

## The World We Build: Genesis 4:17-26

**Main Idea:** God faithfully preserves a people who call upon His name and learn to build all of life around dependence upon Him

### **I. Sin Unrestrained | Genesis 4:17-24**

Genesis 4:17–24 gives us our first picture of a developing civilization outside Eden. Cain builds a city, while his descendants develop livestock practices, music, and metalworking. While the fall did damage our image bearing nature, it did not completely remove it. People still create, discover, and produce things that are useful and beautiful (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15). This explains why Christians can appreciate the work of unbelieving doctors, musicians, engineers, scientists, and others. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). **God’s common grace allows goodness, beauty, knowledge, and order to exist even among those who do not worship Him.** But Genesis also warns us that cultural achievement and spiritual health are not the same thing. Proverbs says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). Christians should therefore learn to evaluate progress by more than efficiency, convenience, popularity, or economic success. Some things can make life easier while making obedience harder.

Cain names his city after his son, Enoch. Later, the builders of Babel will say, “Let us build ourselves a city... and let us make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4). Building cities is not sinful, but there is danger in expecting our achievements to provide the identity, or security that should come from God. **Our culture encourages us to establish a career, leave a legacy, and make something of ourselves. Those desires can be good, but they become idolatrous when our accomplishments define who we are.** Psalm 127:1 warns, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.” Everyone is building something, but are we building unto the Lord or to replace our dependence on Him?

Lamech shows how culture can shape what people admire. His words in verses 23–24 are poetic. He does not merely commit an act of violence; he celebrates it. Culture includes the stories we tell, songs we sing, jokes we repeat, heroes we celebrate, and behavior we learn to consider normal. While we might not immediately reproduce or indulge in every form of entertainment we engage with, repeated exposure can desensitize us. Romans 12:2 warns believers not to “be conformed to this world” but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. **Something can be entertaining but still subtly teaching us to laugh at what God calls shameful, admire what He calls proud, or excuse what He calls sinful.** The goal is not to create a list of forbidden entertainment, but to become people whose lives are increasingly shaped by Scripture. Lamech shows us that sin does not remain private. Cain murdered Abel and then attempted to avoid responsibility for what he had done. Several generations later, Lamech murders a man and turns the act into a song of self-glorification. What was once shameful has become something worth boasting about. **This is one of the dangers of unrepentant sin: people gradually stop pursuing what is righteous and begin treating what God condemns as normal, admirable, or even virtuous (Isa. 5:20).** We see this in individuals, families, and entire cultures. Repeated sin can dull our consciences and eventually change what we celebrate. Believers therefore need more than rules against particular behaviors. We need minds continually renewed by God’s Word so that we do not find ourselves loving the things God finds abhorrent.

### **To Ponder:**

1. How can a believer tell the difference between enjoying Christian freedoms and desensitizing themselves to worldly behaviors?
2. How does Lamech’s exaggerated response serve as an example for how not to respond to those who wrong us? In what ways might you be tempted to overreact to an offense rather than show grace?

## II. Grace Preserved | Genesis 4:25-26

After generations of Cain's descendants, Genesis returns to Adam and Eve. Eve gives birth to Seth and says, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." God had promised that the offspring of the woman would eventually crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Abel has been murdered and Cain was sent away, but human wickedness has not negated God's promise. While Seth is a wonderful blessing from the Lord, Eve still feels the grief of the loss of Abel. **God's grace does not call us to pretend painful things were not painful. But even in the most painful circumstances God remains true to his promises.** This teaches us something important about providence. We can be tempted to only celebrate God's faithfulness when circumstances turn out the ways we wanted. Genesis gives us a fuller picture of God's providence. Eve has experienced exile, the murder of one son, and the loss of another to God's discipline, but God is still faithful. Psalm 33:11 says, "The counsel of the LORD stands forever." **Trusting God's providence doesn't mean we understand everything He is doing or why we are suffering. It means believing that no tragedy places God's promises outside His control.** The cross is the greatest demonstration of this truth: human wickedness accomplished the very thing God used to bring redemption (Acts 2:23–24). For believers, faith is often learning to trust what we know about God even when we cannot understand what He is doing.

Seth then has Enosh, and "at that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD." This expression later describes Abraham and Isaac as they worship, pray, and identify themselves with the Lord (Gen. 12:8; 21:33; 26:25). Notice the contrast between the families. Cain names a city after his son. Seth's descendants call upon God's name. One way of life says, "Let us establish ourselves." The other says, "Our life depends upon the LORD." The difference is ultimately one of worship. **Calling upon God is not a last resort when our plans fail. It is a posture of life that acknowledges Him as our creator, provider, judge, savior, and hope.** This should also shape how Christians think about family. Genesis doesn't say that every descendant of Seth was automatically righteous. Saving faith is not inherited. John says God's children are born "not of blood... but of God" (John 1:13). Spiritual heritage is still important though. God commands His people to teach His Word diligently to the next generation (Deut. 6:6–7; Ps. 78:5–7). **Christian parents can't regenerate their children, but they can build homes where God's name is regularly called upon through prayer, repentance, scripture, worship, and gospel conversation.** We should neither presume upon godly heritage nor despise it. A faithful home cannot guarantee conversion, but it can consistently place children before the truth of the God who saves.

Genesis 4 therefore gives believers a different expectation for the lifestyles we pursue. Cain's story is not about abandoning music, education, or culture. **Christians should work, create, raise families, serve neighbors, and contribute to society. But everything must be brought underneath the worship of God.** "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). Christianity cannot keep "faith" in one compartment of life and everything else in another. Godly living is to build homes, churches, careers, and communities in which God is acknowledged as the One upon whom everything depends. That same thought process should pervade the church. Churches can become preoccupied with what they are doing: programs, attendance, facilities, reputation, influence. Those things may be useful, but they are not the measure of faithfulness. **The church is fundamentally a people who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2).** Our structures and ministries should serve that calling rather than replace it.

### To Ponder:

3. What is the difference between believing that God exists and living as someone who depends upon Him?
4. If parents cannot produce saving faith in their children, what responsibilities do they have in establishing a home where Christ is known and worshiped? What would that look like for your family?