



HEROES FROM HEBREWS



A Tale of Two Brothers – Hebrews 11:4;
Genesis 4:1-16

Tim Badal | May 27, 2018

Last week Jon Culver did a great job of kicking off our series by reminding us what faith is and that our faith needs to be centered on the work and Person of Jesus Christ. He told us that faith produces hope. It's the confidence that no matter what suffering we face, we can know if God is for us, who can be against us? By faith, we can weather any storm that comes in life.

Today we're moving to Hebrews 11:4. This verse gives us the first of many examples. Throughout this book, the writer of Hebrews talks about many lofty thoughts, but he now helps us with practical examples of how people live these things out. We're starting with a man named Abel. Some of you may be well acquainted with him, while others may not, but the original readers of Hebrews would be well aware of him. I'll read this verse, then we'll go back to Genesis to learn the rest of what Scripture tells us about this story of two brothers.

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

Today I'm going to be answering three questions:

- Why did God accept the sacrifice of Abel and not Cain?
- What was it about Abel's gift that God accepted?
- How is it that a man who's dead can still speak?

I come from a family of three boys. My older brother, who is now passed away, was two and a half years older than me. I was born in 1976 and for some that makes me really, really young; for others it makes me really, really old. But 13 months later my younger brother Joel came along. We're called "Irish twins," not so much twins as being born on the same day, but twins because we're so close in age. I tell my brother all the time it's because my parents saw what they could make and how glorious it was, so they thought, "Let's try that again." But I would be remiss to think that's the case.

As Irish twins, from the very get-go, my brother and I were very different. Joel has always been a very serious guy. Even as a young boy he was a sober individual. I was more carefree. I got myself in a lot of trouble, whereas Joel never got in trouble. I was really bad in school; Joel excelled in school. In fact, he finished high school in three years. We were just opposites. A lot of times being opposite created friction between us, or we stepped on one another's toes. While I have the utmost respect for my brother, we are very different even to this day.

Yet amidst our differences, one thing about us is incredibly similar—and that is our faith. My brother has a robust faith. He honors God every day of his life, in the way he lives, the way he fathers and the way he interacts with believers and non-believers alike. Joel loves the church. He loves to be on mission for Christ. I am here to tell you that while he and I are so very different in many ways, we are almost identical twins when it comes to our love for Christ and His church.

Yet we come to a story in the book of Genesis about two other brothers who are seemingly similar in every way, yet they were different in the one area where I believe it mattered most: their faith. Abel seems to have loved, honored and served God, whereas

it seems that Cain did things that angered and upset God. We need to understand the difference between them, because Jude 11 speaks of false teachers who *“went the way of Cain”* and were led to destruction.

Here in the Hall of Faith we read that Abel was righteous and accepted by God. So our question today is are we going the way of Cain or are we going the way of Abel? Are we faith-filled people who are living for God because we want to and not because we have to?

We're given very little here in Hebrews about Abel, which tells us that the recipients of this letter knew exactly what the author was talking about. I suspect in our congregation today there are some who don't even know who Abel was. Or maybe you've heard of Cain versus Abel, but you don't know much more than that. For us to understand what the writer of Hebrews is talking about, we've got to go back to Genesis 4.

First, let's review a little of the story that leads up to Genesis 4. God is an almighty, all-knowing God Who has always existed. At some point in eternity past, He decided to create the heavens and the earth. We don't know why He decided to do that, but in conversation between the three persons of the Trinity, God decided, “I am going to create”—and He did. Genesis records six days of creation and with each creative act He said, “It is good.”

But on the sixth day, He created humanity as the pinnacle of His creation. The first human was Adam, whom God declared to be “very good.” It's as though He said, “This is better than anything I've created up to this point.” It's not that humans were greater in the sense of being the biggest creature. We also weren't the smartest or most powerful creation—that would have been the angels. The reason we were the pinnacle of creation was because God created man to have a very special and unique relationship with Him that was different from anything else He had made. That's Genesis 1 and 2.

At the end of Genesis 2, God gave man a place to live, which is called the Garden of Eden. Then He gave him a job. He said, “You're going to have dominion over the earth. You're in charge of all I've created here. You're going to be my middle manager to oversee all that takes place.” So Adam named the animals and he worked with God to bring order to this creative work God had done.

After this, we're told God saw that man was alone. The animals Adam had named came in pairs, but he was probably aware he had no creature like himself, to be next to him, to complement and to live life with him. God said, “It's not good for man to be alone.” So at the end of Genesis 2, God put Adam into a sleep and created Eve. Adam and Eve honeymooned together and began to live life together. We don't know how long this experience went on. It may have been for a year or for hundreds of years. We aren't told. Still, for some length of time they enjoyed the perfection of the Garden.

I remember years ago when I would go to the doctor's office, there was this illustrated Bible in the waiting room. I was always struck by what the Garden of Eden was like. The illustration usually looked like the Amazon rain forest.

It had to be glorious to be able to relate with God. We're told they walked and talked with God in a relationship you and I will not experience until we get to heaven. They enjoyed earth as it was supposed to be: no trouble, no pain, no hardship of any kind. Listen—in the Garden of Eden, there was no such thing as a Monday. Every day was the weekend. It was an enjoyable time. As John Milton described it, it was paradise.

Then in Genesis 3, something terrible took place. The devil, who had been thrown from heaven as a result of his rebellion—sometime in eternity past—was somehow allowed by God to enter the Garden. My thought is that the devil saw these new creatures that were in close relationship with God—something he had once known—and he realized that if he could tempt the humans to also rebel, then they would be where he was.

So he tempted Adam and Eve to break one of God's commands. Then, in the middle of having everything they could ever desire, they decided to listen to the devil and follow him into rebellion. Yet this time the result was different, something the devil probably didn't see coming. Instead of dooming the man and woman to destruction, God chose to give them curses. After their fall, He administered judgments individually to the man as representing all men, and to the woman as representing all women. He also cursed their relationship with each other. As a result, not only are we now at war with God, we're also at war with one another because of our sin.

But then God did something quite remarkable. In Genesis 3:15, God told them that, unlike what He did with the fallen angels, He was going to bring a Deliverer, a Redeemer, Who would come from the offspring of the woman. Our answer and hope would be brought by God through the human race, and this Deliverer would crush the head of Satan, even though Satan would bruise His heel.

Adam and Eve had no idea what God was talking about. I believe—and other scholars do as well—that Eve may have thought that when she gave birth to Cain, he would be the deliverer God was talking about. Isn't that like us to think that we're the generation who will receive God's promises? How many generations have thought theirs was the generation when Jesus would return? How many of us think, "Well, this has got to be the year Jesus is coming back"? But we've been mistaken, just as Eve was. She could not know that the promise would be fulfilled thousands of years later in the Person of Jesus.

Adam and Eve were then kicked out of the Garden and they now had to live by faith. We read this, beginning in Genesis 4:1: "*Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.'*" She's thinking this is the offspring God spoke of in Genesis 3.

² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker 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 also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of 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 face fell. ⁶ The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. 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 Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying 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 work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." ¹³ Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

The Story

Cain and Abel's story leaves us full of questions.

As we approach these 16 verses of Genesis 4, I need to be honest. The story of Cain and Abel leaves me with lots and lots of questions. As Bible students, when we approach the Scriptures there will be times when we read something and think, "What in the world is going on?" Moses is the writer of Genesis and he was being told what took place by the Holy Spirit. These things took place long before Moses was born.

Even as your pastor, I am asking these questions:

1. How much did Cain and Abel know about God? We can assume Adam and Eve had told them much about God as they were growing up.
2. There is no mention of Cain and Abel being married or having children at this point. Later, when Cain moves to Nod in verse 17, Cain does have a wife and they have children. So if the only people on earth are Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, then who are the people Cain is worried might kill him? Scholars have lots of different theories—some better than others, but it's all speculation. We simply don't know.
3. What was the reaction of Adam and Eve? There's not a Christmas that goes by that I am not reminded by my mom of some ugly thing I did to my brothers. But I never killed them. Where's the response of a mom and dad to the death of their son? There's only a mere mention of Abel's death when Seth is born to Eve as their third child.
4. What was it about Cain's sacrifice that was unacceptable, and what was it about Abel's sacrifice that was acceptable? We'll talk about some speculations people have had, but at the end of the day, we don't really know. Two brothers who lived in the same world and did similar things still had faith that went in two different directions.

Cain and Abel's story leaves us full of applications.

Along with our questions, there are applications to be found in this story. While I won't have time to go into these, I want to list some of them for you to consider:

1. The story of Cain reminds us of the deceitfulness of the human heart. We are one generation from perfection. We have gone from the Garden of Eden to the gutter of sin with one parent-to-child relationship. Cain's parents experienced an intimate and personal relationship with God, then one of their sons killed his brother. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us, "*The heart is*

deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Each of us is capable of ugly, ugly things as the result of sin.

2. Anger needs to be controlled. Cain allowed his anger to get the best of him. Not only did it snuff out another life, it impacted his own life as well. Some of you are struggling with the emotion of anger. The Bible does speak of a godly anger, but usually our anger isn't that—it's anything but godly. Some of us have allowed our anger to get the best of us and it has hurt others, including those closest to us.
3. While Adam and Eve were as close to being the most perfect parents the world has ever known, their success rate was 50-50 regarding their sons' spiritual health. That could be a comfort to some of you parents whose children are now grown. You have raised them to fear the Lord, but the results haven't always been even. One might be following God and another one not. But even the best of parents—because of sin and the fall—can produce unrighteous and ungodly kids. It's not always a reflection on the parents as much as it is on the deceitfulness of the human heart.
4. Perhaps the most important lesson is simply the realization that sin can carry heavy consequences. God spoke to Cain about the judgment he would receive because of his brother's death, to which Cain responded, "Your judgments are too hard." We need to realize that if we play around with sin, its consequences will be hard and can even be horrific. What is done in a moment of passion, in a moment of bad decision, can ruin not only our life but the lives of many others. Cain reminds us of this.

So the story of Cain and Abel raises lots of questions and has lots of applications. But our elders have directed us as preachers to focus on the faith element of this story, so that's what we'll do with the rest of our time today. What do we need to learn about faith?

The Strategies

The story of Cain and Abel gives us instruction regarding how we are to approach God. We see two different strategies of how God can be approached and these are the two ways people have approached God ever since Genesis. Some people go the way of Cain; others go the way of Abel. Clearly, Abel's way was the more excellent way, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us. But in order to better understand Abel, we have to understand Cain as well.

Cain: Living for God is a duty we have to endure.

From the perspective of Cain, living for God was a duty he had to endure. Of course, he got it wrong. We aren't told when or how these brothers learned about their world. There's no doubt both had heard about Who God was from their parents. They probably heard about the blessed life that had been lived in Eden, those "good old days" when everything was perfect. I'm sure those boys were listening. I'm sure they talked about this creative God Who had brought order to His creation. I'm sure Adam and Eve spoke of how loving He was and the things He had told them about His universe.

They probably also discussed the deceitfulness of sin, how the devil had tempted them in the Garden and was now prowling around the world seeking whom he might devour (1 Peter 5:8). So Cain and Abel knew God to be a God of order and also a God Who would correct and discipline those who would rebel.

This reminds us as parents how important it is to be honest and open with our children—not just about the good we did when we were growing up, but the lessons we learned because of our sins and the consequences God allowed. No doubt when Adam and Eve told their boys about the Garden, I'm sure the question was raised, "Why aren't we there anymore? This place is nice, but it's not perfect. We're seeing a lot of blood, sweat and tears in our day. What happened to that perfect place?" The parents would have had to tell them honestly, "We blew it. We didn't listen to God. We were tempted by the devil and we went his way."

We can conclude from our text today that at some point in time, God had given the command that offerings be made. Somehow both Cain and Abel knew they should bring offerings to the Lord. We have to admit there's nothing in this passage that says Cain's offering was bad. He brought fruit from the ground—that which he had produced. Abel, who was a shepherd, brought one of his sheep. Some will say the reason God didn't accept Cain's offering was because it wasn't a blood offering. It wasn't horrific enough.

A.W. Pink, who is a Bible teacher, spends a lot of time explaining the ugliness of sin and how there needed to be an ugly death, but plants don't experience an ugly death when we harvest them. I can't buy that idea. What I suspect took place was that Cain just brought what he was supposed to bring and Abel brought what he was supposed to bring, but there was still a problem.

Others might say it was the quality of the offering. Abel brought a firstborn, which scholars think might have been the best, whereas Cain just brought the worst—maybe even rotten crops. I'm hard pressed to think that as well. It could be, but that would reveal Cain to be angry and sinful at the outset. After all, Cain seemed quite surprised and disappointed when God didn't accept his offering. If you bring trash, knowing God wouldn't accept it, you wouldn't be surprised when He doesn't.

What I think is simply that they were taught to bring something of their own that was of some cost to them—which they did—and probably something of the highest quality. Still, if they both brought things of equal value, what was the difference? The Bible doesn't indicate that it was Cain's offering that was the problem—it was his heart. He lacked faith.

If this is true, this should tell us that we too can bring our best to God, but if faith is not part of what we're doing, it's worth nothing. God tells the nation of Israel this over and over again. He said, "You can bring Me rams and lambs—the streets of Jerusalem can be flooded with the blood from the best of the best—but My ear will still be far from you. What I want is a humble and contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17-17) In some ways He's saying, "Quit killing all these animals; it's not worth it when your hearts are far from Me."

Cain saw obedience to God as a duty to be endured, but his heart was not for God. Romans 14:23 says, "*For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.*" Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "*Without faith, it is impossible to please [God].*" Cain's experience is evidence of those two truths. It brings to mind Matthew 7 where we are told that when people stand before God in the day of judgment and say, "Lord, Lord, did I not do all the right things?" Jesus will say, "Depart from Me—I never knew you."

The lesson we can gain from Cain is that our life before God is less about the actions others can see and more about the attitude only God sees. I believe Cain did things right—and who could blame him. He didn't want to disappoint his parents. As the firstborn, he wanted to do it right. So he went through the motions. He did the right thing and everyone else probably saw nothing was wrong—but he didn't fool God. God knew his heart.

We need to ask ourselves how much of Cain's spirit is living in us? Are we going through motions so we can check off our list of all the religious things we need to do and so the people around us see us as strong Christians? But then, when God looks at our hearts, He realizes our hearts are not in line with our actions. He knows we're not doing what we're doing because we love Him and desire to know Him and please Him.

Some of us might be deserving of Academy Awards for the show of righteousness we're putting on right now. We have everyone fooled about who we really are. People may be convinced that we have an intimate relationship with God—even people in our own families. We see no mention that Adam and Eve were upset by Cain's offering. We don't see Abel saying anything to his brother about the offering. "Hey, Bro, that's the worst thing you could have brought to God!"

Far too many of us are fooling those around us into thinking we've got a vibrant and healthy relationship with God when we don't. And even we ourselves might be thinking, "If I can just keep up this show, then everything will be fine." But Matthew 7 tells us otherwise. On that great day of judgment, Jesus will say, "You had everyone else fooled, but you didn't fool Me. The offering you've been bringing with your life is not acceptable or righteous." Cain's life is a warning to us that we can be fooling people, but we can't fool God.

Abel: Living for God is a delight we get to enjoy.

Cain's strategy led to destruction, but faith changes things. Abel gives us another strategy, one that God commends. It's not because he brought a certain lamb, or because blood was shed, or because his offering was pure and Cain's wasn't. Rather, God's acceptance was based not so much on the offering, but on the person bringing it. You see, our actions aren't the big deal—it's our hearts.

God doesn't want gobs and gobs of money. He's not like a banker who's counting money. He's not saying, "I need your money, or your time, or your energy." God wants our hearts. Over and over again we see that it's not the amount we give; it's the attitude with which we give it. Think of the widow with her two mites. The rich man didn't give a costly offering, but she gave all she had out of her heart (Mark 12:41-44). It wasn't the public prayers of the publican that declared his fastings and offerings; it was the humble man who beat his chest and said, "I am ruined" (Luke 18:9-14). God wants our hearts. Faith is the conduit that allows our heart to be directed to God and not to ourselves.

In Abel, we see that living for God can be a delight that is enjoyed. Abel approached God as One Whom he could serve from a heart of gratitude for all he had received from Him. Abel wanted to honor God.

Cain apparently viewed God differently than Abel did. If you think about it, these two brothers were the first people who needed to exhibit faith. They hadn't walked with God as their parents had. I don't have to have faith to know I'm talking to you this morning. But perhaps this afternoon when I'm meeting with someone else, I can tell them I preached in front of some wonderful people this morning and they're going to have to believe me by faith. They weren't here.

As Adam and Eve told their sons stories about God, the sons needed to believe these stories by faith. But the boys could have heard the stories in two different ways. They might have seen God as mean for kicking their parents out of the Garden. It was really the devil's fault, but they thought all this misery in the world is God's fault—not ours. We hear that from people all the time: this is God's problem. He's the One to blame.

Cain appears to have had that understanding: "God, I get it. I have to sacrifice to You to make You happy. But really, I'm not buying the idea that You're good or fair." On the other hand, Abel probably realized, "God, You could have killed my parents and ended the whole thing—but You didn't. In fact, not only did You let them live, but You promised a Redeemer would one day come. Even though paradise was lost, it will be regained because of the One Who will come to deliver us. You're a God Who loves, forgives and cares for us, and because of that, I'm going to give You my best."

Abel may even have given more than he was required to give. Genesis mentions him giving a firstborn and portions of fat. That last part may have been more than would have been expected. If so, it reveals the heart of a man who knew God had given him much. His attitude wasn't, "How much do I have to give God?" Rather, it was, "How can I try to outgive God?"

Which camp are we in? "God, is 10% enough? Okay, I'll do that, even if I really don't want to." Or are we saying, "God, all I have is Yours. Whatever You'll allow me to keep, that's wonderful, but my heart is to give all my time and energy and resources to show my love for You because of what You've given me." This was Abel's approach. We see this because Abel was committed to obedience. He saw following God as a source of joy.

One of the knocks on Christianity is that it's seen as a "do and do not" kind of religion. Right away, we'll respond, "No—it's a relationship." But that's not exactly true. I've never preached a sermon from this pulpit that doesn't have a "do this" or "don't do that" part in it. The Bible is full of do's and don'ts. The issue is the premise of these rules. It's not that there aren't any in the Bible. It's full of imperatives or directives God has given us. The question is why has He given them? To a person without faith, these are given to kill the joy we're longing for. To a person of faith, these rules expand the joy we can have because of God.

As a parent, I don't tell my kids no because I get some kind of warped pleasure from dictating rules to them. I tell them no because I want them to know the road they're headed down is going to bring them trouble. When I say no, it's because I'm in relationship with them. I also say yes to things I know will bring them joy and blessing.

How much more does God do that for us? He doesn't say no to kill our joy, but to move us to the yesses He gives, so we might experience in greater measure the joy, peace and contentment He desires us to have. Abel understood that and he rejoiced in the God Whom He followed. Can we say that this morning?

Second, are we celebrating what God has done? Abel saw God through optimistic eyes, but Cain saw God through pessimistic eyes. Abel saw that God had created many things and provided him with many opportunities. God was also faithful to forgive his parents' faithlessness—and probably his own times of faithlessness as well. Abel's God is a great God Who deserves to be celebrated.

That begs the question when we gather to worship God, are we celebrating Him? Or has this become a routine chore, even a duty, that doesn't change us? The deceptions that were in Cain's heart are in ours as well.

Finally, this type of faith communicates long after we're gone. Hebrews 11:4 says about Abel, "*Though he died, he still speaks.*" This is a miracle in two ways. One, as we look to the Scriptures, nowhere in either Testament do we have any record of Abel ever saying a word. Yet I just preached a whole sermon on him and his life. Second, the Bible says, "Though he's dead, he's still speaking." His legacy goes on.

This weekend we're celebrating Memorial Day, honoring those who have given their lives for something greater. Abel should be celebrated on Memorial Day in churches, because his life was given so that for generations it would speak of his commitment to God. How does a life of faith go on after we're long gone?

Last week I was gone because I was with my parents celebrating their final Sunday at their church, where my father was retiring from active ministry. I'm sure he'll continue to serve in some ways, but this was the end of his official ministry position. God bless that church—they poured out love on my parents. To know that my parents are being cared for—even as I've been cared for here—

is just an awesome testimony to the people. People shared with us in public and on the side about the impact my parents have had and I had the luxury of saying, “The same Bill and Michelle you knew on Sundays are the same people I saw as I grew up. They’re godly people who have served God well.” Many people told them that what they’d taught were things these people were now teaching their children or grandkids or in their small groups. It was a joy to see the legacy of my parents.

No doubt their legacy is also being lived out in Joel and me. It’s a legacy that will continue, even to generations who will never hear the names Bill and Michelle but will be impacted by their service. Think about who led you to the Lord, then ask who led them to the Lord and keeping going all the way back. If you were to go far enough back, eventually you would reach Abel, who showed faith. We carry his legacy of faith to future generations. They may not know who we are. We may be dead. But in that sense we’re still speaking. Can I tell you something? That’s not true of riches or fame or power. Great men and women have owned this world, but we don’t even talk about them. Instead, we still talk about Abel, who lived by faith and not by sight.

Points to Ponder

I’ll close by giving you a few points to ponder.

About God

First, God is serious and He always demands obedience to His commands. So if you’re playing games with Him, thinking He’s just making suggestions, you’re wrong. God demands obedience because He is a holy God. He has told us how we are to approach Him. Don’t make the mistake of thinking you only have to approach him with the right actions but not with the right attitudes. God talks a lot more about our heart attitudes than about what we bring Him. He is concerned about the real us.

If you’re playing games with God today, cut it out. God is serious and there will be a day of judgment when the seriousness of your mistake in not following His commands will be made fully clear. Your words will be those of Cain’s: “The punishment is too much for me to bear.” But in that moment, it will be too late.

My other point about God is that He doesn’t always give us a second chance, but when He does, change course! Cain missed it. His heart wasn’t right and he came to God’s altar unworthily. God told him straight, “You blew it. The reason why you’re sad is you blew it.” But God also told Cain it wasn’t too late. “Don’t you know if you do what is right, you’ll be accepted? I’ll give you a second chance. But sin is crouching at your door.”

We too may have the opportunity to change course, but if instead we allow sin to get deep into our lives, there’s a possibility we’ll never come back to God. This morning God is offering you a second chance. Stop going through the motions. Stop living for self. God is saying, “Don’t you know if you do what is right, you will be accepted? By the blood of Jesus Christ, you will be accepted. If you repent and turn from your wicked ways, you will be accepted.”

If you change course, God will embrace you. His love will be showered on you. But Cain did not do this—and sadly, some in this place will go the way of Cain.

About our faithfulness

I want you to see three things about the way of Abel—the way of faithfulness. First, there are times when our faithfulness can cause conflict. Nowhere in the text do we see that there was a conflict between the brothers until Abel was faithful and Cain wasn’t. Some of you have lived in families where your relationship with your family was great until you met Jesus, until you started reading your Bible. And you’re thinking, “Wait a minute. I know Jesus. I love Jesus. Why would conflict come up?” Jesus told us it would. He said, “I haven’t come to bring peace. In fact, I’m going to bring division to families.” How you view Jesus is going to determine whether people love you or hate you.

Abel was hated—not because he tended sheep or because he was a bad younger brother. It was not because of anything he did. The reason Abel was hated and then killed was because he was faithful. An evil and unbelieving world hates faithfulness, because it’s a reminder of their own sin. Sometimes you’ll be faithful—in the workplace or in your home or in your community—and you’ll be reviled for it. Remember, Jesus was—and we will be as well.

Second, faithfulness can be costly. Abel died. We need to realize that even though our hearts may be right with God, it doesn’t mean everything will go well with us. Abel died because he was faithful. We too may lose some of our rights, some of our freedoms, some of our possessions—and perhaps even our lives—because faithfulness is a costly endeavor.

Finally, faithfulness is a choice we have to make every day. If you and I are going to live like Abel, it isn't a decision we made at some youth rally. It isn't a decision we made at some Sunday service years ago. Rather, it's a decision we make each and every day. It's a decision we make in the easy things of life and in the hard things of life. It's a decision we make in the little things in life and it's a decision we live by in the major things. We are told that the righteous shall live by faith.

So what needs to change in your life? What show needs to be put away? What part of the real you needs to embrace the God of the universe so that faith can be perfected in you. Faith is lived out every day—in front of church-going people and in front of atheists. It's lived out in families; it's lived out among people we've never met before. Faith is lived out based on choices we need to make each day. I pray for your good and for God's glory that you and I will choose Him.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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