

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-8 Personal Growth: Dealing With Sin

The first seven lessons of this course have discussed some of the basic principles a counselor needs to understand. The counselor must be trustworthy, a good listener, loving and humble. He or she must realize that only the Holy Spirit has the answers to people's needs. Your lessons have used Jesus' example of coming alongside people, loving them, serving them, and listening to their concerns.

The next five lessons will address some of the various needs of people today. People in the Bible had similar concerns. Your friends, family members, or even strangers may come to you with their issues. Often their first questions are about what can be called 'personal growth needs.' Such concerns might be a need for acceptance and approval; needs for food, clothing, and shelter; or overcoming a weakness.

This lesson will address how a person can overcome sin in his or her life. The story of the two sons of Adam and Eve gives an example of God's counsel to an individual who felt rejected because of his behavior. He yielded to one sin after another. God's counsel is just as true today as it was when this event took place. This lesson shows you that often someone seeking counsel will come with a problem they cannot control. It has gone from bad to very bad.

The Book of Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve had their first son and named him Cain. Later Eve gave birth to his brother Abel. Cain worked the soil, while Abel kept flocks. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering. But on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain felt rejected and became very angry. Abel's offering was accepted because he offered it by faith. The writer to the Hebrews says, "by faith" Abel offered God his sacrifice (Heb 11:4).

Then the Lord said, "Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not ... sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." Both Cain and Abel had been taught by their parents what God wanted in an offering. It was Cain who chose to bring an offering unacceptable to God. He had not obeyed what he had been taught was right. He chose his own way.

As the story goes, Cain later said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were there, Cain attacked and killed his brother. It could have been that Cain felt God favored Abel more than him. "Cain ... murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous" (1John 3:12).

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" God already knew what had happened. This was Cain's chance to confess and take control over his sins, but he did not.

"I don't know," Cain lied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground. . . . When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

Cain cried to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; . . . whoever finds me will kill me.”

Cain showed no remorse for his behavior and gave no promise to change. He only felt sorry for himself. God extended mercy and let him live. God even offered him protection from those who would try to harm him. He put a warning mark on Cain and said, “Anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” So Cain went away from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod (Gen 4:1-16).

This story does not tell us if Cain ever came back into the presence of God. It does tell us that God is not concerned mainly with the offerings we bring him. He is more concerned with the condition of our hearts toward him and our relationship with him and others. “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1Sam 15:22).

As you counsel or advise a person God sends your way, you may often notice that their problem started small. Then it got out of control and went on to harm others. It is now a problem they cannot fix alone. It is time for help from another source.

Cain made an offering to God, but not an acceptable one. He offered sacrifice with a lack of faith. After Cain’s offering was not accepted, he became angry at God and jealous of his brother. He deceived his brother Abel, getting him into the field, where he murdered him. He lied to God about what he had done. He declared that he was not responsible for the whereabouts of his brother. Uncontrolled anger, jealousy, deception, murder, and lying—one sin led to another. And the problems for Cain increased as he began to shift the blame for his misdeeds onto others. God told Cain, “If you don’t do right, sin is at the door, and it will attempt to become your master.”

You will no doubt meet people who behave as Cain did. They act without faith and are focused on their own concerns. They do things that harm themselves and others. Because of our free will to act as we wish, we can self-destruct. God allows people to choose to obey or to disobey, but he holds them accountable for disobedience.

It is not uncommon for a person to have many problems, mistakes, or wrong behaviors when they first seek you out. In this story God focused on one issue and asked Cain to deal with that one. That one issue was, “Unless you do right, sin can become your master.” The mark of God that separates you from others will be seen as you begin to control and become the master over sin. With our own faith in God and faith in his Word, we can remind such people that all of us have to watch out for sin in our lives. It can and will seek to destroy us. We will reap what we sow, but God will help us through the consequences of our behavior. He stands ready to extend grace and have mercy on those who confess their sins and call on Jesus.

God’s counsel would be for the person to do what is right **now**. They need to acknowledge their error and come to him in repentance. The person must forsake the sin that lies at their door.

They have to accept the results of what they have done. Even if one suffers as a result of their error, God says “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” He also says he will support the man or woman who mends their ways and overcomes “the sin that so easily entangles” (Heb 12:1).

This lesson is **important** because it gives hope to people who find themselves entangled in problems they cannot fix alone. The minister or friend offering counsel can focus on God’s forgiveness and grace which are available to anyone who repents.

The **truth** this story teaches is that God holds people responsible for their choices and that sin separates them from him, but he has mercy on those who come to him.

To **review** this lesson—

1. Why was Abel’s offering accepted and not Cain’s? [Pause]
A. If you said, “Abel offered his sacrifice by faith and did what was right before God; Cain did not,” you are correct.
2. How did Cain and Abel know what kind of sacrifice God accepted? [Pause]
A. If you said, “Their godly parents, Adam and Eve, had taught them,” you are right.
3. What was Cain’s issue that God focused on in this story? [Pause]
A. If you answered, “God wanted Cain to master the sin at his door,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, think about how Cain’s one choice to disobey led to many other wrong choices. Finally he left the presence of the Lord. Retell the story in your own words. Ask yourself what sin is crouching at the door of your heart. What sin is at the doors of the hearts of people who may come to you?