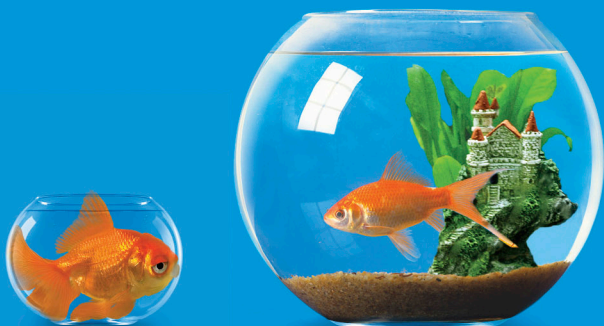


I'm Happy for You

{SORT OF... Not Really}



FINDING CONTENTMENT
IN A CULTURE OF COMPARISON

Kay Wills Wyma

AUTHOR OF *Cleaning House*

Praise for
I'm Happy for You (Sort Of . . . Not Really)

“Kay Wills Wyma once again champions a much-needed culture shift—with heartfelt insight she challenges us to choose contentment over comparison. *I'm Happy for You* gently exposes the growing obsession with self-promotion and one-upmanship that's wearing us all out and, thankfully, offers wise solutions.”

—TRACEY EYSTER, author of *Be the Mom* and *Beautiful Mess*

“Kay Wills Wyma captured my attention with her belly-laughing good storytelling steeped in reality as she tackled a question that's long overdue for an honest answer: What should we do about this comparison trap we find ourselves falling into daily? When comparison steals contentment, it's a problem that demands a solution. Kay gives it to us in a way that is easy on the heart and good for the soul.”

—ELISA PULLIAM, author and life coach

“Who knew comparison was so prevalent and destructive? Awakening to this alone is worth the time invested in reading this honest and sometimes raw literary gem. Comparison's thievery of joy is arrested by the 'just let it go' practicality Kay offers so transparently and humorously.”

—ROBIN POU, executive coach and attorney mediator;
coauthor of *Performance Intelligence at Work*

“Kay Wyma has managed to address what we're all dealing with on a daily basis—the ability to instantly compare our life to someone else's with a mere look at our phone. There we can see all the ways we are failing to be the best mom, the best wife, the best friend . . . and the list goes on. In the pages of *I'm Happy for You*, Kay offers insight into why we do this and how we can stop the cycle. If you're looking to live a life of contentment and authenticity and to be okay when your kid is the C student and not the valedictorian, you'll find comfort and realistic solutions in this book.”

—MELANIE SHANKLE, *New York Times* best-selling
author of *Sparkly Green Earrings*

I'm Happy for You is honest and funny, while tackling a serious problem that is stealing our joy: comparison. Kay creatively uses stories and personal confession to reveal the pitfalls of comparing, while offering a solid

ladder—built on godly wisdom—to help us climb out of that pit. . . . There’s freedom on these pages.”

—JENNIFER DUKES LEE, author of *Love Idol*

“Kay Wyma hit a home run on the Focus on the Family radio program when she talked about ways moms can combat the entitlement mentality in their kids. In her new book, she scores another hit with an insightful discussion of the pitfalls of comparing your life to others, especially through social media. Her advice is timely and relevant.”

—JIM DALY, president of Focus on the Family

“Victims of comparison drive-bys litter the Internet. There are virtual warehouses of new ways to covet your neighbor’s home, decorating skills, summer vacation plans, or Pinterest-perfect kids’ birthday parties. In this paralyzing culture of obsessive comparisons, this book is the detox we all need. With a sense of humor and an unrelenting honesty, Kay walks us through the steps to finding our worth again in the God who never compares us but always only calls us by name.”

—LISA-JO BAKER, community manager for (in)courage;
author of *Surprised by Motherhood*

“With both cultural relevance and biblical foundation, Kay Wills Wyma accurately defines the comparison problem and offers a solution. *I’m Happy for You* is a must-read for anyone caught in the comparison trap.”

—JOSHUA BECKER, founder of Becoming Minimalist

“The pursuit of bigger, better, newer, and more never stops. With a compelling lilt, Kay Wills Wyma’s pen pulls us along only to expose and confront our comparison battle. From one co-struggler to another, Kay brings us perspective and relief.”

—Dr. MICHAEL EASLEY, former president of Moody Bible
Institute; teaching pastor; host of Michael Easley inContext

“Kay Wills Wyma has opened a powerful window on the reality of comparison and how it’s impacting all of us, including vulnerable young lives. With social media, instead of just keeping up with the Joneses, we’re now keeping up with the world. Kay navigates us through the pressures we all face and teaches us how to be genuinely happy for others.”

—KATHY IRELAND, CEO at kathy ireland Worldwide

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*To anyone who has ever endured junior-high
insecurities, even as an adult.*

To everyone else: Really?

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Obsessive Comparison Disorder

A Sign of the Times

It isn't what you have or who you are or where you are or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It is what you think about it.

—Dale Carnegie

*M*y day hits an unexpected lull. All is quiet on the home front. And what's a person to do amid peace and quiet? Clean the house? Address and send envelopes containing Christmas cards from this and the past two years—before July? Get stuff done?

No, of course not.

“Quiet” signals a prime opportunity to waste time on the Internet. So I check my e-mail. Then I click on Facebook to get caught up on what all my friends have been doing.

I see that Jennifer, who writes beautiful coffee-table books, is on tour to promote her latest release. I learn a thing or two from articles shared by Jeff—something on cute koalas and a “Top 25” list of critically important factors related to abundant living. And I enjoy stopping by a swanky local charity event while in my pajamas. Jon and I aren’t swanky, so we normally don’t attend such events. But seeing the photos leads me to wonder whether we could or should have gone. Were we supposed to? Did we miss out? *No*. But somehow I’m tempted to believe otherwise, and I struggle a bit to be happy for all those other people having fun.

Realizing I don’t need to travel any farther down this road of comparison but not wanting to think too long about why it bothers me, I decide to click my way to another site. The teaser for an article catches my attention. The link takes me to my old friend the *Financial Times*, something I rarely read these days, as it belongs to my former career and my pre-kid life. But the idea of sinking into an intelligent business-oriented article feels like slipping on a comfy old shoe. Well, until my brain bumps up against words like *derivative* and *macroeconomic* blah-de-blah-blah. Then I just pretend to understand and reassure myself that I used to know what all that stuff meant.

But today as I click to read, I’m met with a roadblock: “Please log in.”

Apparently I can’t read the article unless I’m a subscriber.

No worries. There are several options for subscribing, one of which provides limited access (three articles per month) for free. The magazine simply needs answers to some questions and a few boxes checked. Looks easy enough.

I sail through the first few data fields: *E-mail Address*, *Password*, *Country*, and *Zip Code*. But I stall at the next: *Your Position*. Instead of a simple fill-in-the-blank field, a pop-up menu provides a plethora of options from which to choose. Without analyzing the choices to find a fit, I quickly search for *Other*. I'm comfortable with *Other*. I wear a lot of different hats these days, but the title that most often comes into play is *Mother* (*other* with an *M*). But *Other* isn't there.

Missing Answer blinks at me in red, preventing access as it politely insists, *Please select your position*. Apparently, in order to read an article, I have to be somebody.

This little exercise is beginning to sting.

I try to find a category I can claim without lying.

- **Analyst.** Maybe. But at this age, I'd prefer something with a little more prestige.
- **Associate.** Could work. Sure, my office has four wheels, seems to always be running on empty, and is filled with stray wrappers and cups from various fast-food eateries. But meetings convene daily. I could do Associate.
- **Manager/Supervisor.** Should we add referee, motivational speaker, counselor . . . ?
- **Other C Level (CFO/COO/CIO/CMO).** Not sure what CMO is, but the rest, yes.
- **Professional.** Sadly, no. As confirmed by a daily soundtrack of "Mahhhwwmm! You're *so* embarrassing!"
- **Programme / Project Manager.** Definitely. "Get your shoes; you have basketball in five minutes!" "Isn't that book report due tomorrow?" "Where's your lunch?"

- **Senior Manager / Department Head.** Yes. “Until you’re out of this house, I am in fact the boss of you.” “Because I said so.”
- **VP/Director.** Always. “I don’t care if you sat in the back last time! You can sit there again.” “Quit whining!”

I decide to select *CFO/COO/CIO/CMO*. I mean how can I go wrong with so many initials? And eventually, I access the article. But by then I no longer care. Such self-assessment exercises can do that to a person. Contentment darts out of reach in these moments, regardless of titles. Ever elusive “enough”—as compared to others and our own expectations, or simply measuring up—dangles just out of reach.

Apparently, I’m not alone. I recently watched one of my kids walk a similar road in which data fields demanded to define his life—or so it seemed. He had asked me to help him register for a college entrance exam. To better understand the situation, I logged into the kid’s SAT account while he was at school. I stared at the password prompt, wondering what he might have used when he tried to do this himself. I typed in our Amazon password and was instantly transported to his account, thankful for our family’s general lack of creativity.

I was floored. Page after page of required information stared back at me.

Beyond name, social security number, address, and photo for identification purposes, a potential test taker gets to recount his life history. Every class, every grade, every extracurricular activity, every interest, every aspiration. It took me an hour to peruse the pages. My stomach hurt as I saw years of hard work summed up by a checked

box. A checked box in a sea of unchecked boxes. Because no one can check them all.

Not every opportunity to size ourselves up comes as boldly as boxes begging to be checked. Such occasions lurk everywhere—in the carpool line, at the grocery store, in front of a computer screen, at church, and in the office—inviting us to assess our surroundings and see how we measure up.

When I talked with my teen about the test form, I tried to shift his focus to the positive. “Don’t think about what others are doing. You’re fine. Those boxes don’t define you.” And yet I couldn’t help but wonder: *Is it possible to have peace in the midst of relentless pressures to compare?*

OBSESSIVE COMPARISON DISORDER

The thing is, for much of my life, I wouldn’t have considered myself tethered to comparison. Besides the normal middle school insecurities and issues with outward appearance in my teens, I never really cared what people thought about me. I assumed my comfortable-in-my-own-skin mentality made me relatively impervious to comparison. Other people compare, but not me. (No need to point out that my simple assessment is formed by comparison.) I would find myself feeling a bit sorry for them and happy I couldn’t relate.

At times I suspected its unsettling permeation, but I had never gone so far as to actually call it out and name it. Until my eyes started to see and I began to become aware of all the ways comparison reaches

its tentacles into our culture, into our homes, into our moment-by-moment thought patterns.

Think about it: When was the last time you walked into an event, whether social- or business-related, and didn't do a quick scan to size up the crowd? Maybe to see who's there and determine your own worthiness to attend. Maybe to compare attire and gauge the suitability of your own. Or maybe you did a quick survey to find someone familiar to stand with so you wouldn't look like a lonely loser. Because you know that others are scanning too, checking where they fall in the lineup. In short, they're comparing themselves to you.

We do it all the time. In fact, whether we believe it or not, there are very few times we *aren't* comparing. We even compare ourselves to ourselves—our expectations, our perceptions, our dreams. Paul An-gone, the popular author of *101 Secrets for Your Twenties*, calls comparison “the smallpox of our [the Millennial] generation.”

What's Obsessive Comparison Disorder, you ask? It's the new OCD I've coined to describe our compulsion to constantly compare ourselves with others, producing unwanted thoughts and feelings that drive us into depression, consumption, anxiety and all-around discontent. It encourages us to stay up late on Facebook [poring] through all 348 pictures of our frenemies' “My Life Is Better Than Yours” album, and then it sends us to bed wondering why we feel so anxious.

Obsessively comparing yourself to others, becoming more and more frustrated that your life doesn't look like theirs, is the absolute most effective way to take your crisis to unhealthy,

eating raw cookie dough with a serving spoon, levels. Like having to run outside to light up a cigarette, our comparison addiction is uncontrollable, and it is killing us.¹

Well said. I'd also add that comparison's impact is not restricted to a certain generation, and it's not all social-media driven.

One evening not long ago my husband, Jon, and I attended a gathering at the home of some friends here in Dallas. I spotted a couple who had recently moved back to the area from Nashville and made my way across the room to hug them. As we chatted, they told us about the home they had bought and were remodeling while they and their son lived in its garage apartment. Standing in our host's lovely living room, the husband shared some of his insecurity about their own housing choices.

"We love where we're living," he told me, "but we drive over here and see kids playing outside. Then I think about *our* neighbors, the youngest of which is, um, around ninety, and I start to worry about Jackson having friends to play with. Which I know is ridiculous since he's almost past that age. But then I look at this house, which is larger than ours. And our perfect-for-our-family-of-three home seems pretty small, which is silly because it's fine. More than fine. It's crazy how quickly thoughts can travel to discontent."

Honestly, I was surprised. Few people have it all together like this guy does.

Right about then, my eye landed on a lovely work of art hanging on one of our host's walls. And I remembered that only moments earlier I might have—okay, I definitely had—longingly gazed at a

butterfly sculpture above the stove in her kitchen and wished it hung in my kitchen. And my thoughts moved to my walls, a few still sporting prints that date back to my days as a single apartment dweller with barely a penny to my name. A framed print of Monet's water lilies has traveled with me from Washington, DC, to Dallas and my every move in between.

I cringed at the thought of this crowd in my home and wondered how many guests have noticed my cheap imitations and possibly hidden scorn behind their smiles. Or maybe silently sighed, relieved that at least their walls aren't as sparse as mine. Which is ridiculous. They're my friends. What do they care?

Or do they?

Rather than basking in the beauty displayed on our host's walls for all of us to enjoy, I couldn't stop myself from comparing my walls to hers and imagining the décor gracing the homes of the other guests. I had taken the bait and was now dangling uncomfortably on comparison's hook, having lost a bit of the joy I had when I entered. I forgot that what's on the walls isn't nearly as important as what's taking place within the walls—the conversations, the laughter, the fights, the making up, the everyday stuff of relationship.

I looked around the room and couldn't help but wonder, *Am I alone?*

Did the man standing by the door think about the car he was driving when he parked and saw other cars nicer or junkier than his? Was the woman on the sofa worried about her outfit? Did she rifle through a closet only hours earlier, searching for the perfect clothes like my teen daughter does before meeting up with friends at the mall?

Could the journey through *her* closet be tracked, the way my daughter's can, by the clothes dropped across her floor? Like breadcrumbs left on a forest floor, discarded outfits attest to our mental anguish as we struggle to choose just the *right thing* to be okay.

Why would an outfit choice hijack our thoughts and prevent us from enjoying the people around us? How could a more-than-enough home suddenly become Less Than? Why do we—why do I—take the bait and make comparisons? It's crazy. And I know better.

THE THIEF OF JOY

The next day at lunch with my teen daughter and her friend Maddie, I described the scene from the night before.

Maddie offered up some honesty herself. "I totally get what you're talking about." She thought for a minute, then added, "In ballet, even though I've been dancing since I was three, I'm just not flexible. So when we stretch, I can't help but look at the girls that can stretch further than me and I want to be them. I want to be better than I am. And I wonder what it would be like if I could stretch like any one of the other girls." She paused to take a bite of her hamburger, then added, "It takes a lot of the joy away from what I love. I don't know why I do it."

I nodded and looked at my daughter, reading in her thoughts a wish not for flexibility but for the willowy thinness of her ballet friend.

Maddie had summed it up in a nutshell: "It takes a lot of the joy away from what I love."

Comparison surrounds us so thoroughly that we don't even realize

how it's suffocating us, stealing our contentment. What we do see is that we're ever striving to measure up, concerned about falling short. If we do manage to come out ahead of the crowd, we struggle to enjoy it because we're fighting to hold on to our position or reach the next level.

We expect the Greater Than/Less Than jockeying for position in middle school. We expect it in the workplace, in sports, in academia. We're blindsided when it shows up as competitive parenting among friends. I find it even in the dresser drawer when I spy a pair of pants I wore before giving birth to five kids. The "someday" jeans that I hold out hope of wearing again hint at the need for a trip to the Goodwill drop-off—but can unexpectedly prompt a disappointing comparison between me and former me. As my mental scales pit me against my own expectations for myself, I feel the joy being sapped out of the moment. Then I remember that even when I wore those pants, I mourned for the hip clothes I had worn in college. So why waste precious time on something as ridiculous as old, too-tight pants?

Why? Because comparison is relentless. It casts a shadow over nearly every aspect of our modern lives: job, car, house, education, clothes, appearance, tweets/re-tweets, Pinterest pins, Facebook/Instagram Likes and Shares, YouTube views, even business cards.

What hold could a three-and-a-half-by-two-inch piece of thick paper have on anyone?

It's hard to explain, but something shifts in the air of a conference room when business cards are exchanged and titles enter the picture. The comparisons escalate as participants work in mentions of their

degrees, their associations with certain institutions, their past athletic achievements, their well-placed connections. A little Ivy and NCAA can go a long way.

Comparison is the thief of joy.

—Theodore Roosevelt

The list of joy stealers goes on and on. The good news is that we can silence comparison when we learn to recognize its insidious invitation to self-obsession. Because really, that's what comparison does: it makes life all about me, how I measure up or fall short. And all that self-absorption consumes our mental energy and prevents us from enjoying life.

In my friend's house, I caught myself in that art moment, and I did one of the things that actually dispels comparison: I quickly forced a mental reboot and chose to be genuinely happy for my friend, our host. When it's not about me, I can appreciate her great taste and the beauty of what hangs on her walls. Then, adding a little *oomph* to my mental reboot, I reminded myself to consider the not-too-shabby aspects of our own home. Maybe the artwork on the wall next to my kitchen table is not professional, but there are a few objets d'art that are of great worth to me. Pencil sketches of a squiggly line elephant, a chair, a light bulb, a rectangle, and a cross, each drawn by my seven-year-old, have hung there for several months and never fail to make me smile. They remind me how quickly time flies. They take me back to the days when all my brood whiled away a day coloring, drawing,

displaying—and going through the garbage can to see what treasure I might have mistaken for trash.

Such reminders of what I truly value help ground my thoughts in a saner perspective and break the grip of comparison.

Does comparison ever end? Who knows? Maybe I'll still be lured into dissatisfaction by looking at my former-me pants or art or house or kids or titles or status or (fill in the blank) when I'm eighty. I hope not. I hope that through honest discussion, we can encourage each other and find practical ways to tame comparison pressures. I think the solution begins with bringing unproductive thoughts into the light so each of us knows we are not alone in this struggle.

But before going further, I should probably introduce myself.

ONE OF THOSE MOMS

My name is Kay. I'm mother to five (mostly) delightful children. I'm a wife, a sister, and a daughter. I'm calendar challenged, organizationally impaired, a tiny bit forgetful, and according to my kids, I talk a lot. When we stopped to get gas the other day, I overheard one of them tell a carpooling friend, "Oh no. That lady just waved at my mom." After preparing her friend for the pending ordeal, she asked, "Do you need to be somewhere? Because we might be here a while." A sibling agreed, begging, "Mom, puh-leeceez don't talk!"

I am also a procrastinator. And I married a procrastinator. Together we are somewhat productivity challenged. There should be some sort of test required before two laid-back people get married. Not much gets done. Only on two occasions did we even leave the hospital

with a child named. Three of our kids were “little guy” and “cute thing” for weeks on end before the blank on their birth certificate was filled. In fact, Jack was named by his sister as she was being dropped off at school after a week of people asking the baby’s name. “Dad,” she said while closing the car door, “his name is Jack David. I’m telling everyone that’s his name.” And that was it. Thank goodness someone can make a decision around here.

Most of our friends might consider us among the least likely household to be affected by comparison pressure—something about needing to be aware in order to compare. But comparison’s far-ranging grasp captures even the oblivious.

I’m a former businesswoman. At some point before donating a majority, if not all, of my brain cells to certain children in multiple visits to Labor & Delivery at Baylor University Medical Center Dallas, I was numbers savvy. These days, given that fifth-grade math eats my lunch, I’m not sure how I ever worked in corporate finance. Jon assures me that I used to be smart. I ask him to remind me what I was like. And I try to remember the days when I could think complete thoughts, when I could start and finish a sentence without interruptions, when I could create multifunction, interdependent spreadsheets.

I no longer produce spreadsheets, but I still juggle complex planning in the form of the family schedule. Thank goodness the kids have become a bit more self-sufficient over the last couple of years, due to an experiment to rid our home of youth entitlement. The truth is, they’re much better than I am at handling their lives anyway.

While the kids are nice enough to put up with me and my harebrained ideas, they still prefer that their identities be disguised in

print. So here, in addition to Jon and me, is the cast of characters, ages seventeen to seven, at our house:

- Boxster. Named after a memorable conversation involving a Porsche and teen-induced car-envy. Needless to say, he does not drive a Porsche. And he no longer looks to things like cars to define his significance.
- Snopes. Known for her ability to spot any suspect actions, especially questionable driving patterns of her mother. I hope you enjoy her wise insights as much as I do.
- Barton. Though entering that season where attitude rules, the girl stays true to her go-to-girl namesake.
- Fury. He remains as passionate as ever, steering more and more toward positive ventures, including mentoring his tagalong, and arguably best friend, younger brother.
- Jack. Our sole real-named character, he has yet to shed his Mary Poppins's "practically perfect in every way" label, but we're sure the day is coming. Maybe that will become his pseudonym, Poppins. Until then, he's fine with Jack.

We have a regular home full of regular kids, all of whom I adore, even though the teen years really do push the envelope. So I'm not going to cut it as Mom Grand Supreme. Apparently I'm not alone in that assessment. The month of May provides plenty of confirmation.

For some reason schools pile everything into May: field trips, field days, birthday lunches (so all the summer birthday kids won't feel slighted), projects, Living History Day, end-of-year parties, end-of-year gifts. And e-mails, oh so many e-mails. E-mails about e-mails, asking

if e-mails have even been seen. E-mails begging for a reply or at the very least acknowledgment.

At times like these I feel sorry for the room mom who has my child in her class.

In the midst of the craziness, a friend said to me, “I know this won’t hurt your feelings, but, well, you know . . . you’re one of those moms.”

What? “One of those,” huh?!

The truth is, my feelings were a tiny bit hurt as I wondered what “one of those” meant. I’m pretty sure I was falling short. I don’t think “one of those” means organized or on top of things. And I’m fairly certain that it doesn’t mean ahead of the game, mindful of grades, orderly, timely, prepared, or even aware. (*Field Day? What’s that? And he needed a tie-dyed shirt . . . yesterday?*)

Maybe you’re “one of those” along with me. Or maybe you’re someone who amazingly has your life all together, wondering why the rest of us are chronically behind. Regardless of where we land, we aspire to live the “right” way, as if there is one. So we spend our lives observing, comparing, and judging. Then we strive. We view ourselves as Greater Than or Less Than according to the set standard—what we’ve done, where we’ve been, what we have or don’t have, what we need to be okay—as it relates to those around us. We tend to view life as a race and use the good aspects of comparison to propel us forward, even sharpen our strengths. But somewhere along the way, we allow the negative aspects of comparison to rule as we make keeping up with the Joneses the benchmark of our contentment.

I expected (and often relished) the competitive challenge in school,

in sports, in the workplace, so I didn't think much about it. But my eyes were forced open to comparison's insidious nature the moment I became a parent.

Maybe it had something to do with insecurity about my complete inadequacy in the area of parenthood. I don't know. But soon after the birth of my first child, I was hit by the relentless onslaught of pressure to get this "right." How and when my child slept, ate, and spent his awake time would set the course of his future life. So I started to look at what everyone else was doing, especially as it compared to what I wasn't doing.

Bombarded by differing "right" ways to do something, I felt a whole new world of comparison entering my sphere. Breast-feeding, organic baby food, playgroups (lots of playgroups), milestones, birthday parties, toddler sports, and Mother's Day Out programs—there was no end to the *should*. It was as if every new parent tried to justify her own choices by comparing them to those of others on a similar road. If only it had stopped at the infant stage, but things were just ramping up to the Olympic-level competition that parenting has become.

Never before had I experienced discontent at such unnerving levels. As I tried to breathe under the weight of all the pressure—especially since that pressure centered on something for which I cared more than I'd ever cared for anything else (my kids)—I searched to flush out the joy stealers. The more I searched, the more I realized that comparison was involved in almost every aspect of discontent.

Because it isn't exclusive to parenting.

I started to realize that comparison's sneaky little traps were set

around every life corner. Even a morning stroller walk with neighbors wasn't safe from snares. It would beg each of us to compare the houses we passed to our own, producing internal longings rather than satisfaction. We all lived in perfectly lovely homes with food on tables situated on hardwood floors next to stocked shelves in kitchens with running water. So what if maybe I had to wash my dishes by hand since our 1940s bungalow had no dishwasher. Could I mentally reboot, be thankful for hot water, and find peace in the moment? Or would I give in to the pull of resenting our limited financial resources, wishing for a home with a second story or, at the very least, a built-in Maytag?

In today's culture, opportunities to compare run rampant.

I began to see comparison everywhere—in every arena and stage of life—driving our posts on social media, determining our educational choices, propelling our consumerism, filling our calendars with must-do events. It's like buying a car. Before making a purchase, we rarely notice the particular make and model on the road. But as soon as we begin driving, similar cars show up everywhere.

Now that I know its various makes and models, I see the peace-disrupting presence of it far and wide. Comparison, like an electric car, arrives silently on the scene and catches our attention through envy, “what ifs” and “if onlys,” fair and not fair, measuring up, and striving for enough. Then it opens the doors and invites us in for a ride to the Land of Discontent.

Becoming a parent brought it to my attention.

Who knew a conversation with one of my kids would send us down the path toward a solution?