



S2.Lesson 16: Our Attention NOT on God – Cain & Abel

Middle School Lesson Plans

Supplies Needed: Journals; Handout; tv or laptop to show movie clip (movie clip link is available at rfour.org/curriculum.html); at least 2 balloons (the bigger a balloon, the better. You want at least 9", but get the 12" if available); a sewing needle (the bigger it is, the better)

OPENING PRAYER

TELL

- We're going to watch a movie clip from a movie called Gulliver's Travels.
- It's based on a book that was written in the 1500's by Jonathan Swift and incidentally, is the book where the word "Yahoo" (now the name of a search engine) was first created.
- The book played with the concept of perspective. In this part of the story, Gulliver is the same size as always, but the people surrounding him are super tiny.
- Let's see what happens.

WATCH Movie: Gulliver's Travels (Jack Black Version). (maybe watch it twice, since it's short)

ASK

- When the Lilliputians fired on Gulliver what happened? (His belly absorbed all the cannon balls and then shot them back).

TELL

- Keep Gulliver's amazing, invincible belly in the back of your mind for later in the lesson.
- The scripture story we're going to read today happens after Adam and Eve are removed from the Garden of Eden for disobeying God.
- Once they left Eden, they decided to have kids.
- That's where our story begins today.

READ Genesis 4 (NRSV)

1 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord." 2 Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. 3 In 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, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 7 If 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." 8 Cain 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. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." 13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! 14 Today 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." 15 Then 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. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. 17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch.

ASK

- At the end of verse 2, what jobs did Cain and Abel have? (Cain was a farmer; Abel was a shepherd)
- In verse 3 & 4, what do Cain and Abel do? (bring offerings/sacrifices)
- What's God's response in verse 4? (God has regard for Abel's sacrifice, but no regard for Cain's sacrifice)
- What's Cain's response to God regarding Abel but not Cain? (Cain's countenance fell and he was very angry)
- In verse 6, who talks to Cain? (God)
- So let's think about this for a minute: What does it mean that God is still in relationship and interacting with Cain but at the same time has "no regard" for Cain's sacrifice? What do you think that says about the sacrifice that Cain offered? (a half-hearted, small offering maybe – we don't really know because the story doesn't tell us, but we can see that it's not because God doesn't like Cain - the problem is about the offering)
- In verse 7, what warning does God give to Cain? (tells him sin is lurking at the door)
- Verse 8, what is Cain's response to God's warning (to ignore it. Seems like Cain is premeditating the murder of Able – has a place picked out for it)
- Verse 15, even though Cain is cursed for his actions, what does God also provide Cain? (a mark to protect him. A second chance).
- Verse 16, where does Cain go away from (from the presence of the Lord, east of Eden)
- Verse 17, what does Cain build? (a city – probably the first)

TELL (Some thoughts about the story)

- So Cain is the firstborn of the parents who choose to defy God and therefore get kicked out of the Garden of Eden. Do you see any similarities between Cain and his parents? Only his actions that are not about God are even more magnified and extreme – he kills his brother.
- 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 isn't really important to the story. What *is* important about the mark of Cain is that it is a reminder that even when we screw up in really big ways, God doesn't give up on us.

TELL

- So for today, in this class, what we're going to focus on is that Cain had the chance and the opportunity and the warning to not kill his brother. But he still did it, anyways.
- This is a pretty typical story. Both in the Bible and in everyday lives: We see people who are told to be careful, told to not do something, told to do something else, and then, what happens? The people don't listen.
- In other lessons, we've talked about people who just don't listen to God, like Jonah. **But listening isn't the only part to being in relationship to God.** One of the things that's striking about this story is that when God first speaks to Cain, Cain doesn't speak back to God until *after* he kills Abel. Which means Cain was capable of speaking to God previously, but chose not to speak and instead stored up his thoughts and feelings about the situation.
- We're going to do a demonstration now that shows what happens when we don't talk about our thoughts and feelings and instead let our thoughts and feelings about a situation build up.

DEMONSTRATION

ASK/TELL

- I'm going to blow up this balloon here For each breath that goes into the balloon, we need to name things that make us angry.
- [Blow balloon up until it's full, then tie off]
- We're going to name some more things that make us angry to blow up this next balloon.
- [using a similar-sized balloon, blow it up until it's full, but do not tie 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. Let's demonstrate that with this balloon, by letting some of the hot air out.

- [let about half the air out of the balloon and tie 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 its tied off at. You might want to warn people to cover their ears, because it's going to pop.]
- As you can see, we are not like Gulliver's invincible belly! We can't just absorb and absorb and absorb. If we try to do so, then we'll explode when we experience enough pressure, just like the 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 its stem. 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 – usually the balloon will not pop!]

TELL

- So in the story, Cain was like the full balloon. He was angry and he did nothing to reduce his anger – even when God spoke to him. And so, his anger exploded at his brother and he killed him.
- 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 some things that he could do differently. Then, he could've been like the second balloon and not exploded at his brother.
- 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 and ask for God's wisdom and guidance. And then, it is important to listen.
- But, as we saw today, the talking part to God is important too because it keeps our anger from building up inside of us until it eventually explodes.

CLOSING PRAYER