Bob: Shannon Popkin has experienced what every mom has experienced when she tries to compare her kids with other people’s kids.

Shannon: Angela is one of my best friends, and Angela's kids are perfect. [Laughter] Her girls, you know, they bump into each other in the hallway and say, “Oh, sorry Sissy,” and give each other a little hug; and they sit and do little crafts. My boys are shoving each other down the stairs, trying to show off in front of these little girls and play macho. I was just undone with comparing my kids to my friend's kids.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, May 19th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. You'll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. Comparison is like having a pet snake; it can turn and poison you at any minute. You've got to be careful. We'll talk more about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. I will never forget an article—this was 25 years ago that somebody gave me this article—it talked about super models. They had asked the super models: “On a scale of 1 to 10, what grade would you give yourself?” All these super models were giving themselves 6s and 7s, and they were immediately pointing out what was wrong with their body and why they were 6s and 7s.

I'm thinking: “Time out. People are paying you tens of thousands/hundreds of thousands of dollars—

Ann: —if not millions.

Bob: —“because of your iconic beauty. You look in the mirror and you see your flaws.” I thought, “What is up with that?”

For guys—I don't know about you, Dave—I look in the mirror; I look great! [Laughter]

Dave: You know Bob, you do look great; you know, looking better every day. [Laughter]
Ann: I tested this out at a conference I spoke at once, where there were probably 1,000 women. I said, “How many of you looked in the mirror this morning and said, ‘I look amazing?’” I thought there’d be several. There might have been—out of 1,000—maybe 5—

Bob: Wow.

Ann: —that stood up.

Bob: Right.

Ann: And the rest of us, I think we get in the mirror and we're like, “Ohhh!”

Bob: We see the flaws, right?

Ann: Exactly.

Bob: We're talking about the whole subject of comparison, which is the subject of a book that our friend, Shannon Popkin, has written. She's with us again today. Welcome back to FamilyLife Today.

Shannon: Thank you, Bob.

Bob: Shannon has written a book called Comparison Girl. Again, I'm just thinking, when it comes to beauty/appearance, I've seen guys—guys are not as focused on appearance; most of us aren't—as women are.

Ann: But I do think it's changing. I think our younger men are experiencing more pressure in this area.

Dave: I know that—you know, when I coached high school football/middle school basketball, 25 years ago—you could go shirts and skins for a little scrimmage in the gym with boys. Now, not allowed because they are so self-conscious about—

Bob: —about body image.

Dave: Yes; back then, you really never thought of it: “Take your shirts off, you guys; let's go.” Now you're like—they'll just look at you like: “No way; there's no way I'm taking my shirt off. I know I'm a little overweight. I'm 12 years old; I'm very self-conscious. I'll get compared to everybody there.” It's a new day.

Bob: Pretty interesting.
Shannon: I remember, when my daughter was little, she grabbed a tube of my lipstick. She's like maybe two years old; and she said, "I'm going to get all pretty." She went and she looked in the mirror; and she said, "Oh! I is all pretty." [Laughter] It's so sweet, you know?

Ann: It's so innocent.

Shannon: It's so sweet, and they just lose that. It's so hard.

Bob: Do you remember when you first started comparing how you looked with how other people looked?

Shannon: I do.

Bob: Really?

Shannon: I remember. It was sixth grade camp, and our teacher had told us it was going to be the best week of our lives. I got there, and it was not the best week of my life. [Laughter] We were combined with the other elementary schools. I was put in a cabin; my best friend was in the other cabin. I was put in this cabin, and I was watching this little group of girls on the other side of the cabin. They had cute hair, and they were wearing cute clothes, and they were talking about the cute boys. I was pretty sure that the cute boys were talking about them.

There was this one girl in particular—her name was Kim—and she just had a really sweet personality. Everybody kind of watched what she did. I remember she said, "I'm going to take a shower at night." Apparently, it was way better to take a shower at night. All the other girls were like, "Oh, yes; we're going to take a shower at night."

I wasn't planning to take a shower at all, because this was camp; like I wasn't in to all the cute clothes and stuff. I remember thinking, "What are they"—I hadn't brought a towel or shampoo, like—"What are they going to think of me, by day three, the girl who doesn't take a shower at all?"

I remember watching this cluster of girls come back. Kim—her hair's all damp, and she rolls her hair up in these pink sponge rollers. [Laughter] I had never seen anything like this, so I watched her doing this. Then, the next morning, she pulls these rollers out; and it was a sight to behold. I was mesmerized because she had these big bouncy curls that kind of moved on her shoulders as she walked. I thought, "Oh my goodness."

I went home from camp. I had gone to camp, happy-go-lucky/carefree; and I went home from camp feeling like, "I'm never going to measure up,"—this deep sense of inadequacy. Suddenly, I was comparing myself to these other girls. Now, I did think, "I've discovered a secret; I think it's pink sponge rollers." [Laughter] I asked my mom to get
some, and I tried them out. I did it just like Kim. I went to the mirror the next morning, and it was not a thing of beauty. [Laughter] It looked like I had been *electrocuted*, because I had really short thin hair; so it didn't work out for me.

I just remember that being a turning point, where I went from happy-go-lucky to sick-to-your-stomach inadequate. I think our enemy really capitalizes on that time in a girl's life, when her eyes are suddenly opened to the differences that she sees. You know, she's kind of blind to it before—to some degree, blind to these differences—and suddenly, she realizes: “Oh my goodness. There are measurements, and everyone's taking them,” and “How do I measure up?”

**Bob:** So it's there for every 14-year-old. Is it there for every 40-year-old too?

**Shannon:** Yes, I don't think we outgrow it.

**Dave:** I know, Ann—you've told me; I'll let you speak—but you've said, when women walk in a room, they immediately compare to all the other women in the room. Is that true?

**Ann:** I think that is true. I think that we do that from an early age. I think every single woman—maybe guys have this too—but I know every single woman has a moment in time, where she suddenly felt inadequate, physically.

**Shannon:** Yes; I remember meeting my Bible study group just this year. I was a new leader, and I didn't know any of these women who were in this group. I remember entering that circle, and looking around at them and thinking, “Oh my word; they are all perfect,”—and not just the way they looked—but they way that they carried themselves. I thought, “What am I doing in this group?” You know what? Now, we've all gotten to know each other, and I don't see them that way; they're just sweet women of God.

But there is something about appearances, and that sideways glancing, where we’re constantly measuring ourselves against our external packaging, as I like to put it.

**Dave:** I think men do it in a different way.

**Bob:** Right.

**Dave:** I'm looking at Bob, just thinking he concurs. Sometimes it can be physical for a guy; but we compare—and women do too—in all areas. It could be intellect—so you're sitting in a room and then he starts to talk; and you're like: “Whoa!

**Bob:** “He's really smart.”

**Dave:** “I thought I was smart, but I'm nowhere near…”
Or especially athletic—you know, I came home the other day, here in Little Rock, after playing full court basketball in the morning. It's real early in the morning. I walk in and Ann knew, the second I walked in—I jumped on the bed, because Ann is still sleeping. I kiss her and I say, “How ya doin? It's going to be a great day!” She goes, “So you played really well today?” [Laughter] “Really, I can't just kiss you and love you?” She goes, “No…”

**Ann:** I know you too well: “You must have played really well today.”

**Dave:** Compared to the other guys, I played well that day; and so it's like: “Wow; it's still there”; and I'm in my 60s—right? That doesn't go away. Not all that's a bad thing; but if that drives your happiness in life, you're in trouble.

**Bob:** Yes; Voddie Baucham said, in the *Art of Marriage* [video series], “Men tend to measure based on the ballfield, the billfold, and the bedroom.”

**Dave:** Right.

**Bob:** Women have different things that they measure on. Beauty is one of those things—that for a woman, a woman's beauty is a part of what she's measuring herself against others with—there's a whole comparison thing there.

What does a woman do if she/if her body shape is different?—or if her hair doesn't measure up? I mean, how do you do if you look in the mirror and you go, “I’m just not as attractive as other women are.” Is that debilitating for a woman?

**Ann:** I remember being nine years old, and we were in Florida on vacation. I was just laying on my towel on the beach, but I was watching women go down the beach in these tiny little bikinis. I was also watching the effect that it had on the men around them/how men would watch them. I remember thinking, “I can't wait to become Barbie!”—the Barbie doll. I kept thinking, “Someday, I'm going to look like Barbie.”

I was waiting, and waiting, and waiting. [Laughter] It was this cruel thing in my mind that: “Oh, I remained Barbie’s kid sister, Skipper.” [Laughter] I'm only 5’1”; I'm little; I'm a gymnast. I was like, “Oh no! Does that mean that I’m less than?” What happened is this deep-seated insecurity started to build up, and I saw women as a competition instead of my friend/instead of my sisters alongside of me.

Because I saw them as competition, I stopped complimenting them; I stopped seeing the good in them. I only saw my own inadequacy and trying to build myself up to feel better about myself. I think that's when it can get dangerous, where Satan really has his hey-day of building walls between us, as women.
**Shannon:** Absolutely; comparison—either we feel inferior or superior—either way, we pull away from each other when we’re measuring ourselves against each other. When we start comparing, often we’re kind of oblivious to this cosmic battle that’s going on with this enemy who’s infiltrating. Especially as women, with our appearances, I think it’s really important to recognize that, if we have some voice that we’re hearing, that’s saying: “Hey, look over at her. Look at her—she’s a mess. You’ve really got it together compared to her.” That voice is never Jesus; that is always Satan.

By the same token, if we're looking over at a woman, thinking: “Oh, look at her. She really looks good in her late 40s/early 50s. Compared to her, I am just a mess.” Again, that voice is never Jesus; that is always our enemy trying to shame us or trying to get us to inflate ourselves.

What if we could just have the freedom to just be the one that God created us to be?—be comfortable in our own skin and live with a me-free perspective, not so painfully self-focused and measuring myself. You know, it’s only when we have that me-free perspective that we can celebrate our sisters; we can say: “You look beautiful today,” “I am so—I love the way God put you together: your packaging; but also your personality, and your gifts, and your talents.” That’s what we’re designed to do.

**Dave:** How do we husbands help our wives when they’re struggling with this comparison? I've never one second in my life thought she's Skipper—[Laughter]—right?—never! I mean, she's the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on. In my mind, she's Barbie times ten.

**Ann:** It's awesome that love is blind. [Laughter]

**Dave:** I mean, honestly, she would share these insecurities, especially early in our marriage; and at first, I laughed—literally out loud—like, “You think you don't look…” Then it took years; I’m like: “She really thinks this.” I know a lot of women think this. I was so naïve; I thought that, “She’s just trying to fish for a compliment.” Then I'm like: “Oh my goodness! When she looks in the mirror, she does not see what I see. I see beauty; I see an incredible woman of God. She sees all these flaws.”

I think husbands are like, “Man, what do I do?” I've said to her, “I think you're beautiful.” She says, “No, you don't.” “No, I…” “No, you don't.” So talk to the men a little bit; what do we do?—because we're the guys trying to help you see what we see, but sometimes it feels like they—we don't know what to do.

**Ann:** Social media has made it even harder, hasn't it?

**Shannon:** It has. With my own husband, I just know that he encourages me by saying: “I think you're beautiful,” “You're great; I wouldn't change a thing,”—and just assuring
me that he loves me, and that he’s happy with the way that I look. Even if I'm not happy, he's happy.

You know, I think giving that compliment; do you know how many wives never hear a compliment from their husbands? Maybe the husband is thinking wonderful things about his wife looks. I can tell you that the different times my husband will turn to me—and say: "Wow, you look really good," or "I really like that outfit," or "Did you get your haircut?"—I think those sink in deep. Every wife wants to look beautiful for her husband. Those are very/I think that's a picture of Christ and the church when a husband encourages and affirms his wife.

Bob: So, here's the question: “Should a woman care about her appearance?—or should she not care about her appearance?”

Shannon: I think the answer maybe is both. [Laughter] She should to the degree that she has the autonomy over her appearance. But you know, for a woman who's 5' 1", to be constantly looking at a woman, who's 6'—and having this angst and frustration that she's not like this other woman over there—she’s really living in bondage rather than just surrendering to her Creator, who fashioned her and made her exactly the way He wanted her to be.

Bob: You know, you didn't write about this in your book; but as I was thinking about the issue of comparison, and thinking about moms I know, the behavior of your kids and the respectability of your kids may be one of the biggest comparison traps that are going on: "What activities is your kid in?" “What grade point is your kid in?” “How’s your kid doing?” “Did your kid get expelled?” “Did your kid have to stay after school?”

Didn't you find, as your were raising your kids, that you were constantly comparing: “Are your kids behaving as well as the other kids are behaving?”

Shannon: Yes; I remember a girlfriend visiting my house for a weekend. She lived away and would come a couple of times a year with her kids. She left one weekend; and my husband was like: “Why are you so grumpy? You’re usually cheerful after Angela's been here. She's one of your best friends; why are you so grumpy?”

And I'm like, “Angela's kids are perfect.” [Laughter] The whole weekend her girls—you know, they bump into each other in the hallway and say, “Oh, sorry, Sissy,” and give each other a little hug; they sat and they did little crafts. And my boys are like shoving each other down the stairs, trying to show off in front of these little girls and play macho. I was just undone with comparing my kids to my friend's kids.

And you know what? The temptation with a friend like that is to pull away/to isolate—and to just say—“I don't want to be her friend anymore; she makes me feel inadequate.” But what a gift I would miss out on. Angela's one of my best friends; and I learn about
parenting when I'm near her; I learn about Jesus; I learn about being a godly woman by embracing that friendship.

Satan's the one who wants to drive these wedges and get us to pull away and pull back, either in inferiority or superiority. But Jesus wants us to draw in and find fellowship and unity with one another.

**Bob:** Did you feel that pressure as a mom?—

**Ann:** Absolutely.

**Bob:** —that you were watching everybody else's kids and your kids, and going, "How do mine measure up?"

**Ann:** Yes, and we didn't even have social media when our kids were little. If I were in this era, it would be much harder because there is a constant comparison on my phone.

I remember, we started our church with two other couples, and I'll never forget going over to their house. One had three girls; we had three boys. They were sitting on the floor, and they were just dialoguing with their little dolls and Barbies. My boys were wrestling and hitting; and I just thought, "What is wrong?!" I automatically thought, "It's my problem."

**Bob:** "What am I doing wrong?"

**Ann:** Exactly; so yes.

**Bob:** That's where I think we look at our kids, even as adults, and it's a reflection on us. When I was in my 20s, I was never thinking how I'm behaving is a reflection on my parents. It's the choices I was making. Yet, it's hard to let go, as moms and dads, and not think, "Those kids are a walking/talking advertisement for how I did as a parent"; right? [Laughter]

**Dave:** Picture this: a community, where people individually, we get up—and we all do this/most of us do this—we look in the mirror, usually to see how we look and present to go. Some people spend a lot of time there; I don't have any hair, so it's pretty quick. [Laughter]

I said this the other day in a sermon at my church—I said: "How many of you looked in the mirror this morning and literally said to yourself, 'Masterpiece; wow!'" Everybody started laughing, which meant the whole congregation—this is universal.
I didn't say that—I don't know if I've ever said that—but if we understood our identity in Christ: “You are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which He prepared beforehand,” Ephesians 2:10—we would have this sense—comparison’s gone now. I'm looking in the mirror—and it's not arrogance—but it is a confidence that: “I'm a child of God.” I can look in a mirror, even though the world would say I should do this or not, I could look in a mirror and have this sense of identity.

Ann: —and purpose.

Dave: —and purpose. I can walk in a room and not be controlled by the room because of comparison, but I'd walk in the room to be able to control the room and influence the room for the kingdom. I'd be giving compliments; I'd be pointing people out; I'd be the light. That all comes out of identity of no more comparison; I am going to live as a masterpiece.

Bob: We're talking about: “Whose approval are we living for?

Dave: Right.

Bob: “Whose agenda are we living for?”

I remember Elisabeth Elliot saying that, when she was dating her first husband, Jim—back when they were students at Wheaton—he said to her, “I'm pursuing an A.U.G. degree.” And she said, “What's the A.U.G. degree?” He said, “That's Approved Unto God”; because that's the approval he cared for.

The reason that we have comparison issues is because we want the approval of people, which is fleeting and fickle. You may get it today, and they may trash you tomorrow. But if you're pursuing God's approval and His agenda, one day you're going to hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” That's the approval you should be looking for.

At that point—it's not: “How do I compare to this person?”—it's: “Have I lived a life pleasing to the Master?” That's how we reframe our thinking so that we're not controlled by the comparison by Instagram, by social media, by what our friends are doing; but we are directed in our thinking toward: “How can we live lives that are pleasing and glorifying to God?”

Shannon, thank you for pressing this issue, and thinking clearly about it, and helping us orient ourselves. Thanks for writing a book that will help us go deeper on the subject.

Shannon: My pleasure. Thanks for the conversation.
Bob: I’ve got to believe that there are a lot of listeners, who are feeling what we’ve been talking about, and would be helped by Shannon’s book. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order a copy, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. The title of the book, again, *Comparison Girl: Lessons from Jesus on Me-free Living in a Measure-up World*. Order, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order: 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

We’ve got something pretty important we need to talk with our regular listeners about. David Robbins, the president of FamilyLife®, is here with me. David, over the next couple of weeks, we’re asking *FamilyLife Today* listeners to help us take advantage of a matching gift that has been made available to us, here at FamilyLife. Honestly, given the events of the last few months, this matching gift is maybe more critical than any matching-gift opportunity we’ve had since I’ve been at FamilyLife.

David: That’s true. We’ve been blessed with several generous partners, who have come alongside us to give a matching gift of $345,000. It is a matching gift that we need; we need certainly more than the three years I’ve been here. It’s a time—if we want to continue to press into the creativity in meeting people what they are walking through right now—we know the last few months have been intense for people. We know that the ripple effects in months to come, whether it be economically, or effects that have happened on people’s families and in their personal world, we want to bring the help and hope to them.

But we ourselves are a donor-supported ministry. We are feeling the crunch from this. We need people, who are able—and if this is on your heart to keep getting the gospel to people and the biblical principles around marriage and family to people—if that is on your heart, we’d invite you to give today.

Bob: We want to ask you to be as generous as you can possibly be. Let me just share with you—if you’re able to help with a donation toward this matching gift, we’d love to send you a copy of Barbara Rainey’s new book, which is called *My Heart, Ever His*, about praying more effectively during difficult, challenging times.

And if you are able to begin giving, as a monthly Legacy Partner, not only will your first Legacy Partner gift be matched, but every gift you give over the next 12 months is going to be matched, dollar for dollar, up to that total of $355,000. And we’ll send you, as a new Legacy Partner, a certificate so you can attend an upcoming *Weekend to Remember®* marriage getaway. Yes, they are coming back. We are going to be gathering again for getaways in the future. So whether it’s you, or someone you know who you’d like to gift this to, the certificate for an upcoming getaway is our gift to you when you become a monthly Legacy Partner, here at FamilyLife.

Please help us take full advantage of this matching-gift opportunity during this very critical time. Donate online at FamilyLifeToday.com, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate.
Thanks, in advance, for whatever you’re able to do in supporting the ongoing work of FamilyLife Today.

Now, tomorrow, we want to talk about the best summer camp your grandkids can attend this summer. It’s one where you, the grandparents, are the camp directors. Susan Yates is going to join us tomorrow to talk about organizing a cousins’ camp. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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