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The Mark of Cain and the Gift of Love based on Genesis 4:1-16 by Ralph Milton

You know the legend of Eve and Adam and the Garden of Eden. They tasted the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In so doing, they chose to be fully human – with the pain and joy that brings. They had to leave the idyllic child-like existence of Eden.

Eve and Adam left the paradise of infancy to live the adult world of choices. Good and evil. Pain and joy. Love and hate. Life and death.

In their new home toward the east of Eden, they learned the joyful pain of sex, and thereby brought new life into their blessed and shadowed world.

The first was Cain and then his brother Abel. Cain became a farmer. Abel grew to be a shepherd.

“You must bring offerings to God,” said Eve to her two sons, “to show your gratitude for life, for food.”

Abel brought the newest lamb from his small flock, and felt the warming smile of his Creator.

Cain? A small sack of grain he no longer needed.

Cain sensed the disappointed pain of God. “So, what’s wrong with that?” Cain pouted. “It’s perfectly good grain. What do you want from me?”

“You gave me your leftovers,” said God. “You didn’t want or need that grain. It really was no gift at all.”

“So, how was I supposed to know that?”

“Make the choices that bring life, Cain. The costly choices that bring joy, real joy. If you are genuinely, deeply happy, Cain, then I am happy too.”

“I’ll try, I guess,” Cain muttered. He turned his face and walked away and failed to see the sad and loving smile of his Creator.

Later that same day, Cain saw his brother Abel leading his tiny flock of sheep to pasture. Abel flashed a smile but Cain read it as a smirk.

“Don’t think you’re so smart, baby brother,” he yelled. “You’re all lovey-dovey with God but I can fix that!”

So, Cain killed his brother.

Out in the field where Abel fed his sheep, far away from God, Cain thought, he murdered his young brother, and hid him in the ground.

“Cain, Cain.”

It was the voice of God. “Where is your brother?”

“How would I know?” said Cain. “Is it my job to babysit my brother?”

“Cain, your brother’s blood is crying out to me from underneath the ground. The evil that you brought into this world destroyed the earth in which you grow your food. You will never again be happy as a farmer, Cain, because when you till the soil, it will grow thistles where you plant wheat, and it will remind you of your brother’s blood. Your guilt will corrode your soul and pain your life.”

Then suddenly, Cain knew what he had done. “I’ll never farm again,” he moaned, “and my guilt will leave its mark across my face and on my body, and everybody I meet will know I killed my brother. How can I live with that?”

“Yes, your guilt will show,” said God. “You cannot hide the sin you bear. You will have that all your life.

“But I will also wrap your wounded soul in holy love, Cain. Your guilt and my love will be your burden and your gift. If you learn to choose a life of joy and justice the mark of love will wipe away the soul destroying smear of guilt.”

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

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