Jealous much? A Biblical Response to Jealousy:

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Credit to Paul Maxwell’s article “Hey, Jealousy!” taken from Desiring God, 2 September 2014.

Why an article on jealousy? What is the significance of it? Because it is a real life issue, that every person on the earth encounters and each one needs to deal with it. But will you deal with it Biblically, or will you do so in your sinful, fleshly desires?

Jealousy is used in the Scriptures in both a positive and a negative sense. When jealousy is used as an attribute of God, it is obviously used in a positive sense. In Exodus 34:14 we learn that "the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." In Deuteronomy 4:24, God is described as "a consuming fire, a jealous God," giving the idea that he will judge because of his jealousy. In Joshua 24:19, Joshua challenges the people to serve the Lord but reminds them that serving God will be difficult because "He is a holy God; he is a jealous God."

Negatively, In Song of Solomon 8:6, jealousy is described as being as "unyielding as the grave." In Romans 10:19, Israel is said to be provoked to jealousy by Gentile nations that receive divine blessings. The same use of the word is used in Romans 11:11 because "salvation has come to the Gentiles." The Corinthian Christians are said to be provoking God to jealousy because of the worship of idols (1 Cor 10:22).

Practically, like Maxwell points out, “Christians always find ways to tidy up difficult and rebellious emotions.” Take Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” What is “Anger?” It is a tantrum, a scream, a baby’s cry – sins response. Furthermore, Proverbs 30:33, “For pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, and pressing anger produces strife.” See the escalation? Pressing the nose, is a result of anger, a form of strife. Solomon wrote, Proverbs 27:4, “Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?”

Jealousy is oppressive and it is disastrous. It feels controlling and you cannot escape it. It feels as if every part of self-control you have in your entire being is boiled into one deep and dark emotional plunge. It brings you to the end of yourself in a millisecond, and you are no longer the same person.

Physically, it makes you feel like you’ve been infected with the rage virus! You find yourself furious and overwhelmed, you are indestructible and decomposing at the same time, as Proverbs 14:30 refers “Envy makes the bone rot.” Relationally, jealousy knows no balance, it is domineeringly demanding, exhaustive, and even unaccepting of excuses, look at Proverbs 6:34: “For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge.”

Your Jealousy vs God’s Jealousy:

Christians can be quick to refer to God’s jealousy in Scripture and say, “But God is jealous, therefore, I can be jealous.” But God’s jealousy is always consistent with His perfect and self-sufficient love (Exodus 3:14). In contrast, we, sinful beings – whether
regenerate or not, are jealous in our finite love, which is limited to our emotional state and relationships. We are vulnerable, putting us in the risk of entering into a relationship where we are battling with one’s own selfish desires and the other person’s well-being. For example, wanting all of your spouse’s or friend’s attention to yourself, instead of allowing their friendships to grow in the Lord, which will have great influence on your life.

C S Lewis said, “The Friendship is not a reward for our discrimination and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauties of all the others.” There is great reward in sharing our relationships, but when we do not share with joy in our relationships, we feel that if we are betrayed or let down, being jealous is justified. But if that is the case, then we will not only lose our love, but our selves.

So how do the two jealousies differ? Humanly, we experience it with a form of individuality, vulnerability, and the possibility of deep pain and betrayal. And yet, human jealousy is unique in that it contains insecurity, because humans are not entirely secure in our relationships. True human jealousy is always insecure, because insecurity is part of the natural goodness of being finite. It is how we respond that determines how we handle our jealousy when it arises.

Through jealousy, God shows us two things. First, he shows us Himself. It is part of His character as the promise-keeping God to take on the pain and hurt of experiencing His bride’s unfaithfulness (Hosea 4:13–14). Second, He shows us ourselves. Through jealousy, the deepest desires of our hearts are provoked and amplified (Genesis 22:12; Psalm 66:18–20).

God is Gracious to the Jealous:

When our jealousy takes the form of suspicion, it’s easy to lose emotional and mental control, your imagination runs away with you at the thought of despair. But it God who reminds us of what is real.

Think about how David responded... “I will delight in God in my displeasure.” But we need more than the ideology. David roots his mind and heart in what is real asking, “Why are you downcast, O my soul?” (Psalm 42:5). This realisation of who God is, allows us to respond as David eventually did, “therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon and from Mount Mizar” (Psalm 42:6).

David knew he needed assurance outside of himself, if your jealousy is a product of excessive fear or mistrust, lean on what is concrete and true to get outside of our mind! Look to the God who is real, and who is the source of strength and joy.

God’s prescription for the Jealous:

In Hebrews 13:5-6, God gives us a liturgy for the times of jealousy and betrayal:

God: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Man: “The Lord is my helper - I will not fear - What can man do to me?”
Let’s be real, stick and stones can break your bones… When someone leaves you, betrays you, or provokes you to jealousy, God still says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” And whenever you are able to pray, “The Lord is my helper,” it will always be true. “I will not fear” you will fear because jealous are a fearful people, but hold on to that truth, it will become a whole hearted reality. Why? The author of Hebrews says it works to “keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have” (Hebrews 13:5).

Man: “Keep my life free from the love of ______. Help me be content with what I have.”

God: “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Man: “The Lord is my helper - I will not fear - What can man do to me?”

It’s not sinful to feel jealous, yet there are degrees where it does become sinful! But we must be aware of realities we need to grip tightly until the emotional wave passes. Paul notes, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Scripture says hold on for God is with you. He is not judging you for jealousy, He knows that you are unsafe and insecure. Keep in mind, in the heart of jealousy, the one who is self-sufficiently Jealous for you “will never leave you nor forsake you,” because he is fighting to “keep your life free.” Beloved, “Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?” (Proverbs 27:4). Those who live in the love which is patient, that is kind, which isn’t envious, doesn’t boast and that is not proud (1 Corinthians 13:4).