

Explanatory Notes:**BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

Message title: When Brothers and Sisters Become Enemies

Topic: Siblings and the conflicts they face

WHEN BROTHERS AND SISTERS BECOME ENEMIES

Genesis 4:8-12* , Ephesians 2:14-21, CEV

Introduction:

One of the virtues that people all over the world strive to attain is brotherly love. We all wish people would love each other as if they were brothers and sisters. If they did, the world would be a better place. That is what we think, but is it true? Do brothers and sisters love each other?

The Bible contains many stories about brothers and sisters. But in almost every case, they fight with each other! The oldest and best-known story of sibling rivalry (conflict between brothers and sisters) is the story of Cain and Abel. Cain and Abel were the very first brothers, sons of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were the first parents. They sinned against God and brought trouble on all people.

Cain brought an unworthy sacrifice to God. Abel brought an appropriate one. God was pleased with Abel and displeased with Cain. Cain became jealous of Abel. This is what happened next:

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go for a walk." And when they were out in a field, Cain killed him.
Afterwards the LORD asked Cain, "Where is Abel?" "How should I know?" he answered. "Am I supposed to look after my brother?"
Then the LORD said:
Why have you done this terrible thing? You killed your own brother, and his blood flowed onto the ground. Now his blood is calling out for me to

***Producers:** For more information on the story of Cain and Abel, see Basic Messages of Hope Message #C-8, "Two Sons, Two Different Attitudes Toward God")

Causes of Sibling Rivalry:

Our sinful human nature is the main cause for sibling rivalry. But there is a natural cause as well:

Parents can only give a limited amount of time, attention, love and approval to their children. Children compete for this needed attention.

Each child that is born into a family gets less attention than the children who were born before it:

- The first-born child gets the full attention of his parents.
- The second child must share half of the attention with the older sibling.
- The third gets one third of the attention, and so on.

The oldest child may see the younger children as stealing some of the attention he previously enjoyed. The younger children can be jealous of the attention the oldest child gets.

Parents often expect first-born children to help them raise the younger children. So first-born

punish you. And so, I'll put you under a curse. Because you killed Abel and made his blood run out on the ground, you will never be able to farm the land again. If you try to farm the land, it won't produce anything for you. From now on, you'll be without a home, and you'll spend the rest of your life wandering from place to place.

Genesis 4:8-12, CEV

children are often leaders. Second born children sometimes are jealous of the success and leadership of their older siblings.

From this story we see **two important truths:**

1. The sin of Adam and Eve affected their children. Sin brought anger, jealousy and hostility between their first children.
2. God expected Cain to care for his brother. So he asked, "Where is Abel?" Cain answered with a question, "*Am I supposed to look after my brother?*" God's punishment on Cain was God's way of saying, "Yes! Of course you are supposed to take care of your brother!"

The Bible contains **many more examples of sibling rivalry.**

- Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. Ishmael taunted Isaac and was expelled from Abraham's home (Genesis 21:1-21).
- Jacob and Esau were twin brothers. As older brother, Esau was entitled to a double share of the inheritance from his parents. He was also entitled to a special blessing from his father. But younger Jacob tricked Esau into selling his birthright (Genesis 25:27-34). Jacob also tricked their father into giving him the blessing (Genesis 27).
- Joseph's brothers were jealous because their father loved him more than he loved them. They sold Joseph to slave traders (Genesis 37:12-36).
- Sisters fought, too. Rachel and Leah were married to the same man, Jacob. They fought with each other for the love of their husband (Genesis 29:16-30:24).
- Martha and Mary were sisters. Martha criticized Mary for sitting to listen to Jesus. Martha wanted Mary to help her in the kitchen (Luke 10:38-42).

Some of these brothers in the Bible became the ancestors of great nations. The quarrels they had as brothers led to wars and hostility between the nations to which they gave birth.

- Isaac was a forefather of the nation of Israel. His half-brother Ishmael was the forefather of modern-day Arabs. Modern-day hostilities between Jews and Arabs today find their origin in the jealousy and fights between two young brothers 4,000 years ago!
- Jacob was Isaac's son. He, too, was a forefather of the nation of Israel. His brother Esau was the forefather of the Edomites (see Genesis 36). The nations of Israel and Edom hated each other throughout the time of the Old Testament. They continued the quarrels of these two brothers.

What can parents do to prevent some of the fighting between their children? One cause of sibling rivalry is that siblings compete for parents' affection. So here is some simple advice for parents to reduce their desire to compete for the time and attention of their children:

- Don't have favorites. Don't show your preference for one child over another.
- Spend time with each child separately. Show them that you care for them.
- Love each of your children for their unique personality and talents. Don't compare them with their siblings or say, "I wish you were more like your brother!" Appreciate them for the special person they are.
- Treat them the same. Don't discipline one more harshly than the other. Don't do favors for one without doing favors for the other. Be fair to each of them.
- If they fight frequently, notice the times when they are nice to each other. Express your happiness when they are "getting along" (cooperating, being kind to each other). Thank them. Tell them how happy they make you when they are at peace with each other.
- When a new child will soon be born, prepare your children. Let them know that the child will need much love and attention from all family members. Let them know that even though your newborn child will require extra attention, you will always love all your children

Additional notes for your understanding of sibling rivalries:

BIRTH ORDER:

The order in which we are born plays an influential role in the shaping of our personalities. Here are some of the characteristics of first-born children, only children, middle children and last-born children.

Not every child fits these patterns. Our gender (male or female) makes a difference. The length of time between births of siblings affects personality, too. And traumatic experiences play a part, too. But as a general rule these traits are considered accurate.

Read them over and ask if they are generally true in your culture. What about your family? Other families you know well?

First-born children:

Parents often give firstborn children much attention. They also give them much responsibility. The expectations parents place on them can be high.

First-born children are often:

Natural leaders; well-organized; loyal; like to see things done well; scholarly and serious; supporters of authority, law and order;

On the negative side, they can:

Be demanding; be perfectionists; have a superior, proud attitude; be legalistic.

equally.

No matter how carefully parents raise their children, they will not be able to keep them from fighting. Some brothers and sisters will argue and fight anyway. And their conflicts may extend to their children and later generations. Maybe you have a brother or sister with whom you have longstanding differences. Or maybe you belong to a family, tribe or nation that is at war because of a fight that broke out long ago, and members of your people still seek revenge and refuse to make peace.

Who will stop all the fighting between brothers and families and tribes and nations? The Bible says that when Jesus returns,

*He will settle arguments between nations.
They will pound their swords and their spears
into rakes and shovels; they will never make
war or attack one another.*

Isaiah 2:4, CEV

We don't have to wait until then for peace. The Bible also says that Jesus created the church as a people in whom the hostility of the nations is abolished:

*For Christ himself has **made peace** between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. **He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us.***

*His purpose was to **make peace** between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups.*

*Together as one body, **Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.***

*So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. **You are members of God's family.** We are*

Only children:

often have many of the characteristics of first-born children.

In addition, they are often:

interested in facts, ideas and details, feel comfortable with responsibility; task-oriented (highly motivated to complete tasks), self-centered, conservative, perfectionist.

On the other hand, they can also:

Be unforgiving, find it difficult to accept criticism, need time to be alone.

Middle-born children:

Parents are not as strict and demanding of middle and last-born children. They do not usually give them as much attention. They do not always discipline them as harshly as the first-born son. They feel caught in the middle of older and younger siblings. They feel the need to be people who 'keep the peace.' They feel jealous of first-born children who get more attention than they do.

Middle-born children often:

Are interested in people; dislike confrontation and seek peace; are calm listeners who can see both sides of a problem; are extremely loyal; are the opposite of the firstborn, especially when the firstborn child excels in what he or she does.

On the negative side, they can also:

Be less motivated; spend too much time trying to please everyone; have difficulty making

*his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. **We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.***

Ephesians 2:14, 15b, 16, 19-21, CEV

What these words mean is that all people who believe in Jesus become part of one new family, the family of God. Their sins against God and against each other are forgiven and erased because Jesus suffered the punishment of these sins when he died on the cross. Believers in Jesus join to worship God together as people whose sins are forgiven. They become members of the same family. It doesn't matter what family or nation they come from. They are brothers and sisters, and Jesus calls them to love and forgive one another.

Does the thought of peace in your families bring you hope and excitement? Do you long for a day when the fighting of the world will end? The Bible calls Jesus the Prince of Peace.

- Jesus is our hope for peace.
- Jesus can bring healing between bitter, angry people.
- Jesus can bring peace to your life and your family if you will submit to him.

[Prayer]

decisions that they know will offend others; feel they have been misunderstood or forgotten and that their older sibling received more attention and love.

Last-born children:

Are not always given enough attention by their parents. They learn much of what they know from their older siblings.

Last-born children often:

Make friends easily; love to talk and to entertain others; enjoy fun and enjoy the presence of other people; are not afraid to take risks.

On the other hand, they also:

can have a short attention span; can manipulate others' feelings; can be distracted and disorganized; can be rebellious and impatient; can be 'spoiled' (accustomed to receiving everything they want).

The order in which we are born affects our relationships all through our lives. We form patterns of relating to the different personalities of our brothers and sisters. These patterns help determine the people whose personalities we like (and those we dislike) and how we relate to these people.