

Our Jealousy vs. Being Content

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. ⁹ The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. ¹⁵ You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Philippians 4:4 – 20)

Historical and Cultural Context

- Paul wrote *Philippians* around 62 AD, about ten years after he founded the church at Philippi (Acts 16). He wrote this from prison, either in his first imprisonment under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28) or in his second imprisonment in the Mamertine Dungeon (a dark pit) in Rome. The Philippians were generally quite poor (2 Cor.8:2) but were still very generous financially towards Paul's ministry and to Christians they had never met, in Judea and Jerusalem, who were suffering from a famine.

Reflection Questions

1. Paul used to struggle with covetousness. He confessed about himself, before he gave his life to Jesus, 'I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind... (Romans 7:7 – 8). As you read *Philippians*, picture Paul imprisoned, and ask yourself,
 - a. How might Paul have been covetous, resentful, or anxious instead?
 - b. What was it about Jesus that made Paul change so much?
2. How have you felt about life changes where you go from:
 - a. Having fewer choices after you (and others) have a wide variety of choices
 - b. Having nothing after you (and others) have a lot
 - c. Obeying Jesus after you (and others) have the 'freedom' to sin
3. Remember that God is jealous for you (previous study). God's jealous love for you is revealed in Jesus and in the Spirit: God wants so much for you that He joins Himself to our humanity. What do you need from Jesus to be more content and thankful in areas where you feel covetous, resentful, or anxious?

Questions

1. Introductory Question (before you look at the study): What have you gotten done in life because you were jealous of someone else, or coveted something you didn't have?
2. How might Paul have been covetous, resentful, or anxious instead?
 - a. Focusing on what his life had been like before prison, or before Jesus
 - b. Focusing on what other people's lives are like, outside of prison
 - c. Focusing on what other people's lives are like who don't follow Jesus, perhaps more carefree
3. What was it about Jesus that made Paul change so much?
 - a. Jesus was the one who defeated covetousness, resentment, and anxiety in himself.
4. How do you think Paul went from being a person who felt 'coveting of every kind' before Jesus, to being 'content in all circumstances' with Jesus?
 - a. What comes to mind when you read Paul saying that 'coveting of every kind'? Sinful lusts, jealousies, greediness, enviousness.
 - b. Is coveting the same thing as jealousy, greed, and envy?
 - i. Coveting is fundamentally wanting something that is not yours. (Miriam Webster: 'to feel inordinate desire for who belongs to another')
 - ii. Jealousy is
 1. (Dictionary.com) (1) a type of resentment against a rival; or (2) mental uneasiness from suspicion or fear of rivalry, unfaithfulness, etc. as in love or aims; (3) vigilance in maintaining or guarding something.
 2. OR: Definition of jealous (Miriam Webster): (1a) intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness; i.e. *jealous of the slightest interference in household management*; (1b) disposed to suspect rivalry or unfaithfulness a jealous husband; (2) hostile toward a rival or one believed to enjoy an advantage : envious His success made his old friends jealous; i.e. *they were jealous of his success*; (3) vigilant in guarding a possession; *new colonies were jealous of their new independence*
 - iii. Greed (Miriam Webster): a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (as money) than is needed motivated by naked ambition and greed
 - iv. Envy (Miriam Webster): (1) painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage; (2) obsolete : malice; (3) an object of envious notice or feeling his new car made him the envy of his friends
5. (optional) Part of the biblical story is that coveting has become embedded in human nature since the fall of Adam and Eve.
 - a. Throughout the long ages, God was helping His people Israel in the Old Testament to understand human jealousy and how dangerous it was. It was the driving sin behind Adam and Eve's plucking the fruit from the tree and eating it. They were jealous of God and wanted to be gods themselves. To be jealous of God – wow! Then, their son Cain was jealous of his brother Abel and killed him. Some people say the primal sin was pride, and pride was surely part of it, but jealousy or covetousness is the primal sin in my opinion and in the opinion of many others.
 - b. Jealousy lies behind every other sin as well. In the movie *The Kite Runner*, an old Afghani man says, 'Stealing lies behind every other sin. If you murder a man, you steal a son from his parents. You steal a husband from his wife. You steal a father from his children. You steal a life from the man.' I think that is true, but I think behind the sin of stealing lies the sin of jealousy in some form.
 - c. Jealousy is a sign that we are corrupted and need Jesus' new humanity. He condemned the sin in his own flesh (Rom.8:3), by never sinning.
 - d. Which is why when I talk to you about jealousy, I'm aware that this is not just about ideas. There is a non-rational part of you that will emotionally resist what I'm saying. And I'm asking you to pay attention to that part of you, and turn it over to Jesus so he can kill it, and take it from you. For those of you who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus, I'm asking you to hear me out and consider what I'm saying, and then make a decision about whether you want to start a relationship with Jesus, if you are struck by how problematic our jealousies are.
 - e. Why is there a resistance in us? Partly because jealousy is a powerful motivation and we can get a lot done out of jealousy!

- i. There's a study that shows when people are stuck in traffic...as long as you are going faster than the people around you, you tend to be happy. So even if you're going 5mph, it doesn't matter as long as everyone around you is going 3mph. As long as we're moving a bit faster than people close to us, you tend to be happy.
 - ii. In many cases, the closer we are to the person, the more these feelings are heightened. For example, I tend not to be jealous of Bill Gates because I have no preexisting relationship with him. However, if Bill Gates was someone I went to school with, were friends with, basically 'on my level', I'd be swimming in jealousy.
 - iii. Envy, according to some definitions, is a more aggressive form of jealousy. Jealousy wants what others have. Envy can go the other direction. Envy would be happy if the other person lost that thing. 'If I can't have it, no one can!' That's envy. Why? We tend to be jealous of others because we make our happiness dependent upon the people around us. We are actually not in control of our happiness the way we think we are, but instead we tie our happiness to factors external to us. And we have learned to value grades and clothes and money and people and experiences mostly by what we have picked up from other people. We have seen other people value those things, so we mimic them. Then, inevitably we compete with those around us.
 - iv. Our jealousies are a by-product of what the Bible calls idolatry, basing your life on lies and even the worship of false gods. We live in a vicious circle of man-made, created meaning. Jealousy is a clue to you that you have based your life on a lie. And the reason why part of you will resist what I tell you tonight is because part of you wants to succeed in the web of lies that we all tell each other.
- 6. Let's explore the dynamic of covetousness, and how it leads to other sins. (Leader, pick one or more, below)
- 7. Jealousy in Friendships:
 - a. Let's say that you are Person #1. And you are friends with Person #2. But you can't stand Person #3. Person #3 gets on your nerves. You don't like being around them. Or maybe it's the other way around. Person #3 doesn't like you. But either way, Person #2 is friends with Person #3. For some reason you can't understand, they are friends. Now apart from the love of God, your response to Person #2 is probably something like this:
 - i. 'I don't really understand how you can be friends with Person #3.' That's the befuddled response.
 - ii. Or, it could be: 'I don't think you should be friends with Person #3, for your own good.' That's the semi-parental response.
 - iii. Or, it could be: 'I'm mad that you actually spend time with Person #3.' That's the insecure, jealous response.
 - iv. Or, it could be worse: 'I'm not going to be your friend if you're friends with Person #3.' That's the *Mean Girls* response, right?
 - b. But with the love of Jesus, you would look at that friendship more positively.
 - i. You would say, 'I'm really glad that you're friends with Person #3, because I can't be that friend, at least right now.'
 - ii. Or, you would say, 'I admire you for being friends with Person #3. I want to get there, too.'
 - iii. Or you would say, 'I admire you, and I'd like to learn from you how are you able to be friends with Person #3 while I am not?'
 - c. My challenge for you is to give your jealousy up to Jesus. Relinquish it. Push through it and make Jesus and his mission your first priority.
- 8. Jealousy in Alcohol:
 - a. If you're underage: If you just wanted to glass of beer or wine with dinner, then you could probably drink that with your parents, because most parents allow that, and it's within the law. The law says that consuming alcohol is not the same as possessing alcohol. Your parents could possess the alcohol while you consume it if they share it with you. But how fun would that be, with your parents? So let's press beyond what we all know and go a little deeper. I don't think the core issue on campus is actually alcohol. I think it's jealousy of other people. Let me highlight several different groups of people and how I think they perceive each other *jealously*.

- b. If you're of the legal age for drinking: You look at people who get drunk and you feel more judgment than compassion. Now, it's true that Ephesians 5:18 says, 'Do not get drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit'. But let me explain that. The verse says, 'But be filled with the Spirit' as the alternative to being drunk with wine, and yet we don't often reflect on that. Let me first tell you how I experienced being filled with the Spirit recently. A few years ago, there was a time that I was hanging out with a friend, sharing stories about our families. When we prayed, I saw a capital letter A in red. I told my friend this, and she said, 'You mean like *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathanael Hawthorn?' I said, 'I guess so.' A few days later, my friend told me that her parents were going through a tough time because her dad confessed to her mom that he had had an affair many years ago. He had been carrying around that burden of guilt for years, much like in *The Scarlet Letter*. He repented and asked for forgiveness, and things have gone well. Thank God. But my friend and I were struck by the fact that the Spirit of Jesus seemed to give me – or perhaps us – a word about that situation before it even came to light, perhaps to let my friend know that He loves her and is healing her dad. I do think that my ability to hear a word from God like that is related to choices I made to grow in Jesus' love. My dad was an alcoholic. There was infidelity in my family. One struggle for me was to love people who got drunk and to care about people even though it touched areas of pain in my life. I was jealous of their apparent carefree attitude so I had to also resist the allure of drowning my own pain in something unreal like alcohol and women, the very same things that hurt me. After years of choosing Jesus' integrity and love instead of my exasperation, Jesus cultivated in me sensitivities and abilities that flowed out of his love. Even just being a better listener was something of a miracle. And I'm thankful. Nowadays, people in my community in Dorchester are seeing God physically heal people miraculously. I want more of all that. I want that for us! I don't know how exactly that will play out for you. In some ways, I recognize that I am calling you into experiences, and abilities, and sensitivities that you may not have yet. But if you choose Jesus, over time, I think you will see the whole thing differently and you will be thankful you chose him. I desire more of him. I think you will, too. The biggest question for you is, 'Do you want to know what it means to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus?'
- c. If you feel more judgment than compassion, you're probably jealous that you're missing out on something, and you're trying to reward yourself by telling yourself you're more moral. But self-righteousness is not the same thing as Jesus' love. People who drink excessively are usually running away from something, like pain or stress. You could be sympathetic to that possibility. At the very least, you could be sympathetic to the fact that a whole bunch of people want to join in this group experience where their true selves aren't even really interacting with each other. They think that other people are funnier than they really are, and they think they themselves are funnier than they really are. People playing a multi-player video game are experiencing more reality than a bunch of drunk people.
- d. For some of you, you're drawn to alcohol because of the people who are drinking. You'd like to be like them, to be one of them. Or at least you think you do. In a sense, you're jealous. They step over limits, and you'd like to do that too. And the truth be told, you have probably spent much of your life trying to become someone else, because you're dissatisfied with yourself and you're jealous of what other people seem to have. But the question for you is also, 'Do you want to know what it means to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus?' What if there is a completely different way of life that is awesome and meaningful, and draws you into real relationships and truth and God Himself? Somehow you think that stepping over limits is what brings you real life, whether it be drinking before you're 21 or drinking until you're drunk. But what if Jesus has something else for you that depends on you cultivating abilities with Him? It's like setting in shape, and feeling awesome that your body can do new things. Or it's like eating healthy, and feeling better, with more energy and less sickness. What if spiritual fitness is like that? I've found that it is, and so have many others.
- e. Why? Why is it so important to Jesus? Because of what might happen. A few years ago, at MIT, a frosh drowned in his own vomit at a frat party. I know a woman at BC who was raped when she was drunk. I know about men and women while they're drunk who make sexual advances on other people and it's just embarrassing for them. Racial incidents have happened here when people are drunk. It seems to me that the party scene is segregated, and it's that way for a reason. Can you imagine two parties right next door to each other having a racial incident? Back in CA, I helped pull apart two men in a bar fight. So this is not a joke. When people are drunk, their other

jealousies come out, and they are vulnerable. So what does Jesus want to do? Jesus would go to some of these parties. He did in the Gospels. He drank wine, but he would stay sober, enjoy people, and listen to them. He would care about people in critical moments. So I know of lots of people who love Jesus who go to parties while they listen for him, stay sober, enjoy people, and wind up getting into good conversations there. People open up, and it's a way to care about people when they are vulnerable. If some people think you're awkward at first, so what? Are you jealous of someone else who seems to fit in? Why are you not satisfied with being with Jesus, and loving others with him? You can be like Luna Lovegood in the Harry Potter story. She didn't totally fit in. But so what? She played a huge role, and she was vital. The real problem is not in how other people are treating you. The real problem is you being jealous of others. Jesus might also spend time with people in quieter settings that are also fun, and I admire people who do that as well. That's a reason why your Core leaders have organized the Super 88 run tomorrow night. We need both approaches because Jesus takes both approaches.

9. Remember God's Jealousy: God is jealous for you as He once said to Israel in Exodus 20:5. He is not jealous OF you, but FOR you. For each of you. You might wonder what the difference is. The difference is HUGE. Why would God be jealous OF you??? What do you have that He doesn't??? God is not jealous OF you.
 - a. Illus: He is jealous FOR you, in a similar way that I am jealous FOR my wife. I am not jealous OF her. But I believe I am right for her and she for me, so I am jealous FOR her and she is FOR me. Let me tell you a story, and then make the parallel. When my wife Ming and I were dating, she was in Boston and I was in the San Jose-San Francisco bay area. We had been introduced on a blind date and started dating long distance. Because of the three hour time difference, we had to figure out what worked for both of us. If we did a Friday or Saturday evening, when I got home from work, it would already be late her time, and she was tired. There was even one time she fell asleep on the phone with me while I was talking! So we decided that I would get up at 4:30am in the morning once a week on a weekday, so we could talk before we both went to work. I remember waking up and immediately jumping into the shower to wake up. That was a big sacrifice! But it was worth it because I was jealous FOR her. I wanted the little time that we had together to be the best we could have. I wanted to be totally present to her because that was the time she was most present to me. We would talk once on the weekends, and sometimes we would read a book to each other on the phone: C.S. Lewis' *Til We Have Faces*. It was a book that brought out some of our best personal sharing, because we were jealous FOR each other that we would know each other as much as we could even though long distance dating was hard. Tomorrow, we are going to a sushi place for dinner because someone gave us a gift certificate. I've been out four nights this week, and I get back late and we're both tired. I'm longing to spend good time with her.
 - b. God is jealous FOR you. He loves you. He doesn't want any distractions to come between you and Him. If you only knew how passionate He is for you, how jealous He is FOR you, that would help you to not be jealous OF other people. And He desires that you relate to Him as your primary relationship, live in His reality, share in His heart for others, and serve with Him in His world as He is reclaiming it from evil. He does not want you to just mimic other people's fallen desires and fallen jealousies.
 - c. God is so jealous FOR you and me that He helps us respond the way He wants us to respond. God became a human being in the person of Jesus to clean and heal and transform a human being of all jealousy ('what the Law was powerless to do, God did, by condemning sin in the flesh' of Jesus – Romans 8:3). Jesus as the Son of God perfected the human response to God the Father, so we can share in what Jesus has accomplished for us. Jesus lived his entire life not being jealous of anyone or anything, but responding in love to the Father's love for him. So God has not left us alone to wrestle with our endemic jealousy. He is not calling us to just 'realize an ideal' that He has in His mind. He gives us the new humanity of Jesus by the Spirit so we can participate in a human reality that He has already perfected in Jesus. God is jealous FOR us to be the best people we can be.
 - d. If that is a new thought for you, if this makes Christian faith seem alive and vibrant and challenging, it is! That is the truth. And if you are not a Christian but would like to talk more about your questions, come talk to me or any of the Core leaders here. Or if this sounds fresh and

different and you'd like to figure out how to get more involved with us on campus, come talk to us about that, too. We would love it if we could walk together with you on this spiritual journey.

10. New Motivations: God's Jealousy for Us

- a. You want the experience of your friend getting the A. You don't want the A yourself. You were content with an A- just before.
- b. You could be self-motivated.
- c. Love as a motivator, directed to a person, with Jesus' perspective on it (not just Kobe Bryant loving the game of basketball). Loving something more than people becomes cutthroat.
- d. Parenting: 'Hey, your cousin got an A, or got this award.'
- e. It's not something we fight directly, but indirectly, by knowing that God is jealous for us and wanting all of us.
- f. Leads to Jesus' baptism and wilderness temptation
- g. Relational identity in a positive sense, not a negative sense or in competition with another
- h. Not rationalizing our selfish desires: something Paul couldn't do because of the objectivity of the Law of God