

It's Not Easy Being Green

Sterling UMC
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Galatians 5:25-26

Begin with skit "Going Green" by Margie Lazo.

Going green, it seems to be the rage these days. And it's a wonderful thing as long as you're talking about doing things like recycling, conserving energy, and doing other things to help preserve our environment. But it's not such a great thing when you're talking about going green in another way.

This morning as we continue our series Breaking Free-The Seven Deadly Sins, I want us to consider what has been called the "nastiest, the ugliest, the meanest" of the seven deadly sins, the sin that no one confesses. If we're red with anger, purple with rage, then we're green with ENVY. Green is a gorgeous color, but when it's your complexion, green people just aren't real healthy. You see as Kermit the Frog used to sing on Sesame Street, "It's Not Easy Being Green."

The hard reality is that every one of us can see a little bit of ourselves in "Green Mary" and "Green Lisa" from our skit.

Resenting God's goodness in others' lives and ignoring God's goodness in my own life is envy. If you've ever envied somebody's car, house, physique, marriage, children, grandchildren. If you've ever envied someone's salary, success, beauty, hair, opportunities, wardrobe, education, temperament, athletic ability, character quality, intelligence or spiritual gift raise your hand. Welcome to Club Envy.

Club Envy has a northern Virginia chapter here in Loudoun County. It's on every street in our neighborhoods. It's in every family. It's in every office, every classroom, and yes even in every church. Envy is universal, but here's the deal. If it goes unchecked it can become very destructive.

I made a list of three things I think envy does. What I see envy do in my life, in my friends lives, in the lives of people that I've counseled. I want to share these things with you. I want you to understand the negative side of envy. Because if we don't understand the negative side we're not going to ever want to attack it. Here's what envy does...

1. It causes conflict with others.

James 4:1 *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"* Envy destroys relationships. Even best friends. Their relationship is destroyed because one of them got special recognition or a promotion or achieved more or acquired more and all of a sudden, because of envy, the fellowship and relationship was broken.

How many of you, when you were kids, played King of the Hill? Only one guy could be on top and he pushed everybody else off. We still play King of the Hill in offices all over America. Who's number one? Who's in charge?

You can't have a healthy relationship with someone and harbor envy in your heart toward them. It's impossible. Envy causes conflict in relationships.

2. It leads to other sins.

James 3:16 *"For where you find envy there you find disorder and every evil practice."*

Envy makes people do evil things. Remember the Texas cheerleader Mom who killed someone because she was envious over somebody else's kid making it.

Or remember from the news last year, a well educated astronaut. A woman who drives eight-nine hundred miles wearing diapers so she wouldn't have to stop with weapons in her car to "scare" her romantic rival.

Who remembers Tonya Harding? Envy gone violent. Attacks Nancy Kerrigan knees so she can't skate.

History is littered with envious people who have done horrendous acts of evil. Cain killed Abel because of envy. Joseph was thrown into a pit by his brothers because of envy. The Bible says, Jesus was put on the cross by the Pharisees because of envy. Envy can cause lying, gossip, anger, adultery, murder.

That's the power of envy. It leads to other sins.

3. Envy makes me miserable.

It ruins my happiness. Proverbs 14:30, *"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones!"* Envy is like a cancer. It eats you up on the inside. When you are envious it is self destructive. When you are resenting God's goodness in somebody else's life and ignoring God's goodness in your own, you're only hurting yourself. It makes you miserable.

How many of you remember the movie Amadeus? It was the life story of Mozart as told by another of Mozart's contemporaries Antonio Salieri. We see how as the movie progresses, Salieri was driven crazy by his envy for Mozart. He became obsessed with somebody else. He fanaticized somebody else's failure so much he ended up the loser in life.

So what's the bottom line? The bottom line is this: You can't live a happy life and be envious at the same time. It's totally impossible. You can't be happy and envious because envy wants something that it doesn't have. No one is immune from envy. But I want you to see today that you can be immune from the bitterness and the resentment and the emptiness that accompanies envy. The good news is that you don't have to rely on just my opinion. The good news is we have God's word. The Bible. God has given us a prescription for how we can prevent ourselves from becoming green with envy. Five ways to get rid of envy in our lives.

1. Resist comparing myself to others.

2 Corinthians 10:12 *"We do not dare classify or compare ourselves. It is not wise."* God says if I'm comparing myself to somebody else, that's dumb! There is always somebody better than me and I'll get discouraged. There is always somebody that I'm better than and I'll get full of pride. Either way I lose. Comparing is the root of envy. If you're going to stop envy you've got to break it by stopping comparing.

I 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 its place was \$2. That was just great. Two dollars is a lot of money for a 2nd grader. And she was thrilled at least it was until, one day Rachel visited a friend of hers. Her friend was telling how she had put her tooth under her pillow and found \$10 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?'"

"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." Make an effort and stop comparing yourself to other people.

2. Recognize my uniqueness

If I want to break the grip of envy in my life and not be unhappy all the time I must recognize my uniqueness. Psalm 139:13 *"You, God, created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb."* God designed you in your mother's womb. You have designer genes. And God says you are unique. Nobody will ever be like you. There will never be another person, ever, like you. So don't compare yourself. You see envy is an expression of inferiority. The real problem is really low self esteem.

You've got to learn to accept your uniqueness. There is nobody in the world ever going to be like you. Psalm 139:15 David said, God, *"You saw me before I was born and scheduled every day of my life before I began to breathe."* God has a plan for your life. His plan is good, says Jeremiah. That doesn't mean that everything that happens to you is God's will. It's not. That doesn't mean that everything that happens to you is good. But it all fits into a plan. And God takes even the bad things in your life, even the dumb things you bring onto yourself by your own sinfulness and He puts them in a plan and He works those for good. So I don't need to envy anybody else! God has a plan for my life. It's already settled before I hit the ground. I don't envy you and you don't envy me because we all have plans designed by God for our lives. We are to make the most of what God gives us. It's our choice. It's not fatalism. It's just saying that I realize that even the problems that come into my life God can use them for good in his general, overall plan.

3. Rejoice in what I have.

Be grateful for what you've already got. We get so busy worrying about what we don't have we don't enjoy what we do have. Ecclesiastes 6:9 *"It is better to be satisfied with what you have than to be always wanting something else."* There is a myth behind envy that says, "I must have more than you to be happy." That's just not true. It has nothing to do with achievements or acquisitions. It has to do with accepting your uniqueness and not comparing and rejoicing in what you do have.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 says envy is the source of workaholism. I'm not content with what I have or where I am so I keep working because I need more to impress other people, I want other people to look up to me and envy me so I burn myself out. For many people the desire to acquire is out of control. Will moving out of a \$200,000 house into a \$400,000 really double my happiness? Not likely. But we don't ask ourselves if that's really the truth.

Philippians 4:11, "*I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.*" All of us need this verse because we all aren't content. If you've got wavy hair you want straight hair. If you have straight hair you want wavy hair. If you're short you want to be taller. If you're tall you want to be shorter. A smaller nose or a bigger nose. I meet singles who want to be married, marrieds who want to be single. Everybody wants to be something different. Notice it says, "*I have learned to be content.*" Contentment is not a natural trait. It's not natural for you to want to be content. It's your natural nature to be envious, to always say, "I want other people to look at me" and "I want more and I don't want you to have anything" because my self esteem goes up when yours goes down. The Bible says we need to learn contentment. Many of you need to enroll in the school of contentment. There are a number of courses in it. Class 101 is "I already have more than I deserve".

Contentment is understanding that God has provided all that I need for my current happiness. Not for tomorrow or next year, but contentment is understanding that God has provided all I need for right now for my happiness. Should you have no ambition, goals, desires? Of course you should. You can admire something somebody else has and not envy it. You can even say, "I'd like to have one of those things," and not envy it. Envy is when you say, "I wish he didn't have it, because I don't." I resent it because he's got it. Don't. That's envy.

4. Respond to others in love.

I Corinthians 13:4, "*Love does not envy.*" The opposite of envy is love. You can't love somebody and envy them at the same time.

How do you do that? Matthew 22:39 "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Is that natural? No. Is it easy to do? No. Is it what society tells us to do? No. But it's the way to be happy. It's the way to be satisfied in life. "*Love your neighbor as yourself*" -- that is not natural, so you need God's love in you to love that jerk at work. You need God's love in your life to be nice to that relative who, when you go to his house, says, "I did this and this and this..." Respond to others in love.

Romans 12:15 "*Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.*" Envy does the exact opposite of that verse. When you envy, you rejoice when other people stumble and fall. And you weep when other people succeed and do better than you and get the prize and the promotion and the big deal. It's the exact opposite of love. We need to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice and be sympathetic. Envy causes you misery because you can't rejoice with anybody else and you're not going to get all the joy in life. You need to fill your life with love.

5. Refocus on pleasing God

Refocus on pleasing God instead of impressing other people. Colossians 3:2, *"Set your mind on things above, not on things of the earth."* Look at life from God's viewpoint, realize that everything here on earth is temporary, nothing's going to last. There's only two things that are going to last forever: people and God's word. Everything else is going to burn up at the judgment -- cars, stereos, homes, everything. Focus on what's going to last forever. Readjust your values. Focus on pleasing God. Make that the primary aim of your life.

When I do that -- when I say "God, you're number one in my life, that's what I'm going to focus on -- pleasing you. I'm setting my mind on heaven and the rewards up there, not the here and now." When I focus on pleasing God, competition becomes irrelevant. It just doesn't matter anymore. Because I'm not competing with anybody. God's called me, put me on the earth, given me a niche, given me the things to do and I'm to do the best I can with them and one day I'm going to enjoy the rewards for eternity. And competition just doesn't matter anymore. It doesn't matter who gets ahead this week, this month, or this year, because I'm looking at it from the long perspective of eternity and none of that's going to matter 1000 years from now. None of that. Refocus on pleasing God.

But life is not fair. Sometimes it just isn't fair. God never said life would be fair. Sometimes the bad guys win. Sometimes the jerks get the promotion. Sometimes the dishonest succeed and get away with it. Life is not fair. What then?

Proverbs 23:17, *"Don't be envious of sinful people; let reverence for the Lord be the concern of your life. If it is, you have a bright future."* Don't worry about the fact that life isn't fair. The books are not closed yet. God has not written the final chapter. The bottom line has not been totaled. Your future is in God's hands and it will be beyond anything you can even imagine here on this earth.

Where are you struggling with envy today? Some of you have envy in your home. You're still reacting to a brother or sister and they don't even live around you anymore. Or a father or mother or relative. You're envious and you think, "How come they got all the breaks?" Some of you are envious of people at school. Some of you are envious of people who have more talent than you. Some of you look at somebody else's husband or wife and think "I wish I had a husband or wife like that!" What are you envious of? Some of you are envious of people at work. Who's got the better office by the window? If you ever find yourself upset by people who have acquired more, accomplished more than you have, you're comparing and the Bible says, that's dumb.

When you allow envy into your life it is a cancer that will only destroy you as much as it destroyed the man who envied Mozart. It consumed him and obsessed him and monopolized his life until he became the loser rather than being what God meant him to be in the first place.

Prayer: "God, help me to resist comparing myself to others. Help me to recognize my uniqueness, that I don't have to act like anybody else to be worthwhile. I don't have to dress or talk or have certain objects in my house like other people in order to be valuable. Help me to rejoice in what I have, to learn to be grateful for what I've got and not always worrying about what I don't have. Help me to learn to be content. Teach me, I want to learn to be content in every circumstance. Father, help me to respond in love, to love my neighbor as myself and those relatives and people at work. Help me to rejoice with those

who rejoice and weep with those who weep as Jesus would. Most of all help me to refocus on pleasing You and not on impressing other people. Help me to set my mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Help me to trust that one day, You're going to settle the score and make things even. Help me to focus on being the person You want me to be and the future we have forever in heaven. Father thank You for Your Word. Help us to be people at peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.”