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 firstborn 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.

6 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.”

8 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?”

10 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.”

13 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.”

I. A Glimmer of Hope

Chapter four begins the account of life outside the Garden – life in the cursed world. Even though Adam and Eve have experienced a dramatic demotion is status; even though they virtually “lost it all” and are starting over in a hostile environment, the chapter begins on a note of hope in the midst of despair. Eve gives birth to two sons. At least Adam and Eve see the beginnings of the blessing of God happening in their lives – the populating of the Earth. Adam and Eve’s sin and failure did not stop the promised blessing of God.

A. Sometimes the blessing survives our human failures.

There are certain blessings that are conditional, but the blessing God promised Adam and Eve – that they would multiply and populate the earth – was not truncated by their sinful failure. However, the conditions under which the promise was fulfilled were certainly more difficult.

B. There is a glimmer of hope in this dark world

Two sons are born and Eve joyously proclaims, “I have brought forth a man!” (acquired; produced).

In Eve’s proclamation, we hear a note of relief; and tone of hope. The human race is on its way to survival! She has sons. Even though we don’t this in scripture, we are to understand she had many children. Adam lived to be 930 years old. We don’t know how old Eve was, but she could have given birth to dozens of children. We know that Cain found his wife in the land of Nod and logic tells us that he ultimately married a sister, or perhaps a niece.
Just Do The Right Thing!

So Eve is rejoicing in the realized promise of God that they would bear children. She is rejoicing in the promise of God that although the process would be painful, she would survive. Even under the difficult circumstances, things are starting to look up. The family is growing.

II. The Bad Seed

The story fast-forwards from the birth of Cain and Abel to the story of worship and sacrifice by the two fully-grown young men.

A. Cain refused to honor God

In short, Abel was a herdsman, Cain a produce farmer. Both brought an offering before the Lord as an act of worship. Abel brought fat portions from firstlings of this flock, Cain brought fruit. God accepted Abel’s sacrifice, but rejected Cain’s.

Why did God reject Cain’s sacrifice? The stock answer we consistently offer is to suggest Abel’s was a blood sacrifice and Cain’s was not. That is derived from our retrospective understanding of the whole sacrificial system that the children of Israel would eventually practice which would culminate in the blood sacrifice of Christ as the end-all sacrifice. We retrospectively impose that on the story of Abel and Cain.

We do not find evidence in this narrative that blood sacrifice was the issue. Both brought a sacrifice before the Lord – a mincha. Mincha is described in Leviticus 2 as a grain offering. It often accompanies an animal sacrifice, but is usually comprised of grain. It was a sacrifice of honor to the Lord, not an atonement sacrifice. In Judaistic practice, fruit and vegetable offerings were as valid to honor God as blood sacrifices. One merely gave out of the bounty of what one possessed.

Second, it is highly unlikely the rejection had anything to do with “firstfruits”, as though Abel gave of the first born and Cain failed to give of his firstfruits. Those details are not given in the story. Furthermore, under Judaism, fruit and vegetable michna offerings were accepted that were not necessarily first fruit offerings. The theories of blood sacrifice and first fruit sacrifice as pertains to Abel and Cain simply have no scriptural support.

In fact, the Levitical laws concerning “michna” offerings were not as demanding on the nature of the offering. So we are still stumped why Abel’s offering as accepted but Cain’s was not. We typically have put too much focus speculating as to why Cain’s sacrifice was rejected. Because it wasn’t blood sacrifice? Because it wasn’t first fruits? Because the quality of the fruit was not up to par? And while focusing on the sacrifice, we tend to ignore the real problem – the rotten heart of the sacrificer.

B. Cain refused to honor his family

Not only is it abundantly clear from the fact that Cain murdered his brother, but Cain exposes his complete disregard for his family when he later responds to God – “Am my brother’s keeper?”

One of the great tragedies of modern day is the breakdown of the family, which is due to the lack of respect. Lack of respect for family comes from lack of respect for God. We see evidence all around us that our modern culture has lost all respect for the family. Children have lost respect for parents because parents have deserted them.

Today, about 64% of children live in a two-parent home. Even though that is a majority, the fact is that is down from 93% in 1950. The trend is clear. We are losing the two parent home, slowly but surely.
Just Do The Right Thing!

Another attack against the family is the increasing trend of childless, unmarried women who fear their biological clock is winding down and desire to have a baby without a husband just so they can feel fulfilled as a woman.

And other attacks against the family are becoming commonplace in our culture. Same sex marriages are attacks against God’s design for the family. Spit families are eroding the family unit. Farming our kids out to be raised by childcare institutions is an attack on the health and well-being of the family. We see some of the most heart-wrenching cases in our daycare as working moms and dads put their child in daycare for up to 12 hours a day. Somebody else gets to see the child’s first steps. Someone else hears the child’s first words. Someone else comforts the child when they are sick or injured. Mom and Dad have careers. It has gotten to the point that having children amounts to something like have a pet. We are paying a steep price for having institutions raise our children.

Abortion clinics are sanitized ways of destroying the family, yet we have become so accustomed to it, we never even lose our appetite. We hear of shocking cases of children suing parents. We hear of shocking cases of children abusing and murdering their parents. In recent news, a young man and young lady were convicted of murdering a child. The young man did the killing, the young woman did the video taping of her own younger sister being murdered. The callous brutality is nauseating. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” You are certainly supposed to be! The whole problem started with Cain.

All we know for sure is God rejected it and made it clear to Cain what it would take to make the proper offering, but Cain copped an attitude. Let’s read it again:

6 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? Cain did something that displeased God, but God was ready to work with him. “Why are you angry? Just fix it and everything will be all right. Don’t get an attitude! You did the wrong thing. Now, do the right thing! It is just that simple.”

But Cain had a problem. We see pride and selfishness and jealousy and disrespect. Cain was his mother’s hope for a brighter future, but he proved to be her greatest disappointment.

When we lose our sense of respect, we lose our moral bearing.

III. Hope Dashed!

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.”

A. “Don’t go there!”

If you do the right thing, you will be accepted. If you do not, sin is crouching at your door.” The metaphor is unfamiliar to our culture. However, it is possible this language borrows from the popular Mesopotamian lore that the demon “rabis” lingered around doorways, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting victims who would cross the threshold. If this is the case, then God warns Cain, “don’t cross the threshold. Sin is waiting to consume you if you cross the boundaries.”

This is the perfect metaphor for sin. It crouches by the door waiting for the opportunity to pounce on those who enter. Sadly, sin has been de-emphasized by our modern culture.

1. In those cases where they recognize sin, people minimize its impact. They make sin fun and adventurous and harmless.
Just Do The Right Thing!

2. In some cases, the concept of sin is completely erased. The idea of sin implies there is an absolute moral standard by which we are judged. But our modern culture hates absolutes and would rather believe everyone is welcome to do whatever they want without being judged by others.

3. In the worst case, sin is shamelessly celebrated, flaunted in front of God, daring God to do something about it.

But the reality is sin is destructive. If people truly understood the hideous lurking dangers of sin, they would not trifle with it.

The choices and their ramifications are crystal clear. Do what is right and fix the problem, or let your anger push you to even more stubborn rebellion and sin is waiting to wreck your life.

We know the story. We know the outcome. Cain refuses to humble himself and receive correction from God. Instead, driven by his anger, Cain goes and murders Abel. His actions defy logic. But sin was crouching at the door. Sin will drive you to insanity when you harden your heart against God.

B. Like father, like son

Abel is dead and God arrives with his probing questions. “Where is your brother? What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground!” We are reminded of a similar situation in chapter three. Adam transgressed against God and God arrives with probing questions. Adam, where are you? What have you done? How did you know you are naked? Did you eat the fruit of the forbidden tree?

And we have Cain following in Adam’s footsteps? “Where is your brother?” Adam deflects God’s investigative question by casting blame elsewhere. Cain deflects God’s questions with a bold lie. Adam’s failure had to do with fruit. Cain’s failure had to do with his fruit sacrifice. Because of Adam’s failure God cursed the ground. Because of Cain’s failure, God curse Cain. Adam is banished from the Garden and sent east of Eden. Cain is banished from his homeland and sent east of Eden. Adam is condemned to struggle against stubborn soil to grow food. Cain is cursed to henceforth be a total failure as a crop farmer. The ground will refuse to respond to Cain’s farming efforts.

But God in his compassion clothes Adam with skin for his perilous journey. And God, in his mercy, puts a protective mark on Cain that no one would be permitted to murder him like he murdered Abel.

When sin is introduced, it proliferates. Innocent people are harmed by your sins. Your family suffers because of your sins. When you sin, you are not bearing the impact alone. You are hurting your loved ones. You may not care you are on the Highway to Hell, but how can you stand the thought you are paving the way for your children and your grandchildren?

For Adam and Eve, they had two boys and thought things were looking up. They had a ray of hope. But hope quickly vanished when one son murdered the other. Now they are beginning to feel the real impact of sin. And it had only begun!

Sin is not to be trifled with. It is deadly and it is far reaching. Sin lies crouching at the door. Why not do the right thing? What is so hard about doing the right thing? Just do it! Quit gambling against sin. You will lose!