

green
with

envy?

get over it!

ever been green with envy? What made you so envious?

Most times envy sneaks up on us and becomes our own little secret. The kind of secret that mocks us, keeps us up late at night, tells us little lies, and gets us to do things we normally wouldn't do. Even worse, as envy grows it can cause us to commit other sins detrimental to ourselves and to others.

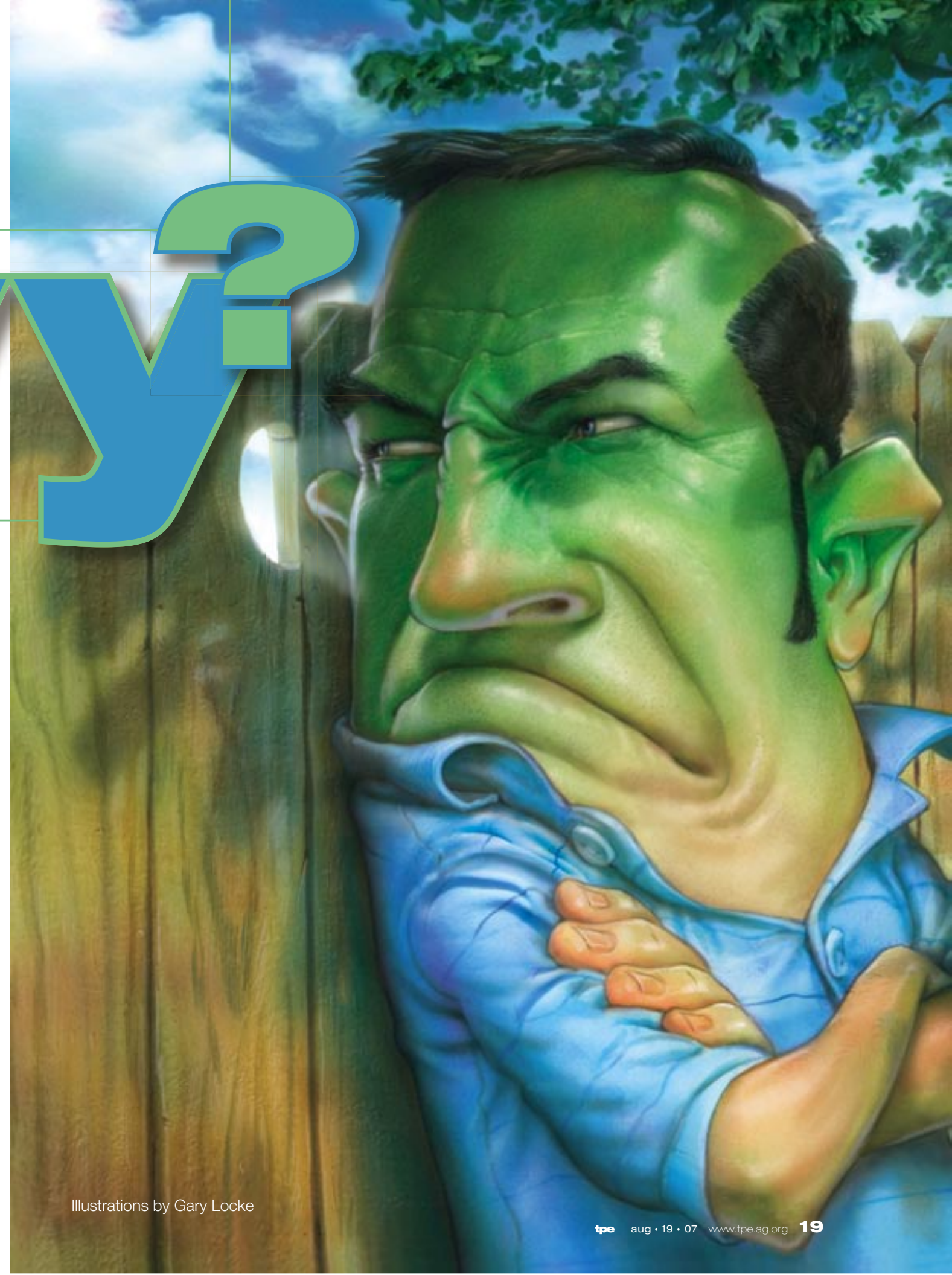
Perhaps envy is trying to take root in your life. Maybe you've let it linger and then had to yank it out of your life. Or, worse, you've tried to ignore it in the futile hope it would die quietly.

Problem is, envy rarely goes away so easily. Eventually, it comes back and starts its attacks anew.

The good news is you can say goodbye to envy once and for all. Be warned, it takes work to rid yourself of envy and keep it at bay. To do that, you'll need to understand it better, commit yourself to prayer and apply healthy doses of biblical truth to your life and circumstance.

Read on to find out how.

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Illustrations by Gary Locke

green with envy?

get your life back

By David B. Crabtree

the root of envy

What the Bible has to say about it

By Stephen Lim

The Greek and Hebrew words used in the Bible for envy have the basic meaning of desire or zeal. They are used in both the good and bad sense, depending on the context. Bible scholars have translated these words as desire, coveting, jealousy and envy — with only the latter invariably negative. Misunderstanding arises in some cases (e.g. Exodus 20:5; 2 Corinthians 9:2), since English readers may consider coveting and jealousy as always bad. The most common meaning of envy is an emotion of discontent or dislike due to an advantage another person possesses and we do not.

The Bible describes envy due to many factors and its consequences:

- Cain was sullen at God's approval of Abel's sacrifice instead of his (Genesis 4:4,5), leading to murdering his brother.
- The Philistines resented Isaac's wealth, causing them to fill with earth the wells that his father Abraham had dug (Genesis 26:14,15).
- Rachel was bitter over her barrenness compared to her sister Leah's children (Genesis 30:1).
- Saul's homicidal hostility was due to the acclaim David received for his military exploits (1 Samuel 18:5-9).
- The Jews' abusive treatment of Paul was due to his popularity (Acts 13:45).
- In Jesus' parable of the prodigal, the older son sulked because of the celebration held for his repentant brother (Luke 15:28-30).

The Ten Commandments include the prohibition, "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17, NIV). Paul describes jealousy as "worldly" (1 Corinthians 3:3) and a result of the "sinful nature" (Galatians 5:19,20). James and Peter likewise admonish against it (James 3:14; 1 Peter 2:1). Envy has the potential to harm the one who harbors it, as well as others. "Envy rots the bones" (Proverbs 14:30) expresses the internal havoc it causes. Envy is also dangerous because it underlies many of our sinful behaviors, while questioning God's goodness. **tpe**

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come clean > break it down > give it up > get a life

I have a file in my mind labeled "wasted time." It holds the record of time I've spent on envy. I go through the file every once in a while, just to be reminded. I have wasted too much time wanting what others have, wishing for a life not my own, or coveting someone else's blessing.

I've wasted too much time looking at someone else's greener fields when I could have, and should have, been cultivating fields of my own. I've deceived myself into believing that success comes in limited quantities, and if someone else has a lot, there cannot be much left for me.

I've cultivated envy. I've watered it with bitter tears, nurtured it with perceived injustice, grown it tall and waited for a harvest. And that's the problem. There is no harvest — only scorched fields and total loss. If you haven't yet filed your envy under "wasted time," consider the following as steps to a better life.

1. Come clean.

Envy is sin. Like all sin, it must be dealt with through confession. We waste a lot of time and strength playing a shell game with embar-

assing truths. Because envy is so devoid of virtue, we hide it from others and especially from ourselves. So long as we are focused on someone else and blinded to our own vice, we are captive to our envy.

Until we get our eyes off others and see ourselves as we truly are, we will continue to wallow, quite miserably, in a pigpen of our own making. Take a look at the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 feeding pigs as a slave. Like him, we need to come to our senses and confess our sin. The Father is waiting, but you can't start for home until you come to grips with the truth. (See Romans 13:13 and Galatians 5:19-21.)

2. Break it down.

How is envy working for you? Does it make you happy? Would you recommend it to a friend? Are you proud of it? Does it produce good fruit in your life? Have you ever considered how it robs you of peace, strips you of contentment, or ruins your reputation? Can you change anything through envy? Has envy ever built a better civilization? What monuments have been erected to its virtues? Who sings of its glory? Doesn't it always end with

tragedy? Isn't envy just the twisted green face of a fallen race? Why should we entertain it?

3. Give it up.

Rejoice in what you have and trust God to meet your needs. You'll fail in trying to make yourself over to anyone else's specifications, so let God have a shot at making you over according to His. Envy has us off chasing rainbows when the One who made the rainbow just wants our trust. Envy evaporates in the light of His empowering presence. God delights in taking us far beyond our desires, but He cannot act until we have surrendered.

4. Get a life.

The abundant life Jesus offers to all who will follow Him is a life perfectly crafted to our individual designs. Envy is a constant and aching discomfort; a displeasure in who we are; a misplaced vision of who we might become.

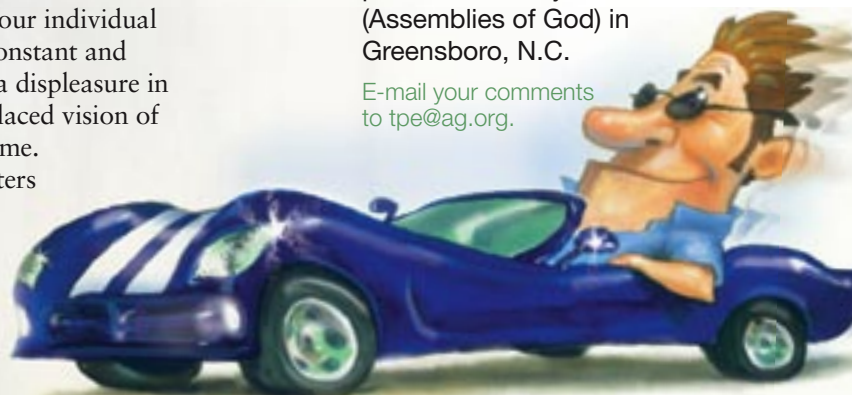
Life in Christ centers on the recognition that God created us with unique gifts and qualities that, when devel-

oped, produce satisfaction, joy, fulfillment and effectiveness. Get comfortable in your own skin. God only made one of you, and envy will keep you from fulfilling His design. (See John 10:10 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Envy is a stubborn sin. Place it on your watch list. Expose it to the light. Kill it by confession. You'll find more time for virtues, visions and dreams. You'll find peace and contentment, grace and dignity. You'll find life beyond the limits that envy once imposed. The life you so long for cannot be measured against anything less than the purpose Christ saw when He called you to be. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



nothing but *envy* in 26D

By Dick Foth

I admit it. What appealed to me most about sitting in first class on the red-eye flight from Denver to Washington, D.C., was that initial eye contact with folks on their way to the economy cabin. The look said, it seemed to me, "I wish I was up here in this wide-leather-seated-attended-to-at-every-turn section." I kind of liked that.

Of course, I am almost always one of "them," the economy class crowd. The ordinary folks. The steerage gang. But, on occasion, because of dozens of flights "back there" I can upgrade on long flights or arduous trips or for almost any other pathetic reason to move up near the pilots. Seat 3B elicits "that look" quite often. Seat 26D never does.

Why is that? Is it the-grass-is-greener thing? Perhaps it is the I-am-a-fallen-man-and-I-can't-get-up syndrome? It's not envy tilting toward jealousy. It's just a little envy that registers as folks move through.

Meg Greenfield, the late editor of *Newsweek* magazine, described Washington, D.C.'s political climate as "high school," that time in one's life when whom we are seen with makes a huge difference.

I was an economy-class kid in high school, good with grades, but not in the top tier of the popular. That is, until I played the lead role of John Proctor in Arthur Miller's Broadway play *The Crucible* my senior year. It got great reviews, and I started being approached by lovely girls I'd never met before to see if I might want to go have a Coke.

I was too embarrassed to respond affirmatively, but I loved the attention.

Some years ago, I heard this statement: "We live in a day when men would rather be envied than esteemed."

I was not sure I agreed, but it really grabbed me. Envy usually has to do with possessions. Esteem has to do with character and achievement. One is short-term and the other is long-term. The difference is found in how I look at life.

When I envy someone, I simply do not understand life. When I esteem someone, I am looking through God's lens. To say it another way, to be on the receiving end of envy is to be misunderstood, but to be on the receiving end of esteem is to be humbled.

On reflection, go for esteem. That's the real first class. **tpe**

DICK FOTH, an ordained Assemblies of God minister, is involved in small groups and discipleship work in Washington, D.C.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

green with envy?

fool for envy

By Kirk Noonan

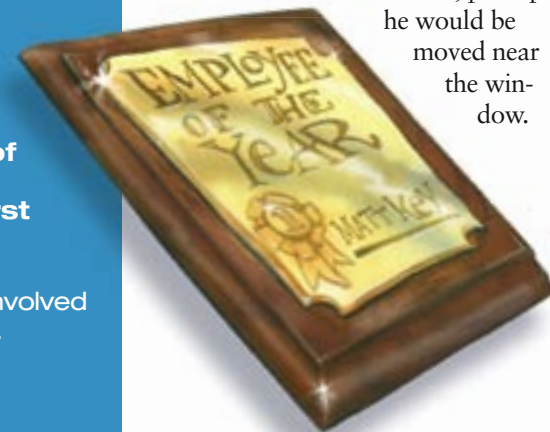
A friend told me a story in college about two old men who shared a hospital room. One of the men was by the only window in the room. To ease their boredom the man near the window would begin and end each day by telling the other man about everything he could see out the window.

He especially loved to tell of the lush, green park just across the street. Each day he spoke of lovers strolling near a pond, red-breasted robins fighting over worms, little boys playing baseball and mothers chasing after toddlers.

As the days went by the man not near the window felt the twinges of envy roiling within him. Within days he hated to hear the stories, the man's voice and especially the man.

"It's not fair," the old man would mumble under his breath. "I deserve to be by the window now; he's had his share."

One night the old man heard the other man gasping for air. Instantly, the old man reached for his bell and was about to ring the nurse when it dawned on him that if the other man died, perhaps he would be moved near the window.



He quietly set the bell back down and pretended to be sleeping as he listened to his roommate die a very slow death.

The next morning when he awoke, his roommate was gone. A nurse was fast at work putting the finishing touches on the freshly made bed near the window. Not wanting to be away from the window a second longer the old man asked if he could have the dead man's bed.

"I don't know why you'd want to be near this window," said the nurse, "but we'll move you."

Staff members were called and the old man was moved to the other bed. He kept his eyes closed until everyone was out of the room. For months he had heard of all the beauty just outside the window and he wanted to experience it all for the first time by himself. Slowly he opened his eyes and instantly disappointment rained down on him.

All he could see outside the window was a fire escape and the grimy side of another building just across the alley.

In researching envy I've learned people envy all sorts of things, for all sorts of reasons. An object of envy can be virtually anything from an idea people have of another person to the kind of car your neighbor's 16-year-old son drives.

Recently, I called some friends and acquaintances to see what they

have envied in their lifetimes. Some of their answers were shocking. Here's a partial list of what they had been envious of:

Height; the gift of gab; the guy who got to carry the football in high school; the girl who seemed to have the perfect family; the bold people who weren't afraid to speak their mind; a brother's full head of hair; a minister friend who had more people at his church; people who talk less, but say more; beautiful skin; school-mates who had braces and glasses; people who are married; and the homecoming queen.

Almost every person I interviewed laughed or turned red when they admitted the object of their envy — some even offered a disclaimer.

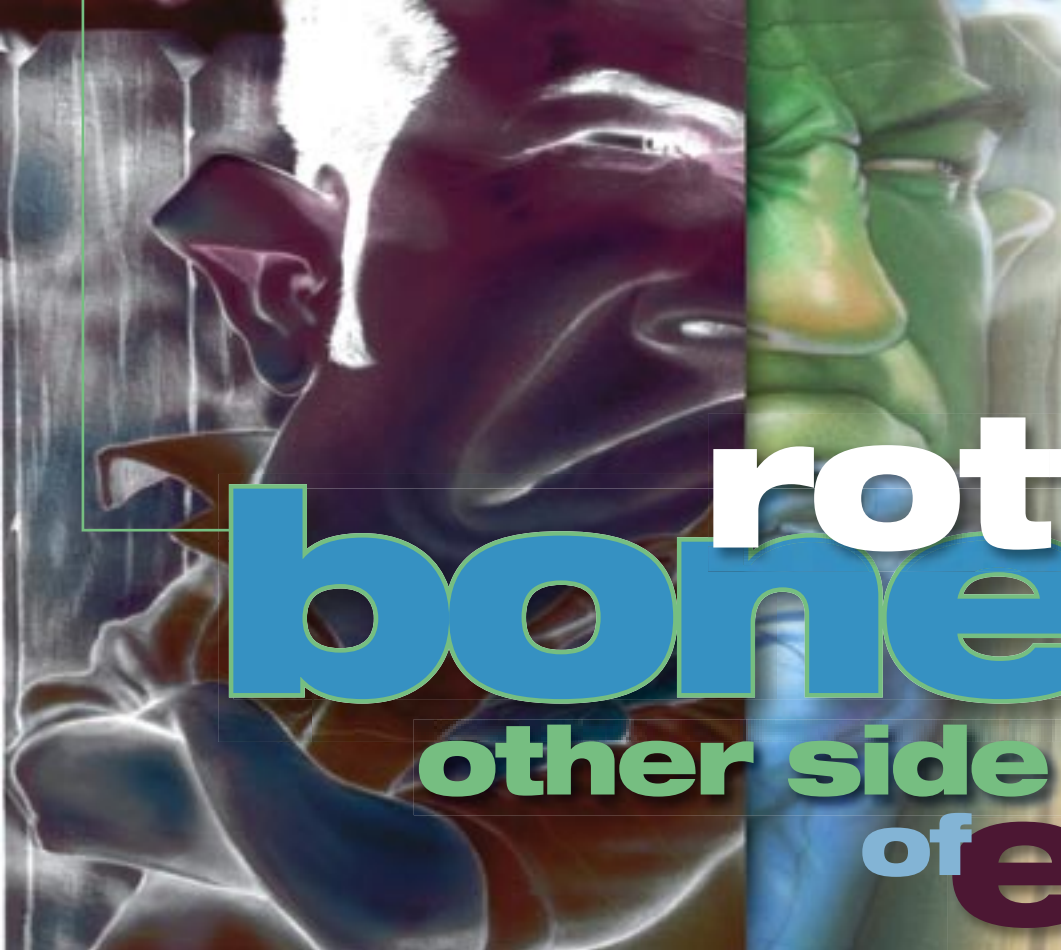
Though envy is a hard feeling to conquer, I've learned something about it over the years — the object of our envy is rarely as great as we think it is.

If you don't believe me, wait until you sacrifice everything to get next to the window and you'll see for yourself. **tpe**

KIRK NOONAN is managing editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.





green with envy?

is it all that bad?

By Scott Harrup

Can envy be good? Is envy bad when it pushes you to strive to be a better person — such as a dad who strives to be a better father because of his envy of a co-worker's relationship with his son? Do the ends justify the means?

The short answers: No, yes, no.

True, you can take a word like "envy" and shine it up. You might say without the least rancor, "I envy the way your family spends time together. Our family needs to do more of that."

But when you're talking about real envy, the bitter attitude that someone else is enjoying a benefit in life and you are not, it's never the right thing to do. Even if you make a positive change in your life, if you do it out of envy you're tainting the benefit of the change.

Paul listed in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 13 some great things people might do — speak in tongues, prophesy, give to the poor, become martyrs for the faith. But if they did it for any motivation other than love, it was for nothing.

Don't use envy as your motivation in life. Use love. All of your relationships should be grounded in love anyway. That's the biblical standard, the one-size-fits-all paradigm for interacting with the human race. And as your circle of loved ones continues to grow, you'll identify more and more personal qualities and lifetime accomplishments in others that are worthy of your emulation.

So, don't envy the co-worker who is an ace parent. Admire those parenting skills and determine to learn from them, all the while treasuring who that co-worker is in your life. **tpe**

By Pat Barrett

rotten bones and other side effects of envy

Many people believe that envy just happens. They don't understand why they become resentful, depressed, easily angered and agitated.

Once, a client with anger and depression problems came in. He went on for some time just looking at what he didn't have.

"Why aren't my children interested in getting A's?" he asked. "Why didn't they get scholarships? Why do I have to push my son to do his homework and chores? Why is my wife overweight and not involved in things that others notice? She has never received a civic award, like my brother's wife."

His final statement was, "Why does God bless others and not me?"

Envy affects a person physically, psychologically and spiritually.

Proverbs 14:30 says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones" (NIV).

This was very evident in my client. He had many physical manifestations of depression brought on by his envy of others. He complained of pain in his joints, con-

stant fatigue and lack of motivation to exercise or complete tasks, which are all common in individuals who are overcome with envy.

The Lord made our bodies to respond to our thoughts and actions as a warning when we are going down the wrong path.

When our thoughts are envious, we tend to deny that fact or complain to others. This is in accordance with James 3:14, which warns us, "If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth."

Denial and boasting to others lead a person to harbor anger and resentment. Psychologically this can lead to many disorders such as depression, anxiety and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The number one result of envy appears to be depression that results from sinful thoughts and behaviors. Clients have reported working long hours, sometimes multiple jobs, to acquire things that others have. Often they complain of missing their children's growing-up years or becoming distant from their spouses.

Other clients I see suffer from anger problems. The anger is fre-

quently a cognitive and behavioral response to jealousy and resentment, which are both the result of embracing envious thoughts. These thoughts have led them into sinful behaviors due to the desires of their hearts not being in line with God's desire for them.

If we envy what others have or do, we cannot see how God has blessed us, much like my client, who couldn't or wouldn't see how the Lord had blessed him. His children enjoyed family times. They were involved in church, lived strong moral lives, and had empathy and care for others.

His wife was faithful and believed she should take care of the home and family. She was there for him and their children when they needed a hug or someone to listen.

He had so much, but his envious thoughts and heart had



“Why does God bless others and not me?”

God's command to love one another as He has loved us. Envy results in physical, psychological and spiritual suffering. To overcome envy, my client had to learn to love. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ARCS OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

1-800-4PRAYER

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center

