

Lessons from our shared family tree

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 March 2026

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Now, can we turn together in our Bibles to the book of Genesis, first book in the Bible, chapter 4. We're going to read the end of chapter 4 and some sections of chapter 5.

We find ourselves looking at two different family trees together. The family line of Cain, who we met last week, and then the family line of Seth.

And we're going to draw with God's help lessons from our shared family tree as we continue to think about our origin story here in the book of Genesis.

So, chapter 4, beginning at verse 17. Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.

To Enoch was born Erad, and Erad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

[1 : 07] Lamech married two women, one named Ada and the other Zillah. Ada gave birth to Jabal. He was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes.

Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah. Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, listen to me. Wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times. Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, God has granted me another child in place of Abel since Cain killed him.

Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time, people began to call on the name of the Lord. This is the written account of Adam's family line. When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them, and he named them mankind when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image, and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died. And then we're going to skip the next six generations, and we're going to come to verse 21 and come to the story of Enoch.

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with God. Then he was no more, because God took him away.

[3 : 12] When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech. After he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died. When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah, and said, He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed. After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died. After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Amen. So, we're in two family trees. So, I wonder as we begin if you recognize this trend, maybe in your own family, two children in the same family with the same parents, but they turn out very differently. Their lives follow very different paths. Perhaps that's your story compared to your siblings. Or to think about whole family trees, to recognize different branches of an extended family can have very different stories. Some will stay local, get married to someone locally and work locally, while others will travel perhaps to the other end of the country or the other end of the world, and their story becomes very different. Or maybe when you think about your own story of your family, it's something like mine

where everything changes in your family tree because a parent becomes a Christian. Or perhaps because you have become a Christian, everything now changes in your family trajectory. Genesis 4 and 5 shows us something of this trend. We meet two of Adam's sons. We meet Cain, and we meet Seth, and we meet their families, and those two families are very different.

We can describe Cain as the ungodly family line, and Seth's as a godly family line. And that's all very well and good, but you might ask yourself, so what? Why am I sitting here in the year 2026 reading about an ancient family tree, reading names that none of us probably can pronounce properly, and it sounds like names and people from a whole other world? What's the point? Why is it in the Bible? What are we intended to learn from these family trees? Well, as we've been saying all along, the book of Genesis, early chapters remind us this is part of our origin story. It actually helps to explain who we are, how did we get here, and gives us indicators how we should live.

I wonder if you've ever heard of a genogram. This is new terminology to me as of last week, but ever since the late 1970s into the 1980s, psychologists and counselors have used genograms, which is basically, if you think about a standard family tree, it's like a more elaborate version of a family tree. So it'll give you marriages, and it'll give you children, but it'll also include, here are some significant life events. Here are some emotional dynamics within this branch of the family. Here are some particular medical conditions that track through the tree, and the intent is, well, this will help me today to understand something of myself if I look back through the generations.

[7 : 08] We can think about Genesis 4 and 5 doing the same thing for us today spiritually, because the patterns and the trends that we identify in these two families are patterns that we still see in ourselves and within every human heart. It goes back to that Psalms and Etch and thing, the line between good and evil cuts through every human heart. So we're going to look at these two family lines together, and we're going to focus, because the author of Genesis wants us to, we're going to focus on the person in the seventh generation. So we're going to focus on Lamech from Cain's family, we're going to focus on Enoch from Seth's family, and we're going to see a couple of big themes. From Cain's family, we're going to see the progress of culture and the progress of sin. And in Seth's family, we're going to see a pattern of death and the promise of life. So that's what we're going to look at together. So we're going to begin with Cain's family, recognizing the progress in culture and then the progress in sin. Now some of us might be thinking, oh my goodness, I did not expect to turn up in church and to go through some genealogy and ancient history. But if you like history, it's a really interesting chapter. Let me show you the progress in culture very briefly. Chapter 4, verse 17.

Here we meet Cain, and what's Cain doing? Cain is building a city. And if we know anything about history, we know that cities are always key to progress in culture. Think about the Roman Empire and how important their network of cities was to holding on to their power, but also to make sure that there was a shared language, shared story, shared culture. Or the Aztec Empire, right at the heart of the Aztec Empire, over in Latin America, was the great city of gold. Or just think about where we find ourselves today in Edinburgh. Edinburgh is associated with royalty and poetry, great novelists and philosophers with universities, with an art scene. So cities and culture go together. Go down a few generations, the children of Lamech, and we find more progress in culture. Look at verse 20. We meet this guy Jabal, and we're told he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock.

And again, when farming develops in any place, all of a sudden you've got a people group who have a sustainable source of food. And when there is a sustainable source of food, then settlements will grow up. And then there's the drive to develop tools to increase productivity. And when you meet basic needs, you've got stability, you've got security, you've got the foundation from which progress in culture emerges. Maybe part of the way we see that is in verse 21.

There's city building, there's farming, now there's music. Lamech was not having his most creative day. Jabal's brother, a guy called Jubal, was the father of all who played string instruments and pipes.

[10 : 28] So do we see the progress in culture? We've gone from this big shift from how am I sort of consuming? Now we're thinking about the creative arts. Up until now, maybe the emphasis is on survival, but now people are singing songs. In chapter 2, we heard Adam's poetry when he first met his wife. And now we've got this continuing trend, and now there's music, and now there's song.

And how important is song and music? How often it's the soundtrack to people's lives. It's an important part of culture. But we're not done there, because in verse 22, we're also introduced to Jubal Cain.

And what does he do? He forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. So we've got tools, and we've got metal working. And now, the human race can really get creative, because with the construction of tools, now new problems can be solved. Productivity can be increased.

And we see the progress here. Now they're extracting iron ore, and there's a refining process, and tools are being shaped, and are being used for the progress of society. Who's responsible for this? It's interesting to notice that it's Lamech's three sons. We're going to come back to Lamech in just a minute, and he is a horrible person. But here is God's common grace at work. There is still progress in culture, even in the family line of someone like Lamech. Cultural progress is good. All of us here, I imagine, we like tools and technology. We appreciate music. We love the city that we live in.

[12:19] If you're ever asked the dinner party question, you know, if you could go back in time and live any time in the world, what period would you like to live in? Honestly, would anybody go back? Maybe we'd go back, maybe the 70s or the 80s, but would anybody go back further? Would anyone go back to the day before there was the NHS, or before we had free access to education? Cultural progress is good.

But remember where we are in the story of Genesis. Remember where we are in the story of Cain. Look at chapter 4, verse 16 with me. We find all this happening after Cain went out from the Lord's presence, and he's living east of Eden. So, we have to remember all of this is happening after the fall into sin. So, at this point, the GPS system of the human heart is now directed, not towards God, but away from God. And so, the sad truth that we're presented with is that while there is progress in culture, there is also progress in sin. So, let's turn to see that together, this progress in sin. And we begin with the head of the family line. We begin with Cain himself. So, last week, if you were here last week, Cain killed his brother Abel, jealousy, anger, and a judgment comes from God. And we read about it in chapter 4, verse 12. And chapter 4, verse 12 ends with the judgment of God on Cain, you will be a restless wanderer on the earth. Fast forward to what we've just read about Cain. What's he done? He has built a city. You'll be a restless wanderer, but he's building a city. What's going on here? Well, it's like perhaps the more famous story we find in chapter 11, in the tower of Babel. In his construction process, Cain is rejecting God's word on his life. He is defying God's authority. When Cain was fearful as he was driven out from God's presence, God showed mercy and gave him a mark of mercy. But Cain does not trust God for security.

And so, he builds his own city for personal security. And so, we see so clearly in Cain's story, the GPS of the human heart is turned away from God, does not exercise faith in God.

Go down to generation 7. Come with me to the story of Lamech, Lamech. As we're given a case study in the progress of sin. His story begins in verse 19.

[15:28] Lamech married two women, one named Ada, the other Zillah. He has two wives. And did you notice the Bible doesn't explicitly say, and he was wrong? Now, why doesn't the Bible explicitly condemn that?

It's because the Bible doesn't need to, because it is clearly obvious from his life that his life is wrong. His heart is wrong. The Bible is subtle. It exposes wrongdoing, but doesn't always say, and so clearly it's wrong, because we just know by looking at Lamech's life.

We then come back to him in verses 23 and 24. But just to make the observation, remember, it's Lamech's children who are promoting cultural progress. But what we see from their father Lamech is he will take culture, which is neutral, and he will twist it and make something ugly from it in this song that he sings. And just as an aside, but I think an important aside in the time that we live, you and I, we need art that is beautiful and good. We need stories that are good and redemptive.

We need music with beauty. That's not always the way our art scene, our cultural scene is going, but that's what we need for our heart and for our soul. But think about this song of Lamech, verse 23.

Ada and Zillah, listen to me, wives of Lamech, hear my words. I've killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. So he's using culture to celebrate his anger and his murder, to celebrate in song. If a young man, even a child provokes me, I will not hesitate to kill.

[17:31] And he goes further and then he twists the story of Cain and God's words spoken to Cain. God promised to protect Cain. Look at chapter 4, verse 15. This is God saying, anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. But Lamech says, if Cain is avenged, then Lamech 77

times. Lamech says, I will be my own avenger. I will bring justice. I will not live with the fear of God. I do not need God. The seed of Cain's sin, his anger and his murder has passed down the family line. Highlighting for us that Cain's is a godless family line. We see culture is progressing, but at the same time, sin is progressing. And we need to think about that. And it calls for biblical wisdom. How do we consume culture? What do we consume?

Perhaps in our devices to recognize that culture can be harmful and it's important to guard our own hearts. So just before we leave this family line, two trends to pick up on for us from the Lamech story.

Because we live in the tech age. We think about the progress of culture. It's so rapid now. Technology is so rapid in the way that it's progressing. And so you and I, we need God's wisdom to navigate wisely and well. How do we use this technology well? Because the story of Lamech reminds us, first of all, that technology can be twisted. Technology by itself, it's morally neutral. Culture by itself is not necessarily negative. But we need to recognize that the human heart is not morally neutral.

And so that what we can do is we can take a person's skill, a person's ingenuity and creativity to develop new tech. And that can be used for good purposes, but it can also be used for bad purposes.

Some of us will know that there was that naive hope in the early 20th century with the progress in science and education and technology. You know, utopia, this wonderful world is just around the corner. And all those optimistic predictions failed to factor in one reality, the reality of the human heart and of human sin. And the result is technology made killing machines and gas chambers and nuclear weapons. And there was more death and more killing in the 20th century than any of the previous centuries combined, because technology can be twisted by our twisted human hearts. Let's move really close to home and let's think about our smartphones, because I suspect most of us will have a smartphone. There is a sense in which they are amazing devices. We're probably using them to take notes and read our Bibles on. A wonderful way to communicate. All kinds of creativity can happen with our phones. It's a world of information at our fingertips. It's a wonderful way to bring blessing to others when used wisely. Our smartphones are amazing. But how many of us would also testify that they can be awful when badly used? Distracted doom scrolling. Social media trolling. The access that we have to a world of pornography and a world of hate, and all of it communicated across the globe at the speed of light.

[21 : 34] Cultural progress does not mean moral progress. And sometimes new technology brings for us new ways to be tempted into sin. And so again, it calls for our wisdom. How am I consuming? What am I consuming?

Do I recognize how harmful it can be for my mind and for my heart? Remember the image in Genesis 4 of sin as predator. That sin is active, the devil is active, and is able even to use technology to tempt us into sin.

Ask yourself the question, what is forming me? What is forming my habits day by day? Because without care, we might find that it's social media that's forming us.

It's the algorithm. It's AI that's forming us. It's cultural trends that are informing our decision-making. And especially for us as Christians, we need to be formed by the Word of God.

By the time that we spend in prayer and in fellowship and in worship with the people of God. So technology can be twisted. We also see from this family tree that technology can be trusted instead of God.

[23 : 10] There's a professor of business and sport analytics who pointed this out in an essay this week. This reality you can trace in the Bible that a new tool or a new development emerges.

And that brings for people new capabilities. That's a good thing in and of itself. But that often leads to, here is a new way to reject or to replace God.

One example. The bricks of Genesis chapter 11. New technology for building. And that leads to Babel. Here's this great city to give glory to people rather than glory to God.

Or think about what happens when horses and chariots become used for warfare. Now God's people are trusting in the horses and the chariots instead of in their God for security.

Or when kingship becomes a feature. Now we're going to trust in the reality of kingship rather than God as king for our dependence. Technology can be trusted in the place of God.

[24 : 15] And if we stop and think for even a moment as we think about our smartphones, don't we find that sometimes they become the tiny gods in our pocket?

That they control us. They direct us. We're always responding to their every need. Remember that the devil is a predator.

That sin wants to destroy. And one way for sure is through replacing trusting God with trust in tools and tech.

I've had a bad day. I feel discouraged. I'm going to pick up my phone for comfort. Or it's what I find on my phone that gives me joy and security rather than my identity in the Lord Jesus.

What you and I need more than any tool or technology is to find ourselves in right relationship with God. Is to find our place in God's story of redemption.

[25 : 20] To find our identity and security and joy in Jesus. To worship Him and serve Him. And then we're in a good place to enjoy culture and to use technology.

So that's Cain's family. Which shows us the progress in culture but also the progress in sin. Now let's turn to Seth's family. Where we see both the pattern of death and a promise of life.

But before we get into it. To help us to think about chapter 5 especially. Think with me for just a moment about a magician. A magician who does card tricks.

And you know how card tricks so often rely on sleight of hand. I love watching card tricks and I love being amazed. I don't like to know how they do it. But I know that one thing that magicians do is they'll use distraction.

You know they'll get you to look just for a moment in a different direction in order to do their trick.

And then we miss what's going on. When we come to Genesis chapter 5.

[26 : 29] If we are not careful. We will be misdirected. We'll look at the wrong thing. And we won't see the lesson God has for us. I would suggest the number one way we get distracted in chapter 5.

Is we focus on those names and the really big numbers. And we get all caught up in how is it possible that they could live for that long?

What was it like? And that can get all our attention. Do you know that's not what God wants us to see. Do you know what God wants us to see? The recurring theme that comes in every generation.

It's actually the pattern of death. It's actually this note. And then he died. Look at generation 1.

Adam's generation. Chapter 5 verses 3 to 5. This pattern we see in six of the generations. We meet Adam. And after a certain number of years. He has a son.

[27 : 33] There's the pattern. And he gives the son a name. And after Seth is born. Adam lives. In his case 800 years. He has other children.

We get told how long he lives. And then he died. Generation after generation after generation. Marriage.

Family. And then he died. In chapter 5 verses 1 to 3. It's really significant to notice. That the blessing that God had promised to people.

It's in effect. There are children. And they're filling the earth. And did you notice. That just as God created people in his image and likeness. So we discover that when Adam has Seth.

Seth is born in the image and likeness of Adam. We're supposed to see that in some ways. There are parallels.

[28 : 30] God creates. Adam and Eve. They procreate. But at the end. Death. Comes into. Every.

Picture. There is cultural progress. But the sad epitaph. On every gravestone.

Over every crowning achievement. Over all that cultural progress. Stands these words. And then. He. Died. And so we can't escape.

What we've been introduced to. Ever since. Adam and Eve rebelled. And rejected God's word. The sting of death. Every generation.

Is living under the shadow. Of the curse. Every death. Is a reminder. Of the punishment. Due. For human. Sin.

[29 : 27] Every generation. Is showing us. That our sin nature. Is now turned. Away from God. That our GPS. Does not add.

God. As our home. And every generation. Is reminding us. As we hear. Death. After death. What we need.

Is the promise. Seed. Of Genesis. Chapter 3. We need the one. Who will come. Who will crush. The head. Of the serpent.

Who will bring. An end to death. And who will bring. Life. Even in the godly line. Of Seth. Death comes. And generation. After generation.

We are left. With longing. Where will hope. Come from. Where will life. Come from. When will the promise. Seed. Arrive. But let's hear.

[30 : 24] If we can. The simple. Somber. Warning. So timely. Don't be distracted. What we need. To hear. From this family tree. And from our own. Family stories. Is to remember. Death. We need to learn.

To view. To view. Our lives. In light. Of our mortality. And in light. Of. Coming. Eternity. To recognize. What really. Matters.

In light of that. To recognize. That we are invited. To live. Each day. Before the face. Of God. To be ready. For the day.

When we will stand. Before. Our God. And to be ready. By trusting. Jesus. The promise. Seen. So that that reality.

[31 : 27] And then. He died. Need not. Have. Fear. For us. Because we can live. With faith. So we see a pattern. Of death. But secondly. We see a promise. Of life.

In the godly line. Of Seth. Let me show. Three ways. That we can trace. This out. First. Chapter 4. Verse 26. We meet Seth. And we meet his son. Enosh. And at that time.

We're told. People began to call. On the name of the Lord. So again. If you've been here. Since the beginning. Of our study. You might have a question. Because we know. Adam and Eve. They worshipped. God. In the garden of Eden.

And last week. We saw that both. Abel. And Cain. They offered. God's sacrifices. So what does it mean. Here. When it says. At this time. People began to call. On the name of the Lord.

It means. Here is the moment. Where regular. Public. Worship. Begins to happen. This is the point. Where in front. Of all the other people.

[32 : 21] That are being born. And are living. Seth's family. Is going to proclaim. Their trust in God. The God of the covenant. The personal God.

The God who had made. That great promise. This is an act of faith. This is them hoping. In the promise. This family. Is going to be marked. By. Worshipping.

Another way. We see the promise of life. Is in the walking. Of Enoch. So remember. Enoch. He's generation seven. Where Lamech. Destroyed.

And brought death. Enoch. Remarkably. Escapes death. So let's look at Enoch. And his remarkable life. Now. One thing. That's really important. To notice. In this family tree.

By a long shot. Enoch. Has the shortest lifespan. So he died. It's a very long life. But only 365 years. Relatives say. To his son.

[33 : 18] Classic Sunday school answer. Who's the oldest man. Who ever lived. Methuselah. 969. Compared to that. Really short. What's that saying to us?

As we think about the story of Enoch. It is saying to you and to me. There is a greater gift. Than living a really long time.

And that gift. Is living. To enjoy. God. And getting to live. With God. In his presence. And all the obsession.

With long life. And extending life. And cryogenic chambers. And all that. What people need. What we need. Is Christ Jesus. As Savior.

Because he guarantees. Eternal life. Knowing God now. And life with God forever. That's one thing. That's striking about Enoch's life. Another striking thing. And we find it a couple of times.

[34 : 16] Verse 22. Enoch walked faithfully with God. 300 years. And then verse 24. Just to underline it. Enoch walked faithfully with God.

300 years. Of walking with God. Maybe some of you have read. Eugene Peterson's book. Really helpful book. A Long Obedience. In the same direction. He talks about patience. And perseverance.

In the life of discipleship. Kind of as an antidote. To the instant generation. Where we expect. Kind of Christian maturity. Now in a moment. Long patient walk. Of obedience.

We need this walk. This was Enoch's walk. 300 years. And the picture is of a servant. Walking. Before his master.

Always eager to do his master's will. Always ready. For obedience. It's the same language actually used of the priests. As they served in the temple. Here is someone enjoying a close relationship with God.

[35 : 13] Delighting to be obedient to God. He's a great example of faith. And we're told then. He was no more. Because God took him away.

And then he died. And then he died. And then he died. But Enoch. He escapes death. He walked with God. He enjoyed life with God.

In his 300 years. And now. He is taken to enjoy life with God forever. There's a promise of life in there.

And the chapter ends with another promise. It ends with a family who is waiting. The chapter closes with a different Lamech. Verse 28. Lamech had lived 182 years.

And he had a son. And he named him Noah. And Noah means comfort. And we need to recognize that in his naming of his son. It's both an act of faith. And an act of longing. He will comfort us.

[36 : 16] In the labor and painful toil of our hands. Caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.

Here's the longing. Is this the generation when the promised seed will be sent? Will my son Noah.

Will he bring comfort by removing the curse? Will it be Noah? Will it be Noah? We're actually going to leave Genesis in a bit of a cliffhanger ending. Because we won't return to it until after Easter.

But spoiler alert. In the story of Noah. We will see that God will use him to bring restoration of the earth. There will be a new beginning in Noah.

But he too will sin. He is not the promised seed. He's not the promised son. He can't undo the curse of sin that leads to death. But there is in that line of seed.

In the worshiping and the walking and the waiting. A promise that there is life. Now why does all this matter to us? Think about your life today. Think about your family story.

[37 : 15] Think about your family tree. There are times when we live and we groan under the shadow. Under the reality of death.

I'm sure most of us were looking at the MSPs debating assisted dying. Didn't it remind us as well of the pain and suffering that so many endure at the end of life?

And the reality of death reminds us that you and I need hope. We need a way to break the pattern. We need a way to find the promise of life in the face of death.

We need the son who will come, who will be sent, who will fulfill God's promise. The one who will defeat sin and death and the devil. And who will bring us new life. The one we need is Jesus Christ, the son of God.

And in the fullness of God's time, wonderfully, Jesus, the eternal son of God, he became a man and he became one of us to live a life of perfect obedience and worship.

[38 : 15] To be the one who would truly, faithfully, always walk with God. Loved to do his father's will. And the father said of him, this is my son. I love him. Listen to him.

And Jesus came and this life of worship was also a life of mission. He came to rescue and to redeem. And he would do that by himself, taking upon himself our sin.

He would go under the curse that we have lived under. He would suffer and die for us so that you and I, by faith, we could find real comfort.

That we could know God and worship God. That we could have eternal hope even in the face of death. That trusting Jesus when we die, we'll know we'll be taken home to our God and Savior.

Today, if that's what you want in your story, if that's what you want in your family story, what does God tell us to do?

[39 : 16] He tells us to turn away from sin, from self-reliance, from rejection of God. And he invites us to turn to trust in Jesus.

To trust him as Savior. To live with faith in Jesus. And then he tells us, share him with the next generation.

Share him with your family. That our family tree would be different because we've known Jesus for our sake.