



JEALOUSY: A CONSUMING PASSION

TIM CLINTON

(1 Peter 2:1)

Empty and exhausted in his marriage, the husband muttered, "Her jealousy is driving me crazy—I've had it." Before he sat down, his wife launched right into her tirade.

"She was tall, blond, and had a dazzling smile. And boy, was she a major flirt with my husband! I hated her right away. The moment my husband saw her, I knew he was attracted to her."

As the woman continued talking, it became obvious that she had a serious jealousy problem. Jealous of her sister, her friends, and her neighbors, now she was jealous of a woman she didn't even know. Wallowing in anger and self-pity, she had allowed her jealousy to consume her emotions and taint her marriage. Feeling smothered and wrongly accused, her husband was pulling away in frustration. She was becoming panicky, predicting that her husband would leave her or have an affair, but behaving in a way that increased the odds of her dark predictions coming true.

DEFINING JEALOUSY

Jealousy and envy are siblings, the perverse children of a toxic mix of anger, anxiety-based insecurity, and an obsessive habit of comparing oneself (usually poorly) with others. There is also a root of fear in most jealousy—the fear of losing the love or praise of one's object of love or affection.

Jealousy usually involves three people. The jealous person becomes fixated with a (usually misperceived) rival, who is viewed as competing for the attention of the beloved. While the rival is the object of sometimes intense hatred and opposition, jealous residues nearly always spill over and adversely affect relations with the

beloved. Many divorces, broken family relations, or failed business partnerships are the result of unremitting jealousy and suspicion.

The Bible says that destructive jealousy is like a torrent if it is not tamed and overcome (Prov. 27:4). Obsessive, fixated, consuming love that is "strong as death," easily produces a powerful jealousy that is "as cruel as the grave" (Song 8:6).

Yet jealousy is not always inherently bad. Scripture describes the Lord as "a jealous God" (Ex. 34:14), whose wrath is poured out on anything that usurps His name and authority. God is jealous for the church (2 Cor. 11:2), and Paul warns us not to provoke God's jealousy by turning away from Him to idols (1 Cor. 10:20-22).

OVERCOMING NEGATIVE JEALOUSY

There is a legitimate role for jealousy. Marriage, or any deep commitment to a relationship, will create a strong feeling of attachment. In this context, the absence of some jealousy can mean that one lacks care and commitment to the relationship. Sometimes, in fact, there is good reason to be jealous. A spouse's secretive behavior, or inordinate time spent outside the home, can raise legitimate concerns.

When carried to extremes, however, pathological jealousy can dominate a relationship. Some spouses, having faced abuse or abandonment in their childhood, bring this pathology into a marriage. Unresolved issues from one's past can be the impetus to a vicious cycle of dysfunctional

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jealousy. A chronically jealous partner, for example, will use self-pity, lies, threats, and other manipulations to control a relationship. When the other resists, the jealous person reacts by becoming more controlling. The other resists further, may confide in a friend or seek relief outside the marriage, and that further fuels the jealousy and worst-case predictions. The consuming cycle is gaining speed and heading to disaster.

So how can people overcome jealousy before it reaches that point of disaster?

➤ *By listening to others.* If good friends and loved ones comment on their jealousy, it's a good sign that a problem exists and should be faced.

➤ *By being honest with themselves.* Rather than react with "I'm not jealous," they must ask, "Do I try to control and manipulate my loved one? What or who is causing these jealous feelings? Am I pushing my loved ones away? Do I attempt to make my loved ones account for every minute, look, or thought?"

➤ *By spending time with God.* Those dealing with jealousy must soak each question above in prayer, asking God to reveal the truth and to give them the courage to act on it. They must ask God to transform their need for security into dependence on and confidence in Him.

➤ *By transforming the beloved in their mind.* Jealous people can use their anxious thoughts and suspicions as cues to stop their dark reactions, take a deep cleansing breath, pray, and get control. Then they should pray for the beloved, think about all the positives in the relationship, and consider what special things they could do, right then, to show love to him or her. A phone call, a touch, or a gift could do wonders—for both people.

People who have a jealous spouse may need to do some self-evaluation. They first

need to assess whether they are in fact doing something that provokes the jealousy. If so, then they must stop that activity for a time in order to show the spouse their commitment to the relationship. They may need to increase their loving actions toward their spouse. If they aren't provoking it, they must not cave in to manipulative behavior, or they will see more of it. They must talk honestly and civilly with their spouse about the problem. Counseling or mediation may be necessary if civil communication is not possible on this issue.

Jealousy can destroy even strong marriages. We need to guard our relationships so we will not be sowing seeds of jealousy.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of jealousy include:

- Genesis 4:3-8; 37:1-36
- 1 Samuel 18:8, 9
- Proverbs 6:34; 12:12; 14:30; 27:4
- Philippians 4:11-13
- 1 Timothy 6:6, 7

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on jealousy at Numbers 5:29 on page 176. See also the personality profile of Rachel and Leah on page 49.

*"All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man^a as the flower of
the grass.*

*The grass withers,
And its flower falls away,*

²⁵ *But the word of the LORD endures
forever."^a*

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

2 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,^a ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

THE CHOSEN STONE AND HIS CHOSEN PEOPLE

⁴Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, ⁵you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

*"Behold, I lay in Zion
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,*

And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."^a

⁷Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,^a

*"The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone,"^b*

*"A stone of stumbling
And a rock of offense."^a*

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

⁹But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

1:24 ^aNU-Text reads *all its glory*. **1:25** ^aIsaiah

40:6-8 **2:2** ^aNU-Text adds *up to salvation*.

2:6 ^aIsaiah 28:16 **2:7** ^aNU-Text reads *to those who disbelieve*. ^bPsalms 118:22 **2:8** ^aIsaiah 8:14

SOUL NOTE



Evils of Envy (2:1) God's people have been purchased at a great price—"the precious blood of Christ" (1:19). Believers should be so grateful to the One who called them to be holy that they desire to be that way in every aspect of their conduct (1:15). This means "laying aside all envy" because envy has no usefulness in God's kingdom. Envy causes hurt, dissension, and division. People who compare themselves to others will feel either superior or inferior. God wants us to stop comparing our looks, possessions, jobs, or abilities with those of others, and to focus on being His child and serving Him. **Topic: Jealousy**

SOUL NOTE



Drink Your Milk (2:2, 3) Believers should never stop growing up. Just as "newborn babes" constantly desire and need milk to help them grow, believers should always crave God's Word, for they constantly need its nourishment. Like milk, the essential food for babies, God's Word sustains believers' spiritual lives. If we desire to continue to grow closer to Christ, to mature in our faith, and to be powerful in our service, we need to nourish ourselves by studying God's Word every day.

Topic: Spiritual Growth

afterward make the woman drink the water.

²⁷When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her and become bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people. ²⁸But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

²⁹This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself, ³⁰or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. ³¹Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt."

THE LAW OF THE NAZIRITE

6 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, ³he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. ⁴All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin.

⁵All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. ⁶All the days that he separates himself to the

KEY PASSAGE



Jealousy

THE WEDGE OF JEALOUSY

(5:29)

The ancient Israelites had a complex ritual for dealing with jealousy. Their detailed process (Num. 5:11-31) recognized the destructive potential of a jealous husband or wife. The most important part was that they dealt with this issue before the Lord (Num. 5:30). Jealousy can destroy any relationship, and in a marriage, it can drive in a wedge of mistrust.

Protection from the wedge of jealousy begins with honesty. Each spouse should honestly consider his or her own tendency toward jealousy, answering the question, "What makes me jealous?" Each spouse should honestly tell his or her feelings. Then they can discuss what they could do for each other to alleviate those feelings. Complete honesty and trust will help to obliterate jealousy.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about jealousy on pages 1656, 1657. See also the personality profile of Rachel and Leah on page 49.

SOUL NOTE



Speaking the Truth (6:2-21) The Nazirite vow included separation from the world and consecration to the Lord. A person could take the vow for a certain amount of time in order to focus on God. Taking this vow was very serious, and the person was expected to follow all the procedures described here. How easily people "promise" to do something, but how hard it may be to keep that promise. Vows (promises) are very important—whether they are made to God or to other people. God does not take them lightly, and neither should we (Matt. 5:37). **Topic: Truth**

more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years.

THE CHILDREN OF JACOB

³¹When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. ³²So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben;^a for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."

³³Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.^a

³⁴She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him

three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.^a ³⁵And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah.^a Then she stopped bearing.

30 Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!"

²And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

29:32 ^aLiterally *See, a Son* **29:33** ^aLiterally *Heard* **29:34** ^aLiterally *Attached* **29:35** ^aLiterally *Praise*

PERSONALITY PROFILE



Jealousy

RACHEL AND LEAH: JEALOUS SISTERS

(GENESIS 30:8)

Probably no situation on earth could bring out the worst sibling rivalry between sisters than for them to be married to the same man. Both Rachel and Leah were Jacob's wives. They battled for his attention and for his affection. No weapon was considered off-limits.

Rachel originally captured Jacob's heart. He labored seven years for her father Laban in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage. Jacob didn't mind the wait because he was in love. The years "seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Gen. 29:20). But Laban turned out to be a treacherous father-in-law. On their wedding night, he substituted Leah for Rachel; and by the time Jacob woke up to the deception, he was already married. Laban completed his plan by offering to let Jacob still marry Rachel as long as he committed to another seven years of labor. Overnight, Jacob's home became a place of conflict.

Although Rachel had Jacob's heart, she was at first unable to have his children. Leah gave Jacob four sons. Rachel became so upset that she insisted that Jacob have children with her servant Bilhah. The two sons Jacob had with Bilhah were a costly and bitter victory for Rachel. The sisters bickered constantly.

Monogamy certainly would have been a better option for this family, but it probably would not have kept Rachel and Leah from jealous battles. Jacob could have practiced greater wisdom and compassion with his wives, but his love for Rachel blinded him to many mistakes. Leah never got over being the second-place wife. Rachel allowed her insecurities and envy toward her sister to disrupt the special place she had with Jacob.

Envy and jealousy grow as by-products of comparisons with others. Favorable comparisons tend to lead to pride and arrogance. Unfavorable ones lead to dejection and anger. Comparisons with others rarely promote goodness. In contrast, God calls us to find our worth in Him. The love God expressed to us in Christ releases us from the vicious cycle of jealousy.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about jealousy on pages 1656, 1657. See also the key passage note at Numbers 5:29 on page 176.

to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish.
²²Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them."

²³But Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.'"

²⁴Then the LORD said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break out against them." ²⁵So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

20 And God spoke all these words, saying:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

³ "You shall have no other gods before Me.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; ⁵you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

⁷ "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is

the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

¹² "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ "You shall not murder.

¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ "You shall not steal.

¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

THE PEOPLE AFRAID OF GOD'S PRESENCE

¹⁸Now all the people witnessed the thundrings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. ¹⁹Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die."

²⁰And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." ²¹So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.

THE LAW OF THE ALTAR

²²Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'You have



SOUL NOTE

His Alone (20:5) God gets jealous? Yes, but this is a different kind of jealousy than what we experience. God's jealousy is perfect, for He wants us to be exclusively His. When people break this commandment—when they turn to other gods—God wants them back. He doesn't want to share our affections with anyone or anything else. How fortunate for us that He is a jealous God, showing mercy to the multitudes of those who love and obey Him. **Topic: Jealousy**

to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ²Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. ³Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.

⁵So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and he behaved wisely. And Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. ⁶Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. ⁷So the women sang as they danced, and said:

"Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands."

Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed *only* thousands. Now *what* more can he have but the kingdom?" ⁹So Saul loved David from that day forward.

¹⁰And it happened on the next day that the distressing spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied inside the house. So David played *music* with his hand, as at other times; but *there was* a spear in Saul's hand. ¹¹And Saul cast the spear, for he said, "I will pin David to the wall!" But David escaped his presence twice.

¹²Now Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, but had departed from Saul. ¹³Therefore Saul removed him from his presence, and made him his captain over a

thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. ¹⁴And David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the LORD was with him. ¹⁵Therefore, when Saul saw that he behaved very wisely, he was afraid of him. ¹⁶But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.

DAVID MARRIES MICHAL

¹⁷Then Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife. Only be valiant for me, and fight the LORD's battles." For Saul thought, "Let my hand not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him."

¹⁸So David said to Saul, "Who *am* I, and what is my life or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" ¹⁹But it happened at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife.

²⁰Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. ²¹So Saul said, "I will give her to him, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall be my son-in-law today."

²²And Saul commanded his servants, "Communicate with David secretly, and say, 'Look, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now therefore, become the king's son-in-law.'"

²³So Saul's servants spoke those words in the hearing of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a light *thing* to be a king's son-in-law, seeing I *am* a poor and lightly esteemed man?" ²⁴And the servants of Saul told him, saying, "In this manner David spoke."

²⁵Then Saul said, "Thus you shall say to David: 'The king does not desire any dowry but one hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to

SOUL NOTE



Green with Envy (18:8) Saul became jealous of David's victory over Goliath and the national attention that it received. The young warrior had upstaged the king. Saul's jealousy led to anger, resentment, fear, and attempted murder (18:11). Like a seething cauldron ready to tip at any moment, uncontrolled jealousy can lead to destruction. We must take our jealousy to God, asking Him to help us appreciate others' talents while showing us how best to use our own. **Topic: Jealousy**

to Christ. ³But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity^a that is in Christ. ⁴For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!

PAUL AND FALSE APOSTLES

⁵For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles. ⁶Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested^a among you in all things.

⁷Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? ⁸I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. ⁹And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. ¹⁰As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. ¹¹Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!

¹²But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. ¹³For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

RELUCTANT BOASTING

¹⁶I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. ¹⁷What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. ¹⁸Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. ¹⁹For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! ²⁰For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. ²¹To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. ²³Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; ²⁷in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—²⁸besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

11:3 ^aNU-Text adds *and purity*. 11:6 ^aNU-Text omits *been*.

SOUL NOTE



Jealous Jabs (11:1–3) The word “jealous” can be used positively or negatively. Paul said that he was “jealous for” the Corinthian believers “with godly jealousy.” He had brought them the gospel message, and they had received it. Paul feared, however, that these young believers would be enticed away from Christ. Paul’s

jealousy was not for his own reputation but for the Corinthians’ eternal safety. Human jealousy, however, often has a less than noble focus—such as another’s looks, wealth, popularity, or power—and it is harmful to all involved. Believers must be careful not to allow jealousy over petty issues to harm them or others. **Topic: Jealousy**