



Envy – Part 3

God's Gracious Solutions

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Well, he was in his prime just about 100 years ago. He was the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. His name was Jack Dempsey and he was feared and revered and a big celebrity in the 1920s. He was everywhere, on the cover of magazines. And he was famous for not only beating people up, but for his one-line strategy that became often repeated throughout the culture. And that is that the best defense is a good offense. The best defense is a good offense. See when Jack Dempsey stepped into the ring, he didn't just want to avoid getting hit. Right? He didn't just want to not be knocked out. He wanted to knock the opponent out. He wanted to neutralize the threat by making sure that he was throwing the punches and landing them. And he knew that he could get through the match if he could just step up his offense. He faced many formidable foes, but they were summarily knocked out because he was an aggressive and very tough fighter who took the initiative to launch a good offense whenever he could.

We've been identifying a formidable foe in the Christian life, and we've spent two weeks already in trying to identify the problem of envy. And it's a sin that we've tried to say is much more destructive and corrosive in your life than you probably imagine. It's the kind of sin that is insidious. It creeps into your life and it's rarely identified. And I know that, as I've said, because I very rarely hear anyone confess the sin of envy and yet envy is a huge sin. It's a sin that is going to mess up your relationships in the lesser evil expressions. It might surface as gossip or criticism or bitterness. But of course, in Scripture we see it leading all the way to murder and even conspiracy to commit murder in the death of Christ himself.

Speaking of Christ, he looked at the Pharisees and he said they've got a lot of this, Pilate could even recognize it, that they were filled with envy over Christ. But Jesus looked at them and he said watch out for these Pharisees because they look like they're all buttoned-up on the outside. Much like going to church this morning. People look like they're godly. They're carrying their Bibles in. They greet each other kindly, the parking lots are not filled with vulgarity. It seems like a lot of respectable Christians marching into church. And yet Jesus said, you know, the exterior really belies the interior, because on the inside, they're a mess.

We need to identify the foe of envy and not only say, well, do we know what it is, but we need to say, can we launch a counterattack? Can we find God's solution for it? And I don't want to over promise in this sermon, but I really mean that if you get today's sermon, if you really understand what we're going to study this morning from God's word, you can deal a knockout blow to this sin and all the residual effects of it. The hundreds of lesser evils that probably exist right now in your life because of this core sin, this root sin, in what church historians like to talk about as one of the seven deadly sins, the sin of envy.

To figure that out, we need to look at the main ingredient. And the main ingredient is something that is so important that when God first chose to reveal himself in writing and I do mean that, the first time he chose to reveal himself in writing was on two tablets and he put

Ten Commandments. I'd like you to go to that passage right now, you Sunday school grads know where it's found. So I don't even need to give you the reference. Exodus Chapter 20. That's for the new people, not for you, but for the visitor. Exodus Chapter 20. And I want you to see that he put in the first set of written revelations he ever gave to human beings, he said, here's number ten, Exodus Chapter 20, and it is the thing that could be insidiously present in your life and you may not even realize it. By the way, when Jesus turned to his disciples and warned them of the Pharisees, he put it this way, "Beware of the" yeast or the "leaven of the Pharisees."

Now back in Chapter 12, which is probably the other landmark chapter in the book of Exodus, they started something that has continued to this day in Jewish circles, and that's the celebration of the Passover, which was to show how God got them out of Egypt. But one of the weird things that is attached to the Passover celebration is the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. You remember that, right? And one of the things you're supposed to do is get all the yeast, all the leaven out of your house and don't have any hint of leaven in your home. Jesus said, you know the problem with the Pharisees is they've got this insidious thing. It's like leaven. Just a little leaven will leaven the whole lump, it will grow. It's like a seed but it's even worse than that. It just is a sin at least, it is a contaminant in the sense that it will go from whatever it initially is into something that affects all the good around it.

And the Pharisees, of course, went off to seminary to study the law, as many of them, I assume, with good intentions. But as soon as the leaven of the Pharisees began to take root, it grew into wanting to kill Jesus, as was so clearly identified because they envied him. They couldn't stand him. The external kind of calmed and buttoned up godliness really belied the fact that inside they were competitive. They were critical, they were willing to conspire against others because they envied what they had. In this case, this traveling preacher from Galilee who had all kinds of crowds that they couldn't seem to fill their synagogues with, and they were envious of him. They thought, "We need to put him down. We need to take him out." From Cain in Genesis Chapter 4 to Jesus and the crucifixion accounts of the gospels, we see envy creating all kinds of problems. And it really comes back to an issue that is identified in the Ten Commandments in Exodus Chapter 20.

So take a look at this passage and remind yourself of the 10th commandment. It's there printed on your worksheet. That's why you weren't stymied, because you have your worksheet out. Exodus Chapter 20 verse 17 is where we see the 10th commandment. You shall not, here's the word, here's the key ingredient to envy, you can't envy unless you do this, covet. "You shall not covet." Now, if there was a period there, we would have all kinds of contradictions in our minds. And we would because the word covet is not universally used in a negative sense. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament. And in fact, when we first introduced to the word in Genesis Chapter 2, when God speaks of the fact that we are rightly going to covet, in this case, we, Adam and Eve, the fruit-bearing trees in the Garden. And that's a good thing. It's their trees. It's their garden. God has put them there to tend it and they are going to desire the fruit of those trees. They are going to be hungry one afternoon. They're going to be doing all the things that God has called them to do and they're to look at the trees



in their garden and they're to say, I desire that. I strongly desire that. I crave a piece of the fruit on this tree that we've been working to cultivate in this garden.

There's not a period there. Right? The sentence continues. It's not that you have a strong desire, which is really what the word covet means. It's like the word lust, by the way. In the New Testament, we associate the word covet in the Old Testament as negative, we associate the word lust in the New Testament as negative. But it's used, the Greek word "Epithymeo," it's used in a positive context because there's a time for you to strongly desire something. There's nothing wrong with strongly desiring even ministry in the church. First Timothy Chapter 3 verse 1 says, "If you," desire or you "aspire," depending on the translation, "to the office of an overseer in a church, you desire a good thing." Well, the word is epithymeo. You covet, you lust. You have a strong hankering, a craving for something. And so it is with this Hebrew word that's translated so often "covet," particularly when it's in a negative context, but it's translated "desire" or "well pleasing" or something that we want or crave or have this strong desire for, if it's a good context.

God is even described as someone who's looking at the land, and he found a piece of land here. Of course he created it all and controls every molecule. But he says, I desire that. I covet that for my house, and that's where we're going to put the tabernacle and it's going to become the temple when Solomon builds it, we're going to put the Ark of the Covenant there on that threshing floor. This is the land that God covets. There's nothing wrong with him coveting the land that he made and land that he has and the land that he controls. The problem here is that the strong craving that we have could be directed in a direction that is sin. And this is one of the big sins. This is the 10th big sin that God is saying, you guys can't do this. Here are the Ten Commandments, commandment number ten, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house."

If you took the word neighbor out of there, I suppose if you had a strong desire to live in the house that God gave you there's nothing wrong with that. I know nothing's wrong with the second one. "You shall not covet your... wife." If the word neighbor wasn't there, there'd be nothing wrong with that at all. That's the whole point. Right? First Corinthians Chapter 7. But if it's your neighbor's wife, then no. You've got to take that strong craving. You've got to deal with that. You can't have that. You can't desire their employees to modernize or "his male servants or his female servants," or the tools or implements of his business, "his ox or his donkey," or here it comes, as broadly as you can put it, "anything else that is your neighbor's." There's the problem.

Strong desire is not the problem. But if you're conscious of your strong desires, then that's the start. Matter of fact, if you want to implement the Lord's solution to the problem of envy, it's not the total solution, that's why it's a three-point sermon this morning, the first solution is just being aware of your deep cravings, your desires. You just need to kind of sort them out like a shepherd would separate the sheep from the goats. This is a good desire. It's a strong desire. It's a proper desire. Here's a desire. It may have the same kind of object, but it's not right, because it doesn't belong to me. That's transgressive. It's out of bounds. Number one on your outline, if you're taking notes, just based on the first text that I've drawn you to, the 10th



commandment in Exodus 20:17, you need to diligently, here it comes, here's the verb, "Police Your Cravings." Police them. You need to walk by and make sure everything's copacetic and not causing any trouble. Right? Because you're going to see the suspects in your life and you are going to have to be in charge of your desires. And you are going to have to say this is a proper desire, this is not a proper desire. You need to start to police. You need to start to discern. You need to start to separate into two categories your desires, your strong desires.

I'm not looking for this. I'm not looking for you to be a flat-line person. We tried to deal with this a little bit in the previous message where we talked about ambition. There's a godly ambition you ought to have. It's an ambition that deals with stewardship. Because when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden, he gave them a stewardship over the Garden. This was the Garden he gave them. It was a stewardship that they were supposed to exercise, cultivate it, exercised dominion over it. And you know what? There's nothing wrong with you craving and desiring the things that you have and that God has given you and that he's given you, by the way, the New Testament says, to enjoy. That's a good thing. And that's a great thing. Matter of fact, that is the definition of contentment for you to want the things that you have. Right? There's nothing wrong with that. You should want the things that you have.

And even some things you have in such a special way it's even okay to be zealously wanting to maintain what you have. That's the word jealousy, right? There's a proper jealousy that you might have. There are certain things, even in your stewardship, that at some point God may take that out of the purview of your stewardship and set it over here into someone else's purview. And all of a sudden now we have Saul's kingdom given to David, and all of a sudden now it erupts with jealousy and envy, because God has the right to move some things around in your life. He may give you a tree that you are to desire, but then he may kick you out of the Garden and say this is not yours anymore. You've got to police your desires and it's not easy. It's a bit complicated. But if you're just aware in your life right now and you do it regularly, what are the strong desires I have in my life? What are the things that get me out of bed that I'm excited to get to? What are the things that I crave? If you're identifying that in your life, you're off to a good start in keeping your life from all of the corruptive effects of envy. Because envy can't happen without a strong desire and strong desire, as it says in Exodus Chapter 24 verse 17, if it's directed toward things that you don't have the right to have, then you need to say, that's wrong.

And if God doesn't have the right to do what he does, and often in Scripture we see it, he may give you a stewardship over something and move that out of the way. And now all of a sudden you have to know I don't have the right to that, and therefore I've got to start talking to my desires. I need to start saying this is something I need to change. And I know in our day we all want to be victims, particularly victims of our desires. You live in a culture, by the way, where the sacrosanct principle of life is if you have a desire, you can't help it, but you got to act on it, right? If you live with that dictum of the world you're doomed. You're doomed. Sanctification requires, as it's put in Colossians Chapter 3 verse 5, and we've quoted it in every message on envy, you have to put to death whatever remains of your earthiness or your fleshliness. "Sarx" is the word. You have this sense of unredeemed humanity and sometimes it just latches onto things and you need to do some surgery there. You've got to be



a hard police officer who carries weapons so that you can deal with your desires. This is put in Romans Chapter 6. You have to marshal the members of your body even though they may desire things. And you've got to say, nope, that's off limits. That's transgressive. We can't do that.

You've got to get serious about that. And you need to stop thinking as a victim and you need to start thinking as an agent and you are an agent over even your desires. As Paul said, there are certain things he does to make sure that he buffets his body and makes it his slave because he wants to make sure he's telling his body and his spirit and in the impulses of his body, who's in charge. Matter of fact, Proverbs hails the person in the Old Testament who has mastery over his spirit. It's the quick-tempered man that is seen to be a fool. It's the person who can take the brewing anger in his life and control it. That's the one who's better than one who captures the city. Better for you to have control over the interior impulses of your life, then the things that you might be able to subdue on the battlefield. I mean, that's a powerful principle. And often anger is the illustrative feeling. But it's not just anger, it could be a growing desire and craving for things that you don't have the right to have and God did not give this to you, and it's not yours.

We all have a lot of cravings. It starts with identifying what those cravings are and then being the police officer of your cravings and being able to sort those into two piles and to recognize what God wants graciously in the solution to the problem of envy is saying you need to start enjoying the things that are proper for you to enjoy. Now in saying that I need to make clear to you and wouldn't really be a Christian sermon if I didn't say at the top of the list of things that you ought to crave, the things that you were designed to crave, the thing that God made you to crave. The thing that if you were to really be able to ingest it illustrative as a fruit, you would say, this is it, right? And here's how it's put in the Old Testament. "Taste and see that the Lord is good." As it's putting Psalm 73, it's like there's nothing I have on earth I desire really, except for you. "Whom do I have in heaven but you? And beside you I desire nothing on earth."

There's an ultimate desire that all of us are created to have. We just got to get down to that craving, find that craving, cultivate that craving and say, you know, there are some cravings that God says are appropriate for me to pursue. But the ultimate craving I'm supposed to pursue and I should pursue and I need to make sure I carefully cultivate it, is the desire to know my creator. And when you get that as Jeremiah 9 says, you can get the rich man who's craved his riches and the intelligent man who's craved his degrees and his learning, let the rich man boast of his riches and the wise man his wisdom. But let him who knows and understands me, let him boast in that. That's the one who should be boasting. That's the who that says they found the thing that is ultimately most important.

By the way, everything else that steps into your lineup and your list of cravings that supersedes that, and I'm telling you, for most of us, we've got so much work to do to elevate that on our cravings list. Everything else that gets in a superior place to that, even if it's the tree in the Garden that God has given us under our stewardship to have. If I'm craving the fruit from the tree in the Garden that God gives me to have, and God is not at the top of that list, if he's not superior in that list, the Bible calls that idolatry. Remember that passage in



Ephesians that we quoted earlier in the series? We said that envy, and then it was in parentheses in our text, which is idolatry, right? Envy itself as a problem is me wanting something that's not proper, something that's transgressive, something that is a transgression. It's a misplaced craving. And the ultimate craving that we should have that really should supersede everything else is my craving to know and understand God. To put it in terms of Jeremiah 9.

Here's a contrast for you. First John Chapter 2 and First John Chapter 5, the last verse, verse 21. First John 2 reminds us, a very familiar passage, about the love of the world. Right? The world is full of things, "Don't love the world," which means don't you get in alliance with the world that's all about fanning and fueling your cravings for things that displace God, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life." Those things of you putting yourself as the recipient of cravings that you hope will satisfy you, that don't satisfy ultimately, they're just temporal things that you think, if I just had the right job, if had the right place, function in the right house, I can have the right marriage. Those things would fulfill me, he says, that is all idolatry and all the warnings in the book of First John, they culminate into the last verse of the book that says, "Little children, keep yourself from idols." Right?

So whatever it is that's on your craving list, I'm just saying, if you come to church, you ought to expect this. We've got to put God at the top of that list. And we know God through Christ, there's only one way to have my eyes open to the living God, and that is to put my trust in Christ to forgive my sins which is the barrier between me and God. That's when my eyes are closed to God. That's why I'm blind before God. I need to open my eyes. And that can only happen through me embracing Christ. Not embracing Mohammed, not embracing, you know, Buddha. It's me putting my trust in the finished work of Christ. And now I can see the one that I was made to crave and love.

And it's a good thing when you start to find it and some of you are on that path. Some of you, though, have been on the path but you've left your first love to quote Revelation Chapter 2. To the Church of Ephesus he said you guys are still doing the right stuff, you got a lot of spinning plates. You are doing the right thing, you have the right doctrine, but your cravings are wrong. You don't have the primary love in place. So much to this and you could see we could preach a series, I suppose, on this. But as I take you in the small group questions to Psalm 42 I want you to have that analogy of the picture of someone craving food or in this case, the deer running through the forest that pants for the water from the streams. Right? "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants after you, O God." That picture of saying I just need to get to that place when I'm famished and I want a meal. I need to start to learn in my life to prioritize the things that would cultivate the desire for me to know and understand the living God.

We've got to keep ourselves from idols. Even things that are in the acceptable stewardship list can become a displacing desire for my desire to know and understand God. But then there are all kinds of things as you look across the street at your neighbor's stuff, your neighbor's relationships, your neighbor's blessings, your neighbor's privilege, your neighbor's whatever it



might be and you've got to say, wait a minute, that's so far off the path. I just can't let those cravings dominate my thinking, my priorities or my life.

How do I prevent that? I'm glad you asked that. Go to First Corinthians Chapter 13 verse 4. The awareness of how the enemy is working in our desires and we're really wired as fallen human beings and have cravings that are all over the map. But when you see those cravings and they're in the displacive category, they're displacing my desire and overshadowing the supreme interest that I should have in my maker, picture the enemy pulling back his arm and making his fist and getting ready to punch us spiritually and we've got to strike first. Right? We've got to deploy something that is going to beat the enemy to the punch. And it's found right here.

Matter of fact, the second and third points of this message they are essential. They will deal with the problem of envy. They're simple. They're not easy. They're complicated. But they're not hard to understand. I hope they're not at least. Let me try and explain it. First Corinthians Chapter 13 verse 4. It being printed on your napkins at your wedding reception notwithstanding, this passage is not about romantic love, although it might apply. This is about our relationships in this case within the church and the kinds of division and the kinds of backbiting and the kinds of rivalry and the kinds of criticism and bitterness that existed in that church was all because of envy. And what they needed was the counterbalance that they needed the solution to that. And the solution is found in this four-letter word L-O-V-E in English. Love.

Here's how love is described. "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy." Okay. So the positive statements, well okay, there's an expression of what love looks like. That's how it works. It's patient and it's kind. What's the first negation here? Well, "Love does not envy." It doesn't envy. That's at the top of the list. It certainly was a problem in Corinth. So maybe that's why it was raised humanly speaking to the top of the list. But I think just objectively, it should be at the top of the list because envy and love are antithetical to each other. You do not love the person you envy. I assure you of that. You certainly don't love them in a Christian love. You don't have biblical love for them. Because it's never going to be a rival, it's never going to boast. It's never going to try to compare with the person I love. It's not going to envy. It's not going to be to have this covetousness desire for what they have. It's not going to try to measure up in the boasting. It's not going to be arrogant and it's certainly not going to be "rude," verse 5.

Why? Because it's not that way. It's not selfish. It's just the opposite. "It does not insist on its own way." By the way, do you want to see the fruits of envy? Look at the next words here. "It is not irritable or resentful." I mean, if I were really to try to describe envy, as I have in the series, in a simple definition, that is the word I used in the definition. Right? It's the resentment that grows up in your heart because of other people's blessings, advantages, or positions. If they have something I don't have here's how I know envy exists. I'm resentful of it. And it's going to fuel a lot of things that are going to be negative and secondary sins. This is a primary sin. Criticism, gossip, backbiting, slander, competitiveness, a kind of worldly ambition can even result to speak of Cain and murder. It can result in conspiracy to commit murder. The



Pharisees and the Sanhedrin in the first century. It's bad, but it starts with irritation and resent. That's what envy does.

"It doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing." It doesn't rejoice when something wrong happens to someone that I love. I certainly would never want that. "It rejoices in what's true" and good and whole. And I'm like, that's what I want. "Love, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Okay, so you know that passage. You've read it a hundred times, then in church, you read it a thousand times. That passage right there reminds me that the word that is used to describe how God treats us in Christ, that is the solution. You need to love in a Christian way, in a godly way, in a Christ-like way. And if you were consciously to deploy Christian love, genuine Christian love to someone who I am tempted to envy, you would neutralize that problem. You're going to beat envy to the punch. Envy wants to cause all kinds of damage and corrosive effects in your Christian life. You could beat that. You see the desire growing. You see this interest of wanting stuff that they have. You see this growing craving about the advantages that they have. And now I'm starting to resent. Before you start resenting, say I have to love this person.

Number two, you need to "Deploy Genuine Christian Love." Let's talk about how to do that. We need to deploy genuine Christian love. I guess maybe just another word to convince you. Here's how I know that even non-Christians sitting in this auditorium today can agree with me about what I'm saying is because even in the common grace of God shedding love in the hearts of parents, because he is a good God who gives common grace for the propagation of the human race. He gives them a taste of this kind of selfless love. When they have children, you shuffled down the hallway at two in the morning because Junior is crying. Soiled diapers. He's hungry. He's teething. You go in and actually it's kind of interesting to watch these young couples.

You even watch sometimes couples come together. You think they're immature and you know, yeah, they're on an emotional, romantic high, but they have kids. There's like there's no romance here. You're just like all of a sudden forced into a selfless kind of love. And it works because somehow God somehow instills this grace of loving a child. Here comes a blob of human humanity out in the nursery. And it's like, it doesn't matter what they look like. If they're fat, their head is oblong. Those parents love that child for no apparent reason really objectively other than God's involved. And in that work, you can't blame it on evolution, you can, and that's what they do, but this is a God thing, this is the common grace of God. And that act of selfless love, it displaces necessarily, it is antithetical to envy.

As that child starts to grow up you don't sit there and envy that child. Think about it. The resentment that the child has something. Like the child becomes, let's just say, you know, send him off school, the student of the month. You know, "I never was the student of the month. I can't believe it." And usually they say, "Hey, did you hear what junior? Yeah. Like, I mean, they don't really know him, obviously, or they would never make my child the student of the month." The kid hits a home run. "Well, you know what? I didn't hit home runs when I was in little league. Can't believe it. Now, look, all these people cheering. I guess I better stand up and cheer. Good job. Look at him. Look how happy he is. Everybody's giving him high fives.



So arrogant, my kid." You don't have to tell a parent to spring up and scream. Dignified parents screaming their heads off because junior hit a home run. Right? Why? Because they love their child.

They are not envious of the advantages they have. As a matter of fact, here's something that most parents want intuitively, "I want my kid to do better than I do." I mean, don't you? Long term. I'd like them to do better. I'd like them to do better in life. I'd like them to do better in relationships. I'd like them to be smarter. I like them to be more talented. That's what you intuitively want for your children. What is that? It's the opposite of envy. That is not a resentment for their advance. Now, can some, you know, depraved tentacles of the enemy get involved in this? Sure. Don't start thinking of exceptions. Of course, the exceptions only prove the rule because the rule is you're working hard to find the exception to this. Or maybe you got some dysfunctional memory of something where you had envy and your parents envied you. Ok, stop.

The principle is when a family is functioning as it ought to, parents want what's best for their kids. Which, by the way, is a good definition of biblical love. You want what's best for them. You want what's best for them. I mean, I have often and frequently through the years when I come back to biblical love, trying to define it this way: it is a commitment to the other's well-being, right? It's a commitment to the other's well-being I think summarizes well, a little more technical than I want what's good for them. But I really do want them to thrive. I want them to have what they need. And I want them to thrive and grow and be good. I would like them to thrive more than I thrive. I'd like them to do better than I've done. We want that. That's the opposite of envy, right? We don't do that. We don't willingly shuffle down the hallway to change some guy's diapers in our small group. That's a terrible example and illustration. (audience laughs)

But it's like we're even when they share their second praise report in the small group that they got another raise. Or they got some new, you know, their second house in the mountains closed or whatever. You don't sit there and act the same way you act when your child gets another trophy or another ribbon or has another accomplishment or scores well on a test. What's the difference? Here's the difference, love. That's the difference. I'm saying if you could learn to love people then you wouldn't have this problem. And you don't love people who you envy. You resent them. Because you're jealous of what they have. And that's just got to stop. Well I'm giving you the solution. Here it is. Employ and deploy in your heart, love. I need to learn to love this person. So that's a change in prayer request because really it's not just I'm craving things they have and I'm resenting them for having them. I don't like that they have it better than I have. You need to start saying, "God, I'm not just saying, please stop those feelings." I'm now praying "God help me to love them, to love them like you do."

And how is that? Philippians 2. I'm glad you asked. Let's go there. Philippians Chapter 2. Look at this passage with me. Here is love demonstrated in Christ. And again, this may be a familiar passage. We need this familiar passage. It's strung together in our minds. Your eyeballs need to be on these texts to help you ingest this truth, because this truth will solve the problem. And you will thank me one day, maybe, that you've actually started to get envy,



which maybe you didn't even identify, but now it's getting under control and a hundred lesser evils in your life are being stopped because we've got these truths strung together in our mind. We have a strategy. I want to entrench a pattern of thinking when you start to feel cravings that you know are transgressive cravings, and they're about my growing resentment because someone has something I don't have, a blessing, an advantage, a privilege that I don't have. Instead of organizing some kind of protest, I want you to learn to love them.

What does it look like? Philippians Chapter 2. Which, by the way, reminds us of what community looks like. Verse 1, "If there's any encouragement in Christ." In other words, you in Christ, we're all in this thing. We all are living by Christ's dictates. We're all doing this. Well, there would be "comfort in that kind of love." It would be amazing. It would be like a warm blanket. It would be fantastic. "Any participation in the Spirit. Right? There's the word fellowship. We all have commonality. It's fine. You need something of mine. Great. I'm not keeping score. "Any affection and sympathy." Oh, man. Talk about me being excited for you and being sympathetic when something hurts you, man, well Paul says, "make my joy complete." Actually get on the same page as Christ, "have the same mind, have the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." All of you just keep moving toward the goal. And the goal is going to look like this. "Do nothing from selfish ambition." It's not about you, it's not about you advancing, it's not about you getting onto the next level, it's not about your raise, it's not about your summer home. It's not about any of that. It's not about you bragging about your accomplishments. Instead, humility. "But in humility count others more significant than yourself."

By the way, can you understand reading this passage, even just with a little emphasis, shows us that we are completely out of step with our culture. They're never going to buy this. Which maybe I should step out of the series in the sermon right now and say one thing you need and I could prove this from First John if we had more time. But let me at least state it as emphatically as I can.

First John 4 verses 7 and 8 make it clear that you cannot love, not biblically love, you cannot love, not really, not consistently, not genuinely, not with pure motives. You can have a touch of God's common grace in your life, but you cannot really live in love unless you know God, because God is love. And that's the point. Real biblical love. And I'm trying to explain it from this text. You can't really love unless you're regenerate. You need a heart that loves. "Love is of God and everyone who loves has been born of God." And that's a big statement. Everyone who loves, who really loves, who has the kind of love I'm trying to explain, that person has been "born of God and knows God. The one who doesn't love, doesn't know God." And that's the point.

Can a parent love his child selflessly? Yes, for a while. But they're not going to love their peers that way. They're not going to love their boss that way. They're not going to love their employees that way. They're not going to love their neighbors that way. They're not going to love their brother-in-law that way. But you can if you have Christ. "If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy," Paul says, "have the same mind, same accord, full of just



one mind," same love, all of it. Be in this mindset. "No selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others as more significant than yourselves." I would like you to have those things because I love you. I'd like you to have blessings because I love you. I'd like you to have advantages because I love you. I'd like you to be healthier than me because I love you. I'd like you to be more beautiful, more handsome than me because I love you. I'd like you to have the advantages I never had. I can think that way about my children. I need to think that way about the people in my life, everywhere.

Even non-Christians, by the way, because envy often can be produced because I'm interacting with non-Christians. You can envy non-Christians. Matter of fact, that's a big problem in Scripture. If we had more time, we could explore that. How often we will envy non-Christians. We envy non-Christians, not just the celebrities on the blogs, on the websites. I'm talking about we can envy non-Christians for a variety of things. Therefore, I better love non-Christians. If I don't love non-Christians, I'm going to envy them. Be vulnerable to that, as Paul said.

And I know I'm going to get through reading this, I promise. But here's another famous verse. Actually, it's stuck between such famous verses it's eclipsed by the surrounding verses. But in Second Corinthians Chapter 5, there's a little statement, and almost as you're reading it and you're getting all these great truths, you almost lose it in the midst of quoting the passage. But it says, "We no longer consider anyone according to the flesh. Even though we once considered Christ according to the flesh, but we regard him thus no longer." What? That verse is stuck between verses about an ambassadorship and all things new in Christ. And you know, it's just a great text. "We no longer live for ourselves but for him who for their sake died and rose again." That passage is stocked full of fantastic verses. And in the middle of it all, "We don't regard anyone according to flesh." What are you talking about?

Paul will make a point throughout First Corinthians that he was not going to care about people's externals, who they were. He didn't show any favoritism. He saw everyone as someone in need of Christ. He saw everyone as someone made in the image of God. And so the playing field was level. Even though at one point they looked at Christ and they really evaluated who he was based on the external stuff, what he owned, what he looked like, how articulate he was. And so they were making decisions based on standards of the flesh. If I no longer in any way regard anyone according to fleshly standards, which is what that verse is saying, then it doesn't matter. Rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, thin or fat, it doesn't matter if they are articulate or they can barely speak. It doesn't matter what they're running or what kind of job they don't have. It doesn't matter. I view everyone just as people made an image of God and in need of Christ. I look at non-Christians that way. I look at celebrities that way. I look at sports figures that way. I look at the guy on the street that way. That's the way I ought to be looking at people. That's the goal. I don't regard anybody according to the flesh anymore. I regard them as people who need Christ. I regard everyone as people who need to hear Christ. And the point is, I'll do all things for all men. I'll do it by all means, do everything I possibly can that they might be won to Christ. That's what I want. "I'm all things to all men, that I might by all means win some."



This is the message to the Corinthians and it's stuck there as a verse that reminds me that's what love is, even to non-Christians. Do I prioritize my love for Christians? Of course I do. Galatians Chapter 6. "I do good to all men, but especially those of the household of faith." As Peter said, First Peter 2, "I love the brothers," but it starts with "honor all men." If you're the king. So I want to honor everyone. I want to love everyone. It's a different kind of love, obviously, in the concentric circles of my commitments, my covenants in my life. But I can even stop envying and coveting the lives and possessions and privileges of non-Christians because I've learned to love them. That's the goal. Looking out for the interest of others.

I know I'm in the middle of reading this passage. "Have this mind among yourselves," verse 5, "which is yours in Christ Jesus." And there's the kind of the head nod to regeneration. Right? If I'm a Christian I can have this mind. I got the Spirit of God dwelling in me who's wanting this mindset. This is mine in Christ, if I could just love Christ the most, if I could love the triune God at the top of my cravings list, this is what he's going to instill in me. And that is, verse 4, that "I'm not going to look out for my own interests, I'm going to look out for the interests of others." Do I need to feed myself today? Yes. Do I need to pay the rent? Sure. But I'm not only going to look out for my own interest to get by. I'm going to look out for the interest of other people.

Because Christ had that mind who, talk about Christ, verse 6, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." I'm willing to give that up. I can give up stuff because I love other people. "But he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." How bad was that? Pretty bad, but it gets worse, verse 8. "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient," to the Father's will for the good of others. Give his life as a ransom for many. How did he die? How was the ransom secured? "To the point of death, even death on a cross." It wasn't an execution. He didn't get his head lopped off by a sword. He hung naked on a tree and suffocated all afternoon because he was willing to put your interest above his own.

And then he turns and he says, I know you've heard it said you should love each other as you love yourself. I've got a new commandment for you. "A new commandment I give to you," John 13, "that you love each other just like I have loved you." And that's different. That's why First John says, "There's a new commandment I give you," as well as an old commandment that's from the beginning because I know it's about loving each other, but "it's a new commandment in him, and I'm giving it to you." You need to put other people's interests above your own, not just your interests and their interest. You equate them, right? It's not just the golden rule of "do unto others as you have them do unto you." No, this is different. This is like you're willing to empty yourself and see them succeed and you don't. Do you see why this sermon is never going to preach in a non-Christian context? That's biblical love. Some say, "I'm going to be a doormat." I'm just telling you, you're laying down your lives for your friends.

Jesus laid down his life for his enemies. Romans Chapter 5. He died not just for his friends, but for his enemies. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." The point is real Christian love is saying I am willing to put other people's interests before my own and I really do care. It doesn't matter if I got moved into some corner of some part of my social strata or if I had



some kind of issue go wrong in my life, or if I have to lose the promotion, or if I don't get that place at that banquet or that party or I don't get invited to that thing, it doesn't matter what deteriorates in my life because really, I love those people. Do you see that envy is always focused on self and love is always focused on them? That's the point. You got to take this eyeball of interest and turn it and say, I care about them.

Christ cared about them. He was suffering in the garden and praying and he was praying for them. Did it mean he didn't try and correct wrongdoing? Of course he did. Peter, James and John were falling asleep. Jesus said, "Hey, wake up. Can't you even stay awake and pray with me?" But he was still willing to give of himself so that he could love them. And all I'm saying is if you truly love someone, you will not envy their privileges or their opportunities.

Deploy genuine Christian love. I know there's a lot to that. But there's one particular expression of Christian love that is very hard. But it's the two in the one-two punch. You see the fist and the arm going back. You see your cravings about to strike you with envy and all the bad that comes with it. Punch number one. Right? Here it is. I'm going to purposely deploy more Christian love in your direction. I have to think and pray that God would give me a greater love. I will command that I will love this person because this is who I am in Christ. I need to crave the mind of Christ so that I can love them and set my interests aside. When the benefactors and the kings of the Gentiles are worried about their strata and where they are in relation to other people, not so among you. "Who among you is greater? The one that reclines at the table or the one who serves? Oh, wait a minute. I am the king of the universe. I'm the one serving you. I'm cleaning out the dirt between your toes." Right? I want you to learn that that's what love is all about. Selfless servant love. And I'm not going to envy advantages and privileges and blessings you have.

Here's the two, though. Romans Chapter 12 verse 15. It is printed on your worksheet, the reference, at least. Let's look at it. It's actually just one, two, three, four, five words. 15a. Roman Chapter 12 verse 15. "Rejoice with those who rejoice." Rejoice for those who rejoice. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Rejoice with those who rejoice. It doesn't sound complicated. Do you understand this is it? This is it. I feel cravings in my life. I police them. I choose to love the people I'm tempted to envy. And now I'm choosing to rejoice with those who rejoice. We think that's the easy part of verse 15 because we selectively do it with our best friends and our children when they hit home runs. But we don't consistently do this. Right?

Matter of fact, we think the hard part is weeping with those who weep. It's much easier for me to find someone I have very little regard for in my heart of sin, I have very little... Matter of fact, you irritate me. But I just found out you were in this terrible accident on the way home from church. Am I willing to mess up my afternoon to go make a call at the hospital and love on the family and deal with all that? Of course. Of course. Am I ready to take whatever fun afternoon I might have had planned to weep with those who weep? What if someone's life was lost in that accident? Would I be willing to engage in their pain? Of course I would. Matter of fact, that would be easier for me than taking someone who is a peer of mine who I am tempted to envy because I'm craving the things that they have and they just got more of what I want. And I find that news. And for me to write a sincere congratulatory letter, to call them up



and say, I'm so genuinely happy for what just happened to you. I'm telling you that one is harder. It's harder if there's any residual echo of envy in your heart.

Number three, you need to "Deliberately Celebrate Other's Blessings." And I mean that as an active verb. Celebrate it. You need to deliberately celebrate others' blessings. Particularly those who you're tempted to envy. You need to celebrate. You need to wipe the scowl off your face. You need to start thinking about how good it is that these things happen to them. That this guy that I'm envious of, this gal that I want what she has, I'm going to celebrate. Think of the gal who is pining away because of the pain of infertility. She gets another baby shower invitation. Right? How hard is that? I mean, there are dozens and dozens and dozens of examples of that even in our own church. We lived through it. We didn't have our first kid until we were ten years married. We know what it's like to have all of our peers have kids and us not. We're trying and we're going to doctors. How hard is that? Well, it really comes down to whether or not I love the people who are now having the news that we want, which is the celebration of a new life.

Can I go to another baby shower and truly, genuinely celebrate? Well, it depends on how much I'm envying them. It really depends on how much I love them. It depends on whether I'm separating the cravings of my life into proper cravings and improper cravings. And if I'm saying, wait a minute, this is an improper craving for me to want what they have because right now God has without a doubt, clearly by the laws of physics, made it clear that we are not having a kid this month. But they are. They're going to celebrate this baby. I'm just saying how hard is that? Well, it's really hard, but that's what we're called to do. Well, it sounds too hard.

Well, have you looked at the context of Roman Chapter 12? There must be easier commands in here somewhere. Verse 14, "Bless those who persecute you." Oh, that sounds hard. You don't really mean bless them. You mean that sarcastically, right? No, no, no. "Bless and do not curse them." Do you understand it's the same theme? Why is it that I can't rejoice with those who rejoice? Because they've been blessed. Something good has happened to them. Why can't I rejoice? Sincerely rejoice with them. Why is it that the words "I'm happy for you" come out of my mouth more as a sarcastic statement than they do a genuine statement? Think about it. Some mumble, "I'm happy for you. I'm really happy for you." Why? Because it's hard for me to take my emotions and set them aside and say, you know what, I am going to marshal the members of my body and all of their cravings. I'm going to do the thing that I'm called to do, just like it says in Psalm 103 when David is concerned about his worship, saying I'm not worshiping like I should. So he starts talking to himself. Psalm 103:1, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." "Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name." I'm talking to you, soul. Do you hear me? Bless the Lord O my soul.

Oh, by the way, do you know the verse I'm quoting? Do you know verse 2? It says again, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not any of his benefits." I'll bet you've tried to apply Psalm 103 if you've been around the block in the Christian life a few times. Have you not? And you say, "Oh, yeah, you're right, God's been good to me. I need to take those benefits and blessings that God has done in my life. You're right. I need to tell my soul to rejoice. So here I go. I'm going to step up and obey Psalm 103 verses 1 and 2 and I'm going to tell my



soul, hey, soul, don't forget the benefits that God has given. Don't forget the blessings. Could you just celebrate those? I'm going to... God, you're right. I'm thankful for my home. I'm thankful that I'm not out on the street. I'm thankful that I'm gainfully employed and I have the job that I want. But I thank you for these things. These are benefits and blessings and I thank you for them." I'm just saying do the same exact thing. You need to start talking to your soul. But do it for other people. That's all I'm saying. I'm saying the benefits and blessings to the people who you're tempted to envy, who you're bitter and resent, I'm saying start to tell your soul to bless the Lord for that. To celebrate that. To thank God. "God, I'm thankful that my sister in Christ got pregnant and we can't. It's okay. I'm not thinking about us. I'm putting their interests before ours. I'm going to celebrate that because I love them."

It might even fuel my celebration a little bit more if I can just get myself out of the equation to think of the fact that I know what it's like to want this and have it. And you know what? I can celebrate this. "I've wanted a raise, and he got it. I wanted a house. We can't get in one, we can't afford it. You just found a house. It only costs you \$3,000 a month. How's that possible?" Yeah. And then you go back with bitterness. I'm just saying, all of those things you need to say, Psalm 103 verses 1 and 2. Not just forget not all of your benefits and he starts listing his own benefits. How about the benefits of others? Do you think Saul could have ever prayed that prayer for David's advances? No, of course not. It's not like Cain went home from the worship service saying, "God, I just I'm so thankful my brother had such a favorable response from you today." No, it almost sounds sarcastic coming out of my mouth because in reality, he's not going to say that. That is, if his heart is bound up with the corrosive sin of envy. But if he could work it, he could say, "God this is what I need to do." And he'd deliberately celebrate others' blessings.

It really gets back to this. Matthew Chapter 20. It's the opening illustration that we read from Christ about the vineyard and the workers, the day laborers, and he goes out to the marketplace. He finds them to send them into his vineyard to work. You know the story. They work for 12 hours. He starts the day with, "Hey, if you work for the full day, I will give you a denarius. That's a fair deal. That's a square deal. That's a good way to do it. A full day's labor for a full day's pay. And they said, "Sure." So they go into the field, they work all day. He goes back and I told you the story and you know it. I don't mean to be redundant. They go back in the middle of the morning, they go in the middle of the day, middle of the afternoon, and then at the 11th hour, the sun is starting to go over the hills, he finds some laborers and asks, "why aren't you working?" They say, "Well, we haven't had a job. We've been sitting here all day trying to find a job. We can't find a job." He says, "well go into my field." They work for one hour.

The foreman gets called. They all lineup. Crickets are starting to chirp. The sun is going down over the hill and Jesus says, let's pay the guys who got here an hour ago first. He gives them a denarius and a full day's wage. And you know how it goes. The guys at the end of the line, Jesus said they start thinking to themselves. "Wow, what are we going to get?" Well, wait a minute. God, in this story, God, the master has already agreed to give you what he's agreed to give you. And you worked and he paid you. And it's exactly right. When it gets down to you he gives them a denarius and they're upset. They grumble. Well, wait a minute. What

changed that? Nothing changed that. Nothing changed that but someone else got more than you got. Had you gone home that night to your wife and you laid down in bed and she said, "how did your day go?" And he said, "you know, I work all day long, but I got a denarius, it was a fair deal. I'm so grateful I got hired because there were guys in the marketplace who didn't get hired." You would have been grateful, but you're not grateful. You go home saying, "Can you believe what happened? That landowner paid the guy who worked one hour the same as me." Do you know how the passage ends? Here's how it ends, with the master saying, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?"

Do you know what belongs to God? Money, riches, jobs, infants, babies in your womb. That all belongs to God. And if God wants to bless someone with something he hasn't blessed you with, is God not allowed to give his blessing out however he wants? Is he not a sovereign God? Can he not do what he wants? Can he give someone more beauty, more brawns, or more brains than you? Can he not? Do you have to be the prettiest one on the planet? No, you can't. Here's the difference between non-Christians. Non-Christians, Titus Chapter 3 verse 3, they're always engaged in rivalry and envying each other and strife. Why? Because all they see is it's me and it's you. It's me and it's you. It's me and it's you. Here's what Christians have got to understand. There's a third party involved. It's a James 1 party, "The giver of all good gifts," and everything you have that you've ever enjoyed, "comes down from the Father with whom there's no shifting shadow." That God has given blessings to people. And he gives one man, to quote First Corinthians 7:7, one gift, and he gives another man another kind of gift. And he stands back and says, I'm free to do whatever I want to with the blessings I bestow. And you're sitting there going in your grumbling, resentful heart, "Why does she get that and I don't?"

And the Bible says you're missing out on the third party in all of this, which is the most important party. And that is you have to believe in the thing that you say you believe when you're singing about it, when it relates to the blessing you just got. But you can't sing about it with the blessing that he's given to someone else because really it's about you. That's not what love is. Love should be able to say you have advantages I don't have, that group has advantages I don't have, that group, that segment, that person, that office, that industry, whatever it is, they're blessed more than I am. Yep. Well, they are. Keep your nose to the grindstone. Do what God has called you to do. Be a good steward in whatever God has given you. Don't worry about what he's given others because he is allowed to do whatever he chooses to do with the good things that belong to him. Or "do you begrudge me because of my generosity?"

There are people who are better than you in your job. There are people who are better than you in this church, people that look better, that do better, that are smarter, that are more talented. You have got to stop if you say you believe in a sovereign God who doles out wisdom, he doles out beauty, he doles out talent, he doles out opportunities, he gives people favor. What does he tell Cain? Just keep going back, do good, deal with it, deal with it and all



will be fine. But instead "there is sin crouching at the door," and it wants to pull a fist back and smack you in the face. You should be celebrating the favor that your brother found.

Jack Dempsey retired from boxing and as the war was ramping up in the 1940s, they enlisted him into the Coast Guard. Since he was a guy who was known for beating people up, they put him in charge of training people how to do hand-to-hand combat. And he wrote a book. You can tell he's a boxer and not an author. The title was called "How to Fight Tough." How to fight tough. Well, he sold more books than me, I'm sure, because I bought it and read it and he's trying to train people in the service to do hand-to-hand combat. It's actually a pretty good book. I've learned a few things. Do you want to pick a fight with me? I got a few moves I didn't have before after reading Jack Dempsey's book.

Of course, his famous statement, his adage about fighting is in there. And anyway, he says, you know, the best defense is a good offense. Matter of fact, in that section I wrote down what he said. He said, "Beating the enemy to the punch," this is page 52, "Beating the enemy to the punch is literally the definition of defense." That's the whole point in his mind. I'm going to beat him to the punch. Three words, by the way, start the book if you get this book. Buy it on Amazon. And don't blame me for it. I'm not telling you to buy it. I wasted my eight bucks. Here are the first opening three words. "Softness is suicide." Hmm. But he's trying to harden the troops to be able to fight. Softness is suicide. Well in a very soft Christian culture, I want to remind you that's true when it comes to you putting to death the deeds of the flesh. You need to go to war with envy. And if you don't recognize it, and if you don't start throwing the first punch, which is not with bombs and it's not negative and it's not vindictive and it's not violent. It's about you loving people the way Christ did, and it's about you celebrating the blessings that God has given them. Those are so simple but such a challenge and I hope that it would be so entrenched in your thinking that it becomes a pattern of your fighting sin.

Would you stand with me as I dismiss you in a word of prayer? Pray with me. God, in a day when we have lots of external battles, may we give attention to the internal battle of the passions and desires that wage war against our soul that are creeping out probably more than we would even care to admit and identify. The resentment, the bitterness, the frustration. Things we call depression sometimes or guilt really are things that we're dealing with because we cannot celebrate the blessings of other people. We don't believe in your sovereignty. We don't believe that your hand is the giver of those good things even in non-Christian lives. It's not unusual at all that you would send your rain on the crops of the evil, that you bear fruit in the lives and let the sun warm the skin of the unjust. And yet you do.

And God, while we even in that passage that we didn't get to the rest of it in Romans 12, we know that it's yours to take vengeance, not mine. Even if my enemy needs a drink I should go get him a cup of water. God, we know that we can envy a lot of people, but we need to start managing our own desires, sorting them out, policing them, and then choosing to love. We should be loving everyone the way that you did, selflessly putting their interests before our own, even non-Christians and their salvation, their interest before mine. And certainly everyone in my small group, everyone in my sub congregation, everyone I sit next to and talk to at church. All my coworkers at the office as well. I need to love them and I need to



celebrate when good things happen. Not as some sour-wfaced person who says, "Oh, I just wish I had all those things," but cast the resentment out and let us be able to say with a sincere tone, "I AM happy for you. I'm truly happy for you. I'm grateful that God has been good to you." God, give us that kind of love for each other. Give us that kind of love even in our weekly relationships with others as we try to defeat the sin of envy in our lives. Help us to love like you did.

In Jesus name. Amen.