

Jealousy



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isa. 14:12–14; James 3:16, 17; Exod. 20:17; Genesis 37; 1 Samuel 18; Matt. 12:14.*

Memory Text: “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” (*Proverbs 27:4, NIV*).

One of the most devastating emotions is jealousy. It is the oldest type of sin (*Isa. 14:14*) and can hurt not only interpersonal relationships (*2 Cor. 12:20*) but our physical health, as well (*Prov. 14:30*).

Jealousy tends to be personal; it targets an individual who is perceived as a rival and a threat. As a result, jealousy often causes violence, either psychological (verbal abuse, backbiting, criticism) or physical. Who hasn't, at some point, felt the misery that this emotion brings?

This lesson provides instances of individuals who allowed jealousy to impact their behavior: Satan, Joseph's brothers, King Saul, and the chief priests of New Testament times. The result always was disastrous. How fascinating, too, that all of these jealous individuals enjoyed high status and privileges to begin with. Yet, all fell into the trap of hating someone else for what they were or what they had.

The Lord warns us away from such an erroneous path and urges His children to love their neighbors to the point of rejoicing with them in their gifts, achievements, and possessions as if they were our own.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 5.*

At the Root of Evil

What was the cause of Satan’s expulsion from heaven? *Isa. 14:12–14*. What does it say about freedom that even in a perfect environment, heaven, this terrible trait was able to arise?

Lucifer, the most magnificent creature from the hands of God, was given the highest place in heaven outside of the Godhead. His honor, beauty, and intelligence were supreme; yet, sin nevertheless grew within him (*Ezek. 28:12–15*). The perfect peace and happiness of all creatures was greatly disturbed by this act of self-exaltation and jealousy toward Christ.

“ ‘I will make myself like the Most High’ ” (*Isa. 14:14, NIV*) was the thought that triggered dissension, rebellion, violence, and much pain to all inhabitants of heaven and then to the entire human family. “Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

By contrast, we look at Jesus. The inception of sin through jealousy and selfishness is rebuffed by Jesus’ willingness to be humbled to the lowest level of humankind and to be killed, like a criminal, in order that each person may be saved from the ultimate devastation caused by sin (*2 Thess. 1:9*).

Read James 3:16, 17. What contrasts are presented here? What should this tell us about how damaging and demonic jealousy is?

Our sinful nature is such that the first bad deed makes the next one easier. When the wrong path is initiated with jealousy and selfish ambition, the result seems to be a smorgasbord of sin: “disorder and every evil practice” (*vs. 16, NIV*), as James describes it. The wonderful news is that there is room for another option, one that is “pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (*vs. 17, NIV*). This option is love.

Lucifer did not look at what he had; instead, he chose to contemplate what Christ had. How often do we tend to do something similar? How much jealousy and envy do you harbor for those who have “more” than you? How can you overcome this dangerous emotion?

Joseph's Brothers

So often jealousy and envy arise among those with whom we are very close, which makes the potential for serious consequences even more devastating. Indeed, a large portion of aggression (physical or psychological) today is found within the family circle, and jealousy and rivalry between family members is so often at the root.

Read Genesis 37. What is the background to the story? What led up to this criminal act? What role did jealousy play?

It's hard to believe that these brothers could have been so cruel. Did they not think, too, about what their actions would do to their father? Their jealousy became so powerful that it overruled not only common sense but common decency and morality, as well. What a powerful lesson this should be to all of us about how potentially dangerous this emotion is. No wonder there's an entire commandment dedicated to warning us against it (*see Exod. 20:17*).

Besides all the pain their actions brought upon themselves and their father, they also feared for what Joseph would do to them after the death of their father, Jacob (*Gen. 50:15*).

But Joseph's attitude could not be more noble, for he said: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" (*Gen. 50:19, NIV*). Joseph had understood that his duty was to forgive the offenders and to trust in God's mercy and justice.

The life of Joseph has been compared to the life of Jesus Christ. Jealousy moved his brothers to sell him as a slave; some priests and elders were jealous of Jesus, and that jealousy fueled their actions against Him. Joseph was sold to the heathen; Jesus was sold to His enemies. Joseph was falsely accused and sent to prison because of his virtue; Jesus was falsely accused and rejected because of His righteousness. Joseph displayed noble benevolence toward his brothers; Jesus, too, forgave His enemies. The evil actions against Joseph ultimately led to good; the same thing happened with Jesus, in that the evil done against Him was turned to good, as well.

What kind of pain and suffering has jealousy and envy—whether your own or someone else's—brought to your life? What lessons have you learned from these experiences? How often, too, have you felt jealousy over things that today seem so trivial and meaningless? What lesson should you learn from that, as well?

Saul's Jealousy of David: Part 1

A classic case of how jealousy works can be seen in the story of Saul and David. Saul was king, ruler over the nation. He had everything going for him, and yet jealousy entered, and it seemed to change everything about him.

Or did the jealousy merely bring out what was already there inside Saul?

What was Saul's initial attitude toward David? *1 Sam. 18:1–5.*

Saul's actions show that he had a very positive attitude toward David, to whom he gave a high place in the army. Also, considering his own son's attitude toward David, it was clear that David had royal favor.

What changed Saul's attitude? *1 Sam. 18:6–9.* Why is Saul's attitude such a common human response?

The rest of 1 Samuel 18 shows just how damaging Saul's jealousy of David became. It led him to all sorts of deviousness and trickery, and yet, none of it worked. The very things that he feared in David became more and more pronounced!

Jealousy generates a series of negative emotions: low self-esteem, hatred, suspicion, fear, guilt, and anger. Saul was afraid of David, as mentioned several times in the chapter. He might have been afraid of losing his kingly position or afraid of David becoming the absolute hero of Israel. But his main source of fear was "because the Lord was with David but had left Saul" (*1 Sam. 18:12, NIV*).

Being left by God is reason enough to be afraid. But Saul's fear was aggravated by the fact that "the Lord was with David" (*vs. 12, NIV*). Saul was unable to apply to the situation the simple logic of Gamaliel: "If [this] is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop [it]" (*Acts 5:38, 39, NIV*). When the Lord blesses people, there is no point in developing jealousy or seeking their doom. God will continue to bless them.

However wrong Saul's attitude, why is it relatively easy to understand? What's your immediate attitude to someone you deem could be a threat to your position? Do you surrender everything to the Lord, or do you start plotting a counter strategy?

Saul's Jealousy of David: Part 2

Read 1 Samuel 19. What path can you see Saul on? What lessons are here for us?

Saul, at first, worked with some stealth and subtlety in seeking to remove the perceived threat of David. When that didn't work, he came right out into the open with his murderous plans. Most likely he, at first, never dreamed he'd go that far. However, once the floodgates are opened to sin, none of us realize how far down the wrong path sin can lead us.

Killing David became an obsession. Saul's negative feelings, first harbored when women sang and danced to honor David, soon reached the point of murderous attempts on his life. In chapters 18 and 19 alone we find eight specific attempts, either mandated or perpetrated by Saul himself, to murder David.

The rest of the story is a sad one, as things grew worse for Saul. As his hatred and jealousy increased, he became irrationally suspicious of David, obsessive about killing him, and frightened of the surrounding Philistines. On the excuse that they had sided with David, he killed 85 priests of the Lord and many men, women, children, infants, and farm animals in the priestly town of Nob (*1 Sam. 22:17-19*). Look at where he was being led!

Full of terror because of the Philistine incursion, he asked the Lord what to do. But Saul had gone too far away from God, turning down divine advice too many times, so he did not obtain an answer. He chose, therefore, to consult an evil spirit through a witch, a practice that he himself had abolished. He even bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the evil spirit, which was impersonating the deceased Samuel (*1 Sam. 28:14*). This was the beginning of his end, for the following day he and his sons lost their lives to the Philistines (*1 Samuel 31*), as forewarned by the evil spirit, obviously a demonic manifestation.

Saul, by letting jealousy take root, followed a path to complete apostasy and ruin. Worse, his sin brought suffering not only on himself but on his own family. Sin is bad enough when it hurts us as individuals. Rarely, though, is the damage and pain so localized. In most cases, our wrong deeds impact others negatively, as well.

Look at all the cases we've seen so far. In each example the jealousy and the results of that jealousy had far-reaching consequences, most likely not anticipated by the one who first harbored the emotion. How crucial, then, that we by God's grace seek to die to self the moment this ugly emotion arises in our hearts.

Jealousy Toward Jesus

“For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy”
(*Matt. 27:18, NKJV*).

Skim over quickly the first 11 chapters of Matthew, focusing specifically on what things Jesus did. Then read Matthew 12:14. What was it about Him and what He did that would have caused the leaders to respond this way? What did their actions reveal about their hearts? As you think about your answer, dwell on the question of how you might have responded were you in their situation.

The chief priests and elders were knowledgeable and exacting in the observance of the law. But their analysis of religious life was so microscopic that they had lost sight of the point of religion. Jesus brought a fresh view of piety, and the people of Israel (including religious leaders) heard the good news of salvation. Instead, though, of thanking Jesus for alerting them to their self-destructive path, they sought to destroy Him.

How often folk let their own jealousy blind them to what should be obvious. After all that Jesus was doing, the miracles, the healing, the casting out of demons, it's hard to imagine anyone questioning Him as being anything other than from God. The evidence He gave should have been more than convincing (*see Matt. 11:4, 5*).

Perhaps because they were more aware of their own need, the common people were more open to Jesus than were many of the religious leaders, who feared that Jesus would change the status quo and thus endanger their position. Jesus' teaching was in many ways so different from theirs, and His message so much more appealing, that they had good reasons to fear His influence. Unfortunately for them, they were more concerned with preserving their own power and influence than they were in knowing and following the Truth.

The fact that jealousy was motivating them wasn't a secret. According to Matthew 27:18, even the Roman leader Pilate knew what their motives were. That's how obvious it had become. Sadly, these leaders were so blinded by their jealousy that they thought they were defending the faith against some impostor who was leading the people astray. Had they surrendered in humility and faith before the Lord instead of letting their jealousy overrule rational thinking, they would have avoided the tragic course that surely led them to eternal ruin. We would do well in our context, whatever it is, to learn from their mistakes.

Further Study: “Satan was once an honored angel in heaven, next to Christ. His countenance, like those of the other angels, was mild and expressive of happiness. His forehead was high and broad, showing great intelligence. His form was perfect; his bearing noble and majestic. But when God said to His Son, ‘Let us make man in our image,’ Satan was jealous of Jesus. He wished to be consulted concerning the formation of man, and because he was not, he was filled with envy, jealousy, and hatred. He desired to receive the highest honors in heaven next to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 145.

“One great defect in the character of Saul was his love of approbation. This trait had had a controlling influence over his actions and thoughts; everything was marked by his desire for praise and self-exaltation. . . . It was the ambition of Saul to be first in the estimation of men; and when this song of praise was sung, a settled conviction entered the mind of the king that David would obtain the hearts of the people and reign in his stead. Saul opened his heart to the spirit of jealousy by which his soul was poisoned.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 650.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How many things do you have to be thankful for? Why is it so important to dwell on those things, as opposed to your problems?
- 2 Can jealousy ever be good, ever be a motive for improving oneself? Defend your answer.
- 3 Think about some of the Bible characters who displayed jealousy in this week’s lesson: the most superior angel in heaven, the king of Israel, the religious leaders in Israel. These all were in exalted positions; these all had so much. And yet, they still allowed jealousy to come in and wreak havoc. What does that tell us about why jealousy is an internal problem, a problem of the heart, as opposed to something that arises only from outward conditions? Why could someone have so much of what this world offers and still be stung by the nasty bite of jealousy?
- 4 Ellen White wrote in *Patriarchs and Prophets* (see quote in Friday’s study) that the “one great defect” in the character of Saul was his love of being praised. Just one “little” defect, and look what happened. What should this tell us about the danger of not seeking to overcome all our character flaws before they overcome us? What Bible promises can you claim that should give you the hope and encouragement that victory over these defects can be yours?

Alive Again: Part 1

by ATTE HELMINEN

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Salo, Finland, was, like many churches, slowly dying. A handful of aging members struggled to keep the church open, and no new members had been added in years. The members had to decide: would they let their church die? Or would they do whatever it took to bring it back to life?

Members prayed for forgiveness for their narrow-minded views and asked God to pull them out of their self-serving mindset and make them other-oriented. They resolved to become a caring community and began reaching out to people they never would have invited to worship before.

A pastor from another town taught them how to reach out to others and share their faith. He taught them how to give Bible studies in a more open and accepting manner than they were used to and challenged them to create their own ministries using the talents and spiritual gifts God had given them.

The members held a health expo that drew crowds from the first day. At the expo, members invited visitors to come to a series of Meet Jesus meetings. Their efforts worked, and within a few months three women joined the church, the first baptism the church had celebrated in years. During the first year, 12 people were baptized. Word spread that the church was alive again, and some Adventists from other areas of the country came to help revive the church. Within three years, church membership doubled.

“We’re learning to be more loving and to use our spiritual gifts for God’s work,” one member says, smiling. “Each of us has found a place in God’s plan for His church. We now have a common joy and a common purpose, and that is to enlarge the family of God.”

And the church continues to grow as people who need hope and love find people with hope and love to share.

Helena was going through a life-and-death struggle with alcohol. Doctors told her to quit or die. One day she came to the church uninvited and smelling of alcohol. Her mother had once been an Adventist, she said, and she just came in one day. Church members welcomed her and cared for her needs. They visited her and tried to be like Jesus to her. Today Helena is alcohol free and a different person. She has been baptized and has become a strong witness for Jesus.

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