

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

41. What Happens When We Compare?

You are listening to episode 41 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast titled, *What Happens When We Compare?* Welcome back to the podcast. I'm so glad you're here. When appropriate, comparing can be a good thing. But used in our relationships, well, it can be devastatingly damaging. Do you ever find yourself comparing who you are with someone else? Or have you ever compared what you have to what someone else has? Like your hair, your body, your clothing, your house, your talents, your journey, your children, your faith? I know, it's probably not something you and I set out to do, but if we're human, which I think we all are, it happens. Right? And for some reason, women tend to get caught up in comparison the most. Well, in this episode we're taking a look at comparison, what God might have to say about it, what happens when we compare, and how damaging comparison can be. So, let's get into it!

She had everything going for her. Her hair was more beautiful than mine. She was more fit than me. She had the perfect life with the perfect home, the perfect job, the perfect set of skills. Her life was, yes, perfect. Or so it seemed. I found myself comparing what I didn't have to what she had. And this made me feel as if she had everything and I had nothing.

But as I got to know her better, I began to realize her life wasn't so perfect after all. Her marriage was struggling, she had trauma from her past that was paralyzing her, and her self-worth was in the pits. It wasn't long before I started to feel like the superior one instead of the inferior one.

When we compare ourselves to others, no one wins.

Sadly, no one wins in the game of comparison. It is a self-destructive game we play with ourselves. Because have you noticed when we play this game of comparing ourselves with others, you and I are either the inferior or superior one? We either put ourselves down or we lift ourselves up. We either feel worse or better about who we are. When we compare, we either condemn ourselves or we commend ourselves.

No one wins in this game. No one ends up as the hero or champion in the end. Instead, everyone loses out. Everyone, both the comparer and the comparee (is that even a word??), lose in this game. And the poor comparee! She doesn't even know she's in the game!

Seriously though, no one wins when we compare.

When we compare, our relationships suffer.

I took a moment to look up what the word compare means. It means to analyze, contrast, divide, rival, segregate, scrutinize, size up, weigh against another. Sounds awful, doesn't it?

So, what about those antonyms of compare? Interestingly they are aid, assist, gather, help, join, unite, support. What a contrast!

This act of comparing ourselves to others damages our relationships. It separates and divides us, it causes rivalries with scrutiny, by sizing up everyone and weighing against one another. On the other hand, refusing to compare is supportive and brings unity as we assist, aid, help, and support one another. We gather instead of divide.

So, why do we play this ridiculous game?

Why do we participate in this game of comparison?

Good question.

I don't believe I have the full answer. I wish I did. Is it a tool the enemy of our souls uses against us and against our relationships? Could it be from our experiences in our past? Does it originate with our ancestors and could we have inherited such a trait? Or is it just engrained in us?

Well, come to find out, this game of comparison actually has a name. It's called social comparison theory.

It was developed in 1954 by psychologist Leon Festinger, so this idea has been around for awhile. (By the way, Mr. Festinger received his Masters Degree in 1942 from none other than Iowa State University, my husband's alma mater. Go Cyclones!) Social comparison theory is the idea that we determine our own social and personal worth based on how we measure up against others. He proposed that each person has a drive within him or her to gain accurate self-evaluations.

I just have to stop here and pause a minute, however. This may all be true, but my question is, how can comparing ourselves to another be anything accurate? Like I mentioned a minute ago, we either condemn ourselves or commend ourselves when we compare. Neither are actually accurate. And how can we be trusted with this self-evaluation? Who are we to make such an evaluation? Our evaluations might not be based on truth and facts, and instead might be rooted in falseness and lies. Maybe even lies we tell ourselves or lies someone else tells us or has told us in the past.

To make this more interesting, I actually found a Bible verse that might support my pause here. It's 2 Corinthians 10:12 in the VOICE translation. "For we would never dare to compare ourselves with people who have based their worth on self-commendation. They check themselves against and compare themselves with one another. It just shows that they don't have any sense!"

So, who can be trusted with this evaluation?

Who has the authority and ability to make such an assessment? Because I don't believe we can and I don't believe we do.

The truth is, God is the only One qualified. He's the only One Who has authority to evaluate us, to accurately assess us. Why? Because He created us. He formed us, He made us, and no One knows us more intimately than Him. Right down to the number of hairs on our heads. That's mighty intimate and amazing, don't you think?

So, our worth isn't based on our assessments. Our worth is based on God's. And because we are His, He says we are worthy. Period. End of story. Matthew 10:29-31 (VOICE) reads, "Look, if you sold a few sparrows, *how much money would you get?* A copper coin apiece, perhaps? And yet your Father in heaven knows when those small sparrows fall to the ground. You, beloved, are worth so much more

than a whole flock of sparrows. God knows *everything about you*, even the number of hairs on your head. So do not fear."

God made you to be you, and me to be me.

When God formed us in the wombs of our mothers, He uniquely created us. We are *designed* to be different. We aren't supposed to be alike. Well, we already know that no two people are alike in this world, not even identical twins, right? Not only do we each have uncommon preferences and partialities, and different gifts and talents, but God also blessed us with unique bodies and physiques. You and I are created to be one of a kind. God's best for us is to live in our uniqueness and shine bright right where we are.

...let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

Romans 12:6a MSG

Yes, let's just be who we were made to be. And forget about sizing ourselves up to someone else.

You and I don't need to compare who we are to anyone else.

Because God's version of each of us is the best there is. What is there to compare?

God knew what He was doing when He created us. He gave us what we needed to fulfill His plans and purposes for our lives. He didn't miss a single detail, nor a single important feature. God designed you and me just the way He wanted us. And if He thinks we are each masterpieces, it's okay for us to think this of ourselves too.

According to God, we are each His masterpieces, and friend, masterpieces don't need to compare themselves.

So, how do we stop playing this game?

How do we quit comparing ourselves, especially if we've done it for so long?

1. **We pay attention.**

Take notice when we begin the act of comparing, or when we're tempted to. Pay attention to what's happening around us. What are we seeing? Where are we? What are we doing? What are we comparing? Why do we feel the need to compare?

2. **We pause and thank God.**

Then stop and change our thinking. Instead of comparing, we thank God for creating each of us magnificently. We thank Him for every way He formed us, even maybe the parts that aren't our favorites (yet). And we thank God for rescuing us from the damaging act of comparison.

3. **We praise and pray.**

After paying attention, and pausing and thanking God, we praise Him for who He is, who He made us to be, and who He made others to be. We pray for us and for those with whom we were tempted to compare ourselves, asking God to equip us all to be who He created us to be.

God can change our hearts to help us quit comparing.

Let's trust Him to do so. Turning away from the tendency to compare ourselves not only benefits all of us, but most importantly, it glorifies God. It, in a way, shows God just how much we treasure His creation and who He made us to be.

Will you pray with me?

Father God, You are amazingly creative in all of Your creation. Thank You for making each one of us unique and special and one of a kind. Thank You that your fingerprints are all over us. God, please make us aware of just how special each one of us is. Help us to love who we are as Your beloved creation, and please help us to love others through Your love. Lord, when we're tempted to compare, remind us of truth. Remind us we are uniquely made by You and what You create is good. Remind us we have no reason to compare ourselves to others. May we encourage instead of compare and inspire instead of compete. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

We are continuing this discussion over in our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook this week. I personally invite you to come on over and join in the conversation. The link to this group is in the show notes.

And if you found encouragement in this episode, please subscribe to this podcast, and rate and/or review it so others can find this encouragement too.

As a reminder, for additional encouraging resources head over to my site and access my Free Resources I've created with you in mind. That link is in the show notes.

In closing, may we glorify God in refusing to compare ourselves in the days to come. May we embrace who He created us to be as we love Him, love others, and yes, even love ourselves. Thanks for being there today, friend. God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre