

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 4: Session 2 – NOT Putting God First

Class 5: Genesis 4:1-16 – Cain and Abel

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Differentiate between the expression of anger and the expression of what is causing someone's anger
- Share how prayer can be a helpful tool in expressing and thereby (potentially) reducing one's anger

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Erin Brockovich*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. At least two balloons (the bigger the better – at least 9" but 12" is even better)
4. A sewing needle (the thicker and bigger the better – for both dramatic effect and increases the likelihood of success in the demonstration)

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we're going to do that now.
- So here's the opening question for today's class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we'll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here's this week's question:* What is something that makes you angry?

TRANSITION to Movie Clip

- We're going to watch a clip from the movie “Erin Brockovich.”
- The movie is about a clerk at a law firm who is instrumental in helping the firm win a huge settlement and bring justice to a number of families hurt by a company's pollution of the local water
- The relationship between Erin and her boss was rocky throughout the movie
- The scene we're going to watch now happens at the end of the movie after Erin has done an incredible amount of successful work for the law firm.

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- Let's see what happens.

WATCH MOVIE CLIP

ASK

- At the beginning of the clip, was the boss being very clear about the bonus that is being offered? (no – only that it will not be as expected)
- What does Erin *think* the boss is saying? (that the bonus is going to be smaller than expected)
- Does the boss ever *say*, “your bonus is going to be *smaller* than expected”? (no)
- What does Erin do with her misunderstanding of the situation? (lashes out at her boss; tells him off)
- So why do you think Erin might have thought that the boss was telling her that the bonus was going to be smaller? (there was a history of him not treating her fairly and so she thought it was happening again; she didn't ask clarifying questions; she didn't look at the check first)
- What could Erin have done differently?

TELL

- We've started a session where one or more characters in the stories that we're going to read do NOT put God first
- Last class, we talked about the story of Adam and Eve eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – which meant they chose to act like God by deciding what was good and evil.
- We then talked about how choice went outside the design that God had created where we let God be God instead of where we choose to act *like* God.
- And since we were not designed to be *like* God, we fall over/make mistakes like the motorcycle in the movie clip that was designed to go straight and fast, instead of take corners.
- In today's story, we're going to see what happens when Adam and Eve, who keep acting like God, have kids (Cain and Abel) and what happens with those kids.

READ Genesis 4:1-16 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

4Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the Lord.” 2Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

3In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, 5but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

6The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 7If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

8Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

9Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” 10And the Lord said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the

ground! 11And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

13Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! 14Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a

fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me." 15Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.

16Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

ASK

- Verse 3 – What does Cain bring to the Lord? (an offering of the fruit of the ground)
- Verse 4 – What does Abel bring (firstlings of his flock, their "fat portions")
- What difference do you see between the two offerings (they each bring "fruits" of their labor – but only Abel brings the best. That is the "firstlings" and "fat portions")
- Verse 5 – What is God's response to the two offerings? (God *regards* Abel's but not Cain's)
- Do you find God's response to be easily understandable? (it's ambiguous – just like when the boss first spoke to Erin in the movie clip. For instance, here's something Cain could've asked God about: Is it *important* that God has no regard for Cain's offering? ...But we don't know the answer because Cain never asked the question.)
- Verse 5 – What is Cain's response to God's response? (his countenance fell – or in other words, he has a negative reaction, most likely a combination of disappointment and jealousy – this reaction shows on his face and changes his mood)
- Despite God's lack of regard for what Cain offers, does God shun Cain in verse 6 and 7? (Not at all – God is still very much in communication with Cain)
- Since it seems that it is important to Cain to have God's regard for his offering, what might Cain have done at this point in the story to find out? (How he might gain God's regard for his offering(s))
- *Warning, this is a trick question!* In verse 6 and 7, after God speaks to Cain, what is Cain's reply to God in verse 8? (Cain *doesn't* reply to God – instead Cain enacts plans to kill his brother)
- In verse 10, God obviously knows what Cain has done, so why do you think God asks Cain where Abel is in verse 9? (hard to say – but questions invite conversation. God is still trying to have a conversation with Cain instead of cutting off all ties with Cain)
- Verse 11 and 12, what are the results of Cain's action? (life just got even more difficult than before; and Cain must wander the earth – he has no home, now)
- Verse 13 and 14 – What is Cain's response to the results? (he complains, but he doesn't *ask* for anything)
- Verse 15 – What is God's response to Cain? (to put a mark on him that will protect him – note that people often consider the mark of Cain to be a curse – but it's actually quite the protective gift)
- Verse 16 – What does Cain go away from? (the presence of the Lord)
- What do you think about God not regarding Cain's offering?
- What do you think about Cain's solution to the problem (by killing Abel)?
- What do you think about God's response to Cain's solution?

TELL

- Some thoughts about the story that are not too connected to one another:

- Irony: Cain wouldn't give a better sacrifice of his own things to better his chances at crops, but instead decides to kill his brother out of jealousy to reduce preference. But what happens instead? Cain's growing of crops gets even more cursed. The land will no longer yield its strength.
- The mark of Cain: No one knows what this was or what it looks like. It's one of those ambiguous things that people like to argue about it: It could be this; It could be that! But it isn't really important to the story, except for the following thing: The mark of Cain reminds us that even when we screw up in really big ways, God doesn't give up on us.
- Cain is the firstborn of the parents who choose to defy God and were therefore kicked out of the Garden of Eden. And now, Cain is getting kicked out of his land, too. Although Cain's actions that are *not* about God are more extreme than his parents – he's followed in his parents footsteps.
- Overall, what we're focusing on today is how Cain put his anger first instead of putting God first.
 - In many ways, this is a pretty typical story both in the Bible and in everyday lives -- we see people who could express the *reason(s)* why they are angry, but instead, they simply express the *emotion* of anger.
 - The difference between the two forms of expression is both slight and significant.
 - If you express the reasons why you are angry, you don't even need to say it angrily. You can say, "This thing happened, and I didn't like it – it was unfair and makes me feel angry." This is similar to how we answered the opening question
 - But, if you express the emotion of anger, then it's an eruption, not an explanation – often this might look like yelling or shouting. Or, like in the case of Cain, physical violence
 - In this story, we see Cain choose to never give reasons for why he is angry. He does not even *speak* to God until after he kills Abel.
 - Cain was certainly *capable* of speaking to God about what was making him angry, but he didn't. Instead he acted in his anger. And nothing good came of it.
 - We're going to do a demonstration now that shows what happens when we let our thoughts and feelings about a situation build up inside of us instead of expressing our thoughts and feelings of anger instead.

EXPLAIN / DO Demonstration

- I'm going to blow up this balloon here.
- For each breath that goes into the balloon, let's name some things that make us angry (we can use our answers from the opening question to begin with).
- [*Blow balloon up until it's full, then tie off*]
- There – here's a balloon filled with things that make us angry.
- Now, let's blow up another balloon with things that make us angry (repeat exercise with second balloon – feel free to use the exact same list of things that make the class angry that were mentioned when blowing up the first balloon)
- [*using a similar-sized balloon, blow it up until it's full, but do **not** tie it off*]
- One of the things that prayer (which means talking **and** listening to God) does is that it provides us a time and space when we can say pretty much whatever we want. We can name the things that make us angry, without the worry of God saying, "You can't say that." So when we say these things, some of it is coming out of us, right? This means there's less of it inside of us.
- To reiterate, it's better if we say what makes us angry – instead of lashing out in anger.
- Let's demonstrate with this balloon -- by letting some of the hot air out.
- [*let about half the air out of the balloon and tie it off*]
- Now let's say these two balloons represent people.

- Let's also say that they are having the same stressful experience.
- That stressful experience will be represented by this needle
- So, we're going to apply that stressful experience to this person and let's see what happens. [Take the full balloon and stick the needle into the bottom of it (opposite of where it is tied off at. You might want to warn people to cover their ears because it's going to pop.]
- As you can see, we can't just absorb and absorb and absorb the things that make us angry. If we try to do so, then we'll explode when we experience enough stress and pressure, just like this balloon did.
- However, let's see what happens when we apply this stressful experience to the balloon/person that participated in prayer...
- Remember, this person has not just been absorbing their anger, but has also been speaking it to God, telling God in prayer what exactly is making s/he so angry. Let's see if that has helped the person with their stressful experience.
- *[Stick needle in the spot of the balloon where it is strongest – at its bottom, opposite of where you blew air into it. This area is usually darker in color. Since the balloon is not filled up to capacity, this area is not completely stretched and is therefore stronger. Then, somewhat slowly, insert the needle directly into that spot – almost always the balloon will not pop!]*

TELL

- So in today's story, Cain was like the full balloon. He was angry and he did not speak about his anger to reduce it – even when God spoke to him first.
- Instead, his anger exploded at his brother
- However, it didn't need to be like that.
- Cain could've turned to God. Could've shared why he was upset. And in doing so, he would've let go of some of his anger, and maybe even understood the situation better – including some things that maybe he could do differently.
- Then, Cain could've been like the second balloon and not exploded at his brother.
- It's easy to be like this first balloon.
- But every day, in every moment, we have the opportunity to be like this second balloon.
- At any moment, we can share with God what we're struggling with, what makes us angry, what scares us, what hurts us.
- And then, we can ask for God's wisdom and guidance.
- Finally, and at that point, it is important to listen.
- However, as we saw today, the talking part to God is also important because it keeps our anger from building up inside of us until it eventually explodes.

CLOSING PRAYER