



Time to Reflect

- Can you think of occasions in your life when you experienced rivalry with someone else? How did it make you feel?
- How do we picture God? How does it feel to realise that we are known, loved, and valued by God?

Last week we started our series of studies on Characters of the Bible. We looked at Adam and Eve and we were reminded of several important lessons. Firstly, that humans are made in the image of God. Secondly, that the gift of life is God-given. Thirdly, that humans are charged, by God, with looking after the world that He made. Finally, that we need to value and grow deeper in our relationships with God. This week we move on to think about Cain and Abel and see what we can learn from their experiences.

“Sin has damaged Adam and Eve’s relationship with God and with each other. In this chapter sin spreads further: a family is torn apart and violence escalates.”

(Richard and Tricia Johnson, ‘Discovering Genesis,’ p41)

Character Profile

- Genesis 4 begins with a story of good news regarding Adam and Eve – the births of their sons Cain and Abel. This is welcomed news following the events in Eden.
- At the end of (v2) the brothers are knowingly compared. Their respective vocations are outlined (v2b). It’s interesting that in the opening five verses of the passage Cain and Abel are compared four times in a chiasmic pattern. This draws attention to the issue of sibling rivalry.
- Now, we all know what it is like to be competitive. It’s almost normal and even expected in life.
- The famous film director Peter Jackson once suggested **“Rivalry doesn’t help anybody.”** There is some truth in this statement. Our first lessons from the lives of Cain and Abel, even at this early stage, is a warning about rivalry.
- As we reach (v3), it is clear that some time has passed since the beginning of the chapter. Both brothers bring offerings to the Lord. (v4) tells us that the Lord looked with favour on Abel’s offering but not on Cain’s. Why did this happen?
- It is widely accepted that Cain’s offering was not accepted by God because his attitude was wrong. It probably had little to do with what was offered. There is another important lesson to think about here – our attitudes are important!
- Cain’s attitude was wrong and this is revealed in (v5b). Anger



surfaces and his face told the story! (v6)

- This leads us to reflect on how we react when things don't work out as we expected. Do we point fingers in blame or do we engage in rigorous self-reflection?
- Cain may have been jealous because Abel's offering was accepted. He was certainly angry towards God! From here the sin in Cain's life would develop at an incredible rate.
- We also learn something about the nature of God through this experience (v7). God recognised the anger that existed within Cain and offered him advice that could stop the progression of sin in his life.
- These are words of care and warning, straight from the heart of our loving Heavenly Father. Cain now found himself at a junction in his life and he had to choose what direction to go.
- He had the option of following a righteous path whereby he would reoffer his sacrifice to God; but he could also ignore this advice and follow his own path.
- Again, there is a lesson here about following God's guidance as we journey through life. We are encouraged to be true to His leading, even when we feel vulnerable and must rely solely on Him, and choose to follow God's ways.
- Cain chose poorly and his life spiralled out of control. The progression of sin reaches an appalling climax when Cain deceives and murders his brother (v8).
- (v9) God asks a leading question and Cain responds with a lie! God asks him 'What have you done?' A heart-breaking question! In turn, Cain is punished (v11-12) and then remorse kicks in (v13-14), but only when he feels self-pity.
- Once more we have an insight to the very nature of God as He responds with grace, mercy and love (v15).
- (v16) highlights how Cain left the presence of God and lived east of Eden. What a sad image of a man walking away from God!
- But God still loved Cain and blessings came in his later life (v17-18). He had a wife, a family, and he established a city (although he named it after his son Enoch).
- We get a snapshot of Cain's family line (v18-22) – the first family tree of the Bible!
- Note how the sin that had previously consumed Cain can be also be discerned in the lives of some of his descendants with polygamy being evident and murder reappearing.
- Sin continued to develop in humanity. Lamech's murder of a young man was a callous act.
- Derek Kidner points out that "Lamech's taunt-song reveals the swift progress of sin. Where Cain had succumbed to it Lamech exults in it..."
- Sin can so easily consume us. This is why confession and drawing close to God is so important.
- This passage does not categorise all of Cain's descendants as sinful and there are several individuals who are specifically named for positive reasons (v20-21).
- As we come to the end of Ch4 we encounter good news. People began to call on the name of the Lord (v26).

