

REDUCING RIVALRY IN RELATIONSHIPS

I Corinthians 13:4

In 1992, publishing history was made in the unauthorized biography of Nancy Reagan. It sold 950,000 copies in the first week. That's a record. Never had a book sold that many copies in its first week. Kittie Kelly, the author, dug up all the dirt and scandal she could find to discredit the First Lady. I'm not here to argue how much of it was accurate or not -- I frankly don't care. What interests me is why would almost a million people buy a book that's full of bad news about somebody? Why do we enjoy reading that kind of stuff? What is it in human nature that makes us feel better when we can bring people who are well known down? What is it in human nature that we feel better about ourselves when other people's faults, foibles, and goofs are shown?

It's the word envy. Envy provides the mud that failures throw at success. You can bet on it that if you make your mark in the world somebody is going to follow you around with an eraser, trying to erase it.

I also read a story not so long ago about a woman whose 2nd grader had collected a fair amount of money from the "tooth fairy." Every time her daughter Rachel lost a tooth, they'd put it in a small envelope and put it under her daughter's pillow, and behold, in the morning, the tooth was gone and in its place was \$2. That was just great. Two dollars is a lot of money for a 2nd grader. At least it was until, one day Rachel visited a friend of hers. Her friend told her how she had put her tooth under her pillow and found \$5 the next morning. Rachel then asked her friend's mother, 'Mrs. Kraft, would you mind doing me a big favor? Would you please call my mom and tell her which tooth fairy you use?"'

This little girl had lost her contentedness. Why? Because she had fallen prey to one of the most devious thieves known to man. A thief that robs people of their joy and satisfaction in life than many things I know of. Again, this thief is Envy.

We're in a series on Building Great Relationships, I Corinthians 13. In verse 4 it says, "*Love does not envy.*" What is envy? In Tagalog, that's inggit.

Now, in English, envy is sometimes synonymous with jealousy. Both mean, "I want what you have." But, envy goes farther than jealousy because it says, "I not only want what you have, but I want you to lose what you've got. I wish you didn't have it." Envy says, "Not only do I want my grass to be greener, but I want yours to turn brown."

Envy can show up in any kind of relationship. In the family for example. The Bible is full of examples of sibling rivalry. Jacob and Essau, Cain and Abel, Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers. There is certainly envy in the family. How about at work? Professional jealousy, salesman envy another salesman, doctors envy other doctors, secretaries envy other secretaries. There's a lot of envy going on at work. In school? Tomorrow morning there will be hundreds of students comparing clothes, boyfriends, cars, grades, athletic ability, and so forth.

We live in a very competitive world. We all are touched by envy. The whole advertising business is built on creating envy. "If you buy our product you will be the envy of everybody else."

This morning, I want us to look at the results of envy -- how it ruins relationships -- and then spend most of our time on how to reduce, or better yet, eliminate it in our lives.

1. HOW ENVY RUINS RELATIONSHIPS

The Bible says there are two things envy does in relationships:

A. It kindles resentment

Titus 3:5 "*Our lives were full of resentment and envy. We hated others and they hated us.*" Envy is the shortest road to resentment. It always, always causes bitterness. We resent other people because we're envious of their success. "I should have gotten the promotion, not that guy!" We resent other people's wealth. "Who do they think they are to live in a house like that? I wish I had it." We envy other people's achievement, their beauty. You can even envy other people's spirituality. "How come her husband is more spiritually committed than mine? That's not fair!" That's envy. And it's resentment. James 3:16 "For where you find envy you find every evil practice." He says if you're green with envy, you're going to be ripe for trouble. Envy leads to other sins. It can lead to gossip, stealing, adultery, murder. Joseph's brothers envied him and they sold him into slavery. When Saul envied David, he tried to kill him. The FBI says that one third of all known murders occur because of suspected infidelity.

Envy kindles resentment. It also

B. It makes me miserable.

If you've ever been envious you know this by experience. Proverbs 14:30 "*A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones!*" Envy is to your soul what cancer is to your body. It will eat you alive if you don't watch out. It will torment you and eventually consume you. When you become envious it feeds on resentment. It gets bigger and bigger until soon you're obsessed with your competition. You get so obsessed you get depressed. Remember in Amadeus the guy that got so envious of Mozart (Mo-tsart)? He finally went crazy! That's what envy can do to you. It eats you up. It makes you miserable. It makes you unhappy. Your envy lasts far longer than the happiness of the person you're envying.

You cannot be envious and happy at the same time. One of the great secrets of happiness in your life is learning how to eliminate envy in your life.

How do you eliminate envy then, from your life? Let me give you five ways.

2. FIVE WAYS TO OVERCOME ENVY TO BUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIPS:

A. Resist comparing myself to others.

All envy is started by comparing ourselves. If you don't do that you're not going to envy. 2 Cor. 10:12 "*We do not dare classify or compare ourselves. It is not wise.*" God says it's stupid to compare yourself to others. Just dumb! We're all different. Comparing is the root of envy.

This is prevalent among kids. Like these three boys who were talking together about what their fathers did for a living. Boy 1 began by saying that his dad wrote a few words on a piece of paper, sent them away and received \$100 for them and they called it a poem. Boy 2, not to be outdone said that his dad wrote a few pages of words, sent them away and received \$1000 and they called it a short story. Boy 3 was full of himself and said that his dad wrote several pages of double-spaced, 14-pt font words, read them out on Sunday morning, called it a sermon and it took 4 people to go round and collect all the money.

Not only children get involved in a game of one-upmanship. Adults still do that all the time. We just do it in more subtle ways. Most of the time we don't verbalize it. "My car is better than your car. ... My house is bigger than your house.... I get paid more than you do...My wife is more beautiful than your wife.... My kid's number one at school." How about "My son was Inmate of the Month in Prison."

Don't compare. God says it's not right. Galatians 6:4 "*Let everyone be sure to do his very best, for then he will have the personal satisfaction of work done well and won't need to compare himself with someone else.*" (Living Bible) You don't need to compare yourself with other people. Do your best. That's where satisfaction comes from. Never measure your worth by anybody else.

Envy is a choice. Anytime you're envious, you're choosing to be envious. It's making you miserable but it's your choice, though.

You're choosing to compare and God says, don't do it! Whenever I start to get envious I need to stop and ask myself the tough questions like, "What am I telling myself at this moment? What am I telling myself about the situation that really isn't true? That my work is based on how I'm compared to somebody else?" So, don't compare. Then,

2. Recognize my uniqueness.

Envy is an expression of inferiority. When I'm insecure I get envious. It's always caused by low self-esteem. Always. That's the real problem. When I have low self-esteem I feel threatened -- by people who are more beautiful, better dressed, have more status, more education, more charisma, more likes on Facebook. BTW, Facebook exposes this envious attitude within us. Do you notice that? A study says that some people's self-esteem gets affected by the number of likes they get or the number of likes they see that other people get. It depresses them. Folks, recognize your uniqueness. Don't be envious.

When a person has low self-esteem -- a child, a spouse, an employee, whoever -- no matter how much love or how much attention you give them it's never enough. Because the moment you change your focus off of them they get envious. And they start envying what your focus is on. That's not your problem, it's their problem. Nobody should be the focus of another person all the time. That's insecurity. If I can deal with that insecurity I can learn to overcome envy and I'm not threatened by other people.

How do I deal with that insecurity?

The Bible says see yourself as God does. Psalm 139:13 "*You, God, created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb.*" God says I put you together; you have designer genes. There is nobody like you in the whole world. There's nobody that will ever be like you. So why compare yourself to somebody else? There will never be anybody to compare yourself with. You're different.

You're unique. When you get to heaven God is not going to say, "Why weren't you more like Moses?" or "Why weren't you more like Billy Graham?" God is going to say, "Why weren't you more like you? I made you to be you. If you don't be you, who's going to be you?" Quit copying somebody else. Quit imitating somebody else's lifestyle. Quit trying to be somebody you're not. God made you to be who you're made to be. That's where satisfaction comes in life. Where meaning, purpose, fulfillment comes.

Recognize your uniqueness. God says, "Not only did I make you unique, I've got a custom lifestyle for you." Psalm 139:15 "*You saw me before I was born. You scheduled every day of my life before I began to breathe.*" God says He scheduled your life even before you were born.

This does not say that everything that happens in your life is God's will. It's not. We're supposed to pray, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" We wouldn't need to pray that if it was always done. It does not say that everything that happens in your life is good. I could go out and kill myself and that wouldn't be good or God's will. But God manages to take everything, all of it, even the bad in my life -- put it all together and bring good out of it. That's what Romans 8:28 says, "*All things work together for good.*" It doesn't say all things are good but that all things work together for good. God has a plan.

If God has a plan and if I'm unique what that means is that everyone is a "10" in some area. On a scale of 1 to 10 you're a 10 in some area. You're a 10 in an area that nobody else in the world is a 10 at. Because of your makeup, your genes, your background, your temperament, your education, your experiences. You're good at a few things, you're bad at most things -- so am I. It doesn't matter what you're bad at. What counts is what God made me to be good at.

Recognize your uniqueness. You don't need to envy anybody. You just need to become all that God meant for you to be in the first place.

3. Rejoice in what I have

In order to overcome envy in relationships, I need to rejoice in what I have. Eccl. 6:9 "*It's better to be satisfied with what you have than always be wanting something else.*" Instead of focusing on what I don't have, I should be grateful for what I do have. In many parts of this country including Northern Virginia the desire to acquire is out of control. People think, "I've got this but if I get more I'll be even more happy." That's not true. You can't purchase happiness. How much is enough? At what point do I stop spending so much on myself and start using what I've got to help other people? I need to ask myself tough questions like "Will moving from a \$100,000 home to a \$200,000 home double my happiness?" No. I don't think God cares at all how much your house cost. What He wants to know is about your motive. If you're doing it so you'll be the envy of other people, you're off base. "I'm getting this house so people will envy me" or "I think it's going to make me more happy". It won't! It may thrill you but it won't bring you more happiness. You can buy thrills but you can't buy happiness. You can buy thrills but thrills don't last. They wear off. Do you know why we get bored with our homes? Because things don't change and people do. God made us to be changing and we get bored with things that don't change. Things never change. They just stay that way and we have to keep reinventing. That's why the thrill doesn't last forever. I need to rejoice in what I have. What do you call this attitude of rejoicing in what you have? Contentment.

Philippians 4:11 says, "*Not that I speak in regard to me, for I have learned that in whatever state I am, to be content.*" You see, that's one way to overcome envy. Learning in whatever state I am in, to be content. The Apostle Paul says that learning to be content with what I have is one good way to eliminate envy. The solution to envy is not getting more. The solution to the emptiness and materialism in our life is not getting the things that we long for.

That would just make us more miserable. The solution is contentment. Because when I am content, I don't feel the pressure to buy the things that I don't have. I don't feel the pressure to keep up with the neighbor and have all the things that they have. I'm not pressured to live beyond my means, but I am content with who I am and with what God has blessed me with.

I must

4. Respond to others in love

Why? Because "Love does not envy." I Corinthians 13:4. Matthew 22:39 "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Why does he say love is an antidote to envy? Love is happy when other people are blessed. Love wants the highest good for other people. Love gets excited when other people succeed. Love enjoys seeing other people be blessed. It's the exact opposite of envy. Romans 12:15 "*Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.*" This verse is the exact opposite of envy. Envy rejoices when other people have a bad time and weeps when other people are blessed. God says that's not what you do. You "*Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.*" That's love. That's how you build a relationship.

Do you ever have a hard time handling the success of other people? Yes, you do. We all do from time to time. "Why did they get a promotion when I didn't? ... How come they're having a wedding and I'm still single? ... They're getting to go to Europe; we're having to pay for braces...They're getting more likes than I do."

So, envy prevents you from enjoying what other people are doing. Envy is resenting God's goodness to other people. It's saying, "I resent it, God, that You were good to those people." It's based on a misbelief that says, "Your success means my failure." That's not true. "Your pleasure means my pain." That's not true. God has enough goodness for everybody. He has no shortage. He can be good to everybody else and you.

When God is good to somebody else it does not mean He's not going to be good to you. He's got more than enough goodness for all of us.

Finally,

5. You refocus on pleasing God.

This is the ultimate antidote to overcoming envy. Colossians 3:2 "*Set your mind on things above not on earthly things.*" Look at life from God's viewpoint. Recognize that material things are all temporary; they're not going to last. Refocus on things that are going to matter, that are going to last for eternity, things that are going to count -- like loving, knowing and serving God. When I focus on making God number one in my life, focus on realizing that He made me unique and He has a plan for me, then competition becomes irrelevant. Because I'm not competing with anybody else. I'm unique. So are you.

If you've ever said, "I've just got to have `this' in order to be happy, to survive". In the Bible, that's called idolatry. It's breaking the first commandment which says, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" Anything that you desperately want to have in order to live is your god. The fact is, there is only one thing that you absolutely have to have to make it in life and eternity. You absolutely have to have a relationship to Jesus Christ. Everything else is secondary. If anything takes the place of that as the ultimate goal and objective in life you're setting yourself up for envy because it can be taken away from you. The only thing that can never be taken away from you is your relationship to God through Jesus Christ, who died for you on the cross, carrying your sins, so that you'll find forgiveness for all the sins you've committed.

The antidote is to be so focused on God's plan for your life that you can't be bothered with envying what other people are doing. You're focusing on pleasing God.

Proverbs 23:17 "Don't be envious of sinful people. Let reverence for the Lord be the concern for your life. If it is, you have a bright future."

Folks, building great relationships takes time and effort. Envy is one of those things that can kill any relationship and prevent us from developing meaningful relationships. But I just hope that we'll keep these five things in mind as we try to build relationships: Resist comparing myself to others. Recognize my uniqueness. Rejoice in what I have. Respond to others in love. Refocus on pleasing God.