



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Comparison is the thief of joy

Recently I watched a bridal reality show in which a full-figured bride shopped for wedding gowns with her sister, who looked like a supermodel, and her mom.

Early on, the bride confessed her insecurities. Naturally, she wanted to look beautiful on her big day, but she worried she'd never find a dress to hide her flaws. She also worried about feeling like an ugly duckling next to her sister because that had been their ongoing dynamic.

All her life, she said it would happen like this: After spending hours getting ready, she'd think she looked great. But once she saw her sister, her feelings deflated because her sister looked better. The sadness on this bride's face was heartbreaking, and I eventually got so depressed I had to switch channels.

This show reminded me of how easily comparison leads to self-sabotage. Physically speaking, this bride was no match for her sister, even on her best day. But what the camera failed to capture were the qualities that made this bride sparkle. Surely she outshone her sister in other ways, ways that were less obvious to the naked eye but still very important.

All of us struggle with feelings of inferiority. All of us know what it's like to feel on top of the world one minute and crummy the next because someone has it better. With our status jeopardized, the claws come out. We get competitive, envious, fixated on ways to keep our opponent down. We start down a road of negative thinking, and the farther we walk, the harder it is to turn around.

When Teddy Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy," he hit the nail on the head. It is the thief of joy, and a murderer at that. It kills our spirit, our drive and our love for our fellow man. And like a home intruder, it catches us off-guard. It can bind us up when we least expect it and hold us captive in our own residence.

But notice the operative word here is "can." Happiness is a choice, and so are the thoughts we entertain. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart,

for everything you do flows from it." To me this means making conscious efforts to keep negative thoughts out. It means treating my heart like I do my home so I can sleep in peace at night.

If I leave the door wide-open, or even unlocked, intruders have access. But if I lock it and set the alarm, I have a warning system. I have time to react. Intruders may still come, but they won't stay long, because there'll be sirens going off and cops hurrying over to cart them off my property in handcuffs.

Keeping intrusive thoughts out is easier said than done, but I believe we can train our minds. One way to cure an inferiority complex is to remember that no one has to fail for us to succeed. We're all designed to be winners, all members of the same team. People peak and valley at different points in life, and just because someone's hitting home runs while we're striking out doesn't mean our day in the sun won't come.

If someone in particular has a stronghold over you, try pushing through your feelings with prayer. Ask God to soften your heart so you can admire their gifts, not envy them. It takes time, but it works, especially if your prayer is sincere.

When it comes to blessings, God spreads the wealth. No one gets it all. While I wish I could sing like Adele, write like Rick Bragg and look like Elle Macpherson, I must focus on being me. I must excel in my areas of expertise and nip any pity party in the bud.

Comparison sucks the joy out of life and turns happiness into stone. By treating it like an intruder, and arming our hearts against it, we free ourselves to enjoy life with a healthier, happier, and more productive attitude.

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