

(dys)FUNCTIONAL Relationships

Genesis 4:1-10 - Cain & Abel (Personal Responsibility)

1. In this lesson, Ryan introduces the idea that the stories in Genesis are not primarily about the great faith of the ancestors but rather God's faithfulness (or hesed) to the ancestors. What is your reaction to this idea? How might it change the way you read these stories?
2. Which brother do you more naturally identify with in the story of Cain and Abel? Why, and what might that reveal about your experiences within your own family system?
3. Describe a time in your life when you, like Cain, were more focused on getting attention rather than being accepted. What was motivating you? What were the effects? Why was it hard to embrace the truth of your acceptance with God at that particular moment?
4. In Genesis 4:15, God puts a "mark" on Cain so that no one would retaliate against him for the crime he committed. What do you make of this ending to the story? Is it fair? If you could write an alternative (or extended) ending to the story, how would it go?
5. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs suggests that the central theme of the Cain and Abel story is that of a failure to take responsibility. Why is taking responsibility for failures so hard? What attitudes or habits do we need to cultivate in our own lives in order to be a people who have the courage to step forward and take more responsibility for our own failures?
6. In this lesson, Ryan points to the example of King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, who in the summer of 2023 issued an apology for his country's failure to act against slavery, even though slavery was abolished in the Netherlands over 100 years ago. What good do you think an apology like this does? What values does it communicate? Do you have any push back or concerns about such apologies?

Genesis 12:4-5, 13:5-18 - Abram & Lot (Generosity)

1. In Genesis 12, Abraham is called to leave his family and kin in order to go to the land God had promised him. Much later, Jesus says "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake ... will inherit eternal life" (Matt 19:29). To what extent has your own faith journey involved moving away from your family of origin? Was this helpful, painful, or both?
2. In Genesis 18, Abraham enters into a back-and-forth negotiation with God on behalf of the innocent people of Sodom. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs suggests that this is the first time in Scripture that someone challenges God. Describe a time when you have challenged God. What were the circumstances, and what did the 'challenge' look like or entail?
3. Christians often think challenging or negotiating with God is a sign of doubt or disbelief – and so, it's something we should avoid. Has this been part of your experience? Why might challenging God be a positive dimension of faith?
4. Sadly, Genesis 19 is often cited as an example of why the Bible is against homosexuality. Drawing on what you've learned in Ryan's lesson, how would you respond to this reading of Genesis 19? What do you think is the take-away lesson from this story about Lot and the visitors?
5. In this lesson, Ryan cites studies that suggest that beyond a certain base level, an increase in wealth does not usually lead to an increase in happiness. To what extent does this track

with your own experiences? Why do you think wealth is not a reliable indicator of happiness?

Genesis 24: 63-65; 27:5-17 - Rebekah & Isaac (Communication)

1. What are some possible reasons that Rebekah did not tell Isaac about God's revelation of the twins' destinies?
2. Are there certain situations, relationships, or contexts in which you don't feel as free to be yourself? What results (good, bad, or otherwise) come from your acting, speaking, or thinking against your nature? What do you do instead?
3. Is it more difficult or easy for you to see events and relationships "from the Lord" as neither essentially good nor essentially bad? Why?
4. Isaac and Rebekah are both products of their families of origin and shapers of their future descendants. In what ways (positive and negative) can you see yourself as both in keeping with and distinct from your own family?

Genesis 25: 27-34; 27:30-41; 33 - Jacob & Esau (Identity)

1. When have you had an experience that significantly helped you understand someone else's perspective?
2. The old saying goes that "time heals all wounds." While clearly not always the case, when is it true that time is the primary factor in healing? Can you think of any examples?
3. While the brothers are reconciled, they don't necessarily become intimate. How are love and intimacy different? How are boundaries important to any relationship and even more so to previously dysfunctional ones?
4. Jacob and Esau continue the pattern of previously estranged brothers uniting to bury their father. What is it about grief that can be healing?

Genesis 37: 3-11; 37: 18-32 - Joseph & his brothers

1. When have you been too close to a situation to understand it well? How did you get some distance and therefore perspective?
2. What prevents us from recognizing the good in others?
3. Joseph attributes his brothers' actions as being part of God's plan to save the family. A good explanation is "God didn't cause the situation, but he didn't waste it." What experiences do we as individuals and as communities have a tendency to waste? How might we more intentionally receive bad circumstances and recognize opportunity in them?