



Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, He Said - She Said is a venue to share differing perspectives.

By Comparison

Mary's Perspective:

We live in a time when comparison feels as natural as breathing. We read labels at the grocery store, comparing the nutrition of one cereal to another. We shop multiple sites online to compare prices and features of the item we desire. We scroll social media and compare the pictures and lives of our friends. In some ways, this is appropriate and healthy for consumerism. Especially in challenging economic times, it is important for me to know which store has bananas on sale!

However, I find that comparison can go to a darker place rather quickly. If one doesn't have stellar self-esteem and insight to the pitfalls of social media, it would be easy to descend into a negative pit of comparison to others. I'm not as smart as she is, or as strong as he is, or I didn't take a fabulous vacation like they did. I don't measure up. My clothes aren't as high end, and I'm sure a lot more round than lean as others are. My friend is a degreed musician, and I feel more like a hack. And on and on.

While those observations may or may not be accurate, they're not the comparisons that matter! By virtue of our baptism, we are compelled to dig deeper and reach higher. We are called to continuous improvement, or forward momentum on our spiritual journey, or whatever words you want to use. In St. Paul's letter to the Romans, he puts it this way:

Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God... Romans 12:2

I read a reflection that said God doesn't compare us to others; God compares us to our former selves. That resonated with me. It doesn't matter that you're prettier or he's more confident than me, because we were each made with our own charisms and challenges and potentials. It's up to us to discern the will of God in who we become. So what matters is if the choices I make today put me in a better place, or make me a better person, than the choices I made yesterday. Am I reaching higher? Am I expanding to my potential?

If we take a sobering and honest look at ourselves, I suspect the answer to those questions is... sometimes. Yes, sometimes I make good choices that move me forward on the path of transformation. Perhaps that means I spend 10 minutes reading a positive, spiritual book or blog instead of scrolling television channels or TikToks. Perhaps that means I chose broccoli instead of donuts today.



Sometimes I make choices that aren't in keeping with making me a holier – *whole-ier*, if you will – person. Yesterday, I walked and meditated on the path. Today, I ate ice cream while flopped on the couch. Yesterday, I spent time in prayer with a friend, but today I yelled at my kids. Do these choices mean we are doomed to a life of anger, restlessness, and high cholesterol? Gosh, I hope not! It means sometimes we take opportunities and make them holy. Other times, resistance or inertia or laziness or tiredness or (fill in the excuse) get the better of us. Fortunately, God gives us lots of opportunities to right the ship. My choice this morning doesn't doom me to the same mindset this afternoon.

The point is, life is not a competition pitting us one against another. God already has the plan for who we are to become – and I suspect that plan reaches far beyond our wildest imagination. I often say, I would never have written the chapters of my life this way, but I couldn't have imagined a better story. We plan, and try, and attempt to be mindful of the details. But we also are infused with the Spirit and inspired by a greater picture, and offered millions of moments where we can choose to be better than we were yesterday. That doesn't detract from the friend's fabulous vacation, nor the model-like pictures another friend posted. I'm not going to suddenly grow taller, and I won't ever measure up to that friend (height joke, get it?) – but when my time comes and the Almighty looks at my life's story, will he find I grew along the way? That I progressed from immaturity to wisdom not just academically, but also spiritually?

Quit comparing yourself to others! Instead, look at YOU – yesterday, months ago, years ago, and moments ago. How can you keep growing forward to becoming more healthy, happy, and whole? Take it a moment at a time.

Bob's Perspective:

I firmly believe that God has a mission for each and every one of us. The success or failure of our assigned mission is based on how well we discover and nurture the gifts and talents that we've been given – and the calls we choose to accept or disregard throughout our lives. God has also given each of us the talents and abilities we need in order to accomplish that mission. God doesn't set us up to fail, rather He gives us what we need to succeed (see [Jeremiah 29:11](#)). Throughout life, we work to discover these talents and abilities – some we discover early on, while others are discovered later in life.

Our missions all vary in size, degree, and intensity – but all of them are essential to the plan. Some may become world famous in politics, science, medicine, music, or something else. Some may not be as well known. There are those that God has called to be teachers, preachers, parents, or friends. Not all are well known, not all are wealthy (from a monetary standpoint), but *all of them are essential*.



I don't know of any famous people that were just plopped down here out of the sky. They had parents. They had family, friends, teachers, benefactors, and others who helped and guided them along the path. Help came by way of guidance, moral support, financial support, educational support, and so on. The famous wouldn't have become famous if it wasn't for a great supporting cast (so to speak).

I often attend concerts and music events. I've heard some really good bands, and some that need more work. One thing that I find most disappointing, though, is when I go to see a band that I know is great, but sounds terrible because of a crummy sound technician. While we all applaud and respond to the act on the stage, much of the adulation (or loathing) is due to those behind the scenes. I recently went to see a band with a friend. A few songs in, my friend said, "I thought you said this band is good; they stink." I corrected him by saying, "No, the band is actually good, it's the technician that's killing them." Everybody's mission is important.

Comparing ourselves to others is a slippery and dangerous slide. In my martial arts training, I often heard my teacher say, "There's always someone who is stronger, faster, or tougher." He said that for a few different reasons; one reason was so that we wouldn't become arrogant and inflated. We all have gifts of various degrees and significance as far as society may be concerned. However, society's opinion isn't the opinion that counts. Each of our gifts, no matter how great or small, are significant and important.

When we embrace and nourish our mission, talents, and abilities, we have no need to compare ourselves to others. When my wife, Maureen, was in the final stages of cancer, she had some terrific doctors who gave excellent advice and treatment. But of equal importance were the hospice aids who came into the room to attend to her daily needs, who spoke kindly to her, who held her hand. I've often said that Simon of Cyrene and Veronica were there to comfort Jesus in his hour of need, but they only did it once. The hospice aids do it multiple times every day. In my mind, they were as life changing as the doctors. They took moments in time that were incredibly painful and provided respite.

Maybe being a parent or guardian isn't the most glamorous mission in the world, but I can't think of anything more important than nurturing and supporting a child. I think of our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Their true greatness is manifested in the sacrifices they made and the hardships they endured.



Many times, when Mary and I give talks to Liturgical Ministers, we say, "Believe it or not, there are people around you who admire you or wish they could more like you – and you may not know or be aware of them."

Comparing ourselves to others is unfair. In many cases, we don't know all their life circumstances, the valleys they may have endured, or the mountains they may have climbed. Like the band with the bad sound technician, we only see the end result – but we don't know all that has gone on behind the scenes.

Comparing ourselves to others is also unfair to us. This can easily lead to us inflating our ego and overestimating our talent, OR belittling and undervaluing the great gifts that each of us have been given. The end result in either case blurs and distorts our mission.

The questions we should ask are, "Am I better today than I was yesterday?" and "What can I do to be better tomorrow?"