

# SAMPLE

## SERMONS AND BIBLE NOTES

### HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

In this *Sermons and Bible Notes* booklet, you will find a Sermon section and a Daily Bible Notes section for each video session in the *Notorious Video Series* or each chapter in the *Notorious* book (sold separately).

The Sermon section can be used as both a **sermon outline** and a **text template for slides** on each topic or character. Just copy and paste the text into an appropriate slide program, then design and customize as you see fit. See the Daily Bible Notes section in this booklet or the *Notorious* book for more context to fill out the slides if you so desire.

The Daily Bible Notes section acts as six-day **devotions**, as each day presents a Bible reading, biblical insights and modern-day stories, and a question to ponder or a prayer to carry you to the next day. (Please note that these are the same devotions that appear in the *Notorious* book.)

### SERMON 1: CAIN

#### *The Call to Authentic Worship*

##### Genesis 4:2–16

##### *1. God sees gift and giver.*

1 Samuel 16:7—The Lord doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

Matthew 5:23–24—So if you are presenting a “sacrifice” at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

Matthew 23:35—“Righteous Abel.”

##### *2. Worship is an act of faith.*

Hebrews 11:4—It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel's offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed His approval of Abel's gifts.

3. *Bring the fat and the first fruits.*

Jude v. 11—For they follow in the footsteps of Cain, who killed his brother.

4. *Worship often generates conflict.*

1 John 3:12—We must not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and killed his brother. And why did he kill him? Because Cain had been doing what was evil, and his brother had been doing what was righteous.

5. *Check what's at the door.*

Hebrews 12:24—You have come to Jesus, the One who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.

6. *Create a legacy beyond this life.*

Hebrews 11:4—Although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith.

## DAILY BIBLE NOTES: CAIN

### Day 1. Cain: Anger

**Read:** Genesis 4:1–5; 1 John 3:11–24

We've witnessed it too often. The headline announces that yet another tragedy has unfolded at a school in the US, as a shooter calmly walks into a place that should be safe and takes the lives of so many innocents. While we must question the mental health of anyone who would commit such an atrocity, we realize that the root of this carnage is anger. Because of rejection, frustration, a feeling of powerlessness, anger has simmered, with terrible results.

Anger led Cain to kill his brother and become the first murderer in recorded history. As we continue to try to unravel this story of God accepting one sacrifice and rejecting another, we turn again to the New Testament to gain perspective on Cain and hear the apostle John roundly condemn him: “who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother.” John offers a motive for Cain's crime: “And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous” (1 John 3:12).

Not all anger is sin. But beware lingering rage and bitterness. It usually leads to disaster.

**Ponder:** Has anger ever been a cause of damage in your life or in the lives of others close to you?

## Day 2. Cain: Failure Is Not the End

**Read:** Genesis 4:1–7; Psalm 32:1

**Focus:** “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?’” (Gen. 4:6–7).

A bright young leader was an inspiration to so many, but he hid a dark secret from nearly everybody. He battled depression that was rooted in his feeling quite shamed. After coming to Jesus as a young man, he drifted away from faith for a while, falling into some rather lurid sexual sins. For some reason, some find it more difficult to recover from failure in that area, and although he’d come back to God wholeheartedly and lived a life committed to the gospel, he couldn’t pull off the shroud of shame that seemed to be draped around his soul. It didn’t end well for him.

As we read John’s statement that Cain “belonged to the evil one,” we could be tempted to write off Cain as beyond help. But that is not what we find in the story. Encountering Cain directly, God made it clear that he had not been rejected, but that his offering had been. At this stage (before any murderous intentions surfaced), in the words that God spoke, there was a clear invitation to Cain to do right and thus know approval—another opportunity for another day. Sadly, anger, and perhaps shame, won the day, and Cain continued his downhill trek into tragedy and judgment, and Abel lost his life.

We all fail, but some of us view failure as a terminal act, which is quite wrong. If you’ve fallen, get up and allow grace to turn your downcast face into a smile of relief and joy once more. There is hope and help for a better day ahead as we celebrate the joy of being forgiven.

**Pray:** Help me to accept the gift of grace that You offer, Lord—the gift that brings hope when I feel hopeless about myself. Amen.

## Day 3. Cain: Sin Crouches

**Read:** Genesis 4:1–7; Romans 6:12–14

**Focus:** “But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7).

During a day out in the high country in the Colorado mountains, we suddenly stumbled upon a rather large moose grazing beneath a nearby tree. These huge animals are infamous for being tetchy; irritate them at your peril, because they have been known to charge passing trains, which is not a sign of great intelligence. We edged closer, bold because of the nonchalant attitude of the moose, who didn’t appear to be aware of his visitors. But he was fooling

us. In a moment, his head came up, and he broke into a charge. He had us in his sights. We felt led to get out of his way! Thankfully, though, he ran out of steam before he could reach us. Still, it was quite a worrying moment.

As God spoke to Cain about sin, He painted a picture of a crouching animal that, as one translator put it, “is eager to be at you.” This speaks of the deceptive, compulsive power of sin and temptation, promising much, urging us to surrender to its wiles, subtle in its attack. No wonder we need to be aware of our weaknesses and diligent about our choices. But there’s hope from God even in the warning to Cain, because he is told to master his sinful inclinations. The call to mastery obviously shows that Cain was not a helpless victim of temptation, but that he could have conquered it.

Sometimes we excuse our behavior, insisting that we “just can’t help it.” We’re only human, we insist. But that’s not true. With the help of God’s Spirit, we can rule over that which seeks to rule over us. Sin crouches. Tackle it, with God’s help.

**Pray:** Today I will be vigilant, Father, aware of temptation, yet not intimidated by it. Amen.

#### *Day 4. Premeditated and Consistent Sin*

**Read:** Genesis 4:1–16; Jude verse 11

**Focus:** “While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him” (Gen. 4:8).

Murder is obviously always horrifying, but the specific details of the first murder in history are especially chilling, not least because this was a brother killing his own brother, his own flesh and blood. And although we’ve already seen that Cain was driven by anger, this was not a sudden impetuous act, a crime of passion. Cain was guilty of a premeditated, deliberate crime that involved careful planning. Luring Abel with an invitation to a walk in the fields, Cain killed him in cold blood. Questioned by God as to the whereabouts of his brother (God knew but asked the question anyway, perhaps to further test Cain’s integrity, or lack of it), Cain lied to the Lord and feigned ignorance of his brother’s location.

So why all this sin upon sin? Commenting on this terrible episode, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested that hatred for God was the root of Cain’s violence and rage. It was God who rejected Cain’s sacrifice, and it was God who ultimately created Abel, whom Cain viewed as a rival rather than a brother. But while God is obviously impervious to violent actions against Him, other humans are vulnerable. As a Christian leader, I’ve seen this principle at work: when people are enraged at God, they will lash out at those whom they see as representatives of Him, such as their local minister or pastor. Bitterness multiplies sin—and hurts those who don’t deserve our ire. Are you engaged in a battle with someone whom you’re using to vent your frustration?

**Pray:** Lord, when I’m struggling in my relationship with You, save me from taking out that frustration on others. Amen.

## Day 5. The Hero: “Righteous” Abel

**Read:** Matthew 23:13–36; 1 Peter 4:12–19

**Focus:** “And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar” (Matt. 23:35).

It’s a lingering myth that we all want to believe: the idea that those who walk with God will not suffer. If that idea seems far-fetched, remember that there are still bestselling authors and television evangelists who hawk the idea that we can avoid bumps in the road of life if we have enough faith. Not only is much of this teaching “faith in faith,” but it is also totally misleading. In confronting the rank hypocrisy of the self-righteous Pharisees, Jesus called Abel “righteous”—the ultimate accolade! And as we’ve already seen, Abel appears in the “Hebrews hall of faith.” So far from lacking faith, he is celebrated as one of the greatest faith heroes in human history. And yet still he died at the hands of his murderous brother. Not only was he unprotected, but his righteousness was the reason for his demise.

Anyone who suggests that faith is a sure guarantee of an easy life only needs to look at the example of the twelve disciples. With the obvious exception of Judas (and the apostle John, who was exiled in Patmos), all died martyrs’ deaths.

Around the world today, good and faithful followers of Jesus are suffering for their faith. They could live untroubled lives if they would just abandon their commitment to Christ, but despite their suffering, they stand firm. Remember to pray for them, their families, and for the authorities that oppress them today. And if you’re suffering today, especially because of your faith, I’m praying that you’ll be strengthened—but not surprised.

**Pray:** Grant strength and hope to those who suffer for Your name’s sake, Father. And grant revelation and repentance to those who oppress Your people. Amen.

## Day 6. Living Worship

**Read:** Hebrews 11:1–4; John 4:1–26

**Focus:** “By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead” (Heb. 11:4).

If you’ve been a Christian for any amount of time, you’ve probably sung a lot of songs and attended a lot of worship services! There’s a danger that worship can become a dull routine, a lifeless weekend ritual. Before we move on from Cain’s sad story, we should consider one other theory about why his offering was rejected.

Some commentators believe that Abel brought a living thing for sacrifice and that worship should be living and vibrant, not coldly mechanical. That doesn't mean that we will always *feel* like worshipping, or that excitement about faith should be the constant norm for all Christians. We worship, not because of what we feel, but because of who God is!

Our worship should always be an act of faith. We've already seen that the writer to the Hebrews celebrated Abel's faith. When we worship, we speak, sing, and bring praise to One whom we cannot see. Perhaps we worship from a place of confusion and struggle. Our worship then is truly an act of faith, not the result of certain feelings, which come and go. Ultimately our worship is a response to the call of the Father, who "seeks" those who will worship authentically—and that includes our gatherings of prayer, praise, and teaching, as well as the way we live our everyday lives.

**Pray:** Let my life, my prayers, my song be true acts of worship in Your sight, loving Father. Amen.