

What Eats Away at Relationships?

We all long for healthy, long-term relationships. However, in our search to form relationships and maintain them, we often fail because of a certain “cancer” that we do not always take into account. What could this cancer be?

Numbers 12 (story)

Tension: Miriam and Aaron are jealous of Moses

¹Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ²Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?’ they asked. ‘Hasn’t he also spoken through us?’ And the LORD heard this.

Relief of tension: The Lord intervenes

³Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.

⁴At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, ‘Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you.’ So the three of them came out. ⁵Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud;

⁹The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.

Result: Miriam contracts leprosy; Moses’ reaction

¹⁰When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam—leprous, like snow.

¹³So Moses cried out to the LORD, ‘O God, please heal her!’ ¹⁴The LORD replied to Moses, ‘If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back.’ (NIV)

Jealousy is the cancer in relationships. Aaron and his sister, Miriam, were very jealous of their brother, Moses. The reason for their jealousy was Moses’ special position in Israel. Jealousy causes a person to be restless—to feel dissatisfied with their own lives and use criticism to trample on those around them. Many people like to hear that others have also failed, because this puts them all in the same boat. Jealousy wishes no one joy.

We do not know for certain why Aaron and Miriam wanted to speak to Moses about the Cushite woman. It could have been a smoke screen for their jealousy. Moses’ answer to their jealousy was humility. He did not find their criticism threatening. When Miriam later contracted leprosy, Moses did not take delight in it. On the contrary, he prayed for his sister’s recovery. Moses learned to use good to conquer evil. He left behind a good testimonial: “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3).



Lord, help me not to be jealous but to be humble instead.

To cure jealousy is to see it for what it is, a dissatisfaction with self.

—Joan Didion (b. 1934), *American journalist and novelist*