

**#STRUGGLES**

*Following Jesus in a Selfie-Centered World*

**By Craig Groeschel**

Unedited Sample for Review Only

Hook: Pastor of LifeChurch and creator of the YouVersion Bible app tells you how to better regain control of your life in world of technology. #Struggles offers compelling insights into the values we live by and practical steps and tools to guide how we use technology as part of our lives with Christ.

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## Introduction

### Devices and Desires

*“Yes, I love technology, but not as much as you, you see. But I still love technology, always and forever.”*

**--Kip in *Napoleon Dynamite***

I have a love-hate relationship with technology.

Most of us are well acquainted with this feeling, but we can't quite put our finger on why.

We know we're obsessed with our devices, but we don't know how to manage the challenges that come with using them, and these problems continue to multiply.

We're busy...but bored.

We're full...but empty.

We're connected...but lonelier than ever.

Our lives are filled with more activities than we would have thought possible, but we often feel hollow at the end of the day. We have more stuff—cars, homes, clothes, gadgets, toys—than any generation in history, yet still we long for more. We're more connected online than ever, but we often feel more alone than we know how to describe. We know God intended for us to have something different, something better, something more. But we aren't quite sure how to find it.

Can you relate?

Most everyone seems to agree that life is getting busier, crazier, and more frantic with each passing day. We're bombarded by more information than we know how to process—news, ads, commercials, blogs, tweets, pictures, sound bites, music, games, more ads. What's crazy is that we now have more devices, programs, and apps than ever before vying to fulfill our needs.

Best of all, our world abounds with countless technological breakthroughs—each one promising to make our lives better.

And unquestionably many of these new innovations have made our lives better. I can text with my close friend in Australia and let him know I'm praying for him. I can share pictures of my son's birthday party with relatives thousands of miles away. I can check my 401(k), buy my groceries, or book a hotel at the beach, all from my phone. And yet with all these upsides, I can't help but wonder about the unintended downsides of some of these conveniences that now I "can't live without."

I'm truly fascinated by how technology and social media impact our lives, our relationships, and even our faith. I don't know about you, but I have to admit I'm conflicted. I passionately love technology, using it almost non-stop, every day of my life. At the same time, I absolutely can't stand it. I hate that I'm consumed with it, dependent on it, and sometimes almost unable to stop my compulsion to run to it as if it holds the answer to everything important in my life.

Like I said, I have a love-hate relationship with technology.

### **#ChangeIsConstant**

Think about how quickly the world has changed during our lifetimes. I distinctly remember when cell phones first became affordable. I actually wondered why anyone would want one. Sure, they sounded great if you were a doctor or on call 24/7, but I recall thinking what a burden it would be. People could reach me at any time.

I would *never* want that.

How things have changed. Instead of not wanting a mobile phone, I almost have a panic attack if I ever leave my phone at home or the office. This may sound crazy to you (or you may know *exactly* what I'm talking about), but I don't even like leaving my phone in another room of the house when I'm home. I might miss an important call from my dentist reminding me of my next appointment or someone asking me to dedicate their new kitten to the Lord. (The answer is no.) Or a text might pop up from one of my kids upstairs wondering what's for dinner...yeah, you know, *urgent*.

I've reached a point where I *have* to have my phone nearby.

It's sick, I know.

A tool I initially avoided has become a lifeline I can't live without.

Email is another story. I can remember in 1997 getting my first email account—a free one on Juno. Believe it or not, that first email address is still active; it's where I send everything I never want to see. Again, I wasn't sure email was for me at first. Sure I could see why some people might need it for business, but I didn't have anyone I planned to talk to from computer to computer. *Who does that? And why couldn't you just pick up a phone and call them? So much easier and quicker, right?* You probably guessed it. Within a year I was wondering how anyone ever survived without email.

I didn't think I needed it. Then I felt I couldn't live without it.

Before long, I felt like a prisoner to it.

Thankfully, email doesn't seem to be as big (at least with my friends and colleagues) as it used to be. Now anyone I really want to hear from can reach me directly by text. But I still depend on email, and yet I don't really like it. I always feel like I'm never caught up, and when I

don't check it for more than a couple of hours on a workday, I worry about what and who might be awaiting some response from me.

But I also can't deny the many ways technology has made our lives so much easier.

We used to have to drive to a mall to shop for clothes. I haven't done that in years. Now it's click, click, click, and I just bought a pair of jeans, a shirt, and some new kicks. Same with the bank. No need drive up to the window when I can bank online.

And my smartphone takes this to a whole other level. I can log how many calories I've eaten, how many steps I've taken, tell me the weather forecast in Bangladesh or in Paris, tell me where my 20-year-old daughter's car is, read the Bible to me, and make an egg salad sandwich. (Okay, so it can't do that last thing. At least not yet.)

It's undeniable that technology improves our lives. The same is true of social media. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, LinkedIn, Vine, Pinterest, Tumblr, NewAppThat'sJustBeenCreatedbySomeKidinCalifornia. Suddenly our indescribably big world has become infinitely smaller. Now we can reconnect with our best friend from the second grade that we lost track of decades ago. We can follow everything our favorite celebrities or professional athletes have to say— as long as it's 140 characters or less. And we can share duck-face selfies with all our followers.

But have we reached a point where technology and social media can hurt us as much as they help us?

### **What's the Problem?**

Now, before you think this is going to turn into some anti-technology-boycott-social-media book, I hope you can feel and hear the heart behind this message. I truly embrace

everything good that our tech age offers. We can learn about virtually anything we want to. We can connect with people all over the world. And we can share our thoughts, ideas, and feelings on every subject, with everyone, anytime we want. I wholeheartedly love what we can do with technology.

As a pastor, I also love that we can use technology to reach people with the good news of the Gospel in mind-blowing ways. Most people assume the last great innovation with the Bible took place in 1455 when Guttenberg invented the printing press. But mobile devices can share more copies of God's Word now than Guttenberg ever imagined.

In fact, our church, LifeChurch.tv, started the YouVersion Bible App back in 2008. As of today, more than 175 million people have downloaded the app for free on their mobile devices. By the grace of God, as of this moment, more than 4 million people are downloading the app each month. Because of the generosity of publishers and translators, the Bible App has 1,037 versions supported in 731 languages and literally thousands of Bible plans to choose from. And if you're not a reader, that's no problem. The Bible App can even read Scripture to you. Like we all know, technology is mind-blowing.

If you are under the age of 25, our present ever-clicking world is, for the most part, all you've really known. You've never had to pay for long distance phone calls, let alone put a quarter into a pay phone. You probably don't know most of the phone numbers you use every day because they've always been stored in your mobile device. Cassettes, let alone eight-track tapes, are historical artifacts. Chances are good you don't even know what a pager is—which is something to thank God for!

But for those around my age, forty and over, you remember when you had to answer your landline phone (you do remember those, right?) without knowing who it was on the other side of

the call. And if you tried to call someone who was already on the phone, you got a busy signal and you just had to try again later. If they weren't home, you couldn't leave a voicemail. Can you imagine? How did we ever communicate?

Movies were events you could only watch in theaters, or years later when they made it to TV. And you actually had to sit by the TV to watch it. If you got up to go to the bathroom, you'd miss the show. We purchased music in either a vinyl or plastic form and played it on a special device now found in retro thrift stores across the nation. Computers took up half a room and were only for scientists, engineers, and accountants.

Ah, the good old days.

There were plenty of struggles and distractions back then, too, as there have been throughout history, I'm sure. But there's something different about what we're experiencing now. For some of us, we're starting to sense that something is wrong, even if we can't quite identify what it is. We still have to battle the age-old struggles with comparisons, envy, jealousy, greed, lust, and a variety of addictions. Only now we have new ways to escape from those "real life" struggles even as we create new battles in the virtual worlds we inhabit. This combination is what I call #struggles.

And while I can't speak for you, I'm finally willing to admit the truth. I'm tethered to my phone, addicted to my favorite apps, and hooked on social media. Technology has become central to my life. It is almost an extended part of my being. I don't really control it. It controls me.

And I don't like it.

**For Better or Worse**

Intuitively, we know that technology and social media are changing us. For better or worse, technology is changing how we receive information, how we relate to people, how we see ourselves, and possibly what we value and believe about God.

Without a doubt, technology is changing the way you relate to people. While it comes with many benefits, it also has drawbacks. The term friend has evolved and can mean someone you've never met but who has access to your social media online. As a result, you can define friendship on your own terms based on who you follow, "friend," or Like. Basically, we're becoming addicted to immediate gratification even as we attempt to control how others perceive us by what we post, pin, and tweet. Real-life, unscripted communication frightens many people now, especially young adults who are used to self-editing their emails, texts, and captions.

Recent studies indicate we're more connected online but less compassionate about real people's needs. We're becoming more isolated as the depth of our relationships decrease. We crave the approval of others, their attention and affirmation, but we avoid sharing about our lives below the surface. These are just a few of the issues we'll explore throughout this book.

## **Regaining #Control**

With these #struggles in mind, we will specifically look at eight different biblical values and how they can help us restore balance in our lives and end our unhealthy over-reliance on technology.

1. **Contentment**: The more we compare, the less satisfied we are. Studies show that viewing social media often leaves us feeling depressed.
2. **Intimacy**: The more we interact online, the more we crave face-to-face intimacy—but the more elusive it becomes.

3. **Authenticity**: The more filtered our lives become, the harder it is to be genuine and transparent.
4. **Compassion**: The more pain we're exposed to, the more difficult it is to care. We become desensitized to the suffering of people around us and around the world.
5. **Integrity**: We're tempted non-stop to see things that pollute the purity God desires.
6. **Encouragement**: Constant online criticism encourages us to focus on the perceived weaknesses, flaws, and failures of others instead of encouraging them.
7. **Worship**: God wants to be first in our lives, but people are finding it increasingly difficult to follow Jesus in a selfie-centered world. It's time to tear all idols down.
8. **Rest**: We have the world at our fingertips, and it's overwhelmingly exciting. We need to rediscover rest and solitude.

Even if you're not a regular user of social media, or if you already have technology under control, this book can still speak to you because we all battle with spiritual distractions, discontentment, and temptations. Even if you've never tweeted, posted, uploaded, or commented, you still live in a selfie-centered world with those around you. And in your heart, you know there's more than what you see.

You love technology and all it offers. But you also hate it.

I can't prove this, but I have some theories, which I'll be sharing, about why we hate it. In a nutshell, social media makes everything so much about us. We're sucked into measuring our lives by how many followers we have, and who they are. We want to believe we're not the sum-total-of-the-likes our last post received, but it still feels like those little clicks matter. The odd

thing is, the more we focus on our selves, the less satisfied we feel. And the more we're consumed with the things of this earth, the more we feel empty on the inside.

The reason is because we were created for more—much more. We were not created for earth—but for eternity. We were not created to be liked but to show love. We were not created to draw attention to ourselves but to give glory to God. We were not created to collect followers but to follow Christ.

That's why I'm writing this book. Because it's time to be honest about our #struggles. And to regain control of the amazing tools that technology provides us.

It's time to put technology back in its place.

It's time to love God with our whole hearts.

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## Recovering Contentment The Struggle with Comparisons

“Contentment is the only real wealth.”

--Alfred Nobel

*I used to think I had a lot of friends. You know, friends at work, friends at church, friends in the neighborhood. We'd grab lunch or talk at our kids' soccer practice, after church on Sunday or when we were out working in the yard. Then after Facebook, I was able to connect with long-distance friends and people I knew from high school and college. But everyone's so busy now. I supposedly have over 300 friends on all my pages and sites. But last week I couldn't find one friend who could meet me for coffee. I've never felt so lonely in my entire life.*

--Carla S.

*My buddy Steve is the most competitive guy I know. He not only has to one-up anything I say or do, but then he has to tweet about it. And post a selfie with whatever award he won, with the new jacket he got, or the cool place he just visited. I used to feel really good about my life and what I've been able to achieve. But I look at Steve and feel like I can never catch up. I would never tell him—or anyone—this, but it makes me feel like a loser, like I'm no good at anything.*

--John K.

*I guess you could say I have a perpetual case of buyer's remorse. Whenever I'm about to buy something, especially if it's a big purchase, I like to research it online, you know, reading customer reviews and consumer reports from the experts. Then I'll shop around and try to find the best price before I finally enter my credit card and hit “buy now.” But then when I get it a few days later, I'll wish I had ordered something else. Sometimes I send it back only to start the whole process over again. It doesn't seem to matter if it's a new sweater, a food processor, something for the kids, or throw pillows for the couch. Nothing ever seems as good as I hoped it would be.*

--Sarah W.

## 1.1 I Want the Fonz

I remember the first time I was crushed by comparisons.

I was in junior high in Beaumont, Texas, and once—for about a week—I was the king of the world. I was the first kid at Marshall Middle School to get a motorized vehicle of any kind. Now, scooters are much more common today, but that’s not the kind of machine I’m talking about. To call my fire-red moped a scooter would be very generous. I had the kind of moped that I like to think of as “the original”: it was essentially a bicycle with a motor. And that motor had a governor that wouldn’t let it go over 25 miles an hour, even going downhill and I’d imagined I was going 50. Unfortunately, my moped didn’t always have enough power to go uphill, either. It had pedals, so you could add your own power to help it along.

When I would ride my moped, especially on level streets, I imagined that I probably looked pretty cool, like one of the Sons of Anarchy on a huge Harley. In reality, especially pedaling as hard as I could uphill, I probably looked much more like Nacho Libre. Whatever I looked like, that didn’t matter, because Tiffany, a girl who lived around the corner from me, thought my moped was the coolest thing ever. I’d strap on my blue helmet (which of course matched my moped), and buzz four blocks over to Tiffany’s house to pick her up. Tiffany would hop on behind me, wrap her arms around my waist, and we’d go zipping off, probably twenty miles an hour or so with the added weight, her hair flying behind us. Life was good.

Until Brian Marquardt got a *motorcycle*.

I buzzed over to Tiffany’s house, parked my sweet ride out front, and strutted up to ring her doorbell. When Tiffany answered the door, she kind of frowned at me. “Oh,” she said. “It’s you. I’m not riding with you today.”

“Why not?” I asked.

Tiffany held one of her hands out in front of her and examined her perfect fingernails as she spoke. “Because,” she said, “I’m riding with Brian.”

I struggled to process this new information. “But I thought we... I mean... I have my helmet here and everything... and your hair is so pretty... and it flies out behind you... and...”

But despite the airtight case I was making, she looked at me, like she felt sad for me or something, shook her head slightly, and said again, simply, “No.”

I just stood there awkwardly for what seemed like several minutes. “Brian Marquardt? Really?”

She looked at me dismissively, and she said, “Listen, I’m sorry, but you’re... well, you’re Richie Cunningham. I want the Fonz.”

#HurtsSoBad.

If you don’t know who Richie Cunningham or the Fonz is, #DontWorryItsOkay. I trust you can tell the difference even if you’ve never seen an old episode of *Happy Days*. Even after all these years, I still think about that moment sometimes, which just goes to show you how far we go with making comparisons. My own view of who I was didn’t match up with what Tiffany saw, and suddenly I’m crushed. I can’t believe I don’t measure up to someone else. I’m not good enough. And that experience has the potential to still come back to me even to this day, and even though I’m married to a wonderful woman and we are incredibly blessed.

And I know I’m not the only one.

Recently at one of my son’s soccer games, I overheard two moms telling each other they were jealous of the things they saw each other posting on social media. One mom had a full-time job and she told her stay-at-home friend how much she envied her. “Every time I see make something you’ve pinned on Pinterest, I just feel ashamed. You pour so much into your kids.

They're always smiling and happy. And when I see all the activities you do with them, all those cute crafts and delicious looking homemade foods, I just feel like a big failure as a mom."

The stay-at-home mom laughed. "Are you kidding me? You have no idea how jealous I am of *you!* Every day I see you getting to do all kinds of interesting things—constantly checking into new places, meeting new people. And you have the best wardrobe—and I just love your shoes! Seriously, I'm lucky if I change out of my pajamas before noon! Sure, I love my kids, but I feel like I constantly have to keep coming up with new things for them to do to keep them from driving me crazy. You know, 'Mom, we're bored!'"

Both moms are living great lives.

But they're jealous of the things they see that they don't have.

If you're on social media, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

You're sitting on your couch in your old sweats, enjoying a plate of mac and cheese and an apple on your lap, flipping through your phone, when you see a friend Instagram the *amazing* dinner she's having on yet another date. The candlelight glows beautifully, and her hair looks perfect, and is that another new designer dress? The linen tablecloth is so white it almost sparkles, and the place setting looks so elegant. It's clearly a nice restaurant overlooking the city. Her picture even has a frame—and how did she get 200 Likes in less than an hour?

Or your buddy posts a selfie from the free-weight room at the gym, lifting his shirt to make sure you can see his ripped abs in the mirror. He's ready for the next *300* sequel while you, well, you're at home, single-handedly trying to eat Hostess out of bankruptcy.

Know what I'm talking about?

Another thing technology lets us do is measure our popularity, often with painful accuracy. Back when I was a kid, you had to just estimate how unpopular you were: "*Let's see...*"

*No one will sit with me in the cafeteria. So far, I've asked three different girls to the Valentine's dance—and gotten three firm No's. I lost the election to be hall monitor—again. Hmm... I guess I must not be very popular.”*

Now empirical data can tell you where you rank with absolute precision: *“Let's see... If I have 73 followers, and my BFF has 423, that means she's almost six times more popular than I am. My last three pics got 29, 33, and 18 likes. Her last three got 88 and 73—then she even hit triple digits with that stupid puppy pic. #MyLifeSucks.”*

It's arguable that no generation before ours has really struggled with discontentment as much as we do. Although we still have poverty and economic inequality, for the most part our everyday lives are filled with convenience, opportunity, and abundance—sometimes to the point of excess. It doesn't take much for us to feel as though we aren't getting everything we deserve, and we face disappointment. Add social media, and what do you get? Never before have so many people had so much, yet felt so dissatisfied.

Some sociologists point to technology as a significant factor in our constant unhappiness. We are the first people in the history of the world who can peek inside the lives of others in real time. We carry tiny media powerhouses in our pockets that let us voyeuristically follow other people around, through all of their check-ins and pictures and videos.

And if what we're seeing in the lives of others seems better, more interesting and more fulfilling than our own lives, we feel like we're missing out. Of course, that feed we're watching may not necessarily reflect the whole reality. Most people generally put their best foot forward, showing you only the things they want you to see. As my close friend and fellow pastor Steven Furtick explains, “We compare our behind the scenes with other people's high light reels.”

Photoshopped and cropped, filtered and edited, what we see online makes our own reality seem dingy and dull.

No wonder we often feel so dissatisfied.

No matter how much we have, it can't compare.

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## 1.2 #GetReal

This isn't just something that I deal with. In fact, a recent study sought to quantify how exposure to social media affects people's moods. Researchers at two universities tracked students who were regular Facebook users over two weeks, asking them to complete life satisfaction surveys five times a day. Students who spent more time on Facebook in between when they completed their next survey were considerably less satisfied and more critical of their own lives. Results indicated that more than one-third of the test subjects felt "significantly worse" about themselves the more time they spent on Facebook. Why? We aren't designed by God to seek the image of others, we are designed to seek him. When our time on social media is spent focusing on how well others present their lives, we are, to use one of my father's baseball analogies, taking our eye off the ball.

Since this is a very real issue for many of us, I'd like to give you a chance to #GetReal with me. Let's take a few minutes to expose any discontent you might be harboring in your heart, which is another way of saying "envy". We'll look at three categories, and I want you to be gut-level honest if you see yourself in any of them.

First, do you battle with material and *financial envy*? Here's how you can tell: when you see a friend tweet about their new car, you immediately picture your piece-of-junk car that barely starts. Or let's say someone from your work posts a picture from the beach, and your first thought is, "Wait... *isn't this their second beach trip already this year?*" (But who's counting, right?) Or let's say your friend posts another #OOTD (outfit of the day) and you start scrolling through her posts and it dawns on you: this girl now officially owns more different kinds of shoes than Zappos carries! Be honest: do you battle with material and financial discontentment?

Second, perhaps you harbor *relational envy*. When all your friends' pics from their dinner out together start showing up in your feed—all at the same time—you wonder: “*How come no one invited me?*” Maybe you're not in a relationship, and you want to be, and it's springtime, and it seems like everyone you know is getting married. While there may be a part of you that genuinely wants to be happy for your friends because you love them, if you're honest, it also kind of hurts, seeing them all pairing off and smiling with their new spouses. You feel left out, overlooked, unwanted.

It could be you're working two jobs, struggling just to keep your head above water, exhausted, feeling sad that you can't give your kids as much time and attention as you really want to. And you have that one friend who always seems to be with their kids, at the game, taking them to the lake, or to the amusement park (again), or even just something as simple as reading to them at bedtime. Instead of feeling happy for them, you just feel guilty for all the things you can't do. If any of these things feel like you, let's call it what it is: relational envy.

Finally, maybe you battle with *circumstantial envy*. You see what other people are doing, where they're working, how they're living. But then when you look at your own life, your own circumstances, and you wonder why you don't have the things they have or get to do the things they're doing. You think to yourself, “*You know, I really thought by this age I'd be more successful—or at least doing something I enjoy.*”

Perhaps you want to have a baby, but you don't see that happening anytime soon. Then it seems like every time you look in your feed or timeline, you see someone else posting collages of their pregnancy months or having their “gender reveal party.” Well, yippedeedoo! Their cake was pink inside! But you're green with envy.

### 1.3 Achieve, Conquer, Accumulate

If I'm honest, it's circumstantial envy that's the hardest one for me, more than the other two (financial and relational). Since I'm a pastor, that means I work weekends, both Saturday and Sunday. So when I'm "on," most of my friends and church members are "off." I can barely look at social media on the weekends because all I see are people at football games, or playing Frisbee, or riding bikes, or jumping waves on Sea-Doos. It makes me crazy jealous. I just have to tell myself, *"Well, I guess I'll just save the world for the glory of God while everyone else is out having fun doing all that stupid stuff."* But the truth is, telling myself that doesn't make me feel any better.

Chuck Swindoll is credited with saying, "Life is ten percent what happens to you and ninety percent how you respond." Of course, most of us probably feel like it's exactly the opposite. We live our lives as though it's ninety percent (or more) of what happens to us. And sometimes it feels like our response doesn't make any difference at all.

I can't think of anyone in history who had a better understanding of managing his responses than the Apostle Paul. When he was in a prison in Rome, chained twenty-four hours a day to a guard (they took shifts), Paul wrote these words: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through [Christ] who gives me strength (Phil. 4:12–13).

Let's break that down. Paul was essentially saying, "I've gone without the things that I need before. But I've also had times when I had more than enough. Life happens in seasons. I've had good seasons where everything was going well, and I've had hard ones where nothing went my way. But in all of that living, I've learned that there's one secret to being content, no matter

what your circumstances happen to be at the time. And that secret is that I can do anything and everything—not by my own power—but through Christ. He’s who gives me the strength to handle anything that comes my way.”

Don’t miss this truth. You will always battle with discontentment until you let Christ be all that you need. Don’t believe me? Then prove me wrong. Chase after everything you’ve ever wanted. Go ahead. I dare you. I double dog dare you. Go earn as much money as you can. Buy whatever you want. Achieve, conquer, accumulate, repeat. Sound familiar? Maybe you’ve already tried some of these things, or at least known someone else who did. None of it matters.

At the end of the day, every day, you’ll still feel empty.

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## 1.4 All You Need

Maybe you're not really into material things. Maybe the party scene is more your thing. Then try that. Go party your brains out. Seek every thrill, pursue every high, get every buzz you can find. Guess what? When the party's over, and everyone's gone home, and that killer hangover finally starts to fade, there you'll be, right back where you started, still longing for more.

Maybe you're more of a people person. You just haven't found the right person who meets all your needs. So keep trying. Find a new boyfriend or girlfriend. If that one doesn't work out, try another. If that still doesn't scratch your itch, maybe just one person isn't enough. Trade out all of your old friends for new ones. Get popular. (Lots of books and websites promise to teach you how.) Who knows? Maybe you could even become famous! And after everybody leaves, and lights go down, and the cleaning crew comes in to pick everything up, it'll just be you again, alone, still lonely, still longing.

If you're going to try all those things, be sure you capture every moment. Get the biggest data plan you can, and collect Wi-Fi passwords at every stop. Check in at all the cool places. Share every inspirational thought you have, and every joke. Post lots of photos and videos, too, of course. And never stop sharing the whole show as you go. Post everything online for the whole world to see. Pile up Likes and Friends and Followers until it's all just one frenzied blur. Hustle until your real life exceeds your dreams. And finally, once you've reached the summit, I can guarantee you this one thing: your longing for more *never* stops.

Why? How could that be possible? Because you were not created for this earth. You were created for eternity. And there is nothing on earth that can ever satisfy that spiritual longing you feel inside—even if you could collect it all.

Nothing.

I remember when I was a teenager, years before I knew Christ, hearing people say, “God makes a Christ-shaped void inside every person.” I remember that saying annoying me. I remember not understanding what they were talking about. But then one day I learned for myself why they said it: because it is absolutely true. Nothing outside of a living relationship with Christ can ever fill the emptiness of that void.

You already know you’ve been searching. I’m here to tell you, Christ is what you’re searching for. He is your source. He is your strength. He is your sustainer. He is your joy. He is your contentment. He is your all in all.

When Christ is all you have, you’ll finally realize that Christ is all you need.

Christ. Is. All. You. Need.

He’s everything that matters. But as long as you keep searching, comparing, and envying what you don’t have, you’ll never have enough. So let’s look at three ways you can help yourself battle the sin of envy, keeping in mind that you’ll absolutely need Christ’s strength to win the war.

## 1.5 Beyond Compare

How can we overcome this strong human drive to compare? Let's look at the first way to combat envy by turning to the Bible: "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" (2 Cor. 10:12).

Pastor Andy Stanley puts this more simply than anyone I know: "There is no win in comparisons." We need to kill our comparisons. This is more serious than most of us realize. Let's look at another passage, and hopefully you'll see what I mean:

"But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice" (James 3:14–16).

Notice "wisdom" is in quotes. That's because James was being sarcastic; that isn't wisdom. But notice this: Envy is demonic. Where envy is, there's disorder. Where envy is, there is **every** evil practice. Look at these words. Demonic? Every evil practice? That's serious. Envy is not from heaven. It's earthly. It's unspiritual. It's demonic. I don't want to participate in things that the Bible calls demonic. I'm sure you don't either. And James doesn't say, "Probably it would be a good idea if you would consider being careful about envy." He says that, in the presence of envy, you find every evil practice. Again, I don't want to have anything to do with that!

Still not convinced? What about the Ten Commandments? You know, God's Top Ten? "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17). Not your neighbors' house. Not your friend's spouse. Not

your coworker's car. Nothing that belongs to someone else. Not even their cat. (Well, now I'm putting my own interpretation on the Bible. It doesn't say anything bad about cats.)

Envy isn't just unhealthy. In God's eyes, it's downright sinful. We need to kill our comparisons. When we compare ourselves to others, that's not wise.

This looks different in different people's lives. How can you be more honest with yourself about the things that tend to push your envy button? Maybe it's time to take a break from social media for a while, especially if it's feeding the sin of envy in your life. I'm not saying you have to throw your phone away or cancel Wi-Fi at home. But at the very least, if you begin to notice that certain people's posts tend to trigger the sin of envy in your life, you should hide them from your feed. Let me be clear: I believe it's best to just cut it off completely. We'll talk more about unplugging in Chapter 8 when we consider Rest. But if you're not willing to unplug for a while as you combat envy, then let me offer some other suggestions.

In fact, let's take this beyond social media. You may need to cancel the subscriptions to those beautiful catalogs constantly coming to your home. Every time you start flipping through the latest from Pottery Barn, you find yourself always wanting something more. How many shopping apps do you have on your phone? Are you addicted? Maybe you should delete those. You might need to stop watching HGTV if you just can't help sinning every time you're getting the tour of someone else's palatial home, and you're just sitting there watching from inside your pathetic little apartment.

Maybe you need to stop going to the boat show, or the car show, or the hunting show, or whatever show it is that's causing you to spend more time than you know you should wishing about something you don't have. It's time to kill comparisons and make time for something else. Maybe you need to stop looking at certain friends' Facebook posts because you always end up

jealous, envious, and covetous. You end up feeling inadequate and unsatisfied, discontented with the life you have when you see all that they appear to have. Why? Because envy is a wildfire, always consuming and never quenched. It's demonic. Every evil practice is there, lurking inside you, that lust, that longing for something more.

And it's insatiable.

So the first step in combatting envy is to consider simply what you can commit to giving up. Just choose one thing to *stop* doing today. Checking your Facebook feed before bed. Posting a picture of your delicious looking plate of food you've been served at a restaurant.

Reciprocating with everyone who follows you on LinkedIn, especially if you don't know them.

Practice *stopping* that behavior over and over. Ask others around you to help you stop doing it.

Commit to yourself and to them that you'll stop.

In the next step, you'll see what you can do that will help you to stop, which will make your commitment to stopping certain behaviors easier.

## 1.6 Shot to the Heart

Killing comparisons doesn't just mean identifying the bad influences in your life and cleaning them out. The second practical thing you can do to kill comparisons is to celebrate other people's successes. When you see someone else being blessed in a way that you hoped to be blessed, celebrating with them can purify the intentions of your heart.

Someone else get the job you wanted? Try this prayer: "God, you must have had a reason to bless them. Thank you, Father, for your blessings in that person's life." When you see someone else get that thing that you've always wanted, try thanking God instead of wallowing in jealousy: "God, thank you so much that your hand of blessing is on them. Please continue blessing them." Celebrating God's blessings in other people's lives purifies your motives. Celebration sends a kill shot right to the heart of envy.

Back when I was writing this book, it was a very busy season in my life. I was already really looking forward to the next opportunity for my family to take a vacation, and then I started seeing pictures online from a couple I know who happened to be traveling overseas at the same time. Dublin, Ireland. Edinburgh, Scotland. Topped off by snowmobiling... across a glacier... in Iceland. And this was all on the same trip! "Thank you, Father, that they're having such a great time. This trip is such a big blessing to them." Suffocate the flames of envy with a blanket of gratitude.

The opposite of this is also true. Back here in my own, normal, everyday life, I'm convinced that when I can't celebrate for others, then I'm actually limiting what God wants to do through me. As I'm writing this, our church is almost 20 years old now. And throughout that time, we've been blessed that every year, we've seen the number of people we're able to reach

expand—except for two seasons. When I look back on those two periods where we weren't growing, both times, I recognized that I was carrying significant sin in my heart.

One of those seasons, not only were we not reaching new people, but we were actually losing people. At the time, our church had two locations, and on Sundays I used to drive back and forth between them to preach at both places. On that drive, there was this one particular small church that I used to pass. It was obviously struggling, with maybe eight to ten cars in their parking lot each week. I would pray for them sometimes, something like, "Father, bless this little church. Please help them find their stride." But if I'm honest, even as I was praying that with my lips, in my heart, I felt proud. In my mind, I was thinking, "Whew! I'm sure glad our church isn't going through that." It was a sick kind of pride, carefully counting their cars every time I passed by.

This isn't the sort of thing I say often, but I really felt like God spoke to me. Now, just to be clear, I'm not saying I heard the audible voice of God booming in my car. But I can very honestly say that I felt a sort of presence, a power that filled my car, and I heard these words inside my head, a voice that wasn't my own. It said very clearly, "Would you really be happy if I blessed them? And if I blessed them more than I was blessing you?"

I realized that if I were to answer that honestly, my answer would not honor God. "Nope. That would not really make me happy. Bless them a lot, God. Just please don't bless them as much as you're blessing our church." I felt sick in the pit of my stomach. I recognized that my heart was impure. My heart wasn't about building God's Kingdom in that moment; it was more about building my own kingdom. And that is a very dangerous place for a pastor to be.

I started praying about it right then, and I turned it over and over in my mind over the course of several days. I repented sincerely. I cried out to him, "God, I really want to come to a

place where I want you to bless other churches more than you're blessing ours." And when God honored that prayer, when he changed my heart, so that my life became completely about his kingdom again, then suddenly, God started to bless our church with growth again.

This next thing I'm going to say, I can't prove. It's not in the Bible, so take it with a grain of salt. But in my own heart, I live this as if it's true: perhaps the reason God is not blessing you with something you want is because you're not celebrating God's blessings in someone else's life. Just as much as I don't want to take for granted God's blessings in my life, I want to be certain I always celebrate his blessings in the lives of others. We're told to "Rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom. 12:15). I don't want my life to be about me. Jesus calls us and invites us to something better, something higher. One of the best ways I know to kill comparisons is to celebrate God's blessings in the lives of other people.

## 1.7 A Continual Feast

A third way to kill comparisons is to cultivate gratitude in our own lives. I saw an excellent definition of envy that went something like this: envy is resenting God's goodness in other people's lives and ignoring God's goodness in your own life. That's powerful stuff.

Speaking of powerful, here's another verse on this topic that I just love: Proverbs 15:15 says, "For the despondent, every day brings trouble" (NLT).

All of us know someone like this. (You might even be a bit like this.)

"Man, I can just tell today's gonna be a bad day."

"Well, isn't that just great! It's going to rain all day tomorrow."

"Just checked the markets...the economy's in the toilet for sure."

"My kids are always so difficult. Every day it's the same thing."

"I sure do hate this car. It's going to give out any day now. I can feel it."

For the despondent, every single day brings trouble. There's no way to see the blessings because the glass is always half-empty.

But that verse doesn't end there. That's only the first half. The second half says this: "for the happy heart, life is a continual feast."

Is the person who starts out his day miserable living in the very same day as the person with the happy heart? Of course they are! The difference is in what you're looking for. The despondent person is looking for trouble—and they find it. The person with the happy heart is looking for God's goodness—and they find it!

If you want to look for bad in this world, certainly there's plenty. Trouble's not hard to find. But have you ever considered looking for the good? Because there's just as much of it, if not more. If you'll just look for the blessings of God, you'll find them!

“For the happy heart, life is a continual feast.”

Every time I read this verse, it reminds me of my dad. Of all the things I admire about my dad—and there are a lot—the thing I admire most is his positive perspective on life. Every time I call my dad, he always says the same thing:

“Hey Dad, how’s it going?”

“Son, life is good!”

This is another one of those things that, back when I was younger, used to kind of annoy me. My dad used to say this so much, I just thought it was automatic, just something he said.

I remember when my dad was battling to recover from a serious stroke, one that could have taken his life. I asked him, very concerned, “Hey Dad, how you doing?”

Without missing a beat: “Oh... (cough, cough) Life is good.”

“It doesn’t sound good, Dad!”

He said, “What? No, it *is* good.”

One day I finally asked him about it. I said, “Dad, do you realize that you always say, ‘Life is good,’ no matter what’s going on? No matter how you’re really doing?”

A funny thing about my dad is that he loves to communicate in baseball terms. For example, if I’m preaching, he says, “I’m on the mound.” Then instead of saying, “Preach good,” he says, “Keep ‘em low and inside.” So when I was surprised because he was positive even though he had significant stroke-related issues, he said, “Well, Craig, I say that life is good because it’s true. Son, you know I could have died. The way see it, I’m living in extra innings right now. It’s true. Life is good.”

I love that! My dad says “Life is good” because it’s what he genuinely believes, no matter what. It’s in his heart. And he’s right!

It's all about perspective.

“For the happy heart, life is a continual feast.”

Some people believe that Solomon wasn't just the richest man of his time, but that, dollar for dollar, accounting for things like inflation, resource distribution, and population density, Solomon was actually the richest man of all time. That guy—that Solomon—said this: “Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have” (Eccl. 6:9, NLT).

You want to have a nonstop party? Enjoy what God has given you, instead of longing for what you don't have. Be thankful for what God has given you, instead of creeping on someone else's Instagram: “Oh, I wish I had their life!” Guess what? They're longing for your life in ways you don't even know about!

“Enjoy what you do have rather than desiring what you don't have.”

The next time you feel tempted to say, “I hate my stupid car,” try saying instead, “Thank you, Lord, that I have a car that runs. I'm grateful that I'm blessed to be in the 8% of all people in the world who own a car. Thank you, God, for my wonderful car!”

“I wish I had a bigger house.” Try this instead: “Thank you, Lord, that I have a roof over my head—and indoor plumbing that works!” Do you realize that half the world doesn't have that? Clean, running water inside their house? That's amazing! It's a significant blessing from God, and we should and can be grateful to have it.

“My life is so crazy right now. I'm just so busy.” Really? Why is your life so busy? Because you have a family? Because you have children? Because your healthy children are involved in activities? With friends they enjoy? Because you have a thriving community that you're actively contributing to? “Thank you, God, that I have so many opportunities to bless

other people. Thank you for giving my life significance. I'm so grateful that you have given me so many people in my life that I care about."

With Christ's help, let's kill comparisons. Envy is earthly and unspiritual. It's demonic. Every evil practice is bound up in envy. Instead, let's celebrate the blessings of others. Social media should be a place to see what's happening in the lives of those you love—not a place that makes you envious. Let's rejoice with those who rejoice. Let's cultivate gratitude.

Let's worship our God, not because he gives us everything we want, but because he is worthy of our praise. Let's worship him because we've learned the secret of being content, whether we're living in plenty or living in want. That secret is that we can do all things through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who gives us strength.

Because he is all we need, let's pursue him with our whole hearts.

Only in him will we find true joy and true contentment.

Because only he is life, and only he truly satisfies.