

Heroic Faith

Part 2

Abel: An Example of Worshiping Faith

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TALKING WALKINGPOINTS

Leader's Guide



A publication of **DISCIPLE**, the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Sadly, the record of Abel's faithful life is scant, yet he clearly is an important biblical figure—the first mentioned in the "**Hall of Faith**"! Let's mine what riches we can from the passages which **do** mention him.

Observation—*What do I see?*

- 1 According to Genesis 4:2–5 & Hebrews 11:4, what specific differences are described between Abel and Cain with respect to their occupations, their offerings, and God's response to each?
- 2 From Genesis 4:2–8 & Matthew 23:35, what words and actions are attributed to Abel himself, and what is notably absent from the biblical record regarding his speech or defense?
- 3 What titles or descriptions are applied to Abel in Hebrews 11:4; 12:24 and 1 John 3:12?

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- 4 On what basis does Scripture indicate that Abel's offering was accepted, and how does Hebrews 11:4 clarify what Genesis 4 leaves implicit? Why is this significant?
- 5 What does Abel's death reveal about the nature of human sin and righteousness in the earliest generation after the Fall (see Genesis 4:7–8; 1 John 3:12 and Jude 11)?
- 6 What did "righteous Abel's blood" accomplish for Jesus' generation (Matthew 23:34-35)?

What **couldn't** Abel's blood accomplish, that Jesus' could—and did (see Heb 12:22-24)?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- 7 What might be some contemporary examples of Cain's outward religious activity? How can Abel's example help protect you from Cain's self-styled formalism without faith?
- 8 How can Abel's example prepare you to respond properly to opposition and injustice when your righteousness provokes hostility rather than reward (1 John 3:10-13)?
- 9 Does Matthew 5:10-16 **normalize** Abel's experience? Why do you think this is?
- 10 From Matthew 5:10-16, make a list of Jesus' instructions to "modern-day Abels".

- ① Abel is a shepherd; Cain is a farmer.
Abel offers “**the first of** his flock and of their fat portions,” while Cain offers “fruit of the ground.” God regards Abel and his offering, but neither Cain nor his offering is accepted (Genesis 4:2–5). Hebrews clarifies that Abel’s offering was made “by faith” (Hebrews 11:4).
- ② Abel is described only as bringing an offering and being killed by Cain. He speaks no recorded words and offers no defense. Yet Jesus calls him “righteous,” and Hebrews says he still “speaks” **through his faith** (Genesis 4:8; Matthew 23:35; Hebrews 11:4).
- ③ Abel is called **righteous** (Matthew 23:35), **faithful** (Hebrews 11:4), a **victim of evil** (1 John 3:12), and **the first example of innocent blood shed** (Luke 11:50–51). Abel’s blood cried out for justice/vengeance whereas Christ’s superior blood purchased forgiveness (Genesis 4:10 & Hebrews 12:24)!
- ④ Whereas the type of offering (blood vs. crop) may have been significant, Scripture indicates the **decisive** factor was Abel’s faith, and Cain’s wickedness. Abel trusted God and honored God with a costly, firstborn offering, whereas Cain lacked faith (Hebrews 11:4; cf. Genesis 4:4–5). “Without faith it is **impossible** to please God” (Hebrews 11:6).
- ⑤ Abel’s murder shows that sin quickly escalates from inner resentment to violence, and that righteousness often provokes hostility from the unrighteous (Genesis 4:7–8; 1 John 3:12; cf. John 15:18–25).
- ⑥ Abel is the earliest example of a righteous person killed for faithfulness to God. His blood “speaks” as a testimony calling for justice, anticipating the long history of persecuted prophets (Matthew 23:35).

Abel’s blood (which cried out for justice/vengeance) **couldn’t** do what Christ’s superior blood did—purchasing our forgiveness (Genesis 4:10 & Hebrews 12:22–24)!
- ⑦ church attendance; wearing a cross/having a bumper sticker; saying “*I’ll pray for you*” (if we don’t)...

Abel’s example warns us from religious activity which can be outwardly correct yet inwardly faithless. We must examine motives, ensuring worship flows from trust, obedience, and reverence rather than mere externals (Genesis 4:3–5; Hebrews 11:4).
- ⑧ Faithfulness to God does **not** guarantee safety or approval—in fact, it **guarantees persecution** (see 2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:18–25)! Believers should expect opposition, entrust themselves to God when obedience leads to suffering (1 John 3:12), and must rejoice in our suffering (Matthew 5:10–12)!
- ⑨ Yes, as do 2 Timothy 3:12; John 15:18–25.
- ⑩
 1. Recognize your blessedness (v. 10–11).
 2. Expect suffering as normal for God’s people (v. 12).
 3. Rejoice and be glad in the midst of suffering (which is not senseless) (v. 12).
 4. Fix your hope on future reward (v. 12).
 5. Maintain your distinctive witness (“be salt”; v. 13).
 6. Continue visible faithfulness (“be light”; v. 14–15).
 7. Let good works remain visible (v. 16a).
 8. Aim at God’s glory, not personal comfort or self-vindication (v. 16b).

Sermon Summary Key Text: Hebrews 11:4

Hebrews 11 devotes only one verse to Abel, but it speaks volumes about how we must approach a holy God. As Cain and Abel grew up, they developed into men with skills and trades—Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer. They were raised with a knowledge of God and with a knowledge of sin. Their parents, Adam and Eve, would have given them firsthand accounts of how to approach God with purity of heart. They would have learned about the necessity of sacrifice which God first instituted to cover Adam and Eve's sin (Genesis 3:21). The death of an innocent victim is required to cover sin's guilt. Of course, we know from the book of Hebrews that the death of an animal cannot atone for a man's sin. Animal sacrifice was instituted by God as a foreshadowing of what God was going to do in the future. It pointed to the future Messiah, Jesus, the innocent Lamb of God, who would die in our place to take away the guilt of our sin. Genesis 4 tells us that in the course of time, Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to God. Abel's offering was accepted, but Cain's was rejected. Abel found his way into God's Hall of Faith because he came to God in faith, and Cain did not (Genesis 4:3–5). From the beginning of time up until this present day, there have never been more than two ways to approach God: Cain's way and Abel's way.

I. Abel's faith was based upon God's revealed will. Abel's faith, as demonstrated in his sacrifice, was a response to divine revelation. God spoke - Abel heard and obeyed. Abel's faith was based upon God's Word (Romans 10:17). Abel obeyed God's instruction, whereas Cain decided to approach God his own way, on his own terms (Genesis 4:5). There was something inferior about either the nature of Cain's offering, or the nature of Cain's heart motivations, or both. Why would God receive a "disgusting" animal sacrifice from Abel, and reject a more "respectable" grain offering from Cain? The violence of man's sin against God can only be atoned for by the violence of the shedding of blood. The shedding of blood was the pattern God Himself established for covering sin. The Word of God is clear. There is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). Because Cain's offering was rejected, and his brother's was accepted, he became angry and killed his brother. I don't think that murder arose in Cain's heart because his sacrifice was rejected. I think this murder was an expression of Cain's self-reliance and declared independence from God. It was clear evidence of a calloused, carnal heart.

II. Abel had a worshiping faith. Not only was Abel's sacrifice a blood sacrifice but he chose the very best of his flocks—rather than an animal that was old or sickly and weak. Abel's actions remind us that whenever we come before the Lord in true faith, it will always be in a spirit of worship. We should bring the very best of who we are and what we have to God. First of all, He created us. Second, every good thing in your life is a gift from Him. Third, He gave his life for you on the cross! Hebrews 13:15 talks about bringing God a sacrifice of praise. That should impact our kingdom giving as well (1 Chronicles 21:24). True worship involves personal sacrifice.

III. Abel had a Witnessing Faith. In bringing an appropriate sacrifice to God, Abel has become a timeless witness to all who would approach God the right way—that is through faith. The only reason any person has ever stood in right relationship with God is because they came like Abel did—by faith through the shedding of blood (Hebrews 11:6). If we will listen to the faith of Abel speaking to us, we will hear it saying that there is only one acceptable way to approach God, and that is by faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

IV. Cain had a Religious Faith. "Religion" is man's efforts to reach up to God, whereas "Christianity" is God's action in reaching down to man. ***Cain's religion was based upon human reasoning.*** Cain brought to God what he had toiled and labored over, and in doing so he violated what God had revealed about the appropriate way to come to Him. Scripture tells us clearly that we come to God by faith, not by works (Isaiah 64:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Ephesians 2:8–9; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 1 John 1:7). Human reason cannot reverse divine revelation. The issue is not what we have done for God; it is whether or not we have accepted what God has done for us! ***Cain's religion was based upon human effort.*** Cain may have brought the very best of his crops to God, but they were rejected because they were based on the merit of human effort. You can't please God through human effort—even when it is sincerely offered. The only way anyone gets into God's Hall of Faith is by exercising faith in God's revealed will.

Are you seeking to come to God on the basis of human effort, trying to be good enough to earn God's acceptance? YOU CAN'T COME THAT WAY! That is the way of Cain! We must come the way that Abel came—through faith in God's required sacrifice—the shed blood of the Lord Jesus.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

Let's see what God tells us about how he is to be worshipped...

Monday— Principle #1—God, not man, decides. Study Deuteronomy 12:32 & Matthew 15:9.

Tuesday— Principle #2— Sincere beliefs aren't enough. Study Romans 10:2 & Proverbs 14:12.

Wednesday— Principle #3—Scripture shows us acceptable worship. Study Acts 2:42 & 1 Timothy 4:13.

Thursday— Principle #4—God rejects unbiblical worship. Study 1 Samuel 15:22 & Leviticus 10:1-3.

Friday— Principle #5—Must be Christ-centered. Matthew 28:20, Ephesians 5:23-24 & Hebrews 12:28-29.

Saturday— Principle #6—Worship must be reverent. Psalm 96:9, 1 Corinthians 14:40 & Ecclesiastes 5:1.

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]