

Part 7: Who Cares

Tyler Velin | Genesis 4:1-16

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The phrase, “self-care,” seemed to be a modern idea. But guess what year it first showed up in the English language? 1840. At that point it appeared alongside other words like “benevolence,” “charity,” and “hospitality.” All those words communicate a concern for the wellbeing of others. But since 1840, those other words have decreased in usage by upwards of 80%. Self-care’s use however, has gone up by 24,455%.

I don't think it's a coincidence that in a culture where words that communicated a concern and care for others is decreasing that words like "selfcare" are rapidly increasing. In a world that seems that it could not care less we are left with the existential question: "Who cares?"

Who cares about your needs? Who cares about your trials? Who cares about you?

There are reasons that humanity shares this collective concern. We aren't in Kansas anymore. The events of Genesis 3 best explain our reality because it is the true story of our reality. Out with paradise, in with the problems. Out with safety and in with scarcity. Our with carefree living, and in with the need for careful survival.

Our passage today shows us that our own families, and even our own hearts are dangerous places to turn to for comfort. My wife just read an article this week as well which said that those who pursue self-care as defined by culture—are actually less happy than when they started. So, as you attempt to make sense of a difficult world—who do you trust to care for you?

So, who cares? That's the title of our sermon this morning. And the answer is our main idea: **God cares, sin doesn't.** Eve was convinced of the serpent’s care—but the bite was brutal. My guess is that most of us haven’t been duped by the false promise of a talking snake. But our passage today shows us that we don’t need to hear the words of the snake to think the thoughts of the snake.

Be careful where you seek your good. The story of Cain and Able reveals this for us today in three points: **Carless Comforts, Careless Counsel, and Careless Concerns.**

The Greeks held a myth that described Zeus’ punishment for humanity after they discovered fire. He made a beautiful woman named Pandora, and give her a box. The box was given to Pandora with one warning: don’t open the box.

Struck by her curiosity, she opened it. Out of the box flew evil, diseases and sorrows and despite her attempt to close the box quickly—it was too late. The world was dangerous. In despair, she opened the box again and one final thing flew out: hope.

This leads us to our first point this morning: **Careless Comforts.**

The myth's similarity to the historic Genesis story is striking. We let sin out of the box, and we can't put it back in. But where Pandora's myth introduces hope as a possibility—it doesn't define it. If that's true, you might spend your life chasing false comforts in hope—but never sure if it will work.

But the true story of Genesis doesn't leave hope undefined. It explains what we did to make things wrong—but it also warns us to not be careless about who will make it right. God didn't leave hope up to us. He said he would do it. He would close the box. Or as we saw in Genesis 3:15, he would crush the snake.

There would be a battle between the serpent and Eve's offspring—but one of those offspring would be the means by which God would bring and end to all of it. God would do it.

Adam and Eve knew that promise. And that's why our passage opens with this: **Genesis 4:1-3**, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.' And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground."

Notice here, how easy it is, if we are not careful—to boast in the comfort of God while really trusting in the care of man. Did you pick up on those subtle hints?

First of all, we meet Cain, the firstborn—and are told about his name and the meaning behind it. But then, almost as a footnote, the second born, Abel is brushed over. No meaning in his name. Just, "Oh yeah, and Abel."

Each of their names rhymes with a Hebrew word. Able's name rhyme's with the word often translated in the Old Testament as: "vanity," or "a breath." But Cain's name sounds like the Hebrew word, "gotten." Why? Eve tells us, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."

What's interesting is Eve doesn't use the typical word for "boy," or "child." She uses the mature word for a man saying, "I have gotten a new man." It's the Hebrew word used to describe Adam. The new Adam had come, he's even a keeper of the fruit of the ground just like his old man. Hope—was here. Eve did it. God maybe helped a bit. But Eve "got him."

Now all that's left is to kick back and enjoy the redemption.

And isn't that how we often believe God's promise works? We believe in God. We repent and put our faith in Jesus. We did the thing—and now God's going to do his part. Which is often jarring when we realize like Eve, that while the war is won—the battle isn't over. We still wrestle with temptation, there's still hardship in life, and it this world doesn't feel like heaven. But if our hope is in what we do, and not in the God who alone does what is good—we will always be disappointed.

Cain was another Adam. But not in a good way. Here's what happens next: **Genesis 4:3-5**, "In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell."

Here we see Cain's careless comfort. Whatever sacrifice he offered, he probably expected it to be accepted. He did the thing before and it worked. He's the first born. He gave of his field. And moreover, it's important to remember that there was no law requiring sacrifices at this time.

But that's part of the problem. Cain didn't need to sacrifice. These sacrifices were meant to be sacrifices of praise—they were to be offered only from a heart that rejoiced in and hoped in God. But Cain fell into the trap we often do in our worship: the careless comfort of performance.

We worship God don't we? We show up to church. We sing songs. We listen to Christian music or read Christian books. We don't do the naughty stuff. And yet, we sometimes do this with a careless, empty heart.

God is not a pouty lover who needs your sympathy smooches. Only insecure people are satisfied with flattery—and God's not insecure. God doesn't need the offering. God wants Cain's heart.

God rebuked Israel's careless comfort when he said, **Isaiah 1:12**, "Who has required of you this trampling of my courts?" He goes on to say, **Isaiah 1:14-17**, "They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you...Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do good."

How easy it is for us to find our comfort before God in the external acts of worship. All the while our hearts are far from him. And God will turn away from those offerings—he's not interested in your things. He's interested in your worship.

And because his outward act of comfort failed to bring him the feeling he wanted—Abel was angry. His face fell.

Brothers and sisters, let this be a warning for you—if you feel like you're doing all the "right" things, but God feels far from you, and you feel angry—he might be calling you to reassess your heart towards him. But, God will not let you stew in brooding confusion. He wants you to find peace, he wants you to know where you can go to be accepted. Look at how God moves towards Cain to help him sort out his emotions, and to prevent him from harm: **Genesis 4:6-7**, "The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

Notice how God's first communication with Cain was not centered on God's displeasure—but Cain's displeasure. If that doesn't cause us to reconsider what we think about God—I don't know what will. God cares for you.

Here's our second point this morning: **Careless Counsel**.

I actually want to start with God's careful counsel. He's reminding Cain that he should know what to do, and he's directing Cain's anger to its source. Abel's not the problem—his own heart is.

Don't we often blame our frustration in life on others? We are mad—but the kids have been a burden. We are overwhelmed—but my professor's lectures are so unclear. We are frustrated at work—but it's because Kyle keeps dropping the ball. We will naturally try to solve and reconcile our emotional life

based off our external circumstances and other people. I don't mean to say we aren't really sinned against. But no one was more sinned against than Jesus—and yet he never sinned. And here God reminds Cain that his emotional life is a reflection of Cain's relationship with God.

One writer put it this way, "People who never develop a deep personal knowledge of God will be limited in the depth of personal knowledge of themselves." But God wants you to know yourself, by knowing him. Our emotional life is the dipstick of our heart towards God. And while it's never comfortable to experience it—God desires to lead us back to acceptance.

God says, "Cain, you're downcast—you're downtrodden. But you know what will cause you to be accepted." That phrase literally means, "be turned upward." The solution for Cain was to go back to God, to return with fresh affection and repentance. Do well. Do it with the right heart. John reminds us in **1 John 3:12**, "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."

And then God gives a warning, "Do well, return to me—because if you don't your heart will listen to another. Sin is crouching at your door."

God sets the stage for Cain and for us. You've got to rule over the sin in your heart. Humanity in the garden was tasked with ruling creation—but now humanity in sin must fight for the rule of their own heart.

Our own heart, stained with sin, has a desire. It drips with passion, the promise of relief, and the roadmap that promises will get you there. But notice what God says—its desire is contrary to you.

It wants you—but not because it wants your good. The Devil wants you because like a crouching lion—he wants to kill you. But not even for his own good. Sin has no need to be fed, it just likes to maim, to tear, and to violate. And it does so by presenting an alternative to God's counsel.

"Why do well towards God? That seems difficult. You'll probably never please him anyway. You already did the thing, and for some reason he didn't care. But here's the reason—Abel. Why worry about your own heart when all of this would be solved if you just kill Abel. No Abel, and God must accept your sacrifice. There's nothing to compare it against!"

My kids and I are reading the *Tale of Desperaux*. In it we meet some rats, and one rat begins to explain to another the meaning of life: "Do as I say, and your life will be full of meaning. This is how to torture a prisoner: first, you must convince him that you are a friend. Listen to him. Encourage him...and when the time is right, talk to him. Tell him what he wants to hear." Why, asks the other rat, "Because," he continues, "you will promise it—but you not grant it...You gain his trust. And then you deny him. You refuse the offer of the very thing he wants...whatever it is that his heart most desires, you withhold...And you become what he knew you were all along, what you knew you were all along, not a friend, not a counselor, not a forgiver, but a rat."

Temptation tries to hide from us our true problem and counsels us in ways that seem easier—but in the end costs far more. God is the one who opens his mouth to warn. God is the one who cares. God is the one who tries to present to you the truth. But sin—sin is a rat.

Sin promises you sun outside but meets you at the door with violence. We will either listen to the Lord who moves towards us before we sin, exposing the danger of sin and calling us to a simple faith in him—or we will listen to the temptation of our heart.

Richard Baxter put it this way, "Sin cuts the very sinews of the soul. The heavenly life will either make you leave sin, or sin will make you leave the heavenly life. And quickly, for the two cannot continue together."

You'll listen to something—your heart—or the God who made your heart. And we can see what Cain carelessly chose: **Genesis 4:8**, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother and killed him." James reminds us that sin's desire, when fully grown, always leads to death.

Sin leads to death. And, like the rat's in Desperaux's prison—when you find you've been duped—it laughs. It offers no help, besides another false promise. It doesn't move towards you, and it does nothing to save you from the mess you've made.

When Judas felt convicted of his own betrayal of Jesus, and realized the comfort of his 30 pieces of silver was not enough to give him peace, he ran back to the Pharisees and look at what happened: **Matthew 7:3-4**, "Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'" They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

When sin's empty promise leads to full problems it hears your complaints and says, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And that's when we might think self-care is our only hope.

But it's not. God doesn't leave us in our sin. Not even the first murderer. Cain rejected God's counsel. Cain killed his brother. And yet God continues to pursue Cain. Just as God graciously confronted Adam and Eve, so too with justice and with mercy—God approaches Cain: **Genesis 4:9-11**, "The Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'"

Notice how dehumanizing sin is! Cain once again takes careless comfort in the fact that he's doing what he's supposed to be doing—he's the garden keeper—but he's not his brother's keeper. He justifies his sin, he severs the realities that care for God's garden is care for all of God's creatures. But God is not so fooled, "And the LORD said, 'What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.'"

Here we see our final point this morning: **Careless Concerns**. Cain, was unconcerned with the effects of his sin. In his mind—he did it. He fixed the thing. But God moves towards Cain and reminds him that God is not careless about sin. God is concerned for Abel's innocent blood, and God is concerned about Cain and his punishment.

Cain's punishment is another step down the ladder of Adam's curse. Adam had the ground cursed to complicate his farming—Cain's curse is that he'll always be a nomadic farmer. The soft ground of Abel's blood meant a life of the ground hardening itself to Cain's crop which he offered with such self-assurance.

And Cain's concern is still so incredibly self-centered. **Genesis 4:13-14**, "Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

Doesn't this reveal to us the blinding effects of sin? The first murderer wasn't put to death—and yet he has the audacity to cry out to the judge saying that his punishment was too great.

When people sin against us—all we want is justice. That dirty Abel needed to go. But when we sin against others—all we want is mercy.

But God's punishment of Cain was not overly harsh—it was overly merciful. God will one day repay all sin in true righteous punishment—either by pouring it out on Jesus, or by condemning the sinner to hell for eternity. But even that punishment is not too great. Our sin is against an infinite God whose eternity expands not only to the future, but to the past. In eternity, we as finite beings are still unable to encounter the true justice we deserve.

How much more then, before we reach that final day of judgment, is God's treatment of us unfairly merciful more than it is unfairly harsh. Cain attacks God's very character, he says, "You're unjust, you're not kind, you're unfair." But we see what leads to such views. Cain's concern was voiced to God—but Cain's primary concern was still man.

Why was God unfair? Because as he wanders the earth men might kill him. Cain said in the midst of his punishment, "God doesn't care." But even in judgment, God cares. Cain knows that if his dad, or if one of his future brothers finds him they will show him no mercy for what he has done. And he assumes that God is just like them—but this God who cares about justice, the God who is not blind to the blood of his righteous saints spilled by evil men—is not like men. He gives mercy even to those who do not deserve it.

Look at what the Lord said, **Genesis 4:15-16**, "Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden."

Even when we disregard God's care—God still cares. Sin walks away and laughs at us as we languish in despair, but God walks towards us and gives mercy to those who do not deserve it.

If you feel stuck in sin, as guilty as Cain—then do not concern yourself with anything else except for running back to a God like this—God cares.

And for those who stand in righteousness, and you feel the temptation of the serpent, or maybe even the violence of Cain—God cares.

And how do we know he cares, what is the new mark which we might take that gives us safe passage in a world that is still so inhospitable?

Because while Cain was not the new man we hoped for, a better Cain and a new Adam would still come. A firstborn who would worship God with pure righteousness. A firstborn who would not take the blood

of innocent men, but whose blood was spilled by guilty men. A firstborn who didn't offer a sacrifice, but a firstborn who was the sacrifice. A firstborn whose blood cries out in our condemnation--but for those who come to him in faith the firstborn whose blood cries out for our reconciliation. Come to him, as **Hebrews 12:24** says, "to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

Sin doesn't care. But God does. Cain didn't care. But Jesus does. Cain's mark extended his earthy life--but the mark of those who take the blood of Jesus are granted eternal life.

Have you received such care? Do you understand that the desire you feel for, towards, and from sin is a lousy photocopy of the desire God has for you to keep you, to grant you the righteous good works of Jesus, to give you the Holy Spirit so that you might do well by his power and to lift your face, you sinners, and to give you acceptance and that eternally.

But for that to be counted to you—you need to see where God has placed his ultimate mercy: in Jesus Christ. You need to stop thinking you've "gotten" mercy and God helped. You must cast it wholly on Jesus and on Jesus alone.

God cares. And because of that, we can have confidence of his care for us.

And to close I want to read this quote by Richard Baxter: "Christian, believe this and think on it: you shall be eternally embraced in the arms of that love which was from everlasting and will extend to everlasting; of that love which brought the Son of God's love from heaven to earth, from earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to glory; that love which was weary, hungry, tempted, scorned, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, crucified, and pierced; that love which wept, sweated, bled, and died. This is the love that will eternally embrace you."

Sin could not care less, but in Christ, God could not care more. So today, as you live your life this week, as you feel the external comparison to others or the internal pricking of your own conscience, will you find that sweet care and resolution in the grace of Jesus?