

The Harms of Comparison

■ by Kathy Konrath MA, LCPC, LMHC



“If you compare, you’ll despair.”

I’m not sure I can attribute this quote to any one person. I had a friend say this to me as I was complaining about how hard my struggle seemed compared with others. Her words have stuck with me, and I find them to be truth that grounds me when I am tempted to examine myself against those around me.

Comparison abounds in our culture.

Advertised are the beauties and successes of Hollywood. We “like” and “tweet” happy pictures of friends and family and make real time updates on our whereabouts, accomplishments, conquests, and so forth.

And somewhere in the unending frenzy of news and gossip, we locate a stick, carry it around, and every so often measure ourselves against it. We find we are, at times, “better than” or “less than” those around us. Our measurements may bring us anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, or worthlessness. On the other hand they may bring us a sense of pride, gratitude, or increased self-worth and esteem.

The common denominator = SELF

The common denominator, whether you feel “better than” or “less than”, is **self**. Self is always in opposition to God. It is our “self” that is bruised or pampered when we compare our lives with others. Comparison seeks to rise to a certain standard. But what standard?

What standard do you measure yourself by?

In the Bible, Paul tells the Corinthian church that “It matters very little to me what you think of me, even less where I rank in popular opinion. I don’t even rank myself. Comparisons in these matters are pointless.” (1 Corinthians 4: 3-4, The Message). Paul didn’t seek evaluation from himself or any other person in matters concerning him. He used the Lord Jesus Christ as his standard and judge. And since there was no way his self would ever measure up to Christ, his self was forgotten. In fact, it had to be. In the forgetting of his self, Paul describes freedom.

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An invitation

There is no law or set of rules that will work for us. The grace we find in Jesus Christ is at our disposal every time we look to the cross. We have the invitation to “die to self” in order that we might “follow him (Jesus)”. Paul knew this when he said the only thing that matters is what Jesus thinks.

We are each made in God’s image. We are individually unique and designed with a purpose and plan that only God knows and only God can reveal to us. Contentment comes when we find ourselves loved and known, in God’s plan; not the plan of our parents; not the plan of our employers, teachers or friends; not the plan of a weight loss program or a dating web site. These standards will either deflate us when we see how we don’t add up, or puff us up with pride and earthly approval when we meet or exceed the mark. In either case, we have uncertainty at best. There is another way: God’s plan.

Our ticket to freedom

The word of God says it is for freedom that we have been set free (Galatians 5:1). God wants you and me to live in the freedom of who we are in Christ alone. This ticket to freedom has already been paid for. The pass lets you explore a new identity and a new way of being. You must leave the standards of others and the world at the door. They won’t fit into this new freedom. But as you enter in, you will find grace.

Put it into practice

Social media and the news can often trigger the urge to compare. When I work with clients who struggle with anxiety or depression, I often recommend taking a break from social media.

It matters what you look at and what you listen to. If you get especially tempted to compare your lot with those around you, consider removing the trigger for a while. Delete the Facebook app from your phone. Turn off Access Hollywood and put down People magazine. Put aside the standards of the world for a time and replace them with the standards of Jesus. Know Jesus, and find acceptance.

Today, turn off the TV and put down your phone.

Take a moment to think about your life.

As you do, say out loud 5 things you have that you are grateful to have.

For now, let that be enough.

For a deeper and thought provoking look at the harms of comparisons, read *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* by Timothy Keller.



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