



“ A HEART FOR GOD” LESSON 3: ENVY

BIBLE BOOK CLUB NOTES

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF ENVY AND ITS CAPACITY FOR HARM

- ▶ JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS – His brothers so resented Jacob's love for Joseph that they first plotted to murder him and then sold him into slavery in Egypt.
- ▶ SAUL AND DAVID – Saul's resentment of David's successes and the love others had towards him (including Saul's own son and daughter) drove him into murderous rage and torment.
- ▶ RACHEL AND LEAH – Loved equally by God but not by their husband, the Lord's blessings upon Leah by giving her children became a source of bitterness for Rachel. When God finally did bless Rachel with the child she desired, her response was not gratitude but to demand He give her a second child.
- ▶ ESAU AND JACOB – Esau had the love of their father, Isaac, but it was Jacob who received the blessings of the first born (which aligned with God's plans for the Messianic line from the Abrahamic covenant). Esau's envy, even though the Lord blessed him with much wealth, led to such rage that Jacob spent many years fleeing his brother's wrath before they could reconcile.
- ▶ THE PRODIGAL SON – Though the prodigal was destitute and his brother was to be the heir of all their father possessed, his brother still seethed with envy over their father's forgiveness and joyful reception of the prodigal son.

TO UNDERSTAND THE DEEP ROOTS OF ENVY WITHIN OUR NATURE, REFLECT FOR A MOMENT ON THESE QUESTIONS:

- ▶ What is it that you desire and what are you willing to do to get it? Will you compromise your Christian beliefs and morality? Will you betray the lessons of God's Word? Will you rage against Him? Blame Him? Question His goodness, His wisdom, His faithfulness, His righteousness?
- ▶ What is your true capacity to love your neighbor as yourself? Particularly if they have something you desire. Will you love them as yourself? Will you practice any (or all) manners of evil against them, including physical violence or evil of the tongue? Will you risk your relationships with family, friends, or God Himself to have what you perceive yourself to lack?
- ▶ How great is your capacity to trust in God? Do you believe God's promises enough to accept that He loves you just as you are? That He has a purpose and a plan for you, just as the Bible says? That He tells us not to lay up our treasures on earth because He understands such a path leads to self-loathing, hatred, torment, and isolation? Do you trust that He may not give you all that you desire, but that He will provide all that you require? Remember: The apostles set forth with nothing but their shoes and their bags, not even a change of clothing or a coin in their pockets. Their faith in God to provide for their needs was sufficient for them. Could you step forth in this same faith?

WHAT CAUSES ENVY?

PRIDE LOOKS DOWN ON
OTHERS FROM AN
ATTITUDE OF SUPERIORITY.

ENVY LOOKS UP AT
OTHERS FROM AN
ATTITUDE OF INFERIORITY.

- ▶ **ENTITLEMENT – BEING OVERLY FOCUSED ON “PERSONAL RIGHTS”** Our society fosters the desire for more entitlements and fewer responsibilities. We blame family, friends, government, school systems, religions, strangers, and God for our circumstances and resent the perceived privileges of others. *Personal rights begin with personal responsibility. Even our salvation begins with the personal responsibility to respond to God's invitation by repentance.*
- ▶ **TAKING OTHER PEOPLE'S SUCCESSES PERSONALLY.** We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves. There is no resentment that originates in sincere love. Remember that the Spirit gifts everyone differently according to the Lord's purposes. To be jealous of what others have and feel inadequate by comparison is to question God's wisdom, gifting, and even His love and devotion to you as His child.
- ▶ **DESIRING SELFISH GAIN.** Remember that the things of this world shall pass away. It is good to have goals and aspirations so long as they do not become obsessions. See them from God's clear perspective for their overall worth in His plans. Keep your priorities straight by asking yourself: What are my motivations for wanting this item, this success, or that person's love? Could you live without it and still feel whole and complete and loved by God? It's not easy to temper our desires in modern society, especially when the media bombards us with daily temptations of the latest gadgets and entertainments programs about love, lust, and power that whet our appetites for what we see.

WHAT CAUSES ENVY?

In the eyes of the Lord, every child is equally worthy of His blessings, but individually gifted for His purposes.

You are made exactly as God desired. He loves you unconditionally. He has gifted you all that you will need. Where we feel we are not enough or that we do not have enough, whatever void in our lives and our souls, God can fill us and complete us. God might remind us of His Words to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee." (2 Corinthians 12:9).

- ▶ **YEARNING FOR STATUS AND ACHIEVEMENT.** Western society in particular values success and measures it by physical appearance, material possessions, career dedication and success, awards, our marriage, our family, and our competitive spirit. When we haven't achieved what others have accomplished---particularly in areas of family and career---we feel inferior and fearful of failure. Remember: Pride factors into envy.
- ▶ **INABILITY TO SHARE.** This is not limited to material wealth (how many Christians to you know who resent even being asked to tithe at church and question the motivation of the church leadership). Envy means that we can't genuinely share in other people's joys and celebrations any more than we desire to share our possessions or finances. Resentment prevents us from being happy for them.
- ▶ **LOW SELF-ESTEEM.** Envy causes physical pain and torment because our perception of ourselves and our thought about ourselves are distorted by sin and the lies of the enemy. We see others as possessing qualities, looks, intellect, skills, possessions, gifts, status, even loved ones that we lack but are entitled to. Low self-esteem makes us compare ourselves unfavorably. Perhaps we've been conditioned to do so from other people unfairly comparing us to a sibling, friend, rival, or a co-worker.

CONSEQUENCES OF ENVY

MAKING DESTRUCTIVE COMPARISONS

Envy needs a target, someone to resent. Someone to make us feel inadequate by comparison.

Yet, how should we determine our worth? All that matters is how God sees us. If our hearts are right with God, it is reflected in our values and morals and attitudes towards others.

This does NOT make it wrong to admire a person who models spiritual and moral qualities if they are inspiring you to improve without feelings of inadequacy or self-loathing.

DEJECTION AND DEPRESSION

Seeing the blessings and good of others a diminishing and disgracing us in some way. This feeling has its roots in uncontrolled self-pity.

IRRATIONALITY AND ISOLATION

At this level of envy, we judge others without mercy or reason. We hate them without boundaries. We actively seek to keep them from having what we cannot have by any means necessary (deceit, slander, violence). We may desire to physically harm them.

Our pride and anger are out of control at this point. We have become convinced that God is wrong and we are right.

What does the Bible tell us about overcoming our envy?

1 Peter 2:1-2

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Jeremiah 29:11-12

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

HOW DO WE MOVE PAST ENVY?

- ▶ **RECOGNIZE AND CONFESS IT.** Our sinful conditions are never beyond God's ability to forgive and heal, if we only admit them. Forgive yourself for your human vulnerabilities. Don't hate yourself for your condition but rather let your newfound awareness of it galvanize you to seek out God's help and healing.
- ▶ **CHOOSE TO GET RID OF IT.** See yourself from God's perspective as His beloved child. See the thing you desire from its value in God's eternal plan. We can carry nothing out of this world except God's Word and His love. Therefore, shall we lay up our treasures on earth in the form of material goods and physical pleasures? Or shall we hold to what is good and eternal? This is a deliberate choice we will have to actively make again and again.
- ▶ **RECEIVE GOD'S FORGIVENESS.** Don't forget to forgive yourself while you're at it. Remember your need for God and His Word. He knows that we are not strong enough to resist the slings and arrows of the enemy. This is why He gave us the shield of faith and the sword of His Word in our armor of God (remember Galatians 5). Go to God in prayer and remain rooted in His Word, even more diligently when you don't feel heard or strong or worthy.
- ▶ **DEVELOP A THANKFUL HEART.** Again, this is a deliberate choice that we make again and again. Look for the blessings and reasons to be thankful. You'll find it comes more naturally the more you practice it. You are God's beloved child whom he DELIBERATELY created because He wanted you. He has made you exactly as you are meant to be. Thank Him sincerely for your life and the people He places in your life and every little gift and blessing He gives you.

HOW DO WE MOVE PAST ENVY?

- ▶ **LEARN THE JOY OF GIVING TO OTHERS.** Resist the selfishness and self-absorption at the root of envy by giving of yourself to others. Giving includes material goods, yes, but it also includes kindnesses, encouragement, time, assistance, and sharing in their joys and celebrations from a sincere heart. It means seeing them as God sees them, as part of our adopted spiritual family.
- ▶ **KEEP EARTHLY ACHIEVEMENTS IN THEIR PROPER PERSPECTIVE.** When our hearts and our minds and our priorities are right with God, the result is peace and joy such as nothing we could covet in this world can provide.

REFERENCES FOR THIS LESSON:

- ▶ “*A Heart for God*”, Rebecca Manley Pippert, IVP Books, 1996
- ▶ “*Envy – The Green-Eyed Tyrant*”, Vickie Kraft, Bible.org, 2/2/2007