



## Introduction

Genesis 4 records that one of the tragic consequences of leaving God out of the picture is the breakdown of trust between people. In the story this is first seen within the family of Adam and Eve. Cain, the elder brother, turns against Abel and in a fight murders him. The choice to become enemies, not friends, tears the family apart and leads to a life of restless wandering and revenge. In the garden of Eden, friendship with God had been broken (Genesis 3) and here in the field, friendships between people are broken, too.

The following lesson outline explores the theme of making good and bad choices in response to what happens to us as friends. Christians believe that by the power of the Holy Spirit, God can give the strength to choose what is good.

## Preparation

Use the retelling of the story from The Barnabas Children's Bible (story 5).

## Development

1. Introduce the story by playing one of the following games:

- Each child should find out who is his or her famous partner or brother. Stick labels on the backs of the children with the names from the list of suggestions below. They should find their other half, but in response to questions others can only answer with 'yes' or 'no'; likewise they themselves can only say 'yes' or 'no' when questioned. Here are some possible pairings:
- Prince Andrew and Prince Charles; Liam and Noel Gallagher; Harry and William; Ant and Dec; Andrew and Peter (disciples of Jesus); Jamie and Andy Murray; Les and Rio Ferdinand; Dick and Dom. (Add in any other well-known pairings from your own school, community or even well-known book characters.)
- Ask the children to work in small groups of two or three. They should become a group of friends. Now using the following list of make-or-break friendship words, call out some randomly and ask the group to interpret what this would mean dramatically for the friendship of the group:
- jealousy, difficulties, unfairness, sadness, favouritism, success, bullying, fear, secrets, new arrivals to the group, good news, bad temper, impatience.

2. Tell the story of Cain and Abel from The Barnabas Children's Bible.

The two brothers were clearly very different in character.

**Cain** farmed the land. He grew vegetables and grain. Maybe it meant he stayed near home most of the time. He clearly didn't like being told what to do and possibly he had a bit of a temper. He lacked self-control and maybe his faith in God wasn't very strong. His first response to being found out was

to lie himself out of trouble.

**Abel** tended sheep. As a shepherd, he was probably often away from home for days on end, searching for good pasture land. He would be no stranger to fighting off wild animals to protect his flock. Clearly, he took trouble about worshipping God, offering the very best of his flock. He liked to do the right thing.

Talk to the class about which of the brothers the children identify with most. Which seems the most likeable? Do they see some aspects of their own characters here? Or the characters of others they know?

Invite the class to tell the story from different points of view. Here are some ideas:

- Imagine what Adam and Eve would say about their sons, if they were interviewed. Do you think they had favourites?
  - I wonder what each brother would have said about the other, prior to the murder.
  - I wonder what the new brother Seth (he was born later; see Genesis 4:25) was told about how his one brother had died and his other brother had disappeared off the scene.
  - I wonder what Cain said to his new friends about what happened back home and to any others he met on his wanderings.
3. Link the themes of this story to life today. How do situations escalate into becoming something as bad as this? Talk about how the following can happen:
- someone else's success can trigger jealousy;
  - jealousy, when nursed, can become hatred;
  - hatred often seeks revenge;
  - revenge looks for an opportunity to hurt the other person;
  - hurt can get out of hand, producing anger, sworn enemies and worse.

Can the class create freeze-frames of some of these scenarios to explore the feelings linked to the breakdown of friendship?

4. Talk about how in the story God did step into the situation to stop it falling apart. For example:
- God spoke to Cain very clearly. He knew that his heart wasn't really in the worship that he had offered.
  - God warned Cain that danger was lurking, but he left the choice of what to do up to Cain
  - God gave Cain a chance to own up and say sorry - but Cain fobbed God off with the words: 'Am I supposed to be looking after my brother?'
  - God did punish Cain - God doesn't pretend that bad things have not happened, but...
  - God also protected him (Genesis 4:15). God did not give up on Cain. Christians believe that God does not give up on us.

From this example, what can we learn when dealing with breakdowns in friendships?



Can the class devise a five-step plan that may help friends to stay together when that friendship is under pressure?

5. Let the class now decide how they might illustrate the breaking and mending of friendship by using four strips of paper of equal length, each shaped like an arrow at one end. Use some or all of these arrows to illustrate the following:
  - Cain and Abel as friends
  - Abel pleasing God
  - Cain disappointing God
  - Cain hating Abel
  - Cain killing Abel
  - Cain leaving the family forever
  - God helping Cain to choose the way of friendship
  - You and me helping each other to mend, not to break, friendships
6. In the Bible story, it is clear that God wants people 'to look after each other', contrary to what Cain says (see Genesis 4:9 and also 1 John 3:11-12, which is a New Testament comment on this story).

In a time of reflection, focus on those who are feeling uncared for, who have lost friends or who are the victims of hatred. Then, celebrate the positive things about being a good friend.