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# The Abundant Life | A Tale of Two Offerings

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## Introduction

The storyline of the Bible is a story of God's abundant generosity — and what human beings have done with His generosity. It is a story of giving and taking.

When you start in the beginning of the human story in the book of Genesis, you realize there is nothing new under the sun. The word for Genesis is the same word for “gene” or “genetics.” In the first few chapters of Genesis, we get the genetic code, the DNA strand of the human race. All of the rest of history is a playing out of rebellion or redemption — the takers, and the givers. Those being conformed to the image of this world — or those being fashioned into the image of God.

Today, we're going to look at the story of two brothers... two offerings...and the lovingkindness of God.

### THE SUBTLETY OF SIN THE TWO OFFERINGS THE KINDNESS OF GOD

*...according to the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4...*

#### Genesis 4:1-8

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**. <sup>3</sup> **In the course of time** 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, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. <sup>6</sup> 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? 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>8</sup> Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” <sup>10</sup> And the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

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## The subtlety of sin

One of the greatest dangers for Christians today is to look at the evil, division, violence, and destruction in the world, and to begin *to believe that it's all out there...* it's far away. It's especially easy to believe that in Williamson County.

What the story of Cain and Abel tells us, and what God tells us in this story is that while there is evil out there... the most dangerous form of it... is right here. That it's *prowling around like a roaring lion, seeking whom it may devour*. It's ready to bring destruction in and through your life.

## Genesis 4:7

“...sin is crouching at the door.”

There’s no greater illustration of this than what you’re about to watch...

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7debB7Nsok>
- You watch that and you think... “*Aww, but it’s so cute and cuddly.*” **Wrong!** That little fluffball wants to kill you!

What God tells Cain is that **sin is like a predatory animal**... it’s crouching... it’s quietly, subtly inching closer and closer until it’s too late! It’s waiting for just the right moment to pounce, to capture you, and devour its prey.

Our greatest threat is not the sin that exists out there — our greatest threat is the sin that exists right here. The sin that is subtly and quietly growing in our own hearts — the hiddenness of it, and the true power of it — the sin right here has far more potential to rob us of the abundant life God wants to give us than any sin that exists *out there*.

Sin is always saying, “*I’m not that bad, I’m not that big of a deal...*”

- **EXAMPLE:** If you have a grudge against someone, sin is saying, “Well, I’m not that bad of a grudge. I’m not a big grudge. It’s just righteous indignation anyway...” Too late. You’re dead. Sin has you...
  - If you think that grudge is going to stay nice and small and isolated from other parts of your life — sin has already won.
- **EXAMPLE:** Self-pity. If you’re always thinking about how bad you have it compared to everyone else... sin already has you! If you’re going to wallow in self-pity, you have to eradicate gratitude from your life — there can be no recognition of God’s goodness to you if you’re entertaining self-pity. You’ll always be grumpy and mad at people for no reason at all... and you’ll be especially mad at happy people just because they’re happy and you’re not...
- **EXAMPLE:** As we talked last week about tithing and about God’s abundant provision... if you’re constantly withholding from God, or your constantly worried about money, sin says... “*Oh it’s not stinginess or materialism, or greed... It’s just prudence.*”

Sin is always saying, “*Oh, c’mon, I’m not that big of a deal.*”

This is exactly what plays out in our story.

Sin, bitterness, hatred, and murder were growing in Cain’s heart long before he ever took his brother’s life.

*And I want you to realize this...*

## Genesis 4:1

“**I have gotten a man** with the help of the Lord.”

One of the unfortunate realities of the English translation, is sometimes it shades or completely misses the meaning in the original language. *In the original Hebrew, Eve is not recognizing God’s hand in the first conceived human being.*

Eve really is giving no credit to God. Instead, she's saying **I've created a man in comparison to the Lord**. On some level, Eve is saying, "I am equal with God. I have equal power to God, because I created a human being, just like He did..."

- And if that level of pride, that arrogance, carried over into her parenting of Cain — Cain is headed for disaster. That pride, the arrogance... the jealousy... the envy... is already growing in his heart before we ever get to the offerings they bring.

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## The two offerings

### Genesis 4:2-5

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. <sup>3</sup> **In the course of time** 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, <sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard.

**OBJECTION:** *Poor Cain. Don't you kind of feel bad for the guy? What's with the favoritism here?*

Fortunately, that's not what's happening here. Both Cain and Abel had the promise that their parents had received — that one day, a descendent of Eve would wrestle with and destroy sin and death forever. We read in Hebrews 11... why Abel's offering was accepted by God... and why Cain's was not...

### Hebrews 11:4

**By faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

The author of Hebrews tells us that it was Abel's *faith* that made his offering pleasing and acceptable to God. How do we know that? How do we see that in the story?

### Two Principles from Abel's Offering:

#### 1. Faith Brings the First

### Genesis 4:4

...Abel also brought of the **firstborn of his flock** and of their fat portions.

- Abel brought his first to the Lord. The firstborn of his flock! Do you realize how costly that would have been. You don't know how many more sheep are coming after this one! You don't know if your sheep will be able to reproduce again after this? This is your source of wealth, of provision, this is your primary resource... and you're going to take the first of it and sacrifice it!?

If you don't trust God, and you live with a scarcity mentality, and you don't believe God is a generous host, a God of abundance that longs to bless you — **if you don't have FAITH in the abundant generosity of God — there's no way you're going to sacrifice and offer the first and best to the Lord.**

*But if you believe that God really is as generous, and as kind, and loving, and as giving as He says He is... only then would you be able to make a sacrifice THAT significant.*

### Genesis 4:4

...Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their **fat portions**.

## 1. Faith Brings the Best.

The fat portions would have been the best part of the animal... it was the most valuable for trade, and the best for eating.

Rather than giving the worst parts to God, and saving the best for himself... Abel brings the best to God, withholds nothing from Him, and trusts that God will provide for him. Abel is saying, *“God you are worthy of my very best. I trust that no matter what I bring to you, you have the power to replace and replenish 10-fold or even more so if you desire. I give you the best I have to offer.”*

Now, look at Cain...

### Genesis 4:3

**In the course of time** Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the **fruit of the ground**,

“In the course of time...” — in other words, he got around to it eventually. Not a priority at all... and it wasn't the first fruits... it was just some fruit.

- In other words, there's no faith! There's no trust. There is no real sacrifice at all... it's like Cain thinks he's doing God a favor by giving Him anything at all! He's giving out of obligation, not cheerfully, begrudgingly... but because he has to!

Is that your heart toward God? When you give... do you think you're doing God a favor? Do you feel it when you give? Is there tension when you give?

**Because God doesn't need your money... but your heart needs your trust to be rooted in God.**

And what God is doing in this passage is he's reinforcing what human beings have desperately needed from the beginning of creation... a radical, deep, dependence, and trust in God as our unbelievable generous provider.

**Abel is a giver. Cain is a taker.**  
**Abel brings the first. Cain brings the last.**  
**Abel brings his best. Cain brings the least.**  
**Abel's giving was faithful. Cain's giving was faithless.**

Are you an Abel or a Cain? Do you bring your first and best to God? Or is what you bring to God an afterthought? Do you give Him the leftovers? Or when you bring your offerings to God, above and beyond the tithe, is it your first and best? That's what Abel is bringing to God because He trusts Him.

And in the month of December we're going to be kicking off what we're calling our “Freedom Fund.” We're going to partner with our friends at Conduit Church, and a network of churches in Pakistan. We're going to bring an offering to the Lord in the month of December and WE are going to bring Freedom to enslaved families on the other side of the world.

*It's time for the Church to quit with small-minded, little “k” Kingdom Christianity, and actually be the Church the world needs! We're linking arms with the capital “C” Church! And together, and in the name of Jesus, we're going to set the captives free!*

**Our responsibility is to bring our first, and our best... and let God do the rest.** That requires trust. Stretching, trying, tension-filled trust. Here's my challenge for you now... begin to pray about what

God would have you bring an offering to Him so that He might set the captives free... *more details coming soon.*

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## The kindness of God

God tries to help Cain. In this passage, you see the gentleness of God, the kindness of God. God isn't a cosmic policeman. He's the Wonderful Counselor.

**1. God intervenes with Cain early on.** He doesn't wait until Cain commits evil... God comes to him before he ever gets to that point.

### Genesis 4:6

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?"

- Why are you sad? Why are you depressed? Why are you so angry?
- God is not far off with arms crossed, tapping his foot waiting for Cain to blow it. He comes down to him.

**2. God intervenes tenderly.** God could have come down to Cain and said, "What's your problem? How dare you question how I handle offerings. Do you know who I am?"

He doesn't say, "What right do you have to be angry?" *He says, "Why are you angry?"*

God isn't saying "Buck up! Get right!" *He comes in and invites Cain to look within... at his motives... at his heart. God is a Counselor. God in the next verse does say "Do the right thing."*

### Genesis 4:6

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? 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."

He says, "You know what Cain, it reveals that you don't trust that I'm good. — that I'm for you. You have no idea how *for* you I am..." and He invited Him, do well. Another chance. Do the right thing.

But the key is, God doesn't JUST say, "*Do the right thing.*" He invites Cain — and He invites us to look deeper — to take inventory.

Cain doesn't respond to God. The sin that was growing in Him drives him further than he ever wanted to go — he kills his brother. God gives Cain his sentence, to be a fugitive and a wanderer... always on the run, never having a home.

### Genesis 4:13

Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." <sup>15</sup> Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. <sup>16</sup> Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord...

God is both **punishing and protecting** Cain, simultaneously.

“God’s concern for justice for the innocent is matched only by one other thing: his care the sinner. Even the whiney prayer of Cain had contained a germ of an appeal. God answered his pledge, together with this mark or sign. It was not a stigma but safe conduct, and it makes God virtually Cain’s protector. It is the most mercy can do for the unrepentant.”<sup>1</sup>

~ Derek Kidner

Cain isn’t receiving God’s kindness. He’s only worried about the punishment. But God in His mercy gives him His protection.

A truly repentant person says, “My punishment is just,” but an unrepentant person says, “*This is more than I deserve. God you’re going overboard! This isn’t fair! This isn’t right!*” And even then, God still shows kindness and grace.

But God showed tremendous care to a whiney, unrepentant murderer. And God exercised both **justice and mercy**. It’s not one or the other, it’s *both and*.

Now most of us lean 100% one way or the other — it’s either all justice, “punish and be done with Him,” or all mercy, “forgive him and let him stay.”

One of the greatest challenges for Christians is to be people of both Justice and Mercy. To say, “*What you’re doing is wrong, but I’m not against you.*” And then to actually prove it. To say, “*You’re doing wrong, but I love you and I’m with you, and I’m for you.*” And then prove it.

**Our culture says**, “If you loved me, if you were for me, *you wouldn’t just accept how I choose to live, you’d celebrate it.*” “Either you accept me completely or you reject me completely, there is no other option.” *And if you’re here and that’s what you think, you’re wrong.*

God says justice and mercy. Not just justice. Not just mercy. Both/And.

**Now here’s where this story gets really good:** If God is this patient, and this good, and this kind, and this merciful to Cain, an unrepentant murderer... if God doesn’t give up on Cain, if God is protecting Cain... if he cares that much for Cain — ***there is no question that he cares for you no matter what you’ve done.***

*And if you’re even just a little bit repentant, a little bit sorrowful over the sin in your life... you are way ahead of Cain!*

Last thing...

**Earlier in the story, Eve proudly compares herself to God in her creative power...** “I’ve made a man in comparison with God...”

Later she has another son... His name is Seth (which means *appointed*). Look at how her language changes...

### **Genesis 4:25**

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “**God has appointed for me** another offspring...”

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner. *Psalms 73-150* (InterVarsity Press, Sep 5, 2014)

**She recognizes that God alone is the giver of life.** That God is infinitely good, abundantly generous — and the moment we fail to recognize that every good thing in our lives comes from His hand... is the very moment we're headed for disaster.

The story of Cain and Abel reminds us that when we, like Abel, bring our first and best to God, when we trust Him, and prove our faith with action... we're putting the sin the crouches at the door in its place — and training our hearts to trust in God alone — as our abundantly generous provider who longs to bless us.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Have you been aware of “sin crouching at the door” at some point in your life? What did you do? Are you aware of any current “sin crouching at the door”?
2. Were you surprised at this interpretation of Eve’s saying, on some level, that she was equal with God, because she created a human being, just like He did? How does that relate to what the serpent said to her in the garden?
3. Did today’s sermon “finally” explain why God accepted Abel’s sacrifice, but rejected Cain’s? What is the primary difference between the two?
4. Are you a Cain or an Abel? Do you bring your first and best to God, or do you give Him the leftovers?
5. How does God intervene tenderly with Cain before he gets to the point of murdering Abel?
6. After the murder, how does God punish *and* protect Cain?
7. How can you exercise both Justice *and* Mercy in your life?
8. How does Eve finally recognize that God alone is the giver of life?

## NOTES