

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY SIXTEEN

The Coiled Snake of Jealousy

Mark 9:38–41

God reserves the right to use others who are not in your group or my group. God reserves the right to bless others you or I might not endorse. We're not in charge of who God blesses.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

A spouse feels the urge to constantly check the odometer of his wife's car for fear that she's sneaking out. A student imagines that a peer's achievement is undercutting his or her success. A pastor feels uneasy when another pastor down the street has a larger and more vibrant congregation than his. Jealousy is like a coiled snake, and its fangs can bite anyone!

Marriages suffocate . . . trust and intimacy collapse . . . ministries lose their vitality . . . and we struggle to breathe spiritually when jealousy wraps itself around our hearts. But we're not alone. Even during Jesus' ministry, the snake of jealousy struck when His disciples thought another person was invading their territory and doing what they thought only they had authority to do.

What is *jealousy*? It is the fear of being replaced by a rival whom we perceive to be taking what we possess. It differs from *envy*, which is a strong desire for another person's possession. Think of it this way. Jealous people's hands are full, and they are determined *to keep what they have*. Envious people's hands are empty, and they are determined *to take what someone else has*.

King Solomon warned about jealousy's dangers:

*Jealousy as cruel as the grave;
Its flames are flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.* (Song of Solomon 8:6 NKJV)

The Hebrew terms in this verse are insightful. *Qin'ah*, “jealousy,” is rooted in an Arabic word meaning “to become intensely red”—like a jealous person's face. The Hebrew word for *cruel*, *qasheh*, means “hard, severe, fierce,” and is translated “unyielding” in the NIV.¹ Both Hebrew words accentuate jealousy's destructive, consuming power.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

The Coiled Snake of Jealousy

Mark 9:38–41

In our passage from Mark, Jesus helps us defang the snake and teaches us how to erect a fence to keep jealousy out of our hearts. With His help, we can live with open hands, trusting God with what we have and being willing to share His blessings.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Guard your heart above all else,
for it determines the course of your life. (Proverbs 4:23)*

Reflect on these words of wisdom that bring true freedom. Then, ask the Lord to inspect your heart and reveal to you what has come in that does not honor Him. Invite Him to expose areas where the enemies of your soul—like jealousy, envy, and pride—have open access. Let Him prepare your heart to receive His precious Word, so His abundant life can freely flow through you.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

It was a unique privilege to be one of the Twelve. Of all His followers, Jesus handpicked these men to “be with Him” (Mark 3:14 NASB). They went with Him to places others didn’t go, heard Him say things others didn’t hear, and saw a side of Jesus no one else saw. He called them His apostles—the ones He sent “to preach” (3:14), and He gave them special “authority to cast out the demons” (3:15).

They were in the Messiah’s inner circle—like prime ministers with free access to the king. No doubt, their heads swelled with feelings of superiority. Overly self-assured, they had tried and failed to cast out a demon in their own strength (Mark 9:14–29). Their egos were bruised, so when they saw someone else *successfully* casting out demons in the name of Jesus, their faces turned red with jealousy! Let’s observe their huffy reaction and Jesus’ gracious response.

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Observation: Jesus Rebukes His Disciples

Use your skills of observation to enter the scene as you read [Mark 9:38–41](#) aloud and in various translations.² John is speaking. Note his repeated use of the first-person plural pronoun. What did he say to Jesus in 9:38?

It's a childlike thing, but we do that when we're jealous of someone else. Isn't it a curious use of the pronoun us? They complained: "He isn't following us"—as if they were to be followed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What was Jesus' response to John in Mark 9:39? Don't you love His greathearted answer—His complete lack of jealousy? Why should they *not* hinder the one casting out demons in Jesus' name?

And Jesus said, "Stop hindering him." It's a present imperative. "Stop doing what you've been doing." "Why?" "Because he's doing it in My name. That's fine. It's no problem." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What did Jesus say to His disciples in 9:40–41? How did He illustrate His point?



Interpretation: Witnessing the Strikes of the Snake of Jealousy

Jesus taught His disciples a timeless principle as an antidote for jealousy. Let's look closer at the text to understand what He taught.

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The disciples had a closed-fisted, fear-based mindset. When they said to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone using your name to cast out demons, but we told him to stop because he wasn’t in our group” (Mark 9:38), what were they afraid might happen if this man continued?

“Who does he think he is? We tried to prevent him . . .” It’s written in the tense that means continued action in the past. “We kept on trying. Hey, don’t do that! Hey, stop doing that! Hey, what do you think you’re doing? Hey, you’re not one of the Twelve. Hey! Stop it. Quit.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus, however, had an openhanded, grace-based mindset. He said:

“No one who performs a miracle in my name will soon be able to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us. If anyone gives you even a cup of water because you belong to the Messiah, I tell you the truth, that person will surely be rewarded.”
(Mark 9:39–41)

How did Jesus’ perspective differ from the disciples’ perspective? What principles about abundance and grace was Jesus teaching?

In one of the few instances in the Gospels, Jesus referred to Himself as “the Messiah.” He was teaching His disciples how to live the abundant life in His kingdom, where there are no limits to God’s grace toward those who believe in Him. What did Jesus’ example of giving a cup of water mean? Why would this person receive a reward?

What a kind thing for him to do. He sees that one of you is thirsty and he brings you a cup of water. There’s a reward for that. You don’t have to be one of the Twelve to give each other cups of water. It’s a nice thing to do.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Sum up Jesus' antidote for jealousy. When we feel jealous of someone, how can we respond with Christ's mindset?



Correlation: Uncoiling the Snake of Jealousy

Let's expand our view of God's counsel on the sin of jealousy by examining other Scriptures. Compare [Mark 9:38–41](#) with [Numbers 11:26–30](#). How does the snake of jealousy uncoil in both passages? What similarities do you find between John's reaction and Joshua's? How would you describe Moses' response?

Isn't that a great response from Moses? "Men, this isn't about me. I'm not the star of the show. I'm just an 80-plus-year-old leader trying to get you to Canaan. I wish that we were surrounded by people who had such gifts. How much we need them!" Moses never stood taller. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What role does godly wisdom play in releasing jealousy's coils according to [James 3:13–17](#)? Which of the characteristics of godly wisdom do you think were missing in John and Joshua? What vital lessons can we believers learn from Paul's attitude toward other ministers of the gospel in [1 Corinthians 3:1–9](#)?

It's a big world. It takes all kinds, even some whose church you would not attend. We need to kill the snake of jealousy. We need to get rid of it. We need to realize that we have become far too narrow if our philosophy is now down to, "It's us four and no more, and I'm not too sure of you three." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Application: Kill the Snake!

How has the Lord opened your eyes to the sneaky and sudden strikes of jealousy in your life? What are you holding on to and afraid of losing to a rival?

There is a narrowness that causes us to have little use for anyone else's presence, giftedness, ministry, or opinion. What are some practical ways that the Lord brought to your mind to kill the snake of jealousy?

It's so easy to pass judgment on people or assume ill intentions. Not everyone who loves the Lord worships Him as we do, and that's okay. In Christ's kingdom of grace, there are many ways to love and serve our King—and He welcomes them all. At the heart of jealousy is fear. To keep jealousy out, put up a fence of faith in Christ, who provides abundantly all that you need. Be glad for others when they receive Christ's blessing, and be thankful for the blessings He pours into your cup, which will never run dry.



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Your Word reaches deep into my heart, removing the coils of this snake so I can experience Your abundant life. Thank You so much for these timeless truths. Help me kill the snake of jealousy. May I remember that we are all in the family and that Your grace abounds. And may my exclusive faith turn to Christ and none other. In His name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 888, 904.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at insight.org.

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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