

# Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

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## *Finding Acceptance With God*

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Why do some people easily find acceptance with God and enjoy a meaningful relationship with him, while others seem to struggle all their life to make that divine connection? Suffering from years of estrangement from God, pent-up words of anger and defeat spill out when the pressure is on. *"I don't know what all this talk is about the Christian life of victory. I've tried and tried to have a personal relationship with God, but to no avail. I study the Bible, I pray, but nothing. God doesn't give me any counsel or direction at all, and frankly I'm getting tired of trying to have a relationship with him."*

Why is it so hard for some people to connect with God? Could it be that some people's sins are just too horrible or too numerous for God to forgive? Or is there something else God wants from us? When the human mind begins to reason things out, without the benefit of God's Spirit, more alarming thoughts surface, *"What if God is merely choosing some people, for reasons only known to him, while others are being rejected?"* Feeding on these thoughts long enough, with the help of the adversary, can drive a person to consider the final act of withdrawal from God, *"I guess God just doesn't accept me. I guess I'm just not one of His chosen ones after all. I might as well forget about trying to abide by the dictates of a God conscience."*

If the words you just read describe the feelings you are having in your relationship with God, then recognize that you are not alone. People in every walk of life are expressing similar thoughts, but that doesn't let you off the hook. You still need to be honest with yourself. Is it really God who is not accepting you, or could it be you may be the one who is not accepting God? When we reach such a low point in our life that we actually believe we have done all we can do, and we blame God for the failure of the relationship - it is a surety that sin is crouching at our door desiring to have us. (Genesis 4:7 NIV)

**Romans 8:6-8 (NIV)** - *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to*

*God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*

As hard as it may be to face, if we decide to wage war against God, we become his enemy. Unless we repent, we are not fit to live in His presence. Wherever there is hatred in the heart, a person becomes a potential murderer.

In the Book of Genesis we find the story of two brothers, Cain and Abel. Each brother brought their offerings before the Lord to lay on the altar, but as it turned out, only one of the offerings was accepted. By studying the character of each of these brothers and how they treated God, we realize that our acceptance with God has nothing to do with the luck of the draw. In the end it is our own attitude toward God that determines our acceptance.

**(Genesis, chapters 3-4)** When Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden they no longer had the privilege of walking and talking with God face to face. Because they gave in to the tempter, they defiled their relationship with God. Though they were being punished for the wrong they had done, they still could worship God by confessing their sins to him. They could do this by offering sacrifices to him upon their altars of stone or earth. When they were ready to seek forgiveness, they would gather wood and place it upon the altar. Then they would lay their offering on the wood and set fire to it, letting their offering burn.

Cain and Abel were the oldest sons of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve wanted their sons to love and to please God, so they diligently taught them about God and how to worship Him. They, also, could offer sacrifices for forgiveness of their sins. Because of God's love for Cain and Abel, the same opportunity was given to both of them. Nevertheless, when it was time to bring their offerings and place them upon the altar, Abel's offering was acceptable before God. It was consumed by the fire, while Cain's offering was not touched by the fire. God preferred Abel's offering over Cain's offering, because

God saw into Abel's heart and knew the spotless motive behind his offering. It was not that Abel physically brought a better sacrifice to lay on the Altar, it was the fact that Abel spiritually had a better *attitude* about the sacrifice he brought. He brought a cleansed, forgiven, completely surrendered heart, a heart that was true to God.

**Hebrews 11:4 (NIV)** - *By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.*

Every person who leaves this world will one day leave behind an influence for good or evil. What we do with the time we have on this earth should be carefully considered, because the message of who we are will speak beyond the grave to those who come after us. Though he died a long time ago, Abel is still speaking a strong message of righteousness to us today.

But what about Cain's message? While God spoke highly of Abel for being a righteous man, he saw something entirely different in Cain. Behind Cain's offering he saw tainted motives and a heart filled with hatred and darkness. Sinful emotions of jealousy and anger began to erupt out of control when Cain saw that God accepted Abel's sacrifice, but did not accept his own.

**Genesis 4:6-7 (NIV)** - *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 master it."*

It was his own desire to do what was wrong, rather than what was right, that caused Cain to look downcast and dejected. Yet, despite his sinful attitude, God loved Cain. He warned him about his wicked attitude and of how sin desired to have him. He instructed Cain on what he needed to do to make things right between them. God gave Cain what he desperately needed to hear, that he *must* master his sin, if he wanted to enjoy a complete and fulfilling relationship with Him.

Knowing what he must do to find acceptance with God, however, just made Cain all the more angry with his brother Abel. Why? Abel was willing to put everything

he had into developing a close relationship with God, while Cain was not willing to extend the effort. Cain was jealous of Abel's righteous attitude. Abel was a walking reminder to Cain of everything good that he *could be*, if only he would put forth the effort. His preference was to give only a physical offering that involved minimal sacrifice, while his brother Abel was showing him up, giving an offering that involved a repentant and contrite spirit!

The hatred that was building in Cain's heart ultimately led to the murder of Abel. But, I don't want to dwell on the fact that Cain killed his brother Abel, because the focus of this lesson isn't about one act of murder. The focus of this lesson is about the many *spiritual acts of murder* we commit, day after day, week after week, against our Lord. It is ironic, but all the while people are gradually killing their relationship with God, through their own neglect, they haughtily blame God for the failure of the relationship. Without understanding the damage they are incurring upon themselves, their words become stout against God. Make no mistake; if we do not honor the sacrifice of what Jesus did for us on the cross, then our continuous actions of rebellion against God will one day kill all goodness in our life. We can push our relationship with God only so far, then one day we either fall on our faces and repent of our sins, or we finally succeed in killing our relationship with God.

**Romans 12:1 (KJV)** - *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

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### Questions for Personal or Group Study:

1. What can we learn from the Lord's warning to Cain, "Sin is crouching at your door"? (Genesis 4:7 NIV)
2. Did Cain have the same opportunity to find acceptance with the Lord, as Abel did? (Genesis 4:6-7)
3. Why did Abel's righteous actions provoke uncontrollable anger in Cain? (I John 3:12)
4. How can we know when we have found acceptance with God and pass from death to life? (I John 3:14)