

# 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 brought by this emotion?

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?

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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 the willingness of Jesus 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?

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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?**

## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 27:4*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize the far-reaching destruction that follows in the wake of jealousy.

**Feel:** Abhor even the beginnings of the feelings of envy.

**Do:** Fill the mind and heart with the selfless humility of Christ as the antidote to jealousy.

► **Learning Outline:**

### I. Know: The Slippery Slope of Jealousy

**A** What examples of jealousy in the Old Testament demonstrate the evil developments associated with on-going jealousy?

**B** How do the stories of Joseph, Saul and David, and Jesus illustrate how jealousy can destroy families and communities?

**C** How should we respond to those who are jealous of us?

**D** How long is it taking for God to resolve Lucifer's problem with Christ? What should this teach us in regard to patience as God works out His plans?

### II. Feel: The Origin of Sin

**A** Often, jealousy can awaken in the heart that has plenty and has no reason to envy anyone else, such as in the case of Lucifer. Why is it so important to surrender to God the first feelings of envy and jealousy?

### III. Do: Antidote to Jealousy

**A** How does focusing our minds on Christ help to protect our hearts against the evils of envy?

► **Summary:** Jealousy indulged results in the most horrible of evils, as illustrated in the lives of Lucifer and Saul. But Jesus' humility and submission to the Father, as He waits for God's plan to work out through the universe, illustrates a positive response to jealousy.

## 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?

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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 the potential danger of this emotion. No wonder there's an entire commandment dedicated to warning us against it (*see Exod. 20:17*).

Besides all the pain that 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?**

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Jealousy is an emotion that cannot coexist in any measure with the peace and joy that distinguish the true Christian life.

If you have ever traveled in the American Deep South, you will see, in many places, vague shapes covered by a thick coat of leaves and vines. Some of them appear to have once been trees. Others may have even been buildings.

All this is the work of a little plant known as kudzu. Kudzu was brought to the United States from Japan in 1876 and introduced at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Proponents touted it as the solution for a number of problems, not realizing that it would itself become a problem. Where it was planted, it thrived at the expense of everything else. If you had kudzu, kudzu was all you had.

One could say that jealousy and envy are the kudzu of human emotions, except that kudzu really does have beneficial properties. Not so with jealousy. Where there is jealousy, there is no peace, joy, love, or patience. You can't have a little jealousy. Eventually it will cover over everything else and strangle it. For the Christian, rooting out jealousy is literally a matter of life and death.

**Discuss With the Class:** Most of us wish we were richer, smarter, more attractive, or more athletic than we are. At best, this can motivate us to work to improve ourselves. How can we keep these thoughts from taking root to the point where we hate and envy other people who seem to have these desired qualities?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

## Bible Commentary

### I. In Search of the Original Sin (*Review Isaiah 14:12–14 with your class.*)

Although it is hard to see, envy has a tiny bit of the good in it, however twisted and perverted. Oscar Wilde wrote that hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. In the same way, envy can be said to be the tribute paid to the good and

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## 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.*

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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?

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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?**

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

the beautiful by evil and ugliness. The person who is envious of someone else recognizes the presence of good qualities in another person, but rather than enjoying them and being thankful for their presence or working to emulate those qualities, he or she selfishly desires to take them for himself or herself, at the expense of the other.


This brings us to Lucifer. Lucifer is said to have been the covering cherub. Some even speculate that he may have been chief of the angelic choirs. In other words, in contemporary church terms, he was (assuming this is true) the worship leader or even the minister of music. It was his position to draw attention to the praiseworthy attributes of God, worship them, and encourage his colleagues to worship. Apparently he excelled at this, until that day he stopped enjoying and appreciating the divine attributes and started wondering why he couldn't have those attributes in the same way and (most of all) be worshiped for them. In short, the original sin was envy of God.

**Consider This:** Even in a spiritual or religious context, envy and jealousy may appear. Most of us probably have taken note of people who seem to be more spiritually advanced than we are, and maybe, for one brief moment, we wished we were as good as they are, or even entertained the thought that they are fakers or hypocrites. Why, then, is it safe to follow others only as they follow Christ? (*1 Cor. 11:1*).

## II. Jealousy, the Soul Virus . . . (Review Genesis 3:5 with your class.)

We see from the previous passage that Lucifer went from the admiration and appreciation of God's attributes to the belief that the glory due to God could and should be due to him. Next came the belief that God was actively withholding these honors from him to his detriment. The next step was to convince others of this. He succeeded; a full third of the angels rebelled against God with him. The result was their confinement to a backwater planet, third from a rather ordinary star somewhere in the Milky Way galaxy. But there were others there, and perhaps he could convince them to see things his way. . . .

Adam and Eve had an entire planet that was created for their enjoyment and enrichment. Beautiful things to see, delicious things to eat, majestic animals, natural wonders, and perpetual communion with God, all theirs except for one tree in a remote corner of their habitat of which they were not to eat. A trifle, really.

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## Saul's Jealousy of David: Part 2

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

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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.



Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Perhaps they wondered about it. They were probably curious. Maybe they occasionally took a scenic route through the garden so they would have an excuse to stare at it. But they would never have doubted God's wisdom and intentions without that push which Lucifer, in the form of the serpent, was prepared to give.

One day when Eve found herself in that corner of the garden, someone else was there, too, asking seemingly innocent questions: Were they really not supposed to eat from the tree? Why not?

It turned out that the serpent not only had questions, he had answers too: *God prohibited Adam and Eve from this tree because He knew good things would happen to the first humans if they ate from it, and He wanted to keep it all for Himself! All the good things that they had were really just mere crumbs thrown to them to keep them fat, happy, and stupid! They could be like God, the serpent argued, and they should be like God.*


**Consider This:** What does the experience of the first humans tell us about jealousy? Why is it so dangerous even to entertain envious thoughts toward others? How could Adam and Eve come to doubt and suspect God's intentions?

### III. Jealousy Is Murder (Review Genesis 4:1–15, Genesis 37:13–24, and 1 Samuel 18:6–9 with the class.)

Jealousy, however common it is and however much some people seem to luxuriate in it, is not a pleasant emotion. Perhaps that is why jealousy seems to lead to attempts to erase the source of it.

The first murderer, Cain, felt that God did not esteem him sufficiently. He felt slighted next to his brother Abel, who was (in his mind) clearly less deserving. When this became clear, God warned Cain that sin was crouching at his door, but he ignored it. He irrationally decided that the source of his trouble was Abel, and if Abel were gone, the trouble would be too. In fact, it was only the beginning of a pattern that would continue throughout history.

**Consider This:** All three of the passages above show examples of how jealousy leads to violence. We know that in day-to-day life we don't literally murder people we envy, but in what way can it be said that we do so in a moral sense? (See Matthew 5:21, 22.)

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## 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.

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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 needs, 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.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 3—Apply****Thought Questions:**

- 1 How do we see jealousy at work in our society and among individuals today? While we are taught from an early age that jealousy is an ugly and unworthy emotion, what are the ways in which our society subtly promotes it? Examples could include the focus on the material goods of others; also, the joy which the media often encourages us to take in others' misfortune.
- 2 Do you agree that jealousy is at the root of many sins and possibly sin itself? Why, or why not?

**Application Questions:**

- 1 As noted in the lesson, much of the opposition to Jesus among the religious leaders of the time was motivated primarily by jealousy. Have you ever seen jealousy at work in today's church, to the extent that it hampers our ministry? How can we firmly but compassionately guard against its influence over ourselves or the climate of the church as a whole?
- 2 One of the worst aspects of jealousy is that it blinds us to what is right in front of our eyes—as it did to the religious leaders of Jesus' time—and gives us distorted concepts of the motives and character of other people. If we find ourselves thinking this way, what can we do to bring ourselves back to reality?

► **STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** The following activity is meant to supplant jealousy with its opposites: gratitude and self-esteem.

Hand out slips of paper with the phrase at the top, "I am grateful to God for . . ." and three columns labeled "things I have," "things I am," and "things I've done." Have your students fill these out individually, or they can discuss their responses in small break-out groups. Come back together as a class and discuss the results. How can their responses help class members to foster an attitude of thankfulness instead of jealousy and envy?

**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:

- ❶ 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?
- ❷ Can jealousy ever be good, ever be a motive for improving oneself? Defend your answer.
- ❸ Think about some of the Bible characters in this week’s lesson who displayed jealousy: the most superior angel in heaven, the king of Israel, the religious leaders in Israel. They all were in exalted positions; they 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?
- ❹ 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?