Well, we are in our final week of a series called “I quit” where we’re deciding once and for all to quit the things in life that not only don’t add value… but that rob us of the best life Jesus has for us…

And no, we’re not talking about quitting our job or school… In this series we said I Quit Complaining, I Quit Living in Fear and I quit making excuses.

And today we’re saying, “I quit comparing.”

Comparing is just built into our culture. If you want to buy something new, you pull up a comparison chart so you can see the pros and cons of both. Advertising is set up to make us compare our lives to the life of the person in the ad… are they cooler/smarter/faster? If so, I want that stuff so I can be cooler/smarter/faster.

Psychology Today cited a study that said 10% of our thoughts are comparing ourselves to other people. 10%. 10% of our mental energy is going to measuring ourselves up against someone else. That’s 10% that’s not invested in hobbies… in our spiritual health… in our emotional well being… with our spouse or kids… it’s comparing ourselves to other.

10%.

Let’s play a little game. It’s called “put a finger down.” So you’re gonna hold up your 5 fingers and I’m going to ask you some questions, and if it’s true about you, you can put down one finger.

Put a finger down if you’ve ever compared your possessions with someone else’s. You pull into your friends house and they have a super nice, brand new car… and you were like… wow. That’s a nice car. Maybe you even felt a little bad about yourself. Or your friend pulls out a Nokia flip phone and you’re holding your brand new iPhone 12 and you’re feeling a little good about yourself. Put a finger down if you’ve ever compared your possessions.

Put a finger down if you’ve ever compared your appearance with someone else. Maybe you saw someone else’s fresh hair cut and you thought dang, I wish my hair looked as good as that. Or maybe you saw someone with massive biceps at the gym and looked at yours and wondered how theirs got so big. Last week, my sister randomly texted me and said that she asked her son if he would rather look like his Uncle David or his dad when he grew up… and he said… “dad… cause I don’t want to be a string bean.”

So I did the only logical thing I could think to do… I filmed myself doing pushups and sent it to my nephew and said, “bet your dad can’t do that!” And then I wore a long sleeve shirt to hide my string bean arms.

Put a finger down if you’ve ever compared your appearance.

Put a finger down if you’ve ever compared your performance. As a parent or a grandparent… as a husband or wife… or at work… maybe you have a coworker who your boss is giving more attention to and you don’t understand why since you’re clearly the better worker… or you think you could be a better boss than your boss is… this is especially hard when we see on social media perfectly themed birthday parties… like everything is on point… and perfect… and you’re like man, my kids birthday party was adult themed… and no… not that of adult themed… I’m talking, being an adult… the kids competed to see who could fold the most socks in 5 minutes… we played pin the dirty dishes in the dishwasher… you might be tempted to compare your performance as a mom or a dad to others…

If you’ve ever compared your performance, put a finger down.

If you’ve ever compared your circumstance, put a finger down. Maybe you’ve been dreaming of starting a family and you see people with kids and a spouse and you compare. Or you see a couple friend of yours fighting and you compare your own marriage with theirs and you feel kinda good about yourself… or maybe you aren’t able to travel much because you’re on a tight budget and when you see other people’s big vacations you feel like your vacations to visit family just aren’t enough. Maybe you feel under appreciated when you see someone else being praised and thanked for their hard work, and you compare.

If you’ve ever compared your circumstance, put a finger down.

And the last one is the most serious… put a finger down if you’ve ever compared prices at the grocery store… no I’m just kidding… I just needed to get all those fingers down!

10% of our thought life… 10% of our mental energy goes toward comparing ourselves to others.

And I want us to quit comparing because comparing bears ugly fruit in our lives.

Jesus helps us understand this in a parable he told one time. It’s the parable of the lost son, or maybe you’ve heard it referred to as the prodigal son. It’s found in Luke 15 and basically, this man has two sons. One of his sons decides he doesn’t want to work on the family land anymore. He wants to go out and live life the way he wants to live, so he asks his father for his share of the estate and he leaves.

He goes out and he royally screws up. Luke 15:13 - ***13****“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.”* Jesus calls it wild living, so you can kind of imagine the things it might include, but eventually he hits rock bottom and he takes a job feeding pigs. He’s so destitute… so hungry that Jesus says even the pig food looks appealing to him.

He eventually comes to his senses and realizes that the grass isn’t greener, so he leaves to go back home to ask his father for forgiveness and asks to be a hired servant.

Now, Jesus doesn’t tell us the sons motivation for leaving, but it seems obvious. He saw the way other people were living, and he compared it to his own life, and he thought his life was lame, so he left. He compared and as soon as he did, he experienced the first ugly fruit of comparison.

**Comparison Kills Contentment.**

When we compare, we often find ourselves no longer satisfied with what we have. You loved your kids adult themed birthday party… your kid and all their friends had a good time… but then saw the perfect Frozen themed birthday party. There was literally an ice castle sculpted in the living room, and the kids played in it… Elsa was there.. it was off the hook. And you saw it and you were like, man, my kids birthday party was lame compared to theirs. Comparison kills contentment.

I want us to quit comparing because when we compare what we have… or when we compare our ability or when we compare our circumstance with someone else’s, it can kill our contentment.

And you know what happens when we get discontent. We either sulk in our discontentment or we’re like the prodigal son and we seek contentment by filling our life with the things we think we’re lacking. Things we think will make us feel content… We buy a house we can’t afford… we date people we shouldn’t date… we act the way we think other people want us to act…

\*You know, it’s sad… when comparing kills our contentment and we live our lives to meet the expectations or the standards of others or to win their approval… it causes us to ignore the approval of the one who actually matters… what God wants for us. I think about us as a church. If we were comparing ourselves to other churches and what they’re doing… we would work really hard to have the most people or the best building and then once we got there, we’d be done.

But our goal isn’t to be better than other churches, our goal is to be faithful to Christ. And the mission of Christ is to grow the faith of believers and invite the lost to follow him.

And that means that for us, as a church, we have to constantly ask ourselves the question: what is God calling us to? How does God want to use us to accomplish his mission in the world? How can we be obedient to Christ in this season?

We don’t want our church to grow so we’re bigger than a church down the street but we absolutely want our church to grow because as we reach out to our community and to our neighbors and we invite them to follow Jesus… if we’re faithful to God’s call on our lives… we will grow. And we might need to make some sacrifices and take some risks along the way. But not because we’re comparing ourselves and we’re discontent with how we measure up… but because we want to be obedient to Christ in our lives and in the life of the church.

If we’re just comparing and trying to find contentment, we’re kind of like this character in a book my kids used to read all the time… the mixed up chameleon. You ever heard of it? Basically, this chameleon sees all these other animals and people and wishes he was more like them and lo and behold, he transforms into a little bit of each of them. So he’s got an elephant trunk and a giraffe neck and fish fins… it’s a silly book… but at the end of the book he realizes he isn’t who he was created to be anymore, he became the version of himself that he thought would make him content… but he still wasn’t content.

**Comparison kills contentment.**

And I think comparison fueled the prodigal son to leave. He was content – he saw someone else seeming to enjoy something better – he got discontent – and he left only to find that the grass wasn’t greener.

So the prodigal son returned home.

Now there’s another character is this parable. It’s the prodigal son’s brother. And when he sees his brother coming back down the driveway… he could just see how bad he messed up his life, and he starts feeling pretty good about himself. This is the second ugly fruit of comparison.

**Comparison makes us prideful**.

If comparison doesn’t kill our contentment, it makes us prideful. It makes us puff out our chests and walk with a certain strut that says, “my life is gooood… compared to most people’s.” If comparison doesn’t kill our contentment, it makes us prideful.

In Luke 18:11-12 we see a Pharisee out in public praying loudly for everyone to hear and he says “GOD, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” In other words – look at how great I am!

Now you’re probably not doing that in public, but it might look a little more like this… you’re walking through Walmart and you see a kid on the ground screaming about a toy. And you know what you’re thinking. “Thank God my kids aren’t like that.” “Those parents gotta just be more consistent in their discipline.” “That kid needs to have someone teach her respect.”

What’re you saying there? “Thank God I’m not like them!” That’s pride.

Here’s the problem with pride… it’s based on comparison. And therefore, it doesn’t last. And when it looks like we’re not gonna be better for very much longer, we start to get discontent. C.S. Lewis explains it like this: “We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good looking, there would be nothing to be proud about.” Pride is dependent on comparison and therefore, when we’re no longer better, we’ll lose our contentment.

Comparison kills contentment. And comparison makes us proud. And **comparison makes us resentful**.

The older brother was prideful about his good life choices… but here’s what happens when the prodigal son comes home.

Luke 15:20-24 - **20***So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

***21****“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

***22****“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.****23****Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.****24****For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

The older brother sees how well his younger brother is being treated… and he’s filled with resentment. He says to his dad in Luke 15:28-30 - **28***“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.****29****But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.****30****But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*,

The older brother’s life didn’t change when the younger brother came home. He just compared his life to his younger brothers and saw how well he was being treated and he resented him for it because shouldn’t he be getting something better than his failure of a brother?

How many of you know that every good thing you have comes from God? James 1:17. Every good and perfect gift comes from God.

So when we resent something good happening in another person’s life, we are resenting God’s goodness for them.

And at the same time you’re ignoring God’s goodness in your own life.

Comparing is a lose-lose game and I know you know this. I know you’ve played the comparison game and you saw the ugliness that it bred in your life. Discontentment. Pride. Resenting God’s goodness

So what do we do? How do we quit comparing.

Paul, who was an early follower of Jesus… imprisoned and beaten for his faith… he wrote a letter to the church in Philippi and when he wrote this letter he was actually imprisoned because of preaching the gospel… And in the letter he said this - “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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 him who strengthens me.”

First, lets just point out, Paul is in prison and he’s figured out to be content and some of us have a house, two cars, some toys, a couple smart phones, a big tv, and we struggle. What’s the secret?

The first thing to notice is that Paul said, “I have **learned”** to be content. He wasn’t born that way. It didn’t come naturally and it didn’t happen overnight. He learned to be content. And so it’s something we can learn, too. But it’s gonna take work.

And here’s the first thing to do to learn to be content: **Know what you have.**

It’s not about how much you have compared to your neighbor. It’s knowing what you have?

After the older brother finished expressing his resentment to his dad, his dad responded by saying this Like 15:31 **31***“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.*” In other words – don’t look at your brother, know what YOU have.

Comparison makes us focus on what other people have, but if we want to learn to be content, we need to know what we have.

So what do you have? Do you have a friend? Do you have food? Do you have a house?

What do you have? Do you have a yard to mow? It’s easy to complain about having to mow the yard, but man…. You have yard! And you have the energy and the ability to mow it! You have that!

Even now, you may be slipping into comparison mode and thinking about how you don’t have a yard. Or you aren’t able to mow. Or you have trouble affording food and so you get it from the foodbank.

If you want to quit comparing and learn to be content, you don’t need to know what other people have that you don’t… you need to know what **you** have and be thankful for it.

So maybe you aren’t able to mow your yard…

But thank you God for my neighbor that mows my lawn for me.

Maybe you can’t afford to buy all your food yourself…

But thank you God for the folks who give to my local food bank so that I have food.

Thank you for my pet that keeps me company.

Thank you for the dirty dishes that remind me we get to eat together as a family.

Thank you for my house.

To quit comparing, know what you have and thank God for it.

If we’re comparing what we have with what someone else has, we’ll never have enough… there will ALWAYS be someone else who has more. And when we’re comparing to others there’s no amount of stuff, no amount of money, no amount of friends that will make us feel like we have “enough.” If we’re discontent with what we have now, we’ll be discontent if we had a little more.

Knowing what you have is a great exercise to practice as we approach Thanksgiving. In fact, I want to challenge you. If you want to quit comparing, between now and thanksgiving, make a list. Every single day write down one thing you have that you’re thankful for. Maybe you want to do a list together with you family. But know what you have by making a list. That’s the first step to say I Quit Complaining.

And remember, part of knowing what we have is knowing who we have, isn’t it? We have a God who loves us, who’s with us. God who forgives us and redeems us and sets us free from the mistakes of our past. You have that. Enjoy it. Be thankful for it.

Some of you are looking at your past decisions… maybe the decisions you made last night or last year and you wonder if there’s any way God could possibly love you.

Jesus told the story of the prodigal son to tax collectors and sinners… and proud pharisees. And he told this story of how this son who had been living a wild life was welcomed back by his father… because he wanted us to know, whenever we stray from God, he welcomes us back. He runs down the driveway to meet us and he celebrates our return.

God redeems us and forgives us and sets us free from the mistakes of our past.

And today, know that you have a God that loves you no matter what.

To quit comparing you need to know what you have. The second thing you need to do is **know who you are**.

In our world, it’s so easy to feel like our value and worth comes from our accomplishments. That’s part of our draw toward comparing ourselves to others… how do I measure up to those around me? Am I smarter? Better looking? Am I at least average? Cause if we’re better than others than we’re more valuable…

But here’s the truth I hope you can hear today. It doesn’t matter if you’re first in your class or 151st in your class. It doesn’t matter if you drive a Cadillac Escalade or if you borrow your moms car. It doesn’t matter if you’re the highest paid employee at the company or the lowest paid employee. It doesn’t matter if your kids birthday party was pinterest worthy. It doesn’t matter if your small business folded or if it’s still going strong. It doesn’t matter if your BMI is 18 or 48. It doesn’t matter if you got invited to that gathering with your friends or if you were left out. It doesn’t matter if you play first chair in district band or if you didn’t make the cut.

None of those things determine who you are. None of those things make you valuable. As long as we believe those things make us valuable we’re going to keep comparing ourselves to the people around us to measure our value. But here’s what God’s word says about you. Ephesians 2:10 says this about – “YOU are God’s masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

Here’s what I need you to do – say that out loud after me – I Am. God’s masterpiece.

Let’s try again. I am. God’s masterpiece. Nice and loud. I am. God’s masterpiece. That’s who you are.

You are loved by God and were created by God for a good purpose, so we don’t need to compare anymore, because it doesn’t change who we are… it doesn’t help us. It hurts us. Comparison kills contentment. Comparison makes us prideful and it makes us resentful.

But if we know what we have and we know who we are we can quit comparing and learn, like Paul, to be content in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. And when we do that, we’ll live a life more like Jesus and we’ll better experience the full life that he invites us into.

**Next Steps**

1. Read the story of the Lost Son in Luke 15:11-32
   1. The younger son and the older son both struggled with comparing. What are some of your most common comparisons?
   2. The younger son left because he was discontent. What areas of life do you need to be more content?
   3. The older son saw his brother’s mistakes and was prideful. Where do you struggle most with pride? How has that pride impacted you?
   4. The older son resented the father’s love for his brother. How have you struggled to celebrate God’s goodness in the lives of others and ignored God’s blessings in your own life?
2. Read Ephesians 2:10.
   1. Do you believe that is true about you today?
   2. Consider memorizing this verse.
3. Look up a few of the following verses. 1 John 3:3, Ephesians 1:6, John 1:12, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 1:1, Colossians 1:14, Colossians 2:10, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 3:12
   1. Which ones are most helpful as you “know who you are?”
4. Start a “Know What You Have” list. Each day from now until Thanksgiving write down one thing that you have and thank God for it. Each day add something new. Consider doing it with other members of your family.