

## I. Advanced Organizer -

### A. (Story about value of connection verses disconnection)

1. **teachable moment with our girls - Junia and Gwen**
2. on vacation, heading to beach - Gwen vomits in the car
3. Junia knows we're supposed to go to Legoland next day, "I feel sad for Gwen". Recognition of Empathy
4. **Social scientists and psychotherapists long recognized importance of empathy in meaningful social interactions, relationships.** Junia is in the midst of a primary stage of human development where this skill is particularly being learned - ages 5-7. Perhaps why many educators have long felt that the most important skills for kindergartners aren't academic but social - learning to listen to other kids and share the glue and the pink paint.
5. More than an important part of emotional intelligence. **Neuroscience has also recently discovered connection between two people's brains: relational neurobiology.** Biological explanation for empathy.
  - a) **Mirror neurons** are subset of your brains neurons that fire when something happens to someone else. The only thing that keeps you from believing that you're not being touched or hurt, is your own skin. Phantom limbs or numbing medication.
  - b) Our human brains are profoundly connected to other human brains. We're wired for connection.

### B. New Series, "It's All about Connection"

1. Something we think a lot about in Blue Ocean World; this series we're gonna be **leaning on some of the work of other Blue Ocean pastor friends**, like Charles Park of the River, Ken Wilson from Ann Arbor.
  2. **Election brings out a lot of disconnection.** We want our side to win. Our point of view to win. We find ourselves baffled at the other side. Other point of view. We feel separation. Gridlock in Washington because we can't compromise with the other side.
  3. Often it can feel like **religion plays right into this**, maybe even heightens it
  4. What if that wasn't the only way to think about it? What if our experience of faith actually made a way for greater connectivity rather than greater division? Would that be better for our biology? For our emotional health? And maybe for our social conversations?
- C. I'm gonna be making the pitch throughout this series that what neurobiology has been telling us in the last twenty years about the fundamental human need wired in our very brains for connection, **our ancient wisdom has been telling us for centuries.** And in our Judeo Christian tradition, **you don't have to look any further than the first few chapters of our Sacred Text, the Bible.**

#### 1. Genesis 3 - Original sin, the Fall story

- a) summary - story of the first human beings living in harmony and relational community with their creator, God, and the rest of creation. And they have access to the tree which brings life. But they are asked not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for they are warned that eating of it will bring death. But the humans do eat from this tree, the eat of the tree of judgement, they take upon themselves the right to choose what is good and what is bad, and it leads to isolation. They are banished from the garden and they no longer have the same level of harmony and intimacy with God and creation.
2. Stay right after, **Genesis 4 is exact echo.** Same points, different characters. **When this happens** - 2 stories in a row that are really the same story, **tells us this is a very important point** (like parables)
  3. **Sets up the rest of the Bible** - right at the beginning. Seminal Story.

## II. Genesis 4: 1 - 16

Now Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the Lord’s help, I have produced a man!” 2 Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. 3 When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. 4 Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, 5 but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

6 “Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? 7 You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

8 One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out into the fields.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

9 Afterward the Lord asked Cain, “Where is your brother? Where is Abel?”

“I don’t know,” Cain responded. “Am I my brother’s guardian?”

10 But the Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! 11 Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood. 12 No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

13 Cain replied to the Lord, “My punishment is too great for me to bear! 14 You have banished me from the land and from your presence; you have made me a homeless wanderer. Anyone who finds me will kill me!”

15 The Lord replied, “No, for I will give a sevenfold punishment to anyone who kills you.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him. 16 So Cain left the Lord’s presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

A. Ends very dark but **Starts very happy**. Birth of a baby boy.

1. **Partnership between man and woman and God that brings life.** Man and woman with the Lord’s help. Cain’s name - “creation”. (vs. Abel, “breath, vapor”) Echo of Gen. 2 - God creates man, breathes into him and says, not good to be alone. Only thing in all creation that is “not good” Partnership - bringing together that brings life. Being alone is the only thing that’s not good.
2. **Connection and partnership vs. alienation and loneliness right from the beginning.**
3. Trouble in paradise - tree, judgement that brings alienation - and here - verse 4 and 5 shows this

B. **God rejects Cain’s offering.**

1. **Not clear why.** Doesn’t say why. God doesn’t explain himself. “You brought crappy stuff”... he doesn’t do that.

2. **Says, “you need to respond well”.** “If you do well” means “if you respond well right now”. Not that you should have done well. He doesn’t give explanation for why he rejected the gift. Challenges Cain to respond well to the rejection.
3. **How could Cain have responded?**
  - a) **could have said to God, “I’m really mad”**...what’s up with this, can we talk? (good response)
  - b) **could have gone to Abel...**“I hate you right now, can we talk” or “Abel, you know something I don’t; can you help?”
  - c) all of those kind of responses better than killing. Talk it out. Better out than in
4. **Instead, Cain went all-in.** Went into his own head and started stewing.
  - a) It’s not right, it’s not fair, go internal
  - b) “I’m the first son; what’s this about...?”
  - c) **Because he doesn’t talk to God and Abel goes off track**
5. **God: Sin is crouching at the door.** - better translation - sin is waiting to devour you; you must subdue it.
  - a) These kind of stewing thoughts can devour us. (examples) “Why God...?”
  - b) Subdue - second time in creation account. Genesis 1: you must subdue this earth, as if there’s wildness that must be subdued
    - (1) Gen. 3, they encounter the wildness
    - (2) instead of subduing the serpent, they are subdued by it; they lose
    - (3) they eat from the tree of judgement that leads to alienation
6. Gen. 3 and 4 defining what sin and spiritual warfare is
  - a) these thoughts that are wild that leads to distancing, that must be subdued.
  - b) Cain subdued, too. Gorges himself on the tree of knowledge of good and evil, judgement - whips himself in such a rage he kills his brother
7. Murdering someone is ultimate alienation.
  - a) saying “You don’t deserve to live...not worth of life...not really human being made in the image of God”
  - b) judgement against someone
  - c) we’ve see this all over this summer: infidel is not worthy of life, the gay dancer at the club, the black person, the police officer...
  - d) self-justification as people judge others to not be worthy of life
8. Lord asks Cain, where is your brother?
  - a) doesn’t ask because he doesn’t know
  - b) asks same question to Adam in Gen. 3
  - c) it’s to give Cain a chance to fess up - own up to what he has done and own up
  - d) Cain needs to get in touch with who he is, talk about it
  - e) Cain deflects the blame, just like Adam “Am I my brother’s keeper”
    - (1) unwilling to face who he is and what he has done; won’t become vulnerable
    - (2) greatest alienation - self deception
    - (3) hopeless - when you are not willing to see who you are, how will you ever get better
    - (4) deep darkness - putting up of masks, covering up
9. As in Genesis 3, Cain is exiled.
  - a) exile is not an arbitrary punishment
  - b) exile is the natural consequence of giving yourself fully to alienation
    - (1) alienated from self - not willing to face who you are
    - (2) not willing to connect to Abel - kill him instead
    - (3) you hide from God, lie to him

(4) all this leads to exile - alienation, isolation - you are alone

10. **All the components of Genesis 3 are repeated - every part - just told in a different way.** fleshing itself out

- a) **Our story**; mankind that is ever true, even now
- b) How easy is it for us to deceive ourselves? How much of us is putting up masks? Responding to social cues?
- c) How many of us are truly in touch with what's really going on inside of us?
- d) How easy is it for us to be down on the world? Everything sucks. Down on yourself all the time?

**C. This is why Jesus, and ultimately the Cross he submitted to is so powerful**

1. What **Jesus did is a counter-example**

- a) he laid down his godhood on the cross - not what was right, what was fair
- b) to **bring connection**
- c) to restore our connection to God, to each other, to ourselves
- d) When he did, brought acceptance - don't have to be so insecure. Don't have to fear judgement of others.

2. **Cross doesn't stand for justice, it stands for connection**

- a) This is what I think he was calling his followers to, when he said take up your cross and follow me. He was inviting them, and us way of cross - is not to go down Cain's path, but to subdue sin, to subdue the thing that stews within us and separates us from others and from God.
- b) Like Jesus understood this to be the fundamental human problem - we go after all these other things - money, beauty, power, success - to fill our void because we are disconnected from tree of life, the tree of intimacy and connection, instead eating from tree of judgement.
- c) I see this in my kids. Their empathy in a moment can be tuned to rivalry. Give one of them a new toy and not the other, and that empathy turns to competition, rivalry, jealousy, separation, enmity.
- d) Cross brings a different kind of power so we can be vulnerable. It shields us from the judgement that is the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and gives us the capacity to say when we're mad and sad and not just argue with people about what's wrong. Not simply get sucked into the Facebook feuds over which side is right, which side is wrong. Who is justified, who is not. Cross invites vulnerability and intimacy instead.

**D. Practical Section**

1. **Respond to "no" well.**

- a) **without resentment, bitterness, and defense mechanisms.**
- b) when life, God, people say no, how do you respond?
- c) Often there is no explanation. It's like the authors of Genesis were warning us that was the case. Why didn't I get that job? Why did they pick him instead? Why didn't that marriage work? Why did my loved one have to die? We often don't get the answers.
- d) chief task is responding well
- e) so easy to go off track when we're disappointed - we stew, gather allies, gossip
  - (1) facebook - whipping each other up about who is right and wrong
- f) this is the spiritual warfare; root of all your problems
- g) when you find yourself in that space, don't stew there and think it's ok cause you're not hurting anyone
- h) sin is devouring you right there. root of all other sins - when you eat from tree there

- i) can I respond in the way of cross? Vulnerable? Open hearted? Direct? That's the spiritual task

**2. Ask, "What will bring connection?" that's the right response**

- (1) Think about marriage. My friend Charles has told engaged couples this - At some point you will feel outraged. "Who is this person?"
- (2) you must respond well. What will bring connection instead of how you are in the right
- (3) vow wasn't "I vow I will make sure what's right, gets done". Vow to love your spouse.
- (4) Doesn't mean you're a doormat. You don't become absorbed; be connected. Need to learn to say no so your yes can have meaning. Say no and hear no well. These are the tasks we need to work on. learning to say no well and learning to hear no well. In ways that foster connection.

- E. So this is what we're gonna be considering over the next several weeks. It's so easy in our world to get consumed with our own priorities. It's easy to unconsciously judge who is worthy of our time and who is not. It's so easy to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But when we can subdue that urge, there is greater power than can be released. End with a video that shows one way this power was released when a woman looked past judgement and opened herself to a moment of connection with a man living on the street. (Show video)
- 1. Cain reminds us that we have great capacity to choose isolation and alienation.
  - 2. But Jesus reminds us that we also have great capacity to overcome isolation. To live in vulnerability and reconciliation. To choose connection. Let's choose the way of connection. Amen.