

MONDAY MANNA

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THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF JEALOUSY

By Rick Boxx

Jealousy. One dictionary definition of this term is, “feeling resentment against someone because of that person’s rivalry, success, or advantage, or against another’s success or advantage itself...a jealous feeling, disposition, state, or mood.” Is this something you have experienced?

Envy is a close cousin of jealousy, defined as “an emotion which occurs when a person lacks another’s superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it.” Can you see any benefit from being jealous or envious of another person? We would be hard-pressed to find one, but these feelings and attitudes are common in the marketplace.

Years ago, I struggled with jealousy. As I watched a peer’s organisation flourish, I found myself envious of his rapid success. Even though I tried to ignore them, questions like, “Why is his organisation doing better than mine?” or, “What does he have to offer that I don’t?” would arise in my mind.

Such thinking is unproductive, I realised, and if left unchecked can become destructive. So, after some soul searching and prayer, I asked God to forgive me. This was partly because, intended or not, I was feeling resentful toward the Lord for not giving me the same measures of success and achievement. My prayers of repentance also prompted me to ask my peer for his forgiveness.

The result? I felt as if a tremendous weight had been lifted from me, and was freed to enjoy my own level of success without comparing it to my peer, or anyone else. It enabled me to focus on the admonition of Ecclesiastes 9:10, “*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might...*,” without looking over my shoulder to see how anyone else was doing.

In its typical candour, we find many examples of jealousy in the Bible, individuals becoming resentful toward a brother, friend or rival that seemed to be valued or blessed more than they were. In Genesis, for example, we read about Joseph’s brothers becoming jealous of their father’s favouritism toward him, so they sold him into slavery.

The Israelites wrestled with this in a major way. In Numbers 11 we read about Joshua, Moses’ aide, hearing and complaining about other leaders suddenly prophesying as only Moses had done previously. We find the Israelite leader’s response in Numbers 11:29, “*But Moses replied, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!’*”

The apostle Paul quickly defused an issue of jealousy and quarreling in the ancient church in Corinth by putting things in the right perspective: “*...one says, ‘I follow Paul,’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos’.... [We are] only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.... For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building*” (1 Corinthians 3:4-9).

Both Moses and Paul knew jealousy was fruitless. It is God’s job alone to determine which talents and opportunities each person should receive. Our job is to focus on how we use what we have been given. If we are faithful to that, rather than comparing our success to others, we will have the peace and joy the Lord intends for us to experience in our everyday work responsibilities.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

When you hear the word “jealousy,” what immediately comes to your mind? Do you agree that jealousy – or envy – is common in today’s workplace? Explain your answer.

How big a challenge is jealousy for you, feeling resentment or envy toward others for what they have accomplished or what they have?

When you have felt jealousy, how have you dealt with it? What would you advise to someone else on how to overcome it?

What difference does it make, in your opinion, to recognise that “we are co-workers in God’s service,” or as another translation states it, “God’s fellow workers,” for being able to properly handle feelings of jealousy toward others, whether it is another person or a rival business?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Exodus 20:17

Proverbs 14:30, 15:17, 17:1

Galatians 5:19-21

2 Corinthians 12:20