



# PRACTICAL STEWARDSHIP:

**Applying Biblical Principles  
to Everyday Life**

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LEADER GUIDE | SESSION 1

*Am I Offering My Best to God?*



**SCRIPTURE TEXT** Genesis 4:1-12

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE** Through the example of Cain and Abel's sacrifices, we see that God knows our heart and expects us to offer Him our best.

**BIBLE BACKGROUND** In the book of Genesis, Cain and Abel are the first two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain, the firstborn, was a farmer, and his brother Abel was a shepherd. The brothers made sacrifices to God, but God favored Abel's sacrifice instead of Cain's.

**THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY** God desires that we worship Him, and approach Him in worship with a proper reverence and inclination of our heart. Just as He weighed the heart and the motivation of Cain and Abel when they brought sacrifices to Him during a time of worship, God evaluates our hearts and lives today. He desires that His people live in a way that reflects our gratitude for His grace, and a realization that He is worthy of us offering Him our best, both in worship and in life.

# BIBLE STUDY

*Get Your Group Talking*

**ASK:** "When have you seen someone give their best and be recognized for it?"

## Transition to the Bible Study

**SAY,** "Giving our best feels good, especially when we are recognized for it. When we don't give our best and it is noticed, we often feel negative emotions. In the Bible study today, we'll see how two brothers worshipped God, but only one was recognized for bringing his best to God. One brother was rewarded, and the other felt such strong negative emotions that he killed his brother."

**INVITE** your group members to fill in the missing blanks on their listening guide as you share each of the three main points in this study.

## POINT 1: THE LORD IS AWARE OF OUR OFFERINGS

Genesis 4:1-5

**ASK** a group member to **read Genesis 4:1-5 out loud.**

*<sup>1</sup>The man was intimate with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. She said, "I have had a male child with the Lord's help." <sup>2</sup>She also gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel became a shepherd of flocks, but Cain worked the ground. <sup>3</sup>In the course of time Cain presented some of the land's produce as an offering to the Lord. <sup>4</sup>And Abel also presented an offering—some of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. The Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup>but he did not have regard for Cain and his offering. Cain was furious, and he looked despondent.*

**GUIDE** group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

### Commentary

**V1:** The first command that God provided Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). They were obedient to this command and Eve credited God in helping them fulfill the command and give birth to their first son, Cain.

**V2:** Abel is born to Adam and Eve, and the first family began to expand. We see that both sons of Adam and Eve worked. Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd. It is important to note that work should be a part of our daily activity. Prior to the Fall, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Adam was told by God to work it and watch over it (Gen. 2:15).

Work can take a variety of forms. Some people work in an office, while others work outside. Others are full-time homemakers, and some seniors are part-time workers, supplementing their income. Work is something that people have

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done since the beginning of human history. It is not a product of the Fall. Cain and Abel were both working, and as we will see shortly, their offerings to the Lord came from their work.

**V3:** This chapter of Genesis opens with the two brothers at worship. The initial question becomes, “Why was Cain’s offering not acceptable, while his brother’s offering was?” The key to understanding this verse is realizing that when he brought his offering to God, Cain did not give his best. Cain did not bring the firstfruits; he brought only “some” of his crop (v. 3). This is contrasted with the offering of Abel (“but Abel”), who brought not only “some” of his “firstborn” but the best of the animal, the fatty portions (v. 4). K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 267.

We may see this lived out today as well. Instead of giving God our best, we can find ourselves giving Him whatever is left over. We attend a weekend worship service as long as it does not intrude upon our schedule. We may give an offering to the Lord, but only a fraction of what we should since most of our disposable income was used for a weekend getaway, new furniture, a car payment, or a host of other things that we use for ourselves.

**V4-5:** Abel, however, had a much different perspective. He gave his best. We know this to be true because the text states he gave the firstborn of his flock and their fat portion. The firstborn is

viewed as the opposite of the “last and leftovers.” The fat portion was considered to be the most tender and tasty. Abel was not going to skimp on his offering; he was giving the best.

The text teaches us that God was fully aware of both offerings in that He had regard for Abel’s offering and did not have regard for Cain’s. The word regard in the Hebrew language means to look upon with favor. God not only looked upon Abel’s offering with favor, He also looked upon Abel with favor. Also note the order of God’s regard. He looked upon Abel and then His offering. This tells us that when we bring our best to the Lord, He is fully aware and looks upon us with favor.

**DISCUSS:** Because God is aware of our offerings and our motivations for making them, how might this change how and what we give?

**DO:** Instruct the group members to work in pairs or triads. Ask them to discuss and record their responses to the question, “What actions can we take to ensure that we are giving our best, like Abel?” Ask the groups to share their answers after a short time.

**TRANSITION TO POINT 2:** If we see one of our children or grandchildren going towards something dangerous, we immediately act to warn them because we love them. We will see that God warned Cain about the deficient nature of his offering, and He did so out of love for him.

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## POINT 2: THE LORD PROVIDES WARNING

Genesis 4:6-7

**ASK** a group member to read **Genesis 4:6-7 out loud.**

*6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you furious? And why do you look despondent? 7 If you do what is right, won't you be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."*

**GUIDE** group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

### Commentary

**V6:** God is fully aware of our thoughts and emotions. This can be alarming, or a source of great encouragement. We need to realize that we cannot hide something from Him. It is encouraging if we realize He loves us and wants what is best for us. Because of this, He often intercedes and redirects our thoughts or actions, or both.

After Cain and Abel presented their offerings to the Lord, God confronted Cain about his attitude and actions. God asked Cain to explain why he was furious. The word furious indicates a continual fit of rage. Cain was not simply hot under the collar, but was in a continual state of rage. God wanted Cain to explain this, not because God didn't know, but because Cain was unaware of the negative emotional path he had headed down. Cain also looked despondent. Cain's inward fury was resulting in an outward display of anger. Cain may have thought he could hide this from others. We too may think we can hide our thoughts and feelings.

**V7:** When we see a loved one about to engage in harmful behavior, we provide warning. If we do not provide warning, then we should ask ourselves if we truly love them or not. God saw Cain on the verge of engaging in extremely harmful behavior and he lovingly warned Cain not to go any further.

God warned Cain that sin was lurking. In fact, sin was not far away – it was crouching at the door. The word crouching has significant meaning. First, it shows a continual state of being as opposed to a one time act. Second, the term reflects a desire to pounce upon a victim. Sins continual desire is to rule over and dominate its victims.

**DISCUSS:** What can we learn about the character and nature of God given that He provided warning to Cain?

**DISCUSS:** When have you experienced God's intervention on your behalf?

**DO:** Prior to the start of this study, read **Psalm 31:19-20.\*** Discuss David's circumstances and how he saw God as a good father who would protect him from all harm. Psalm 31 is a lament psalm in which David is trying to work through his son Absalom entering Jerusalem in an attempt to kill him.

In the face of challenges, David finds solace in expressing his unwavering trust in God. He sees the Lord as the bedrock of his confidence, a steadfast foundation that remains unshaken.

*19 How great is Your goodness that You have stored up for those who fear You, and accomplished in the sight of everyone for those who take refuge in You.*

*20 You hide them in the protection of Your presence; You conceal them in a shelter from the schemes of men, from quarrelsome tongues.*

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**TRANSITION TO POINT 3:** We see that God loves us enough to give us a warning. And He also loves us enough to let us experience consequences for our sinful choices. When a parent constantly steps in to shield a child from the consequences of their actions, the child never learns. God wants us to learn from our sins so that we grow in our faith.

### POINT 3: THE LORD HOLDS US ACCOUNTABLE

Genesis 4:8-12

**ASK** a group member to **read Genesis 4:8-12 out loud.**

*<sup>8</sup> Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." [a] And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's guardian?" <sup>10</sup> Then he said, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground! <sup>11</sup> So now you are cursed, alienated from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood you have shed. <sup>12</sup> If you work the ground, it will never again give you its yield. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."*

**GUIDE** group members to understand the text by sharing some of the following commentary notes:

#### Commentary

**V8:** We quickly determine that the words of God are accurate. God told Cain that sin desired to rule over him. We now see what happened when Cain's sin was left unchecked. It resulted in the needless death of Abel. Unchecked sin in our own lives can impact those around us.

**V9:** God once again engaged Cain in dialog. The original language does not indicate a harsh tone. God asked Cain questions in an effort to get Cain to confess to the sin so that restoration could begin.

Does He not do the same for us today? God wants us to confess to our sins so that we can be restored to Him. We need to learn from Cain and not offer excuses. If we are a believer caught in sin, we should confess it to the Lord. If we are not yet a believer, we should look to the cross as God's perfect place for us to find forgiveness and become part of His family.

**V10:** All of us have been guilty of trying to cover up our wrongdoings. It's like a teenager who punched a hole in their bedroom wall, then moved a poster over it to hide it. It would not take long, however, for the teen's parents to notice that a coverup was taking place! If that teen was growing up in a loving home, the discovery would actually be a relief. Love is often demonstrated in confrontation handled correctly.

God is the definition of loving and He is fully aware of all our sins. He was aware of what Cain did and pursued a conversation with Him. If God was unloving, He simply would have punished Cain for his actions. The fact that He engaged Cain in conversation demonstrated His love.

**V11-12:** When we step out of line, we should experience negative consequences. If we do not, then how are we supposed to learn? If someone in authority does not allow us to experience the results of our bad behavior, then we are much more apt to repeat the bad behavior.

We see all throughout Scripture that God is loving. Because He is loving, He is also just. It

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was just for Cain to experience the consequences of his sin. The reality, however, is that Cain did not have to experience this. God warned him about sin crouching at his door, and he chose to ignore God's warning. Cain had no one to blame but himself.

This entire scenario began with Cain giving less than his best. His offering was never about the amount, it was about his heart behind the offering. He gave less than his best and became jealous of Abel. Cain's jealousy led to sin, and the sin led to the death of

his brother. Sin truly has a desire to rule us and God loves us enough to warn not to flee from it.

**DISCUSS:** What can we learn about the nature of sin through the actions of Cain?

**ASK:** "God allowed Cain to experience the consequence of his sin. God also allowed Jesus to experience the consequence for our sin. What does this say about the character and nature of God?"

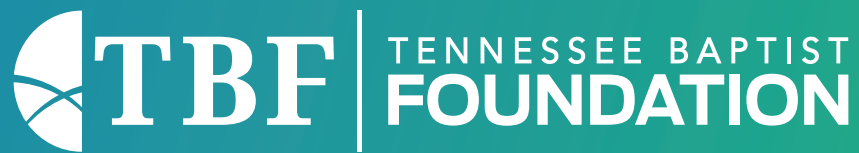


**GUIDE** group members to identify which of the following steps they will attempt before the group's next study.

- 1. Tell God thank you** – Accountability is something we tend to struggle with, even when given in love. God loves us and therefore shows us where sin is lurking. Thank God for providing the warning about the impact and sin and ask Him for the strength to learn from Cain's errors.
- 2. Give God your best** – Abel gave God his best and God had regard for Abel and his offering. God still desires our best today. Our best is not simply our time, treasure or talent. Our best starts with giving God our heart and submitting to His Lordship. If you have never submitted to God and asked Him to be your Lord, let today be the day in which you give Him your heart. This is the best you can give Him.
- 3. Perform an audit** – When we audit something, we look at it with the intent of finding errors and making needed changes. Perform an audit of your time, treasure and talents. Ask God to show you where you are giving less than your best and begin the process of adjusting these areas in your life.

**SUMMARIZE the session:** Our very best is just that, ours. It is not someone else's very best, but our very best. Our very best is not about the amount or the talent. It is about the heart of the one who is giving it. Someone else may be better engineer, a better line worker, a better housekeeper, and the list could go on and on. God is not concerned with what others are offering Him, He wants us to give our very best. When we do so, then He looks upon us and our offering with favor.





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