

WARM UP

1. What was the last list you made, and why?
2. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be and why?
3. Growing up how and why were you compared to others?

WORD

As humans, we often want to do better and improve. Sometimes when we are fed up with ourselves at not getting better, we give up, and either move on, or sulk for a while (some may even slowly sink into a depressive state). It is so easy today (especially with Social Media) to cultivate unhealthy comparisons between ourselves and others. They are better, cooler, richer, stronger, prettier, nicer, thinner, etc. than me. Comparison can breed discontentment, so we need to be aware of this hidden trap in the self-improvement game.

Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding. - 2 Corinthians 10:12 ESV

This quote from the Apostle Paul is sometimes also translated “they are ignorant.” This leads us to our first point:

1: Comparison is ignorance and does not honour God.

Comparison flies in the face of everything we know about God and the unique ways he’s created each one of us. He did not make us the same nor does he want us to be the same. We are all unique and special to Him. The way to kill something special is to compare it with something else.

Man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart. - 1 Samuel 16:7

Comparison can rob us of contentment. Who says we need to be the same or better than each other? It’s not God.

2: Comparison is the result of believing a lie.

God is not a man that He should lie. – Numbers 23:19a

Since God cannot lie, God cannot be the source or root of comparison. Where there is fruit there is a root. We need to get the roots of lies that have produced the fruit of comparison in

our lives. When gardening, while it is easier to cut back a weed or noxious plant, it is better to uproot it, so it does not grow back. However, digging up roots takes extra time and is harder work. When we are confronted with comparison, we can ask ourselves: what lie am I believing? What's making me feel inadequate, insignificant, or insecure? Former US president, Teddy Roosevelt stated, "Comparison is the thief of joy."

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. – John 10:10a

The thief the Apostle John is referring to is the devil. Earlier in John's Gospel he recorded Jesus saying:

When [the devil] lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44b

Lies can become our reality if we continue to listen to them and begin believing them. How do we identify lies? By knowing the truth. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Jesus connects us to God, the Father, who unconditionally accepts us, because of the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done. Immediately following the thief's purpose, Jesus states his purpose:

My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. - John 10:10b

3: We can't faithfully follow Jesus if we're always comparing ourselves to someone else.

Let's consider: who or what is going to define my self-worth? My ability? My bank account? What my parents, family, classmates, workmates say? If you are a follower of Jesus and your answer to this question is anything besides Christ, you will constantly be running a race you cannot win. Such a life does not lead to joy. If we look to the culture around us to define us, we're going to end up striving towards an unattainable goal that was never set specifically for us. It will leave each one of us feeling like a failure and without purpose. So:

...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles [comparison]. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us [not someone else's], fixing our eyes on Jesus [following Him], the pioneer and perfecter of faith... Hebrews 12:1-2

God has a plan, purpose, and calling that's unique for each one of us; and, it's not someone else's calling. The Apostle Paul encourages us:

So run to win! 25 All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. 26 So I run with purpose in every step.1 Corinthians 9:24-26

Run to win. Run the unique race set before you. The great thing is: Jesus has already won! He's the ultimate overcomer. He is already the best. Jesus determines our win. Let's each do what God has called us to do. Work with integrity. Be faithful in relationships. Pray for others. Serve others. Disciple people. We can each be thankful for the race that God has chosen for us. No one can beat us at being us. Rephrased: No one else can be you.

4: Overcoming comparison

How do we know if Jesus Christ defines our self-worth? Does what we believe about ourselves match up with what God says about His children in the Bible? The Bible is full of our worth and what God thinks about His children. We use the word of God which is a two edge sword like a sledge hammer and attack the lies. Let the warrior within arise.

We cannot rewind time and undo mistakes, or beat ourselves up over and over again for things. But, we can learn and move forward with God, since he is gracious, and the Holy Spirit is available to us to help us in our time of need.

To overcome comparison we can: 1) Repent of the sin of comparison (not wanting to be as God created and intended you to be, and wanting to be like someone else). 2) Resist the devil's lies. James (Jesus's half-brother) tells us to:

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. - James 4:7

Reading, understanding, knowing, believing, and living God's word (the Bible) is submit ourselves to him. The final way to overcome comparison is 3) Run your race, fixing your eyes on Jesus; follow him. Do these and we will grow stronger in our identity in Christ.

APPLICATION

1. What have you learned today, and what do you think God would like you to do about it?
2. We can learn to not listen to the enemy's lies about our identity. What lies do you hear that attempt to derail you, take you out, or disempower you? What deflates you? (Follow-up: Are those things true? What does God actually say about us?)
3. Which of the three ways to overcome comparison is most challenging for you and why?

Prayer

- *Pray for anything that is shared in the application time.*
- *Pray to know God's truth, so it can dislodge any lies from the enemy.*
- *Pray that God would reveal to each person's heart their collective purpose being a child of God, and also their unique purpose that God has chosen for them to fulfil.*
- *Pray for a warrior spirit to arise that will contend for God's identity for each of us, and especially those of the next generation.*

(please remember to always pray for each other and any church/ministry needs)