

EHC Week 7
Jealousy + Envy
Psalm 73
07/03/22

Introduction

Pray. Grab a Bible. Go **Psalm 73**. Spending the 2nd half of our series “The Emotionally Healthy Church” by addressing specific emotions. **Today I want to talk to us about Jealousy + Envy.**

Lake Lure Joke. I feel like I got a crash course in this emotion this weekend. Lindsay and I spent the weekend up at Lake Lure with her sister and her family. Between the two families there were 6 kids under 4. It was a lot of toddler refereeing and lessons on sharing. This is an emotion that is in there from the beginning - and I think if we're honest that feeling of wanting what someone else is always a temptation, isn't it? So I'm excited to get to talk about it from the Scriptures.

Definition

Here's how I would define this emotion of jealousy/envy/coveting (to use the language of the Scriptures). I'm going to use envy mostly in this sermon because I think it's the most helpful term for what we're talking about.

Here's how I would define this overarching feeling for us:

Envy is a corrosive desire to have something that does not belong to you.

It's a yearning towards something that someone else possesses.

- It's that pit in your stomach when you hear about that person you're interested in hanging out or going on a date with someone else.
- It's that anger you feel when your coworker gets the promotion or the recognition you felt like you deserved.
- It's that cynicism or bitterness that seems to rise up when someone talks about the house they just bought, or the vacation they just took, or the new “toy” they just purchased and you know you can't afford it.

This is what God has in mind in the 10th commandment. He tells His people in **Exodus 20:17 - 17 “You shall not covet (desire, long for, be jealous or envious of) your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”**

That belongs to your neighbor. That is not yours to have. That is what they have, that is their lot in life - do not be envious of it or long for it.

Envy is a corrosive desire to have something that does not belong to you.

Now, I say **corrosive** because, in both my personal experience and in the narrative of the Scriptures, envy seems to have this incredible power to damage ourselves, our relationships with others, and our relationship to God.

Proverbs 14:30 - A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

James 3:16 - 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

The Bible says there's a way in which jealousy just kind of makes everything within us and around us breakdown.

This is exactly what Psalm 73 is going to speak to today. So let's walk through this text together and see what it is that we can learn about envy.

Psalm 73:1-15

Written by Asaph - he's like an Old Testament Israelite worship leader. Writing a song about his own experience that the broader people of God - the Israelites - would have sung together as a part of their corporate worship.

1 Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

Verse 1 is hugely important, we'll circle back to it in a little bit.

2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Alright pause. This is such a great example of what we talked about in the first couple of weeks - Asaph pauses. He acknowledges - something is off with me. My feet are almost stumbling, I'm slipping - this is religious language - he can feel himself being pulled away from God.

And he doesn't put on a false self. Doesn't ignore it, blame shift, justify it - he is willing to go in and see what the issue is - "I was envious of the prosperity of the wicked."

Let's see what he's envious over...

V. 4-12

4 For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. 5 They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. 6 Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. 7 Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. 8 They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. 9 They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. 10 Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. 11 And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" 12 Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

Asaph says I'm looking to the left and to the right and I'm envious, I'm jealous. Why? Well he tells us:

These people:

- They've got no pain.
- Their bodies are incredible (they're fat and sleek - whatever that means).
- They don't have any troubles or problems like everyone else.
- They're always relaxed/always at ease.
- They're bank accounts just keep getting bigger.
- And to make it worse - they keep talking about all the good things they have and how awesome their lives are!

Sound familiar to anyone you know?

Is this not what we do in our envy? Is this not the pull of temptation on our sinful hearts?

We look to the left and right - they're doing well, they're doing well. They've got no problems - Great job. Great spouse. Great kids. Great vacations. Great health. Great face. Everything about them is just great. COOL.

Now, I think if we got to this point where Asaph is, in our culture we would do a couple of things:

- We would make a joke about it. “You got to go to Disney World? UGH I’m so jealous...”
- We would stew in it. Just kind of let it sit in us, carry quiet resentment.
- Or some of us are ultra competitive and we would just work really hard to do better and “win”.

But none of those are good options - because envy is corrosive. Envy is damaging. It’s emotionally and spiritually unhealthy.

And there’s a few reasons why this is so dangerous to us that I want to spend some time on...

1. Envy lives in unreality.

One of the biggest threats to your emotional health I’ve tried to get you to see in this series is living in unreality. Don’t live in a false world.

Envy lives in unreality. What I mean by that is that often the picture we have of someone else’s life isn’t actually real.

One commentator on this passage says that this is likely a hyperbolic character sketch. Asaph is just so in his head about how great these folks’ lives are. Like, sorry Asaph but no - they’re lives are not actually 100% devoid of trouble. There’s definitely some ancient Israelite instagram filters, ok? (That’s a bad joke. I should’ve cut it, I’m sorry...)

But y’all, our perception of that other person’s life - I am going to 100% guarantee you, it’s just not real.

That influencer, that friend, that famous person, that CEO - whatever - it’s a facade.

I love the way **Monica Furlong** writes about it. She was a British journalist and activist in the mid 1900s. One of her most famous quotes was this - **“If envy was not such a tearing thing to feel it would be the most comic of sins. It is usually, if not always, based on a complete misunderstanding of another person’s situation.”**

How many times do we get jealous because of someone else’s highlight reel? If you compare your real life with someone else’s manicured social media and public life - you will lose 100% of the time.

But that’s not ultimately helpful right. Hey, don’t be envious - they’re life is probably terrible too! That’s not really what we need to hear. There’s more.

Envy is also dangerous because...

2. Envy keeps us from loving others.

Asaph calls them “the wicked”, but he’s not praying for them to turn from their evil ways and come back to God. He’s not thinking about how to love them and serve them and point them to repentance. His envy has corrupted his ability to love them.

Here’s what happens.

Romans 12:15 - 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

The invitation of the Scriptures is to celebrate others’ victories and grieve others’ pain. Envy takes those and flips it. Instead we celebrate others’ pain and grieve others’ victories.

We see that person with the thing we want, or in a life stage we long for - someone getting exactly what it feels like our souls long for and crave, and it drives us to cut off the relationship - we don't love the person, celebrate and rejoice with those who rejoice, we hate them because they have what we want - so we cut them off - it's corrosive to our relationships with others.

But the 3rd and most dangerous part to our envy is what Asaph says in verse 13...

13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

OT scholars talk about how this "cleaning and washing of hands" is worship and spiritual practices language. He's talking about this idea of faithfully following God. "Washing his hands" would have been a part of their spiritual practices they would do as a part of worshiping God within the temple - a physical symbol of a spiritual cleansing and washing of their sin.

In other words, in verse 13 Asaph has reached his low point. He's looked out and surveyed all of the things these other people have. He's envious. He wants a life of no problems. He wants a life of ease. He wants a life of riches.

And he throws up his hands and he says - "What was the point of trying to follow God anyways?"

3. Envy pulls us away from God.

One of the struggles of the human heart from the very beginning of history has been to want and long for what God in His sovereignty has withheld from us. That's Genesis 3 right? God told Adam and Eve - don't eat from this specific tree. How does Satan tempt them? **God is withholding from you - you cannot trust Him.**

That same lie courses through our envy. See what they have? See the way they're prospering? See the way they're flourishing? See what God has given them?

Isn't it in vain you've worshiped God?

Isn't He withholding from you?

Why would you keep worshiping God when He's not giving you these desires you long for?

This is the pull on Asaph - is it all actually worth it? Because it seems like these people who want nothing to do with God - their lives are just better. I wish I had that. I wish my life was like theirs. Maybe the answer is to just step back from all this Jesus-stuff.

And this temptation - the belief God is withholding from us, this truly is at the core of all of our envy.

Envy + God's Faithfulness

Yes Asaph is looking around left to right seeing all of these people prosper but him. That's provoking him to envy, absolutely. But ultimately his envy is because he's forgotten verse 1.

He's forgotten the deeper reality that says, despite his circumstances - **1 Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.**

Last week we saw how fear and anxiety says - **"I'm not sure God will be good in the future."**

Envy is similar. Our envy, our unrighteous jealousy. Our corrosive desire to have something that does not belong to us, that says - **“I am sure God has been good, just to someone/anyone besides me.”**

So it's not **just** that God hasn't fulfilled my desire, hasn't given me what I long for and want and feel like I need, but it's that it feels like he's given it to my friend, to that person in my community group, to my sibling, to my coworker, to my neighbor.

God is good! Just not to me. God provides! Just not to me. God supplies our every need, just yours and not mine. That is the crucible of our envy. All of our envy is ultimately a trust problem → **Do we trust God is good, not just generically but to us?**

A verse the Lord just keeps pulling me back to over the course of 2022 speaks directly to this reality. If we've talked in the past 6 months I have probably brought it up.

Psalm 34:9-10

9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! 10 The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

I wish I was a person who had this sort of trust. That in seeking the Lord, I lack no good thing. There are so many things I want right now. So many people my heart is pulled to be jealous of and envious of. Do I believe this? Do I believe - Lord if I seek you I lack no good thing. And if it would be good for me in your sovereignty and providence then I would have it. Lord, help my unbelief...

All of our envy, though horizontally provoked, is a reflection of our relationship with God.

Which, when we get this, is why it makes so much sense what Asaph's solution to his envy is.

Worship vs. Envy

Look at verse 16...

16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, 17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

This all seemed like too much - I was doubting God, I was losing my footing, I was envious of everyone around me - then I went and worshiped God. I went into His sanctuary. I got on my knees and I prayed. I went to church and I sang with God's people. I went to the sanctuary, I got in God's presence, and He showed me what was real.

And look at what happens...

Psalm 73:21-28

21 When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, 22 I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. 23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. 27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. 28 But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

When Asaph goes to worship God, God shows him what is real - these things you're jealous over, envious over → They don't last. These things you're desperate for that that person has, or that that person bought, or that - fill in the blank - they don't go into eternity.

All of these things will fail - **But God is the strength of our heart and our portion forever.**

There's just a sense in which, in the middle of his bitter jealousy - Asaph looks up, and as Christian cliché as it sounds goes - "Oh yeah, I have God."

What a beautiful reality - that God is mine and I am His forever.

- So no, I didn't get that promotion my coworker got - but I have God.
- No, I don't have that relationship that I want - but I have God.
- No, I don't live in the house of my dreams - but I have God.

And this is not to cheapen the suffering that comes from lack, to cheapen the struggle, to cheapen the pain of unmet desires. That's not what I'm after - "Get over it, you have God." That's not what I'm saying - I'm saying man, there's a deeper, more beautiful reality that will still be true when this life and its joys and sorrows are past - **God will still be on the throne.**

- So yes there are things our soul longs for, and there is a painful reality that we don't have it now or may never have it.
- There are relationships we crave that might not be what God has laid before us, and it hurts.
- There are ways we wanted or want our life to go, and it just feels like brick wall after brick wall after brick wall.

But God is our portion forever.

Which means - every earthly desire we have, points us to the deeper fulfillment on offer in God.

- In our envy of someone's relationship - God offers to be our portion, to satisfy our craving to be known and loved forevermore.
- In our envy of someone's house, cars, or money - God offers to be our portion - our true security and provision now and into eternity.
- In our envy of someone's status or power or title - God offers to be our portion - declaring over us sons and daughters with a forever identity and place in His kingdom.

So we let those deep desires in our envy drive us to desire more and more greatly the God who is our portion forever.

And we have the guarantee of him being our portion available to us in the finished work of Jesus.

The good news is not just that we get God as our portion, but that God is eager to give us Himself as our portion.

And I can confidently say that, because the hope for our envy, our unrighteous jealousy over the things of this earth, is God's righteous jealousy for us as His people.

Exodus 34:14

14 For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God...

Envy (unrighteous jealousy) is a corrosive desire to have something that does not belong to you.

BUT...

Righteous jealousy is a loving desire to have something that rightfully belongs to you.

That is what God has for His people.

God is jealous for what is His and we are His. He wants our worship. He wants our focus and attention. He wants our allegiance. He desires relationship with us. He seeks us out. Chases after us. All who are in Christ, called into His kingdom, brought into His family - we are His people.

And it is His passionate commitment and jealousy over us - that He will rule and reign over and in those who are His - that gives us confidence that He will root out our envy. He will root out our "other things getting the throne of our hearts" pull.

I don't want you to be jealous over that person's job - I'm jealous for you. Be mine!

I don't want you to be jealous over that person's spouse - I'm jealous for you. Be mine!

I don't want you to be jealous over that person's influence, position, status, or power - I'm jealous for you. Be mine!

Dan Allender + Tremper Longman - "It is God's jealous love that both unnerves us and draws us to Him. His relentless pursuit, His fierce hatred of any rival, and His incomprehensible willingness to anguish on our behalf captures our heart for His love. His jealousy is our shield; it is our promise of eternal protection and passionate exclusivity. It is our confidence that the divine Lover will win His bride."

God will not lose. He will win His bride. He will win us. So our buffer, our protection, our hope for sanctification and growth away from jealousy and towards faithfulness and contentment is God's commitment to Himself that He will be made much of in our lives.

Our hope is that God will complete the work He started. He will be worshiped by those who are His. That He purchased our redemption and reconciliation and relationship on the cross - He will not lose what He owns.

Practicals

So in light of that, let me just end briefly with a couple of practical ways to fight against our envy. We'll hit them quick.

1. Worship

Do the same thing Asaph says he does in v16...Go into the sanctuary. Go into the presence of God. In worship we have the opportunity to see God clearly. To remember what is true about Him and His goodness.

2. Confess

This is a step that takes some wisdom and discernment - but I think one of the best things to fight against envy, depending on who and what and when - is to consider confessing it to the person you're envious of. If they love Jesus and love you, sometimes it's best to bring it into the light.

And not in a "I'm going to ½ confess but really just blame you for this" sort of way. Like "By the way I'm jealous because you started dating them and stopped hanging out with me." That's not a confession. That's blame shifting.

“Hey I’m jealous of this about your life. I’m not rejoicing with you, loving you, caring about you and your well being - I’m harboring bitterness and resentment at you. Often it means I’m pulling away from you.

And I just see this time and time again - where because of envy someone will pull back from certain relationships, pull back from community or church family - because someone is flourishing in a particular way they long for - job, money, pregnancy, marriage - whatever it may be - and they just bail out of bitterness and anger and sadness on the relationship.

Instead the call of Christ is to go “man, this is really hard. And I’ve got some grieving I need to do with God and others, but the call of sacrificial, loving, Jesus-centered family means I can still love them. I can still want what’s best for them, even in my pain. I’m going to not run in my envy, but work through my envy to get to where I can rejoice with those who rejoice, even in my own pain and hurt.”

And so part of the step of fighting against our envy, growing into an emotionally mature and healthy person in this area of our lives is to, when appropriate and with discernment, confess that envy to the person we’re envious of.

3. Gratitude

Stop looking around, start looking up. Taking stock of God’s kindness to you.

Conclusion

Will we trust ourselves to a faithful God. That what we have is what He has seen in His sovereignty to give us. Will we stop looking around start looking up, trusting our lot in life from His hand.

He can be trusted!

He’s proven it on the cross.

Communion. Pray.