

# Real Sin and the Grace of God

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at [Christchurcheastbay.org](http://Christchurcheastbay.org). Good morning. Happy Sunday.

I'm Tonya and I'm part of the Ocos in the Oaks Friday Women's Group and Women Reading Women Monthly Book Club. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Genesis chapters 4 verses 1 through 26 as printed in your liturgy.

A reading from the book of Genesis. Adam made love to his wife Eve and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, with the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.

Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.

[ 1 : 07 ] And Abel also brought an offering. Fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel in his offering. But on Cain in his offering he did not look with favor.

So Cain was very angry and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right will you not be accepted?

But if you do not do what is right sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you but you must rule over it. Now Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field.

While they were in the field Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, where is your brother Abel? I don't know he replied, am I my brother's keeper?

The Lord said, what have you done? Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

[ 2 : 08 ] When you work the ground it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord, my punishment is more than I can bear.

Today you are driving me from the land and I will be hidden from your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever finds me will kill me. But the Lord said to him, not so.

Anyone who kills Abel, sorry, anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him could kill him.

So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. 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 Ired and Ired was the father of Mahu-hel and Mahu-hel was the father of Methusel and Methusel was the father of Lamech.

[ 3 : 07 ] So Lamech married two women, one named Ada and the other Zillah. So Ada gave birth to Jebal. 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 played string 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 Nema. 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 77 times. Ada 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 Enoch. At that time, people began to call on the name of the Lord. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

[ 4 : 10 ] Let's pray as we receive this word from God. Lord, we ask that you would help us to distinguish between the way of Cain and the way of Christ, that you would make the way of Christ beautiful to us, so beautiful that we live in that way as a blessing to this world.

For our own good and for your glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You know, I've really been looking forward to preaching this particular passage today, and it's not because we have a jealous murderer problem here in this church, or even that we're terrible at being our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

No, the reason I find this text so convicting and relevant for us, and really for me, is because beyond the jealousy, the murder, and the malice, there is a more basic evil here that led to the kind of competitive jealousy, the kind of image of God denying selfish, murderous godlessness that we see in this story, and also that we've witnessed, right, in these past few weeks in our headlines nationally and internationally.

There's a deeper, more basic evil on display in this text in Cain's heart and life, and it's an evil that we bear witness to every single day, and not just out there in the world, but in me and in you.

So, this morning, I want to make the argument that there are two ways to live, the way of Cain or the way of Christ. And I want to argue that while the selfish, striving way of Cain has reigned for most of history, it is and it will be the selfless, surrendered way of Christ that's going to change the world.

[ 5 : 51 ] You know, like many of you, my family, we just got back into the school rhythm, and it's an exciting year for us. Our oldest, Cammie, she's starting first grade, and our youngest, Leah, she's starting kindergarten.

She just started kindergarten. But as exciting and as cute as that first day of school was, you know, I was getting them ready for school, getting their stuff together, Chelsea's yelling at me as she gets the girls on the porch, get your phone, Andrew, get your phone!

Got to take that first day of school picture, right? As all that was happening, as I felt excitement and love and gratitude, do you know what I also felt as I prepared my little girls for their first day of school?

It's the same thing I felt last year when Cammie started kindergarten. I felt dread, trepidation, anxiety on my girls' behalf. Because in my mind, not only was I sending them off to get an education and to grow up and to develop skills and competencies that will help them go in the name of Jesus to love and serve this world, but in my mind, what tugged at my heart was the sense that I was also sending them off out of our carefree home into the rat race, into the realm of brutal competition, where there are winners and losers, and where the stakes will only get higher for them with each passing year.

And where, yes, I do want them to crush it, but at what cost? By what means? For whose glory? And according to whose standards? So as I stood on that porch, taking Leah's first day of school picture, I couldn't help but think, what way of life is little Leah about to enter into?

[ 7 : 24 ] What will she live for? What will she be known for? And as her dad, what do I want her legacy to be? What do I want our family's legacy to be? What will define little Leah? What will define the Ong family?

Our hard work and hustle? Our achievements and accolades? What we've built and begotten? Or might our defining distinctive be something deeper, purer, holier, something far more sacred and lasting?

As we open up Genesis chapter 4 this morning, I want to remind you of the hopes and dreams that Adam and Eve had for their own offspring, the legacy on their minds as they ventured east of Eden and gave birth to their first child.

Remember, they were longing for what? They were longing for salvation, someone to reverse the curse, defeat the serpent. And you can even hear it in Eve's voice here in verse 1. Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.

She said, with the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man. She's thinking, or at least hoping, here he is. Here he is. I did it, and labor was painful, but I have brought forth, you could translate this as, I have procured a man.

[ 8 : 28 ] And she names him after that. Cain means gotten, procured, acquired. And as we shall see from the moment of Cain's birth, he and his descendants will live up to that name, that everything that I want in life, I have to get, I have to procure, I have to acquire myself.

Then verse 2. Later she gave birth to his brother Abel, and Abel just means emptiness, vapor, even vanity, meaninglessness. It's the same word as in Ecclesiastes. It's almost like Abel is an afterthought to their firstborn son, because Cain is the one upon whom all the family's hopes and dreams rest, right?

He's the firstborn. He's gonna be the one. Verse 2. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. So Cain is the one going into the family business. He's working the cursed ground with his dad. He's sharing in the sweat and toil. He's battling the thorns and thistles, helping the family produce their own daily bread to survive. Then verse 3. In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord, and Abel also brought an offering, fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.

The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

[ 9 : 43 ] So Adam and Eve are trying to raise these God-fearing young men who offer worship unto God with these offerings. But only one offering is accepted by the Lord, only Abel's. Why?

Well, see, Abel's gift was the fattiest firstborn, right? Not his leftovers after seeing how well his flock did that year, but his firstborn, not knowing how many more sheep he would even have that year. He gave the best of his firstborn sheep. And the writer of Hebrews interprets this fatty firstborn offering as an act of faith, as Abel saying, I'm gonna worship you, Lord, because you deserve it all. And I'm gonna trust you with all that I have and give you the first and best of what you've given me. Abel lived by the principle that God has given to me, and I'm gonna live out of that. But for Cain, he lived by a different principle. The principle of, I gotta get mine.

And that's why he was so angry with God. He thought God owed him a good response to his offering. Abel offered authentic faith and worship, but Cain offered performative, tokenistic religiosity.

[ 10 : 45 ] Cain just did his duty. He gave his offering, and so God should have been obligated to accept his offering and be happy with him. But for Cain, it was all transactional. I give, then I get. And the moment Cain's transactional way of life stopped working for him, it says his face fell.

He wasn't just angry. He was depressed and despairing, all because he had a flawed understanding of who God is and of who he was and of what he owed God. He didn't get that God is not a God who's so interested in having a transactional relationship with his people as if we could get God into our debt.

Like the elder brother, Cain wanted a transaction and not a father. But just as the prodigal son's father humbled himself to go and pursue not just his prodigal son, but his petulant older son, so does God approach Cain.

Not with immediate condemnation, but with intentional questionings, almost like a counselor. Look at verse six. Why are you so angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?

But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door. It desires to have you, but you must rule over it, my son, he says. God comes to Cain trying to help him understand his own heart, his own lack of faith and worship and love.

[ 11 : 59 ] God is trying to help him understand and get out of his transactional way of life. He's trying to help him into something far better. But even after hearing directly from God, Cain goes on living up to his name, procuring, acquiring, even if it means taking from others.

See, because you have to understand, for his whole life, Cain had been living by the Ricky Bobby Creed, all right? If you ain't first, you're last, all right? But now he finds that his supposedly meaningless brother has come into first place with God, and so in his self-centered jealousy, Cain would rather dismantle his own brother than dismantle his own me first, gotta get mine way of life. Verse eight says, Now Cain said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field. While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Only the second generation after Adam and Eve, and humanity has fallen so far, so fast, from foolish disobedience in the garden to family murder in the field.

Verse nine, Then the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel, your brother? And listen, it's not because God doesn't know where he is, right? No, he's pursuing Cain as a gentle father. But here Cain has the gall to lie to God and to renounce his responsibility and to do it with sass.

He said, I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper? And this is the more basic evil, the me first denial of our human responsibility to love one another.

[13:31] So God makes it clear to Cain, you are supposed to be your brother's keeper, and so much more actually, Cain. Verse 10, The Lord said, What have you done? Listen, your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

Don't you know? No injustice goes unnoticed before me. And God says, Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. You further curse the ground, Cain. This ground that was supposed to deliver life is now drinking in death. This ground that I gave to you from which you were supposed to receive your daily bread, you have force-fed it your brother's blood.

So now verse 12, So, when you work the ground now, Cain, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth. You will be anxious, fearful, homeless, and insecure for the rest of your life.

But still, Cain isn't even remorseful, repentant, or even ashamed. All he can think about is himself. Verse 13, Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is more than I can bear.

[14:37] Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence. I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me. All he can think about is himself.

But for some reason, God delays justice here. He's apparently got some plans to temporarily preserve Cain, even use Cain, for his purposes in history. So he says in verse 15, Not so.

Anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over. Full justice. Full vengeance. Then the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who found him would kill him.

And this is the beginning of a long motif throughout the Bible of the innocent suffering, and of them crying out to God for justice, as Abel's did to God. Crying out, How long, O Lord?

How long will the unjust? How long will the strong? How long will the arrogant oppressors continue to, continually seem to just rack up all these wins, right? And while this is a sad and confusing motif throughout the Scriptures, it's also the very wisdom of God, the thing that God will eventually use to save the world, right?

[15:43] The suffering of the innocent one. But in the meantime, as the strong men, as the wicked ones continue to win, this story now presents us with a rather challenging choice.

A choice to live Cain's way or God's way. And it's a challenging choice because though Cain doesn't exactly have it easy, what we're going to find in the rest of this passage, like from this point on, is that he's actually quite successful.

Even when he chooses not to be his brother's keeper or anyone else's, even as he commits himself to looking out for number one, it works out pretty well for Cain. Verse 16 says, So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

So the worst possible thing has happened to him. He is expelled from the presence of God, but you can still see him fighting to survive, fighting to preserve the worldview of his name.

He refuses to wander. He settles somewhere. Verse 17 says, he starts a family. And if you're wondering how he started a family, how that works, who is threatening him outside the garden, talk to Jonathan about that, all right?

[16:46] I know we're happy to chat about that, but we want to focus on what the text is focusing on here, all right? So continue with me in verse 17. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.

So Cain, he manages to survive and to procreate, and not only that, but he even builds a city and he names it after his son Enoch. And Enoch means inaugurated, initiated, dedicated.

Basically, Cain is glorying in his accomplishments. He's naming his self-made city after his self-made son. He's celebrating himself as a self-made man.

Like, sure, God exiled me, but look at me now. I built a city, and I'm dedicating this inaugural city to myself and my offspring. I don't need God. I will initiate. I will get, acquire, procure what I want.

I will survive on my own outside of the presence of God. And thus, in Cain, who's actually turned out to be the very first offspring of the serpent, in Cain's own heart and life, the serpent's lie, it lingers.

[17:49] See? You will not surely die. Life without God works. You're fine. You're better than fine. After being banished from his presence, you aren't just surviving, you're thriving.

Cutting corners pays off. See it for yourself. God's way is whack. Verse 18 tells us that Cain's line continues on and then especially thrives under Lamech in verse 19, who takes not just one wife, but two, because to him, it's all about the gains, right?

It's all about the wins. It's all about maximization and productivity. While God told Adam and Eve that husband and wife, the two shall be one, and then bless them as a couple to be fruitful and to multiply, Lamech says, forget that.

I can multiply twice as fast with two wives. And this is the beginning of polygamy. It's the beginning of the objectification of women, using them to continue the way of Cain, to acquire and to self-produce more and more and more.

But look what happens. Lamech actually is quite productive. Civilization is built from his offspring, from both his wives. Verses 20 and 21 tell us that from one wife he gets two sons.

[18:57] One is the father of tent dwelling, the father of wilderness survival and livestock rearing. The other is the father of music and instruments, right? And then Lamech's other son from his other wife, Tubal Cain, he's the forger of metal instruments.

And not just plowshares, but probably also swords. Swords. So while the only sword humanity had ever known up to this point was the flaming sword, prohibiting them from the tree of life, here humanity is saying, fine, fine.

If we can't partake of the tree of life and live forever, we will now live by the sword. We will exercise dominion by swords that we forge for ourselves.

And so from the line of Cain, particularly through his descendant Lamech, cities and kingdoms are forged. Farm raising, music, craftsmanship, technology, and military power, culture, kingdom, and empire are being developed almost, almost like God intended when he told us to be fruitful and to multiply.

And yet, there's still something very off about this picture, isn't there? A familiar arrogance, a godless, self-sufficient spirit, the worship of power, a familiar propensity for violence and oppression.

[20:12] And even the celebration here of all this wickedness, look, Lamech is so pleased. He is so proud here of all his accomplishments, all his children's accomplishments. This is the birth of mansplaining and peacocking here in verse 23.

Lamech said to his wives, Adon, Zillah, hear my voice, you wives of Lamech. That's who they are to him. Not human beings with personal, individual integrity. They are his wives, the wives of Lamech. Listen to what I say.

He's commanding them. And this is what he sings and celebrates. I have killed a man for wounding me. That's what he celebrates. Lamech celebrates impropotional violence.

He sings of power and dominance. His song goes like this, A young lad struck and wounded me and I, a strong grown man, I killed him for it. Then Lamech even makes a godlike declaration about his own future and security even greater than what God spoke over Cain.

Lamech says, If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech 77. Lamech here is an ancient proto-Machiavellian here, all right? It's all about ruthless power and preservation for himself.

[21:19] And this, this is the way of Cain. This is the way of Cain. See, the way of Cain says, I go and I get what I want. I take what I can, I make my own fortune, I win by being on top and staying on top, and if anyone crosses me or threatens me, I outdo them or I take them down.

I will build my own city, I will fix my own security, and I am able to do it on my own and therefore, all glory to me, all glory to my city, and that is how I will be remembered in history, by my achievements, by my hustle, by what I produce, by my self-made life.

The way of Cain is the way of impersonal transaction, performative posturing, brutal competition, godless self-sufficiency, arrogant empire building, and self-interested survival at all costs.

And so see, the point of Genesis 4 isn't merely thou shalt not kill. It's not just thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not be jealous like Cain. It's not even simply thou shalt love your neighbor as yourself, or thou shalt be your brother's keeper.

The point of Genesis 4 is that the way of Cain is still so very much the way of our world, the way we've all been programmed and conditioned to live, because why? Because why? Because what if we don't live the way of Cain?

[22:34] We've seen it so many times, right? If we don't live the way of Cain, we're going to get slaughtered like Abel. Haven't we all internalized that? That it's the strong man who always wins.

Everybody knows that Cain and his descendants, they're the winners. They're the military superpowers, the political majorities, the tech geniuses, the CEOs, the influencers, the wealthy, comfortable, and least vulnerable.

They're the ones who are written about in Time magazine and in our history books. In our experience of this hard, cruel world, it's pretty hard to deny that the first are first and the last are last.

The thorns and thistles that infest our fields of labor are real. And we constantly find ourselves bumping up against scarcity after scarcity. Weaker dollar, slower job market, companies going lean, conflicting national interests.

So what do we do? We sweat and we toil, we neglect our families and our relationships with God and the church. We neglect our health and our mental well-being and for sure we don't have time to love our neighbors or to consider ourselves as our brother's keepers.

[ 23 : 36 ] No, instead we grind. We grind and we grind ever toward these self-made ideal versions of ourselves, always trying to level up closer and closer to first place, always trying to acquire more positions, promotions, profit, or maybe some of us are just trying to keep our heads above the water and not get left behind, right?

Like Cain, we feel the echo of God's word that to dust we shall return and so also like Cain, we fight violently to delay that dusty end.

To many of us, the way of Cain is really the only way and we hope to sing our own versions of Lamech's song, right? Started from the bottom, now we're here, right?

It's the same song but really, what is the actual fruit of living to sing Lamech's song in the way of Cain? That's what I want us to consider. What is the fruit of living in the way of Cain?

If your whole understanding of what it means to be human and how to be human is to get what's yours and to do whatever it takes to survive, survival to fit us, does that truly lead to human flourishing or human floundering, to arrogance, selfishness, division, dehumanization, oppression, and violence?

[ 24 : 51 ] These are the true fruit of Lamech. In his book, *The Tyranny of Merit*, the political philosopher and Harvard Law Professor Michael Sandel, he says, you know, a lot of us think we like the idea of a very pure meritocracy, the story of the self-made man.

But then he invites us into that thought experiment to imagine a purely meritocratic society. He says, like, think about it, okay? A purely meritocratic society.

He says, it can actually be a devastating double-edged sword that not only commends the winners, but also condemns the losers, right? A system that justifies hubris for winners and humiliation for losers.

And the more we think of ourselves as self-made and self-sufficient, the harder it is to learn gratitude and humility. And so he challenges us to consider, is this way in the world of Cain really the world of our dreams, where our worth can be based on what we produce and build and whether or not we crush it and successfully build our cities and empires?

Or is this actually everyone's worst nightmare? You know, in his book, *The Prince*, Machiavelli, right, he's advising new rulers on how to maintain and expand their power. And he writes, the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves.

[ 26 : 13 ] One must therefore be a fox to recognize traps and a lion to frighten wolves. But the thing is, what if we can't just become these mythical lion-fox creatures?

What then? Is this world only made for those who can somehow morph into this weird, strange lion-fox thing? Does that even exist? Is there no place for a faithful turtle in this world?

Right? A gentle rabbit, a limping lamb. Is it really not possible for the lion and the lamb to coexist? And listen, I'm not anti-hard work and diligence.

I'm not anti-innovation, institution building, or culture influencing. No. Cain's descendants accomplished what they did because even their sin couldn't extinguish the profound culture-making image of God that was within them.

God wants us to pursue excellence in our fields, at our work. He wants us to cultivate His creation. We were made to work. But see, the more important question is not whether to build, it's not whether to build and pursue excellence, but for whom.

[ 27 : 23 ] Who is worthy of all our excellence and effort? And who is worthy to rightly order and prioritize our ambitions, our direction, and the pace of our lives? In the final two verses of Genesis 4, after we've read so much about the way of Cain and all his triumphs and accomplishments, or as David Brooks likes to call them, all Cain and his descendants' resume virtues, right?

After all of that, we find in these final, just two verses, an alternative legacy, an alternative way to live that emerges. Verse 25, 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. And notice, Eve's tune is different. It is no longer I have brought forth, but what? God has granted. That's what Seth means, granted, appointed, not taken by force or achieved by hustle, but given by grace.

Cain's name meant I got. Seth's name means God gave. Cain's name points and says, look what I achieved. Seth's name points and says, look what God granted.

And verse 26 says, Seth also had a son and he named him Enosh, and Enosh actually means weak and frail, mortal man, very different from the high-achieving names of Cain and his descendants. And yet, as unremarkable as Enosh may have been, verse 26 tells us that when Enosh was born, it was at that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

[ 29 : 00 ] And see, this is the beginning of another way, a different way, not the way of acquiring, building, dominating, but the way of receiving, depending, and calling, the way that will eventually lead not to Babel, but to Bethlehem.

No city is mentioned here, no empire, no long resume padded with innovative achievements. Sure, Cain built a proud city he could call upon and name after himself.

But here, all we're told about Seth's people is that they called upon the name of the Lord. That's it. And yet, this is the very people that God would use to save the world.

The line from which another Lamech would come, the father of Noah, the father of Shem, from whom Jesus, the Messiah, would come. And not just any Messiah, but the way, the truth, and the life, and what a uniquely beautiful way he has shown us.

See, while Cain's descendants toiled to build themselves cities to secure their own survival, and these cities lasted maybe a generation or so, always eventually finding themselves either being threatened or threatening others, Jesus says, I go to prepare a place for you.

[ 30 : 13 ] A new heaven and a new earth, an imperishable inheritance with renewed access to the tree of life where there is healing for all the nations and no more tears forever. In the kingdoms of Cain, there are pledges of 77-fold vengeance upon their enemies.

But Jesus says, not in my kingdom. In my kingdom, you shall forgive your enemies 77 times. For while the blood of Abel cried out to God a word of accusation, the blood of Jesus speaks a better word of atonement.

And while the way of Cain might sing, I'm a lion and I've slain a lamb, in the way of Christ we sing of a lion who is the lamb, slain in our place and yet raised, exalted, and worthy of our worship.

And this is the gospel. This is the good news. This is the core of the Christian faith. This is the only way we will ever be our brother's keepers. This is the only way we will ever experience the security that Cain and his descendants thought that they were achieving for themselves by building their cities.

Not by the way of Cain. Not by the way of Cain, but by calling upon the name of the Lord. This is the way he wants for us. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall what? Shall be saved.

[ 31 : 29 ] That's the legacy of Seth's line. Nothing flashy, nothing impressive by the standards of this world, but most importantly, it's a return to a relationship with God.

A life unremarkable by most standards, but unmistakably set apart by its commitment to calling upon the name of the Lord. So the question for us is what do we want our legacy to be?

The legacy of our children. What way will we walk to get there? The legacy of Cain or the legacy of Seth? The way of Cain or the way of Christ? The way of striving or the way of calling upon the name of the Lord?

Christchurch, you know we joke here at Christchurch a lot, maybe even humble brag, about how educated and how high achieving everyone in this church is, right? But what if God is calling us, regardless of how nice our resumes look, what if God is calling us to a different distinctive, not as a wealthy church, not as a smart and thoughtful church, not as a church with good preaching or whatever, but as a praying church, as a church that's known for calling upon the name of the Lord? Are our households places of prayer? Are our community groups? In the coming weeks, you're going to hear from Truba and Josh about how we hope to expand our prayer ministries here beyond our pre-service boiler room prayer on Sunday mornings and beyond our second Wednesday prayer meetings every month.

[ 32 : 48 ] You're going to hear more about how we hope to be a praying church. But that's the question, do we hope to be? Do we want to be a praying church? Do we want our legacy to be that we called upon the name of the Lord?

You know, near the end of his life, my all-time favorite preacher and thinker, Tim Keller, he was asked in an interview, looking back on 50 years of your ministry, what do you regret? What do you wish you had done differently?

And without hesitation, he said, oh, that's easy. I wish I prayed more. And that's changing my life. That's changing how I'm planning to pastor you.

of all the things that he could have said after leading a more fruitful, more impactful ministry than I would ever dream of having. Keller's one regret was not preaching more, writing more, building more, but not praying more.

And if we're honest, that probably sounds so strange because doesn't prayer just feel so inefficient and ineffective, right? Especially here in the Bay Area where we're constantly being told that the hope of the world is artificial, artificial innovation and technology and production, if we can just move faster, scale bigger, produce more, we'll be safe, secure, and successful.

[ 34 : 00 ] But will we? Do you know what else relentlessly scales and advances to achieve dominion? Cancer. And that's the way of Cain. Sure, growth.

Sure, expansion. But always restless, consuming, and devouring. So what if God is calling us away from cancerous production and into the slower, steadier, more life-giving way of the tree?

Rooted, stable, enduring, like that old redwood in Oakland, old survivor, not impressive enough to have been chosen and cut down during the gold rush, but the only one left standing 500 years later. Not because it produced more, but because it stayed rooted. Because it committed itself to a practice that no one would see, measure, or celebrate. Simply centuries of seeking its roots deeper and deeper underneath the ground, abiding in its source of life.

See, that's what prayer is. That's what it means to call upon the name of the Lord. It's the shift from technique to trust, from skill to supplication, from striving to surrender.

[ 35 : 08 ] So contrary to what Cain and all his descendants after him would preach to us about what it takes and what it looks like to flourish as human beings, contrary to what I often want to preach to my girls about how they better hustle, you better grind, you better fight to get to the top by any means possible or else, right?

Or else no one will ever call upon their names with respect and recognition for all their achievements. The Holy Spirit speaking to us from Genesis chapter 4 this morning has a better word for us and for our children.

That the kind of people God's eye and favor are upon, the kind of people among whom he has chosen to dwell, the kind of people whom God will use to change the world, are those who call upon the name of the Lord.

Let's pray. That's our simple prayer, Lord God, that we'd be a people of prayer, prayer over production, that you would bring us to our knees in dependence upon you, that you would wipe away all our preoccupations with our resume virtues, and that you would make it beautiful to us to pursue a legacy in which all we are known for is calling upon the name of the Lord and therefore being the people who you will use to transform this world.

We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.