

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
JANUARY 19 2019

out of control

Scripture Story: Genesis 4:1-16.
Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 5.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The story of Cain and Abel depicts two types of people who travel two different paths in life. While Cain and Abel were raised by the same parents, they held different attitudes about God and His character—this is where their paths diverged. Abel saw the mercy of God in the way the Creator provided for the redemption of the human race, but Cain rebelled against God in his heart (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 71). The distinction may not have been obvious until it came time to sacrifice.

The drama between Cain and Abel is really about the struggle between Cain and himself. Although Cain was given a chance to turn around, he held ever more tightly to his stubborn pride and stumbled further away from God. The way of Cain and the way of Abel is a discussion of monumental importance to young people. Several themes should emerge from this study:

- God’s plan for salvation is not negotiable—it is a gift.
- The human heart, when it clings proudly to self, stumbles on a slippery downhill slope of destruction.
- God constantly reaches out to those who rebel to give them an opportunity to make a turn-around (repentance).

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the basic truths about sin, repen-

tance, and redemption as portrayed in the story of Cain and Abel. (*Know*)

- Experience the conviction to trust fully in God’s redemptive work. (*Feel*)
- Have a choice to make Abel’s way their way, instead of going the way of Cain. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

- Worship
- Salvation (experience of)*

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the *What Do You Think?* section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Invite the students to share which would be the hardest thing to admit. You can ask for volunteers to share their number one, or simply ask, “Who thought cheating on an exam was number one (or hardest)? Why do you think you chose that one?”

Below is an alternative thought and discussion starter.

Voting: Ask the students to vote on whether they agree or disagree with the following statement: “*The only way some people will learn is the hard way—hitting rock bottom.*”

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The hike *almost* ended without drama or injury. A group of 10-year-old boys with their nerve-racked leader were on the last leg of the journey. They had come to a steady downhill path that led to a grassy meadow in the park. The band of junior-aged hikers made their way down the trail. Naturally, they couldn't just walk down. One had to lurch forward and jog, which inspired the others to follow in the same manner. Their leader was concerned and cautioned them as they picked up speed. But with the rush of adrenaline and a semblance of bodily control the young lads rumbled on down the hill.

There came a point on the trail, however, at which their speed picked up drastically, and the leader could see the excitement on their faces turn to fear as their momentum overtook their control. Their shoes smacked the ground with flat-sounding slaps as their arms flailed wildly in the air for balance. One at a time they fell at the bottom of the hill as their feet hit the thick sand at the edge of the grass. The justifiable bruises and scrapes marked them as their parents arrived to take them home.

After all the parents had communicated their disapproval of the leadership, the leader studied the trail to see at what point the disaster could have been prevented. *Exactly where had they gone wrong?* he asked himself. *Where had their walk gotten out of control?*

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

The same questions could be asked of Cain. Where do you think he went wrong? If you compare the life of Cain to a hike down a hillside, at what point do you think he started running? At what point did he become out of control? At what point could he have stopped? In the case of Cain, is it possible that he got to a point at which the only thing that would stop him would be a hard fall at the bottom? The story of Cain and Abel is a stark reminder of the truth that there are two responses to the problem of sin. One response is to deny it or justify wrong behavior, and the other is to admit it and repent of it.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with

your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- What parts of the story are key? (*Underline* them.)
- What aspects or details of the story are new to you?
- What words or phrases best capture the various emotions of this story most? (*Circle* them.)
- What emotions, actions, and adjectives enrich this story? (*Draw a rectangle* around them.)
- What emerges as the central lesson of this story? In other words, why do you think this story is included in the record of Scripture?
- How do you think the occupations of these two young men shaped their view of God?
- Note the points in the text (with a U-turn sign) that might have been pivotal points at which Cain might have avoided his folly?
- In verses 6 and 7, describe the attitude and approach God takes with Cain? Does it help or hinder the situation? What can we learn about God's character in the way He speaks to Cain?
- What does it mean when someone's face is "downcast"?
- Why was Cain angry? After all, he was the one who had disobeyed God.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: 2 Samuel 12:1-13; Galatians 2:11-14; Acts 11:1-18.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share in your own words.

The story of Cain and Abel is set in the beginning of human history. Cain and Abel were born outside of the garden but were aware of the story of the serpent, the Fall, and the plan to restore humanity through the sacrifice of God's Son. It is amazing that with such rich, vivid evidence of God's blessing and the curse of sin, one of Adam and Eve's children would adopt the same attitude as did Lucifer and act out his selfish pride.

Consider the following information:

1. The ritual of sacrifice was first experienced by Adam and Eve after the Fall. Notice two themes that are often emphasized by Ellen White in regard to the biblical story: (1) the awful destructive quality of sin, and (2) the amazing, abundant grace of God.

"To Adam, the offering of the first sacrifice

was a most painful ceremony. His hand must be raised to take life, which only God could give. It was the first time he had ever witnessed death, and he knew that had he been obedient to God, there would have been no death of man or beast. As he slew the innocent victim, he trembled at the thought that his sin must shed the blood of the spotless Lamb of God. This scene gave him a deeper and more vivid sense of the greatness of his transgression, which nothing but the death of God's dear Son could expiate. And he marveled at the infinite goodness that would give such a ransom to save the guilty" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 68).

2. Consider this quote that comes from *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* on the story of Cain and Abel:

"Cain recognized the existence of God and His power to give or to withhold earthly blessings. Feeling it advantageous to live on good terms with Deity, Cain considered it expedient to appease and avert divine wrath by a gift, even though it be offered grudgingly. He failed to realize that partial, formal compliance with the explicit requirements of God could not earn His favor as a substitute for true obedience and contrition of heart" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 239).

- How are people today like Cain?
- Who did he think he was fooling? Did he think he could hide his heart from God?

- What difference does it make to you today to know that God sees your actions but more important knows your motives?

3. In Genesis 4:6, 7 God appeals to Cain with brutal honesty mixed with hopeful mercy. God emphasizes how pivotal this moment is for Cain by warning him that "sin is crouching at [his] door" (NIV). The image is of a hunting lion ready to pounce. This is Cain's defining moment—his response to God will dramatically shape his future. This is not the only place in Scripture we see this pivotal type of moment in someone's life. Peter heard similar words from Jesus Himself:

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren'" (Luke 22:31, 32, NKJV).

4. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoēō*, which means "to change one's mind or purpose." It implies that you have thought about things to the extent that you change the direction of your behavior. Essentially, what Cain needed to do was to seize the moment, to think about what he was doing and where he was going. Cain needed to have a change of mind and a change of heart so that he could ultimately stop depending on his own merits for salvation and begin trusting God.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the Key Text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

In Genesis 4:7, 10, and 15 is recorded God's attempt to give Cain an opportunity to repent. But Cain refused God's offers to the end of his days. Jude 11 refers to "the way of Cain" as a stubborn refusal to embrace God's grace and turn away from selfish pride. Surely the "way of Cain" is still evident today.



Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Think-pair-share.

This strategy simply asks students to think about a question or series of questions (individually), then pair up and share their response with another person. Each student processes the question individually. Every student has the opportunity to share their response. All the students hear the point of view of at least one other person.

For example:

Step 1: Think

I want you to write down on a piece of paper three good decisions you have made in your life that you think were turning points (or high-impact choices).

Step 2: Pair/Share

Pair up with someone in the class and share your response with them.

If time permits, invite the pairs to share with the entire class what they discussed, or at least to share one of the partner's good decisions.

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III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

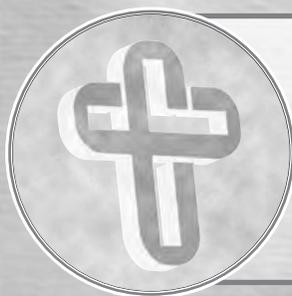
- Make a list of five ways that you have seen God giving people turnaround opportunities.
- How does He get our attention?
- What are some trailhead points on life's journey that are good places to stop and examine our behavior, our motives, and our attitudes about God?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Cain and Abel's story is the story of how people respond to God, sin, and salvation. These two brothers represent the ways you and I think about God's character, His plan of redemption, and ultimately what part we play in obtaining the free gift of grace. For his salvation, Abel trusted in the sacrifice of blood that pointed forward to Christ. Is that your choice? Cain chose to look selfishly at God's plan and reject it, offering his own produce. There are two ways to pay: You can try to pay it yourself or you can have someone pay for you. Which do you choose? God offers turnaround moments to everyone. Maybe today is a turnaround moment for you. You can trust in God's provision for you at Calvary and live a life of worship and devotion to Him, or you can refuse to turn around and keep going the way of Cain. May you take your place with Abel as one who trusted fully in the character and provision of God's mercy.

*Fundamental Belief No. 10.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 5. A special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets* has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.



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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Genesis 4:1-16.

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Photo by Colleen Cahill

flashlight

“Notwithstanding that Cain had by his crimes merited the sentence of death, a merciful Creator still spared his life, and granted him opportunity for repentance. But Cain lived only to harden his heart, to encourage rebellin against the divine authority, and to become the head of a line of bold, abandoned sinners” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 78).

keytext

“Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why that scowl on your face? If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling; but because you have done evil, sin is crouching at your door. It wants to rule you, but you must overcome it.’”

(Genesis 4:6, 7, GNT)

what do you think?

Rank in order from hardest (1) to easiest (5).

In which scenario would it be hardest to admit guilt and make a turnaround:

- Cheating on an exam.
- Looking at impure material on the Web.
- Admitting to someone that you were critical of them behind their back.
- Lying to a friend.
- Owning up to a peer that the reason you are unkind to them is because you envy them.

did you know?

God refused Cain's sacrifice and warned him, "Sin is crouching at the door; . . . but you must master it" (Genesis 4:7, NASB). The word "master" in the Hebrew is *maschal*, which means to rule, reign, or govern with the authority that is given. Cain was given the choice and the power to squash the stubborn pride in his heart.

INTO THE STORY

"Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.' Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

"Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the first-born of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 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 rule over it.'

"Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?'

"'I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

"The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.'

"Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.'

"But the Lord said to him, 'Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.' Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden."

(Genesis 4:1-16, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What parts of the story are key? (*Underline* them.)

What aspects or details of the story are new to you? (Place an *arrow* beside them.)

What words or phrases capture the various emotions of this story most? (*Circle* them.)

What emotions, actions, or adjectives enrich this story? (Draw a *rectangle* around them.)

What emerges as the central lesson of this story? In other words, why do you think this story is included in the record of Scripture?

List the major lessons that you see emerge in this story.

What does this text tell us about how sin is not really freedom but bondage? (See Rom. 7:14-25)

If you were to capture this story in five words or less, what would you say?

punch lines

“Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple” (Job 5:2, NIV).

“A person’s own folly leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the Lord” (Proverbs 19:3, NIV).

“The bloodthirsty hate a person of integrity and seek to kill the upright” (Proverbs 29:10, NIV).

“And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31, 32, NKJV).

“It was faith that made Abel offer to God a better sacrifice than Cain’s” (Hebrews 11:4, TEV).

“They overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (Revelation 12:11, NKJV).

“Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us” (Acts 4:12, TEV).

further insight

“There is wonderful power in silence. Words spoken in reply to one who is angry sometimes serve only to exasperate. But anger met with silence, in a tender, forbearing spirit, quickly dies away.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 486.

connectingto life

Sabbath

Read Proverbs 19:3.

Complete the exercise in the *What Do You Think?* section. Why do you think it would be hard to confess and admit that particular shortcoming? What do you think makes owning up to sin difficult? Is it the shame you feel or is it because you think that feeling might go away in time? What are the benefits of honest confession to God and others?

As you reflect on Cain's fall down the slippery slope, in what way is his story a warning to you?

Sunday

Read Proverbs 29:10.

Read the story of Cain and Abel in the *Into the Story* section of this week's lesson and work through the study questions listed in *Out of the Story*. As you read the story and note how Cain's rebellion picked up momentum, how do you see this problem among your peers today? Is the slippery slope of Cain's rebellion still part of the landscape of the lives of young people in your world? If so, in what way? What does this slippery slope look like today?

Monday

Read Genesis 4:6, 7.

After reading the *Key Text* and consider how much God tried to get Cain to turn from his anger and repent. Look at each phrase God speaks to Cain and note the attitude of God toward Cain. Is it possible that God is trying to get your attention today about an area of your life that can get out of control?

Everyone has weaknesses and areas of their life that can lead them on a steep downward path. What can you do today to enable God's grace to work in your life and strengthen those weak areas?

Tuesday

Read Luke 22:31, 32.

The quote in the *Flashlight* section reveals that the sin of Cain was as much in the continued resistance and pride of heart as it was in the act of killing his brother. Cain's rebellion closely resembles Lucifer's, and highlights the patient grace of God as well.

Think of someone you know who admits their faults right away and has learned the value of honest and immediate confession. How do other people perceive this person? What are some things you have learned from them that you think will help you respond to God's voice promptly?

Wednesday

Read the *Punch Lines* for this week and identify the one verse that is speaking directly to your life today. What do you think God is trying to say to you in that passage? Is there an area of your life in which you might be (or about to be) running out of control? What do you think you should do to make a U-turn?

When God spoke to Cain, He warned the young man that his response to his sin would be a pivotal moment in life. What pivotal moments do you face? Do you know someone who is running out of control downhill? Take time to pray for them. Consider writing them a letter letting them know of your prayers.

Thursday

Read Hebrews 11:4.

Read chapter 5 in *Patriarchs and Prophets* and note the steps of Cain's fall. Look for insights into this story that you may not have thought of before. For example, did you know

that Cain's self-absorbed offering was born out of his anger at God for kicking his parents out of the Garden of Eden? He began each day thinking God was unfair and arbitrary. How do our basic perceptions of God shape the way we relate to Him every day? Continue to search this chapter for new insights and make note of them.

Friday

Read Acts 4:12.

In spite of Cain's rebellion, God labored with him still. Who has been a godly voice of reason to you—cautioning you about going too far too fast? Try writing them a note thanking them for their influence in your life and think about to whom you could be a voice of grace-filled caution this week.

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this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 5.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rB09s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* series each year.