

# My Brother's Keeper

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Many people remember the story about Cain and Abel found in Genesis 4. The brothers each gave an offering to God, but God preferred Abel's over Cain's (verses 3-5).

Cain became very angry (verse 5), and he killed Abel (verse 8).

Verse 9 proceeds to show a quick conversation between God and Cain.

**Genesis 4:9**—"Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'"

We understand the major lesson of what Cain was saying. He was trying to convince God that He should overlook Cain's heinous sin against his brother.

Yet, too many people have taken this verse to mean that they should indeed be busybodies and control freaks in the lives of other people.

## **Definition of keeper**

Have you noticed how the English word *keeper* is defined?

The first definition of a keeper is: "One who keeps or guards as—(a) a guardian or protector; (b) the overseer of a prison; (c) the caretaker of a wild animal."

The second definition of a keeper is: "One in charge of a specific place, thing, etc."

## **A time for keepers**

When we consider the family unit, we realize that there is a time for parents to be keepers of their children.

When we were little children, we had some keepers (or guardians).

When we had children, we knew that we were the keepers (or guardians) of our little ones.

We realize that, in a psychologically healthy family, the role of the keepers changes as the children grow up.

The good parents want their children to grow up and to be their own keeper.

Psychologically unhealthy parents seek to keep their children from maturing emotionally and mentally.

### **Beyond the family**

Not only does this dysfunctional thinking apply to many families, it permeates other aspects of society.

There are people in this world who want to make other people feel as if they will always need a keeper.

That's why some employers do not trust their employees with freedom to make decisions for the good of the company.

That's why some politicians do not listen to the input and ideas of their constituents.

That's why some church leaders treat the people in their congregations as "dumb sheep."

### **Moffatt translation**

The Moffatt translation of Genesis 4:9 provides a different way of looking at "keepers":

**Genesis 4:9**—"How do I know?" said Cain; "am I a shepherd to my brother"?

Did you notice the word *shepherd*?

### **Helper of their joy**

Always remember that God is in charge. He is the parent and we are only helpers of one another's joy (2 Corinthians 1:24).

Make it a goal of yours never to allow another person to be a controlling keeper over you. We can have confidence in the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-14).

And, while you are at it, focus your attention on resisting the temptation to be a keeper over other people.

We really can't change another person, and we shouldn't spend any time trying to do so.

We can seek to better learn God's ways—through study and meditation. When people ask us for help, we can be prepared to explain our understanding of God's great ways.

Instead of viewing ourselves as their keeper, we can seek to be a helper of their joy.