

Main Idea: By looking at the world’s first parents and first children in Genesis 4:1-12 we learn about the proper and improper responses to God’s grace.

- I. The first parents experienced God’s grace (1-2).
  - A. God gave them children.
  - B. They gave God the credit.
- II. The first children experienced God’s grace (3-12).
  - A. Abel responded in the right way (3-4).
    1. He exhibited proper faith.
    2. He exhibited proper action.
      - a. True faith involves a relationship.
      - b. True faith involves a life-changing acceptance.
      - c. True faith involves the heart, not just externals.
  - B. Cain responded in the wrong way (5-12).
    1. He had privileges (1-2).
      - a. He was raised in the same home with Abel.
      - b. He received the same opportunities Abel did.
    2. He had a deficient faith (3-12).
      - a. He disobeyed God (3-5).
      - b. He became angry and depressed (5b).
      - c. He killed his brother and lied about it (8).
      - d. He ended up living a self-sufficient life (12-18).

Make It Personal: What do we learn from the first family?

1. We learn about God.
2. We learn about the problem of sin.
3. We learn about our need for grace and genuine saving faith.

In our current series, *The Christian Family*, we are turning our attention to a very special family in the Bible, *the first family*. God, of course, created all things for His honor, including the family. If we want to know how to have families that honor Him we must open His Word and take heed.

What kind of family was the first family? In Genesis 2 we meet Adam, *Ish*, the first man, created by God from the dust of the ground. And we meet *Isha*, as Adam first called her, ‘woman,’ later renamed ‘Eve.’ God made them in His image and placed them in a perfect garden. They enjoyed unhindered communion with God and each other, never a cross word, never a reason to utter a cross word. It was total paradise in the Genesis 2 world.

That all changed in Genesis 3 when one fateful day Ish and Isha foolishly disobeyed God’s commandment. God’s warning couldn’t have been clearer: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it *you will surely die* (Gen. 2:17).”

They knew better, but they listened to the serpent rather than God. They *ate* the forbidden fruit. And life changed immediately, not only for them but for all creation.

The first children were born in the post-Genesis 3 world. Ponder that thought. Adam and Eve didn’t raise their children in a perfect, postcard world, and they didn’t get perfect results either, as we’ll see today.

*Scripture Reading: Genesis 4:1-12*

I need not tell you that we do not live in a Genesis 2 world. We live in a post-Genesis 3 world, an important point to remember if you’re serious about having God’s kind of family.

---

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the messages preached at WBC in 2000 and in 2007.

There's something interesting about children. Two children can have the same parents, grow up in the same home, experience the same opportunities, and they always turn out the same, right? Hardly! No two children are exactly alike, even children from the same family.

That's true not only today. It was true in the *first family*. When we open our Bibles to Genesis 4 we're introduced to the world's first parents, Adam and Eve, and the world's first children, Cain and Abel.

In light of God's warning in Genesis 2 and man's sinful choice in Genesis 3, what would you expect to find in Genesis 4? The Genesis 2 prediction was *eat and you will die*. The Genesis 3 choice was *to eat*. You would expect, then, to see next the record of *death*, wouldn't you?

But what do we find when we come to Genesis 4? Do we see death? The answer is surprising. Yes, we see a *dying* world, but Adam won't die physically until chapter 5. What do we see in Genesis 4? In a word we see *grace*, what theologians refer to as *common grace*. In fact, we see two amazing expressions of God's common grace in Genesis 4:1-12 that make family possible even in a fallen world. Let's take a closer look.

#### I. The first parents experienced God's grace (1-2).

Verses 1-2 "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.'" <sup>2</sup> And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground."

Notice verse 1, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived." Stop there. Does that sound like death? Just the opposite. Although Adam and Eve sinned, God now graciously enables them to create *life*. What kind of life?

**A. God gave them children.** Verse 1 again, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." And another child in verse 2, "And again, she bore his brother Abel."

Remember, God created Adam and Eve as mature, grown adults, Adam fashioned out of the dirt, Eve out of a rib from Adam's side. With the rest of humanity God used a different means. Adam 'knew' Eve his wife. God created Adam and Eve as sexual beings, with the ability to procreate, and this as a demonstration of His kindness and generosity. He *gave* them children. And how did the first parents respond?

**B. They gave God the credit.** Listen to Eve in verse 1, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." That's an amazing confession from Eve. She acknowledges that God exists, that God helps, and that God is the giver of children.<sup>2</sup>

Ponder Eve's faith-cry. Was Eve saved? What did it even mean to be 'saved' then? Eve didn't know of Jesus or the Cross, though God gave her a veiled promise in Genesis 3:15. There would be no sacrificial system until Moses came along in the fifteenth century BC.

Eve knew that God was holy. She knew that God judged sin. She knew He had been merciful to her. She knew God provided for her need of clothing, and now had given her a son. Eve was saved by faith alone, just as we must be.

Faith is more than a mere mental agreement with some facts about God. Faith is believing that God exists, that He's personally involved in your life, that He graciously provides for your needs. All of your needs, including forgiveness, and eternal life, and everything needed for this life too.

---

<sup>2</sup> In fact, in Hebrew Cain's name means 'to acquire.' There seems to be a play on words when Eve says, "With the LORD's help I have *acquired* a man."

Friends, real faith shows up when you come to church on Sunday to give thanks, yes, but also when you have a child. A person who truly believes in God acknowledges God as the source of that and every gift.

And let's not miss Eve's perspective on children. Children are a blessing, a gift from God. They're certainly not a nuisance and never a mistake. Children are an opportunity to bring into the world another generation of people who can honor and serve God.

Moms and dads, is that the way you are thinking about your children, as a gift from God, and an undeserved expression of His common grace? And if it is, is this blessing from Him prompting you even now to turn to Him, to acknowledge Him as the Giver and therefore the One who deserves your thanks and devotion?

It's interesting what often happens when a young couple has a child. Prior to the birth of that child, the couple is wrapped up in work and perhaps play. And then they see the child. And what happens? They're reminded of Someone, and of their need for that Someone, and of His amazing goodness and worth.

Yet there's more. Not only did the first parents experience God's grace, but so did the first children.

## II. The first children experienced God's grace (3-12).

Grace is when God gives us what we don't deserve. Grace is God's unmerited favor and help. The expressions of God's grace in our lives are so many that we're prone to miss them. What effect should grace have on us? We find out by looking at the first children. One got it right. The other missed it again and again.

The two brothers were very different. Occupationally, they differed. Cain was a farmer, Abel a herdsman. And they were different when it came to their response to God's grace. Very different.

**A. Abel responded in the right way (3-4).** How do we know? Look at what happened in verses 3-4, "In the course of time [how much time we're not told] Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,<sup>4</sup> and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering."

Look carefully at these two brothers, first at Abel. Abel was a man of God. How do I know? I know it because there are two characteristics in the life of a person who pleases God, and by God's grace Abel exhibited both of them.

*1. He exhibited proper faith.* Real faith. Genuine faith. Saving faith. Remember, Abel never knew the joy of Eden. Like every other child post-Genesis 3, Abel entered the world with a sin nature, cut off from God. But somewhere along life's journey, by the grace of God, Abel began to believe in the God he could not see. And he put his trust in Him. He began to exhibit *faith* in God.

You say, "How do you know Abel had proper faith?" Because Hebrews 11:4 says so. In fact Hebrews 11:4 tells us more about Abel than Genesis 4 does. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead."

Did you catch that? *By faith... by faith... by faith.* The verse repeats the phrase three times as a summary of Abel's life. Abel was a man who, enabled by grace, exhibited genuine, real, proper faith.

He also exemplified a second characteristic that's found in any person who is pleasing God.

2. *He exhibited proper action.* Faith and action always go hand in hand. And in Abel's case, what was the proper action? In the course of time, Abel did something. For that matter, so did Cain but his action was deficient.

What did they do? They both brought offerings to God. Why? Did God tell them to do so? The text doesn't say. But from the beginning, people—even wicked Cain—have recognized that the God who gave them life deserves their worship.

But not all worship is acceptable worship. This is an important reality that God Himself makes clear again and again in the Bible. There's true worship, and there's false worship, and we see them both in the first family.

In Abel's case, he worshiped God by bringing an acceptable offering to God. He gave God some fat portions from firstborn animals he raised. His offering was evidence of his faith. And it pleased the Lord.

Not so with Cain, as verse 5 reveals. “But on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.” Why not? We're not told, not here. We might conjecture, “It's because Cain brought a grain offering instead of an animal offering.” But later in Israel's worship God commanded and accepted grain offerings (e.g. Lev 2:1). Others have suggested that sheep-herders were more acceptable to God than farmers. One ancient Jewish interpretation says Cain's problem was that he failed to observe proper ritual when he brought his offering. The fact is that none of these suggestions have biblical support.

Thankfully, God gives us the answer. Where? In Hebrews 11:4, which says, “By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.” What pleased God about Abel's offering? He brought it *by faith*. Again, the text tells us three times that Abel brought his offering *by faith*. The implication? Cain's offering was *not* by faith. Cain did not have what Abel did. Cain had a *deficient* faith.

Again, don't miss this. Not all faith is *saving* faith. James 2:19 says that demons have a type of faith, that they “believe God, yet tremble.”

This raises the question, “What's true of *genuine* faith?” Look carefully at the answer given in Hebrews 11. True faith involves three ingredients.

**a. True faith involves a relationship.** It's more than saying, “Sure I believe in God. Doesn't everybody?” Genuine faith involves a relationship. “By faith Abel offered *God* a better sacrifice. True faith involves a personal relationship with God.

**b. True faith involves a life-changing acceptance.** Acceptance of what? Of the provision and promise of God. That's the point Hebrews 11 makes at the outset. What is true faith? According to verses 1-2 (NIV), “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.”

Who are ‘the ancients’? Abel was one of them. And for what were the ancients commended? They took God at His word. They were *sure* about God's provision and promise.

What did Abel offer to God? Some of the firstborn of his flock, the best he had. And what part of the animal is specifically mentioned? He offered *fat portions* to God. Maybe it goes without saying, but in order to offer the fat portion to God, what did Abel need to do? He had to kill the animal and cut out the fat portion, just like the priests would later do in Moses' day.<sup>3</sup>

**c. True faith involves the heart, not just externals.** Hebrews 11:6 indicates that people of faith are those who “believe that God exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Abel was influenced by God's actions (see Gen. 3:21).

You see, a person can have religious ritual and not have a faith-based-relationship with God. Apparently Cain did. Was Cain a 'religious' person? I think so. He was religious enough to bring an offering to God. And Genesis 4 doesn't say that Cain brought leftovers, either.

Both men brought their best to God. Both participated in worship. Both brothers did the same thing *outwardly*. The only difference was something only God could discern because only God knew their hearts.

Please realize that *what* Cain did was not wrong. *Why* he did it *was* wrong. Cain's problem is one the Bible attacks from Genesis to Revelation. God takes no pleasure in outward forms of worship when the worshipper's motivation is anything other than appreciation for divine grace.

So if we want to know the proper response to grace, let's look carefully at Abel. This is what is needed in our families, for ourselves and our children. The Bible commends Abel as a righteous man, with genuine saving faith. And even though he's dead he still speaks to us, as Hebrews 11:4 puts it.

What about Cain? To put it plainly...

**B. Cain responded in the wrong way (5-12).** Cain was not what we might call a 'secular' man. He had a religious side to him. He brought God an offering, a costly offering, one he raised with his own hands and sweat. And he brought it "to the LORD," as verse 3 clearly specifies.

Friends, if Cain was living in our day, he'd be in church on Sunday, and not just sitting in the back either. He'd be a charter church member, a good worker, a tither. And he'd be just as lost as the agnostic who never darkens the door of the church house.

What's wrong with Cain? What's missing? Parents and grandparents, we need to know the answer to that question. Frankly, many parents are raising little Cains, and proud of it. Who wouldn't be pleased to have a child that takes his work seriously, and his religion?

Consider a couple of observations about Cain.

*1. He had privileges (1-2).* Let's start with his occupation. Cain worked the soil. Nothing wrong with that. He learned that from his father. Adam, too, worked the soil. It's good to work. We were created to work. Cain grew up in a home that taught him to work. Indeed, Cain had a lot going for him.

**a. He was raised in the same home with Abel.** Same loving mother. Same devoted father. Were they sinners? Sure. Did they miss the parenting mark at times? Yes. But they did so with both boys. Can grew up in the same home with Abel.

**b. He received the same opportunities Abel did.** Again, the same parental love, the same teaching, the same modeling, the same exposure to divine truth.

Can't you just imagine the stories Adam and Eve told these boys as they sat around the dinner table? About their walks with God in the garden. About the paradise they enjoyed, and forfeited. You can be sure they told their boys about that fateful day, about that conversation with the serpent, about their foolish decision to listen to his evil advice rather than God's good word.

And certainly, you know that Adam and Eve talked frankly with their sons about the consequences of disobeying God. And about His grace, and how He met their needs by giving them clothing, and forgiveness, through the death of a bloody substitute.

Again, both sons heard these stories. Both Cain as well as Abel. There is no indication in the biblical record that Cain's problem was poor parenting, or a lack of education, and not even some traumatic experience. In fact, it wasn't something around Cain that happened or didn't happen. It was something *in* Cain.

That was his problem. Oh, he had privileges. What he lacked was true faith.

2. *He had a deficient faith (3-12).* Genuine faith is something you can't hide. The same is true for deficient faith. Give it time, put a little pressure on it, and it will always show its true colors. When faith is real, you'll see it. When it's deficient, you'll see that too. By their fruit, you will know them, according to Jesus.

Cain's deficient faith showed up in four very tangible ways. You'll note a downward spiral in these four expressions of deficient faith.

**a. He disobeyed God (5).** Cain brought a grain offering to God. That might impress us, but it didn't impress God for reasons we've already discussed. And so, God rejected Cain's offering.

I want to repeat a personal story that I shared a couple of weeks ago, for it's quite pertinent. When I was about five I went into our neighbor's garage and found an old football. It was lopsided from use and the inside rubber was exposed. That gave me an idea. I ran home, got a pin, and returned to conduct an experiment on that football. I wondered what would happen if I put the pin into the exposed rubber on the ball, and so I did it. And the ball went flat. I told my mother about my experiment and do you know what she did? She made me go knock on my neighbor's door, confess my deed, and ask for their forgiveness.

Why did my mother confront my sinful behavior rather than excuse it or overlook it? It was an expression of her love for me, right?

The fact that God rejected Cain's offering and let him know about it is a good thing for Cain. God's rejection is actually a demonstration of His grace. By helping Cain see his shortcoming, God is giving Cain an opportunity to change.

How did Cain react? Here's the second expression of deficient faith.

**b. He became angry and depressed (5b).** "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell [NIV 'was downcast']." Who is he angry with? Apparently, with *God*. The world says it's okay to be angry with God if you're disappointed with Him. That's not what the Bible teaches.

It ticked off Cain that God didn't accept his offering. Consequently, his anger affected his countenance. Literally, 'his face slumped.' What a vivid word picture of depression. It's worth noting that depression and anger often go hand in hand.. They did with Cain.

What should Cain have done when God rejected his offering? He should have found out *why* his offering was unacceptable, right? And then he should have repented, and made things right with God.

How do we know? Just listen to the questions God asked Cain in response to Cain's despondency. God, the perfect counselor, asks Cain three questions in verses 6-7. "The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?' <sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted?'"

Notice the questions. First, "Why are you angry?" That's a good question for a self-absorbed, depressed person. The second question (NIV), "Why is your face downcast?" In the ESV, "Why has your face fallen?" In other words, "Cain, snap out of it!" And the third question, "If you do well [NIV 'what is right'], will you not be accepted?"

God is obviously the best counselor anyone could ever have. Watch how He works with Cain. First, He asks him two probing questions about his *feelings*. Then, with his third question He helps Cain see that his poor feelings are linked to his sinful *actions*.

What's Cain's problem? He's feeling poorly, but are his feelings the problem? Does he have 'emotional' problems? No. His emotions are working just fine. He's feeling depressed, and that's a good thing. Why? His feelings are God's gracious gift to tell him he has a fundamental problem. And what is it? It's not complicated. Cain has failed to do what's right. The solution? Cain needs to do what's right.

Which is exactly why God followed up the third question with a stern warning in verse 7. “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”<sup>4</sup>

Is there grace in that warning? Indeed there is. God is giving Cain an opportunity to change. What a merciful God! God didn't want Cain to fail. Granted, God knew what Cain would do, yet still he warned him. He talked straight with Cain about the *danger of sin*, ‘it's crouching at your door.’ And the *power of sin*, ‘it desires to have you.’ And the *remedy for sin*, ‘you must master it.’

Friends, Cain thinks his feelings are the problem. He sees himself as a victim. But God lovingly says, “No, Cain. You don't have to remain in your depressed stupor. You're feeling the way you're feeling, not because of your parents, nor your brother, but because of your sinful heart. Deal with your sin, or your sin will deal with you.”

Hard words to hear? Yes. But so necessary, for Cain, and for all who are like Cain. And we all are when we first come into the world. Proud. Self-righteous. Convinced we can make things right with God on our own merit.

I remember hearing the prayer of man in my study one morning. He told me he'd always thought he was a Christian. After all, he was a faithful church-goer. And then, after spending weeks together studying the gospel of John, his eyes were opened by the Spirit of God to the truth. And so he prayed, “Oh, God, there's a great gulf between me and You. And I cannot reach You. I need You to reach me. And I know that's why You sent Jesus, to save me.”

Let's set the record straight. Everyone is a sinner, including Christians. But a Christian, a true Christian, is a person who takes his sin seriously, who deals with his sin in the way God has provided. Not by trying to compensate God, but by receiving a gift from God, not of works, so no one can boast.

This is the mark of a true believer. We see it in Moses. Yes, Moses killed a man, but he took his sin seriously, and experienced God's forgiveness and restoration. We see it in John Mark, who quit the ministry once, but faced up to his shortcoming, and by the grace of God started serving again. We see it in Paul, and Peter, and James and John. They sinned, and their sins are recorded in black and white. But enabled by grace, they repented of their sins, and received God's forgiveness.

God gave Cain the same opportunity to deal with his sin. Just like he's doing with you and me today. Hear His invitation, “Sin is crouching at the door, but you must rule over it.”

You say, “But I can't. Sin is too powerful. I can't rule over it!”

And that's the point. You can't defeat this powerful enemy. But if you will ask Him, if you will do what He says is right, namely, if you will learn to live *by faith*, He will do it for you, and set you free from its power.

We must experience what Paul described in Galatians 2:20. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live *by faith* in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

My friend, Jesus Christ lived perfectly, and then died in the place of sinners, including you and me, for our sin. He rose again and now offers to you a new life, a transformed life. Indeed, He offers to live *through you*.

What does He ask of you? Faith. He asks you, He commands you, to believe Him, to believe in Him, to put your total trust in Him and in His power and in His word. Then, enabled by His power, you can begin to choose to *do right*.

---

<sup>4</sup> In the NIV, “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

This is God's counsel to Cain. And how did he respond to God's counsel? Sadly, he didn't say a word. Silence. Sulking. Brooding. But in time, the silence spilled out into a third expression of Cain's deficient faith.

Listen to verse 8 in the ESV, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."<sup>5</sup>

**c. He killed his brother and lied about it (8).** Unthinkable, yet true. Murder in the first family. You say, "I don't understand. He's upset with God, I see that. But why kill his brother?"

We discover an important insight about Cain in 1 John 3:12, "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because *his own actions were evil* and his brother's were righteous."

There's the answer. Why did Cain kill his brother? John says that Cain's problem preceded his murder. John says Cain did so because his *actions* were evil. The "big" sin (murder) started with other "little" sins (little to us, that is), an unacceptable sacrifice, anger, pride, the refusal to heed God's counsel.

It's the "little foxes that spoil the vine (Song of Songs 2:15)." It always starts with "little" sins. Ananias and Sapphira sold some property and gave a gift to the church. The problem wasn't with what they gave, but with what they *said* they gave, yet didn't. They just stretched the truth a little bit, and their "little" sin cost them their lives.

Had Cain heeded God's counsel, he could have broken his downward spiral into sin. But he didn't. His disobedience, which led to anger, which resulted in depression, sent him into a deep brooding, until he did the unthinkable.

He talked with his brother, and apparently used some deception to coax him into a secluded place in the field. And there he killed him. Cain committed cold-hearted, premeditated murder.

It doesn't make sense, does it? Why did Cain take out his anger on Abel? Abel hadn't done anything but live a godly life, had he? That's exactly what Abel did. He lived a godly life. And a person who lives a godly life is like a burr in the saddle to an ungodly person, a constant reminder that there is a standard that they've missed.

Think back to your school days. Remember the person who was the brain in the class, the guy or gal that always aced the tests? How do students treat the student that excels? Do they congratulate him, pat him on the back and say, "Way to go! It's great to have you around!"? Hardly. Usually, classmates ridicule the 'brain.' Why? Does he make them miss answers on their tests? No. But his very presence is a reminder that they're missing the mark.

Cain could take it no longer. Every time he saw Abel, the madder he got. He either had to get right with God, or get rid of Abel. In the end, he chose the latter.

It's just like Jesus later said. "Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment (Matthew 5:22)." The anger came first, friends, and then the murder. Anger destroys people, starting with ourselves, and then those around us.

Now notice verse 9, "Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?'"

Again, don't miss God's grace in that question. There's hope for Cain, even now, if he will but face up to his sin.

But he refuses. In fact, he lies to God. "I don't know," he replied." And then he tries to justify himself with a question of his own.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" What's Cain doing? He's hiding and hurling. We've seen this before, haven't we? Just like his dad and mom did with God in chapter 3.

---

<sup>5</sup> Here's the NIV, "Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him."



At this point, God has had enough. After all, He's holy and just. So He sends a bolt of lightning and removes this lying murderer from His planet.

No, He doesn't. To the contrary, He keeps pursuing the sinner. More grace, this time in the form of another question. In verse 10, "And the LORD said, 'What have you done?'" The question is not for God's sake, but Cain's. If there's any hope for Cain, he must learn to face up to his sin.

But God doesn't wait for an answer this time, for He knows it's not coming. This time God gives Cain a piece of information to consider, at the end of verse 10. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

Cain sinned in secret. He thought no one knew. But he's wrong, and God lets him know he's wrong. "I hear your brother's blood crying out to Me," He tells Cain.

Again, do you see the grace of God in this? Parents, we must see this. This is how we must deal with our children when they sin, and they will sin. We must keep going after them. We must do all we can to help them see how serious their sin is, as is ours, how it must be dealt with, how it can be dealt with by the grace of God.

And then God shares with Cain another expression of His grace. He informs him that he is going to experience consequences for his sin. Notice verses 11-12, "And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

Once again, this penalty is actually another expression of God's grace. He's trying to get Cain's attention by touching what he loves most, *his work*. Every time Cain reaches down to work the soil and gets a handful of thorns, it will be a reminder that he is not right with God and desperately needs to be!

Parents, we are prone to try and shield our children from the consequences of their sins. That's not wise. When we do that, we're interfering with God's good intention to use the consequences of sin to get their attention.

So how did Cain respond? Was he remorseful? Did he cry out, "Oh God! I have sinned. I deserve my punishment for You are just in your ways! Be merciful to me a sinner!?" Was that Cain's response? No. What then?

We don't have time now to see the answer in detail, but just scan the rest of the chapter and notice the tragic outcome. First, in verses 13-14, Cain complains about his bad lot in life. And then, he just walks away from the Lord. Verse 16 says, "Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod."

In other words, Cain just got on with life. According to verse 17, he had a son, built a city, even named it after his son. And he did it all *without the Lord*. In other words...

**d. He ended up living a self-sufficient life (12-18).** Time and time again, God extended grace to Cain, by letting him live, giving him strength to work, even blessing him with children. But time and time again, Cain said *no thanks*. I don't need You in my life.

And so God gave Cain what he convinced himself that he wanted, a self-sufficient life, a life without God, to his own eternal peril.

#### Make It Personal: What do we learn from the first family?

We learn about three vital subjects.

1. *We learn about God.* We learn that God is patient and longsuffering, merciful and kind. But He is also holy and just, and to come to Him, we must come on *His terms*.

And this is precisely where Cain's trouble began. He settled for what Patrick Morley calls 'cultural Christianity.' In his book *Man in the Mirror* Morley observes: "Cultural Christianity means to pursue the God we want instead of the God who is. It is the

tendency to be shallow in our understanding of God, wanting him to be more of a gentle grandfather type who spoils us and lets us have our own way. It is sensing a need for God, but on our own terms. It is wanting the God we have underlined in our Bibles without wanting the rest of Him, too. It is God relative instead of God absolute.”<sup>6</sup>

2. *We learn about the problem of sin.* “If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at *your* door.” That warning God gave Cain applies to us, too. We’re born in sin. Sin isn’t some abstract concept. Sin is an active reality within us. It’s a monster, and if we don’t deal with it, it will destroy us and even those around us.

But the problem is, we can’t deal with it. It’s too powerful for us. We can’t put chains on this monster. We can’t tame him either. We can try to hide him behind the walls of a ‘good life,’ we can even add religion to our life to make our monster look respectable. But at the end of the day that monster is still there, growing in strength, looking for the right opportunity to destroy us, to destroy us *eternally*.

My friend, learn from the first family! Don’t cling to your self-righteous efforts to please God, as did Cain. Be like Abel. Put your faith fully in God, specifically in His perfect Son, Jesus Christ, who nailed monster-sin to the cross (see Col. 2:13-15).

3. *We learn about our need for grace and genuine saving faith.* How different the first family’s story would read if only Cain had acknowledged his need for grace! How different our family’s story will read if only we learn to cherish grace!

**Closing Song:** #406 “*My Hope Is in the Lord*” (all four verses)

**Closing charge:** Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Community Group Discussion:

1. As we continue our series today on *The Christian Family*, we’re considering the world’s first parents and first children in Genesis 4. We’re also continuing to get to know about each other’s families. How many brothers and sisters did your parents have? How many children were in your family growing up? How were you and your siblings similar, and different?

2. In this morning’s message, we looked at the world’s first parents and children in Genesis 4:1-12. After reading the passage again, discuss these questions. What do we learn about God from this account that can encourage parents? What helpful insights do we learn about children from this passage?

3. What kind of son was Cain? What kind of son was Abel? How would you describe their relationship with God, and with each other?

4. Without question, God is the perfect counselor, and in verse 7, God gives counsel to Cain. What was His counsel, and what effect did it have on Cain?

5. As Christian parents, we long to see our children (and grandchildren) share our faith. But what do we learn about faith from this account? What does it take for a child (or adult for that matter) to experience saving faith? After discussing this, spend time as a group praying for the salvation of the next generation(s).

---

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Morley, *Man in the Mirror*, p. 33.