

Sermon Series: Transformed Leadership

Sermon Title: Leadership Lessons from Cain and Abel

Sermon Text: Genesis 4:1-10

Sermon Presenter: Pastor Larry

“You alone deserve the glory, the honor and the praise!” We live in a world where it seems everyone wants glory, honor and praise, but the truth is, Jesus is the only One who deserves the glory, honor and praise of worship. He gave His life for our redemption, and for that He deserves our very best! We’re going to be talking about that very thing today. Let’s pray and ask The Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds to hear His transforming Word today!

Introduction: You might be here today and saw that this series is about leadership and thought to yourself, “Well, I’m not a leader so this whole series is not going to relate to me!” I pray that you will give me this first sermon of the series to prove you wrong! Why does leadership matter to everyone? Everyone is a leader in some way to someone, so leadership principles and truths are applicable to everyone. I realize that not everyone is called to a position of leadership and I’ve often said, “if you are not called to a position of leadership but seek and desire a position of leadership then something is terribly wrong and you may have lost your mind! I mean, who would want the responsibility that goes along with a leadership position, unless it’s a calling from God to help make a difference in a good way! So not all of us are called to be in a leadership position, but Zach said it well last week when he said your faith story may never be written down or told to the masses, but your story matters to God and your story influences more people than you might care to think. And if your life only influences one person, that influence could cause that person to do great things that will influence the masses for good or it could cause that person to do great harm that will impact countless lives negatively! I have come to believe deeply that while there are many who hold positions of leadership, leadership is not a position. Leadership is a person. And just because a person has power does not mean that person has achieved true leadership! They may have the power to lead because of their position, but their position cannot fix poor leadership decisions or bad direction! There are good leaders and bad leaders and leaders at all points in between, and yes they are all leaders, but what kind of leaders are they, and where are they leading? It has saddened my heart deeply in the last few weeks to see the reports of poor leadership in our own denomination for a number of years when it comes to the way they’ve handled or not handled abuse allegations. People expect more from their leaders and should! I understand there’s no such thing as a perfect human leader, and there are sometimes good leaders who want to do the right things, and no matter what decisions they make, some will disagree, but when people are in leadership positions who are not humbly seeking to be all that God has called them to be, and are living lives of blatant hypocrisy, that is unacceptable! If we are going to hold out the truth and the light to the world, then we’ve got to hold ourselves to a higher standard than the world! In fact, Jesus made it very clear that we are to not follow the ways of the world...

Matthew 20:25 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Matthew 20:26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

Matthew 20:27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—

Matthew 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In other words, our leadership style should be to put God first in everything we do and to be willing to serve others in the same way Jesus served others. We should be willing to lay down our rights in service to others and take up the Cross of Jesus and follow His example of leadership and selfless service! A Godly leader who is doing that will not be afraid or opposed to being asked hard questions. At Northshore Church you are always welcome to email, call or come by the office to ask questions concerning our ministry. And I would hope that if you are in this room today, or if you are joining us online, that your heart's desire is to be a good leader yourself, a Godly leader, a person who leads others to good, and for good, and that would mean that your desire is to lead people to God! And if that is your ultimate goal in life, then this series of messages will help you become the leader God created you to be. And again, don't get scared and think that leadership means you will have to be a public speaker, or lead some big group of people, or head a board or a cooperation, or hold political office, it may mean none of those things, it could, but if you will allow God to help you become a good leader in the way you live your daily life, then your influence in leadership will be powerful and will make a difference in this world and in eternity! And you might be surprised at this truth...

Matthew 25:23 “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!’

So be faithful in the little things and God will amplify your leadership impact! We've spent the last few weeks talking about extraordinary faith and how it is the object of our faith that makes our faith extraordinary! The object of our faith is our extraordinary God Almighty! In the same way, our leadership is transformed from ordinary to extraordinary when the One who inspires us and calls us to become leaders is The Creator God of Heaven and Earth! Thus our new series: Transformed Leadership! There are theories of leadership out there called transformational leadership! There are many books on leadership in general and many of them tout specific leadership styles or principles as being the best leadership styles, or the secret to successful leadership. There's no end to books on how to become a great leader. However, for our purposes and for this series on transformed leadership, we are going to focus on how our leadership is transformed by the God we believe in, worship and follow! We will see examples of Godly men and women who allowed God to transform their leadership, and we will also learn from the tragic mistakes of those who chose to follow their own ways or the world's ways of leadership apart from God! These lessons, good and bad, will help us become the transformed leaders God wants us to be!!

Leadership is not about charisma, it's about character and Godly character can only develop when a person humbly yields leadership of their heart, soul, mind and life to The Holy Spirit of God!

Leadership is transformed when an ordinary person places their faith and trust in the extraordinary God of the Holy Bible and is then inspired by, directed by, motivated by, captivated by and dedicated to the principles of God! Like the Psalmist when he said...

Psalm 119:13 With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth.

Psalm 119:14 I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

Psalm 119:15 I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways.

Psalm 119:16 I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.

Today we're going to begin our series Transformed Leadership by looking at two very famous brothers from the book of Genesis that you've no doubt heard about, but probably never in the context of leadership. Our text is found in Genesis 4:1-10. Let's read it together.

The Text

Genesis 4:1 Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."

Genesis 4:2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.

Genesis 4:3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.

Genesis 4:4 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,

Genesis 4:5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Genesis 4:6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?"

Genesis 4:7 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."

Genesis 4:8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Genesis 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Genesis 4:10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

Our story depicts the first recorded acts of worship. Worship can be transforming, because of our extraordinary God. The reason I said "can be" is because a lot depends on the heart and motivation of the worshiper. Cain and Abel both brought offerings to the Lord in worship but Cain's was rejected while Abel's was accepted. There are very important lessons to be learned about transformed leadership from the actions of both Cain and Abel.

1. Leadership Lessons From Cain

Cain was a farmer! He worked the soil. He was Adam and Eve's first born and Eve was grateful to the Lord for helping her have a child. That's about all the background we have until the next verse which shows us a grown up Cain bringing an offering and unintentionally teaching us some lessons on leadership. First of all we see that...

Transformed Leadership is indicated by the heart!

Genesis 4:3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.

When you first read this it seems innocent enough! It says "Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD." However, let's look a little closer. Sometimes you need to think about what is not said! It says Cain brought "some of the fruits." It doesn't say "first fruits" or "best fruits" just "some of the fruits." That's not a little thing, it is a very important thing. Jesus had something to say about this...

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What is your motivation in worship, in giving, in singing? We should examine our hearts. This is not to say that we have to be perfect and without any mess ups or mistakes in our lives when we come to God in worship, but we at least need to be willing to humbly admit our sins and shortcomings and come with an attitude of wanting to not only be forgiven, but wanting to truly do better. This is extremely critical when it comes to how we are leading others with our lives! God knows if we are playing games or if we are truly repentant and desiring of living righteous lives before Him! Remember, hypocrisy is not being a sinner, in need of God's Grace, it's being a sinner and wanting everyone to think you're not and thinking you're fooling God, but I can assure you that you're not fooling God! He knows the heart!

1 Samuel 16:7 ... The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Illustration Leftovers - I personally love leftovers. Sometimes I'll look in the fridge and say, "I'm just gonna eat this" and Debbie will say, "Sweetheart it's been over five days since we had that need to toss it!" To which I say, " But it was so good, I hate to waste it!" It's not that leftovers are bad, you just need to be careful, right? But wouldn't it be weird if someone invited you over to eat and when you get there they start pulling out all of the leftovers from the past week and say "just fix yourself a plate and we'll stick it in the microwave!" That would be strange, right? But that's how many of us treat God, He gets our seconds, our leftovers, the things we would have thrown out anyway, the stuff that was going in the garage sale box! It's not as if God is without food and needs us to give Him a meal, but if we're going to invite Him over for dinner shouldn't we break out the best china and serve Him our best prepared meal?

When you come to worship, not just on Sundays but everyday you spend time in worship bring Him your best, bring Him your all! He deserves nothing less!! When you do, the transformation of your heart, soul, mind, life and leadership will be amazing!

Now you might be thinking, "That's cool, but aren't you being a little judgemental towards Cain based on what was not said about his offering?" Are you sure you can make those statements about his motivation and heart? Here's the deal: the reason we know something was not right was because of what God said to Cain after his offering was rejected. And from this we get another lesson in leadership...

Transformed leadership is a choice!

Genesis 4:6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?
Genesis 4:7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?"

So something was obviously not right! In fact, Cain got angry and his face was visibly downcast. When God brings conviction to a person's heart it is not to bring condemnation it is to bring change! God knows what sin is capable of and God especially understands the ramifications for our ability to lead others with our lives. God doesn't force us to do the right thing or to allow Him to transform our lives and the way we lead others, but He offers us a choice! We can listen to Him and allow Him to transform us or we can choose to ignore His advice and live with the consequences. Because this story is about the offerings of Cain and Abel, I think Paul's words to the Church in Corinth have practical application...

Paul said this...

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Transformed leadership is a choice! Will you place your faith in our extraordinary God and allow Him to transform everything about your life, including the way you lead with your life? Consider this truth as you make your decision...

Transformed leadership rejected has consequences!

God said to Cain...

Genesis 4:7 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."
Genesis 4:8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Genesis 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Genesis 4:10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

Instead of allowing God to transform his attitude, and the direction his life was taking, Cain's sin of pride caused him to dwell on his rejection and he allowed his jealousy of Abel to consume him. This took him down an unthinkable path! He took his brother's life. Cain was following the ways of the world where selfish ambition is the end goal of leadership. And here's the thing...the world's leadership models don't make a lot of sense. For the world, the goal sometimes tragically moves from beating the competition, to taking out the competition! But the weird thing in this story is that Cain was seeking God's approval, and how in the world could he think that getting rid of his competition was going to win God's approval. And isn't it sad that Cain seemed to see Abel as competition in worship! Worship shouldn't be a competition in the first place. If you bring your best to God it doesn't matter what the next person brings. Their gift may be bigger, more expensive but it's not better if your gift comes from the heart! Do you remember this parable of Jesus?

Mark 12:41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.

Mark 12:42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

Mark 12:43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

Mark 12:44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

So the problem was not that Abel's offering was better or bigger, it was a heart issue and Cain had a heart issue! God gave Cain an opportunity to repent and do right! He warned him that sin was crouching at his door. But Cain did not heed the warning. He allowed what I call the unholy trinity to take over, me, myself and I! Instead of yielding himself to God in worship, he stubbornly refused to yield his heart to God in worship. He decided to do things his own way which led to some tragic outcomes. There's a book called "Leadership Secrets of Attila The Hun." It describes the world's ways pretty accurately. In it the author states this...

"Lust for Leadership: 'You've got to want to be in charge. Above all other traits, one who desires to lead must possess an intrinsic desire to achieve substantial personal recognition and be willing to earn it. . . . You must have the courage, creativity and stamina to focus on accomplishing your responsibilities through the directed, delegated efforts of subordinates.'" Wess Roberts, Leadership Secrets of Attila The Hun (New York: Warner Books, 1987), 26.

In other words, step on whoever you have to step on to get where you want to be! Cain followed this ideology, took the life of his brother, and paid dear consequences. And what was the worst consequence? Listen to God's Word in Genesis...

Genesis 4:16 So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

He went out from the LORD's presence! When we choose to live according to the world's ways we forfeit the transforming power of the presence of God in our lives and our leadership! What a loss! Now, let's look at Abel's leadership lessons.

2. Leadership Lessons from Abel

Abel's name meant "breath or vapor." His life was very brief compared to others of his day. Abel is the first recorded human being to die, and the first to be murdered. However, he is also the first man to be associated with Christ and the first to offer an acceptable offering to God in worship! Abel was a shepherd by occupation. Thus his offering some of his flock to the Lord in an act of worship! Abel exemplified transformed leadership through his act of worship! Even though Abel evidently held no positions of leadership, he was not a political leader, or even a religious leader, his heart, his motivation and his actions serve as a wonderful example for anyone desiring to be a good leader. Abel teaches us that...

Transformed Leadership flows from a properly motivated heart!

Genesis 4:4 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,

The word choices are important here. It says, Abel also brought an offering, fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. Firstborn is important. This indicates that Abel didn't just bring some of his flock, but the firstborn. This was a big deal. Bringing the firstborn indicated faith that there would be others born. Rationally he could have said, "Well, these are the firstborn, let me build up my flock some and make sure I've got plenty of animals to insure that my flock will grow, then I will bring some as a gift to the Lord. But that's not what he did. Abel brought his firstborn and trusted God to multiply his flock. It was an act of faith. How do we know this was his motivation and that he was acting on faith? When it comes to Abel's motivation we have the benefit of additional Scriptural evidence. We turn to the writer of Hebrews to find this additional information about Abel and his act of worship through giving...

Hebrews 11:4 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.

And how does he still speak? How is Abel an example of transformed leadership? Through his act of worship and the heart behind it! Abel's offering was not better because it was an animal instead of the fruit of the ground. We know that those who were farmers were allowed to bring the first fruits of their crop as offerings, except as a sin offering. Abel's offering was accepted because of the motivation and heart of his worship! Abel brought fat portions from some of the

firstborn of his flock. He gave his best, not second best. This indicated where his heart was and as we've already seen, God knows the heart! Transformed leadership begins with proper motivation of the heart! But there's another way Abel still speaks and is an example of transformed leadership.

Transformed leadership takes place when our faith depends on God not self!

Hebrews 11:4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous...

Abel made a choice when he brought his offering and when he chose to bring what he did! It is widely accepted that Abel's action indicated a dependence on God, as opposed to self! Abel had a spirit of thankfulness for his blessings and was grateful for what God had done for him, and believed God would provide for him in the future! Thus he brought one of the first born lambs from his flock as an offering of faith to God. Now a good skeptic would interject right here, "But Abel was murdered!" Yes, but here's the powerful thing. God did take care of him! Because Abel had worshiped in faith he was commended as righteous and we know that as soon as he drew his last breath on this earth he was ushered into the very presence of God! Why? Because God would someday give His only begotten Son, Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God on the cross to make a way for Able! And anyone who believes by faith, then the sacrifice of Jesus is accredited to their sin account and they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ! What Jesus would do on the old rugged cross many years later would take care of Abel. Paul put it this way in Romans...

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 3:24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:25 God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—

Because Abel walked by faith and worshiped by faith, we know God provided for him through the sacrifice of Jesus. Now I have a very important question for each of us today: When it comes to your worship, your leadership and your very life, are you depending on your own righteousness, and good works, or are you depending on the grace, mercy and forgiveness that comes through Jesus' life and sacrifice? When you come to worship, are you depending on your own good works throughout the week in order to have a good worship experience or are you by faith depending on the righteousness of Jesus Christ to allow you to come into the very presence of God? And here's how this truth applies to leadership: Your leadership will not be transformed into Godly leadership if your dependence is on self rather than God!

Transformed Leadership looks for God's approval

Hebrews 11:4 ...By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings...

Are you seeking man's approval or God's approval? There are so many in our world who want to be considered great leaders because they desire the approval and applause of men! I want to tell you this, the applause and popularity and approval of the world is fleeting and short lived. And it never brings the satisfaction you thought it would. The world can love you one minute and hate you the next. Transformed leaders desire God's approval for the right reasons. They desire to bring honor and glory to God with all they do! King David put it this way...

Psalms 19:14 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

J. Harry Cotton wrote the following in The Interpreter's Bible Commentary...

"In all our frenzy for impressive statistics we need to be reminded of the place of faith. No outward excellence can atone for the want of it. Faith may seek noble forms of worship, and should; but God may be more pleased with the rude service of a wayside chapel than with the splendor of a cathedral. God may more effectively use the humble testimony of a simple layman than the scholarly eloquence of a pulpit prince. The gifts of a poor widow may carry more weight with God than the donations of the mighty. The hearty courage of an obscure lad may be more priceless than the bravery that leads an army. Faith that rests its confidence in God, that is sure of his grace, that expects his appraisal and away--this is the true worth of a man."

Paul the Apostle stated this principle very clearly to the Corinthians...

2 Corinthians 8:12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.

And finally, Abel teaches us that...

Transformed leadership leaves a lasting testimony

Hebrews 11:4 ... And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

Abel didn't have a long life to build a powerful legacy. But what he did in his short life and especially with his beautiful act of worship through faith when he gave of his very best to God, continues to speak of the transformation God brings to human leadership! Henry and Richard Blackaby stated this in their book on Spiritual Leadership...

"Spiritual leadership...is not a position for which one applies. Rather it is assigned by God. God determines each person's assignment. Historically, God has chosen ordinary people who were not looking for a divine assignment. Nevertheless, God saw something in their hearts that led Him to assign particular tasks. While there is nothing wrong with wanting to experience God

working powerfully in one's life, those wishing for God to use them mightily should not covet leadership positions in God's kingdom. They should seek God with all their hearts and wait upon His will!"

What will your legacy of leadership be? Will it be said of you that you lived and led by faith in Jesus Christ? Will your life lead your children and grandchildren, nieces and nephews, co-workers and neighbors to know of the love and saving power of Jesus Christ? Are you, with your life, teaching principles that showcase the transforming work of Jesus and His teachings? This matters so much. People are watching you and some are following you whether you know it or not! Where are you leading them? Let's pray!