

Comparing Ourselves to Others

Many of our emotional and psychological troubles can be traced to a single cause: the constant need to compare ourselves to others. How can we escape this?

“I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men” (Psa. 73:3-5).

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector’” (Lk. 18:11).



The moment we are born into this world, we enter a contest with billions of other humans. The comparisons are endless: Who is the smartest? Who is the most beautiful? Who is the richest? Who is the strongest? Who is the wisest? Who is the most popular? The competition is relentless, and we are constantly reminded of how we stack up against others in all these categories.

Faced with this endless struggle to measure up, the impact on our self-image tends toward one of two extremes: Either we will see ourselves losing most of these face-offs, which will discourage and embitter us (think of the author of Psalm 73, who resented the success of others); or we will sense our superiority in several of these areas, which will turn us into self-righteous, arrogant snobs (like the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable). Either way, we will develop a

distorted view of ourselves that damages our relationships with others and inhibits our effectiveness in God’s kingdom.

Somehow, we need to get over this incessant need to compare ourselves to others. But is that even possible? We interact with people every day of our lives, and those interactions provide constant reminders of the differences between us and them.

We cannot escape the reality of different talents, achievements, and fortunes among us. But there is one thing we *can* change: *who* we choose to compare ourselves to.

Instead of comparing myself to other people, what if I focused on the life of Jesus—His holiness, His perfection, His power, His knowledge of every detail of my life? Such a comparison would deflate my pretensions of greatness. By reflecting on His majesty, I would come to realize that it really doesn’t matter what advantages I may have over others. In the presence of the Son of God, I have no room to gloat about anything I may have achieved or possess. *He owns me*, and that should humble me into the dust.

At the same time, if I study the horrible death of Jesus, not as a stale historical event but as a personal gift I could not earn for myself, the knowledge of such a vicarious sacrifice would lift me from the gutter in which I find myself. “The Son of God loved ME and gave Himself for ME” (Gal. 2:20). In light of that cosmic truth, who cares how I measure up to the achievements of others? I am a child of the King! I have a mansion waiting for me in heaven! What more do I need?

Ultimately, there is only one comparison that really matters: my relationship with Jesus Christ. If I make that my primary concern in life, it will force my heart to embrace two essential truths: *I am not worthy of God’s blessings*, so I can’t get proud and cocky toward others. But at the same time, He has given me an enormous gift motivated entirely by a love I cannot comprehend. *I am valuable to God*, regardless of what others think of me, so I have no reason to despair.

If I keep my eyes set on those two truths, there will be no need to compare myself to others. I won’t have the time or the desire to play all the petty games that come with that futile exercise. I will be *free* in the truest sense of the word, liberated from the constant pressure to win a contest that means nothing in the end.

— David King