

COMPARISON GIRL for Teens

THRIVING BEYOND

MEASURE IN A WORLD

THAT COMPARES

SHANNON POPKIN & LEE NIENHUIS



KREGEL
PUBLICATIONS

Comparison Girl: Thriving Beyond Measure in a World That Compares

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Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505. www.kregel.com.

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Shannon Popkin is represented by the literary agency of Credo Communications, LLC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, www.credocommunications.net.

Published in association with the Books & Such Literary Management, 52 Mission Circle, Suite 122, PMB 170, Santa Rosa, CA 95409-5370, www.booksandsuch.com.

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Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-0-8254-4819-5, print

ISBN 978-0-8254-7117-9, epub

ISBN 978-0-8254-7116-2, Kindle

Printed in the United States of America

24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 / 5 4 3 2 1

*For our girls,
Lindsay, Gabriella, and Lexie Beth:
Beautifully made by God and loved beyond measure.
You are treasures.*

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A NOTE FROM SHANNON

IN SIXTH GRADE, I WAS a silly, imaginative, carefree girl with glasses and freckles. My best friend, Kathy, and I amused ourselves by passing tiny notes tucked into my pencil sharpener during class. We often had sleepovers, laughing into the night over the ridiculous fill-in-the-blank stories we made up. Life couldn't have been better.

Everything changed, though, at sixth-grade camp. Kathy was in a different cabin, and I was with girls I didn't know who wore makeup, dressed in cute clothes, and talked about boys. I was pretty sure the boys were talking about them too. Especially Kim—the girl with long blond hair, thick eyelashes, and the cutest dimples when she smiled.

As we unpacked, Kim told her friends that she preferred showering at night, and they all agreed. *Oh yes, it was far better to shower at night.* But I hadn't planned to shower at all! This was camp. I hadn't even packed a towel or shampoo.

When the girls returned from the showers and began getting ready for bed, I watched with interest as Kim did something I had never seen: she rolled her damp hair into pink sponge rollers. Then in the morning, as Kim pulled out the sponge rollers, I almost gasped! Her long blond hair had been transformed into big, beautiful curls that now bounced along on her shoulders as she moved. I was intrigued, to say the least. I was also secretly delighted, for though it was glaringly obvious that I didn't measure up to Kim and her friends, she had just disclosed her secret to enviable beauty. Sponge rollers!

I returned home with a new determination to grow up and reinvent myself. First order of business? Sponge rollers.

I showered at night, just like Kim, and rolled up my damp, shortish brown hair in the pink rollers. The next morning, I pulled the rollers out and ran to the

A NOTE FROM SHANNON

mirror. This time I *did* gasp—but not because of my enviable beauty. I looked as if I had been electrocuted!

Sixth-grade camp was a turning point. My life went from lighthearted to awkward. From happy-go-lucky to sick-to-your-stomach inadequate. Why? Because I now saw something that had been previously hidden. A whole new dimension I'd been oblivious to was opening up: the world of comparison.

Have you entered that world? Are you feeling awkward and inadequate because of the ways you don't measure up? Or maybe you secretly enjoy the ways you rank above others? Either way, I hope you'll listen to what Jesus says about comparison and the truth that can set you free.

These are lessons I wish I'd figured out earlier, and I hope you learn from my mistakes. As you read, know that Lee and I see you, we know the heartsick feeling of endless measuring, and we want to walk with you to freedom. Are you ready? We're rooting for you!

Love,

Shannon

A NOTE FROM LEE

I WAS THIRTEEN THE FIRST time I pinched myself hard enough to leave a bruise. My best friend, Melissa, and I had been having a slumber party, complete with late-night snacks, face masks, and loud music. Melissa and I had been inseparable for a couple of years, and she was trustworthy and loyal in all the ways you hope a friend will be. So I asked the question that had been circling in my head for weeks.

“Melissa, tell me the truth. Am I pretty?”

“Lee, you know you are pretty. Guys like you. You have friends.”

“But, if I could change or work on any part of me to be better, what should it be?” I asked and held my breath.

“Honestly?” she asked. I nodded.

“Well, you are in good shape, but your thighs could be more toned.”

And that was the moment. The moment when my thighs became my enemy.

From that night on, I’d look at them and wish they were different—more toned. Less like an athlete’s and more like a dancer’s. I’d put my fingers on the outside or the inside of my thighs—anything that moved or jiggled—and pinch hard. I suppose at first it was out of frustration. I’d imagine pinching so hard that the jiggle would fall off and fix the problem. It may have started as a drive to look perfect, to have dancer legs like Melissa, but later it became my way of measuring. How much could I pinch? Was it less than the day before? Deep-purple bruises would remain. A couple of years later, when I’d “fixed” my thighs through exercise, it became my arms, my belly, and my sides.

It didn’t matter if I was making healthy eating choices, staying physically active, or in good shape for my body type. It wasn’t fixed by guys who liked me or a pile of friends. I was not okay with me, and I was angry at the one person

A NOTE FROM LEE

who I thought could change it all. *Me*. I reasoned that if I could just try harder or do better, I could be who I wanted to be.

I didn't meet Jesus, or truly understand that he loves me as I am, until I was sixteen. By that time, I was a thousand pinches into a habit I didn't know how to break—the habit of measuring and punishing myself when I failed to live up to my own expectations or the expectations of others. Sometimes I'd leave marks on my skin, but I was also bruising a place I could cover—my heart.

Now I know the truth. That's not the voice of my friend Jesus. He doesn't talk to me that way, and he would never want me to live black and blue from believing a pile of lies. When I read Shannon's book for women about comparison, I knew you needed this too. Jesus doesn't want his girls to bruise themselves or each other with all this measuring. What if we could walk in a lifetime of freedom to be who God created us to be? Joy-filled and filled with truth. Here's to freedom, girlfriends.

We love you,

Lee



Chapter One

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MEASURING UP

Lee: Hey, friend, I'm so tired of this comparison game. One minute I think I am the one everybody just tolerates and the next minute I'm feeling smug because I'm at least prettier, smarter, or more popular than another girl. I'm sick of it. Both of my reactions are gross.

Shannon: Oh, girl. I know that feeling all too well. Sometimes I do the same thing! Let's work on this together. We could be "Done Comparing Sisters."



QUIZ—ARE YOU A COMPARISON GIRL?

YOU MIGHT ALREADY KNOW THAT comparison's an issue for you. Or you might think other people have a way bigger problem than you do. Here's a quiz to help you see where comparison might be a problem for you. You can mark your answers in the book or scan the QR code to take the quiz online and see how your score compares with other girls'. (Yep, we're okay with that.) We want you to know you're not alone.

	Yes	No
1. When I walk into a room, I identify the prettiest girls.		
2. I often wish I had nicer things (phone, clothes, etc.).		
3. I pay attention to how many likes, follows, and comments people receive on social media.		
4. I'm a perfectionist.		
5. I've felt jealous or threatened when someone has the same skill or ability I do.		
6. I compare my family to other families.		
7. When I see someone else succeed, I'm secretly jealous.		
8. I get super frustrated and embarrassed when I make mistakes.		
9. Sometimes I judge people when I see them not living as I think they should.		
10. I'm self-conscious and obsess over what others think.		

Quiz—Are You a Comparison Girl?

So, how did you do? Maybe you answered yes to almost all of these. Maybe just a few.

Did you think of some other girl who really needs to take this quiz? If so, we think that's great! Will you invite her to read this book and talk about it with you? One thing we know: trying to figure out comparison is much easier and more enjoyable when done with a friend or a small group!

Asking for a Friend

Almost daily we read posts on social media asking questions phrased like this:

Is it bad to eat a whole package of Oreos? Asking for a friend.

Is five hours of YouTube too much in a day? Asking for a friend.

Has anyone found a makeup tutorial that actually helps? Asking for a friend.

It would be rare to check zero boxes in the quiz above. Comparison is a part of life. But even if you don't see comparison in your life right now, it's probably just around the corner. It's totally okay if right now, you just read this book for a friend. Most of all we hope this quiz will get the conversation started, and the rest of this book is our way of continuing it. Ready to get started?

Day 1

A MILLION WAYS TO COMPARE

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper,
to be with you forever.*

JOHN 14:16 ESV

A DAY IN THE LIFE of a Comparison Girl:

6:15 a.m.—The alarm goes off and Anna groans.

6:30 a.m.—Anna gets out of bed and looks in the mirror, comparing her skin and hair to the Instagram pictures she scrolled through before bed last night. *It's going to take a lot of work to look good for school, and I still won't look like the influencers I saw last night.*

6:45 a.m.—Anna dries off from her shower and notices her chest, waist, and thighs. *Too flat, too big, too bumpy, and now my jeans are tight.*

6:50 a.m.—Anna looks in the mirror to pump herself up. *You look awesome! Your hair looks good. Your outfit is on point. You look good! Now try not to forget it before you even get on the bus.*

7:00 a.m.—Anna heads downstairs and pours herself a bowl of her favorite

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MEASURING UP

cereal. *Kenzie's probably making herself a green smoothie right now. I'm so unhealthy. No wonder I'm fat.*

7:15 a.m.—Anna walks to the bus stop to catch the bus to school. *I wish I had a car. There is nothing cool about a sixteen-year-old riding the bus.*

7:16 a.m.—The bus arrives and Anna slides into a seat in the middle. *Not toward the front where the little kids sit, and not the very back where the bad kids are. I wish I had someone to sit with.*

7:58 a.m.—Anna walks through the school doors and immediately feels self-conscious. *I haven't seen one other girl wearing jeans like these today, and this shirt looks too faded now. For once I wish I could have an outfit that felt cool.*

8:14 a.m.—Anna heads into first hour just before the first bell rings. Her teacher hands back last Friday's test with grades written in red across the top. *An A! I can't believe it! Hallelujah. Oh, but Grant and Alicia got As too. This must've been an easy test because they don't usually get good grades.*

9:15 a.m.—Class is dismissed and Anna walks into the hallway, noticing the groups of kids forming along the hall of lockers. *Jocks. Girls who like the jocks. Youth group kids. Drama kids with their own vibe. Nerds. Druggies. Where do I really belong anyway?*

11:15 a.m.—Anna heads to lunch with her friends. *I wonder who will buy hot lunch today. Will I get a good seat at the table? Will they save me a seat? I wish I had packed my lunch like Katie. She has the cutest lunch bag this year. She's pretty too.*

11:19 a.m.—Anna slides into the seat next to Katie at the lunch table. *I wonder if I should've sat next to that girl who is new. I don't want her to feel alone. But if I did, what would my friends think?*

11:20 a.m.—Anna’s friends have all pulled out their phones and are looking at pictures from last weekend. *I should’ve taken the time to put a filter on these pictures before I showed them to these guys. My acne scars look rough.*

This may seem like a normal day to you and Anna, but this kind of comparison is exhausting, and it isn’t even noon yet! Anna still has a full afternoon and evening of comparing in classes, sports practice, homework, and which guys notice her (or which ones don’t)—not to mention time comparing herself to YouTube and social media posts when she gets home.

- **Go back and put a star by the parts of Anna’s day you can relate with. Are there any other times of the day that are especially comparison driven for you? If so, which ones?**

- **When you think about Anna’s morning, what are some words that come to mind? How do you imagine Anna feels at the end of the day?**

Are We Fed Up Yet?

From our earliest years, most of us spend our days trying to be a person who has absolutely no flaws. When we feel behind or exposed, we cover and hide. And if we finally do measure up, we get lost in perfectionism, independence, and pride. Or maybe we just give up hope of ever fitting in and hang with the “weirdos on purpose”—the ones who are so sick of not measuring up they decide to avoid fitting in at all.

All of these responses lead away from freedom and joy. Instead, they lead us to fear what people think or what they might say. We are left trying to prove

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MEASURING UP

ourselves and measure up, all the while dreading that someone might find out we're a sham.

When you look at all that pressure, are you fed up with living like a Comparison Girl? We hope so. It's no way to live. There may be a thousand ways to measure, but none of them make us feel whole. The logical response is, "Stop comparing." But our question is, "Okay, *how?*" Comparison is as natural as noticing that your shoes are bigger than mine, or you got an A when I got a C. What can we do—put blinders on like the ones horses wear?

And when we do try to stop comparing, ironically, that's exhausting too! Many of us know better than to glance side to side, comparing ourselves to other people. So we try harder and work harder to fix our comparison issues. The whole thing becomes a vicious cycle. Comparison really is a trap that we can't escape on our own. It's everywhere and never shuts off.

Where Do We Get the Power to Stop?

The power to stop measuring isn't in us. (What?!) Wrestling and fighting comparison on our own only leads to tighter knots. There are battles we fight and problems we face that can only be overcome with help from God. In fact, the power to stop measuring only comes *when* I quit trying to do it on my own. The loosening of the knots of comparison comes from the Spirit of Jesus working in me, renewing my mind and my thought processes. Life-changing power only exists in the context of a relationship with him. There's no loophole, no shortcut, no cheat sheet or code.

When it comes to matters of mind change and life change, help is only a simple, silent prayer away. Feel free to model your prayer after mine.

Jesus,

I need your help. I can't fix this on my own.

Teach me your way and give me a heart that wants to do it.

Amen.

Friends, Jesus is drawn to our neediness. That's when he shows up with power. And when he shows up in *his* power, comparison doesn't stand a chance.

What Does It Mean to Compare?

Here are three quick thoughts about what it means to compare:

1. The word *comparison* is neutral. It means to think about or consider how things are similar and different.
2. When we compare, we relate one thing to another, making measurements of all kinds of things—from things we can see to things we can't. We do this with physical items, places, and people all the way to preferences, feelings, and personalities.
3. A decision is often made when we compare: we decide if something is alike or different, if two things agree or disagree, and sometimes we assign value to those things based on our decision.

■ **Is comparison always a bad thing? Why or why not?**

■ **What are some comparison words you use every day? (We'll start you out.)**

Smaller

Cheaper

Kinder

■ **What do you think can make comparison harmful?**

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MEASURING UP

Comparison is nothing new. People were stuck in comparison back when Jesus lived here on earth too. But Jesus showed them the way out. Are you ready to find your way out too?

God,

I'm tired of comparing. It leaves me stuck in my thoughts and sometimes my relationships. I can't fix this comparison problem on my own. I need your help.

Amen.