



Faith Fits – Cain

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... our story today is about a sibling rivalry that led to a massive tantrum. So, who was the troublemaker sibling in your family? Did you have that one brother or sister who just seemed to find the wrong side of the parents' ire? If you're an only child, you know what that means. Discuss!

OPENING PRAYER

**God of Patience, help us see the areas where we risk letting our sin control us,
And give us the humility to change.**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to week 3 of our series, where we have been looking at some of our heroes from the Bible, and, though we like to think of them as unflappable, stoic saints, we learn so much from the times

when they have a meltdown. There's just something comforting when these pillars of the faith lose it, and nearly all Biblical characters throw a tantrum at some point. Though we usually learn from their successes, it's important to also look at their failures. So that's what we're doing in this series, cuz, well, even we are not immune from throwing the occasional tantrum, are we? Life can become too much... we get overwhelmed, exhausted, frustrated, and we want to throw our hands up and have a little meltdown. And that's okay. It's okay to be not okay. It's okay to get the emotions out, (in a constructive, productive way, at least.) Thing is, we just can't stay there. We have to learn from whatever it was that caused it, get back to life, and move forward. That's where these Bible stories come in handy. We can learn from what they did, because, though they had their meltdowns, most of them turned out... okay? So, by looking at their fits, we can learn to how to move forward from ours, too. Regardless of which sibling was the troublemaker in your family, today, we're going to look at a Bible story where a sibling rivalry led to a tantrum... one that didn't end well for either party. But we'll come back to that.

Question 1: Last week, we talked about not being patient enough to wait on God's timing and setting up idols instead of what God wants for us. How did you do with that this week? We're you better about waiting on God, or are you still expecting "2-day shipping" on your requests?

SCRIPTURE

To this point, we've covered Elijah's tantrum, and learned that we need a "nap and a snack. That is, we need to take a break from the thing that causes us to get to the point of a meltdown, and make time for something that feeds our soul to give us sustenance for the journey. Then last week, we examined a literal meltdown by the Israelites and Moses, reminded us that so many of our fits stem from our lack of patience to wait on God's timing. We also need to eliminate the idols we place in our lives that get in the way of our relationship with God. So, what's next? Well, let's back up again... ALL the way to the beginning, to a man named...

Cain

The book of Genesis recounts the Biblical Creation story, and the first two humans, Adam and Eve. After the whole "eating the fruit, getting kicked of Eden" fiasco, they set about populating the Earth, which is where our story picks up.

Read Genesis, chapter 4, verses 1 through 15.

Whelp, that escalated quickly. Cain woke up and chose trouble, and his tantrum ruined multiple lives in the process. And yet, there are many things we can learn from this one, too... (and not just "to keep an eye on that troublemaking sibling.)

Question 2: Talk about this story. It's one you may have heard before, but did anything new stand out to you? What catches your attention? Are you more likely to be Cain or Abel?

REFLECTION

In the Jewish tradition, there are two types of teaching: the written tradition, (what we have as the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible,) and the oral tradition, the Talmud, (which is often an elaboration on the written tradition, expounding on what we read.) There is so much value in the oral tradition, the instruction of the story, that brings this story to life, and can help us when we look at our faith fits. And so, we're going to look at both. First, what do we find in the writing, in this recounting of this story, that can help us when we are the verge of a meltdown? Well, for that, let's go back to verse 7, and what God says to Cain BEFORE things get out of control. God says, **"Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."** (v7) God knows Cain's buttons. He knows what sets him off... jealousy, insecurity, rivalry, pride, shame. And God knows where those things could lead if Cain doesn't get them under control. And so, God reminds Cain, "okay, I can feel your blood pressure going up... your button got pushed. And those issues, that struggle, that place where you take it too far... that's like a tiger, crouching outside your door. Will you open that door and let it consume you? Or will you take control and conquer IT?" As we see, Cain ultimately opens the door and lets his anger consume him, leading to the ultimate tantrum, and he ruins multiple lives in the process.

Thing is, your button, your struggle, your trigger is laying wait outside your door, too. And God gives you the same choice Cain had: will you let it consume you? Will you open the door to it, and let it in, and bring about the inevitable meltdown, that could hurt people in the process? What leads to your meltdown that might just hurt others? What are you letting control you, that takes you down a path that God doesn't want you to follow? Identify your weakness, and don't let it consume you.

Question 3: What's your button? (And go deeper than just "people who cut me off in traffic.") Maybe, like Cain, it's jealousy of others' lives or insecurity that leads to a lack of self-worth or value?

Perhaps you slip into fits of pride or anger or struggle with a lack of compassion or forgiveness? What's the tiger crouching outside your door, threatening to take you and someone else down?

Now, that's what we learn from the *written* tradition. When we look at the *oral* tradition that comes with this, we learn something else. Take a look at verse 4, **"⁴ Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock."** (v4 NLT) However, in the original Hebrew, it doesn't say "lambs." It just says Abel brought the firstborn from his flock, but doesn't say what his flock consisted of. So, where does the NLT get "lambs" from? The *oral* tradition. The oral explanation of these stories passed down by the teachers of these books through hundreds of generations says it was sheep. Why is this important? Well, the oral tradition gives us an answer to that, too: Cain brought flax, (again, not in the written part,) and though flax was

one of the best grains, he brought God a lesser quality of it. On the other hand, Abel brought the best of his lambs, though cows would have been the better species. Summary: Cain brought a lesser quality of the best grain, while Abel brought the best quality of a lesser animal. And God chose Abel's sacrifice over Cain's to show that whatever you bring God, make it the best of that thing. And then, God comes to Cain, and says, "okay, pouty pants, don't whine, just do better." (That's Pastor Mike's addition.) The lesson... Cain's sin, that thing crouching outside his door was not that he brought a lesser quality sacrifice to God. His sin was in not being humble enough to change. (Yeah, that stings a little.)

Notice, God doesn't get mad and hit the smite button like he wanted to do last week. He simply teaches Cain that, "whatever you bring, bring me your best." All Cain had to do was swallow some pride, say, "okay, lesson learned, sorry God, my bad. I'll do better next time." But Cain doesn't want to admit he was wrong and instead, sticks to his tantrum, maintaining that he was right, and look where it led? If he'd only had the humility to admit he was wrong, to admit his failure, to admit that he had an issue with jealousy and insecurity and pride and anger, we wouldn't have much of a story to read... but Abel would still be around. Once you've identified your weakness, be humble enough to change. Work on not letting it consume you. Work on not letting it control you, bringing you to the point of a meltdown. It's there that you hurt yourself and others. Be aware enough to admit those faults, those buttons, and then humble enough to admit where you're wrong... and change.

Question 4: Consider your answer to question 3. What would it take to be humble enough to change that thing? What would “mastering” it look like? Is there someone who can hold you accountable to not letting that thing control you?

CLOSING

Our fits can lead to hurting others. Abel was the tragic consequence of Cain’s tantrum. But we can learn from Cain’s mistake. First, there is something crouching outside your door, a button, that when pushed, leads to your meltdown, and potentially hurting others. Don’t let it control you. Become its master. And second, this story isn’t about not giving God your best... it’s about being humble enough to admit your faults, admit when you’re wrong. And then, for the sake of those in your path, being humble enough to change. Learn from Cain, (maybe go hug that troublemaker sibling,) but also don’t let that sin control you, and be humble enough to change.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations and close in prayer.