

S T U D Y T W O

From Envy to Compassion

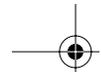
1 Samuel 20:30-42

No biblical example reveals the destructive pathos of envy as clearly as Saul's relentless pursuit of David. The biblical narrator offers such a bone-chilling description of Saul's slow progression from consumptive envy into paranoia and madness that it could provide therapists enough material to last a lifetime.

Envy rears its head when we are unable to celebrate the gifts or good fortune of another. Envy is the pain we feel when we perceive that someone possesses some object, quality or status we do not possess. Conquering envy requires us to see it for what it is—a dissatisfaction and lack of contentment with life, leading to anger against God.

In contrast to the envy of King Saul toward David is the compassion of Saul's son Jonathan. Jonathan no doubt wanted very much to be the next king of Israel, but he put aside his own self-interests to do what was in the best interest of David. The Bible tells us that Jonathan felt "one in spirit" with David and he "loved him as himself" (1 Samuel 18:1). That is envy's opposite, not to be in competition against, but in solidarity with. When love is expressed through compassion, it is simply incompatible with envy.





OPEN

- If envy is so destructive, why is it also so appealing?

- Recall a time you have been on the receiving end of envy. How did you feel about that situation?



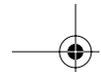
How did you feel about the person who envied you?



STUDY

Background: Saul had become envious of David's military victories and favor among the people (1 Samuel 18:5-9). He even told his son Jonathan, heir to the throne, to kill David, but Jonathan refused and warned David instead (1 Samuel 19:1-2). For a time Saul's jealousy appeared to wane; then he again tried to kill David, but David escaped and arranged with Jonathan to sound out Saul's plans. The two arranged a signal using arrows to indicate whether David was





still in danger. If Jonathan indicated that the arrows were beyond the boy, then it would mean David must flee. David hid in the field while Jonathan made excuses for his absence at a festival dinner.

Read 1 Samuel 20:30-42.

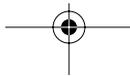
³⁰Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? ³¹As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"

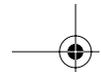
³²"Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. ³³But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

³⁴Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

³⁵In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, ³⁶and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. ³⁷When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" ³⁸Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. ³⁹(The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) ⁴⁰Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town."

⁴¹After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most.





⁴²Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

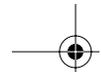
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1. Saul said that David had to be eliminated to insure Jonathan's succession to the throne. How did Saul demonstrate that Jonathan's kingship was not his chief concern (vv. 30-33)?



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2. What reasons would Jonathan have had to be envious of David?

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3. Why do you think Jonathan chose to see David as a friend rather than as a rival?





- Put yourself in the place of David, waiting out there in the field for two days (1 Samuel 20:24-27). How might your thoughts turn to envy of Jonathan?

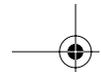
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- If David had let envious thoughts run away with him, what might he have done when Jonathan came to shoot arrows in the field (v. 35)?



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- How did David and Jonathan demonstrate the depth of their compassion for each other (vv. 34-42)?

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- David and Jonathan both wept, but why do you think David “wept the most” (v. 41)?





8. In order for compassion to overcome envy, what must happen in a person's heart?

9. In your own experience, when has God turned envy of another person into compassion for that person, and how did it happen?



10. Where does the story of David, Jonathan and Saul speak to you most specifically?



COMMIT

- Consider someone you envy. (If you can honestly say you envy no one, think of someone for whom you have trouble feeling compassion.) Try to see that person through God's eyes. Enumerate all the good and positive qualities of that person.





- Consider ways that the person you envy (or for whom you feel little compassion) might be suffering from spiritual, emotional or even physical pain. Put yourself in that person's place and notice changes in your attitude.

*Pray that you will see yourself and anyone you envy through God's eyes.
Pray that compassion will replace envy.*

For further reading: Chapters three and four of *A Heart for God*.

