

Compare Your Life To Those Who Suffer

By Paul Jetter, Pastor of Upper Valley Community Church, Piqua, Ohio

<http://www.uvcc.info>



We have a tendency to rate the quality of our lives according to how well we stack up against others. But those who base their happiness on a comparison with others end up hopelessly unhappy. If more conveniences, longer life and more education caused persons to be happy, this would be the happiest generation that ever lived. But the fact is, we often long for the "good old days" when things were simple and families stayed together. Instead of comparing our lives with those who prosper more than we do, it would be wiser to compare our lives with those who suffer more than we do.

Some time ago, I came across the following writing called "The Cross Room." The anonymous writer understood the vanity of much of our complaining.

"The young man was at the end of his rope. Seeing no way out, he dropped to his knees in prayer. 'Lord I can't go on,' he said. 'I have too heavy a cross to bear.'"

"The Lord replied, 'My son, if you can't bear its weight, just place your cross at the door of this room. Then go in and pick out any cross you wish.'"

"The man was filled with relief. 'Thank you, Lord,' he sighed, and he did as he was told. Upon entering the room he saw many crosses, some so large the tops were not visible.

"Then he spotted a tiny cross leaning against a far wall. 'I'd like that one, Lord,' he whispered.

"And the Lord replied, 'My son, that is the cross you just brought in.'"

When I lived in Central America, many North American Christians came to visit our mission work. By North American standards, most of them were not wealthy. They had to struggle to make ends meet. Some of them had faced difficult health or personal problems. They were, for the most part, average North Americans.

We often took them to worship in an average part of the country they were visiting. Many of the houses were no larger than the size of a two-car garage. Sometimes the water ran only as fast as the two legs that carried it. Common daily wages were less than most of the visitors made in an hour. And in spite of it all, most of the people seemed genuinely happy.

For many of the tourists, it was a life-changing experience. Often I would hear them say, "When I get home, I will never complain about anything again."

Abraham Lincoln said, "A man is about as happy as he wants to be." Happiness depends not on what life throws at us, but instead on what we choose to throw back at life. In the end, contentment depends on the attitude we choose and not upon the things that we have.

That is what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote, *"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."*

God will give anyone the strength to be content - if we really want to learn to be content. In the end, being happy is our own choice.

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