

# *Wrestling with Comparisons*

J. B. HAWS

In our Church history classes, we often talk about the importance—and blessing—of openness and candor. So, in a nod to that spirit of openness, I feel compelled to admit candidly that when I first received this invitation from vice president Matthew O. Richardson’s office, I mulled it over for a day, and then I wrote an apologetic email asking if there was any way that I could be excused at this time.

A couple of things factored into my sense that I just did not want to give a devotional right now. First, I have always sort of dreamed that my debut on BYUtv would be a guest cameo on Studio C, and I just was not ready to give up on my dream! If any of you know me, and if any of you know Studio C, you know that my whole life would be a treasure trove of material for new “Awkward Avoidance Viking” sketches. Second—and this held only slightly more sway in my decision-making process—I just did not know what I would say at the devotional. And that really weighed on me. I thought about all of the past devotionals that have been so memorable. I could start running through a list right here of BYU devotionals that still stick with me. Plus, I rationalized that the intervening weeks might be too busy to put in the preparation time that this deserved. I cared too much about BYU devotionals

to get this wrong! Vice President Richardson sent back a very gracious and understanding email agreeing to let me off the hook, and I felt no guilt.

The next morning though, a new thought wiggled its way into my consciousness. It was one of those inner-dialogue moments—those moments that, somehow, we can just sense originate outside of ourselves. Here is how I would express that new thought: “Are you really going to tell me that you are going to pass up the chance to put in the time to think about something, wrestle with something, and learn something just because you know it is going to require work and focus? Why would you pass up on the chance to learn something that you need to learn, to put in the work so that you can put down onto paper things that now might only be swimming around vaguely in your head?” And then there came to me a quote by Francis Bacon that a former professor of mine was wont to repeat: “Writing [makes] an exact man.”<sup>1</sup> Somehow I just knew that I needed to learn something with more exactness and with more precision through the exercise of writing it down.

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My guess is that many of you, at the end of our time together, might wish that the lesson I *had* learned was to leave well enough alone when we receive gracious and understanding emails letting us off the hook when we have nothing to say. But I was no longer in a place in which I felt like I could do that. The truth of the situation had been laid bare, and I knew that I should do this.

But I still did not know what I was going to say. I just could not shake the feeling of how good past devotionals have been or the feeling of wondering if I could measure up. This might be my one shot, I thought—on the off chance, of course, that the Studio C thing does not pan out. What would people think? What if the best thing my family members could say to me afterward would be, “Hey, I loved how the BYUtv makeup artist did a good job of making your eyebrows look smaller?” How would my devotional talk compare in the field of BYU devotional talks? And, in a flash of recognition, I was suddenly pulled up short. There it was. That was it. I needed to spend some time wrestling to the ground this vexatious tendency to compare.

### As Natural as Breathing

This tendency to compare is something that I think about all the time because I do it all the time. But even that statement is a bit misleading. Saying, “I do it all the time,” is like saying, “I breathe all the time.” It just happens without me thinking about it. It can almost feel reflexive—almost *natural*. And that is the point. That is why it is so vexatious. We know from Mosiah 3 that when we are left to our “natural” state, we struggle to “[yield] to the enticings of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup> We are not where God wants us to be, and we are not what He knows we *can* be. We are in opposition to Him, at cross-purposes to His plan. But also, because these comparisons seem to happen so naturally, I hope that we all feel like fellow travelers on this road.

So what would the Holy Spirit entice us to do? Where can we yield on this?

First, we need to identify the problem. Let me outline it by revealing how I used to envision the

scriptural narrative in Doctrine and Covenants 7, with some admitted literary license. This section adds important detail to the account in John 21 and retells how John expressed his heartfelt wish to have “power over death, that [he could] live and bring souls unto [Christ]”<sup>3</sup> until Jesus comes again. We learn in section 7 of the Doctrine and Covenants that Peter, on the other hand, had desired that he might “speedily come unto [the Lord] in [His] kingdom.”<sup>4</sup>

Here is how I have imagined this scenario playing out. This is my mental screenplay of the scriptural story. Peter approaches the Savior a bit hesitantly and quietly asks, “What was John’s heartfelt wish?” Peter learns that John desired to stay on the earth until the Second Coming to preach the gospel. I can see Peter keeping a forced smile and saying, “Wow. That is wonderful.” But in his mind he is really thinking, “Ahhh! I am so dumb! Why didn’t I ask for that? Why didn’t I even *think* of that? John is so much more righteous than I am! Not to mention he is a faster runner than I am! Why do I always have to be so impetuous and jump in first on everything?”

In this reading, one might assume that Doctrine and Covenants 7:5 would read like this: “I say unto thee, Peter, [your desire to come speedily into my kingdom] was a good desire; but my beloved [John] has desired that he might do more, or a greater work yet among men than what [you have done, *thou slacker*].” I can still remember where I was, however, when I realized that of course the verse did not read that way. Here is how it really reads: “I say unto thee, Peter, this was a good desire; but my beloved has desired that he might do more, or a greater work yet among men than what *he* has before done.”<sup>5</sup>

I feel this with the force of truth: our perfect, loving God makes no horizontal comparisons. In this verse Jesus only compared John with John’s former self—John with old John. He only compared Peter with old Peter, with former Peter. And He only compares me with old me.

Here is a more contemporary example from President Boyd K. Packer’s time as a mission president:

I needed a new assistant and had prayed much about the matter. I then called zone conferences, where I met and interviewed every missionary, always with the thought in my mind, "Is this the man?" The answer finally came: "This is the man." He was appointed. He had been permitted to come on a mission only after some considerable shaping up to become eligible.

After the announcement one of the zone leaders came to see me privately. He came from the same community in the West as did the new assistant. He was obviously disturbed. His first question was, "Do you really know the elder you have appointed as your assistant?"

"Yes, Elder. I know all that you know about him, and a good deal more," was my answer.

"Why, then, was **he** appointed your assistant?"

I pondered for a moment and then said, "Elder, why don't you ask the question that you came to ask?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ask the question that is really on your mind," I encouraged.

"But I did," he said.

"No," I said. "There is another question. The thing that is on your mind is not 'Why did you appoint him as your assistant'; it is 'Why did you not appoint me?'"

Now please understand. I thought his unexpressed question to be a very logical and sensible one. . . .

. . . I had sympathy for this young man and admired him greatly for his courage to speak.

"If you should ask why you were not chosen," I said, "I would have to answer, 'I do not know, Elder.' I only know that he was chosen. Perhaps he may fail. But at least I know he is the one with the combination of talents and ability and qualities best calculated to get done what the office needs at the moment.

"This is no reflection upon you. You may yet preside over him and many above him. You may be his bishop or his stake president. You may preside over the Church. I do not know. But his call is no reflection upon you. Do not be injured by it.

"Go back to work and serve the Lord. Sustain him," I counseled. "Your contest is not with him but with yourself."<sup>6</sup>

I need to read that golden line again: "Your contest is not with him but with yourself."

Or, put another way, here is Elder Jeffrey R. Holland on this:

[God] doesn't measure our talents or our looks; He doesn't measure our professions or our possessions. He cheers on **every** runner, calling out that the race is against sin, **not** against each other.<sup>7</sup>

These are such important statements. They are the type of statements that I want emblazoned on my mind, that I want written on the "fleshy tables of [my] heart."<sup>8</sup> Just repeating a sentence like "your contest is not with him but with yourself" or "the race is against sin, *not* against each other" feels like verbal aloe vera on our sunburned souls. It soothes, it cools, and we feel tense muscles relax.

We know all about this, don't we? We feel these truths deeply. But if we know these truths, if they make us feel so settled, then why is it so hard to remember them once we leave the safe confines of a BYU devotional or the reassuring embraces of our wise mothers or fathers or siblings or friends who have just reminded us of these truths?

Why is it still so hard? And what do we do?

If it is like *breathing*, what do we do?

What *can* we do?

### The Process of Becoming Aware

Well, for one thing, we can be mindful. One aspect of mindfulness (and this is certainly from my novice's perspective of mindfulness) is to pay attention to your breathing—and good things happen. So, first, let's draw attention to our tendency to compare. Be mindful of it, think about it, and sit with it. And here are some things we notice.

Mortality and modernity seem to be especially well designed to give us the "customized curriculum"<sup>9</sup> (Elder Neal A. Maxwell's wonderful phrase) that we need to confront our tendency to compare. And as we confront this, we sense that comparing can lead to all kinds of trouble. On the one hand, it can breed arrogance. It can breed conceit. It can breed disdain and contempt (thinking of the profound things that Arthur C. Brooks said at commencement two weeks ago<sup>10</sup>). It can breed self-satisfaction and complacency and apathy. On the other hand, it can breed despair. It can breed hopelessness. It can breed feelings of worthlessness and shame. It is a pretty potent instrument for sin and misery, I would say! Chapter 6 of

3 Nephi presents a situation in which Satan’s success in getting those Saints to be puffed up in comparisons and in ranks and in distinctions meant that “the church began to be *broken up*!”<sup>11</sup>

No wonder that Alma said that he sinned in his wish to be an angel. I have always thought that was a bit of poetic hyperbole on Alma’s part. After all, who could fault a desire to have the voice of an angel to “cry repentance unto every people”?<sup>12</sup> But maybe he was on to something. Maybe he understood deeply that comparisons—which then can fuel envying and coveting or self-loathing and the paralysis of inaction—can really be just that debilitating. They can keep us from playing the vital role that has been “allotted unto [us],”<sup>13</sup> and so Alma needed to call it like he saw it: he was sinning in his wish.

Can’t we just hear echoes of President Ezra Taft Benson’s classic discourse on pride, which is always worthy of a reread? President Benson said, “Pride is essentially competitive in nature.”<sup>14</sup> President Benson also quoted C. S. Lewis:

*Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. . . . It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone.*<sup>15</sup>

Let’s pause for a dose of reality here. I can imagine my own reaction to all of this if I were sitting in this audience. I can hear myself thinking: “Well, thank you very much. Now not only do I feel badly about myself because of all these comparisons with everyone around me, I feel even worse because of the realization that I am *sinning* when I make these comparisons. That is just super. I wish I had just stayed in bed today.” If any of this is coming across in that way, I get that. But I think that another way to look at this would be to see it as empowering. We can take Nephi’s approach. We can say, “Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin,”<sup>16</sup> and “Why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul?”<sup>17</sup>

We can notice how false these comparisons most often are—that is, that they are often based

on falsehoods and on faulty premises, both of others’ making and of our *own* making. That is worth noting, worth confronting, and worth constantly reminding ourselves.

### Too Many Variables

Korihor’s exchange with Alma rightfully gets a lot of attention in Church lessons and discourses. Alma 30 is a rich and layered chapter. But I think that one of Korihor’s assertions does not get enough attention for just how demonstrably false it is. Here is how that assertion is reported in Alma 30:17. Korihor asserted that “every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength.”<sup>18</sup> That assertion is simply not true, and when we are honest with ourselves, we know it is not true.

What I mean is that no one can legitimately say, in the ultimate sense, “I prospered because of my genius,” or “I conquered because of my strength.” We know that, in reality, so many variables are involved. Where we are born, when we are born, our race, our gender, the schools available to us, the education level of our parents, genetic markers like height and muscle mass, the timing of our application and the pool of applicants for a program or a job—there are so many things that are out of our control. All of these factors impact the degree to which we even have the *opportunity* to “prosper” or “conquer.” There have been many geniuses who have not had equal opportunity to prosper and many strong men and women who have not had equal opportunity to conquer. And for that matter, what does “prospering” or “conquering” even definitively look like?

We have to be careful here. This does not mean that we simply acquiesce to biological determinism or circumstantial determinism, nor wallow in defeatism. Agency is a reality and an incomparable endowment. But can we see why comparisons just are not fair—to us or to others? There are too many variables involved. That is why degree of difficulty matters in Olympic diving—and in life, as Elder Maxwell would remind us.<sup>19</sup>

All of this is to say that we should certainly be more compassionate with *everyone* because we do not know what burdens they are carrying or

what life loads are weighing them down. And we should certainly be more humble when we succeed. Is it any wonder that King Benjamin asked, “Can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay.”<sup>20</sup> I wonder how many doors have been opened in my life because I grew up in Hooper, Utah. I can take no credit for the golden ticket of being from that beautiful beachfront town on the shores of the Great Salt Lake.

We really must acknowledge that privilege is real. Prejudice is real. Injustice is real. Remember that Korihor was *anti-Christ*. The demonstrably false statement that we prosper according to *our* genius seems to be another way of denying that we need Christ—or that we need *anyone*. Think of the punchline of Ephesians 2:8–9. We need to be reminded that it is “by grace” we are saved.<sup>21</sup> It is the gift of God, lest any of us “should boast!”<sup>22</sup>

On the beautiful flip side, then, we can trust that the Lord’s grace *is* sufficient to ultimately right every injustice, to make up for every loss,<sup>23</sup> and to make weak things become strong.

When we come face to face with our weakness, Ether 12:27 is a good place to turn. We are reminded that the Lord gives unto men and women “weakness that they may be humble.”<sup>24</sup> Not *weaknesses* but weakness. Weakness. A shared, universal condition: mortality. Mortality makes us humble—again and again and again. And I might submit that this tendency to compare is part of mortality and that it is universal—to lesser and greater degrees, of course. When we are humbled by that recognition, we can trust that through the Lord’s all-sufficient grace, weak things can become strong.

And that is ultimately the only place we *can* turn, “the only name” by which “salvation [can] come.”<sup>25</sup> I realize, again and again, that I cannot overcome this on my own. I realize, again and again, that I do not have to.

### Childlike Humility

What Elder Ronald A. Rasband reminded religious educators three months ago is the same message that has been weighing on my heart, and I feel inadequate to deliver it with the forcefulness that it deserves. Elder Rasband titled his talk

“Jesus Christ Is the Answer.”<sup>26</sup> This is the message we all need to hear. In this human dilemma, Jesus is the answer: His teachings, His example, and His power to effect a change of heart—a lasting, saving change of heart—in each of us.

Let’s consider a thought or two about the teachings of Jesus Christ. When we find ourselves worried about how we measure up as we compare ourselves with everyone around us, and when we are worried about what others think of us, at least we are in good company! I am so grateful that the gospel writers were honest enough (even, in some cases, honest enough about themselves!) to include passages that show that Jesus’s apostles struggled over this, even squabbled over this.<sup>27</sup> When they asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (perhaps the champion of all comparison-motivated questions!) “Jesus called a little child unto him . . . and said . . . whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>28</sup>

This of course starts cross-references popping up in our minds. We remember that one of the ways that King Benjamin recommended that we overcome our natural man or natural woman state is to become as a little child.<sup>29</sup>

I have four wonderful children—Parley, Marshall, Truman, and Ashley—and I have learned so many lessons from them. An image that is as vivid in my mind today as it was when it happened a dozen years ago is a backyard game of catch with my two oldest boys, Parley and Marshall. Parley was five or six years old; Marshall was probably three. I would throw the football to each of them in turn. Parley was catching the football almost every time. Marshall, not so much.

I can see Marshall concentrating, watching the ball—and then missing it every time. No matter how I threw the ball, it seemed like it always hit him on the head as it went right through his hands, which were closing for the ball just one beat too early or too late. Luckily it was a really soft, inflatable football. But here is the thing I will never forget: Marshall cheered, jumped up and down, and squealed in delight every time Parley caught it. I can still hear his little voice yelling,

“Good catch, Par!” or “That was great, Par!” And then he would miss the next throw that came to him. But somehow that did not dampen his enthusiasm for Parley’s success. Somehow he knew that his contest was not with Parley. He could have joy in Parley’s success. How do we recapture that sense of childlike celebration for the good fortune of others?

### Less About Ourselves

I think we recapture that sense by thinking less about ourselves. That statement calls for so many qualifications. We all have to be on the lookout for the ways that a sincere desire for selflessness can, in some terrible situations, be manipulated into codependency or victimization. Please know that if we see this happening to others around us or to ourselves, we are never called to self-abnegation that harms our mental or physical or emotional well-being. Some of the best things we can do for ourselves or others is to stop abuse of this kind. Remember that Jesus said that we must cut off hands or eyes that offend us, and the Joseph Smith Translation makes clear that this cutting off might include so-called friends and family and those we have trusted who are leading us down pernicious paths.<sup>30</sup> These are situations that cannot be ignored.

But with that important caveat always in our minds, here is how President Dieter F. Uchtdorf captured what the *right* kind of selflessness looks like, in the best sense:

*When we see the world around us through the lens of the pure love of Christ, we begin to understand humility.*

*Some suppose that humility is about beating ourselves up. Humility does not mean convincing ourselves that we are worthless, meaningless, or of little value. Nor does it mean denying or withholding the talents God has given us. We don’t discover humility by thinking less **of** ourselves; we discover humility by thinking less **about** ourselves.<sup>31</sup>*

Here is how C. S. Lewis said this:

*Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call “humble” nowadays: he*

*will not be a . . . person . . . who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what **you** said to **him**. . . . He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.<sup>32</sup>*

Doesn’t this description just fit with the image of the Son of God kneeling before weary and confused disciples and washing their feet? Isn’t this Jesus—while on the cross—assigning the duties of a son to John because of Jesus’s concern for His heartbroken mother? This is Jesus, choosing to be a guest at a publican’s house without worrying about the way that His reputation might be harmed in the eyes of murmurers. This is Jesus, immune to the criticisms of people who, if they had lived in today’s world, would be making their same sniping judgments in the comment sections of social media posts. This is Jesus, sincerely and wholeheartedly deflecting praise and glorifying His Father. And on and on and on.

A brief anecdote from Sister Susan W. Tanner captures this as beautifully as almost anything I have ever heard. She was serving as the general president of the Church’s Young Women organization when she related this in an October 2005 general conference talk:

*I remember well the insecurities I felt as a teenager with a bad case of acne. I tried to care for my skin properly. My parents helped me get medical attention. For years I even went without eating chocolate and all the greasy fast foods around which teens often socialize, but with no obvious healing consequences. It was difficult for me at that time to fully appreciate this body which was giving me so much grief. But my good mother taught me a higher law. Over and over she said to me, “You must do everything you can to make your appearance pleasing, but the minute you walk out the door, forget yourself and start concentrating on others.”<sup>33</sup>*

That is it. In a beautiful nutshell, that is it.

Think of all of the questions that bombard us on a daily basis: Did I get picked for a leadership position on my mission? Did I score more points than my rival in the basketball game? Did I get

the highest score on the test in my class? Was I the one student from BYU who landed the internship? Did I play more flawlessly in my audition than did everyone else? Did my witty comment in Sunday School make more people laugh than my roommate's comment did? If I glance over at the treadmill next to mine, will I find that I am running at a faster pace? And on and on and on. These constantly nipping questions are all about me, me, me. And it is exhausting.

Doesn't it sound freeing and liberating to think less about ourselves? To not be thinking about ourselves at all? And to do that effortlessly, as naturally as breathing, because it is just who we are? As if the armor of God that we put on is coated in Teflon, so that none of this—not flattery, not worry about where we measure up, and not insecurities fueled by the lack of retweets—can even possibly stick to us?

Jesus is the answer: His teachings, His example, and especially His power to effect this change in our hearts. I am so thankful for Moroni 7:48:

*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.*

Amen, indeed!

When we pray with all the energy of heart and strive to be true followers of Jesus Christ, this pure love of Christ is bestowed *on* us. It fills us. This matters so much in this specific area of our “strivings within”<sup>34</sup> (isn't that a fitting phrase from the hymn “More Holiness Give Me”?) because charity renders powerless this temptation to compare. That is because, when filled with charity that “seeketh not her own,”<sup>35</sup> we are purified even as Jesus is pure.

One area in which we need that purifying power is in our motives. President Benson wisely said about pride that it is in “our motives for the things we do . . . where the sin is manifest.”<sup>36</sup>

I have heard historian Richard Lyman Bushman say this so forcefully. When our motives are pure, when we act out of a pure heart, and when our *only* intent is to bless others, prideful comparisons are defanged. They have no bearing in our thinking. When we are filled with charity, we will be like the Savior. Why was being pure so natural for Him? Because, simply, He *knew* who He was and He knows you and He knows me. He truly knows us, truly sees who we are. That changes everything. If we ask ourselves whether or not Jesus compared Himself to those around Him or took comfort in where He stood “on the ladders of . . . success”<sup>37</sup> and in who was beneath Him, the question becomes instantly ridiculous. We remember that this is the Savior who aims to make us—in the language of Doctrine and Covenants 88—“equal with him”!<sup>38</sup> There is no jealousy, no competition. If the temptation to compare reared its head, He “gave no heed”<sup>39</sup> to it. And we can be like Him.

### Give No Heed

The truth is, we are going to walk out of this room and right back into the pressure cooker. Universities, the job market, social media (oh, social media!), and even Church basketball are all set up systemically, almost intrinsically, to force comparisons upon us. But that does not mean that we have to give heed!

A few years ago, after we had read in class excerpts from President Benson's talk on pride, including some of the passages we have read here about competition and comparison, a student asked, “Then how I am even supposed to play sports?” Admittedly, I did not have any easy answers then, and I do not have any easy answers now. It *is* tough. But I do say that we should not shy away from these crucibles of comparison in which our character is forged and in which we can really practice what we are talking about here.

We can play sports and feel the thrill of our muscles stretching and responding as we are learning new skills and putting into action things that we have practiced; our contest can be just with ourselves, and we can honestly celebrate the successes of others. We can take our exams in

school without worrying about how our grades compare to those of others. Instead, we can measure ourselves against only ourselves and feel the thrill of calling on new knowledge to solve new problems. (Okay, I admit that I might be waxing a bit too poetic about the thrill of celebrating new knowledge when we have to take school exams, but you catch my drift.) We can play musical pieces, paint paintings, write stories, and join in the joy that these expressions of talents and hard work will bring to others.

Think of how Jesus freely used His talents and gifts to bless others, over and over and over. This is not about hiding under a bushel; this is about not worrying how brightly our light shines in comparison with the person right next to us. This is about having pure motives—being purified even as He is pure. After all, Jesus is the very light that we want to “hold up!”<sup>40</sup> And do we ever need this light! Does the world ever need this light! Why? Because we come to realize that *everyone*, to some degree or another, feels these insecurities. It is so vital that we reach to lift others because everyone feels the weight of this trying to pull them down. There is even a syndrome to describe this weight: impostor syndrome.<sup>41</sup> It is this nagging sense that no matter what you have accomplished, sooner or later someone will discover that you simply are not good enough, that you do not belong, and that your qualifications really are a sham. In a world in which that weight drags on everyone, we need people who respond to President Benson’s call to “[conquer] enmity toward our brothers and sisters, [esteem] them as ourselves, and [lift] them as high or higher than we are.”<sup>42</sup>

### What Really Matters

This whole endeavor is rife with paradoxes, but, as Terryl L. Givens has so aptly put it, as disciples of Christ, we are a “people of paradox!”<sup>43</sup> These very tensions can be so productive. The best way to remember that our contests are only with ourselves is to think less about ourselves. The best way to stop comparing ourselves with others is to think more of others! When we don’t find easy answers, it is my hope and my prayer that the

Spirit will teach us of these “peaceable things of the kingdom,”<sup>44</sup> even when they are hard for us to articulate.

There is no question that you and I are going to fail at many things we attempt to do, and in the eyes of those making comparisons, we all are repeatedly going to fall short. There is always a bigger fish, so to speak. You are going to get emails or voicemails or text messages—maybe even this very day—notifying you that someone else was hired for a job, that someone else was picked for the team, that someone is not interested in a second date, that someone else has been called as Relief Society president, and so on. But *do not* take that as a mark of your worth. Disappointments do sting, but they can also be wonderfully, albeit painfully, formative. All things really can “work together for [the] good [of] them that love God.”<sup>45</sup> But do not let the temptation to compare give these disappointments destructive power. These comparisons are counterfeits; they do not—*cannot*—adequately measure what really matters. When disappointments hit, we take a deep breath; we remember what *really* matters.

I remember being very struck the first time I heard someone quote what President David O. McKay said about imagining our future interview with the Lord. Elder Robert D. Hales quoted this in a BYU devotional in 1988. The focus of President McKay’s hypothetical interview was the quality of our relationships, with special attention on individuals in our immediate families. Pointedly, deliberately, President McKay stressed that the Lord will not ask about our professions, only our integrity. He will not ask for our résumé of Church callings, only our interest in ministering to others.<sup>46</sup> These are the things that really matter.

C. S. Lewis once proposed, “We might think that God wanted simply obedience to a set of rules: whereas He really wants people of a particular sort.”<sup>47</sup> I would submit that this includes becoming the sort of people who slough off the tendency to compare just like water off the proverbial duck’s back. Like Lehi in his dream, we pay no heed to those siren voices or those “finger[s] of scorn.”<sup>48</sup>

So, with all of this said, in our quest to become people of a particular sort, how do we evaluate



how we are doing? Well, not by comparing! This is another of those paradoxes. If we are not careful, we might fall into the trap that is waiting for us just around the corner. Can't you just hear yourself saying, "I am doing so well at this not-comparing thing. I bet I compare myself to others way less than my roommate does." And here we go again. One thing we all need is something that Elder Maxwell recommended in another classic, must-read address titled "Notwithstanding My Weakness." Here is one of his recommendations to help "manage" what he called "these vexing feelings of inadequacy":

*We can make quiet but more honest inventories of our strengths, since, in this connection, most of us are dishonest bookkeepers and need confirming "outside auditors."<sup>49</sup>*

I have to pause here to acknowledge deep, personal gratitude for so many "outside auditors" in my life, especially my wife and my mother, who personify all that we have talked about today and who just are this way! We can be those all-important outside auditors that others need.

I am also confident that President Benson would say to us, just as he did in 1989:

*We must be careful, as we seek to become more and more godlike, that we do not become discouraged and lose hope. Becoming Christlike is a lifetime pursuit and very often involves growth and change that is slow, almost imperceptible. . . .*

*We must not lose hope. . . . The Lord is pleased with every effort, even the tiny, daily ones in which we strive to be more like Him.<sup>50</sup>*

In "tiny, daily" ways, then, we practice. We purify our motives. We pray with all the energy of heart for the Lord to fill us with the love and grace that make our practice and our purifying efficacious—until this all feels as natural and as effortless as breathing, as the love between parents and children, and as the love between siblings or lifelong friends.

And lastly, we combat falsehood with truth: We see Korihor's lie, and we raise it with a truth about

the celestial kingdom, the kingdom in which we will "see as [we] are seen, and know as [we] are known."<sup>51</sup> Could we pray for clearer glimpses of that in the here and now? Could we pray more to see others that way? Could our prayers and our comparisons stay riveted on how we are becoming "new creature[s]" in Christ,<sup>52</sup> on how far His grace has taken us and can yet take us from our old selves?

Here is one last story. I love this story as much as any story that has ever appeared in the *New Era*. It is called "The Visitor," by Ken Merrell, from the May 2000 issue.

*When I was 18, as I was preparing to serve a mission, my bishop called me to teach the Sunbeams. . . .*

*One day I invited Mike to come to church and sit in my class. Mike was my age but had stopped attending church completely by the time he was 12. We had remained friends over the years. . . . Once in a while Mike would accept my invitations to come to an activity. It always surprised me when he did, so I kept inviting him.*

*At that time, Mike had long, black hair and a beard. . . . I don't remember when I invited him to my Primary class, but one day he showed up.*

*"Class, I would like to introduce you to my friend Mike," is how I began my lesson. "He is visiting us today."*

*Mike sat next to me in front. The children sat in a semicircle with their eyes fixed on him. They were much quieter than usual. I was about five or six minutes into the lesson when one little boy got up from his chair and walked across the room and stood directly in front of my friend. . . .*

*. . . The other children watched the two of them for a few minutes. . . .*

*Then it happened. . . .*

*With the innocence of a child, [the boy] said to Mike, "Are you Jesus?"*

*The look on Mike's face was total surprise. It seemed, as I glanced at the children's faces, they all had the same question on their minds.*

*Mike looked at me as if to say, Help, what do I say?*

*I stepped in. "No, this is not Jesus. This is His brother."*

*Mike looked at me as if in shock.*

Then without hesitation the boy . . . reached up and wrapped his arms around Mike’s neck. “I can tell,” the boy said as he hugged Mike.<sup>53</sup>

The author ends the story by saying that just over a year later, Mike was serving as a missionary. My guess is that he was reminded of something that day that he had not thought about for a very, very long time.

So, I say this to you and I say this to me: Let’s all find a mirror. Let’s look at ourselves. Let’s see as we are seen. Let’s repeat, “My contest is not with anyone else; my contest is with myself. The race is against sin, not against each other.” Then we must pray with all the energy of heart to be filled with the pure love of Christ, of Him who is “the author and finisher of our faith.”<sup>54</sup> We must refuse to let lies “interrupt [our] rejoicings”<sup>55</sup> over the truths that are deeper and more convincing than the falsehoods of comparisons. And then we must walk out the door, forget ourselves, and start concentrating on others.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## Notes

1. Francis Bacon, “Of Studies,” *Essays* (1625).
2. Mosiah 3:19.
3. D&C 7:2; see also John 21:20–23.
4. D&C 7:4.
5. D&C 7:5; emphasis added.
6. Boyd K. Packer, “*That All May Be Edified*” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 51–52; emphasis in original.
7. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Other Prodigal,” *Ensign*, May 2002; emphasis in original.
8. 2 Corinthians 3:3.
9. Neal A. Maxwell, “Insights from My Life,” BYU devotional address, 26 October 1976.
10. See Arthur C. Brooks, “More Love, Less Contempt,” BYU commencement address, 25 April 2019.
11. 3 Nephi 6:14; emphasis added.
12. Alma 29:1
13. Alma 29:3.
14. Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride,” *Ensign*, May 1989.
15. C. S. Lewis, “The Great Sin,” in *Mere Christianity* (1952), book 3, chapter 8, paragraph 3; quoted in Benson, “Beware of Pride.”
16. 2 Nephi 4:28.
17. 2 Nephi 4:27.
18. Alma 30:17.
19. See Neal A. Maxwell, “According to the Desire of [Our] Hearts,” *Ensign*, November 1996.
20. Mosiah 2:25.
21. Ephesians 2:8.
22. Ephesians 2:9.
23. See Joseph Smith, “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 2, 10 March 1843–14 July 1843,” 145, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-2-10-march-1843-14-july-1843/153.
24. Ether 12:27.
25. Moses 6:52.
26. See Ronald A. Rasband, “Jesus Christ Is the Answer,” Evening with a General Authority, Broadcasts, address to seminary and institute of religion teachers, 8 February 2019, churchofjesuschrist.org/broadcasts/article/evening-with-a-general-authority/2019/02/12rasband?lang=eng.
27. See Luke 22:24–27.
28. Matthew 18:1–4.
29. See Mosiah 3:19.
30. See JST, Mark 9:40–48.
31. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Pride and the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, November 2010; emphasis in original.
32. Lewis, “The Great Sin,” *Mere Christianity*, book 3, chapter 8, paragraph 9; emphasis in original.
33. Susan W. Tanner, “The Sanctity of the Body,” *Ensign*, November 2005.
34. “More Holiness Give Me,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 131.
35. Moroni 7:45; 1 Corinthians 13:5.
36. Benson, “Beware of Pride.”
37. Benson, “Beware of Pride.”
38. D&C 88:107.
39. D&C 20:22.
40. 3 Nephi 18:24.
41. I am grateful to Joseph R. Stuart for suggesting the connection between the weight of

comparing ourselves to others and the impostor syndrome.

42. Benson, "Beware of Pride."

43. See Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

44. D&C 36:2.

45. Romans 8:28. See also D&C 90:24, 98:3, 100:15, 105:40.

46. See Robert D. Hales, "Understandings of the Heart," BYU devotional address, 15 March 1988; quoting David O. McKay from notes of Fred A. Baker, managing director, Church Department of Physical Facilities.

47. C. S. Lewis, "The 'Cardinal Virtues,'" *Mere Christianity*, book 3, chapter 2, paragraph 11.

48. 1 Nephi 8:33.

49. Neal A. Maxwell, "Notwithstanding My Weakness," *Ensign*, November 1976.

50. Ezra Taft Benson, "A Mighty Change of Heart," *Ensign*, October 1989.

51. D&C 76:94.

52. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

53. Ken Merrell, "The Visitor," *New Era*, May 2000.

54. Hebrews 12:2; see also Moroni 6:4.

55. Alma 30:22.