

TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN, PURPOSE, AND DESIGN

"Am I My Brother's Keeper?" Part 2 Genesis 4:8-12

October 20, 2024

INTRO.: Last week we began looking at the question posed by Cain after God asked him, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain responded with this question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God was giving Cain the opportunity to confess his sin and restore his relationship with God, but Cain chose to conceal his sin. This didn't work, as it never does, and his sin of murder confronted him as our sin always does. "Be sure your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23)." God then tells Cain the consequences of Cain's sin because there are always consequences to our sin. Next week we will look at Cain's response to these consequences. We want to concentrate this morning on Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" That is, am I supposed to care for and be concerned about my brother? The Mosaic law would have given an affirmative answer to Cain's question (Kenneth A. Mathews). Community was very important among the Israelites. Cain wasn't looking for an answer from God when he asked this question.

Allen Ross, "His question to God was defiant and was meant to be rhetorical; he was saying he had no responsibility for his brother's welfare. But his question actually had an answer: Yes, he was his brother's keeper. It was his duty to look out for the welfare of his brother, as his brother would have for him."

In the New Testament, those who have come to faith in Christ, are described as being brothers and sisters in the faith. The Bible has much to say about the importance of our relationships with one another. God did not intend for us to walk the Christian life alone, and He has placed us around other believers. The word, *church*, means "called out assembly." It refers to the people and not the building. So, when the *church* gathers it refers to the people coming together. To attempt to do life without others is both dangerous and foolish. It is even better for your health if you have the proper relationships.

In 2023 the U.S. Surgeon general released a report detailing the effect of loneliness on the American population. The report revealed that "lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day." Even more scary, I found that loneliness resulted in a "29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke."

We live in a world that is more "connected" than ever through technology but also more isolated than ever. Technology cannot replace relationships. One man shared that a chatbot, that is AI (artificial intelligence), saved his life. He found companionship through an app, and he said his whole life changed. Even though he said he felt less alone, his isolation from people was unchanged. Forty percent of Americans say they don't have a best friend at all, up from 25 % in 1990. The percentage of men without any close friends jumped fivefold, from 3% in 1990, to 15% in 2021. Fewer than half of Americans attend church services or any other type of religious service where they could develop these types of friendships. In the Wall Street Journal in 2023, "Through all the years of studying these lives, one crucial factor stands out for the consistency and power of its ties to physical health, mental health, and longevity. It isn't career achievement, or exercise, or a healthy diet. These things matter, but one thing continuously demonstrates its broad and enduring importance: good relationships."

We are more apt to do life alone than ever before. Is that the way that God intended it to be? We want to get our direction from the Word of God. There are many ideas about the importance of relationships and how they are meant to work, but what does the Bible have to say? We are going to look at two things this morning: **WHAT** does the Bible have to say and **HOW** does it happen?

WHAT???

How do you and I know that God is concerned about relationships among fellow believers? There are at least 50 "*one-another's*" in the Bible. God wants to use relationships to make us more like Jesus. It would be easy to spout off a list of "*one-anothers*" from the Bible, but we also need to remember that each of these should be taken in their context. Within the notes you may have picked up there are several of them mentioned and I would highly encourage you to read before and after the verses to better understand the context. All of these remind us that the community of believers is important. This does not mean that we don't have relationships with nonbelievers for how else will they hear the gospel, the good news, and see how that is lived out by Christ followers?

Let me give you a few examples as it relates to the context of the one-another's.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 Therefore encourage (comfort: present tense command) each other with these words.

The context has to do with knowing that Christ will one day return, those who had died previously, would be raised, joining the believers who are alive, experiencing a new body, being with God forever. The Thessalonian believers did

not have worry about the future of fellow believers who had already died. They were to be encouraged and comforted knowing these promises.

John 13:34 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

This phrase, “*love one another*,” occurs at least 16 times. The context informs us of why this is so important.

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are (present tense) my disciples, if you (have: present tense) love one another.”

Galatians 6:1–2 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **2** Carry (present tense command) **each other’s burdens**, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

When a brother or sister is caught in a sin those who are spiritual (which should be what all believers aim for) are called to restore him gently. In reference to this we are called to bear one another’s burdens, helping them to avoid anything that would cause them to fall back into that sin.

The following is from Jeffrey Kranz: “One another” is two words in English, but it’s only one word in Greek: ἀλλήλων (*ah-LAY-loan*). It’s used 100 times in 94 New Testament verses. 47 of those verses give instructions to the church, and 60% of those instructions come from Paul. He lists the following and reminds us to know the context of each.

Unity. One third of the one-another commands deal with the unity of the church.

1. Be at peace with one another (Mk 9:50)
2. Don’t grumble among one another (Jn 6:43)
3. Be of the same mind with one another (Ro 12:16, 15:5)
4. Accept one another (Ro 15:7)
5. Wait for one another before beginning the Eucharist (1 Co 11:33)
6. Don’t bite, devour, and consume one another—**seriously, guys, don’t eat each other** (Ga 5:15)
7. Don’t boastfully challenge or envy one another (Ga 5:26).
8. Gently, patiently tolerate one another (Ep 4:2)
9. Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another (Ep 4:32)
10. Bear with and forgive one another (Co 3:13)
11. Seek good for one another, and don’t repay evil for evil (1 Th 5:15)
12. Don’t complain against one another (Jas 4:11, 5:9)
13. Confess sins to one another (Jas 5:16)

Love. One third of them instruct Christians to love one another.

1. Love one another (Jn 13:34, 15:12, 17; Ro 13:8; 1 Th 3:12, 4:9; 1 Pe 1:22; 1 Jn 3:11, 4:7, 11; 2 Jn 5)
2. Through love, serve one another (Ga 5:13)
3. Tolerate one another in love (Ep 4:2)
4. Greet one another with a kiss of love (1 Pe 5:14)
5. Be devoted to one another in love (Ro 12:10)

Humility. About 15% stress an attitude of humility and deference among believers.

1. Give preference to one another in honor (Ro 12:10)
2. Regard one another as more important than yourselves (Php 2:3)
3. Serve one another (Ga 5:13)
4. Wash one another’s feet (Jn 13:14)
5. Don’t be haughty: be of the same mind (Ro 12:16)
6. Be subject to one another (Ep 5:21)
7. Clothe yourselves in humility toward one another (1 Pe 5:5)

Here’s the rest:

1. Do not judge one another, and don’t put a stumbling block in a brother’s way (Ro 14:13)
2. Greet one another with a kiss (Ro 16:16; 1 Co 16:20; 2 Co 13:12)
3. Husbands and wives: don’t deprive one another of physical intimacy (1 Co 7:5)
4. Bear one another’s burdens (Ga 6:2)
5. Speak truth to one another (Ep 4:25)
6. Don’t lie to one another (Co 3:9)

7. Comfort one another concerning the resurrection (1 Th 4:18)
8. Encourage and build up one another (1 Th 5:11)
9. Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (He 10:24)
10. Pray for one another (Jas 5:16)
11. Be hospitable to one another (1 Pe 4:9)

Of course, Jesus and the apostles give many more instructions to the church; these “one another” passages are a good start, though.

Also: make sure you read these in context! These commands come from Jesus, Peter, John, Paul, and James, and they’re scattered across the New Testament. Don’t just stop at this list: dig into these passages to see what the author was talking about.

This is not just a list where you and I just check off the boxes. None of this can be done without God working and Him giving us the power and strength. With the sheer volume of the *one another*’s in the Bible we can conclude that God does not want us to do life alone. This brings us to the question:

HOW???

How does this work? I believe that are at least three ingredients in developing the type of relationships that God desires. We need to be:

***Faithful**

First, it is being faithful in our relationship with God. It begins by having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. As we saw in the Garden of Eden, our sin has caused a break in our relationship with God. Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection for our sin is the only remedy.

1 Peter 1:18–19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

There is nothing we can do to earn or deserve God’s forgiveness; it is only by His grace!!

Ephesians 2:8–9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

Having that personal relationship with God makes all believers brothers and sisters. Years ago, the Pittsburgh Pirates, on their way to a World Series title, had as their slogan, *We are family*. Through Jesus we have a huge family tree. Not only do we need to have a personal relationship with God through Christ, but we also need to have an ongoing and growing relationship with God. He alone provides us with the desire and strength to minister to others and the willingness be ministered to by others.

Philippians 3:7–9 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8** What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

As you and I walk with God we will be more aware of the needs of those around us and the realization we need the Lord and others to do this Christian Walk.

1 Corinthians 4:1–2 (NKJV) Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

Secondly, we need to be faithful in our relationships with one another. We can’t be disappearing Christians. Others need to be able to trust us to be consistent in our character which is rooted in Christ. Do others know that we will consistently speak the truth in love? Will we still be around when things get difficult?

ILLUS.: One of the valuable lessons that one learns in any branch of the service is that you’re in this together and you need to be able to count on the others in your platoon and they need to be able to count on you. Brenda has found some pictures of our son in boot camp and most of the pictures are shots of them working together. When they get in combat,

they need to know that they have each other's back. Every believer is in a spiritual battle. Who has your back? Who's back do you have?

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Proverbs 27:6 Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Who would consider you as a friend using the above as the definition of friendship? Whom do you consider to be your friend using the same definition? You need to be faithful (Jesus is the ultimate definition of faithful: He will never leave or forsake us). You need to be **faithful**, but you also need to be:

***Available**

What is your response when someone asks you, "How are you doing?"

There is almost a sense of pride if we can say, "I'm very, very busy." It's like a badge we proudly wear. It truly becomes a matter of priorities, doesn't it? Are you and I taking the time?

What are our time robbers? (computer, phone)

We are often distracted with the tyranny of the urgent at the cost of the proper attention to the important.

This is a two-way street. We need to be available to invest in others and have time for others to invest in us. You and I will always find the time to do what we believe is urgent, sometimes to the detriment of what is important.

Busyness has become the goal and makes me feel important. I'm needed but am I truly doing what God wants me to do and am I hearing from Him?

Jim Cunfer, one of our Elders, shared this with the men's group that meets on Saturday mornings at Bason's on Mill Street. He had mentioned the idea of a day with no distractions. "Better yet, I mentioned the notion of "phone fasting" for 24 hours. And the thought occurred to me of twisting an oft-used quote. The original quote is "Don't just stand there, do something." What does this imply? Get busy!!"

Think of this: **"Don't just do something, stand there."**

Jim asked, Do you see it? To stand still, to enjoy no distractions, and to revel in the lack of being busy for the sake of being busy. Otherwise, we become members of the "impression management" club. So, my question is this: **What is it that you always do, so that others will be impressed by you?**

Is our schedule so full that we have no time for God? The following is the conclusion after Jesus speaks about worrying about the necessities of life: food, clothing and shelter. God cares for the birds and for the flowers, so He certainly will care for those who are created in His image. With this in mind:

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Is God speaking into my life?

Is my schedule so busy that I have no time for others? When we come home are we all there or are our minds somewhere else? In the case of men, do we operate like we don't need close, safe, authentic, habitual, forgiving brothers? In the case of women, do we operate like we don't need close, safe, authentic, habitual, forgiving women?

I believe we need three types of friendships: men with other men and women with other women.

*Accountability: those going through similar things

*Mentors: those who have been on the journey of faith longer, whom I respect

*Those I can mentor

As you may know Jim Cunfer and LaRue Brion go to the North Central Secure Treatment Unit every week to pour into the lives of young men who are incarcerated there. They minister in one particular unit and they have recently been made aware that there are some men in another unit who are seeking the same thing. So, we could use two men who would be willing to pour into the lives of these young men.

Since we believe the answer to Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?," is a resounding yes we must be:

*faithful: first to God and then others

*available: am I too busy?

Finally, we must be:

***Teachable**

When you and I stop learning, we stop growing.

ILLUS.: Last year Jeff Brandt retired from coaching cross country at Danville High School after 47 years. In my mind he is the best coach of any sport that I have personally witnessed. I believe one of the reasons that he was so good at coaching was his desire to keep learning. After that many years coaching he could have just felt that he didn't need any input from others. After all, he's the expert. Just look at the results. Yet, he was continually seeking input from others, asking, what they thought about his proposed workouts. He would seek input from the student athletes. Over the past several years I have had the privilege to help coach junior high runners. This past week I met the mother of one of our junior high runners who had Jeff as a coach when she was in high school. We talked about what a wonderful coach Jeff was.

Nobody wants to be around someone who believes they know everything about everything.

*We first need to be taught by the Lord.

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Jesus speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to every believer.

John 14:25-26 "All this I have spoken while still with you. **26** But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

We need to spend time with the Lord in His Word and in prayer. We need to be involved in a local church that teaches and preaches the Word of God as truth. Are we being taught by the Lord?

*We need to be willing to be taught by others, those walking with the Lord.

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Proverbs 11:14 For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure.

Proverbs 24:5-6 A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength; **6** for waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers.

Are we teachable? One of the motivations for developing relationships with other believers is knowing that I need to continue to learn how to better follow and imitate Christ.

SO WHAT???

To attempt to fly solo in our walk with God leaves us like this (picture of a target). What does the enemy desire to do?

1 Peter 5:8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

"self-controlled:" a command (be sober)

"alert:" command (be watchful)

"prowls:" present tense (walking)

"roaring:" present tense

"looking:" present tense (seeking)

*How is my walk with God?

*Who is it that speaks into my life?

*What two or three believers know me, meet with me, and walk with me through life?

*How do I make sure that I'm answering the question, "Am I my brother's keeper," in the affirmative?

