

## COULD YOU BE LIVING WITH A SOCIOPATH?

Third in a series by Dr. Rick Perrin on *Understanding and Repairing Our Relationships* from  
Genesis 4:1-15

*“Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ And he said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’”* Genesis 4:9

If I ask you to think of a sociopath or as some call it, a psychopath, you would probably name someone like serial killer Ted Bundy, or Adolph Hitler or Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden—murderers all. And you’d be right. They are sociopaths. But you’d be only partly right. Only a few sociopaths are killers. Last Christmas one of my friends in our congregation gave me a book entitled, *The Sociopath Next Door* by Martha Stout (New York, 2005). Dr. Stout is a psychologist who has worked for most of her professional career with the victims of sociopaths. My friend warned me, “Don’t start reading this book on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, or your family will be angry with you. You won’t be able to put it down.” Against his advice I cracked it open during a slow moment on Christmas Day, and just as predicted, the family was not happy with me—until I started reading aloud to them the book’s description of a sociopath. Typical of our family, they had great glee voting on who in the family best matched the various characteristics listed in the book.

But this is really not a laughing matter. Dr. Stout says that in America, one in every 25 people is a sociopath, four in a hundred. We have a higher percentage of sociopaths in our population than most other countries do, and the number is rising. Essentially, a sociopath is a person who does not have a conscience. They lack any moral restraints. They know the difference between right and wrong but they feel no remorse and no guilt. The inner sensitivities that restrain most of us do not affect them. They have no normal feelings, no emotional ties to other people. They imitate feelings, sometimes so well that you won’t pick up the absence of an emotional connection. But as you get to know them better you discover their relationships are ice cold.

Sociopaths are stimulated by playing the game to get whatever they want. It may be power or sex or just the freedom not to have to work. They may be pastors or police officers, doctors or teachers, or coaches or politicians—or nothing at all. They use the respect we normal people give to those who hold a position of trust or influence as a tool to accomplish their aims. They don’t care how they use a person, whom they hurt, or what they destroy. They enjoy watching other people scramble. They take advantage of the way normal people make excuses for them—“He’s forgetful, she’s just not a thoughtful person, he’s overly ambitious, she’s depressed”—and so on, to manipulate and carry out their schemes. And they are good at making other people feel guilty when we judge them harshly. But in their wake they leave a trail of broken lives.

We’ve been talking these Sunday mornings about our relationships, and we’ve said it’s important to identify why we have problems relating to other people. Last week we said that many problems in our relationships may be caused by what we do—our sin, if you will. Today I want to look at the other side, the part of our relationship problems that result from what other people do. In extreme cases these come from encounters with sociopaths. One effect of Martha Stout’s book was that I began to think in a new way

about Cain, the oldest son of Adam and Eve. Turn to Genesis 4 and take a look with me at the world's first sociopath. We're going to learn something about how other people cause the problems in our relationships, and what to do about them. We'll proceed in three parts. **1. The Quick Collapse of Human Relationships, 2. The Quiet, Comprehensive Judgment of God, and 3. The Quintuple Consequences of Sin.**

**1. The Quick Collapse of Human Relationships.** Last week we examined the fall of Adam and Eve, how it impacted their relationships, and how that problem has been handed on to us. Because of their sin Adam and Eve lost their home in the garden and had to start life all over again in a broken and hostile world. As chapter 4 begins, we have recorded the birth of the first baby. Back in Genesis 3:15 God had graciously promised that the seed of the woman would one day overcome the effects of human disobedience, and so when Cain was born, Eve expressed the hope that this new born son might turn out to be the promised savior. Verse 1 says, *"Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.'"* Soon there was a second little boy running around the Adams family. Verse 2 says, *"And again, she gave birth to his brother Abel."* We wonder how a child who came into the world with such hope, could fall so far so fast.

Verse 2 tells us that these two boys grew up to follow different career paths. Abel turned to the animals and tended flocks of sheep and goats and cattle. Cain, on the other hand, found his interest in growing crops. Now, there's nothing wrong with growing grain and vegetables, but I wonder about this description of the two brothers. Given what follows, is this a hint that Abel enjoyed relationships with animals, but Cain possessed no relational interests and was content to labor alone in his fields? Perhaps.

But we find something more revealing of what was going on in the hearts of these two young men in verses 3-5. Verse 3 tells us, *"So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground."* What's going on here? Worship has been part of the human experience since the beginning. Back in Chapter 3, verse 21 we find an interesting event. It says that God took animal skins and taught Adam and Eve how to clothe themselves. That was very kind of God. But think for a minute. If there were animal skins, then there had to be an animal that died, that gave up his skin. It must have been God who killed the animal. This suggests that God, as he killed the animal, taught Adam and Eve how to worship. An animal was to be sacrificed in order to be a perpetual reminder that in order for their sins to be forgiven, a life must be taken. Since an animal is not equal in value to a human being, the animal was a symbol that reminded Adam and Eve that one day the Savior would come and offer his life in place of theirs. By trusting in God's savior to provide an ultimate sacrifice, Adam and Eve were placing their faith in the Christ who was coming. Adam and Eve would have taught this form of worship to their children, and then the family would have gathered once a week, offered a sacrificial animal, and expressed their faith in the Savior. The fact that Cain abandons animal sacrifice and decides that his fruit and grain would be a sufficient act of worship reveals something about the state of his heart. He did not care about maintaining a relationship with God. Here is a basic characteristic of a sinner. He disregards the rules. And a sociopath—no rules bind him in his heart.

Abel brought an animal sacrifice to God as he had commanded. Now look at the consequence of Cain's disobedience at the end of verse 4 and into verse 5. *"The Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell."* Another characteristic of a sociopath is that he feels resentment toward someone who is better looking or more successful than himself. Cain resented Abel, that's what the end of verse 5 means. Still another characteristic of sociopaths is that they take risks. The thrill of risking everything and getting away with it is the only emotion they feel. Look at verse 8. It says, *"Cain told his brother."* He complained that God was being unfair in not accepting his offering, that God was being unreasonable. After all, he'd done the best he could with what he had. But apparently Abel didn't buy it, didn't give Cain the sympathy he needed to continue his disobedience. So Cain decided to eliminate his competitor. That too is a characteristic of a sociopath. Verse 8 says, *"It came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him."* When no one was around, Cain, with premeditation, attacked and killed Abel and then made it appear a natural death. He had not the slightest twitch of conscience, not the tiniest tug from their fraternal relationship to give him pause! And then he plots to cover up his crime. In verse 9 when God asks Cain where his brother is, listen to Cain's answer. *"I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"* No remorse. No guilt. He's intending simply to continue with life. His parents were grief-stricken. Cain didn't care. He had no feelings.

There is one last thing to notice that clinches my hypothesis that Cain is the world's first sociopath. God punishes Cain for this murder. He doesn't impose capital punishment here. I'll explain why in a few moments. But nevertheless, the punishment is severe. Cain is described in verse 2 as a tiller of the ground. Notice what God says to him in verse 11. *"You are cursed from the ground."* And then in verse 12: *"When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth."* Cain lost absolutely everything. Notice his response in verses 13 and 14. *"Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is too great to bear! Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground.'" Notice it's not the loss of human contact that bothers him. It's his estrangement from the ground, his avenue to wealth. And then he goes on—and I want you to note the play for pity. "And from Your face I shall be hidden, and I shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and it will come about that whoever finds me will kill me."*

Dr. Stout, in her book, says that the surest indicator of a sociopath is the pity play. She tells of a patient who was referred to her by the courts, a man already identified as a psychopath. She asked him, "What is important to you? What do you desire more than anything?" She expected him to say "money" or "to stay out of jail." But he surprised her. "That's easy," he said. "What I like better than anything else is when people feel sorry for me. The thing I really want more than anything else out of life is people's pity." Why? The reason is that good people will let a pathetic individual off the hook. So the sociopath, wishing to continue the game, plays for pity because pity will give him *carte blanche* to do anything he pleases. (107-108) Are you beginning to get the picture?

**2. The Quiet, Comprehensive Judgment of God.** We may learn from God something about how to deal with people who cause relationship problems for us. In describing how to respond to a sociopath, Dr. Stout cites the *Rule of Three*. She says, if a person lies to you once or fails to deliver on a promise, it could be a misunderstanding. If they do it a second time, it may be a serious mistake. But if they do it a third time, she says, walk away from the relationship. We're talking about adults here, not your children, who require correction time after time in order to learn how they are to behave.

Notice what God does with Cain. When Cain brings grain and vegetables to worship, God gives him a second chance. You can see this in verses 6-7. God says to Cain, "*Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?*" In other words, "If you do what I command you, obedience will make you happy." Obeying God brings blessing, even when we think it won't. His commands are for our benefit. God goes on, "*If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.*" Sin only brings unhappiness in the end. Well, Cain goes out and kills Abel, and sure enough, it brings him unhappiness, as we have seen. But notice in verse 15 that God gives him a second chance. He doesn't take Cain's life. Capital punishment comes in later as a fundamental principle of human law and order. (See Genesis 9:5-6) Instead, God sends Cain away, even gives him a sign to protect him. Cain complains he will be hidden from God's face in verse 14, but of course that was not the case. At any time he could repent and God would forgive him. But he would not repent, and God gave Cain no third chance.

Another thing Dr. Stout says we must be careful not to do when we encounter a sociopath is to allow him to hide his true character. She says often when they are cornered they say, "Don't tell anyone!" That's what a pedophile tells his victim. But she says, the sociopath has no right to have his deeds hidden because that only gives him the cover to strike again. Notice that God shows Cain no sympathy when he tries the pity game on God. In verse 11 God tells Cain that even the ground is crying out the truth that Cain had killed his brother. And then a third thing Dr. Stout says to do to protect yourself from a sociopath, avoid him. Cut him out of your life. Notice that in verse 12 God orders Cain out, since human society was not yet developed enough to expel him themselves. "*You shall be a vagrant and a wanderer.*" The point is to protect the innocent from this person who will not be governed by conscience or the law of God. There is much more that could be said here, and it is not so simple when we are talking about a marriage relationship. But the point I want you to understand from this is that we are not to be saps and we must not be intimidated by those who are morally unrestrained. Because sometimes, the problems we encounter in our relationships are much more serious than just the tendency to sin that every human being possesses.

**3. The Quintuple Consequence of Sin.** This last section is brief, but it is essential in order to view the whole picture. I want you to see how this story plays out. Five quick points. Number 1: In verses 16-17 Cain picks up life after the murder. He doesn't repent. He leaves human society with his wife. Many people have asked, Where did Cain get his wife? The obvious answer is, she was his sister or his niece. There were many people in the world by this time. I want you to consider what kind of woman

would have gone with Cain, and what would it have been like to be his wife. The answer is, Cain picked a woman who would put up with him. It can't have been a satisfying marriage. Cain's wife had culpability, but the bottom line is, she was one of his victims.

Number 2: Look at what this family produced. It took five generations. Then, in verse 18 we are introduced to Lamech, and he is a sociopath much worse than Cain. In yesterday's newspaper Bob McAlister had a column in which he takes to task certain school districts in the Columbia area which plan to feed children crackers and juice for lunch if their parents haven't paid. But then he assails the families where the adults drink or gamble away the family's money and don't care what happens to their children. He mentions a little girl he and his wife befriended some years ago. She was from a broken home. They bought her Christmas presents, but later learned her mother had returned them and used the money to party. Today the girl is not yet twenty. She has two illegitimate children and is in prison. Sociopaths produce sociopaths.

Number 3: Verse 19 tells us Lamech was the world's first polygamist. He broke all the rules and married two women because he wanted both, and no one could stop him. Number 4: I wonder about those two wives, what kind of a life they had. They were more victims. In verse 23 we find a song Lamech composed that I take to be a threat against his wives. "*Give heed to my speech,*" he sang, and the subject of his song is chilling. That's number 5: It's a song of brutality and abuse of power. "*I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me.*" A boy--I wonder if the boy was his own son, attempting to defend his mother's honor. More victims. The point is, Cain fathered a family of sociopaths, and the whole human race suffered. Sometimes the people who cause our relationship problems are more than ordinary sinners. They don't deserve to be excused, coddled, or treated compassionately. That's for their victims.

There is one more thing we must see in this chapter. Adam and Eve went on with life. In spite of their sadness and sorrow they continued. In verse 25 Eve gives birth to another son whom she named Seth. Notice her persevering faith in God. She says, "*God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel.*" She is still looking for the promised Savior. When you deal with a sociopath, you sometimes must cut your losses. We said earlier that there is a rule of three—three lies, three betrayals, and out. Save your help and compassion for those who want to be helped. Adam and Eve wanted God's help and he gave it to them. Verse 26 says Seth had a son named Enosh. It was in Enosh's generation that "*men began to call upon the name of the Lord.*" Or, better, "*men began to call themselves by the name of the Lord.*" That is, they openly identified themselves as followers of God, people saved by faith in Christ. Jesus gives help to those who want it. You may suffer relationship problems because of what other people do. You may be the cause of the problems. But if you take those problems to Jesus he'll bring healing into your life. He'll rebuild what is broken down. He'll restore what you've lost.