

Empathy for the Wicked – Cain

Matthew Vander Els • 2018-12-25 • foundedintruth.com

MAIN VERSES

[Genesis 4](#) • [Judges 21:25](#) • [1 Samuel 20](#) • [Jeremiah 31](#)

Alright, Shabbat Shalom everybody. We just finished up this long series on the Sermon on the Mount and how Yeshua is describing what a [Jeremiah 31](#) person looks like—someone with the law of God written on their heart and living it out from their heart. I enjoyed that series because, in many cases, as we always are when we preach what Yeshua says, I was at the other end of the sermon. I hope that was edifying for you.

I was smiling when I came in this morning. Someone asked me, "What are you so happy about?" And I said, "I'm just blessed to be a part of a community." And I love you guys, and I'm glad that you're my family, and I'm glad that God has not only established a community here, but is cultivating it, which is something that I see and that I love, and it gets me excited. I'm just thankful that God brought you here today and to this community.

The Bible as a Story

And so as a community, we understand that the Bible is not simply a commentary. The Word of God is not simply a bunch of words. It's not something to memorize. It's not even simply a checklist of things that we need to do or not do. The Bible is a story meant to instill wisdom about the nature of our God. And through this wisdom, we understand His love, we understand His grace, we understand His mercy and His justice. It's through this wisdom that we are equipped to walk out His kingdom, per Yeshua. Bear His image, per the plan in the garden, and walk into a world and proclaim the light of His kingdom to a world that finds themselves far from him. And that's our calling. That's your calling as a believer.

So when we read the Bible, we are indeed reading a story. It's a narrative. It's one big story where every single book connects to and adds to the larger story. Sometimes we make the mistake of taking a book and isolating it and not realizing that it was put there by the biblical authors inspired by the Holy Spirit to be connected in the story.

This is why so many people have issues with Judges. I was talking to Ellie about this. Because you start reading Judges and you're like, it makes you uncomfortable. Anyone read Judges and just gotten uncomfortable? And it's fascinating because the more you read it, the more uncomfortable you get. It doesn't get better throughout the book, but there's one common theme through Judges. And what is it? "This was a time when there was no king and every man did what was right in his own eyes." And that's the common theme.

So when you take the Book of Judges out of the context of the bigger story, you have this book about this people that are supposedly hearing from God and they're doing this weird stuff, barbaric things, and you think, oh, God must be condoning these things. And that's not the case at all. The book belongs right after the people go into the land because it shows what happens when the people lose focus on who their God is and they forget what the character of their God is. And it just progresses and gets worse and worse and worse. It's meant to show you what happens when you have no king and you do what is right within your own eyes.

And so that's just an example. When we read the Bible, we have to remember that everything is placed in the type of narrative to give us wisdom so that we can live out God's kingdom and know and understand and show forth God's character through our vocation of being His image bearers.

How the Story Ends

And so we know where this story leads to. It leads to the climax of God making His kingdom known through the person of Yeshua, Jesus. And the story begins with image bearers who fail in living out the kingdom of God and the reign of God in the garden. But we know how the story ends. We can flip to the end. It ends with a people of all languages, all skin colors, all cultures, all nations shining one light, the light of God through the example of the redemption of Yeshua.

See, John hears about the 144,000, right? Who's 144,000? It's kind of this paradox. 144,000, where there are 12,000 from each tribe, right? So it's representing in some way, shape, or form Israel, the people of God, the covenant people. And this is what John hears, but then John turns and he looks. And what he sees is not 12,000 times 12 Israelites. He sees a multitude of people he can't even number, innumerable, of all skin colors, of all languages, of all cultures, right? All of them standing in covenant with God. This is the people of God. And I find that so encouraging because the book of Revelation is not a book that we're supposed to consume as a

warning of fear and judgment. The book is an encouragement and it's a book of hope written specifically to seven churches but also to you.

And there's only one point to the book of Revelation and that is Yeshua is one. It's very simple and it's very encouraging and it's very hopeful. We know how the story ends. Sorry, that's my soapbox.

Empathy for the Wicked

So, when starting a new series, the pastors of this fellowship, the elders, we all got together and we explored another way that we could dive deep into God's Word to gain knowledge, to become familiar with the Scripture, with the Word of God, but also to gain wisdom, to learn, to challenge our very flesh, to audit itself in our soul's pursuit to be conformed after the image of the Son of God. And somehow this series—do we have a—there we go. This series is what we came up with. Isn't that exciting?

So this series, Empathy for the Wicked. We're going to be talking about the bad guys in the Bible, the villains, the wicked, the evil of the Bible. And we're not going to be exploring these characters to look down on them or necessarily to judge them. We learned that lesson when reading through Jonah, right? No, the goal of this series is to get a practical understanding of what empathy is and how empathy can be our greatest asset when looking over the characters of Scripture.

If you can leave this message better understanding just the people around you, that's awesome. I think that's edifying. But if you can leave this series understanding why the villains of the Bible are the way they are, I think it will be an amazing journey for you as it has been for us. Because if we can understand why someone became what they became, why someone did what they did, what caused a person to end up the way that they are, we have the opportunity to apply this to our own lives so as not to step in the same potholes and make the same mistakes and not see the same warning signs that they missed or passed.

Understanding Empathy

Empathy. Empathy is a word that is not always understood. Sometimes when people think of empathy, they think of weakness. They think of someone who's not courageous, not bold. They think of someone being passive. And those things are simply not true. Any Brene Brown fans in here? The most courageous thing you can be is empathetic. Good people! Awesome. Okay.

Many times when we hear the word empathy, we think of what? We think of sympathy because the words sound alike, so obviously they should mean the same thing, and that's a common mistake that many make. Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy comes with a feeling of pity or sorrow for somebody. Pity is conjured up when you witness someone's misfortune or you feel sorry for them. It's a negative reaction to their circumstance. Pity can be sorrowful or based on shame.

And in our discussions in the coming weeks, we're going to be speaking about people who did very evil things in the Bible. The most evil things in the Bible. And I'm not going to ask you to be sympathetic towards them because the biblical authors did not want you to be sympathetic towards them. But empathy is the ability to share in understanding someone else—to understand their emotions, their feelings, their motivations for doing what they do or did. Everybody has a capacity for empathy. You wouldn't be able to communicate with each other if you didn't.

If we choose not to empathize with wicked people and refuse to understand what caused them to reach that status, we can never track down the warning signs they missed and why they became evil. In reading the Bible as one mission-oriented narrative, a story from God, we're meant to understand and empathize with its characters—all of them, especially the bad ones. That's my assertion today.

Delilah's Story

You see, if we read the story of Delilah, we can quickly write her off as a pagan woman, a whore. Quickly. Done. Check. What was the point? What would we learn from her story? Why was she even included in the story? It would be more edifying to ask why. Why did Delilah do what she did?

For those of you Bible nerds, you realize that Delilah is the only woman named in the story of Samson—not even his own mother. His father is named, and his wife who had Samson is mentioned, but his own mother isn't even named. But the biblical author saw fit to name her specifically: Delilah. There's something about her that we want this story to convey to every generation so that they can learn from this situation.

On the day that Delilah was born, were her first words against the God of Israel or was she raised by a loving family that nurtured her and tried to do their best to incorporate her into her people? What happened in Delilah's life that would make her want to take the bribe from the Philistines, to fall into corruption?

What caused her to become the person she is presented as? What was her downfall? If we're paying attention, what was the attribute that she was most vulnerable to? Selfishness? Arrogance? Self-entitlement? Was she just power hungry? So she gained pleasure of shaving the beard of Israel, Samson? Was she greedy? Did she have allegiance to the Philistines? If we can attempt to empathize with Delilah, we can then see the warning signs the Bible's trying to give us about our own life, not just hers. The things we struggle with and the things that can lead to a similar status in us: wickedness. Lest we look at the tax collector and simply thank God that we're not like him. So everybody, get it? We're good? Okay, great.

Introducing Cain

Okay, let's jump into the grand divine story of the Bible. I want to jump not far from the beginning, to Genesis chapter 4. There's not a whole lot of verses in the story, but the story is packed with a lot of punch nonetheless. And we're going to be talking about the first villain introduced to us here, at least in human form: Cain. So we're going to start in chapter 4 and jump right in.

Verse 4: Adam made love to his wife, Hava, Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. And she said, With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man. Later, she gave birth to his brother Abel. Did you catch that? With the help of the Lord, I gave birth to this man, Cain. And Abel was born later. This is how storytelling works, right? Biblical authors, guided by the Holy Spirit, want you to know something. Cain was kind of a big deal. Abel—his name means vapor, mist. What happens to mist? Cain.

So here's the story setup, the plot setup. I'm going to be doing this a lot today. I'm going to invite you to use your imagination. When you read the story, don't ignore the details and images that you get. I want the story to engulf your imagination. I want you to not just read the verse, but allow it to consume you. So here Adam and Eve became one and produced their firstborn, Cain.

Cain means spear or strength. Many scholars actually believe that Eve gives us a cryptic explanation of his name right here. See this word here? With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man. So that word for brought forth is *canai*, *canai* in Hebrew. Many believe Cain is named after the one that came forth, the shoot, the spear, the strength. This is a big deal.

Now think about this story. We've read this story a million times, and we're probably not that emotionally wrapped up into it, but I want to present you with something like, oh wow, this

was a big deal. We have Adam and Eve. We have the experience of the garden, the start of the greatest story ever, ending in trauma and tragedy and exile from the presence of God.

The First Human Born

Now in the midst of their punishment for their own rebellion, living outside the garden, tilling the ground, experiencing the true fruit of their choices, she becomes pregnant again. Pregnant. You can't help but feel a little bit of excitement for her. This is kind of a big deal. Like something out of a love story that takes place in hell. There's hope here.

For nine months, Eve carried this child in her womb. The first child ever to be in a womb. Kicking. Can you imagine her emotions throughout? She has no Mama Crunchy Granola blogs to go to and figure out what this is like. She has no lavender oil. This is a new experience for her.

And Adam, boy, Adam, what does he think? Can you imagine Adam just timidly putting his hand on her belly, her looking up at him? You feel him? You feel him kicking? Do you feel him, Adam? This is incredible. She became pregnant. Let that sink in.

So Cain's a big deal, right? Continuing with verse 2: And in the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil.

Everybody go angry. We need the Hulk image, all of it: angry. So now here's the Cain we all know: the angry, merciless, cruel, muscular, dirty, ape-looking man. It's Cain.

So Cain was the firstborn, and were firstborns important in the Bible? Absolutely, yes, they were very important. Firstborns were responsible for carrying forth the traditions and the blessings and the heritage and the story of the families. They are the priests and the caretakers of the homes. They will be responsible for the entire tribal inheritance moving forward through the next generation. Plus, as I said, he's the first human being born in the biblical story. Sometimes we forget that. We read the story so many times. Kind of a big deal. First human with a belly button. I'm just saying.

Understanding Ancient Culture

So let me paint a story for you. As I said before, I want to captivate your imaginations so that you can see an underlying tone and lesson through the scriptures. When the Bible was written, do you think that the people it was written to—not the people it was for, but the people it was

to—understood a lot of the backstory of the culture when they read it? I would think so. Like in 1 Samuel chapter 20, we're familiar with it. We did men's Bible study on this.

When David and Jonathan were talking about how they were going to tell if Saul was mad at David because that only happened a few times. Something about Saul and a spear in David—just a recurring theme. But Jonathan, hey, he mad at me? I don't think so, David. I'm going to find out.

And so there was a new moon festival that David was going to go to. And David told Jonathan, he's like, listen, if Saul notices I'm not there, I'm going to give you an alibi and I'm going to tell you where I'm at. Right. And what's he tell him? He says, I'm going to go to the annual tribal sacrifice in Bethlehem. And that was a good alibi, right? So if Saul sees I'm not there, where is David? Oh, he's at the annual tribal sacrifice in Bethlehem. No big deal.

What was this tribal annual sacrifice, limited to each family from their hometown in the Bible? No one knows. David seemed to think it was a really good excuse for King Saul though, right? Was it a mourning festival? Something that the ancient Canaanites did, and possibly ancient Israelites. Every year there's a remembering, a mourning of the families that have passed away, family reunion. Was it the annual Super Bowl party in Bethlehem? Like, what was it? What was the sacrifice for?

I mean, it wasn't something God spoke about in the Torah. What was this? It was some sort of tradition that came from the culture itself. David used it as an excuse. The biblical authors don't tell you what it is because you're supposed to already know. Oh yeah, that's a great cover for David, duh.

Imagine me telling you I'm going to travel to my Aunt Lisa's house in Charlotte and I got stuck in traffic. I want you to catch the images that went through your head and you're throwing out right now. Pull them back. What do you imagine? You automatically think of me in a car. You automatically think of me going down 77. There's an accident. You know those brake lights. I'm backed up forever. And I got stuck in traffic going to Matt, Elise, and Charlotte.

Imagine if you said that phrase to someone in ancient Israel. They wouldn't know. We don't know. And so I want to emphasize that. Some cultural details may or may not be correct, but I want to fill in the missing spots in this story. Everyone ready? Okay.

Building the Sacred Altar

So who can we assume did the sacrifices before Cain and Abel? Would Adam be a fair assumption? Yeah, Adam did this. So would Adam have taught Cain how to make sacrifices on the, I don't know, sacred family altar, if we can do that? Sure.

Now, I want you to imagine being raised by Adam, with him emphasizing the importance of this altar offering—a way to commune and connect with God despite being exiled from the garden. It would have been a very holy time, wouldn't it? What did it look like? I don't know, maybe a stone altar that they built, just a mock thing. Lots of detail in making sure all the stones are connected, solid, unmovable.

Maybe at the top there was a flat stone like you see in movies, where some sort of fire was ignited and sticks or hay were laid to burn the offering. Maybe there was a divine eternal flame that sparked from God's acceptance of whatever offering was placed on it. Similar to what happened at the altar dedication at the tabernacle. Every time Adam laid the first fruits of his yield on the altar, he set the fire. It began to burn. But out of nowhere, maybe a boom, a different fire births and consumes all the offering. Some sort of sign of intimacy, some sort of sign that God accepted the offering.

Cain Brings His Offering

Well, this day that we read in Scripture is like no other. Cain, the firstborn of the family, sits and he's produced this yield from the field of—and he's placed it on the altar. The grain, the squash, green beans, tomatoes, potatoes. And he lit it. And he's watching it burn. And he knows what to look for. He knows when the divine fire, the eternal flame, catches and it's consumed because it's different. It's not just cooking.

Cain's Offering Not Accepted

But as he watches it, he notices that the potatoes aren't burning at the same rate as the grain because that's how it works when you're just cooking. He knows what to look for when everything engulfs. And slowly he's waiting, he's watching his sacrifice slowly cook. The potatoes are beginning to be charred, turning black. Concerned Cain, he wonders, why has the divine fire not come? I don't understand. Why is the offering not consumed? Maybe it's the altar, maybe he's checking the stones, anything loose, mortar came out, I don't know, is it the stones? Why is God not giving me a sign that he's accepted my offering? This is not the first time that Cain's done an offering, but it was the first time that he had ever seen an offering not accepted. Every time Adam did it, poof! Even after Adam allowed Cain to begin making

offerings, he had never simply seen food cook on the top of the altar. Only witnessed the theophany through the divine fire that consumed the fruits of the field that he offered.

The Memory of First Offerings

Can you imagine Cain sitting there having a flashback to the very first time that he had ever offered on the altar? Adam closely surrounding him, showing him how to do it for the first time. Cain, this is time for me to pass this on to you. Moving the different yields of fruit to different sides of the altar. Cain following suit, lighting the fire, stepping back, waiting for something to happen. You could hear nature itself breathing. Then poof! The divine flame, the sign of acceptance from God, consumes the offering. Can you imagine what this did for a child like Cain? Eve is probably crying. Adam crying more than Eve as he grabs his son, telling him how proud he is of him. I am so proud of you, son. You will be the priest of our home. You will be the one that carries this on. This was not simply an offering. This was a rite before God himself.

Watching His Brother's Acceptance

But here the memory would come to a halt as Cain is faced with the current reality. The ancient one has no longer accepted his offering. It's not happening. What's wrong? Can you imagine Cain gurgling up ready to call for Adam? Adam, something's wrong. Dad, something's wrong. He looks over, but he sees the divine flame. There it is. And at that moment, he can smell the meat piercing through the air, captivated by the divine flame. He sees burning, not on his altar, but on a pile of rocks at the bottom of the crest of the hill. A slain lamb is on top of it. And he's watching the divine flame just as he always does. The divine flame doesn't consume, it reveals layer by layer of the offering as it slowly licks up every ounce of it. And as the last flame licks up the fat on the altar, Cain breaks his focus and sees a prostrated body beside the altar weeping. It's his brother Abel.

His brother? What is Abel doing? Why is he there? Trying to make sense of all this, he begins to head home. Frustrated. What is happening? He looks up and he sees Eve at the door, maybe, crying, because she's so proud of her son, but—she sees Cain. They're standing right beside him. They've witnessed the whole thing. Unable to make sense of this. They can see him concerned. They try to lift their hands to comfort him. No, he walks away. He walks out into the field alone.

God's Call to Cain

At that moment when he's finally alone, a figure flashes before him, causing him to stumble backwards. Then the Lord said to Cain, verse 6, Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what's right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what's right, sin is crouching at the door. And it desires to have you, Cain, but you must rule over it. You can rule over it.

Imagine seeing the figure for the first time. I don't know if this is the first time Cain has ever seen this divine messenger or God. Something out of the imagination, possibly birthed from what his mother told him about the garden and the angels cherubim at the gates of the garden. Cain, why are you angry? Imagine Cain in silence, in awe. Can you imagine Cain speaking up? Because you didn't accept my offering. You didn't accept me. Cain, we did accept you. No, no, the divine fire fell on Abel's offering, not mine. But Cain, the family was accepted today. The offering of the family was accepted today. But not on my altar.

Cain's Frustration Rising

These are the feelings we see. I am Cain. I till the dirt from the sweat of my brow. Look at all of this that I've tilled. Every ounce of this land. Where was Abel when I was producing this vast produce? Why are you angry, Cain? Don't you know if you do right? Don't you know? But if not, sin is crouching at the door. It will overtake you. Can you imagine, Cain? Cain's done what is right. I've done everything right. I've honored my parents. Did everything good. I've produced the yield. I offer it. I mean, what else do I need to?

Cain, your family has been accepted just like every other day. Why are you angry? Can you imagine Cain being so frustrated at this moment? He speaks to the Holy One, the Ancient One, but his emotions speak for him. It's not from the heart. He can't control himself. He storms off from the presence of the Ancient One. And as the story goes, Cain called Abel out of the field in the very next verse.

The Murder

Can you imagine Cain talking to himself as he's walking out in the field? Angry towards his brother, towards everybody. He's done everything right. I build the sheepfolds. I'm the strong one. I repair the sheepfolds because Abel's too weak to do it. I till all the ground. They don't know what it's like to till the ground. All these rocks and thorns and thistles. It's their fault. I'm

doing the work. Why can't I? I don't understand. Then he looks up. He looks up and he sees Abel laughing and chasing some sheep around. I am the one that was brought forth. I am Cain.

So scripture says that he called Abel. Abel, quick to obey, to please his older brother, runs towards him. At that moment Cain is still confused, overwhelmed with his emotions. He finds that there's a stone on the ground that his hand rests on. Here the first murder takes place in the Bible. Cain, the firstborn of the biblical story, slays his brother. Abel's blood is consumed by the dirt of the earth for the first time and it cries out as a result.

The Root of Sin

What was Cain's sin? From the little bit of narrative we have in the Bible, what was Cain's sin? Well, of course, murder. Duh. He was a murderer. But what led to his sin? Cain did not just wake up one day and be like, hey, I'm a murderer, so I think I'm going to go murder someone today. Just like we don't wake up thinking, I'm a liar or I'm a thief or I'm an adulterer or I'm angry or I'm a sinner. I think I'm just going to go sin today. No, it doesn't work like that. Cain was angry that his offering was not accepted, that Abel's was, which prompts a totally different question.

Why wasn't it? Well, the Bible tells us that Abel gave the very best, the first fruits of his yield, and depicts Cain's offering as kind of just some crops. He offered crops. But it doesn't give us details about Cain's offering. But probably not the best, not the first. And there's a huge lesson that can be preached on that verse about tithing and giving and give your first. But what is fascinating is even though that verse implies that Cain's offering was not good enough, Verses 6 through 7 kind of give us a different impression. They give us the impression that Cain wasn't rejected by God.

Why are you angry, Cain? Like God missed it. Why are you angry? You do what's right, you'll always be accepted. The biblical characters in the story seem to have no clue why God accepted one over the other. God seems confused at why Cain's angry. You ever notice that? Anyone ever notice that and been like, God, you know why he's angry? Because you did that thing. No. Why are you so mad, Cain? If we take the Bible at its word, maybe Cain was not rejected just because his offering was.

Identity and Idolatry

So put yourself in Cain's shoes, if you can. I know I'm asking a lot from your imagination in this, but hopefully it's edifying. You're the firstborn. You're the prized child. When compared to

Abel's birth, yours has this really climactic first of mankind. He comes forth from Hava, the one that gives life. Big deal. And then Abel was born. It's like Abel was an afterthought, like the vapor. Abel was born later. Cain was the storyteller for all future generations. Returning to the garden was on Cain's shoulders. He was the family priest. He was the hope, the future. And Cain had woven his own identity through all of these roles, just as we do at times.

We all tend to ground our identity in different roles we find ourselves in, don't we? I'm a faithful spouse. I'm a loving father. I'm a devoted Christian. I'm a productive employee. I am fill in the blank. And labels and roles that we put our identity in, sometimes they help us strive on. They make us better, putting forth effort, as we continue on our journey. But according to the Bible, these are very, very, very, very, very weak foundations for a strong identity. When we look at our identities to give our life meaning, we end up making them into idols. Andy Crouch, author of a book called *Playing God*, had one neat thing to say. He was talking about idolatry, and he said, "...idolatry is anything that advances a claim about the ultimate nature of reality that is ultimately mistaken." And since Creator God is the ultimate meaning of the world, an idol is a representation of a false god, implicitly or explicitly.

All idols represent a challenge and counterclaim to the identity and character of the true Creator God. What was Cain's underlying sin that manifests through murder? It seems Cain may have grounded his identity in something other than what God was. What happens when you're grounded in an identity of being a good father?

Anybody ever been like, pat yourself on the shoulder, I'm a good dad? So I feel vulnerable whenever I do this, maybe I haven't—no one has ever done that to me. Sometimes as men, we like to be, yeah, I'm a good dad. It's good. Until the new neighbors move in and boy, that guy sure does give a lot of attention to his kids. What if, what if he's a better father than me? What if she's a better mother than me? What if he's a better son, daughter than me? See, it's only a matter of time before your label will be challenged. You may think you're top dog at work. Anybody been there? No? Okay, top dog—unreplaceable. I feel secure. Been there for whatever, 15 years? And they hire this new kid out of college. No threat till he starts work. Faster, more reliable, solves problems quicker. He's a better employee. And because that is your identity, what happens to you? Do you get angry? Anybody ever get angry at people because they're encroaching on your identity? You guys must have that problem. I've never. I'm a good parent. Until you see that large family with way more kids than you, and they are so doggone better behaved than your kids are, they're like the Von Trott family, whistles and all, just, who are these people? Anyone ever find themselves angry and jealous of other people? Anyone use Instagram in here? All y'all know what I'm talking about. Okay, that's good. Anyone ever

become angry at someone threatening their own identity? It's part jealousy, part anger. Our reaction masks the fear that we have deep down inside. And despite how you feel about someone encroaching on your identity, it's not their fault, it's yours. Because you've created an identity out of sand. It's never going to last.

Identity Built on Sand

What if, just a thought, what if we have the story of Cain all backwards? And that's fine. If you're trekking along, Matt, you're a heretic, it's okay. I love the Bible, and I always think God is trying to reveal more from it. But what if we have the story of Cain backwards? What if God was trying to rescue Cain? Or is that too far-fetched for our God? Do what is good, and you will always be mine. You will always be accepted. What if God was inviting Cain into a deeper identity in him and Cain got angry, just as we all do when our identity is only founded in farce foundations? God rejected Cain's offering for the day. I think it's an okay assumption. He accepted Abel's. For that day, Cain was not priest of the home. For that offering, Cain had lost that identity. Whether it was going to continue like that or not, story doesn't say. I'll take liberties. His identity was taken from him at that moment. What if God's rejection of Cain's offering was not a rejection of Cain? Again, just a thought. I could be totally wrong, but remember, God was trying to warn Cain. He was trying to get Cain. Sin is crouching at the door. Stay focused, Cain. Don't be distracted, Cain. Why are you getting angry, Cain? Why are you looking at other people, Cain? Why are you so concerned about everyone else, Cain? Why are you so consumed about things that don't matter, Cain? Look at me, Cain.

Sometimes we look at other believers and we judge them for the ways that they worship God and then we get ticked. Anyone ever? No. We get ticked. When God is actually accepting their offering and his peace and his joy and the fruit of his spirit is on their lives, we're like, yeah, but they're not doing it like I do it. They're not doing it right. I'm doing it right. That's my identity. But yet they have the fruit of the spirit. They're getting the Holy Spirit. They're getting the peace and the love that God promised with his kingdom. Why are they getting it and not me? I'm doing everything right. Remember, anger is not a sin. God gets angry. Anger is actually a secondary emotion. Anyone realize that? Secondary. It means that it's caused by something else. Forensic psychologist Dr. Steven Diamond, he says that anger is an assertion of the individual's most basic right to be an individual. I thought that was kind of clever. Anger is an assertion of an individual's most basic right to be an individual. We view anger as a negative emotion, but Dr. Diamond pushes back. He says, without the capacity for anger or even rage, we would be unable to defend ourselves or those we love when needed, to fight for freedom and what we

truly believe in and value. We'd be unable to face down evil, leaving us even more vulnerable to it. In other words, anger is actually like a warning light on the dashboard. Darn check engine light that goes on and off. When we feel the swell in our chest, right, men? It's a signal letting us know that someone or something is challenging our identity or what we root our identity in. So anger can be a sign that something is very desperately wrong in your life. It's the tightness that you feel when someone you love is threatened because your identity is in that. It's a good thing. Don't threaten my wife, my kid, my son, my spouse. It's mine. It's the flush redness that you get in your face when you hear about other Christians being persecuted around the world. It's anger. It's frustration.

When Anger Becomes Irrational

Anger can become so irrational. Anyone ever had irrational anger? I know. I know the answer. Anyone ever had irrational anger because someone cut you off in traffic? No. I mean, more angry than you've ever, you've said some things, right? Altar call worthy. Things just... And it wasn't that big of a deal. That's something you learn real quick. If you ever drive in Israel, I miss driving in Israel because it's so great. Because the rule in Israel is no harm, no foul. Like, it's amazing. It's great. Like, ooh, that close? Didn't hit him? No problem. And a simple wave covers a multitude of sins when you're driving in Israel. It's amazing. Oh, sorry. It's okay. It's just amazing. Not like here. But regardless, anyone ever flipped a lid when someone disagreed with their political views? It's okay to get upset, but I'm talking about that anger. You wouldn't have that much anger if someone kicked in your door to rob you, but you have that much anger because someone disagreed with your viewpoint on things. The problem with anger is that it doesn't tell us why it's protecting us, why it occurs, why the light comes on. It's covering us from something, whether it be insecurity, trauma, or hurt. It can't tell you if your identity is being built up on rock or sand. It reacts the same. It only knows that something is wrong in your life.

Most of us don't realize God's invitation to Cain is also yours. Why are you angry? Don't you know if you do what is right, if you stay focused, if you make your identity in me, don't you know if you stop making idols out of everything else, don't you know that I accept you? But sin is crouching at the door and it's ready to devour you. Why are you getting angry? Most of us go through life never realizing anger is an invitation to examine ourselves. We let it bottle up, right? And then we let it explode. And then we try to sweep that incident under the carpet like it didn't matter. And then we move on to another two, three, six months, year, however often it happens. And it's a repeating cycle. Oh, you think I didn't know? It happens to just about

everybody. And we try to ignore it as if it's not there for a reason and trying to tell us something. This is what God wanted Cain to know. I think it is what God wants you to know. And I think that the question needs to be, what are you built on?

You know, it's fascinating because some of the most angry people, rank time, angry people I've ever met claim to be followers of God. Christians, messianics, tour keepers, myself included. What are we scared of? What are we scared of? What's being threatened that we have to be so angry? What inadequacy do we have that we refuse to allow God to fill and be the foundation of? You ever seen someone flip? Because someone read a verse about the Sabbath or whatever and they don't interpret it the same way that you do? Angry! They're not angry for God's sake. What would have happened if Cain took hold of the invitation from God to find his identity in him, in his kingdom? Cain, you're accepted. Do what's right. Stop being distracted about everything else. Not some checklist you feel you need to complete to please the roles in your life. Cain chose to keep his identity, his firstborn status, his role as the priest carrying the family forward. What would happen if you took hold of the invitation God gives? To let go, to know that God loves you, to know that God cares for you, that you are accepted by God, that God is calling you to be closer to him. What would that look like? Stand strong. Don't allow sin to overtake you. It's crouching, but you can rule over it. God invited Cain to do what is right. Instead, Cain killed his brother. You know how we know that Cain was preserving his identity? He killed his brother to make himself number one again by default. Who else is it going to be now? Problem solved.

In the past few weeks, we read about Yeshua mentioning something about anger on the Sermon on the Mount and something about murder too, right? And he said, if you allow anger to overtake you, to overtake your heart against someone else, you've committed the sin of Cain. You've murdered someone else. Be careful, be watchful, and know that God accepts you and is calling you back to him. Do what is right. Matt, what does a life like that look like? Enter Yeshua's teaching on the Torah, Yeshua's teaching on how to walk out as an ambassador of the King, the Christ, the Kingdom of God. Living out the Kingdom that is coming now so the world can see it, feel it, that it shines all darkness away. Do what is right. You'll always be accepted.

Understanding Cain

Did this maybe change the way that you view Cain? Just a little bit. Maybe not all of you. I don't know. Not to be sympathetic. I mean, he was a murderer. Cain's a bad guy. Don't be sympathetic towards Cain. You don't need to feel sorry for Cain. He's a murderer. But you can at least try or attempt to understand what happened.

Many of us don't wake up every single day thinking that we're going to murder someone. Some of us might be tempted, but not all. And we feel like we're safe from this lesson. Oh, I don't need to worry about that. Just like Yeshua taught, if you allow anger, if you don't deal with anger and deal with the issues in your life, the things that threaten, the faulty foundations of your own identity, if you don't find rest on a solid rock that is who God is and will always be and who you are as a child of God, you're prone to the sin of Cain.

The Power of Empathy

This is the power of empathy. Looking into someone else's life to see why they are the way they are. Did Yeshua have empathy for others? The correct answer would be absolutely. He knew the past of the prostitute when he invited her to the table. He knew the past of the tax collector. He knew the past of the pagan Samaritan before he opened his mouth. The untouchables in society. He knew their past. He understood. And he reached out and said, follow me. Do what is right. You can be accepted. You can erase the past. Oh, your sins, they're forgiven. Be raised to life now. I have a new identity for you.

A Warning Light

The next time you see someone you do not like, maybe your anger is a warning sign. Maybe. Anyone have people that just... All of us do. It's not like... I don't expect any of you not to raise your hand. That should be the warning light. And remember, try to look at that. Why am I getting... I just don't like them. But the just is a big just. Why? Why is that your default? Dig down. Why don't you? Are they encroaching on a part of your life? Maybe they're just kind of a jerk. Okay. Or maybe they're encroaching on a part of your life that you feel threatened by. And that's not their fault. That's not a faultiness in their character. Be empathetic. Start off by default, viewing everybody as an image bearer of God and go from there.

Growing in Empathy

Such an easy thing to say. This is the way of Yeshua. And this is the power of having empathy for the wicked. So I'd invite the worship team to come up. We conclude services every week the same way we enter in, through praise and worship. And so I invite you to stand as we usher out of services the same way that we came in.

I don't know where you're at today. Maybe this lesson, this message, the story of Cain that the biblical authors detailed the way that they did for a reason meant nothing to you, and that's

okay. Maybe it did. Maybe it did. I invite you, don't just let it pass by. Continue soul searching and pray to the Father that he would reveal to you in your heart what is it that's causing the warning lights to go off. Pray that you can have empathy towards others and that he will give you wisdom to search out the things in your life that are keeping you from him. Empathy is a very big deal.

So as I said, I think we have a prayer team off to the sides. If you need prayer, I invite you to take advantage of the group of people who will support you, stand with you, and pray beside you and lift you up for whatever needs you may have.

Avinu Malkinu, our Father, our King, Father, we thank you for this opportunity to once again dive into your word, that you would continue to show us your wisdom to conform us into the image of the only perfect one, Yeshua, that when people would see us, they would not see us, they would see his handiwork. They would see his love, his justice, his reign. They would see his empathy towards them. Father, enable us to grow as believers, those in covenant with you. Allow us to see what is right and pursue it always. In the name of Yeshua, we pray. Amen. Shalom, I'm Matthew Vandrells and I hope you enjoyed this message.

Founded in Truth exists to cultivate a fellowship of image bearers that live the redeemed life only Yeshua can give. If this ministry has been a blessing to you, we would love to hear from you. Send us an email through the contact form on our website and tell us how God has used this ministry to edify your faith and relationship with Him. If you'd like to see more messages like this one, subscribe to our YouTube channel by clicking here. If you'd like to donate to this ministry and be a part of what God is doing through it, you can donate through our online giving portal here. We thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to next time. Shalom.

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at Foundedintruth.com EMAIL: Info@foundedintruth.com FACEBOOK: facebook.com/foundedintruth WEBSITE: <https://www.foundedintruth.com> Google: <https://g.co/kgs/az3iPeM>

Watch or listen: foundedintruth.com/bible-teachings/empathy-for-the-wicked-cain/

This automated transcript has been lightly edited for readability; scripture quotations appear as spoken. For the authoritative teaching, watch the video. • Founded in Truth Fellowship, Rock Hill SC • Saturdays 11:00 AM • Your giving keeps every teaching free: foundedintruth.com/give