

Cain and Abel Children: A Unification Parable

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In the “Cain children” vs. “Abel children” dichotomy, I’m of a mind that the primary category is “children.” Looking at Cain and Abel, the parents would say: “These are all my children. Some are older, some younger, some look more like me, some less, but we are one family and they all receive my inheritance.” Thus I apply the family paradigm from the parents’ viewpoint, rather than as we usually do, from a sibling (rivalry) point of view. I’m also of a mind to bring out the virtues and responsibilities of Cain more than usual.

The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is instructive. Here, Abel took the inheritance, abandoned his father and wasted it in a self-centered life. But the spark of God within him woke him up; he realized his abject status as a sinner and returned to his father, ready to be a servant of servants. Based on this condition, the father bestowed blessings upon him. On the other hand, Cain served his father faithfully, building up the father’s fortune. He did not share the father’s willingness to bless Abel. But the father reached out to him and told him that all that was the father’s belonged to him and encouraged him to rejoice.



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This reminds me of our relationship with True Parents over the years. We Cain children worked so hard, fundraising, witnessing, teaching, sleeping little, having nothing. We in New York would rise well before dawn on Sunday mornings to attend True Father’s sermons at Belvedere, only to get chastised for being sinners. I would think to myself, “But Father, we’re your children who are here attending you! What about those who didn’t even come here?” In the back of my mind was, “Father, you should be praising us, and chastising those who didn’t come.”

I was wise enough to realize a bit of what was going on, and now I’d like to expand upon that. We were True Parents’ Cain children. There’s one important distinction between their Cain children and Abel children: the Cain children were a lot older and so could serve as object partners doing the work with True Parents. We were young to Father, but to the Abel children, the biological children, we were a bunch of old folks running around exhausting ourselves in a missionary life, often joyful, sometimes resentful, but obediently lining up to bow in front of their parents. We had so many complicated feelings toward True Parents, and the Abel children, whose feelings for True Parents were simpler at first, could see it and feel it.

Later, the Abel children's feelings toward True Parents and the movement became more complex, of course, and they dealt with their own "Cain-type" feelings. But they were more innocent about those feelings. They were more confident of their parents' love and the security of their inheritance than we were. I felt, when I encountered the Abel children voicing "Cain" views about True Parents and the movement, "Wow, maybe True Parents will listen to them!" and at the same time, "Wait a minute; these are not good thoughts; I've been suppressing them as evil for years. I thought these were Abel children, but they are more Cain than me!"

Which is to say that the Abel children can learn something from the Cain children who survived, that is, who remained on the farm with True Parents. And that something is what the Cain children learned from the ultimate members of the first generation: True Parents themselves.

You see, to the natural children, their parents are just fine, are king and queen, are indeed perfect. The adopted children have that sense as well, but also have some worldly wisdom, and have of course the fundamental experience of death and resurrection associated with joining the movement in the first place, that paradigmatic experience even that Father had when he encountered Jesus, and True Mother must have had when she heard the notion that "Hey, you are going to be his wife," and responded, "Oh, is that so?"

When we sat in the freezing dawn at Belvedere to get chastised for being there, it was a mini-death and resurrection experience. We were told, "You are sinners; now, go out and love and serve and die for those who are greater sinners." That means, you are sinners through whom God can express His love and salvation. You are taking my anger on yourself, and protecting those who deserve it even more, to show them how much I love them. This is the paradigm of death and resurrection, that the Cain children experienced continually, the path of Christ, the path of True Parents. The dawn at Belvedere was paradigmatic of countless experiences of injustice we had to digest through self-denial as we discovered God's restorative love. And, ultimately, this is the path of the Abel children, too, one of whom at least was outspoken about how he is a sinner.

In the prodigal son story, what the older brother knew, and the younger brother didn't, was that the father was not all true justice and compassion. The father was short-sighted at times, made unreasonable demands. The older brother showed up at 4:30 a.m. to milk the cows, and the father, unhappy that the younger brother had left and just grouchy about life in general, chastised him for not having his pants on straight. The older brother digested it. The father decided to plant corn in a field where the older son knew it wouldn't grow, but the father insisted and the older brother complied, and somehow nonetheless the farm expanded. The older brother learned the lessons of filial piety the hard way. The older brother saw his father come home drunk sometimes. He would see his parents argue, and see them make up. He would see him goof up deals selling the crops, and buy lame cows and skinny pigs. And he stuck it out with his father and loved him anyway. And the father could say to him, "All that I have is yours."

The younger brother missed all that. Why did he leave? For him, his father was Mr. Bankroll. He didn't see the withered corn and dying sheep; he just saw the savory lamb and nice veggies on the table. He didn't see the grouchy father; he just saw his mom being really nice to him and his father coming home and resting. It was all built around his personal desires, and so he thought that life was all about fulfilling your personal desires. So when his desires took him beyond the farm, he took the money and ran.



Now, God bless him for repenting and returning. And God bless his father for killing the fatted calf. And God bless the older brother if he hugs his dad and comes back into the banquet. But the story isn't over yet. The younger son still sees his father as Mr. Bankroll and everything as unmerited grace. Of course, that is all true, but it is only part of the story. He still doesn't know about the freezing pre-dawn hours, the fallow fields, the failed crops, the bad decisions, the emotional trials. The older brother, Cain, absorbed all of those. Abel knows only the good stuff, and that he is the blessed one, that he is the one, not his elder brother, for whom the father killed the fatted calf.

But one day, the father dies. Who knows how to run the farm? The older brother. With whom does mom partner in the enterprise? The older brother. No more protection from the grace-filled father. The mom and older brother ease the younger brother into reality. And the mom starts assuming the father's role — the total role, not just the grace of the fatted calf and letting him sleep in while others milk the cows. Abel

just might turn on his older brother. Who are you to manage the farm!? Look, the crops are fallow, one of the cows died, the eggs won't hatch! Try as he might, Cain can't convince him that it's always been that way, but his father protected him from it. Cain just looks like someone who is taking over his father's position and ruining everything.

And the mom protects Abel as much as she can, but she is wise enough to work with Cain in running the farm. And she's still the parent, and so she makes the decisions, and she starts acting a lot like her husband did. Some of the decisions are good, some are bad. Some work out, some don't. She gets a little bossy. "Mom!" says her younger son, "Stop listening to Cain! He's just destroying our beautiful, productive, well-managed farm!" His mom smiles but decides that it's time for a little tough love. "Wake up, son. Your father and I love you still, but we need you now to earn your inheritance. Get out there and work with your older brother. You know your father's grace more than he does, but he knows your father's ways and responsibilities more than you do. No more fatted calf until you bring it home together with him."

The younger son, Abel, begs and begs his mother to see things his way, but she is firm. "The cows need milking, fields need plowing. It's well into day. Your brother's waiting for you. We can talk later, together, over dinner."

The younger son has a choice. He can run away again. He can go into the town and tell the people how wicked his older brother is, how his older brother has stolen his father's farm, which his father gave to the younger brother, and how his older brother has tricked his mother and made her comply, his poor, blind, benighted mother who also... "Gee, I never realized how arrogant my mother really is, how she never really loved my father, not like I did!"

Or he can do a little death and resurrection. He can pull up his panties, milk some cows with his older brother, try to figure out which fields to plant, which pigs to sell, pay his dues, and, you know what — someday teach a few things to his older brother about God's grace.

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Painting at top: *Detail from "The Return of the Prodigal Son" (1670) by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.*