

Letting Go of Joy-Stealers

May 28, 2024

Comparing Yourself to Others

Symptoms of this are:

- an uneasiness in your spirit
- feeling guilty about something but you're not quite sure what
- knots in your stomach
- discontent with who you are and where you are
- a general sense of gloom and despair.

Do you recognize some of these in yourself?

David's Encouraging Example

The story of David and Goliath, found in 1 Samuel 17 gives us some clear guidance.

David volunteered to go fight Goliath. He related to Saul his experience in killing a lion and a bear. He said, *"The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine"* (1 Samuel 17:37a).

So, Saul relented and then Saul tried to tell David how to do it:

1 Samuel 17:38 – 40

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.



You know the end of the story: David takes aim at Goliath's head with his slingshot, hits him in the right place, and with one stone he knocks him out. Then he cuts off Goliath's head with Goliath's own sword, and claims victory.

How did David defeat Goliath? By using his own slingshot. David realized that he would make a huge mistake to try to do what God wanted him to do in someone else's armor.



Paul wrote to his young disciple Timothy:

"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6).

Timothy didn't need to be like Paul. He just needed to use his own slingshot, as it were, and take the gift God had invested in him to the next level—fan it into a flame.

Another important lesson in the David and Goliath story is that David was able to kill Goliath with a slingshot because, as a lowly shepherd boy, he had plenty of time to perfect his skill as a marksman. He was there, all by himself, in that seemingly unimportant, going-no-place job of taking care of dumb sheep but it was not wasted time!

Of course, David didn't know when he was tending sheep that God was preparing him to be king. But he did that job well, and while he was doing it, he learned to do other things.

The Sin of Comparing

Did you ever think about what it really means when you compare yourself to others and try to be like someone else?

Usually when we compare ourselves to others, we come to one of three conclusions:

1. *I'm better than they are.*

Luke 18:9-14a:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God."

How often do we form strong opinions based on how someone dresses, or how articulate they are, or how professional they seem?

As the Lord said to Samuel when he was choosing the next king of Israel from among Jesse's sons (and he thought Eliab, the firstborn, would be God's choice),

"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).

2. *They're better than I am.*

Secondly, comparing ourselves to others can lead us to think that others are better than us. Consider the parable of the talents that Jesus gave us in Matthew 25:14-30.

In the end the master rewards the first two servants equally: *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness"* (v. 21). Even though one had ten and one had only four, they got the exact same reward.

But what does the master say to the third servant?

"You wicked, lazy servant!...Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has ten talents" (vv. 26 and 28).

The lesson here is that God does not compare us with others, but he does expect us to make very good use of the resources that have been given to us.

Notice what happened to this third servant as a result of comparing himself to those who had more:

- First, it made him fearful
- Second, he became lazy.
- Third, it led him into sin.

James 4:17: *If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

- Fourth, he lost what he had.
- Fifth, he lost his reward.

3. We envy others and feel that we've been cheated.

Comparing ourselves to others can cause us to be envious and jealous.

Peter fell into this trap after Jesus had risen and was about to ascend back to heaven.

John 21:18b-19a

'When you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

Then Peter made the mistake of comparing himself to John. Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, what about John?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:21b-22).

God is sovereign and he does as he pleases. It is his prerogative to lead each of us in whatever paths he chooses.

Proverbs 14:30: *A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.*

Wise Solomon said it clearly: envy actually rots your bones—it affects your physical well-being in addition to affecting you spiritually. One of the attributes of real love, as described in 1 Corinthians 13, is that "It does not envy ..." (v. 4).

Appreciating Yourself

Scripture tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and we are each created in God's image. Consider what that means.

- First of all, you're not a mistake.
- Secondly, what you are is like what God is.

How did God create you? Describe God's creativity in YOU!

Can you say: "I like the way God created me"?

Learning to accept who you are doesn't mean you give up on trying to improve.

By God's grace you can let go of this very harmful practice of comparing yourself and learn to be thankful for who you are.

Needing the approval of others

Do you have an approval addiction? One sign of an approval addiction is you resent and reject criticism. Another sign is that you try to solicit approval from others.

How do we get over our need for the approval of others?

We don't! What we have to do is to look for approval in the right place!

The apostle Paul tells us how to do seek the approval of the Lord:

2 Corinthians 5:9

So we make it our goal to please him (the Lord), whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

Galatians 1:10

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:4b, 6

We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts ... We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else.

1 Thessalonians 4:1

We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

We have to consciously make it our goal to please the Lord and stop trying to please people. It begins with prayer. Choose one or two of the verses above and pray it into your life each morning.

Pray specifically that God will show you whose approval you have been addicted to, and why you needed their approval so much.

Living Free from Needing the Approval of Others

Just think about the difference it would make in your life if you were truly striving for God's approval instead of the approval of people.

Don't try to stop pleasing people—it's impossible to do; just start trying to please God. That is replacing wrong thinking with right thinking.

Become a Dispenser of Approval

As we learn to get over our addictive need for the approval of others, it should cause us to become more sensitive to how others need our approval.