

Why Hopelessness Haunts You And How To Overcome It

Hopelessness, crushes the spirit and makes a terrible life. Alison Crosthwait appeared to have it made. She had a good job. She was a trader in capital markets, and then she went into research and became a researcher. She had a good income. She had friends, she had romance.

Yet she described the condition of her life in these terms: shame, anxiety, insecurity, sadness and helplessness. Hopelessness crushed her inner self and her inner life and made life terrible for her.

Alison is not alone. Her description describes multitude to millions of people in a worldwide epidemic of hopelessness.

The philosophers and counselors of our day recommend a solution to helplessness. They call it existentialism, and that's a \$15 scientific term. Let's put it down in its meaning and describe it so that you can understand what that means.

It describes the autonomy of the individual, a person with the freedom of an individual. No rules to follow except those that I make or those that I choose to believe and follow. The purpose and meaning in my life will be what I choose it to be. Nothing external will influence me. It will be what I decide and choose. I am the captain of my own ship, of my own destiny. I will create my own meaning within myself. I will fulfill my own personal desires and thus find happiness in life.

What the philosophers and counselors mean to solve the riddle of hopelessness only fosters it and develops it. Actually hopelessness first appears in our world and in our experience as humans in the Garden of Eden. Satan was the first existentialist for we read in the Scriptures that he describes himself as "I will be like the most high God."

God had created him, gave him great gifts and talents and abilities, and he thought he would become like God. But God, with his armies of followers and other angels, cast him out, and he first appears on earth in the garden of Eden. He appears in Genesis chapter three when he inhabits the physicality of the serpent, and he tempts Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden.

And it's interesting the temptation that he gave to Adam was exactly the lifestyle that he chose. In essence, he told Adam and Eve live, "Live your own lives. Don't listen to God. He's lied to you. Great happiness will come to you if you'll just follow your own rules and do your own thing. Go ahead and eat of the fruit. It's good. It's delicious. Look at it. It does not look nice."

Eve succumbed to the temptation and Adam followed her, and the perfect life that they had lived up to that point left them, and they thus began a sinful nature within them because of their sin. Depravity now permeated the totality of their beings and what they had once experienced as a perfect sinless life now began a life of death, sadness and hopelessness.

They were separated from God under God's condemnation and ultimately God's judgment came upon them, and He removed them out of the Garden in Eden. Thus began a life pattern of following their own desires. It began with Satan, followed through on the human plane by Adam and Eve.

When we come to Genesis chapter four we find an interesting thing occurs for Adam. Adam and Eve now have children. We don't know how many. It just says they had many children. Genesis chapter four describes two of them, two boys, Cain and Abel. What do you know about Cain and Abel? Do you know anything about Cain and Abel?

The story has come down through the centuries and in fact artists and artisans over the thousands of years since this story have made Cain and Abel the subjects of many art projects. Lord Byron, the great English poet wrote a play called "Cain". And then more current times, if you consider the 1950s current, John Steinbeck wrote his famous novel *East of Eden*. In the fifties, later in 1955 I believe it was the year, they made that book into a movie starring James Dean. That movie has become one of the top 400 movies of all time.

I want us to look at this story of Cain and Abel for it gives us some very interesting insights into hopelessness, its origin, and how we can find victory over that tremendous fall in our lives. It's in Genesis chapter four and I'll just read some of it, and I'll just make a few brief comments about it so that you understand this tremendous story. And we'll take a look at this occurrence between Adam and Eve starting in Genesis chapter.

I'll just read a couple of verses and make sure you get the drift, the drift of it. "And Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and she bore Cain and she said, I have gotten a man from the Lord." That makes reference to the fact when God in the Garden of Eden in chapter three when He judged Adam and Eve for their disobedience. He made a promise that He would send a man, a champion who would crush the serpent.

And here we see Eve thinking that this young man Cain was going to be that man. Sadly, he was not that man. So here's Cain. And then shortly after she bore Abel, a second son, and Abel was a keeper of sheep. He was a shepherd and Cain was a tiller of the ground. He was a farmer. That's their occupations.

We find in verse number three in the process of time it came about that Cain brought the fruit of the ground of his crops, and he made an offering to the Lord. And then we find in verse number four that Abel followed in a similar pattern. He also brought an offering, only he brought an offering from his flock. He was a shepherd, so he brought something from his flock. And it says in verse four, and this begins the conflict between Cain and Abel, that says the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and his offering He had not respect.

Does it tell us why He chose Abel's offering and accepted it? He does not. The Scripture do not tell us at this description why He rejected the offering from Cain, but it does tell us Cain's response. It says Cain was very wroth and his countenance fell. His anger became so fierce and so violent within him that affected his whole visage in his whole body.

Fierce, violent anger; doesn't it tell us toward whom, whether towards God for rejecting his offering or towards Abel in jealousy because God accepted Abel's offering. We don't know. Just know that Cain was fiercely angry over the rejection of his offering. The Lord came to Cain and said, "Why are you wroth and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, will you not be accepted?"

God came to Cain and said, look, Cain, why are you angry? What has gotten you so upset? Don't you realize that if you go back and you make it right that you'll be accepted? In the human terms of our day, in a sense, God gave him a Mulligan. God said, you've got another opportunity, Cain, I'll give you another chance. Let's redo this. Go, go back and make an offering again. Let's correct it.

Now we see Cain's response here. God said to him, you know, sin is tempting you. Sin wants to possess you and control you. Don't give into it. Don't yield to that temptation that wants to rule over you and dominate you. Don't give in.

Next we find Cain coming to his brother Abel and wants to go out into the field with him. Let's talk. So Cain talked with Abel, his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him, killed him, murdered him.

We don't know how. We don't know whether he used an instrument or whether he cut him to pieces. We don't know. We just know that when he killed him, it caused Abel to bleed because we read about it in a few moments. His anger consumed Cain to such an extent that he killed his younger brother.

Now we read in verse number nine that the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel? Where's your brother?" Cain said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" That famous saying, you've heard that saying multitudes of times, I am sure. Here's its source, its origin. Cain just murdered his brother, and God came to him. Cain, where's your brother? Cain said, I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper? Is it my responsibility to take care of my brother? I don't know where he is.

Uh, but the Lord didn't let him off the hook that easily. The Lord said to him, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground." I know it, Cain, what happened? You killed him. You slew him, and his blood is crying out to Me from the ground. His blood is crying out to me for vengeance and for revenge, and here God gives a punishment to Cain for his disastrous treatment of his brother. "Now are you cursed from the earth which has opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."

Cain was a farmer. This, this was a horrible punishment that God placed upon him. The ground was not going to be fruitful to him anymore. Oh, it might have some, but certainly not like it was. "You are accursed from the earth, which has opened her mouth to receive the brother's blood. When you till the ground is, shall not hence forth the yield unto her, her strength, a fugitive and a vagabond that shall be on earth." Cain had two punishments. One is the ground is cursed. You're not going to get the greatest crops anymore, and you're going to be a vagabond. You're going to wander all over the earth. You're not going to have a settled down life.

Then we read Cain's response to God's judgment upon him. We read, it says, "Cain said to the Lord, my punishment is greater than I could bear." That word, punishment, is an interesting word. It has a multitude of, of descriptions and uses that can talk about guilt. My guilt is greater than I can bear. It also talks about punishment. The punishment that you have made it out against me as greater than I could bear.

What am I going to do?, Cain thought. Hopeless, despair, sorrow, sadness, fear. What am I going to do? How am I going to live? The ground isn't going to be fruitful anymore. I'm going to be a vagabond. I'm going to wander all over the earth. Life will hold no meaning for me anymore, and it shall come to pass that anyone who sees me will take vengeance against me and slay me.

Then the Lord said to him, "Whoever will slay you, I will take vengeance against that person seven fold, and He put a mark on Cain. What was the mark? Don't know. But somehow God put a mark upon him, identified him in some fashion so that people would not take vengeance against him for what he did to Abel, his brother.

It says in verse number 16 of Genesis four that Cain left and departed and went out to another land and began a life

of wandering and vagabond experience, a life of hopelessness, sorrow, anxiety, fear.

That's the story of Cain and Abel. Rather simple in this description, but profound, all profound in its experience. It brings up a logical question, which maybe come to your mind. Why did God inspire Moses to write this story? Moses wrote it. Those first five books in the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Moses wrote those. Why did he write this story? Why did God inspire him to include in his writing this story of Cain and Abel?

Well, you must understand when Moses wrote these books, he wrote these books during the time period when the children of Israel had an Exodus out of Egypt. They had lived in Egypt for 400 years, lived in servitude to the Egyptians. God brought them out of Egypt, was taking them to the promised land that He had promised.

And we would read about it later in the book of Genesis, if you would follow through in the life of Abraham, God promised it to his offspring that he would bring them out Egypt into the promise land.

As they traveled from Egypt to the promised land, Moses wrote those five books and included this story of Cain and Abel. The children of Israel needed some history. They needed some backstory, if you will, to their existence in the wilderness as to why God brought them out of Egypt: why God was giving them the promised land, their origin as even existing as humans. Where did we come from? How did all this happen? Where did this creation come from?

So God wanted to provide some instruction to the children of Israel to prepare them for His teachings, His commandments, His demands that they worship Him, to prepare them for entrance into the promised land. All of this is backstory to them in history, to prepare them for what God had in store and then promised for them and so doing what God did.

Through this story is described to the children of Israel the nature of mankind and the nature of God. He described to the children of Israel the nature of mankind, why they were sinful people. Why were they constantly rebelling against God? Why did they constantly fight Moses, their leader? Because they had inherited through the line from Adam and Eve that original sin nature, the depravity of the human heart that completely dominated and permeated the totality of their beings and caused them to sin and lead them into disobedience and their rejection of God's authority over them.

Thus began another expansion of individual freedom and autonomy as we described a few moments ago. That's how they lived their lives, and God wanted them to see where it came from. It came from the original source, satan himself, tempting Adam and Eve who fell and sinned and then by birth, an inherited sinful nature from the progeny and offspring of Adam and Eve down through the Israelites and down through history.

So we see those people, the children of Israel separated from God under God's condemnation, depraved in nature, constantly following the sinful desires of their own heart, unable to satisfy God and please Him in and of themselves. It shows that they needed offerings to God to please and satisfy Him. They knew they were separated from God. Cain and Abel knew that, Adam and Eve knew that they had separated from God because of their sin.

There was a chasm between them. Their nature was different from that of God, and they needed to provide something. There needed to be some way of bridging the gap between God and man because they had inherited the same sinful nature of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and multitudes of people before them. They could not satisfy God in and of themselves any more than Cain and Abel.

That is a glimpse into the human nature of the children of Israel that they observed by this story of Cain and Abel and the events in their lives. Well, what does it teach us about God and his nature? Because we see that here as well, that God used it to the children of Israel to help them get a little bit knowledge about Him. First of all, it proves to them and shows to them that He exists.

There is a God and the word used for God is a covenant, keeping God personal, God the only true and living God. He exists, and He showed it to them through this story of Cain and Abel. We see God showing Himself in the story of Cain and Abel as transcendent. He is above and beyond the experience of personal levels and of normal experience. He transcends humanity.

We also see Him a Holy God. That's why they had to bring offerings. Cain and Abel had to bring offerings because there were not holy. God was Holy, and they needed to somehow bridge that gap. God wanted the children of Israel to see He was Holy in nature. They were not. They needed something to bridge the gap between them.

We see God showing Himself as sovereign, the authority, the ruler, the governor, the creator, the One worthy of obedience, the One worthy of worship because of His transcendence, because of His holiness, because He created all things and created the children of Israel.

We see grace, God, a God of grace, for He did not immediately smite Cain for his awful deed. He gave him another chance and even after Cain rejected the opportunity to do another offering to please God in a way that would satisfy Him, God still protected him. He didn't slay him and bring retribution upon it. He punished him, but He didn't take his life for his murder of Abel his brother.

We see God presented as omniscient knowing all things. He knew about the offerings. He knew the thoughts and intents of the heart of both Canaan and Abel. He knew Cain's murder of his brother. He knew where it happened and how it happened. God was omniscient, and He wanted the children of Israel to see that aspect of His nature and His character.

God presented to Adam and Eve in the garden that He would provide a champion. Does this story in any way progress that promise in any fashion? Is there anything in that story that gives us a hint as to God's development of that promise of redemption and salvation for the children?

Well, it shows that mankind needs divine intervention. Mankind cannot please God by himself. Even though Abel brought an offering, it was just one offering, and it was for one occasion. Humanity needed divine intervention. And this story revealed that to the children of Israel.

It also shows the inability of mankind to bridge that gap. It shows that God is the Judge of what He will accept and what He will reject and having the rightful privilege and position to make that judgment, those requirements, those demands of worship and obedience.

So, in summary, from this story God revealed to the children of Israel, mankind's dependence upon God to satisfy Him. They couldn't by themselves. They needed God's help. They need God, God's divine intervention to bring about that bridging between humanity and its sinful and depraved nature and condition.

And God's holiness ultimately leading to the fulfillment of the promise to provide the serpent crusher, the champion that God had promised, who would defeat Satan and destroy him.

So we move on from here and we ask another question. What correlation does this have for you and me? We've seen how it applies to the children of Israel and why God would bring it into Moses' attention to describe it and to include it in his writing and the benefit for the children of Israel. But what about you and me, does it have any correlation for you and me today, especially as we examine this issue of hopelessness?

This story reverberates down through the centuries to our day with a message of the origin of hopelessness and God's provision for its relief. Let's take a look at a few things. You might find it interesting to know that this story of Cain and Abel, although described in Genesis chapter four in the very first book of the Bible, it is referred to and allusions drawn from it 10 different times in the New Testament.

There are 10 different references and allusions to the story of Cain and Abel as we looked at it in Genesis chapter four. For example, it talks about Cain and describes for us the nature of Cain, which we saw pictured and described, but there is some further evidence and description of Cain in First John chapter three verses seven to 13 and in Matthew chapter seven verse number 20 describe Cain as wicked and having the wicked nature of Satan. Satan is described in Scripture as the father of lies. Cain lied. He was a liar, and it described Satan as a murderer from the beginning and Cain as a murderer. He had the same nature of the wickedness of Satan.

That's how the New Testament describes Cain. Then there's also some description about Abel, and it tells us why it was that God accepted Abel's offering. In Hebrews chapter 11 verses four and five, it tells us why God accepted Abel's offering. It says, Abel made his offering by faith. It was the attitude of the heart that God saw and observed and accepted.

In this instance, it was just a, a thank offering. It was given frequently to someone who was of superior nature and position than you. So the fact that Cain gave of the fruit of the ground was not necessarily the evil part, why it was rejected, but instead God saw his heart, a heart of wickedness, of unbelief and of doubt.

And he saw the heart of Abel as he made his offering. It was a heart of faith and trust and belief. And the Scriptures describe Abel as righteous, and we're told that without faith it is impossible to please God. So Abel's faith pleased God and He declared him righteous.

There's another interesting set of verses that make reference to Abel and a specifically relates to Jesus Christ. There are some verses in the New Testament that talk about the relationship or the picture or the description of Abel and the description of Christ and some things drawn from the life of Abel. I'll just point them out to you because they're important for us to understand about the distinction between Abel and Jesus.

We find for example, in Abel's life he made a sacrifice, a good sacrifice in faith, believing and trusting upon God, and then we find him murdered, and that's basically all we know about Abel. Those two things, the sacrifice made in faith and his death.

It's interesting in the New Testament, it makes reference of Jesus Christ in contrast to evil. It's about the blood of Abel. It tells us in Hebrews chapter 12 verse number 24 that the blood of Jesus Christ is greater than the blood of Abel. Here it is talking about the blood of Abel's sacrifice because the sacrifice that Abel gave was a bloody sacrifice.

By contrast, the Lord Jesus blood exceeds that of Abel. If you look at the sacrifice of Abel and the blood spilt in that

sacrifice, who did it help? Abel. Did it give anyone else a benefit? No. Did Abel have to give a sacrifice like that again? He would have had he lived had Cain not killed him; he would have had to give multitudes of sacrifices repeatedly over and over and over again all of his life. So the blood of that sacrifice was good for one occasion for one person.

Not so the blood of Christ. The Scriptures tell us in First John chapter one that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin so that those who come under the blood of Christ don't have to make a sacrifice again and again and again repeatedly throughout all of their lives. Christ's sacrifice was one time for all sin.

So the blood of Jesus Christ exceeded the blood of Abel's sacrifice in its effect and its extent covering the sins of all those covered under the blood of Jesus.

We find also the death of Christ exceeded the death of Abel. Abel's death helped nobody. It was just a sad, sad occurrence; not so the death of Christ. The death of Christ exceeded Abel's in that it provided life for multitudes, for many. The Scriptures tell us in John that Christ gave His life a ransom for many. So the death of Christ was a substitutionary death. Jesus didn't have to die for His own sin, not for something where He had disobeyed God. It was on behalf of others. It was a substitutionary death.

He died in the place of people like you and like me, that His blood might cover our sin and that we might find relief from our sin. So the death of Christ and His ultimate resurrection from the dead provided the culmination of God's promise to Adam and Eve as recorded in Genesis chapter three. The serpent crusher arrived, and He defeated the devil on the cross and in His resurrection, so that now those covered by the blood of Jesus, those who trust Christ, those who claim Him, they now have joy instead of hopelessness. They have peace instead of despair, they have forgiveness instead of guilt.

So now I come to you, and I would ask, what does the Holy Spirit of God, how does He want to use these truths in your life? Today?

It could be that you are a believer that you are under the blood of Jesus. You have trusted Him. You have experienced the new birth as described in John chapter three, and you trust Christ and you claim Him as Lord and Savior. I would suggest that perhaps you might need some repentance and viewing your life and in view of God's nature and how we have seen him described and the experiences of Cain and Abel and some of His nature.

You might have to repent from sin that you have mistreated him, not obeyed God as you should, not trusted Him like you should, and yet at the same time, it can also bring you praise and joy and cause you to honor and glorify your Lord and Savior.

What if you're not a believer? What if you have never trusted in Christ? Up to this point, you have lived a life as described by Alison and by millions of people, a life lived by multitudes of people down through the centuries, a life of individual freedom, autonomy. "I will do things my way in a way I want to do them," but today, something has come into your mind and enlightenment to your mind, to understand yourself in new ways that you've never seen in the past.

The Spirit of God has opened your eyes to see that you need a savior. You cannot find happiness on your own and no way can you satisfy the demands of a Holy sovereign God. There is a chasm between you and God, and the only bridge between you and Him is Jesus Christ, the substitute who died on the cross who was blood was spilt on behalf of people like you and like me. And then for all those who trust and call upon him, that blood will wash all of their sins away.

And so I pray for you today. I pray that the Spirit of God will give you that new birth that you need, that will change you completely. Give you a new nature, a nature of God Himself coming to live within you.

I pray that He will bring that life to you. I'm praying that He will give you the faith to believe in and trust Christ and to call upon Him and trust Him as your own Lord and savior.

And I pray that you will do that today. I pray that the spirit of God will bring that into your life today.