

# The Little Foxes

## Lesson 6 - The Little Fox Of Envy

**Song of Solomon 2:15 KJV** Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines *have* tender grapes.

**James 3:14-16 KJV** But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. **[15]** This wisdom descendeth not from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, devilish. **[16]** For where envying and strife *is*, there *is* confusion and every evil work.

### I. INTRODUCTION—ENVY IS DESTRUCTIVE

Several years ago, because of a class that I was taking, I was encouraged to read a biography about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. He is the famous classical music composer and I actually had very little interest in him until I started reading his biography by Maynard Solomon. As I labored through the first chapter or so, I suddenly was swept into a very compelling but dark story of this composer. He was a young musical prodigy who owed much of his development to the iron will and discipline of his father, Leopold.

It was not very long in his young life that he was invited to play for the emperor and his court. As he played through his set of music, the emperor and his attendants were shocked at the skill that this young man displayed. However, there was another musical genius who heard the composition on that fateful day and it would forever ruin his life. Antonio Salieri was a disciplined and noted classical composer and musician himself who felt that God had called him into the field of music. On that day in the emperor's music theatre, Salieri realized that what he had pursued and disciplined his whole life had slipped from his grasp and had been given to this young Mozart. It was as if Salieri, who had pursued God with everything he had in the world of classical music, lost the gift of music to this young intruder Mozart.

Wolfgang Mozart was a very talented young prodigy that composed a minuet and trio for the piano when he was six years old. This was followed by seventeen operas, forty-one symphonies, twenty-one piano concertos, and

multiple piano sonatas. His ranging musical talent also branched into musical scores and pieces for the organ, clarinet, and other instruments. What is ironic about it all are his crude habits and reproachful behavior. Mozart was given to great pompousness and arrogance. He did not have control of his moods and often expressed them in extreme outbursts of rage, anger, and violence. He was prone to get drunk and pursue immoral relationships. He was also subject to great irreverence toward things that were in authority or to be held in godly honor. Through all of this, it appears that Mozart did not have any spiritual leanings whatsoever.

As a great contrast, Antonio Salieri, in his early days pursued the path of piety and moral cleanliness; a path that was directly opposite of Mozart. He sought God for guidance and opportunities that would honor Him. Mozart apparently never sought God for anything and seemingly was quite ungrateful for his personal gifting in the field of music. This literally drove Salieri to his own destruction. Salieri became envious of Mozart and worked night and day to discredit and tear down all that he did. Before long, Salieri's soul had become so hardened to God, that he allowed this envious spirit to drive him toward hatred.

### **A. Quotes on Envy**

**Erwin Lutzer**—Envy is rebellion against God's leading in the lives of his children. It's saying that God has no right to bless someone else more than you.

**J. I. Packer**—Envy is one of the most cancerous, soul-destroying vices there is. . . It is terribly potent, for it feeds and is fed by pride, the taproot of our fallen nature.

**Unknown**—Criticism is often nothing more than low-grade envy.

**Lloyd John Ogilvie**—One of the major causes of stress is combative competition—more accurately envy. . . it grows in the soul-soil of comparisons and blossoms in noxious thorns of desire for what others have or achieve.

**Leslie Flynn**—The envious man feels other's fortunes are his misfortunes; their profit, his loss; their blessing, his bane; their health, his illness; their promotion, his demotion; their success, his failure.

**John Dryden**—Jealousy, the jaundice of the soul.

**Clarence Macartney**—Beware of envy! You are not too refined, too educated, too sensible, and too Christian to avoid destruction. The flame is there in your heart, and unexpected breezes of a tempting occasion may break forth in devastation that now would appall you.

**Clarence Macartney**—Envy is the spur with which the devil will ride the noblest tempers.

### **B. Biblical References Concerning Envy**

The Bible has much to say about envy also. Here are a few passages concerning it:

**Job 5:2 KJV** For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.

**Psalms 37:1 KJV** *A Psalm of David.* Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

**Proverbs 24:19 KJV** Fret not thyself because of evil *men*, neither be thou envious at the wicked;

**Psalms 73:3 KJV** For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

**Psalms 73:17-20 KJV** Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* understood I their end. **[18]** Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. **[19]** How are they *brought* into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. **[20]** As a dream when *one* awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

**Proverbs 3:31 KJV** Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.

**Proverbs 14:30 KJV** A sound heart *is* the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.

**Proverbs 24:1 KJV** Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.

**Proverbs 27:4 KJV** Wrath *is* cruel, and anger *is* outrageous; but who *is* able to stand before envy?

**Ecclesiastes 4:4 KJV** Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit.

**Romans 1:29 KJV** Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

**Romans 13:13 KJV** Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

**1 Corinthians 3:3 KJV** For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

**Galatians 5:19-21 KJV** Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, [20] Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,

[21] Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Galatians 5:26 KJV** Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Envy is the painful and oftentimes resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by someone else. Sometimes we want that same advantage, leading to the further sin of covetousness. And sometimes we just resent the other person having something we don't have. But we don't just envy people in general. Usually, there are two conditions that tempt us to envy. First, we tend to envy those with whom we most closely identify. Second, we tend to envy in them the areas we value the most. (From *Respectable Sins*, Jerry Bridges, p. 149.)

**Instances of Envy:** Cain, of Abel—Gen. 4:4-8; Sarah, of Hagar—Gen 16:5-6; Gen 21:9-10; Philistines, of Isaac—Gen 26:14; Rachel, of Leah—Gen 30:1; Leah, of Rachel—Gen 30:15; Laban's sons, of Jacob—Gen 31:1; Joseph's brethren, of Joseph—Gen 37:4-11; 37:19-20; Act 7:9; Joshua, of Eldad and Medad—Num 11:28-30; Miriam and Aaron, of Moses—Num 12:1-10; Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, of Moses—Num 16:3; Psalm 106:16-18; Saul, of David—1Sam 18:8-9; 18:29; 20:31; Haman, of Mordecai—Esther 5:13; The princes of Babylon, of Daniel—Dan 6:4; Priests, of Jesus—Matt 27:18; Mark 15:10; John 11:47; Jews, of Paul and Barnabas—Acts 13:45; 17:5. (From *Nave's Topical Bible*.)

## **II. THE LITTLE FOX OF ENVY**

We now come to another little fox that might be scoffed at along with some of the others. The little fox of envy can be very destructive for our souls if it is allowed to run free in our lives. Whether we are honest enough to admit it or we are careful enough to cover it, envy will at some point work to wreck your soul. Always remember this: the devil does not care what trap he uses to catch men, just so he finally makes the capture is all that he is interested in.

### **A. Envy Defined**

Envy is a sin by which we grieve at the good of another whether it is hurtful to us or not. Envy causes men to grieve at the good and prosperity of others without any efforts at attaining the good and prosperous. Envy is an expression of fleshly carnality and we must understand that we are naturally bent toward this activity (James 4:5). It is just as natural for a carnal man to envy as it is for men to breathe and yet it is very unhelpful in our relationship with God.

Envy works relentlessly to level the playing field. It is self-seeking because it wants self to emerge as number one. Envy causes men to work within their own class. Authors aren't envious of physicians only other authors. Mothers do not envy CEO's of major corporations they envy other mothers whose children seem better. Pastors are not envious of college presidents but of other pastors who seem to have larger churches and more high-profile ministries.

## B. The Danger of Envy

Envy can even invert itself and cause those who are godly to become perplexed with those who are wicked. Inverted envy causes us to become troubled at their exaltation, seeming blessings, and advantages that they may

enjoy in life. It really can gather steam when the spirit of envy is mixed with righteous indignation. This is where we must be spiritually perceptive as to what the devil may be endeavoring to do our soul.

According to an ancient Greek legend, a certain athlete ran well but placed second in the race. The winner was encompassed with praise, and eventually a statue was erected in his honor. He resented the winner, and he could think of little else. Eventually he decided he would destroy the statue.

Night after night, he went to the statue under the cover of darkness, chiseling away at the foundation. But one night as he chiseled away in violent anger, he went too far. The heavy marble statue teetered on its base and crashed down on the disgruntled athlete. He died beneath the weight of the marble replica of the man he had grown to hate. His own envy destroyed him.

*(Preacher's Sourcebook of Creative Illustrations, Robert J. Morgan, p. 271.)*

The Bible mentions that we can pour out our complaint *to* God (1 Sam. 1:16; Psalm 12:1; 55:2; 102:1; 142:2). He is well able to handle the stumbling steps of every saint of God in this avenue of life and if you haven't been there yet, you will make it at some point. But there is a huge difference in complaining *to* God and complaining *about* God. This is where the devil wants to take envy and invert or twist it even further to our demise. He desires that we envy the wicked and then complain *about* God. It leads our heart becoming atheistic in thinking that God is not really for us or does He desire to work out what is best for us. Suddenly this atheism turns into a sense that we may dislike God or become suspicious of His ways. We consider that the wicked have a better lot in life and have a world of better circumstances than what is currently our own present state.

Another difficulty with inverted envy is that the devil longs for us to take launch rebellious attacks on the wicked. He greatly desires for the cause of Christ and the mission of the church to be compromised by these foolish actions.

There are several dangers of envy. **First**, envy opens us up to a critical spirit. It will lead to overwhelming feelings of cynicism and will cause us to be very negative in our mindset. **Secondly**, it will lead to a divided mind. If you are envious, it will cause you to be distracted and instead of doing the will of God, you soon find all sorts of substitutes to spend your time on. It will cause a loss of focus on the principles of the Word of God. **Thirdly**, it leads to anger, bitterness, and resentfulness. Over the course of time we are unable to hide those raw emotions and they betray us. Anger, bitterness, and resentfulness are written on our faces. Our actions display a certain amount of tenseness. The **fourth** danger is a sense of insecurity that is marked by a constant state of wondering if we are doing the right thing. The **fifth** danger of envy is a susceptibility to depression. Depression is often ushered in when sin is deliberately allowed to come into our lives. The **sixth** danger of envy is a broken fellowship with God. Envy is self-centered and anytime that we become self-centered we lose the ability to be God-centered. It blocks our ability to pray with a heart-felt devotion. Because of the isolation that takes place with God, His Word no longer can touch us. The **seventh** danger of envy is that it can lead to physical sickness. All of the troubled emotions caused by envy; bitterness, resentment, hostility, anger, and jealousy can be the precursors to physical disease.

***Envy Went to Church—Elva McAllaster***

*Envy went to church this morning,  
Being Legion, he sat in every other pew.  
Envy fingered wool and silk fabrics,  
Hung price tags on suits and neckties.  
Envy paced the parking lot  
Scrutinizing chrome and paint.  
Envy marched to the chancel with the choir  
During the processional. . .  
Envy prodded plain-Jane wives  
And bright wives married to milquetoast dullards,  
Any kind men married to knife-tongued shrews,  
Envy thumped at the widows and widowers,  
Jabbed and kicked college girls without escorts,  
Lighted invisible fires inside khaki jackets.  
Envy conferred often this morning  
With all of his brothers;  
He liked his Sunday scores today  
But not enough:  
Some of his intended clients  
Had sipped an antidote marked Grace,  
And wore a holy flower named Love.*

**C. The Actions of Envy**

Envy causes us to attempt hurt others with our words and our associations by excluding them from our own world. Envy causes men to criticize the good

that is in others and turn it into hatred and persecution. What the envious man does not realize is that it becomes so harmful to his spirit that he ends up with a spiritual stench about him. The Proverbs indicate that envy is 'the rottenness of the bones' (Prov. 14:30).

The spirit of envy opens up other spiritual defects that will side-track our effectiveness for God. Envy leads to jealousy, competitiveness, and manipulation. The actions of envy can be traced out in our lives in the following ways:

- We may envy the talents and expertise of someone in our same field of work.
- We rarely envy those who are above us but only those that we feel equal to.
- We are tempted to envy others when there are enough things alike that the differences tend to hit us in the face.
- We may envy other parents who have children who are better students, more talented, and more sociable.
- We can envy friends who have a nicer home or drive a more expensive car.
- We have a temptation to envy those who have better circumstances than we may have.
- We can envy someone who recently received a promotion that we thought we should have gotten.
- It causes us to cast doubt on the accomplishments of others.
- It causes us to ridicule and reject those who are more disciplined, successful, and gifted than we are.
- It causes us to avoid events that honor those that we envy.
- It causes us to engage in gossip and backbiting to bring down the person we perceive as higher on the rungs of the ladder than we are.
- It builds a wall between us and others because we choose to distance ourselves from those who have what we want.
- Envy causes us to destroy the career, damage prized possessions or relationships, or take actions to tarnish the reputation of those we envy.

In the end, what is destroyed is our own sense of joy, contentment, and peace. Envy will wipe out any motivation you have to achieve. Envy will cause you to begin to just go through the motions of the routine and over time, your



soul becomes deadened because of a loss of hope. It leads to great feelings of inferiority.

*Envy ultimately is a denial that God is good!*

### **III. CONCLUSION—THE REMEDY FOR ENVY**

While the sin of envy paints a very grim picture that we all are susceptible to, it is also important to understand that there is a remedy for this kind of behavior. You may ask how you can deal with envy effectively in your life. I believe that God allows us to walk through these kinds of situations to create a sense of sanctification in us. This is the walk of holiness being brought out in our lives. God is interested in my holiness and not necessarily in my happiness. There are some practical things to do to take care of envy.

#### **A. Get Honest!**

It is very helpful when confronted by the Word of God that we immediately get honest about our life. We can certainly pass all of this off and say, “It doesn’t affect me!” or “He is reading somebody else’s mail!” However, we can be certain that somewhere this Bible study created a little bit of discomfort in our own spirit because there are things that we all have a tendency to be envious of. Honesty with the issue means that you confess it in prayer and seek forgiveness through repentance.

#### **B. See It As It Really Is**

The sin of envy is in a direct conflict with the will of God. As long as we rationalize and keep it hidden by some psychological mind trickery we will not see it as sinful behavior that is in opposition with the will and purpose of God. If there is a chance that you might be envious of another person then ask the Lord to help you to encourage, compliment, or befriend that person. Understand that this has to be done in humble sincerity and it may take several prayer meetings before you can really do this.

Just as we have to see it as a conflict with God, we also have to see what is motivating the envy. The person we are envious of is not the problem. The

problem is the devil that will do his best to entrap and enslave you. Knowing this ought to make you hate the devil and his ways even more than before. Godly repentance and submission to God work against the traps the devil has carefully laid for us.

### **C. Culture a Sense of Gratitude**

If you can ever come to the point of thanking God for what he has done in our lives, which will go a long way toward helping you to overcome this deadly sin of envy. Gratitude is based on delighting yourself in the Lord (Psalm 37:4). As you delight yourself in the Lord, he will give you the desires of your heart. This is not meant to be understood as a part of the health, wealth, and prosperity message but rather as helping you to understand that when we are the most satisfied in God, contentment is ushered in.

### **D. Look Closer**

Through prayer, we should ask God to really help us to see the person that we are envious of. You will soon understand that they have their own cross to bear. If God could give us some insight into the heart of that person, I have a feeling that our own envious passions would greatly subside. There is really no way to know about the inside of another's heart but they could be dealing with a very hurtful situation from the past that is motivating their actions. Instead of continuing to try to push to the front, it is important for us to rest in the presence of the Lord.

In our effort to look closer, I have a feeling that God will soon bring some insight and revelation to your own heart. Self-discovery is one of the greatest ways that spiritual maturity takes place in our lives. Self-discovery is directly related to us laying down our own will and desires of what we want and allowing God to work through us.

In looking closer, it very well could be that some of our own actions have caused the person we are envious of to act the way they are acting. Joseph enjoyed showing his coat to his brothers because it gave him power over them. He was a bit naïve to think about his actions. Actually they were going to enrage his brothers to the point that they were going to consider killing him.