

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed some people tend to enjoy talking about their illnesses? If you ask how they are doing, they’re going to give you their recent medical history. I had a man ask me recently, “Did I tell you about my latest surgery?” I said, “No, and I appreciate it!”

There is one illness many of us suffer from that you won’t find in any of the medical dictionaries. It’s called *comparisonitis*. It’s when we continually measure our self-worth or our success by other people. In medical terms, when the suffix “-itis” is added to a part of your body, it denotes inflammation. For instance, tonsillitis means swollen tonsils. Colitis means the swelling of the colon and arthritis means the swelling of the joints. In the same way, comparisonitis sets in when you have an enlarged tendency to compare yourself to others.

Comparisonitis is at epidemic proportions in America. If we drive a Toyota, we feel okay until we see a friend driving a Lexus. If we live on a nice street in a big house, we feel okay until we see someone who lives in a bigger house in a better neighborhood. If we’re wearing a certain kind of shirt we feel secure until see someone wearing a more expensive label. We compare our appearance with others, we compare our salary with others, we compare the schools we attend, we compare our kids’ report cards, and, yes, we even compare pictures of our grandkids. Of course, I don’t do that, because I don’t want to embarrass all the other grandparents! If you’re suffering from comparisonitis, it’s my prayer that by the end of this message you’ll be able to diagnose it and discover God’s cure for it.

As we read our text, remember Paul was writing to a congregation where not everyone loved him. Some of the members of the church had criticized him, and felt they were spiritually superior to him. As he tries to correct their false impressions he writes in 2 Corinthians 10:7-12,

“You are looking only on the surface of things. If anyone is confident that he belongs to Christ, he should consider again that we belong to Christ just as much as he. For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it. I do not want to seem to be trying to frighten you with my letters. For some say, ‘His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing.’ Such people should realize that what we are in our letters when we are absent, we will be in our actions when we are present. We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.”

The biggest problem with comparisonitis is when you compare yourself to another person, you’re using an unreliable standard.

A man walked to work every day in a small town. It was his job to blow the whistle at the local factory at 7 a.m. and then again at 5 p.m. He took his job seriously, so every morning as he walked past a furniture store, he carefully synchronized his pocket watch with the grandfather clock in the display window. He would then blow the factory whistle according to that time. He did this for years, and one morning the store owner happened to be standing on the sidewalk.

The factory worker said to him, "I set my watch every morning by this grandfather clock. How do you keep it so accurate?" The shop keeper said, "That's easy. Every day I set it by the factory whistle." If you think about it, that's not a very reliable system! They were comparing the two clocks with each which Paul says isn't wise. We do the same thing when we compare ourselves to one another. As we diagnose comparisonitis today, I want to look first at the warning signs and then let's talk about God's cure for comparisonitis.

1. WARNING SIGNS OF COMPARISON-ITIS:

Because of web-based medical programs, we have greater access to medical science than ever before in history. For instance, if you're suffering from tonsillitis or colitis, you simply type that in the search line on a website like WebMD and you'll find helpful information on both the symptoms and suggested treatment for the disease. Let's consider three different warning signs of comparisonitis.

(1) Blurred vision: Inability to see below the surface

Some diseases create to blurred vision. Comparisonitis blurs your vision because you can only see what's on the outside. Paul observes in verse 7, "You are looking only on the surface of things." One of the dangers of comparing ourselves to other people is that we can't see what's on the inside. Our culture is obsessed with outward appearance and physical beauty. Just look at the covers of the gossip magazines at the grocery store check-out. All you see are air-brushed images of Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Matthew McConaughey, and Mike Parks! But that's just Photoshop.

In the Old Testament, when Israel wanted to have a king, God gave them a fine physical specimen by the name of Saul. He was tall and handsome. In fact, the Bible says he stood head and shoulders above the other men of Israel. But Saul's heart wasn't devoted to God, and He rejected him as king. Then God sent the prophet Samuel to a house near Bethlehem to choose the next king. When Samuel arrived at Jesse's house, Jesse proudly presented his first-born son, Eliab, who was a tall, handsome man. Samuel said, "Surely, this is the Lord's anointed!" But before Samuel designated him as the new king, God stopped him. He said, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7) That's one of the most important principles in God's Word. We look only on the outward appearance and the Lord looks on the heart.

That's why it's dangerous to compare ourselves to another person. If you're a guy you can look at me and all you can see is my outward appearance. You may think, "I'm younger, taller, more handsome, thinner, and more muscular than he is." That may be true, but God sees my heart and God sees your heart, and God is judging us by the attitude of our hearts rather than the appearance of our bodies, or our outward trappings like houses and cars. Another warning sign of comparisonitis is:

(2) Inflated ego: Thinking too highly of yourself

Another warning sign for certain diseases is an elevated blood pressure, or inflated fluid levels. In comparisonitis, we often have an inflated sense of our own importance. The Bible says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

The best example of chronic comparisonitis is found in the story Jesus told in Luke 18 about two men who went to church. One was a sinful tax collector and the other was a proud, arrogant Pharisee. The tax collector knelt at the back of the church and begged God for mercy. But Jesus said the Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, “God I thank you that I’m not like other men, robbers, evildoers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and tithe my money to the church.” He was suffering from comparisonitis and Jesus pointed out that the tax collector went home justified before God *not* the Pharisee.

It’s easy to think you’re better than everyone else if you only compare yourself to certain people. You can usually look around and find people who are lazier, who are less attractive, and have less than you do. Have you ever noticed how people tend to try to improve their moral standing by saying something like, “Well, I’ve never robbed a bank or killed anyone.” You’re always going to look pretty good if you only compare yourself to murderers and bank robbers!

You may be thinking, “That’s not me! I don’t think that I’m better than anybody else. In fact, I think that I’m worthless. Another warning sign of comparisonitis is the opposite extreme of egotism. It’s:

(3) Bouts of self-criticism: Low self-esteem

Sickness may also result in lowered levels of healthy chemicals in the body. Comparisonitis can lead to a critical reduction of our confidence and trust in God. Do you look around and feel bad that you aren’t as rich, as talented, or as successful as others? We often develop this kind of inferiority complex when we’re kids in school and we start comparing the way we look with our classmates. It’s called peer pressure and you start feeling inferior if your complexion isn’t as clear as your classmates, or if you’re not wearing the right labels. It continues into adulthood when you’re driving the right kind of car.

Comparing ourselves to others isn’t healthy. It’s like the boy who was in love with a girl and he said, “Susan, I know I’m not good-looking like Bill Jones, but I like you. I know I’m not muscular like Bill Jones, but I really do care for you. And I know that I’m not as funny and clever as Bill Jones, but I love you.” Susan said, “Sure, sure. But tell me more about this Bill Jones!”

One of the problems with an inferiority complex is that it prevents you from ever attempting anything great for God out of fear that you will fail. Moses is a good example of overcoming an inferiority complex. When Moses was 80, God called him to go to Pharaoh and announce. “Let my people go!” But Moses didn’t jump at that chance; instead he argued with God and made excuses. He said, “When they say ‘What is your God’s name,’ what do I tell them?” God said tell them, “I am who I am. Tell them I am sent you.” Then Moses argued, “Well, God, what if they don’t believe me?” God turned Moses stick into a snake and then back into a snake, and

said, “Any more excuses, Moses?” Moses said, “Yes, Lord. I can’t speak eloquently. In fact, I stutter and stammer when I talk. Nobody will listen to me.” God said, “Moses, who made your mouth? If you’ll just open it, I’ll fill it with the right words. Besides, you have a brother, Aaron, and I’ll give him words to say as well. Now get up and go!”

Are you suffering from the same kind of comparisonitis? If God is calling you to do something for Him, stop hiding behind your fear and your inferiority complex. Stop comparing yourself to others. God can end your suffering from comparisonitis. How? Let’s talk about:

2. GOD’S PRESCRIPTION FOR COMPARISON-ITIS:

Comparisonitis is a debilitating illness. But fortunately there’s a cure. There are four different dosages of medicine God has to combat and to cure comparisonitis.

(Rx 1) Rejoice that you’re a unique creation of God!

God made you different from any other person in history. Have you ever heard someone say, “When God made him/her He broke the mold?” Well, that’s actually true of every one of us! You are an original-hand-made-by-God-one-of-a-kind person! God designed and made you without a duplicate. The swirls of the skin on your fingertips aren’t duplicated in any of the other 6 billion people on this planet. Your DNA is different than anyone else’s. The pattern in your eyeballs are unique to you alone. Even the shape and size of your ear is unlike anyone else’s.

Don’t take this personally, but you smell differently than anyone else! If you don’t believe it, go home and ask your dog. Fortunately, our olfactory senses aren’t developed enough to detect that (most of the time), but that’s why police can use tracking dogs to find a lost person.

The Bible says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful.” (Psalm 139:13-14) God didn’t sit up in heaven and make millions of cookie-cutter children—He designed you and me as unique individuals. God didn’t stand at the heavenly copy machine and Xerox duplicate disciples; He lovingly and carefully created each of us. Now, if God made you and threw away the pattern, what does that mean? It means He cares enough about you personally to make you just the way you are.

My favorite author, Anonymous, has explained it this way: “Just think, you are here not by chance but by God’s choosing. His hand formed you and made you the person you are. He compares you to no one else; you are one of a kind. You lack nothing that His grace can’t give you. He has allowed you to be here at this time in history to fulfill His special purpose for this generation. You are God’s servant in God’s place at God’s perfect time.”

(Rx 2) Recognize your strengths instead of worrying about your weaknesses

Another healthy dosage of God’s medicine for comparisonitis is to stop worrying about the areas in your life where you think you don’t measure up to others, and focus on those areas of strength that God has given you. One of the problems with comparisonitis is that we compare ourselves to

each other using standards we’ve invented, like a little boy who told his mother one morning that he was going to sell his dog. The mother asked, “How much are you going to ask for your dog?” The boy said, “Well, he’s a pretty good dog, so I think I’ll ask \$10,000 for him.” His mom smiled and said, “Good luck.” A few hours later he returned without the dog. He announced, “Well, I sold my dog.” The mother said, “That’s great. Did you have to come down on your price any?” The little boy said, “Nope.” His mother was shocked. “Are you telling me that you sold that dog for \$10,000?” He said, “Not exactly. I traded him for two \$5,000 cats!

God doesn’t want you to measure your abilities with the gifts and abilities of others—that’s a false standard. Instead the only measurement He wants us to use is His plan for your life. You may not be able to preach like Billy Graham, who can? You may not be able to sing like Steve Green or Chris Tomlin. But rather than worrying about what you *can’t* do, discover your strengths and maximize them.

In addition to being a totally unique creation, God has also gifted you in a way that is different than any other person, so you shouldn’t compare your gifts and abilities with anyone else. Rick Warren uses the acrostic SHAPE to describe how each of us is uniquely gifted. The S stands for Spiritual Gifts. God has given every believer one or more spiritual gifts mentioned in the Bible. The H stands for Heart, that means there is something you can do that really expresses the passion of your heart. The A stands for Abilities. These are a combination of natural and acquired skills. The P stands for Personality, because we have different personalities, we express our abilities in different ways. And the E stands for Experience. Our past experiences have impacted us all in different ways. So when you take those five factors, you can begin to understand your special SHAPE in God’s family. The next dosage of God’s medicine is:

(Rx 3) Relate to other believers as partners instead of competitors

When you’re always comparing yourself to others you tend to see everyone else as a competitor. Two good old boys, Jim Bob and Joe Ray who were up north squirrel hunting. To their surprise they met up with a bear. Jim Bob and Joe Ray both raised their .22 rifles and shot at the bear which only made the bear angry. As the old bear charged them, the two hunters started running for their lives. As they were running, Jim Bob started kicking off his hunting boots so he could run faster. Joe Ray saw this and said, “Jim Bob, what’s the use, you know you can’t outrun that bear.” Jim Bob said, “I don’t have to outrun the bear. I only have to outrun YOU!” Comparisonitis won’t kill you, but it can make you miserable because it can alienate you from family members and friends.

Our culture is a dog-eat-dog world of competition where there’s only room for one at the top. There are only winners and losers and second place is the same as losing. When organizations find a weak link, they eliminate it. But the church isn’t a lifeless organization, it’s a living organism. And when one part of our body hurts, we all hurt. If I hit my thumb with a hammer, I don’t cut my thumb off, instead other parts of my body rush to help. First, my vocal chords go into action as I yell, “Ow!” At the same time my other hand immediately moves to covers it, and next my mouth opens to suck on the bruised thumb! That’s the way the body of Christ operates. We’re aren’t in competition, we’re in cooperation with each other.

In his famous book on the church, Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed it this way: "In a Christian community, everything depends upon whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable. Every Christian community must realize that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of the fellowship." The last dosage of God's medicine for comparisonitis is:

(Rx 4) Rest in your true identity in Christ!

Sometimes a doctor prescribes plenty of bed rest for a patient. For comparisonitis, the Great Physician prescribes plenty of grace-rest in who you are in Christ. When we compare ourselves to others, we try to do more and more to impress others and to impress God. But if you are in Christ, you have only to rest in your position of being enveloped in His righteousness.

What is the primary basis for your identity? In other words, how do people know you? By your job? I'm a coach, or a doctor, or an electrician. Are you known by your hobby? I'm a tennis player, or a golfer, or I play mahjong. Are you known by your family ties? I'm Mary's daughter, or John's wife, or Tommy's dad. We're all known in different ways, but there is only *one* identity that will never change: Who I am in Christ. I may retire from my job, and lose my ability to play golf, and family members and friends may die or move away, but who I am in Christ is secure for all eternity. I really can't truly rest in any other identity than my relationship with Christ. And I can't compare my relationship with Christ with yours, because He is incomparable!

As another anonymous writer expressed: "In Christ we have a love that can never be fathomed, a life that can never die, a peace that can never be understood, a rest that can never be disturbed, a joy that can never be diminished, a hope that can never be disappointed, a glory that can never be clouded, a light that can never be darkened, and a spiritual resource that can never be exhausted."

CONCLUSION

Comparisonitis is psychosomatic, because it's all in your mind. You start believing Satan's lies rather than God's truth. For instance, there are three comparisonitis myths that enslave us. They are (1) I must be like everyone else to be happy. (2) I must be liked by everyone to be happy. And (3) I must have the things everyone else has to be happy. But I want to show you God's truth for those three myths. You must replace the myth, "I must be like everyone else to be happy" with this truth, "God made me to be unlike anyone else!" Instead of believing, "I must be liked by everyone to be happy." God's truth states, "My true value is based upon God's love for me!" Instead of believing the lie "I must have the things everyone else has to be happy," you must replace it with God's truth that says, "The secret of contentment is seeing my net worth in Christ."

This is truth that will set you free and you can start seeing your worth in the eyes of God. One of the greatest living examples of this was Ethel Waters. You might remember her from when she used to sing at the Billy Graham Crusades. But she had a rough life and an amazing career before she came to know the Lord. Ethel Waters was born as a result the rape of her 13-year-old

mother. She grew up being shuttled from family to family, many of whom were her alcoholic uncles and aunts. She soon learned to be a thief to steal food. She married at age 13, and soon left her abusive husband and took odd jobs singing and cleaning a hotel for less than \$1 a day. Even after she was converted to Christ as a teenager, she struggled her self-worth, because she had been born to a mother who never loved her. Later she became a famous blues singer and an actress. She starred in several movies and was the second African American person to be nominated for an Academy Award. It wasn't until later in life that she recorded her favorite song, “His Eye is On the Sparrow” that she came to truly that God loved her in spite of her past. She is quoted in her biography as saying, “I know I'm somebody, 'cause God don't make no junk!”

In all the times she sang for Billy Graham, she could have looked around the platform and compared herself to Billy Graham, or to Cliff Barrows or to George Beverly Shea. If she had, she probably would have been too intimidated to sing, but Ethel Waters had been cured of her comparisonitis and she drew strength from knowing that God don't make no junk. Have you discovered that yet? Why don't you stop comparing yourself to others? Just say that with me right now, “I know I'm somebody, 'cause God don't make no junk!”

OUTLINE

1. WARNING SIGNS OF COMPARISON-ITIS:

- (1) Blurred vision: Inability to see below the surface
- (2) Inflated ego: Thinking too highly of yourself
- (3) Bouts of self-criticism: Low self-esteem

2. GOD'S PRESCRIPTION FOR COMPARISON-ITIS:

(Rx 1) Rejoice that you're a unique creation of God!

The Bible says, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful." *Psalm 139:13-14*

(Rx 2) Recognize your strengths instead of worrying about your weaknesses

(Rx 3) Relate to other believers as partners instead of competitors

(Rx 4) Rest in your true identity in Christ!



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes