

Holly was a bright, pretty child. But she had a peculiar habit—she always wanted her friends' toys. She cried when her best friend got a beautiful doll for her birthday. She whined when the neighbor girls appeared at church in matching Laura Ashley Easter dresses. She pouted when her older sister was taken to Disney World as a reward for straight A's throughout high school. When Holly became a teenager, she turned her attention toward boys. She quickly mastered the use of makeup, lightened her hair dramatically, and learned to dress with a slightly sexy flair. Her competitive drive always drew her toward her friends' boyfriends, and she made it her habit to call them, ask them for advice, and sow seeds of criticism about the girls in their lives. Then, at eighteen, she met Jack and Tammy Jensen, a couple in their early thirties who were youth leaders at her church. At first Holly innocently joined the other kids at the Jensens' home. They gathered as a group, watched videos, and just hung out. But before long, Holly was spending a lot of time talking to Jack—alone. Like any married couple, Jack and Tammy had their small differences from time to time, and Holly instinctively honed in on them. While flattering Jack on one hand, on the other she gently questioned his reactions to Tammy's quick temper, her same old hairstyle, or her not-quite-perfect housekeeping. Holly's divisive arts were astonishing, as were her manipulative capabilities. She called the Jensen home in tears one night from a pay phone, hysterically claiming to have been kicked out of the house by her parents. She asked Jack if he could pick her up. She knew the family well enough to calculate that Tammy would be getting dinner on the table for the children and that Jack would arrive alone. He did. Jack listened to her story patiently, and by now he felt close enough to Holly to put his arms around her in comfort. The truth was, he'd been wanting to hold her in his arms for weeks. Before the night was over, Jack had become an adulterer. Before the year was over, Jack and Tammy had filed for divorce, Jack left the church, and he and Holly are living together. The tragedy doesn't end with the breakup of Jack and Tammy's marriage. In fact, it continues. Holly has become disillusioned with Jack—she complains that he's too old for her. She constantly compares him to younger men, humiliating him with caustic jokes about his weight, his thinning hair, and his middle-aged attitudes. Holly wants a house at the beach, like the Fosters'. She needs a new BMW, like the Jarvises'. She and Jack fight constantly and bitterly over her insatiable desires for more things, better things, things her friends have that she'll never get

because Jack is "such a boring old man."

This tragic tale was told by the late Vickie Kraft to illustrate a vice that is as old as sin. Jack wasn't the only one Holly was living with. She was living with a green-eyed monster called envy.

Envy, like vainglory, is a disordered desire. Somebody has received something, some gift or advantage or benefit, that you would like to have. That doesn't necessarily make you envious. The desire to succeed or to win or to be chosen is a good desire when it inspires you to imitate someone who is worth imitating. But that desire becomes twisted when it is tinged with resentment toward the person who has what you don't. That's what makes it envy.

Envy and jealousy are often confused. In fact, the term "green-eyed monster" coined by Shakespeare, originally referred to jealousy. Envy and jealousy are so closely related that, over the years, the term has been applied to both. What's the difference? Jealousy is the fear that something I have will be taken away. Jealousy can actually be a good thing. God is a jealous God meaning He owns us and is not interested in competing with false gods for our affections. **God is jealous but God is never envious.** To envy is to want something someone else has.

The reason envy is so dangerous is that it carries with it the added feature of hoping the person who has what I want will fail in some way. The Germans call this Schadenfreude. Americans call it football season. Schadenfreude is a word which means "taking delight in the misfortunes of another." One more month until the beginning of Schadenfreude season. The first weekend of September Alabama plays USC. Who do you think Auburn fans will be cheering for? UCLA plays Texas A&M. I wonder who Texas fans will root for? Oklahoma plays Houston. I can tell you who Oklahoma State will be cheering for. OSU fans have two favorite teams, OSU and anyone playing OU. I call that "college spirit." God calls it envy.

In a perfect world, losers would rejoice at the good fortune of the winners. The winner would respond lovingly to the loser. But this isn't a perfect world. This is a world of the haves and have-nots. If you have, you jealously guard what you have so no one else will have it. If you have not, you are consumed with the desire to have or at least, to see the winner lose.

Envy is one of the earliest sins recorded. Gen. 4:1-8. There is great debate as to why God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's. Some say that it was because Cain brought some of his crop but Abel brought a blood sacrifice. But

there is no indication that God had instructed them to bring a blood sacrifice. After all, Cain was a farmer and Abel was a rancher so they both brought a portion of what they produced. It is more likely that the difference was not so much the sacrifice but the attitude of the one who brought it. God is not nearly as interested in the forms of our worship as He is the motives behind our worship. Worship is not based on the state of the art but the state of the heart. The lesson is simple; anyone who is envious is prey for the evil one. Envy is an invitation for the enemy to control us. Ultimately Cain's anger led to murder.

Envy is a killer. It kills relationships. James describes it this way, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask." Ja. 4:1-2

Genesis 37 tells the story of Jacob's sons, envious of their half-brother Joseph who was loved by Jacob "more than all his sons, because he was the son of his old age." Gen. 37:3. When Joseph came out to the fields where his brothers were taking care of the family flocks sporting his new multicolored coat, they were so smitten by the green-eyed monster that they planned to kill Joseph. Fortunately for Joseph, Reuben intervened and saved his life. Instead of killing him, the brothers sold him into slavery to some Ishmaelites. But God had plans for Joseph and what his brothers meant for evil God meant for good.

God's sovereign choice of a leader often brings out the jealousy and envy of those who must submit. The actions of Jacob's sons, prompted by the belief that they should have been leaders, shows exactly why they should not have led. The envious person who feels they must be in charge is the very person you should never put in charge.

And on and on it goes. Leah and Rachel, David and Saul, the Pharisees and Jesus. Pontius Pilate knew envy when he saw it. He was aware of the motivation of the Pharisees who wanted Jesus gone. "For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy." Mk. 15:10. Can I write your name into the sermon? Are those same destructive emotions doing a number on you? If you're not sure, give yourself this test taken from Les Carter's book *Mind Over Emotions*:

Do you work extremely hard to come out looking good?

Do you examine others with a critical eye?

Do you complain about not getting fair treatment?

Do you have an insatiable desire for success?  
Do you need a lot of recognition for your achievements?  
Do you tend to be status conscious?  
Do you find it hard to pay compliments to others?  
Do you keep score of your own good deeds and those of others?  
Are you willing to pass along negative rumors about a successful person?  
Do you base your self-image on your performance?

How do we kill the green-eyed monster? We can't! But we know someone who can. "If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Ro. 8:13. The only way to kill that green-eyed monster is to be filled with the Spirit so that we can exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. And what is the first fruit of the Spirit? Love.

Love is the antidote for envy. God's love for me and my love for others. You are a child of God, chosen and beloved by the One who created you. You are just the person God created you to be. Thank Him for your face and figure, your health, your abilities, your family, your job, your bank account, your friends. Thank Him for the spiritual gifts that make you essential to the body of Christ. You don't need to compare yourself with others because God loves you with an everlasting love. His love frees me from the trap of constantly comparing myself with others.

If love is the antidote for envy, comparison is the fuel that feeds the fire of envy. *Comparison is a thug that robs your joy. But it's even more than that — Comparison makes you a thug who beats down somebody — or your soul. Scales always lie. They don't make a scale that ever told the truth about value, about worth, about significance. And the thing about measuring sticks, girl? Measuring sticks try to rank some people as big and some people as small — but we aren't sizes. We are souls. There are no better people or worse people — there are only God-made souls. There is no point trying to size people up, no point trying to compare — because souls defy measuring. Ann Voskamp*

Rather than comparing myself with someone else, I can commit myself to act in their best interests. "To love is to stop comparing." Mark Noll. So whenever you discover you are comparing yourself to someone else, go to that person and compliment them on the very thing you envy. Celebrate with them.

Proverbs tells us: "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." (Prov. 14:30).

D. L. Moody once told the fable of an eagle who was envious of another that could fly better than he could. One day the bird saw a hunter with a bow and arrow and said to him, “I wish you would bring down that eagle up there.” The man said he would if he had some feathers for his arrow. So the envious eagle pulled one out of his wing. The hunter shot, but the arrow didn’t quite reach the rival bird because he was flying too high. The eagle pulled out another feather, then another—until he had lost so many that he could no longer fly. The archer took advantage of the situation, turned around, and killed the helpless bird. Then Moody made the application: if you are envious of others, the one you will hurt the most will be yourself.