



# Weaving God's Promises

## LESSON 2 CAIN AND ABEL

### SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

After Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, Eve bears two sons: Cain and Abel. Both make a sacrifice to God upon the altar. God accepts Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's. Angered, Cain kills Abel and then must account to God. God sends Cain away, but puts a mark upon his forehead to protect him from harm by others.

### KEY CONCEPTS

- Jealousy
- The meaning of sacrifice
- Attitude toward God

### WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

#### **In the Bible**

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

**Genesis 4:1-16**

#### **In Our Sunday Lectionary**

This story is not told in church on any Sunday.

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## WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

The sin of Adam and Eve was not a fluke, not a one-time occurrence.

We think of this story of Cain and Abel as “the first murder,” but it is really a continuation of the story of Adam and Eve: sin and its consequence. For Adam and Eve, the sin is against God, a breaking of the commandment “to love the Lord your God.” For Cain, the sin is against another—his brother—breaking the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

We do not know why God rejects Cain’s sacrifice (there have been many guesses, but there is a literary gap here). In fact, it may not have been Cain’s offering that was necessarily displeasing to God. Look at God’s advice to Cain: “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.”

The sin has not yet been committed. But the warning seems to be not about the quality of Cain’s sacrifice, but about his attitude—and likely his attitude toward and relationship with God.

Perhaps if Cain had merely given another offering, in humility, or had spoken with God, or given an offering of thanksgiving to God, the outcome might have been different. In Cain’s reaction to God’s non-acceptance of the sacrifice, we see a refusal to accept God, a refusal to accept his dependence on God and a need to control the terms of the sacrifice.

Angry, Cain murders Abel and God condemns Cain. His punishment is to wander the earth. Again, as in the story of Adam and Eve, the consequence of sin is exile from God, not death. The penalty for humankind’s rebellion against God is separation both from God and—as in this story—from other people. Thus, the theme of alienation continues to unfold.

Remember, though, that in the end, God protects Cain’s life, despite his grave sin. *God stays with us, no matter what.*



## THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

This story is not found in any of our Sunday readings, and its lesson is difficult for us.

A look at our confessions found in our *Prayer Book* will help us see the sin of Cain. In the confession for Morning and Evening Prayer Rite I on pages 41 and 62, we say:

- ...we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, we have offended against thy holy laws...

Our tendency to do what we ought not to do and to leave undone what we ought to have done is so universal that we confess that failure in our General Confession each week. But as Episcopalians we are careful when we look at the story of Cain and Abel. As Urban T. Holmes III, one of our foremost theologians, says, Episcopalians reject a dichotomy of good and evil, for “we must risk evil if [we are] to know the meaning of the good” (*Spirituality of Ministry*, Harrisburg: Morehouse Press 1982, p. 127).

For us, the way to wholeness always lies through evil, that is, by way of the cross. In other words, we acknowledge the evil that is in each of us; we do not deny it. We also acknowledge the good. And we take faith and find hope in knowing that, in our fragile selves that contain both evil and good, God is with us.

At our worship services, we, like Cain and Abel, offer up a sacrifice to God when we offer the gifts of our life and labor to the Lord in our offertory. We are reminded, however, that these gifts are only tokens of what belongs to God. In truth, we are giving back to God a little of all that God has given

us. And we are also reminded that our true offering is the offering of our selves, our obedience and love, our commitment to God and our praise and thanksgiving.

As the celebrant invites us to make our offering, he or she often says a passage from scripture found on pages 376-377 of the Prayer Book. As we place our money in the offering plate, these passages tell us what our true offering is:

- Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and make good your vows to the Most High (Psalm 50:14).
- ...present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1).
- Through Christ let us continually offer to God the sacrifice of praise... (Hebrews 13:15).

This is the kind of offering that pleases God—an offering of ourselves to God out of love and thankfulness for God's great mercy and love for us.



## GATHERING

### Check-In

Invite the group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each

other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with your group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



## PRAYER

### Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- large pillar candle or large Christ candle
- matches
- cross

After all the group members have had a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer. Ask one of the members to light a pillar candle while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting this verse from Psalm 119 in the meeting room).

Invite the member who lit the candle to read a brief prayer, such as:

- Thank you, God, for bringing us in safety to this new day. Please stay with us as we hear your story and learn about your love and how we can love you. We ask this in Jesus' name. *Amen.*

Carefully extinguish the flame.



## TELLING THE STORY

### Set the Scene:

- Quietly play the song, “He Ain’t Heavy (He’s My Brother),” sung by Brian Lane Green or Clay

Crosse. (Music can be found online.)

- Distribute the lyrics to the group. Search online for these by the title of the song.
- Solicit some guesses as to the subject of today’s story.

Read the story from a Bible, or tell the story in your own words.

You’ll find more ways to bring the story to life on pages 1-2 in the Appendix, also found on the website.

The story of Cain and Abel is an important part of this year’s story—the story of our salvation—but you do not need to explain or analyze it, nor do you need to ask the students to explore its meaning at this time. For now, we just want them to absorb the story in their heads and hearts and to remember its power. Later, use the discussion or arts time to help the group members draw appropriate and meaningful connections between the story and their own lives.





## WEAVING OUR FAITH

### Lesson Box

#### Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*
- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a student to act as class *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As prompts, you might ask:

- What could Cain have done differently?
- How would you respond to Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"
- Why did God not punish but exile Cain?

Once the class has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered in the kids' own words.



## Weaving God's Beloved Community

Cain's anger led him to respond in a way that harmed God's creation.

While this hurt God, God gives us an example of how to respond, even when we are hurt or angry.

- Have you ever responded in hurt or anger in a way that was hurtful to someone or something else? What about people in your life or in the world?
- How does God want us to respond when we are hurt?
- How can we help others remember better ways to respond?



## CLOSING PRAYER

Before the youth leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or back to their homes with God's love and blessing.

The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us evermore. *Amen* (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 102).

End the class with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The youth respond:

- Thanks be to God!



# Weaving God's Promises

## ALL ABOUT ANGER AND ATTITUDE

Group members take a look at their own anger and attitudes and share their thoughts with the group.

### **Materials:**

- copies of the “All About Anger and Attitude” worksheet (p. 8)
- pens and pencils
- manila folders, one per participant
- file box to hold manila folders

### **Preparation:**

Make copies of the “All About Anger and Attitude” worksheet (p. 8), one per member.

### **Directions:**

Distribute the worksheet and invite each group member to take a few minutes thinking about and answering the questions. Then, jump-start a conversation with these questions:

- Is it wrong to get angry?
- What do you get mad about?
- What does the Bible say about anger? (Look up and read Ephesians 4:26-5:2.)

### **Close:**

- Tell participants to place their worksheets into their individual manila folders for safekeeping. Place these folders in the file box.

# ALL ABOUT ANGER AND ATTITUDE

What really makes you angry? Name at least 2 things.

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When I get angry, I \_\_\_\_\_

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What do you think? Make each statement below YES or NO.

\_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes, getting angry is a good thing.

\_\_\_\_\_ My anger can be explosive.

\_\_\_\_\_ Everybody needs to get angry now and then.

\_\_\_\_\_ Getting angry is not a big deal for me.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do a pretty good job of dealing with my anger.

Name two things that can change or affect your attitude.

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People who know me would say that I have a(n) \_\_\_\_\_  
attitude toward life.

At this point in my life, my attitude toward God is \_\_\_\_\_

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# Weaving God's Promises

## COVENANTY

Group members think about how they want to be in community together and will contribute ideas to create a list to be posted in the class.

### **Materials:**

- large sheet of paper or poster board
- large markers
- optional:* tape or tacks

### **Preparation:**

Set the poster board on an easel or tape/tack the paper to a surface where all group members can see it.

### **Directions:**

1. Ask the group how a covenant relates to the story of Cain and Abel. Explain that a covenant is an agreement amongst two or more people. We will see more of this later in the Bible. God makes many covenants with God's people. Today, your group is going to make a covenant on how they want to be treated by each other while meeting together. Let them know that their input is important and that, when they've agreed on a set of guidelines, it will be posted and referred to over the course of the year.
2. Tell the group to think about such areas as respect, working together, participation and even attendance with respect to the covenant. Write out each suggestion on the paper/poster board. Take some time to review and refine the answers until the group comes to a consensus on the covenant. Copy it over neatly onto another sheet of paper/poster board and post it for the remainder of the church school year.

### **Close:**

- Ask each of the group members to sign the finished product and post where all can see it.



# Weaving God's Promises

## THE MEANING OF SACRIFICE

Participants work in pairs or small groups to brainstorm a list of things they could do that, in their opinion, would constitute “sacrifice.”

### Materials:

- copies of “The Meaning of Sacrifice” worksheet (p. 11), 1 per pair/group
- pens and pencils
- scissors
- tape
- index cards, one for each letter of the word *sacrifice*
- large envelope titled *Cain and Abel*

### Preparation:

Ask the group for their definition(s) of the word *sacrifice*. Once the brief discussion is complete, divide participants into pairs or small groups. Give each group a worksheet and instruct them to use each letter on the page as the start for something they might give up or do as a sacrifice. For example, the S could start the phrase “Save part of my allowance each week.” The A could begin the phrase “Allow my younger sibling to use my video games.” Allow about 10-15 minutes to complete the list.

While groups are working, write the each letter of the word *sacrifice* on the index cards and post them, in order, around the room. If possible, tape them to the wall.

When groups have finished, ask them to cut their responses into strips, one for each letter of the word. Then, ask one member to tape all responses under the appropriate index cards. Invite the entire group to walk around and read all of the suggestions.

Ask the group to sit down. Initiate a discussion with the following questions:

- What is a sacrifice?
- Which of the ideas do you find easy/difficult/impossible?
- What does attitude have to do with sacrifice and its acceptability?

### Close:

Collect the index cards and responses and place them in the envelope.

# THE MEANING OF SACRIFICE



S

A

C

R

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F

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C

E



# Weaving God's Promises

## INSPIRATION STONES

Group members paint and decorate stones to be kept as symbols of healing and calm.

### Materials:

smooth stones, at least 3" in diameter or length  
permanent markers, assorted colors  
craft paints, small paintbrushes, or paint pens  
containers of water for cleaning brushes  
paper towels

### Preparation:

Ask the group to reflect on the story of Cain and Abel, but rather than focusing on anger and disobedience, have them consider words related to the lesson that suggest healing and calm: *forgiveness, protection, atonement, peace, respect, etc.*

Invite each participant to take a stone and, using a marker or paint, write the word of inspiration on the stone. Encourage them to embellish the stones as they see fit.

If time and supplies permit, encourage the group members to decorate additional stones.

### Close:

- Invite participants to take the stones with them and either keep them or give them to special people in their lives.

**Note:** The group may consider selling the stones to raise money for future service projects.



# Weaving God's Promises

## LETTING GO—LETTING GOD

Participants write personal issues of anger and jealousy on slips of paper and light them on fire, sending them up in smoke to heaven and giving them up to God.

This activity should be done in a worshipful setting, with a worshipful attitude. For safety reasons, it probably should be done outside.

This is a great inter-generational activity. Invite older members of the congregation to join in, making sure to have one of the youth members explain the purpose of the activity.

### Materials:

- paper, white or various colors (if possible, consider ordering flash paper)
- scissors
- pens or pencils
- cast iron pot, fire pit or other container that can safely contain the fire
- matches or fire starter

### Directions:

1. Invite each participant to think about anger they've not been able to let go of or about things that have been making them jealous. Tell them to write each issue/concern on a separate slip of paper.
2. Ask the group members (and other participants) to drop their pieces of paper into the pot. With the group following in a procession, carry the pot to a place where it's safe to have a fire. Light the papers with a match and remind all of the participants that they are letting go of the anger and the jealousy and giving their feelings up to God for God's help.

### Close:

- Recite the following prayer, asking participants to repeat after each line:
  - Take our minds, and think through them.
  - Take out lips, and speak through them.
  - Take our hearts, and set them on fire with love for you.
  - Amen.*

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