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**Questions on the  
Mind of God:  
Where is Your Brother?**  
Dr. Bruce Lancaster

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## Questions on the Mind of God: Where is Your Brother?

### *Genesis 4:1-9*

Listen again to part of our story from Genesis, but listen as if you've never heard the story before: *Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. Then the Lord God said to Cain, "Where is your brother?"*

Stop right there. Because if this is your first time hearing the story, I can imagine the storyteller pausing after the question, and we the listeners are wondering: "What will Cain say?"

What might have happened if Cain had been honest with God? What if Cain had said, "Yes, I know where my brother is."

You see, justice requires us to be honest; to stand up and tell the truth when the whole world wants us to be deaf and blind.

What might have happened if Cain had been honest with God, had accepted responsibility for what he had done?

Would the world have been different if he had told God the truth: *Abel is dead; I killed him; he is lying dead in the field*

What could have been an act of confession and repentance, Cain lied, "I don't know."

Or as Eugene Peterson has it in "The Message": *How should I know? Am I his babysitter?*

But the truth is, as Burt Visotzky, Old Testament scholar, notes: *This answer “turns out be the seed of all our ethics because the answer for every reader is: “Yes, of course, you’re your brother’s keeper.”*

What we have in our story in Genesis is that only a few short paragraphs separated from the paradise God had created, humans have created a violent world.

God asks the question and what’s at stake is our humanity: what it means to be human in God’s creation, of living in community with other creatures of God.

That’s what the issue is as Cain asks, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The word translated “keeper” is the same word God used in the creation of human beings. God say that humans were to work and to care for – that is, to keep God’s creation.

But Cain has not guarded God’s creation. He’s not taken care of his brother. He has destroyed his brother and, thus, destroyed the creation of God.

Cain’s violence against his brother, Cain’s dishonesty before God, gives us his version of humanity, of living in community with other human creatures of God.

And it is because we live Cain’s answer today that we cannot hide from God’s question, “Where is your brother?”

This question does not repress the violence or dishonesty of our world, but unmask it, denounces it, condemns it.

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Look at the story: God warns Cain about his choices: “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door...”

But not even God is able to talk Cain out of his sin. The choice belongs to Cain. The choice belongs to you and me.

Just look at the gods of fear, anger, deceit and manipulation and violence that have become a new world religion.

It can happen to any of us. It has happened to some of us. It is a temptation to all of us who have secret angers and not so secret resentments and sometimes find it hard to believe that God loves us as we are, where we are.

We fall prey to the idolatrous illusion that we have the right to pass sentence on anyone, strutting about when we have had enemies in our hands and have taken advantage, arrogantly asserting our own rights as we crush, refuse dignity, drive to despair another human being.

The Bible calls this frustrated sputtering, this living of the lie, this dishonesty before God “cursing,” and it happens easily, quite apart from any four-letter words we may or may not use.

“Cursing is an attitude in action,” says Robert Morris. It includes all our ways of seeking power by excluding, diminishing, destroying the one who gets in the way of what we want.

Just look at us in our country, we have armed ourselves beyond all reason with weapons of our graceless dishonesty, our assault on the truth of God’s love in Jesus Christ: greed, rage and bitterness, arrogance, selfishness, stupidity.

Our fear and our pride are a toxic mix that pulls the trigger of hate and anger. In terms of our story: We leave them lying to die in the field.

“Where is your brother?”

This biblical question sets the framework for the foundation of all our social and political and economic and emotional relationships: A radical, revolutionary, redeeming question for how we live with one another in this world.

Every man, woman, and child is a child of God. Not this one more and the other one less. Not this one valuable and the other one worthless.

Where is your brother, your sister?

Jesus shows us what it means to answer honestly about where our brothers and sisters are, what it means to be human, what it means to be responsible for other humans.

Jesus is the ‘honest to God’ keeper of God’s creatures and creation!

He fed people; he cured people; He restored the poor and the oppressed and the outcast to community, gave them a place at the table in society.

Hunger, Health, Home...these difficult days have pulled back the cursed curtains of our culture to reveal these are the basic answers of what Jesus believed is at stake for being human, for how we care for each other in community, life versus death.

## Questions on the Mind of God: Where is Your Brother?

Jesus' answers are being put to the test by willful ignorance and weak fear, false pride and selfish deceit, every thought and word and action that disavows our responsibility as keepers of God's creation and God's creatures.

Thank God for the men and women of our own day who have answered the question faithfully and honestly to be peacemakers, healers, comforters, giving hope to the hopeless, joy to the sad.

Where is your brother, where is your sister?

It is the question to be asked in Silicon Valley and Wall Street, in Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, in Beijing and Moscow and Washington, DC.

And if they would be honest to God, how different the world could be.

It is the question for Bruce Lancaster, a question for each one of you...Where is your brother, your sister?

I hope and pray our answer will be radically repentant and redeemingly honest to keep us on the path that the world might be different as we live into the new normal.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.

*God's questions are doorways to grace.*

*May your faithful answer*

*be the truth to set you free*

*and bring mercy and peace to your brothers and sisters*

*with the blessings of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,*

*this day and always. Amen.*





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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15241  
412-835-6630  
[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)