

“*Cast Away by the Seven Deadly Sins: ENVY*”
Proverbs 14:30; Galatians 5:13-26

[Girl Scouts ... Families ... Grown up scouts ... Lent ... Series ... Envy]

In the movie *Amadeus*, Antonio Salieri is the court composer to the Austrian Emperor. He knew from childhood that he was destined to write music and dreamed of becoming a great composer. Although he is a well-respected musician, Salieri is both intrigued by and repulsed by the talent of an upstart composer named Mozart. To Salieri, Mozart is an immature, philandering fool, unworthy of the fame he has acquired. But when Salieri has the opportunity to examine some of Mozart’s manuscripts, he is astonished by the perfection of each composition.

Envious, Salieri contemplates why God allowed Mozart to drink of the fame for which he’s thirsted all his life. Enraged, he pulls a crucifix from the wall and throws it into the blazing fireplace. He declares to God: *From now on we are enemies, you and I. Because you chose for your instrument a boastful, smutty, infantile boy and gave me for my reward only the ability to recognize his genius. Because you are unfair and unkind, I will block you. I swear it. I will hinder and harm your creature on earth. As far as I am able, I will ruin him.*

Envy can drive us to do drastic things. It is an aspect of our personality that none of us wants to acknowledge. When we are envious, we’re tempted to do without God or others. We see this in the story of Cain and Abel. Each brother brings an offering to God. God looks favorably upon Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s. Aware of the envy that washes over Cain, God warns him: *“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is*

crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:6-7).

Cain however does not heed God's warning. He kills his own brother over his envy. [P]

Max Dupree retells a *medieval* tale in his book *Leadership Jazz*: "Envy and Greed were walking down a path when they were confronted by an angel. The angel offered them a deal: One of them would receive everything that he wished. The other would get twice as much. Greed quickly asked Envy to choose first. After a little thought, Envy wished for one blind eye."

Envy is the desire for another's traits, status, abilities, situation, possessions ... Which, at times, can motivate us to improve, to work harder, to accomplish good things. But more often than not, *envy develops out of a warped sense of fairness. Envy becomes deadly when we presume the power and position of judge* – where we become the ones who decide what others deserve or don't deserve, particularly in comparison to us!

Here are some examples from notproud.com: "I'm trying to break into an industry that does not advertise entry-level positions. I moved across the country and have been busting my back for almost a year to build up the list of contacts I even have now. The people I've met in this industry had their jobs dropped in their laps by the good old boy network the second they graduated from college. I still want their jobs, though."

"Why the heck does anyone like her? She's not even pretty. She looks like a drowned rat. She's not a nice person ... And yet, everyone is still drawn to her. I'm such a nice person. I'm a singer, dancer, actress ... an awesome friend ... What the heck is wrong with all of you?! Why can't you all love me instead?"

Can you hear the sense of judgment in their desires? "They don't deserve what they have ... but I do." And now for our *Gilligan's Island Moment* ... Any guesses as to which of the castaways encapsulated envy? [P] Mary Ann. Does that surprise you?

Mary Ann was a simple farm girl who was in many ways the opposite of Ginger. As the two single women on the island, they were companions, but deep down, they were rivals. When it came down to it, Mary Ann was envious of Ginger. A constant adjective for Mary Ann was “sweet.” She was so sweet that she even made envy look nice!

Like the other deadly sins, envy is a subtle sin to fall into. Let me give you an example from my own life – the envy of a twin brother ... competitive academically ...

Envy Tears Down. Someone once said: *“Envy is not a gentle emotion. It’s not simply ‘I want what you have, too.’ It’s aggressive: ‘I want what you have, and I want you not to have it! I want to take it away from you, and if I can’t do that, I’ll spoil or destroy it!’”* ... “I’ll take one blind eye if that means you get two.”

There’s a destructive quality about envy – a tearing down. Titus 3:3 – “At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”

Without Christ’s transforming work in our lives, we would still be living for ourselves. And such a life will always be marked by malice and envy. Eugene Peterson describes it as “the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival.”

But the impact of envy is not just on the person of whom we are envious. The root of the Hebrew word for *envy* means to shrivel or wither; to spoil, ruin, or corrupt. We’re given a picture of this in our Proverbs passage: “A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.” Envy corrupts us on the inside. It prevents us from caring for others, celebrating with them, loving them. As someone once confessed, “I should be happy for them ... but I’m not.” Instead, we end up doing the exact opposite – we tear down and destroy – as our Galatians passage warns us: “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” (v. 15)

With envy, we resent God's goodness in others and ignore it in our own life.

That's what's so tragic: We miss out on all the goodness that is already present in our lives – goodness that God wants us to enjoy – all because we are preoccupied by what others have.

Consider Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20. Workers were hired throughout the day. At the end of the day, all were paid the same daily rate. We hear the grumblings of the workers hired first. But we also hear the response of the vineyard owner – Matthew 20:15 – “Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?”

The first workers were consumed by their warped sense of fairness: “We worked more; we get more. God's response is: “I treated you fairly, but if I want to be generous to them – why is that your concern? I will be gracious by giving more than is deserved!

This is what Paul is inviting us to look into. We started looking at Titus 3 earlier. Let's hear what else Paul tells us: “We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior ...” (Titus 3:3-6)

This is the new way of life – life in the Spirit! Not a life of constant comparisons, rivalry, of who got what and who deserves what (which somehow always ends up being biased in our favor). Instead, it is a life soaking up the generosity of God's grace. If I recognize that I have received so much more than I deserve, how can I ever be envious?

How petty, how arrogant our envy can be. Envious of someone with a higher salary when half the world makes \$3 a day. Envious of someone with a bigger house

when tens of thousands are living as refugees. Envious that somebody is more popular when I am wholly and unconditionally loved by God?

That's part of the freedom Paul is speaking of – not trapped in games of keeping up with the Joneses. But rather, soaking in God's generosity. Just ponder His promises: "I completely and absolutely forgive you." "I will give you joy and peace." "I will work for your good in all things." When we are caught up by the goodness and the grandeur of our God, how can we be envious?

With envy, there is a tearing down – because we are living for self. But life in the Spirit has the opposite effect – there is a **Building Up through Love**. In our Galatians passage, we see that life in the Spirit brings about the fruits of the Spirit. Hear vs. 22-23 again, this time from *The Message* – "But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates us. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely."

We become people who are freed from tearing others down to building them up. It is the commandment to "serve one another in love" – just as *we* have been served in love – given more than we ever deserved. [*The Son of Man came not to be served ...*]

How differently that medieval story could have gone. If Envy could've thought more on what he was to receive, rather than on what Greed would get. If Envy could've even celebrated God's wondrous generosity – not just for himself, but for his companion as well. If these two would have put the other first, rather than themselves, there would

be two less people walking in blindness and two more people enjoying God's incredible riches.

What will we choose: To live a life of envy – resenting God's goodness in others and ignoring it in our own life? Or will we choose to live life in the Spirit – celebrating God's goodness in our life as well as in the lives of others. May we never again tear down – may we always and only build up – for the glory of God.