

Comparing to Others

Galatians 6.4-5

Rev Ben Arcus

Rathkeale's Greatest Human Being Competition

Obviously this is a silly competition. It's not fair for me to compare my strengths to someone else who may not have those strengths. If this was a real competition no one would take it seriously.

But we actually do something like this all the time. We often judge ourselves and compare ourselves to others who may have more or less natural ability in academic work, sports, musical or creative ability, and social ability like self-confidence or 'rizz'.

So what should we do? What would be a fairer way of judging how we compare to other people? Should we try to find someone who is more like us in ability to compare ourselves with?

That's really impossible – there's no way to know where each person is starting from, or what life experiences they have had that have shaped them up to this point. There are so many factors, even down to how each person is feeling on the day, that can influence our performance, that it is really impossible to make a fair comparison to another person in any aspect of our lives.

Isn't it strange then, that we so often and so naturally want to do that – to compare ourselves to others. It's such a logically flawed exercise. No one ever has the same set of circumstances and so comparison is never fair or helpful. So what should we do?

The answer is obvious – don't compare yourself to others. Only compare yourself to yourself. Just compare how you are doing now with how you have done in the past. And even how you perform can be different on different days depending on a whole lot of things that are out of your control.

All you can really control is how much effort you put in – all you do is the best that you can do on the day.

For one person, getting excellence in most assessments is them just doing okay. While for a different person, just getting out of bed in the morning and making it to school at all is a huge victory.

Not only do we make the mistake of comparing ourselves to others; we also make the mistake of thinking that success looks the same for every person. Or we let our definition of success be shaped by what society or those around us expect. You know the kinds of success that society promotes: being rich, having a flash car, getting an important job.

But you should define success by what matters to you, even if you never see that kind of success celebrated on Instagram or TikTok.

Our definition of success should be determined by what matters to us, and by our own particular shape as a person. My mother never considered herself a success because she never had an impressive career or got her

name in the newspaper for her achievements. But what she did do was raise 4 children to feel loved and cherished. She created a happy family for them to grow up in, where loving people was valued over material wealth. And she is an endlessly helpful and supportive grandmother. Her version of success can be seen by the fact that she regularly has 22 family members, over three generations, who love her and love each other, around her dinner table several times a year. That is all she ever wanted and valued. And by that measure her life has been a huge success, even though she never even finished high school.

I recently watched a Netflix documentary about Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was my childhood hero. He is arguably the greatest body builder ever to have lived, possibly the greatest action hero ever to make movies, and a very successful politician. He has achieved more than most other human beings ever to walk the earth. If there was a greatest human being competition, then maybe he would be considered someone likely to win it. But what stood out to me at the end of the documentary, was that he seemed to have failed at the thing that was most important to him – he had destroyed his marriage and family life because of an affair he had. At the end, I felt sorry for him.

The greatest goal in life we should have is to love ourselves, and to love those around us. Sometimes, it is not that easy to do. But that is success that is within reach for us all.