

Taming The Monster Within - Envy

Introduction:

Pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust - the Seven Deadly Sins - are the greatest obstacles to making space for joy and flourishing in our own lives, community, and the world. In this series, ***Taming The Monster Within***, we're looking at the Seven Deadly Sins the church fathers considered toxic and deadly; Pastor Jeremy talked about pride last week and we'll be looking at envy this morning.

As I was preparing for this message, I came across Les Carter's book *Mind Over Emotions* in which he posts the following questions for self assessment of "envy":¹

Do you work extremely hard to come out looking good?

Do you examine others with a critical eye?

Do you have hidden feelings of inferiority?

Do you complain about not getting fair treatment?

¹ Os Guinness says that envy "works in everyday life, at almost every level and sphere of society, creating neighborhood tensions, ethnic and racial hostility, gender rivalries and national and international strife. Among problems directly linked to envy are arson ... assassination, and vandalism. Resentment and hatred ... the rage for rights and entitlement, the destructive tearing down by gossip columns and television 'gawk shows' ... culture of rage ..." (*Steering Through Chaos*, p. 76-7.)

² While other vices could have their fun and find temporary satisfaction - e.g., the proud takes pleasure to be the boss; the glutton enjoys his chips, chocolate bars,

Do you have an insatiable desire for success?

Do you need a lot of recognition for your achievements?

Do you tend to be status conscious?

Do you find it hard to pay compliments to others?

Do you keep score of your own good deeds and those of others?

Are you willing to pass along negative rumors about a successful person?

Do you put on a false front in order to appear impressive?

Do you base your self-image on your performance?

These reflective questions propel us to looking closely at this green eye monster:

"Of all the sins, only envy is no fun at all" (Joseph Epstein), and it's **"the most joyless of the Seven Sins"** (Jeri Holladay).²

and ice cream; the greedy gets her discount and sales in the outlet mall; the angry gets his sweet revenge; the lustful binges at pornographic materials; the sloth enjoys her extra break and stress free lifestyle – the envier is the most miserable person on earth.

Here are a few characterizations of envy: "the cancer of the psyche" (Richard Condon), "the rabies of the heart" (Herman Melville), "the diabolic sin" (St. Augustine), "a characteristic mark of man's rebellion against God" (St. Paul; cf. Rom. 1:29).

No wonder the bible says,

Prov. 14:30 A heart at peace gives life to the body,
but envy rots the bones.

The bible contains many stories of the damaging and diabolic consequences of envy; in fact, the story of Cain and Abel is the first recorded murder because of envy, then there are others like Joseph and his jealous brothers, Aaron and Miriam envious of Moses' leadership, the religious leaders' envious of Jesus, etc.³

We will look at the relationship between King Saul and David which is a revealing story that shows how the vice of envy the progressive downward spiralling toward the bottom pit of envy.

Now in 1 Sam. 17 we read that David the lowly shepherd boy became a famous mighty giant-slayer, after he killed Goliath. He's successful in every assignment King Saul asked him to do and became a popular commander-warrior (1 Sam. 18:5, 14). Let look at how jealousy and envy turn Saul's love and admiration of David to torment and hatred.

1 Sam. 18:6 When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and

dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres.⁷ As they danced, they sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands.”

We see in this story the fire of envy and jealousy, started by an innocent song of praise, burns within King Saul, and it's consuming him; he is miserable and he wants to be happy again.⁴

Seeing David's success, comparing and perceiving his own lack, accentuating his own sense of inferiority, acting out of hurt-ego, Saul seeks to bring down his “thorn in the flesh,” even though David is the God-appointed heir to the throne.

In short, Saul's envy is “**Schadenfreude**” (a German word which literally means "harm-joy"), the feeling of joy or pleasure when one sees another suffer misfortune. The best way to define “envy” is this:

Weeps when the other celebrates;

Celebrates when the other weeps.

Of course, we don't blatantly show our glee, but as Rebecca De Young has pointed out in her book, *Glittering Vices*, there are some clear manifestations of envy: feeling

³ See Gen. 4; 37; Num. 12; the four Gospels.

⁴ Happiness is (to the envious person): “an agreeable sensation arising from contemplating the misery of another.” [Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*]

Cf. 1 Sam. 16:14; 18:10.

offended at the talents, successes, or good fortune of others; reading false motives into others' behavior; belittling others; false accusations; backbiting; slander; arousing, fostering, or organizing antagonism against others; teasing or bullying ...⁵

God doesn't want to deal with superficiality; He wants us to go deep and look at what needs to be cleaned up in the secret closets of our hearts!

The story of Saul and David gives us three practical takeaways in dealing with envy:

1. Stop harmful comparison with others and keep personal insecurity in check.

¹Sam. 18:6 ... the women came out from all the towns of Israel ... singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres ...⁷ "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."⁸ Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?"⁹ And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

⁵ Rebecca De Young in her book, *Glittering Vices*, p. 45.

⁶ Brené Brown, *Atlas of the Heart : Mapping Meaningful Connection and the Language of Human Experience*

Rick Warren says, "Every time you compare, you fall prey to either pride or envy. When you find someone who's doing a better job than you, you fill up with envy.

Saul was disturbed by the comparison with David. Of course, comparison is part of life. But comparison becomes harmful when it causes us to diminish who we are. When we start to look at and troubled by what the other person has, does, what the others have accumulated, who they are, what they have done with their lives, and all that make us feel inadequate or inferior, insecure, or even ungrateful - we feel like we have not then gotten our fair share and thus become resentful against God and others.

Comparison is the death of joy.

Mark Twain

Brené Brown describes comparison as simultaneously "trying to fit in, and stand out." Whether we are comparing against someone we perceive as better or worse, "in the end, comparing ourselves to others leads us to fear, anger, shame, and sadness."⁶ **[If time permits, I will share my story in the early days at Regent.]**

So instead of harmful comparison (and competing to win at all cost) and thus allowing other to define us, we should ...

When you realize you're doing a better job than someone else, you become filled with pride." (https://pastorrick.com/comparing-is-the-root-of-envy/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Comparing+Is+the+Root+of+Envy&utm_campaign=Daily+Hope+-+English+RSS+Feed+-+Ongoing+Daily+Emails&vgo_ee=MQ0Uvq8asC2OqISicQABjQ%3D%3D)

Acknowledge our God-given identity, appreciate and apply God-entrusted abilities, strengths, and gifting.

Ps. 139:13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

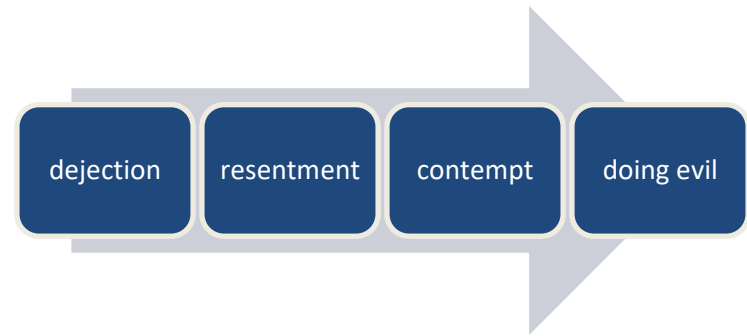
Go ahead and tell your neighbours, "Praise God! You are fearfully and wonderfully made." And "Thank God! I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

If any of you wants to learn about your spiritual gifts, you can go to take the free spiritual gift test on our webpage. And look out for our next Living Your Strength workshop.

2. Put aside personal contempt and relational hostility.

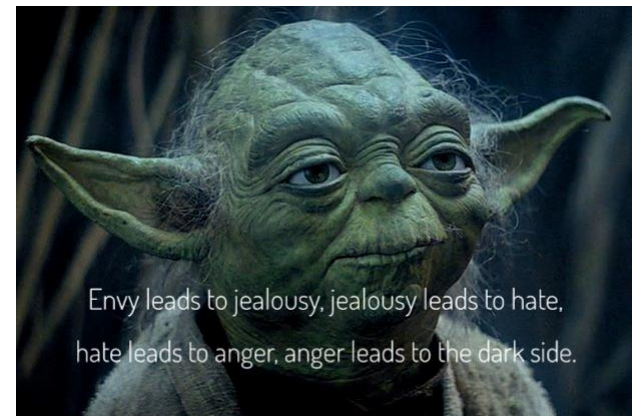
¹⁰ ... while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹ and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

Saul's envy takes root in his prideful heart, breeds alienation from God and other people (especially those closest to him, i.e., Jonathan & David). Saul became self-absorbed, self-willed and filled with arrogance; he progresses from...



Envy – the attempt to destroy, if not physically then the soul or the spirit - is a loser's game and it always backfires:

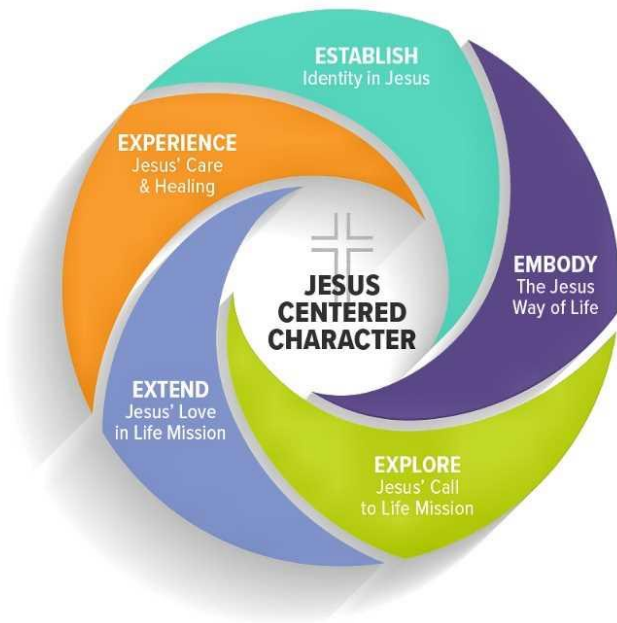
"We are doomed to lose even if we win. For to 'win' at envy is to destroy the possibility of love between oneself and others, and oneself and God." (Rebecca De Young)



Gal. 5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious ... ²⁰ hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy ... ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Envy is the cancer that ruins the fruit of the Spirit⁷ and the unity of the church.⁸

By the grace of God, the power of the Risen Jesus, and the enabling of the Holy Spirit, if it is possible and as far as it depends on us, serve, advance, and celebrate any God-honouring relationships/friendship.⁹



<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway/>

Taming the Monster Within is not just about pursuing a virtuous, moral living, getting rid of the vice of envy; it's not about "pursuing an ethics of avoidance" or "formulating a sin-management system" but it's all about growing or maturing as a Jesus follower –

Establishing identity in Jesus (instead of in other's success or qualities),

Embodying the Jesus way of life (instead of our prideful, self-absorbing way),

Exploring Jesus' call to life mission (thus finding God-affirming strengths and abilities instead of imitating others),

Extending Jesus' love in life mission (encouraging and empowering others instead of devaluing or bringing down others to make us feel better),

Experience Jesus' care and healing (being wounded healers instead of hurting self and others).

3. Cultivate attitudes, behaviours, and speech that build community.

⁷ Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control.

⁸ 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:3; cf. Ps. 133:1.

⁹ Rom. 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves ...

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice ... ¹⁶ Do not be proud ... Do not be conceited.

¹² Saul was afraid of David ... ¹³ So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men ... ¹⁴ In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him.

Fear of David's success – suspicion of his intents (cf. ⁸What more can he get but the kingdom?) - instead of faith/trust in God's sovereign purpose as well as David's good intent; being threatened by David's abilities instead of empowering his leadership strengths (*contra* ⁵ Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army).

When you are envious of someone else, you don't want to be in their presence. When you are being envied by someone else, they don't want to be near you.

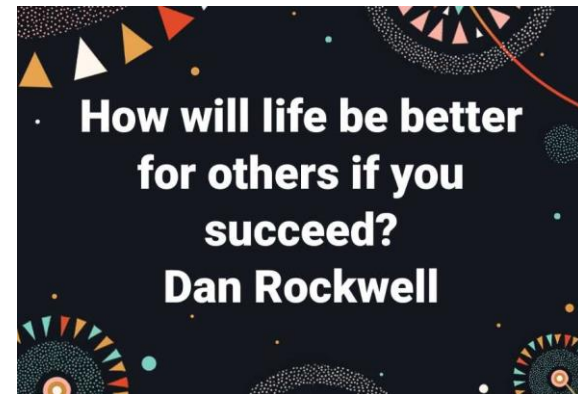
Hedy Collver

Envy destroys community; but love builds community and doesn't devalue people so to make self more important or bigger.

^{1 Cor. 13:4} Love is patient ... Kind ... does not envy ... does not boast, it is not proud ... ⁵ does not dishonor others ... not self-seeking ... not easily angered ... ⁶ Love does not delight in evil ... ⁷ always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Again, De Young hits the nail right on: "A self secure in its unconditional worth, a worth based on God's love, is a self free to affirm others' gifts without feeling threatened or thereby made inferior ... a self free to love without anxiety that its own contributions will be compared to another's and found wanting. It is a self able to take joy in its own good and in the good of others. The key ... is to "love without desiring all that you are not" ...

We protect unity and build community by pursuing acts of kindness so to empathize, encourage, and empower others to become the best version of self that God intends.



Conclusion:



“History tells of a statue that was erected to Theagenes, a celebrated victor in the Greek public games. The erection of this statue so excited the envious hatred of one of his rivals that he went every night and strove to throw the statue over by repeated blows. Ultimately he succeeded, but alas, the statue fell upon him, and he was crushed to death beneath it. Such generally is the end of the man who allows himself to be carried away by the spirit of envy.”¹⁰

The green eye monster is self-destructive at the end!

¹⁰ <https://tourguidegirl.wordpress.com/tag/theagenes-of-thasos/>