

Day 3

“Am I my brother’s keeper?”

For the last few days we have talked about what it means to be in loving relationships, with God, and our neighbor. Coming from our theme scripture Matthew 22:36-39. Today we are going to continue that conversation by talking about being our brothers/ keeper.

We begin with a question today, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Or to say it another way, “Are you your brother’s keeper?” And, of course, the question refers to both brothers and sisters.

This question is a haunting one. It challenges us to think about our responsibilities to our siblings and to those around us. The story comes from....

Genesis 4

New International Version

Cain and Abel

4 Adam^[a] made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.^[b] She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth^[c] a man.” ² Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. ⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? 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.”

⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.”^[d] While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

⁹ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

¹⁰ The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. ¹¹ Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

Pause here and answer questions.

- Do you Have any sibings?
- Have you ever been jealous of you siblings or friends?
- Have you ever been extremely mad and annoyed with your siblings or friends?
- What did you do?

Let us be clear that we are talking about both our blood siblings as well as those who are not related to us. So if you don't have siblings that is ok because this lesson is about how we love and have responsibilities for our neighbor too.

Lets us continue with the story and take an overview of the story of Cain and Abel and see how Cain responds to Abel.

The story of Cain and Abel

This is a familiar story, from Genesis 4. Let's remember it together:

- They both brought an offering to the Lord
- God had loved Abel's. But God wasn't that pleased for Cain's, who was the older brother.
- Cain became jealous, angry and depressed.
- God counseled Cain to do well and to beware of sin.
- Cain, however, murdered his brother while they were in the field together
- So God confronted Cain, "Where is your brother?" Now, of course, God already knew what had happened, but he is inviting Cain to confess and take responsibility for his actions.

And this brings us to –

The question

– which is our focus. Cain responded to God, "I do not know (where Abel is); am I my brother's keeper?"
– Genesis 4:9.

First of all he lies. He knew where his brother was. And second his question communicates his belief that **he has no responsibility for his brother** and his well being. This belief shows up clearly in that he could murder Abel, and yet evidence no hint of sorrow; there is not a shred of guilt in any of his responses.

But let's look at the question more closely, because there's a lot going on here. The word "keeper" means "to watch over, to guard, to have charge of."

- It is used in Genesis 2:15 of Adam as the keeper of the garden of Eden – which was his full-time job as it were.
- It is used in Genesis 3:24 of the angel that constantly guarded the tree of life to keep Adam and Eve away from it.

So Cain uses this word to exaggerate what God wants from him. What he is saying is that, "Hey, I can't be expected to keep up with every detail of my brother's life! That's not my full-time job; I'm not his body guard." And he asks the question in this way because **he's seeking to get rid of any responsibility for his brother**

But even though he asked it as a way of avoiding responsibility, the question has a way of coming back to condemn him nevertheless. That's because even though Cain is not responsible for every aspect of his brother's life, he does bear responsibility to care for him and help him. And in this regard he failed in the worst possible way.

So the answer to the question is actually, "yes." Cain did have a responsibility to his brother. And we have a responsibility to help and care for our brothers and sisters, that is to say our neighbors – especially when they are weak and in need.

Pause here to answer questions.

- In which ways can you love your siblings better?
- In which way can you love your family better?
- Is being your brother/sisters keeper just about taking care of blood siblings?

No, being your brothers/ sisters keeper is also about loving your neighbor like we talked about yesterday. This point is made abundantly clear in Scripture, and I want you to see this, so we are going to look at a lot passages. We begin with –

The call to be our brother and sister's keeper

This shows up in different ways in Scripture, but it is certainly clear in ***the command to love our neighbor***. Leviticus 19:18 says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We are to act for their good; for their well-being. In Matthew 5:44 Jesus expands this to cover all people when he teaches "love your enemies."

We are especially to help and care for those who are weak and vulnerable. Psalm 82:3-4 says, "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." In Acts 20:35 Paul says, "We must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And in I Thessalonians 5:14 Paul says simply, "help the weak."

Now let's look at some specific –

Examples of being our sister and brother's keeper

We are to care for the needs of widows and orphans. Exodus 22:22 says, "You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child." Isaiah 1:17 says, "Bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause." James 1:27 tells us that we are "to visit orphans and widows in their affliction . . ."

We are to care for immigrants, most of whom are, by definition, weak both economically and socially. Leviticus 19:33-34 says, "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself . . ."

We are to care for the disabled. Deuteronomy 27:18 says, “Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.” Rather we should help the one who is disabled.

We are to honor the poor. James 2:9 indicates that if you dishonor a poor person, “you are committing sin.” Proverbs 17:5 says, “Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker.” Rather we should give honor where others give disdain.

We are to give food, clothing and shelter to the needy. Ezekiel 18:7 gives a description of a righteous person. Among other things, he “gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment.” Isaiah 58:7 teaches that true fasting means to stop all oppression and “to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him.”

In Luke 3:11 John the Baptist said, “Whoever has two tunics (or items of clothing) is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” In Luke 12:33 Jesus said, “Sell your possessions and give to the poor.” We are to do this instead of storing up our excess wealth for ourselves.

We are to give the poor economic assistance. Leviticus 25:37 says, “You shall not . . . give him your food for profit.” That is, sell your food at cost. Leviticus 19:10, speaking of gleaning says, “You shall leave [some of your harvest] for the poor and for the sojourner.”

Deuteronomy 15:7-8 says, “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor . . . you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.” Exodus 22:25 says, “If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor . . . you shall not exact interest from him.” Jesus said in Luke 6:35, “Lend, [even to your enemies] expecting nothing in return.”

We are to invite the needy to share in our celebrations. There are several examples of this in the Old Testament. This one has to do with the tithe feast. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 says, “At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled . . .”

In Luke 14:12-14 Jesus said, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

There is so much need in the world!

And it is easy to get overwhelmed. Just the crises of one week, like flooding in Pakistan and landslides in China are enough to overwhelm. And then you have things like the gulf oil spill and Katrina which continue on for years.

So, yes, it is easy to throw up your hands and say, what can I do? But we have to be careful that we don't do something similar to what Cain did. We can't use the vastness of the need as an excuse; as an out for not acting; for not taking responsibility.

It's true we can't do everything. But ***we can do something.*** We can help some people. And we can care for some needs. And that is what God asks of us

God wants us to love those that he gives to us. Whether that be by blood or not. We all have a responsibility to make we are all okay and to look out for one another. So as we close this VBS move forward with love in your heart. Be mindful of you actions and your thoughts, both in your house and out of your house!

Go Love the World as God has Loved us!