift. But it says in 2 Peter 2:7 - 8 that Lot was shocked by the behavior of the other residents of Sodom.

Cardinal Newman, the great Roman Catholic Cardinal for whom many Roman Catholic Newman Centers are named on college campuses, once said:

Our great security against sin lies in our being shocked at it.

When we are shocked by something, we avoid it. The sight of a person dying of emphysema or lung cancer might shock us enough to cause us to avoid smoking cigarettes. The reality of a buddy dying in our arms in battle might shock us enough to cause us to become anti-war. The shock of a spouse saying, "I've had it; I want out of this marriage" might cause us to finally wake up and choose to change.

I have read that if you throw a frog into a pot of boiling water, it will immediately jump out. But if you put the frog into a pot of cold water and slowly raise the temperature, it will literally boil to death because it will become insensitive to the slow, steady change in the atmosphere.

Friend, do you see this in your own life – there are things that used to shock you and no longer do, things you never would have participated in; shows you never would have watched; entertainment you never would have exposed yourself to; places you go or recreate that you are now dull to – do you see that like that frog we are slowly being boiled to death in America?

Sodom lost its capacity to be shocked. All the men of the city, both young and old, are gathered to have sex with the stranger. They are breaking the door down.

I wonder about our own capacity in 21st century voyeuristic American culture in which the most perverse secrets of people's lives are being filmed on video and distributed online. I wonder if we have lost one of the main protections against sin; that is the ability to be shocked.

Sodom was characterized by a rejection of moral judgment

Genesis 19:9

"Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

He wants to play the judge! In Sodom any moral statement is seen as judgmental and intolerant. You know you are in Sodom or a Sodom-like work environment or school environment or family environment when every moral statement is viewed as intolerant. How dare you suggest that your moral perspective could possibly be the right one? Who made you the judge?

Sodom is like America today – hyper-individualistic, utterly subjective, totally relativistic - we frequently hear the claim that all moral statements are merely statements of personal opinion and personal preference. No one has the right to say what is moral or what is correct for any other person. That's just your opinion. You can only speak for yourself. Each of us has to choose our own path. Each of us has to choose our own values. That is America now. That was Sodom then.

I would ask someone who claims that all moral statements are just a matter of opinion, the person who claims that there is no objective right or wrong, nothing transcendent; I would ask the person who held that view: "Is there anything at all, anything, any behavior that you believe would be wrong regardless of what someone else believed about it?"

I read an article in the New York Times this past week about a woman in Pakistan whose children were starving to death as the result of the terrible floods that hit that country last month. The woman has lost one child to starvation; the other two children, a 2 ½ and a 1 year old, are starving to death in her tent. The UN has doctors on the ground and one of the doctors has repeatedly gone to this woman and said, "You must get medical attention for your children, or they will die." The 1 year old is so listless that she can't even sit up. The mom said, "I understand, but my husband will not allow me out of the tent. Without his permission I can't go and get help for my children." Her husband held to a very traditional cultural belief in his society about women not going out unescorted. Can you say that this traditional belief of her husband is wrong? It's costing the lives of three children.

Must you say, “Well, that’s just his view. Who are we to judge him?” Or can you say, “No; refusing to let your wife to out of your tent to save the lives of your children is just plain wrong regardless of your beliefs.”

Sodom is characterized by a rejection of all moral judgments. Sodom says: it’s all just a matter of opinion. There is no God above us who has shown us the way. There is no God to whom we are accountable. No God has revealed himself; we are left to our own subjective opinions, none of which are better than any others.

How do you survive in Sodom?

Obviously, one of the main biblical directives regarding Sodom is to flee Sodom – get out of there! End the relationship with a person who is pulling you down; flee the bar scene; stop going to “Happy Hour” with your coworkers. Quit the job that is destroying your family. Move out of the dormitory. Leave, get out, and flee. That’s one of the main directives regarding how to deal with Sodom..

But you know, we can’t do that with our whole country. We can’t do that with the whole world. There are features of Sodom all around us. So how do we survive in a Sodom-like country, or in a Sodom-like city?

Maybe you are a follower of Jesus and you find yourself in great conflict with people around you at your school, in your workplace, or at family gatherings. Maybe you find yourself at times getting into ridiculous arguments and you don’t feel like you’re helping other people find Jesus. After all, if you are a follower of Jesus, our goal is not to offer moral critiques about everything in life. The goal ought to be assist the residents of Sodom to find Jesus and to be saved.

So, how do you survive in Sodom? How do you lower the temperature of the environment so that you can engage in constructive conversation? Let me tick off just a few thoughts.

Avoid bad judgmentalism

All moral statements are not bad judgmentalism. That’s what Sodom says. But there is something we can label bad judgmentalism. Jesus tells us to avoid bad judgmentalism. Here is what it says in the Message version of the Bible:

Matthew 7:1-4

1 Don’t pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults – unless, of course, you want the same treatment. That critical spirit has a way of boomeranging on you. It is easy to see a smudge on your neighbor’s face, and be oblivious to the ugly smear on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, “Let me wash your face for you,” when your own face is distorted by

contempt? It's this whole traveling road-show mentality all over again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your part. Wipe that ugly smear off your own face, and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.

Our goal, again, is to not win moral arguments about abortion or sex or divorce. Our goal, especially on a personal level, is to point people to Jesus. And I discovered over the years when people meet Jesus, Jesus cleans up their lives. I'm so grateful that before I entered a relationship with Jesus, I met Marlene, who did not make me feel condemned, and never exercised the bad kind of judgmentalism with me. She cared about me. She wasn't afraid to tell me the truth. But she knew what I needed most of all was Jesus and her love was filled with such integrity that she didn't need to say anything. I saw some of the corruption in my own life just by seeing the contrast with the goodness that was in hers.

How do you survive in Sodom?

Stop believing in your own moral superiority

The only way to stop practicing bad judgmentalism is to stop believing that you are morally superior. If you frequently find yourself making the statement, "I can't believe that so-and-so is doing this," perhaps you believe that you are morally superior.

I was thinking about this recently regarding Tiger Woods because I heard myself critiquing him. And then it occurred to me: Rich, what would you be like, if Jesus had never entered your life? I mean, if you took the restraining, transforming influence of Jesus out of my life and I had 1000x more money than I presently do and 1000x more opportunity than I presently do, it occurred to me that I would be Tiger Woods. What makes me think that I am any better than him?

Don't say everything you think

You know, there are so many Proverbs about exercising tact and discretion. You are not a washed out compromiser just because you don't announce all of your moral opinions all the time in every conversation. As your pastor, I want to free you from the feeling that you are somehow being unfaithful to God, if you don't say everything you know and everything you believe to everyone all of the time. Proverbs, which is in the Bible, is God's Word and direction to us. Proverbs tells us how important it is to speak timely words. We must wisely choose what we say to the appropriate person at the appropriate time and place. We have to say it with appropriate tact and discretion.

Many conflicts could be cooled just by having Christians being wiser in their communication.

Do something good for people

Instead of merely being upset about the moral decline in America, do something good. I don't mean go on a moral crusade. I mean get in there and do something good.

You know, I have discovered that people are willing to give us in Vineyard a wide berth regarding our beliefs and our moral perspectives because of the good that the church is doing in the community. People say I've seen you feeding the poor, helping immigrants, giving free legal or medical or dental services, assisting people find jobs, teaching kids. People, if you are known as a person of great integrity, who does good.

And finally, if you want to survive in Sodom,

Go deep in your relationship with God.

I've been reading a book, along with a number of the staff here at Vineyard, titled *Souls In Transition* by Christian Smith. It is the best book I have read about what it means to be a young adult in America right now. *Souls in Transition*. It is the best book I've ever read about the Twenty-Something generation and how they are navigating life in America.

One of the things that the book concludes regarding faith is that many Twenty-Somethings are doing quite well navigating life in Sodom living in 21st century America. You know which young adults are succeeding – you know which young adults in America are not using drugs, or sleeping around, but are giving time to volunteer and making a difference in their world. They are young adults whose relationship with God runs really deep. They're able to handle college or grad school or career because they have a strong personal prayer life. Many of them are supported by parents who have a strong personal faith. They've had an experience of God in their lives; they have supportive adults around them; and, they read the scriptures. Young adults who go deep in their relationship with God have been able to successfully navigate this culture.

Here's the ultimate secret for surviving in Sodom. Go deep in your relationship with the Lord. Let's pray.

When You Live In Sodom

Rich Nathan

September 26, 2010

Genesis: Family Mess Series

Genesis 19

I. How did Lot end up in Sodom? (Genesis 13)

- A. The problem of money
- B. The significance of choices
- C. The seduction of materialism

II. What are the characteristics of Sodom?

- A. Sodom was characterized by sexual immorality
- B. Sodom was characterized by a loss of ability to be shocked
- C. Sodom was characterized by a rejection of moral judgment

III. How do you survive in Sodom?

- A. Avoid bad judgmentalism
- B. Stop believing in your own moral superiority
- C. Don't say everything you think
- D. Do something good for people
- E. Go deep in your relationship with God