

“Desiring God brings freedom” (Psalm 73:23-28)

We are together taking a journey of the series “Being Set Free.”

Last time, we looked at the story of the four generations; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. They are the classic example that certain patterns repeat themselves from one generation to the next.

Peter Scazzero says; the ‘family’ is an emotional system of two to four generations who move through life together in different places at different times. When we are born into families, we inherit their ways of relating, their values, and their ways of living in the world. (Adopted children inherit not only birth family traits but draw on traits from their adoptive family.) Your family’s story and your individual story cannot be separated.¹

God gave us the new family of Jesus. There we are taking the process of breaking free from destructive sinful patterns of our pasts, so we can live a life God intends, so we can be a gift to the world. And that is, the very heart of Christian spirituality and discipleship.²

For putting off the sinful patterns, we need to know what we have inherited from our family of origin. We must recognize our “emotional garbage” in us, which hinders us from living out the Word of God and prevents us from growing as Jesus’ lovers.

And we must relearn how to do life God’s way in God’s family. Through practice and experiences, the emotional garbage inside us will be replaced by the Word of God. It is like re-writing the auto-pilot program little by little. Slowly but surely, we are re-parented on doing life God’s way. We do it in the new family, Jesus’ family. That is church, believers’ community.

Today we will take one step forward. That is, “Desiring God brings freedom.”

1. Favoritism caused problems

When we observe the family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, we realize that favoritism is in common throughout the four generations. And that is one of the very reasons caused problems in the family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and

¹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course Workbook*, Zondevan, 2014, p.47

² Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Course DVD*, Zondevan, 2014, Session 3.

Joseph. We can see favoritism is the seedbed of jealousy, jealousy is the byproduct of favoritism. Favoritism grows jealousy bigger and bigger.

Abraham had two sons, but he favored Isaac. Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob, but he favored Esau (Gen 25:28). Jacob had 12 sons, and he favored Joseph more than any of his other sons (Gen 37:3). You see, Jacob was born and grew up in favoritism and carried out favoritism.

And favoritism nurtured jealousy in him. It drove him. He took Esau's birthright (Gen 25). And he took Esau's blessing (Gen 27).

And it spread out through whole his family. Jealousy became his family's culture. There was an intense jealousy between Jacob's two wives, Rachel and Leah (Gen 30:1). Jacob had no idea how to handle it. Perhaps jealousy was normal to him. And this jealousy was what his children grew up watching.

Jacob had 12 sons and Joseph was his favorite son. Jacob made a richly ornamented robe just for Joseph (Gen 37:3). If we were to contextualize this in our modern day, perhaps it would be something like this. Jacob is an owner of a family business, and he's made Joseph his CEO. He gave him a nice office, a fancy car, and even a skillful secretary. Jacob's other children are Joseph's assistants. So, it's no surprise that Joseph's brothers were jealous of him. But Jacob didn't do anything about this. Again, perhaps jealousy was a normal part of family for Jacob. As a result of this dynamic, Joseph's brothers tried to kill him and ended up selling him to Egypt as a slave (Gen 37:11).

We see favoritism in our daily life. It is pretty common. Favoritism is everywhere, in school, in companies, in shops. When I did this in a class room, I was scolded. When Alice did the same thing, the teacher overlooked it. When Steve asked our boss for advice, he gave him help. When I asked him for advice, I was scolded for others' mistakes.

Unfortunately, there is favoritism in the family as well. Parents try their best to love their children equally, hopefully. However, for children, their parents favor one child over others. Why is my brother's snack always bigger than mine? All my clothes are hand-me-downs from my sisters. Why do I always have to wash the dishes, while my brothers are watching T.V.?

That is the reality. We must face the reality. Not all our desires will be satisfied. And we see some people have greater wealth, pleasure, opportunities, power and joy of fellowship than you have. In this reality two kinds of emotions arise. That is envy and jealousy.

2. Envy and Jealousy

What is the difference between envy and jealousy? Both are kinds of desire to possess something. Just a foot note. Actually in Hebrew language, one word is used for both envy and jealousy.³ Then what is the difference?

According to Tremper Longman, “Envy is the desire for what another has that we don’t have.”⁴ “Jealousy is a desire to protect what we do have (or falsely assume that we possess) and which we fear another may take away from us.”⁵

There are two boys. Jerry has a toy police car. Tom wants that police car. That is envy. While Jerry is away from there, Tom took that police car and plays with it. Then Jerry comes back there and says, “That’s mine! You can’t play with it!” That is jealousy.

There are two musicians. Chris and Rick. Rick made a band with very famous top artists for a special event. Chris was not happy when he heard about it. That is envy. Then the promoter invited Chris to that special event as a guest musician. Chris just played one song, and he received a standing ovation. When Rick saw that he was not happy. “That should be mine!” That is jealousy.

Today we will focus on envy, and will look at jealousy next time.

3. I envied them.

One article on “Harvard Business Review” talks about envy at work.

As you enter your recently promoted colleague’s office, you notice a photograph of his beautiful family in their new vacation home. He casually adjusts his custom suit and mentions his upcoming board meeting and speech in Chicago. On one hand, you want to feel genuinely happy for him and celebrate his successes. On the other, you hope he falls into a crevasse in the Alps.

When you’re obsessed with someone else’s success, your self-respect suffers, and you may neglect or even sabotage your own performance and possibly your career.

³ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/qana.html>

⁴ Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, “The Cry of the Soul,” Navpress, 1994, p.89

⁵ Ibid., p.90

Why do we pull away from colleagues we envy? Perhaps because we experience this emotion more intensely with people who are close to us. According to psychologist Abraham Tesser, people are indeed unhappier when a close friend succeeds in a personally relevant domain than when a stranger does.⁶

It's almost un-avoidable to face the situations which cause envy in us.

Psalm 73:2-5, 12

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵ They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ... ¹² This is what the wicked are like- always carefree, they increase in wealth.

Asaph, the writer of this psalm grieved that he was tired of living faithfully and sincerely. The arrogant and the wicked are making success. They are rich, wealthy, so they don't have to experience hardships. They are healthy. They live comfortably and they have no trouble like ordinary people have. And they are becoming even richer and richer. Looking at them he confessed honestly. "I envied them." I think it's natural as human. If we face situations like this where the arrogant and the wicked face no problems, become success and rich, enjoy a comfortable life, it can have the effect of growing our envy.

4. Desiring God brings freedom

What shall we do when we start to envy someone?

(1) Check your heart.

Emotion is the window which shows our inner things. So don't ignore it. Remember, there are only two directions, either turning toward God or turning away from God. In the feeling of envy, where are you heading toward? Check your heart. To a material thing or to God? To what I want or to God's will? To get

⁶ <https://hbr.org/2010/04/envy-at-work>

in his way or to God, seeking his righteousness in love? To my achievement or to God, his kingdom will come?

There is a pitfall, that is to remove desire. To remove all desire in order to overcome envy and jealousy is a false solution. There is a place in our lives for intense desire. Indeed, desire motivates us to pursue and achieve excellence in those areas in which God has called us to serve.⁷

One article on “Wall Street Journal” describes envy in two ways: One is you want to cut the advantaged person down so you look better by comparison, and the other is you are motivated by another person's success and strive to emulate it.⁸ The second one sounds positive, right? But where does it take you? What direction does it lead you? Your success, not to God. We may come to God for our success, for our own glory, for satisfying our ego. “Society is often motivated by an envy-fueled ambition.”⁹ When we deal with our envy, we must carefully observe where we are heading toward.

What do we do, when we start to envy? We check our heart. Which way our heart is turning? To our success or to God, his name will be glorified? My reputation, status, accomplishment or God, his will be done?

(2) To be aware that God knows your situation and your needs.

We have been in Vietnam for almost 11 years. In 2002, I made a long trip from one village to other village in the highlands. One local pastor took me by his motorbike. I left his place early in the morning. The first hour on the road was quite Ok, but in the next few hours, the road became so bad. We went up and down the road, which was winding, rough and dusty. Before noon, I arrived at the village. I was totally exhausted. I had no energy to speak nor eat. I excused myself and lied down.

A couple of hours later, I felt a little better. The pastor that guided me there and a pastor in the village suggested I should stay there for one night, but I told them I'd like to go back. In the end, they reluctantly agreed. We started our return trip, going up and down, on that winding, rough and dusty road again. It was twilight when we reached a paved road. I knew in about an hour, I could lie down.

⁷ Ibid., pp.97-98

⁸ <http://www.businessinsider.com/successful-people-use-envy-to-get-ahead-2014-4>

⁹ Dan and Tremper, p94

Then I casually thought in my mind, “I want to eat an apple.” It was not a prayer. It was just voiceless murmur in my mind.

When I arrived at the pastor’s place, I thanked him and went straight to bed. Soon after I lied down there was a knock on the door. It was the pastor’s wife. She gave me an apple. I ate it with tears. God’s presence was so rich and real at that moment. He was so close to me. He heard my voiceless murmur and he responded to me.

God knows our situation, and He knows our needs. It doesn’t guarantee us a comfortable life. There are some people who lost everything and are persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Heb 11:35-37

Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—.

This world is full of unrighteousness and unfairness. That is the consequence of mans’ sin. There, the wicked are thriving and enjoying life. Not only that, those who follow the Lord are suffering. Looking at these situation, sometimes we may feel hopeless, and even leave the Lord.

Then, what would you believe in this unrighteous, unfair world? In what would you put your hope? Where can you find righteousness, fairness, love, joy, peace, and hope and life, without coming to God?

(3) God is my portion!

Psalm 73:23-28

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. ²⁸ But as for

me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

God is my portion! Why do we need to desire what is someone else's?

Luke 11:9, Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you."

It doesn't mean whatever we ask and want will be all given. Probably more often they won't be given. Most of the time, we may not get what we want to have. Then in situations like that, what is God's answer for our prayers?

"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

God gave us the Holy Spirit! God gave us His Spirit! God gave us Jesus!
God is my portion!

Here let me challenge you, my friends. How much value do you put on the fact "God is my portion"? How valuable is it for you that "God is my portion"? It's my challenge too, of course. This is not the matter of our theological understanding. But, it's the matter of our everyday lives, how our daily lives show what value you put on "God is my portion."

We don't treasure something which we think is not valuable. And we don't neglect something which we think is valuable.

When I was two years old, my parents took me to a zoo for the first time. They saw I really loved one picture book about an elephant. So my parents took me to an elephant. "Look, here is an elephant!" They really expected to see how excited I would be when I saw the elephant. However, I was so attracted by the insect on the fence in front of me and didn't look at the elephant at all. My parents tried to shift my attention to the elephant by various means, but they all failed. I enjoyed watching the insect at the zoo, in front of an elephant. My parents went home very disappointed.

The whole bible is pointing out Jesus, and says "Hey, look! Look at him! There your favorite one!! Can you see he is smiling on you!!" But we are so busy for looking at something else, and don't pay attention on the voice. Or perhaps we hear the voice, but we don't spend enough time with him to make him know deeper and deeper, we know him chitchat level all the time. So we never come to know how valuable the fact "God is my portion" is.

Then when we see someone who has something better or more interesting, we envy that person and feel bad or have pity on ourselves. And sometimes we fight against each other, we compete with one another, boast to each other, and deceive each other. And finally we say “Where is God?!”

Dear my friends, the truth is there is God, he is with you and he is your portion. Let us come close to him and spend time with him and know him more and more, how great he is, how wonderful he is, how real he is in our everyday lives. The more we know him, the more we hunger for him because he is so great. And desiring God brings freedom from envy because God is our portion.

For Lifenet groups or personal reflection

- 1) Have you ever felt envy or jealousy in your family, school or work place? How did it affect your self-awareness and relationship with others?
- 2) “Society is often motivated by an envy-fueled ambition.” Have you ever seen this? What is the danger of this?
- 3) Read Psalm 73:23-28. What does God speak to you? How does this scripture help you to overcome envy?
- 4) Have you ever experienced that God knows your situation and your needs?
- 5) How valuable is it for you that “God is my portion”? What may be the challenge to integrate this with your daily living?