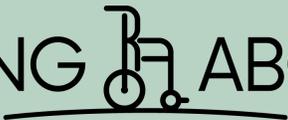


Comparison Trap



RISING  ABOVE
MINISTRIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Becky Davidson is the Co-founder and President of Rising Above Ministries, a multi-dimensional outreach to families impacted by disabilities. She is passionate about supporting and encouraging special-needs families. She co-authored *Common Man*, *Extraordinary Call* with her late husband, Jeff Davidson. Becky and her adult son with special needs, Jon Alex, live in Cookeville, Tennessee.

Comparison Trap

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE?

This resource can be used as a small group curriculum or as a personal reflection and study.

If you are utilizing this as small group curriculum, you can download and print a copy for everyone in your group, and discuss the questions together.

We would love to hear your feedback. Email us at info@risingaboveministries.org. Thank you and we hope your small groups are filled with a deepening of your relationships with one another and with our Heavenly Father.

Comparison Trap

SESSION 1

GOLDFISH
& SPARROWS

I have a love/hate relationship with social media.

I love seeing updates from family and friends and reading encouraging posts. I really do! But then there are those posts, you know the ones, when friends with typical children post photos of their families doing things my son can't do or traveling to places we will never be able to go. Those posts challenge me sometimes.

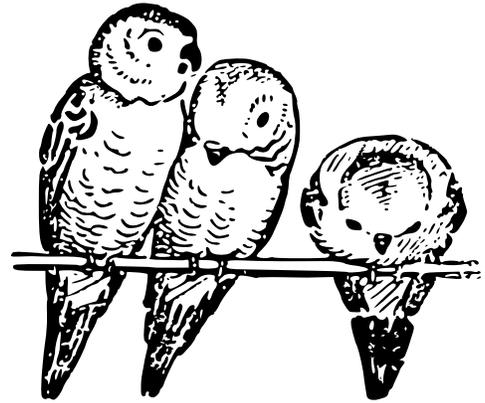
It seems to hit me the hardest at the milestone markers. For instance, it was particularly hard a few years ago when Jon Alex turned sixteen and his peers were getting their driver's licenses. It was painful being reminded that he would never drive. And now, when I see Facebook posts of people his age graduating from college or getting married... well, the loss washes over me in living color.

Don't get me wrong, I'm happy for the graduates and newlyweds. I celebrate them! But watching from the sidelines, I often grieve the life we will never have.

I think one of the biggest struggles special-needs parents face is the temptation to compare our lives to others in the "typical" world. We are like goldfish looking up to see sparrows fly overhead. Somehow the sparrows seem freer and happier in the sky, but they know nothing of how to swim and the mysterious magic of living underwater.

The big problem comes when a goldfish wants to be a sparrow. We are doomed to live a life of discontent when we do not joyfully accept the role in life we have been given. It is easy to get sucked into social media and begin thinking that our underwater world doesn't live up to life in the sky. We see typical families doing things we will never be able to do, and we compare ourselves to them. We walk right in to the trap of comparing two totally different realities.

Sparrows are lovely and blessed to fly above it all, but we know the secrets found only by living the deeper life. We know how to breathe underwater, how to glide through situations that would kill a sparrow. We see a world that sparrows will never see. They will never know the beautiful treasures found underwater where things are magnified and intensified.



We all know that what people post on social media is just a highlight reel of their life. Most of our Facebook friends do not post the realities of their daily life. They do not show the failures and disappointments, so when I compare the realities of my day-to-day life to someone else's highlight reel...my life comes up short every time.

I will always be disappointed if God created me to be a goldfish and I constantly measure my life against the people who were created to be sparrows. Both lives have beauty and purpose. The world would be less if we didn't have one or the other. Both lives matter and both have meaning - but they will forever be distinctly and intentionally different. A sparrow has no need for fins, and a goldfish no need for feathers. How sad it would be if sparrows were always trying to swim and goldfish to fly? What a waste of divine purpose and destiny!

Here's the truth friends, and we must settle this issue in our minds. We must wholeheartedly accept and embrace our underwater life and stop wishing for feathers if we were given fins. We are only on this planet for a short while. If we live our lives devoted to God's purpose, then we will have eternity to enjoy all the goodness of God. Someday all the pain, suffering, and disappointment will be gone. Someday we won't need feathers or fins

While we're here on this earth let's dive deep and discover all the mysteries hidden in the life we have been given. Stop right now and think of three things you love about the life you have that would be different if your child was typical.

Here are three of mine:

1: Because Jon Alex cannot drive I will never have to stay up late worried about where he is and if he is ok.

2: Because Jon Alex is non-verbal I never have to hear him curse, belittle someone else, or take God's name in vain.

3: Because Jon Alex has special needs, I have come to know a world of goldfish who shimmer and shine like nothing I have ever seen in the sky. I am so glad I did not miss that!

So, be honest with me. What is your current attitude about your life right now?

Are you stuck comparing your life to others and finding yourself jealous of what they seem to have? Are you someone who ends up complaining about the life you have been given? Are you tempted to be bitter and angry about your life as a special-needs parent? Do you lash out in frustration at your family?

Are you okay with being a goldfish, or do you want wings?

What would people who know you the best say?

In this series, I will share with you some of the survival skills that have helped me with the challenges I have faced as a special-needs parent. Together, we will try to avoid the pitfalls of the comparison trap and learn to see life with a Godly perspective.

Think about it...

- Do you find yourself being lured into the comparison trap? What are your triggers?

- If you were asked to describe your life, what would you say? Would you portray it in a positive or negative way?

- Have you settled the goldfish/sparrow issue in your heart?

Prayer...

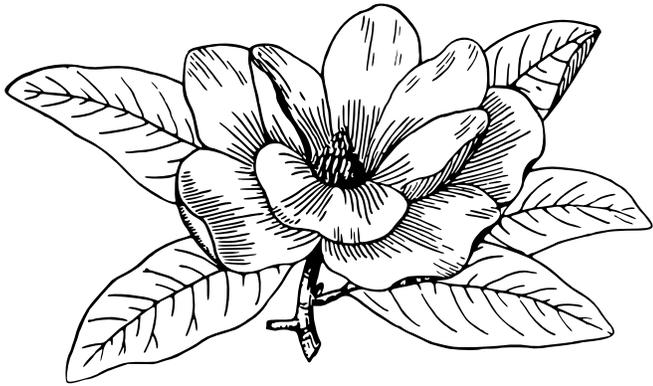
Thank you, Father, for the life You have given me. I am grateful that You are with me and that You have a specific role for me to play in the story You are telling. Help me embrace this assignment with joy. Amen.



Comparison Trap

SESSION 2

THINK ON
THESE THINGS



One of the most stressful places for my son to go is to the dentist. It is an anxiety filled experience for both of us. Because of his profound special needs, he has to be sedated and held down in order for them to clean his teeth. The whole ordeal is traumatic and overwhelming. I know many of you can relate.

Several years ago, following another difficult dentist appointment, we sat silently in the car trying to decompress and settle ourselves before beginning the hour long drive back home.

While we were gathering ourselves, a lady driving a luxury vehicle pulled into the parking lot. I watched as this beautiful mom got out of her car along with her cute little girl. I remember thinking to myself, "That mom has no idea what we just went through and how hard it is for our family to go to the dentist!"

And then, it happened...

The mom walked to her trunk and pulled out a child sized walker. Then, she went to the other side of the car and helped her son with special needs out of the car and into the dentist's office.

In that instant, I realized how quickly I had judged her and the situation before I knew the whole story.

How often do we do the same thing? We compare our lives to what we THINK someone else's life is like. When, in truth, we have no idea the challenges they face. Before we even realize it, we are caught in the comparison trap.

For me, it starts with my thoughts. A negative or judgmental thought comes to mind about someone or something, and if I am not careful, I begin to ruminate on it. I allow it to play over and over in my mind, and before I know it, my outlook is tainted and my opinion about that person or situation is changed.

Philippians 4:8 reminds us where we are to fix our thoughts.

"And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." Phil 4:8 (NLT)

We are to fix our thoughts on what is...

- True
- Honorable
- Right
- Pure
- Lovely
- Admirable
- Excellent
- Worthy of praise

This is a deliberate and intentional command. FIX your thoughts! When I stop and deliberately choose to see my life – the situations I face and the people I encounter, through this lens, my outlook and my attitude become more positive. When I don't, my thoughts tend to become negative and I am at risk of getting caught in the comparison trap.

It is a choice that I must make over and over, multiple times throughout the day. When I choose well, I have more joy and peace and I can better handle this special-needs life.

Think about it...

- Think of a time when you judged someone or a situation incorrectly. What did you learn from that experience?
- How have destructive or negative thoughts affected the way you interact with other people? How do those thoughts affect your perspective on being a special needs parent?
- How can focusing on the words from Philippians 4:8 affect our attitudes towards others and help us avoid the comparison trap?

Prayer...

Father God, thank you for helping me to fix my eyes on things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and worthy of praise. Show me anytime my thoughts are not fixed on things that please you. Amen

Comparison Trap

SESSION 3
IN EVERYTHING

"I have nothing to wear today!"

That was the thought that ran through my mind as I aimlessly looked in my closet filled with clothes and shoes trying to decide what to wear. Moments later, while scrolling through Facebook, a photo came into full view on my computer screen. The photo showed someone in an impoverished country wearing homemade shoes from water bottles and twine to protect their feet. The caption on the photo read, "Tell me again what you have to complain about!"



In that moment, I was convicted. I take for granted all that I have to be thankful for. I get caught in the comparison trap because I have my eyes fully focused on myself, my circumstances, and hardships. I fail to realize how truly blessed I really am. I see things that my friends in the typical world get to do or see commercials advertising a life we can't afford. That's when jealousy creeps in.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 reminds us to be thankful in all circumstances.

Did you catch that? Be thankful *in all circumstances*.

I must admit, giving thanks in all circumstances can be a struggle for me. When it is 3:00 AM and I am up in the middle of the night changing my son's sheets AGAIN for the third night in a row, I don't always look to find something to be thankful for. But, I have a choice. I can grumble and complain about the task ahead of me and the lack of sleep or I can be thankful that I have clean sheets to put on his bed and clean clothes for him to wear. It's a choice.

Regardless of what I am facing, I can always find something in that situation to be thankful for. I just have to choose to look for it and recognize it.

The special-needs life is hard. No doubt. But the reality is we are so blessed. Many times, we get wrapped up in the day to day responsibilities and stresses we face. It is easy to overlook or take our blessings for granted.

Finding things to complain about seems to come much more naturally for me.

I complain about having to cook. ***Yet, there are people around the world who have to walk for miles just to get clean water to cook with.***

I complain about laundry, but I have a washer and dryer in my home with its own room ***while people in other parts of the world are washing their clothes in muddy rivers and streams.***

I complain about what I don't like about my house ***while there are children in other nations who make their home in a trash dump.***

Changing your thoughts takes practice. But, when I choose thankfulness over complaining, my heart is filled with joy and contentment. When I choose to give thanks in all circumstances, good or bad, I am less likely to getting caught in the comparison trap - a never-ending self-deprecating cycle. Well, that's a great idea. But HOW do we change our thoughts?

The first step is right now.

Choose, in this moment, to be content with where you are, who you are, and how God has formed your family.

Your next step is practical and tangible. Go get a stack of post-its. Post a note on your dishwasher about how wonderful it is to have that dishwasher. Post a note on your child's door listing their best qualities. Then, say them out loud to your children. Our children hear everything. They hear you complain. BUT they also hear your praise. Choose to verbalize more positives than negatives.

As a third step, consider calling or texting a friend and asking for them to be your accountability. Ask them to remind you often about the good things in your life. Encouragement from a friend can do wonders for your mind.

Think about it...

- When you look at your life, be honest, do you complain more or do you look for the good?
- Read Philippians 2:14-15. Think about this verse. How can you make steps to implement this into your daily life.
- Make a list of the top three things you are thankful for today.

Prayer...

Father God, thank you for the way you bless my life every day. Thank you for the family you have entrusted to me. Forgive me for the times I grumble and complain or fail to thank you for your goodness. Today, I choose to be thankful. I choose to see the good in my situation. Amen.

Comparison Trap

SESSION 4

SOMETHING
BETTER

When my husband and I found out we were expecting our first child, we had dreams and visions of what we thought our life as a family would look like. I expected that I would be a mini-van-driving President of the PTO and soccer mom. Jeff and our son would go to University of Tennessee football games together just like he had with his dad. We would go on fabulous vacations as a family. Our son would make the honor roll and grow up to be a successful businessman like his dad.

I thought they were great plans, but the problem was... they were mine.

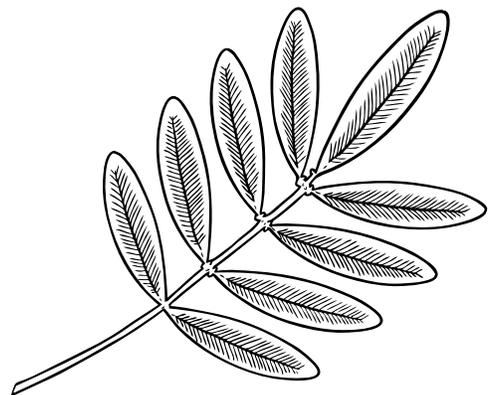
Turns out, God had a different plan for our family. I remember how hard it was in those early years of our son's life as I tried to line up my dreams and expectations of what I thought my life would look like alongside my reality. My expectations and my reality clashed as I struggled to come to grips and accept that this was our new normal. Our dreams came crumbling down all around us and we felt ourselves slipping into the pit of disappointment and despair.

There were moments of peace. We started noticing the blessing that came with this life. We slowly climbed out of the pit.

The shift in our perspective began when we launched Rising Above and started pouring into other families affected by disability. By helping others, God was able to heal our wounds. We saw that we were not alone and became a part of an amazing community of other special needs parents.

On an early morning a few years ago, I was contemplating how our life looked so different than what I had originally expected. In the quiet of that morning, I heard a still small voice whisper in my heart, "I had something better for you." I thought about those words for a moment and replied, "Yes! Yes, You did God! You did have something better for us."

I can honestly say, 20 years later, that God's plan for our family is better than what I had in mind.



My plan was that Jon Alex would go to college and live the “American dream”. My son will never graduate college but he has taught me more and provided a knowledge bigger and better than anything he could have ever learned at a university.

My expectations were that Jon Alex would marry and have a life with his own family. I will never be a grandparent and Jon Alex will never marry but I have the greatest joy of having my son live with me and share my life every day for the rest of his life.

You see, I thought it would be best if our family were a typical family. But God made us something different and special. He made us better. He gave us a story that has reached further than we ever could have imagined. When I was able to lay down my expectations, I was able to embrace my story and thrive in the life I was blessed to have.

Think about it...

- What are some ways that your previous expectations differ from your current reality?
- How does disappointment over unmet expectations affect your perspective?
- Have you embraced the life you have been blessed with or are you struggling to hold on to the expectations of what you thought your life would be?

Prayer...

Father, thank You that You have the best in mind for Your children. Help us to trust Your heart and Your character even when our reality doesn't match our expectations. Help us to see Your faithfulness in every circumstance.



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