

Killing What's Killing You | Envy/Comparison

Aaron Brockett | Romans 8:12-13

All right, happy 2019 everybody! How are you doing? Good to see you.

I want to welcome all of our guests and first-time visitors, whether you are joining us from North, Downtown, West, online, those of you here at Northwest. You guys are looking good. At all of our campuses put your hands together. Make it a warm environment. Greet somebody around you. We're so glad to have you here today.

Before we get rolling, a couple things I just want to celebrate with us as a church family beginning of the year. If you were here the last couple of months of last year, we were talking a lot about just the vision behind our year-end giving and so I want to celebrate that with you today, kind of tell you where all those numbers came in at, really just by giving you two numbers.

The first number is our operating budget—strategic partnerships, any initiative, church plants, campuses; all that just goes into one big bucket. So our financial need for 2018 was this number right here: \$17,850,000.

I want you to know that the number that you gave last year was this one right here: \$19,480,000.

Come on, man, celebrate that! That's amazing!

If any of you are thinking, "Well, those are big numbers," I'd be like, "Well, yeah!" That scares me. There's not been a year here that I've been serving where you haven't given more than our financial need. That's just amazing. You're the most generous church I know of and it's humbling to me to be a part of this awesome ride and adventure that God's got us on together.

I want you to know that we take those numbers very seriously, the stewardship of those dollars very seriously for Kingdom purposes. So I want you to know that the overage there we said was going to go towards really two primary things.

The first is Hands of Hope, this organization in our city that ministers to vulnerable children in the foster care system. This is a big, big issue in our city that as a church we just believe we have the size and the resources to lean our shoulder into it and to really move the needle on it and make a difference.

I know that we have a number of families and God's called you to adopt and we want to come around you and help you with that. Those that are fostering, maybe some of you are in care

communities, and we want to come alongside Hands of Hope and really resource them, so a significant portion of that giving is going to go towards that organization. We're going to be talking more about this in the coming weeks and months of 2019.

The second thing is that we just believe that one of the most effective ways to reach people all around our city is by going to where our people are already living so that you can be on mission with us through multisite through campuses, and that's really the heart behind it. It wasn't to franchise our church. It wasn't to spread out. It certainly wasn't to grow bigger.

The idea for us as a church is we identified where people were driving more than 20 minutes from specifically the Northwest campus several years ago and we found there were a couple of pockets of people driving more than 20 minutes, and so three years ago we sent about 250 people from the Northwest campus to the north side to Carmel. They started meeting in a portable setting in a middle school and today they have their own facility and we will have anywhere from 1,600 to 1,800 people or so at the North campus.

A couple years ago, we did the same thing. We sent 250 people to downtown Indianapolis and they began meeting portably in the Public Library. Today we've got our own campus down there, same thing, running between 1,600 to 1,700 people on a typical weekend.

Then, about a year and a half ago, we sent about the same number of people to the west side to Avon, and they are meeting in a portable situation in a middle school, setting up, tearing down every single week, and they are having anywhere between like 800 or 900 people every weekend. They're inviting their friends. They're getting on mission.

If you've never been to the West campus, can I just tell you just take a Sunday and go visit sometime. It's amazing what David Cupp, the campus pastor there, a good friend of mine, and his staff and all the volunteers, what they do to just turn that middle school into this incredibly compelling environment that's filled with energy and enthusiasm and just looks and feels like home when you walk in. So God's doing some amazing things there.

Part of our surplus and giving is we've identified where we believe God's leading us for campus five and six and so super excited about it. I want to ask you as a church just be praying about it. When we have information to share with you we'll share it with you. I can tell you right now it's exciting, it's humbling, it's big, and so we're super thrilled for what God's going to do. And we only want to go when he tells us to go and when he opens up the door.

The next piece is that we've got such a cool announcement that I just want to celebrate the beginning of 2019 and that is right before Christmas we were notified by a very generous family within our church that has committed to give a financial gift in 2019, so this isn't 2018 but 2019, and it's going to enable us to secure a piece of property to build a permanent facility for our West campus.

Man, come on, can we celebrate that? That's amazing! It's incredible! Right now at our West campus I just want to look right into the camera and address West. West, I hope that you feel the love from all the other campuses. We're behind you. We're excited for you and what God's going to do in and through your campus there.

Thank you so much, all the people who volunteer, set up, tear down, thank you for being on mission with us and reaching so many people, and we just think this is going to be a tool that's just going to enable you to reach more people effectively, so we are super, super thrilled for that.

Before we get going—end of the message—I just want to stop real quick and just ask you did you appreciate Downtown campus pastor Ryan Bramlett's message from last week? Didn't that guy do an amazing job?

Ryan is a great communicator, a great leader. He's a better husband and father to his family. He's a good, good friend. One of the things I love about Ryan's story—if you were here you heard it—that he came to our church far from God and he met Jesus here and to watch him grow has been amazing.

It just reminds me that our church just reproduces influencers, men and women who want to be on mission, whether that's vocational ministry or whether that's out in the marketplace. I'm just super thrilled that you got to hear from Ryan. You'll be hearing more from Ryan in the future.

Today we are beginning a new four-part series of messages to kick off the new year, so I hope you come for every single week. We're calling it *Killing What's Killing You*. To start off, let me just kind of illustrate it this way. Several months ago on a hot, humid, sticky summer day, I was at home doing some yardwork.

I don't know about you, but when I do yardwork, I sort of zone out. Anybody with me? I put in earbuds and I listen to a podcast or I daydream. It's probably not the safest thing to be operating with fast-moving, sharp blades and I'm not fully there.

So I'm kind of doing some yardwork and not really paying attention and I've got the mower in front of me and I go between these two trees that are relatively skinny trees and they're just far enough away for me to get the mower through them. What I did not see was the most ginormous spiderweb that was connected between these two trees.

So I'm walking through and I'm in another place. I didn't even see it until I walked right through it, and the thing, I kid you not, literally wrapped around my whole face and reconnected behind my head. It was a good thing that nobody was out there to see me because I'm like running around, flailing my arms around, screaming like a little girl, stop-drop-roll trying to get this thing off me because I don't know about you but whenever I walk into a web, I always feel like the spider's still attached. It's like on my back and it's crawling up. It's going to bite me in the neck.

So I get this spiderweb off. The next thing I did is I searched for the biggest stick I could find and I searched for all the spiderwebs I could find all over my house. I'm like going around. I spent the next half hour knocking down a whole bunch of spiderwebs and thinking, "Okay, I've got them all down. I'm not going to walk through anymore," but you and I both know that that's a temporary fix. I could knock down the web, but actually if you want to get rid of the webs once and for all, you've got to go after the thing that spun the web to begin with.

So that's part of what we're talking about at the beginning of this new year, *Killing What's Killing You*. I'm not a New Year's resolution hater—I think you should make them, make a bunch of them and I hope you accomplish all of them—but just be careful that your New Year's resolution isn't just all about like cleaning out the cobwebs. We oftentimes need to go deeper than that.

This phrase *Killing What's Killing You* actually is inspired by the words of a dead theologian by the name of John Owen, and John Owen said be killing sin or sin be killing you, and that's what we want to talk about over the course of the next several weeks together: What is the thing that is really killing us?

I think that this guy named Paul really had walked into a few webs of his own because he addresses this very thing, only with different words, in one of the greatest chapters in one of the greatest books of the Bible, Romans chapter 8.

In Romans 8:1, he starts off with I think one of the greatest statements found in all the Bible. He says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation..." not for those who are religious, not for those who are perfect, not for those who have memorized the Bible or have got it all figured out, no, no, no; he says, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are..." and if you know it, just say it with me. "...in Christ Jesus." Man, I think it is one of the greatest statements in the Bible.

And then he goes on in those first opening verses to explain why. He says for what the law failed to do in that our weak flesh was unable to earn it or to achieve it, God did it completely in and through Jesus Christ.

In other words, what Jesus did for you and me on a cross is completely sufficient for your salvation and for your right-standing in God's eyes.

And then he says this in verse 12. He says, "Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature **urges** you to do."

I think oftentimes, when we think about the urges of our sinful nature, our mind automatically goes to the major things like sex, drugs, and addiction. Certainly, it includes that, but it's oftentimes far more subtle than that.

See, my sinful nature urges me to do things that actually don't feel like sin. My sinful nature urges me to do things like this: I'll compare myself to you in order to boost my self-esteem or to figure out my sense of worth.

My sinful nature urges me to be so fearful that I actually never take any step of faith and never act with courage when the number one command in Scripture over anything else is "fear not".

My sinful nature urges me to be bitter when things don't go my way.

My sinful nature urges me to wallow in shame whenever I've messed up over and over again.

So he says you're under no obligation to follow the urges of that sinful nature. Don't walk into those webs.

And he says this, verse 13. Here it is. "For if you live by its dictates, **you will die.**" Now that's not a threat; that's a warning. And he's not talking about just physical death. Every one of us is going to physically die no matter how good of a life you live. He's talking about emotional death. He's talking about relational death. He's talking about are you going to really get the most out of life. "But if through the power of the Spirit"—here it is—"you **put to death** the deeds of your sinful nature, **you will live.**"

In other words, he's saying you've got to kill what's been killing you. I think it's so important for us to understand that when we talk about *Killing What's Killing You*, we are not talking about earning your salvation...because you can't do it. We're not talking about doing something to make God love you more than he already does. You already have God's love. You already have his favor in and through Jesus.

When we talk about *Killing What's Killing You*, we're talking about freedom. We're talking about unshackling yourself from these things that have been holding you back.

So the first one that I want to talk about today, the first nasty web that I get wrapped up in more times than I care to admit, is this little word right here: Envy.

Envy defined is simply this: a feeling of discontent or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck.

Any of you ever been envious? You know what it's like to actually be having a pretty good day and then you look at someone else's life and someone else's opportunities and someone else's appearance and then you begin to compare yourself? If envy is the web, the thing that spins the web is **comparison**. That's how they're connected. Comparison spins the web and then we end up walking into the web of envy.

Can you remember maybe the earliest time in your life when you were envious of someone else and you realized it? I'm sure that there was a time in my life when I experienced envy way

earlier than this, but the time that I remember the most clearly, and I was aware of what I was doing, was in the third grade.

In the third grade, my mom and dad bought me a brand-new bike on my birthday to replace the old, faded red, beat up BMX deathtrap that I had been riding around. They bought me a baby-blue Diamondback racing bike with white mag wheels. It was the '80s; give me a break.

The white mag wheels—the guy at the store told me that they were made out of the same material that they put on the landing gear of airplanes, which I don't know why I needed that. It seems like a little bit of overkill; I'm just jumping curbs. But anyway, I thought it was awesome.

So my parents gave me this bike and I *loved* this bike...for one full week. And then my neighbor friend, Pete Heron, his parents got him a neon yellow Dyno Freestyle bike. This thing had features that I didn't even know existed. It had the gooseneck seat so it sat way back. Some of you don't know what I'm talking about. Just trust me. It was amazing.

And it had the handlebars that would spin all the way around, like 360, because the brake lines were wireless. Once again, it was the '80s. That's the first time you ever saw something like that. It had pegs on the front, the back. I mean, this thing was incredible.

I was happy with what I had until I saw what he had. Then I actually wasn't as happy with it anymore.

It kind of reminds me of what pastor Craig Groeschel said about this issue. He said, "The fastest way to kill something special is to compare it to something else." Isn't that true?

The fastest way to kill something special in your life is to compare it to something or someone else. I was happy with my Diamondback racing bike until I saw Pete Heron's Dyno Freestyle bike and then I wasn't happy with it anymore.

Some of us have done this when it comes to like remodeling our kitchens. Maybe you spent thousands of dollars and months and months remodeling your kitchen and you guys were eating your dinners in the garage, but you're like, "It's going to be worth it one day."

You finally get that thing done and you just think it's amazing, but then you get invited over to dinner at the Jones's house and you walk into their kitchen and it looks like stinking Joanna Gaines lives there. There's shiplap all over the place and they got that little pipe thing that comes out of the wall and gives you instant hot water. (I don't even know what it's called, but it's awesome and I want one.) And they've got the soft-close drawers and it's just like, "This is incredible and our kitchen is awful and we need to start all over. Let's sell the house. Let's sell the house!"

Comparison just spun this web of envy that we walked right into and it's not good for our soul. And if there is anything that we can compare, we'll do it. So we'll compare what we look like.

We'll compare what we wear. We'll compare our relationships. We'll compare the shape of our body. We'll compare our reputation. We'll compare the number of followers on social media. We'll compare our career. We'll compare our finances. We'll compare where we go on vacation.

I was happy with what I had until I saw what you had and I wasn't as happy with it anymore. Here's the thing. We have never lived in a time in world history when it is as easy and as prevalent to compare ourselves with other people than it is right now.

Have you ever been having a really, really good day and then you got on Facebook or Instagram and then not such a good day? You're scrolling through it and you're looking at the pictures and you see a picture. You're like, "Wow, I recognize everybody in that picture. Every person in this picture is a good friend of mine. And they're all together. And they're at a party, a New Year's Eve party, and I'm in my jammies at home. Why didn't I get the invite? What's going on?"

Or maybe you see the exotic picture of that person's vacation and immediately you get jealous and resentful and you start tearing them down in your mind. You're like, "Now wait a second. Didn't they just get back from like Hawaii a couple months ago? I can't even afford to go to Gatlinburg for a weekend and they've already been on their second cruise this year. I mean, this is just a little ridiculous. Somebody's running up some credit card debt. That's what I think is happening. Somebody needs a little Dave Ramsey in their life."

Or the worst is this. You see that picture of the feet on the beach. Don't you hate that picture? There's like this blue water and the white sand, the book, and the cool drink, hashtag bless life, and you look at that picture and you're like, "I hate that water. I hate that sand. I hate that book. I hate that drink. I hate your stinking feet." And then you like it and you move on. That's just what happens. What is wrong with us?

Every single person listening to this right now wants to live in the land of Er. Rich-er. Pretti-er. Fast-er. And then once we live in Er for a while, it kind of wears off and we want to live in the land of Est. Rich-est. Pretti-est. Fast-est. And this has been an issue since the dawn of humanity.

In fact, Paul sees this as an issue as he's writing a letter to a group of people living in the city of Corinth. Listen to what he says in 2 Corinthians 10:12. He's defending his ministry from some critics and he says, "Oh, don't worry; we wouldn't dare say that we are as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only **comparing themselves with each other**, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant!"

So here's what he's saying. All of us are compelled to compare. That's not a bad thing. Here's where it goes bad. When I compare with you in order to figure out who I am. That's bad. When I compare with you—what you have, your opportunities, your appearance, your relationships—in order to see where I fit, in order to see where I find my fulfillment and my affirmation and my sense of purpose.

Now I want to be really, really clear here and to speak into something that I see actually growing like a tidal wave in our society more so than ever. Because we've been beaten down so often and because people have said mean and harsh things and held us back, I see kind of an overreaction to this where a lot of times, and you see it a lot on social media, where people are like, "Man, don't listen to what anybody else says. Just follow your heart. Just do your thing. You just do you."

I understand the heart behind it. Can I just give a cautionary warning that if you take that to the nth degree, then that means you're not listening to anybody, like nobody can speak anything into your life because you've sort of shut it down.

You don't need to listen to everybody, but you also don't need to shut everybody down because mentoring and discipleship require speaking truth in love. So you can't just be a rubber wall just bouncing everything everybody says to you off.

I'm not even saying you can't look to somebody else and be inspired by them. Man, be inspired. I'm not saying you can't look to somebody else and be motivated by them. There are preachers who I grew up listening to and reading. I was inspired by them. I was motivated by them, but I can't be them. And when I tried to be them, I actually failed. I needed to actually figure out how Aaron Brockett would do this.

But I'm talking about comparison, and comparison's a really deadly thing. Actually, Paul says it's ignorant. Why? Because when I compare myself to you one of two things happens: I either will tear you down, even if I don't say anything to you, even if it's just in my own thoughts, or I'll tear myself down. Either way, we're not building anything. There's just a path of destruction behind us.

When we are constantly comparing ourselves with other people, we are taking our eyes off of God and what he says about us and what he wants for us and the way that he created us. When you compare yourself, you actually fail to see yourself the way that God sees you.

I get a little taste of this with my kids. I've got four kids at home, and every now and then, maybe before bedtime, and especially when they were younger, I would just go in and sit on their bed and talk to them long enough they'll start to open up and they'll begin to maybe share with me some of their fears and their worries and their concerns and almost always somebody else gets brought up. Almost always they talk about their classmates, their teammates, and their fears that maybe they're not measuring up.

What always gets me is when I try to encourage them. I'm like, "No, no, honey, you are great. And you are good," and it's just like a rubber wall. They're not receiving it from me. Maybe part of that is just I'm their dad. They kind of expect me to say those things, but it breaks my heart when they won't receive it from me.

I think we get a little taste whenever we do that with God. We're constantly looking around and we're constantly comparing ourselves and God's been speaking through his Spirit, through his Word, through other people. Are you in a place where you're ready to receive it or are you so distracted with comparisons?

This is the part of the message this last week that I wrote to this point and then I thought, "Okay, now where do I take the message?" And I was kind of stumped honestly. I was like, "Do I just tell you to like stop it?"

Any of you remember that Bob Newhart piece on MADtv? If you don't, you can Google it. Don't do it now, but later. It's hilarious. Bob Newhart, this comedian, he plays this therapist. A lady comes in. She's all worried. She's all concerned. She's got all these problems, and his only counsel to her is "stop it!"

She's like, "Well I'm really worried."

"Stop it. You don't want to worry anymore, do you?"

"No."

"Stop it!"

So I thought, "Well, I could go that route." Right? So like, "You don't want to envy anymore, right? Stop it."

There are some really great verses I could throw at you, like 1 Corinthians 13:4. It says this. Love does not envy. That's a great verse, so like, "Man, you want to be a loving person, don't you?"

"Yeah."

"Stop it! Love doesn't envy! Let's pray."

You could do that.

Proverbs 14:30. It says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones."

"You don't want to have rotted bones, do you?"

"No, that sounds awful."

"Then stop it!"

I could do that, but I don't think you'd come back. I don't think it's very helpful.

So then I thought these two things. I thought, "Well, how does this play out in real-life relationships in the Bible?" Because one of the things I love about the Bible is that if the Bible was less than real, then all the relationships would be perfect. But they're not. The relationships are really, really messy.

The second thing is what would Jesus say about envy? Did Jesus ever say anything about envy? And I was reminded of the relationships between the disciples. Jesus had 12 really, really close friends, the individuals who hung out with him. They ate meals together. They sat around the campfire late at night. They were his disciples.

That's honestly what we're trying to do. We're trying to lead as many to Jesus as possible and make disciples, which is another way of saying I want you to invite Jesus into every area of your life and for you to grow, for you to walk with him. That's what we're trying to do.

It's going to be imperfect. It's going to be messy. It's going to be a jagged line, not straight up to the right. The reason why I can say that so confidently is because the disciples had Jesus physically with them and they couldn't quite get it right, so what makes you and I think that we will?

When we look at the relationships of the disciples, it's very, very clear that they compared each other all the time. They were constantly calling shotgun at meals. "Shotgun! I'm sitting next to Jesus."

They were in these debates. One time, James and John, they were arguing over who was the greatest, so they go and get their mom involved in the argument. How pathetic is that? They're just like, "We want to know who the greatest is?" That's what their conversation centered around.

I think that the two disciples who had the biggest rivalry were Peter and John. In my honest opinion, I don't think they liked each other very much. I think that John thought that Peter was a loudmouth. I think that John thought that Peter made promises that he couldn't ever fulfill.

I think that Peter thought John was really, really annoying, and honestly I kind of see his point because when you read through John's Gospel, he always refers to himself in the third person and that's kind of annoying.

So I want to show you an example of this. In John chapter 20, John is actually telling us about the resurrection of Jesus. So what happened is Jesus dies on the cross and it's just before the sun goes down before the Sabbath and the Jews can't do any work on the Sabbath so they rush to get his body in a borrowed tomb.

As soon as they are able, they need to get back to the tomb to properly prepare his body with spices so that it doesn't start to smell, so that Jesus can have a proper burial, and so Mary

Magdalene goes very first thing on Monday morning, and that's always amazing to me: She was not expecting a resurrection; she was expecting to find a corpse.

So listen to the way that John describes all this, but I want you to notice the details that John throws in here revealing the comparisons that he was making to Peter. "Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, **the one whom Jesus loved.**" That's John, by the way. That's a little annoying. He's the one writing this. Okay, John. We get it. "She said, 'They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'"

Now check this out. Verse 3, "Peter and the other disciple" (that's John) "started out for the tomb. They were both running, but the other disciple **outran** Peter and reached the tomb **first.**"

Now notice this in verse 6. I love this. It's so subtle. "Then Peter arrived" (implied *out of breath*) "and went inside."

John's like: Yeah, I beat him by such a margin that my heart rate had gone down by the time he finally got there. He's a slowpoke.

How much of a guy is this? You're talking about the resurrection of our Lord. "Yeah, yeah. Jesus, resurrection. It's the thing that changed everything, but let's get this one thing clear: I beat Peter in a footrace." That's a dude if I've ever seen one.

Now, Jesus appears to the eyewitnesses, appears to the disciples, goes away for a little while. Very next chapter, John 21, the disciples are on the Sea of Galilee. They're fishing. It's early in the morning, and they see Jesus at a distance, and listen to what John says. It's so subtle, but it's right here. "Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It's the Lord!'"

Why would he say that? We don't know fully for sure. It feels like to me that John wants us to know that he was the first one to recognize Jesus. That's the kind of relationship they had. He recognized him before Peter recognized him.

Now listen to what he says about Peter: "When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his tunic (for he had stripped for work), jumped into the water,..." A tunic was your underwear. "...and headed to shore." That's not very dignified.

So here's what John seems to be saying: I was the one to recognize Jesus. He jumped into the water in his underwear. It's almost as if he's trying to paint this sort of undignified picture of Peter.

But why did Peter jump in? See, Peter jumped into the water to get to Jesus as fast as he could because he had some unfinished business with him. Maybe you remember that the very last words that Jesus heard Peter say were three denials of him. And you know that that would

have been eating Peter up on the inside. Now he sees Jesus and he runs to him. He swims to him. He's like, "I've got to get back to Jesus," because they had some unfinished business.

I love this. It says that the disciples all get to the shore. They're all drying off. They're getting ready to make breakfast, and Jesus says to Peter: Hey, Pete, let's go for a walk.

I love this moment in the Scriptures. It gives me so much hope and I hope it gives you hope too because here's a guy who's messed up about as bad as you could mess up and Jesus is the one to initiate his reconciliation and his restoration.

Jesus is walking along the beach and he asks him a question three times. "Do you love me?" And every time Peter answers it. "Do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord."

"Well do you love me?"

"Didn't you hear me the first time? Yes, I love you."

"Do you love me, Peter?"

He's like kind of offended by the third time. "Yes, Lord. You know that I do." Then it hits him. Three questions for three denials. It's Jesus' way of giving him grace and truth.

Then he says to Peter, he says, "Peter, I know you don't think much of yourself right now, but I think a whole lot of you. Feed my sheep." He's recommissioning him. He's saying: You can come back from this, Peter. You can come back from failure. I've still got a plan for you. I've still got a purpose for you. You don't stay down in that pit of shame anymore. Man, get up and keep going, Peter.

It is an absolutely amazing moment that should speak to the heart of every person in here because we've all got our denial moments. We've all got these moments when we've messed up so royally that we wonder in the back of our minds am I really loved by God? Am I really a Christian? Did the first time take? Do I need to get re-dunked? Is God mad at me because I just can't keep doing this thing right?

You pay attention to that conversation because it'll tell you everything about the way that Jesus feels about you. It's an amazing moment and we could stop it right there, but that's when Peter walks right into the web of envy, right in that moment, right there on the beach.

Notice what it says, verse 20. "Peter turned around and saw behind them the disciple Jesus loved—the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, 'Lord, who will betray you?' Peter asked Jesus, '**What about him, Lord?**'"

Do you get the image in your head that they're walking along the beach and I don't know. I don't know if John was just minding his own business back at the campfire and he's just sort of behind them. I think that John noticed that Peter and Jesus are walking along the beach and he started to get jealous, like, "I wonder what they're talking about. Hey, guys. What's going on? Can I get in on this convo?" I think that's probably what's going on.

So Peter notices this and he totally misses what Jesus said to him. He turns around and he goes, "Well, what about him?" Hear what he's asking? He's like: Well what's he going to do? What assignment do you have for him? Is it going to be better than mine? I mean, he didn't mess up; I messed up. Is he going to get some kind of special favor? Are there going to be anymore foot races involved because I'm really, really tired of hearing about how fast John is.

Notice Jesus' response to him. It's so powerful. And I want you to receive these words for you because they are for you and me. Verse 22: "Jesus replied, 'If I want him'" (referring to John) "'to remain alive until I return,...'" That's kind of a weird statement. It's an exaggerated statement. In other words, Jesus is saying: If I want to do something with John that's really, really cool like, I don't know, make him invincible, make him bulletproof. Jesus had a sense of humor. It's so subtle, but it's there. He's like: If I want John to remain alive until I return, here it is. "...what is that to you? **As for you, follow me.**"

This is huge! What he's saying here is not only true, but it has the power to free you and me from the envy and the comparisons that we make with others. The kinds of comparisons that we make when we're trying to search for our own meaning and purpose and fulfillment.

All of us have that person in mind who you compare yourself to in your weaker moments. You have that person in mind? Maybe it's a group of people. Whenever something good happens for them or whenever other people start to talk about them in really glowing ways, you ask these two questions: Why them and what about me?

Why them and what about me? And what you do next is so crucial.

Several months ago, I was on my way home from the office and I stopped into the store just to pick up a couple things real quick. There was this really sweet lady who goes to our church and she sees me as I walk around the aisle. She's like, "Oh, Pastor Aaron." She comes running up to me and she goes, "I'm so glad I saw you." She's like, "I just wanted you to know," and I thought okay, here it is. I could use a little encouragement today, just a little prop up. She goes, "I just want you to know that Pastor Petie's message three weeks ago just spoke to me so much. It was just amazing! I just felt like God was just speaking right through him to me."

I was surprised at first. I was like, "Oh. Well, of course. Yes, it was. It was great. It was good."

And she kept going. "I mean the way he said this, and then this insight, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

I know she didn't mean anything by it at all. I mean his message was great. It was fantastic. I was ministered by it. I'm like I don't know why you're telling me though.

So I'm sitting there and finally, like 5 or 10 minutes later, she kind of stops and then she goes, "Well, so what have you been up to?"

"I've preached a few times. I mean, is there anything...anything in there at all?"

I walked away wiping the web off the face and I felt it. You know that feeling? You're just like, "Man, I was having a pretty good day until then." You're reading into it, like, "What'd she mean by that?" and then immediately I'm tempted to start tearing him down or tearing me down.

So here's what I did. I just stopped it right away. I got to my car. I pulled out my phone. I texted Petie right away. I just said, "Hey, Petie, I just ran into this lady in the store and your message just really spoke to her, and I agree with her, and I just want you to know I was reminded how thankful I am for you and that we get to do this together. Way to go. I just wanted you to know." And I meant it. I meant it. Immediately I felt so much better.

You know what he did? He texted me right back and encouraged me. I was like, "Man, I'm so glad I handled it that way." You see, here's the thing. When you find yourself tempted to kind of compare and go, "Man, why them and what about me", you have to ask yourself what is it that I'm really searching for? What is it that I'm really after? Because see for a lot of us, we are searching for the approval or affirmation of someone who is never going to give it to you.

Maybe because it's your father and he's no longer in the picture; he's never going to give it to you. Maybe it's your mother and she's never going to give it to you. Maybe it's a spouse or a former spouse; they're never going to give it to you.

Many of us are shackled in chains right now because we want a boss to say something to us or a peer to affirm us and they're not going to do it. Maybe not because they're a bad person, it's just not even on their radar, and yet you're imprisoned by what they're not saying to you.

You have to ask yourself this question: Who's opinion matters most to me? In 2019, who's opinion matters most? Now this is not a license for you to say, "Forget y'all. I'm just going to be me." That's not wise either. But whose opinion matters most?

He's got a name. His name is Jesus. And that's just not some religious mumbo jumbo. Jesus genuinely wants to speak into and inform your identity. Jesus wants to have a walk along the beach with you just like he had with Peter. He says: Man, stop taking your eyes off of me and putting them onto other people.

The author of Hebrews gives us this great metaphor in how to think through this in a practical way when he says in chapter 12:1, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith," meaning all these men and women who came before us and

they were running the race before us and now they're with the Lord; they're cheering you on. "...let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with **endurance...**" It's not just a sprint. It's a long run. "... the race **God has set before us**. We do this by..." What? Say it with me out loud, all of our campuses. "...**keeping our eyes on Jesus**, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

In other words, he's saying: Hey, man. We're all in a race *not with each other*. And so when you run, there's that narrow lane—those of you who ran track—and it's this narrow lane and when you're in a full-out sprint, the fastest way to slow down or to get tripped up is to look to your left or to look to your right.

Jesus says run your race. Stay in your lane. There's only one you and I made you to be you, Peter, not John. Run your race and keep your eyes fixed upon me. Stop looking at other people. Now, I'm not saying that you can't admire them or learn from them, but don't compare yourself.

So as I wrap up, let me give you three practical handles to take away with you today. I know I'm preaching long, but it's a brand-new year so cut me some slack, all right?

So three practical things that I want to give to you just to take away. Maybe only one of these is helpful to you. That's fine. That's fine.

Here's the first thing: Maybe at the beginning of the year you just take a break from social media, especially if this is a big deal to you. I know not everybody's on social media and I'm not saying social media's a bad thing. It's not. It's a great tool. But check your screen time. If you're on Instagram six hours a day, might be a problem. So just do a self-check.

Or pay attention to your mood. When you get off social media are you in a bad mood or are you in a good mood? That might be an indication and you can just say, "You know what? I need a detox for a little bit. Maybe it's a week; maybe it's a month. I just need to step away from social media."

You will go through withdrawals. Your thumbs will not know what to do. They'll be doing this a lot and you just tell people, "Social media fast."

Here's the second thing: Start writing down all of your opportunities and blessings. I know that maybe sounds a little bit antiquated but do it. Here's why: Because if you don't write it down you forget.

I have a tendency to remember all the negative things that happen throughout the year and I have a tendency to diminish or forget the good things. So just start writing down blessings, even if they're really, really minor, like, "I was coming up on that yellow light and it stayed yellow and I got through." I don't know, write that down.

Then December 31, 2019, you'll actually have an objective record of how good of a year it actually really was. My guess is you're blessed more than you even realize.

Here's the third thing: Celebrate the victories of those you struggle with, those you are tempted to compare yourself to. Especially them. I knew that wasn't going to get any applause. Come on, man, you've got to celebrate the victories of the people—that's the quickest way to actually get rid of this feeling of envy. I'm telling you, it is, because if you don't celebrate it, you'll tear them down or you'll tear yourself down.

Here's a simple equation I just want to give you: You want to be encouraged? Encourage others. You want to be respected? Start respecting others. You want to be honored? Start honoring others. That's just the way this thing works.

When you feel tempted to compare, ask yourself why and where are my eyes? Why am I comparing? What am I trying to justify? What am I looking for? And where am I looking?

See, that's what it means to follow Jesus. Following Jesus doesn't just mean you read your Bible and pray and go to church. It can include those things, but those things are there to help facilitate you keeping your eyes fixed upon Jesus because here's what happens. When you invite Jesus into those questions, he walks with you and he begins to answer those questions and you find freedom in him.

So here's the charge I want to give you for 2019: Somebody blesses somebody in your life—maybe it's your former spouse, maybe it's your roommate, maybe it's your coworkers—what is that to you? Encourage them, celebrate them, then go run your race—there's only one you—and you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Look at Jesus and run.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you right now and I pray as we begin a brand-new year that you would keep us from walking into the web of envy that comparison spins for us on a daily basis.

I pray, God, that you would help us to know the race that you've set out for us to run individually; that you would give us the confidence to trust that we are who you say we are, not what others say or think.

God, I pray that our confidence would be grounded in you, that you've done enough, that Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient not just for our salvation, but for our life right here and now.

I pray that we would be a community of Christ followers that would turn this city upside down because we're all running our race, not against each other but with each other to make your name famous and to reach as many people as possible and to bind up as many wounds as possible so that you can be glorified.

God, we ask this of you. We pray that you would meet us in this space right now in this quiet time for us to reflect; I pray that you would do a work within us before we leave, before we're dismissed; and I pray that you would show up every week of this series and really lean in on those places in our hearts that you need to expose.

We love you. We thank you for your grace and we thank you for your truth. We ask this in Jesus' name, and everybody says amen.