

Set down your selfie stick and pick up this book instead! *Liking Jesus* is a must-read for anyone who feels enslaved to technology—and let's face it, don't we all? Craig Groeschel's masterful blend of storytelling, humor, and biblical truth makes this his most compelling and thought-provoking book to date. I can't think of a more relevant message for my generation as we navigate life and love in today's digital world.

—Austin, age 25

In a world where we're often drowning in demands and constantly connected to social media, Craig offers a refreshing relief from the madness. *Liking Jesus* gives you tools you can use every day to embrace life instead of being consumed by it. This book is a gift to our generation!

—Michelle, age 29

Having phones, tablets, and computers at our fingertips can be amazing, but it also causes plenty of struggles in our lives. In his new book, Craig gives us some practical suggestions to help us in the advanced, technological society in which we live. You won't hear him tell us to discard the techie toys we've grown to love, but we will be challenged to put our devices in their rightful place. Pick up this book now and end the struggle!

—Cindy, age 45

I may not be in the digital generation, but the struggle is real for me too! Craig's important book *Liking Jesus* inspired me to take a long break from social media. I deleted the apps from my phone for a few months to reset my behaviors. If you need a reset, you will definitely want to pick up *Liking Jesus*.

—Kendra, age 42

There's not a person alive who doesn't need to push the reset button in life from time to time. Craig's amazing book gets straight to the heart of the struggles we all face using humor and practical suggestions to get us on track and stay on track.

—Dana, age 36

We can all agree that technology and social media can be used in powerful ways to accomplish amazing things. We also recognize that the struggles Craig Groeschel outlines in his latest book can be equally destructive. Never fear! Craig shares with us how to use technology and social media in a positive way while maintaining authenticity and engaging in real-life relationships and opportunities to make a difference. Whether you are sixteen or sixty, Craig's humor and transparency will inspire you to apply some of the practical tips he suggests for striking a balance in our use of social media.

—Allyson, age 47

Craig Groeschel's book *Liking Jesus* is easily the best book written about being a follower of Christ on social media. If you've ever felt like everyone except you has it all together, put your smartphone on silent and start reading *Liking Jesus*.

—Jordan, age 20

Pastor Craig has a finger on my generation's pulse: many of us live vicariously through laptop screens instead of living victoriously through Christ. This book touches a nerve that didn't even exist a decade ago. If you're on social media, put down the phone and start reading *Liking Jesus*.

—Chuck, age 26

I stare at my screen and I feel less. Less than I am, less than I want to be, and less than I was created to be. Is the technology to blame? No. Do I need help balancing the power it holds for me and others? Absolutely. Enter *Liking Jesus*, a much-needed book for anyone who spends time online.

—Lori, age 45

I'll never forget when my university got Facebook years ago. It's been part of my life ever since. Reading Groeschel's book *Liking Jesus* will help you understand the place social media should have in your life. This book is definitely a must-read for Millennials.

—Jess, age 31

With the advancement of social media, it's become easier than ever to connect with people around the world. If we're not careful, these online interactions can become more of a priority than the people right around us. In *Liking Jesus*, Craig Groeschel shares great principles that helped me look beyond the gadget in my hand to fully engage with the people in my life in a way that honors both God and them. Everyone who has a smart device needs to read this book!

—Amanda, age 44

No matter your age or stage of life, you can't deny that social media is changing the world we live in, and Pastor Craig makes the connection for how it's changing each of us. Our struggles are real, and this book gives this generation timely advice on how to keep our eyes fixed on Christ instead of being trapped by a screen.

—Lucinda, age 30

It seems like my whole world is wrapped up in what my friends are doing online. I've always felt empty but didn't know why. Craig's new book, *Liking Jesus*, woke me up to admit that I really am addicted to social media and worry way too much about what other people think. Because of this book, I'm going to get closer to Jesus, and I believe it will help you too.

—McKae, age 14

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Previously published as *#Struggles*

intimacy and contentment in a selfie-centered world

Craig Groeschel 

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Liking Jesus

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This book is for everyone who refuses to
worship something that never satisfies.
May you experience more of him.

He must become greater; I must
become less (John 3:30).

CONTENTS

Introduction:	Devices and Desires	11
# 1	Recovering Contentment The Struggle with Comparisons	21
# 2	Restoring Intimacy The Struggle with “Likes”	41
# 3	Revealing Authenticity The Struggle with Control	65
# 4	Resurrecting Compassion The Struggle with Desensitization	85
# 5	Reviving Integrity The Struggle with Secret Impurity	105
# 6	Remembering Encouragement The Struggle with Constant Criticism	127
# 7	Reclaiming Worship The Struggle with Idolatry	151
# 8	Replenishing Rest The Struggle with Constant Distraction	173
Conclusion:	Keeping Technology in Its Place	193
Appendix 1:	The Ten Commandments of Using Social Media to Grow Your Faith and Share God’s Love	205
Appendix 2:	Safeguards	219
Acknowledgments	225
Notes.	227

Introduction

DEVICES AND DESIRES

Yes, I love technology, but not as much as you, you see. But I still love technology, always and forever.

Kip in *Napoleon Dynamite*

I have a love-hate relationship with technology.

Most of us are well acquainted with this feeling, but we can't quite put our finger on why. We know we're obsessed with our devices, but we don't know how to manage the challenges that come with using them, challenges that continue to multiply.

We're busy, but bored.

We're full, but empty.

We're connected, but lonelier than ever.

Our lives are filled with more activities than we thought possible, but we often feel hollow at the end of the day. We have more stuff—cars, homes, clothes, gadgets, toys—than any generation in history, yet we long for more. We're more connected online than ever, but we often feel more alone than we can describe. We know God intends for us to have something different, something better, something more. But we aren't sure how to find it.

Most everyone seems to agree that life is getting busier, crazier, and more frantic each day. We're bombarded by more information than we know how to process—news, ads, commercials, blogs, tweets, pictures, sound bites, music, games, more ads. What's crazy is that we now have more devices, programs, and apps than ever before vying to fulfill our needs. Our world abounds with countless technological breakthroughs, each one promising to make our lives better.

We're more connected online than ever, but we often feel more alone than we can describe. Can you relate?

Unquestionably many of these innovations *have* made our lives better. I can text my close friend in Australia to let him know I'm praying for him. I can share pictures of my son's birthday party with relatives thousands of miles away. I can check my retirement fund, buy groceries, or book a hotel

14 liking jesus

at the beach, all with my phone. Yet with all these upsides, I can't help but wonder about the unintended downsides of some of these conveniences that now I "can't live without."

I'm truly fascinated by how technology and social media impact our lives, our relationships, and even our faith. I don't know about you, but I have to admit I'm conflicted. I passionately love technology, using it almost nonstop every day of my life. At the same time, I absolutely can't stand it. I hate that I'm consumed with it, dependent on it, and sometimes almost unable to stop my compulsion to run to it as if it holds the answer to everything important in my life.

#CHANGEISCONSTANT

Think about how quickly the world has changed during our lifetimes. I remember when cell phones first became affordable. I wondered why anyone would want one. Sure, they sounded great if you were a doctor or on call 24/7, but I recall thinking what a burden having one would be. People could reach me at any time.

I would *never* want that.

How things have changed. Instead of not wanting a mobile phone, I almost have a panic attack if I ever leave my phone at home or the office. This may sound crazy to you (or you may know *exactly* what I'm talking about), but I don't even like leaving my phone in another room of the house when I'm home. I might miss an important call from my dentist reminding me of my next appointment or someone asking me to dedicate their new kitten to the Lord. (The answer is no.) Or a text might pop up from one of my kids upstairs wondering what's for dinner—yeah, you know, *urgent*.

I've reached a point where I *have* to have my phone nearby.

It's sick, I know.

A tool I initially avoided has become a lifeline.

Email is another story. I can remember in 1997 getting my first email

account, a free one on Juno. (Believe it or not, that first email address is still active; it's where I send everything I never want to see.) At first I wasn't sure email was for me. Sure, I could see why some people might need it for business, but I didn't have anyone I needed to talk to from computer to computer. Who does that? And why couldn't you just pick up a phone and call them? So much easier and quicker, right? You probably guessed it. Within a year I was wondering how anyone ever survived without email.

I didn't think I needed it. Then I felt I couldn't live without it.

Before long, I felt like a prisoner to it.

Thankfully, email doesn't seem to be as big (at least with my friends and colleagues) as it used to be. Now anyone I really want to hear from can reach me directly by text. I still depend on email, but I don't really like it. I always feel like I'm never caught up, and when I don't check it for more than a couple of hours on a workday, I worry about who might be awaiting some response from me.

But I can't deny the many ways technology has made our lives so much easier.

We used to have to drive to a mall to shop for clothes. I haven't done that in years. Now it's *click, click, click*, and I just bought a pair of jeans, a shirt, and some new kicks. Same with the bank. No need to drive up to the window when I can bank online.

And my smart phone takes this to a whole other level. It can log how many calories I've eaten and how many steps I've taken. It can tell me the weather forecast in Bangladesh or in Paris, show me where my twenty-year-old daughter's car is, read the Bible to me, and make an egg-salad sandwich. (Okay, it can't do that last thing. At least not yet.)

It's undeniable that technology improves our lives. The same is true of social media. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Vine, Pinterest, Tumblr, NewAppJustCreatedBySomeKidinCalifornia. Our indescribably big world has become infinitely smaller. Now we can reconnect with our best friend from the second grade whom we lost track of decades ago. We can

follow everything our favorite celebrities or professional athletes have to say, as long as it's 140 characters or less. And we can share duck-face selfies with all of our followers.

But have we reached a point where technology and social media can hurt us as much as they help us?

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Now, before you think this is going to turn into some anti-technology, boycott-social-media book, I hope you can hear the heart behind this message. I embrace everything good that our tech age offers. We can learn about virtually anything we want to. We can connect with people all over the world. And we can share our thoughts, ideas, and feelings on every subject, with everyone, anytime we want. I love what we can do with technology.

As a pastor, I also love that we can use technology to reach people with the good news of the gospel in mind-blowing ways. Most people assume the last great innovation with the Bible took place in 1455 when Gutenberg invented the printing press. But mobile devices can share more copies of God's Word now than Gutenberg ever imagined.

Our church, LifeChurch.tv, started the YouVersion Bible App back in 2008. As of today, more than 200 million people have downloaded the app for free on their mobile devices. By the grace of God, as of this moment, more than four million people are downloading the app each month. Because of the generosity of publishers and translators, our Bible App has more than a thousand versions supported in more than seven hundred languages and thousands of Bible reading plans to choose from. And if you're not a reader, that's no problem. The Bible App can even read Scripture to you.

If you are under the age of twenty-five, our ever-clicking world is, for the most part, all you've really known. You've never had to pay extra for long-distance phone calls, let alone put a quarter into a pay phone. You probably don't know most of the phone numbers you use every day because they've

always been stored in your mobile device. Cassette tapes, let alone eight-track tapes, are historical artifacts. Chances are good that you might not even know what a pager is—which is something you can thank God for!

But those around my age, forty and over, remember when you had to answer your landline phone (you do remember those, right?) without knowing who was calling. And if you tried to call someone who was already on the phone, you got a busy signal and had to try again later. If they weren't home, you couldn't leave a voice mail message. Can you imagine? How did we ever communicate?

Movies you could watch only in theaters, or years later when they made it to TV. And you had to sit by the TV to watch them. If you got up to go to the bathroom, you'd miss part of the show. We purchased music in either a vinyl or plastic form and played it on special devices now found in retro thrift stores across the nation. Computers took up half a room and were only for scientists, engineers, and accountants.

Ah, the good old days.

We had plenty of struggles and distractions back then too, as people have had throughout history. But there's something different about what we're experiencing now. Some of us are starting to sense that something is wrong,

Some of us are starting to sense that something is wrong, even if we can't identify what it is.

even if we can't identify what it is. We still have the age-old struggles with comparison, envy, jealousy, greed, lust, and a variety of addictions. Only now we have new ways to escape from those "real life" struggles even as we create new battles in the virtual worlds we inhabit.

While I can't speak for you, I'm finally willing to admit the truth. I'm tethered to my phone, addicted to my favorite apps, and hooked on social media. Technology has become central to my life. I don't really control it. It controls me. And I don't like that.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE

Intuitively, we know that technology and social media are changing us. For better or worse, they are changing how we receive information, how we relate to people, how we see ourselves, and possibly what we value and believe about God.

Without a doubt, technology is changing the way we relate to people. While technology comes with many benefits, it also has drawbacks. The term *friend* has evolved to even mean someone you've never met but who has access to your social media online. As a result, we can define friendship on our own terms based on who we follow, "Friend," or "Like." We're becoming addicted to immediate gratification even as we attempt to control how others perceive us by what we post, pin, and tweet. Real-life, unscripted communication frightens many people now, especially young adults who are used to editing their emails, texts, and captions.

Recent studies indicate we're more connected online, but less compassionate about real people's needs. We're becoming more isolated as the depth of our relationships decreases. We crave the approval of others, their attention and affirmation, but we avoid sharing about our lives below the surface. These are just a few of the issues we'll explore in this book.

REGAINING CONTROL

With these struggles in mind, we will look at eight biblical values and how they can help us restore balance in our lives and end our unhealthy over-reliance on technology.

- *Contentment*: The more we compare, the less satisfied we are. Studies show that viewing social media often leaves us feeling depressed.
- *Intimacy*: The more we interact online, the more we crave face-to-face intimacy, but the more elusive it becomes.

- *Authenticity*: The more filtered our lives become, the harder it is for us to be genuine and transparent.
- *Compassion*: The more pain we're exposed to, the more difficult it is for us to care. We become desensitized to the suffering of people around us and around the world.
- *Integrity*: We're tempted nonstop to see things that pollute the purity God desires.
- *Encouragement*: Constant online criticism encourages us to focus on the weaknesses, flaws, and failures of others instead of encouraging them.
- *Worship*: God wants to be first in our lives, but people are finding it increasingly difficult to follow Jesus in a selfie-centered world. It's time to tear all idols down.
- *Rest*: We have the world at our fingertips, and it's overwhelmingly exciting. But we need to rediscover rest and solitude.

Even if you've never tweeted, posted, uploaded, or commented, you still live in a selfie-centered world. And in your heart, you know there's more than what you see.

Even if you're not a regular user of social media, or if you already have technology under control, this book can still speak to you because we all battle spiritual distractions, discontent, and temptations. Even if you've never tweeted, posted, uploaded, or commented, you still live in a selfie-centered world. And in your heart, you know there's more than what you see.

You love technology and all it offers. But you also hate it.

I can't prove this, but I have some theories, which I'll be sharing, about why we hate social media. In a nutshell, it makes everything so much about us. We're sucked into measuring our lives by how many followers we have and who they are. We want to believe we're not the sum of the Likes our last post received, but it still feels like those little clicks matter. The odd thing is the more we focus on ourselves, the less satisfied we feel. And the more we're consumed with the things of this earth, the more we feel empty.

20 liking jesus

The reason is that we were created for more—much more. We were created not for earth but for eternity. We were created not to be Liked but to show love. We were created not to draw attention to ourselves but to give glory to God. We were created not to collect followers but to follow Christ.

I'm writing this book because it's time to be honest about our struggles and to regain control of the amazing tools that technology provides us.

It's time to put technology back in its place.

In our selfie-centered world, more than ever we need the intimacy and contentment found only in Jesus. Not only is he worth liking; he's worth following.

Are you ready?

Chapter 1

RECOVERING CONTENTMENT

The Struggle with Comparisons

Contentment is the only real wealth.

Alfred Nobel

I used to think I had a lot of friends. You know, friends at work, friends at church, friends in the neighborhood. We'd grab lunch or talk at our kids' soccer practice, after church on Sunday or when we were out working in the yard. Then after Facebook, I was able to connect with long-distance friends and people I knew from high school and college. But everyone's so busy now. I supposedly have over three hundred friends on all my pages and sites. But last week I couldn't find one friend who could meet me for coffee. I've never felt so lonely in my entire life.

Carla S.

My buddy Steve is the most competitive guy I know. He not only has to one-up anything I say or do, but then he has to tweet about it. And post a selfie with whatever award he won, with the new jacket he got, or the cool place he just visited. I used to feel really good about my life and what I've been able to achieve. But I look at Steve and feel like I can never catch up. I would never tell him—or anyone I know—this, but it makes me feel like a loser, like I'm no good at anything.

John K.

I guess you could say I have a perpetual case of buyer's remorse. Whenever I'm about to buy something, especially if it's a big purchase, I like to research it online, you know, reading customer reviews and consumer reports from the experts. Then I'll shop around and try to find the best price before I finally enter my credit card and hit "buy now." But when I get the item a few days later, I'll wish I had ordered something else. Sometimes I send it back only to start the whole process over again. It doesn't seem to matter if it's a new sweater, a food processor, something for the kids, or throw pillows for the couch. Nothing ever seems to be as good as I hoped it would be.

Sarah W.

1.1 I WANT THE FONZ

I remember the first time I was crushed by comparisons.

I was in junior high in Beaumont, Texas, and once—for about a week—I was the king of the world. I was the first kid at Marshall Middle School to get a motorized vehicle of any kind. Scooters are much more common today, but that's not the kind of machine I'm talking about. To call my fire-red moped a scooter would be very generous. I had the kind of moped that I like to think of as “the original”: it was essentially a bicycle with a motor. And that motor had a governor that wouldn't let the bike go more than twenty-five miles an hour, even downhill, but I'd imagine I was going fifty. Unfortunately, my moped didn't always have enough power to go uphill, either. It had pedals so you could add your own power to help it along.

When I rode my moped, especially on level streets, I imagined that I looked pretty cool, like one of the Sons of Anarchy on a huge Harley. In reality, especially pedaling as hard as I could uphill, I probably looked more like Nacho Libre. But whatever I looked like didn't matter, because Tiffany, a girl who lived around the corner from me, thought my moped was the coolest thing ever. I'd strap on my blue helmet (which of course matched my moped) and buzz around the corner and four blocks over to Tiffany's house to pick her up. Tiffany would hop on behind me, wrap her arms around my waist, and we'd go zipping off, probably twenty miles an hour given the added weight, her hair flying behind us. Life was good.

Until Brian Marquardt got a motorcycle.

I buzzed over to Tiffany's house, parked my sweet ride out front, and strutted up to ring her doorbell. When Tiffany answered the door, she kind of frowned at me. “Oh,” she said. “It's you. I'm not riding with you today.”

26 liking jesus

“Why not?” I asked.

Tiffany held one of her hands out in front of her and examined her perfect fingernails as she spoke. “Because,” she said, “I’m riding with Brian.”

I struggled to process this new information. “But I thought we . . . I mean . . . I have my helmet here and everything . . . and your hair is so pretty . . . and it flies out behind you . . . and . . .”

But despite the airtight case I was making, Tiffany looked at me like she felt sad for me or something, shook her head slightly, and said simply, “No.”

I just stood there awkwardly for what seemed like several minutes. “Brian Marquardt? Really?”

She looked at me dismissively and said, “Listen, I’m sorry, but you’re . . . well, you’re Richie Cunningham. I want the Fonz.”

#HurtsSoBad.

If you don’t know who Richie Cunningham or the Fonz are, #DontWorryItsOkay. I trust you can tell the difference even if you’ve never seen an episode of *Happy Days*. Even after all these years, I still think about that moment sometimes, which shows you how far we go with making comparisons. My view of who I was didn’t match up with what Tiffany saw, and I was crushed. I couldn’t believe I didn’t measure up to someone else. I was not good enough. That experience still has the potential to hurt me, even though I’m married to a wonderful woman and we are incredibly blessed.

And I know I’m not the only one who has experienced this hurt.

Recently at one of my son’s soccer games, I overheard two moms telling each other they were jealous of the things they saw each other post on social media. One mom has a full-time job, and she told her stay-at-home friend how much she envied her. “Every time I see something you’ve pinned on Pinterest, I just feel ashamed. You pour so much into your kids. They’re always smiling and happy. And when I see all the activities you do with them, all those cute crafts and delicious homemade foods, I just feel like a big failure as a mom.”

The stay-at-home mom laughed. “Are you kidding me? You have no idea how jealous I am of *you*! Every day I see you getting to do all kinds of

interesting things—constantly checking into new places, meeting new people. And you have the best wardrobe—I just love your shoes! Seriously, I’m lucky if I change out of my pajamas before noon. Sure, I love my kids, but I feel like I constantly have to come up with new things for them to do to keep them from driving me crazy. You know, ‘Mom, we’re bored!’”

Both moms are living great lives.

But they’re jealous of the things others have that they don’t have.

If you’re on social media, you know exactly what I’m talking about.

You’re sitting on your couch in your old sweats, enjoying a plate of mac and cheese and an apple on your lap, flipping through your phone, when you see a friend instagram the *amazing* dinner she’s having on yet another date. The candlelight glows beautifully and her hair looks perfect, and is that another new designer dress? The linen tablecloth is so white it almost sparkles, and the place setting looks so elegant. It’s clearly a nice restaurant overlooking the city. Her picture even has a frame—and how did she get two hundred Likes in less than an hour?

Or your buddy posts a selfie from the free-weight room at the gym, lifting his shirt to make sure you can see his ripped abs in the mirror. He’s ready for the 300 sequel while you, well, you’re at home single-handedly trying to eat Hostess out of bankruptcy.

Know what I’m talking about?

Another thing technology lets us do is measure our popularity, often with painful accuracy. Back when I was a kid, you had to estimate how unpopular you were: “Let’s see . . . No one will sit with me in the cafeteria. So far, I’ve asked three different girls to the Valentine’s dance and gotten three firm no’s. I lost the election to be hall monitor—again. Hmm . . . I guess I must not be very popular.”

Now empirical data can tell you with absolute precision where you rank: “Let’s see . . . If I have seventy-three followers, and my BFF has 423, that means she’s almost six times more popular than I am. My last three pics got twenty-nine, thirty-three, and eighteen Likes. Her last three got eighty-eight

28 liking jesus

and seventy-three—then she hit triple digits with that stupid puppy pic. #MyLifeSucks.”

It’s arguable that no generation before us has struggled with discontent as much as ours. Although we still have poverty and economic inequality, the everyday lives of most of us are filled with convenience, opportunity, and abundance—sometimes to the point of excess. Yet it doesn’t take much for us to feel as though we aren’t getting everything we deserve and to face disappointment. Add social media and what do you get? Never before have so many people had so much and felt so dissatisfied.

Some sociologists point to technology as a significant factor in our constant unhappiness. We are the first people in the history of the world who are able to see inside the lives of others in real time. We carry tiny media powerhouses in our pockets that enable us to follow other people’s lives through their check-ins, pictures, and videos.

And if what we’re seeing in the lives of others seems better, more interesting, and more fulfilling than our own lives, we feel like we’re missing out. Of course, that feed we’re watching may not reflect reality. Most people put their best foot forward, showing only the things they want others to see. As my close friend and fellow pastor Steven Furtick explains, “We compare our behind-the-scenes with other people’s highlight reels.” Photoshopped and cropped, filtered and edited, what we see online makes our own reality seem dingy and dull.

Never before have so many people had so much and felt so dissatisfied.

No wonder we often feel so dissatisfied.

No matter how much we have, it can’t compare to what others appear to have.

1.2 #GETREAL

This dissatisfaction isn't just something that only I deal with. A recent study sought to quantify how exposure to social media affects people's moods. Researchers at two universities tracked students who were regular Facebook users over two weeks by having them complete life-satisfaction surveys five times a day.¹ After students spent time on Facebook, their surveys showed them to be considerably less satisfied and more critical of their own lives than they were before the Facebook time. Results also indicated that more than one third of the test subjects felt "significantly worse" about themselves the more time they spent on Facebook. Why? We aren't designed by God to seek the image of others; we are designed to seek him. When we spend time on social media focusing on how well others present their lives, we are, to use one of my father's baseball analogies, taking our eye off the ball.

Since this is a very real issue for many of us, I'd like to give you a chance to #GetReal with me. Let's take a few minutes to expose any discontent—which is another way of saying envy—that you might be harboring in your heart. We'll look at three categories, and I want you to be gut-level honest if you see yourself in any of them.

First, do you battle with material and *financial envy*? Here's how you can tell if you do: when a friend tweets about their new car, do you immediately picture your piece-of-junk car that barely starts? Or let's say someone from work posts a picture from the beach. Is your first thought, "Wait . . . isn't this their second beach trip already this year?" (But who's counting, right?) Or let's say your friend posts another #OOTD (outfit of the day), and you start scrolling through her posts, and it dawns on you—this girl owns more kinds of shoes than Zappos carries? Be honest: do you battle with material and financial discontent?

Second, do you harbor *relational envy*? When all your friends' photos from their dinner out together start showing up in your feed—all at the same time—do you wonder, "How come no one invited me?" Maybe you're not

30 liking jesus

in a relationship, and you want to be, and it's springtime, and it seems like everyone you know is getting married. Part of you wants to be happy for your friends because you love them. But if you're honest, it also kind of hurts to see them all pairing off and smiling with their new spouses. Do you feel left out, overlooked, unwanted?

It could be you're working two jobs, exhausted with struggling to keep your head above water and feeling sad that you can't give your kids as much time and attention as you want to. And you have that one friend who always seems to be with their kids at the game, or taking them to the lake or to the amusement park (again), or even just doing simple things like reading to them at bedtime. Instead of feeling happy for your friend, do you feel guilty about all the things you can't do with your kids? If you respond in any of these ways, let's call your attitude what it is: relational envy.

Finally, maybe you battle with *circumstantial envy*. You see what other people are doing, where they're working, how they're living. Do you then look at your life, your circumstances, and wonder why you don't have the things they have or get to do the things they're doing? Do you think to yourself, "I really thought by this age I'd be more successful—or at least doing something I enjoy"?

Perhaps you want to have a baby, but you don't see that happening anytime soon. Then it seems like every time you look at your feed, you see someone else posting collages of their pregnancy months or their "gender reveal party." Do you think, "Well, yippedeedoo! Their cake was pink inside!"? If you do, you're probably green with envy.

1.3 ACHIEVE, CONQUER, ACCUMULATE

If I'm honest, circumstantial envy is harder for me than the other two (financial and relational). Since I'm a pastor, I work weekends, both Saturday and Sunday. So when I'm "on," most of my friends and church members are "off." I can barely look at social media on the weekends because all I see are

people at football games, or playing Frisbee, or riding bikes, or jumping waves on Sea-Doos. It makes me crazy jealous. I just have to tell myself, “Well, I guess I’ll just save the world for the glory of God while everyone else is out having fun doing all that stupid stuff.” But the truth is, telling myself that doesn’t make me feel any better.

Chuck Swindoll is credited with saying, “Life is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you respond.” Of course, most of us probably feel like life is exactly the opposite. We live as though it’s 90 percent (or more) what happens to us. And sometimes we feel like our response doesn’t make any difference at all.

I can’t think of anyone in history who had a better understanding of managing his responses than the apostle Paul. When he was in a prison in Rome, chained twenty-four hours a day to a guard (they took shifts), Paul wrote these words: “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 all this through [Christ] who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:12–13).

Let’s break that statement down. Paul is essentially saying, “I’ve gone without the things that I need before. But I’ve also had times when I had more than enough. Life happens in seasons. I’ve had good seasons when everything was going well, and I’ve had hard ones when nothing went my way. But in all of that living, I’ve learned that there’s one secret to being content, no matter what my circumstances happen to be at the time. And that secret is that I can

You will battle with discontent until you let Christ be all that you need.

do anything and everything not by my power but through Christ. He’s the one who gives me the strength to handle anything that comes my way.”

Don’t miss this truth. You will battle with discontent until you let Christ be all that you need. Don’t believe me? Then prove me wrong. Chase after everything you’ve ever wanted. Go ahead. I dare you. I double-dog dare you. Go earn as much money as you can.

32 liking jesus

Buy whatever you want. Achieve, conquer, accumulate, repeat. Sound familiar? Maybe you've already tried some of these things, or at least known someone else who has. None of it works.

At the end of the day, every day, you'll still feel empty.

1.4 ALL YOU NEED

Maybe you're not really into material things. Maybe the party scene is more your thing. Then try that. Go party your brains out. Seek every thrill, pursue every high, get every buzz you can find. Guess what? When the party's over and everyone's gone home and that killer hangover finally starts to fade, there you'll be, right back where you started, still longing for more.

Maybe you're more of a people person. You just haven't found the right person who meets all your needs. So keep trying. Find a new boyfriend or girlfriend. If that person doesn't work out, try another. If someone else still doesn't scratch your itch, maybe just one person isn't enough. Trade out all of your old friends for new ones. Get popular. (Lots of books and websites promise to teach you how.) Who knows? Maybe you can even become famous! But after everybody leaves and the lights go down, it'll be just you again, alone, still lonely, still longing.

If you're going to try any or all of these things, be sure you capture every moment. Get the biggest data plan you can and collect Wi-Fi passwords at every stop. Check in at all the cool places. Share every inspirational thought you have, and every joke. Post lots of photos and videos too, of course. Never stop sharing the show as you go. Post everything online for the whole world to see. Pile up Likes and Friends and followers until it's all just one frenzied blur. Hustle until your real life exceeds your dreams. And even when you've reached the summit, I can guarantee you one thing: your longing for more will *never* stop.

Why not? Because you were created for eternity, not for this world as we know it. Nothing on earth can ever satisfy the spiritual longing you feel inside, even if you could collect it all.

Nothing.

I remember when I was a teenager, years before I knew Christ, hearing people say, “God makes a Christ-shaped void inside every person.” That saying annoyed me. I did not understand what they were talking about. But then one day I learned for myself why they said it: because it is absolutely true. Nothing outside of a living relationship with Christ can ever fill the emptiness inside.

You know you’ve been searching. I’m here to tell you that Christ is what you’re searching for. He is your source. He is your strength. He is your sustainer. He is your joy. He is your contentment. He is your all in all.

When Christ is all you have, you’ll finally realize that Christ is all you need.

He’s everything that matters.

If you keep searching, comparing, and envying, you’ll never have enough. So let’s look at three ways we can help ourselves battle the sin of envying, keeping in mind that we’ll need Christ’s strength to win the war.

When Christ is all you have, you’ll finally realize that Christ is all you need.

1.5 BEYOND COMPARE

How can we overcome the strong human drive to compare? Let’s look at the first way to combat envy by turning to the Bible: “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Cor. 10:12).

Pastor Andy Stanley puts this more simply than anyone I know: “There is no win in comparisons.” We need to kill our comparisons because they are more serious than most of us realize. Let’s look at another passage, and hopefully you’ll see what I mean: “But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:14–16).

34 liking jesus

Notice that *wisdom* is in quotes because James was being sarcastic; these attitudes are not wise. But also notice this: envy is demonic. Where envy is, there is disorder. Where envy is, there is *every* evil practice. Look at these words. Demonic? Every evil practice? This is serious. Envy is not from heaven. It's earthly. It's unspiritual. It's demonic. I don't want to participate in activities that the Bible calls demonic. I'm sure you don't either. And James doesn't say, "Probably it would be a good idea if you considered being careful about envy." He says that with envy there is evil.

**Envy is not from heaven.
It's earthly. It's unspiritual.
It's demonic.**

Still not convinced? What about the Ten Commandments? You know, God's Top Ten that includes "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17)? Not your neighbors' house. Not your friend's spouse. Not your coworker's car. Nothing and no one belonging to someone else. Not even their cat. (Well, now I'm putting my own interpretation on the Bible. It doesn't say anything bad about cats.)

Envy isn't just unhealthy. In God's eyes, it's downright sinful. We need to kill our comparisons, because comparing ourselves with others is not wise.

Killing comparisons looks different in different people's lives. How can you be more honest with yourself about the things that push your envy button? Maybe it's time to take a break from social media, especially if it's feeding the sin of envy in your life. I'm not saying you have to throw your phone away or cancel Wi-Fi at home. But at the very least, if you notice that you respond with envy to certain people's posts, you should hide them from your feed. Let me be clear: I believe it's best to just avoid the envy button completely. We'll talk more about unplugging in chapter 8 when we consider the topic of rest.

But if you're not willing to unplug for a while to combat envy, let me offer some other suggestions and take this discussion beyond social media. When you start flipping through the latest catalog that comes into your home, do you find yourself always wanting something more? You may need to cancel or just throw out those beautiful catalogs. Or how many shopping apps do you have on your phone? Are you addicted? Maybe you should delete those. You might need

to stop watching HGTV if you just can't help sinning every time a show tours someone's palatial home while you watch from your pathetic little apartment.

Maybe you need to stop going to the boat show, or the car show, or the hunting show, or whatever show that's causing you to spend more time than you know you should wishing for something you don't have. It's time to kill comparisons and use that time for something else.

Maybe you need to stop looking at certain friends' Facebook posts because you tend to end up feeling jealous, envious, or covetous, or inadequate, unsatisfied, and generally discontent with your life when you see all that they appear to have. Why? Because envy is a wildfire, always consuming and never quenched. It's demonic. It causes "every evil practice" to lurk inside you, including lust, that longing for something more that is insatiable.

The first step in combatting envy is to consider what you can and should give up. Just choose one thing to *stop* doing today. For example, stop checking your Facebook feed before bed. Don't post a picture of the delicious plate of food you've been served at a restaurant. Stop reciprocating with everyone who follows you on LinkedIn, especially if you don't know them. Practice stopping that behavior over and over. Ask others around you to help you stop. Commit to yourself and to them that you will stop. The next step will show you how you can help yourself stop, which will make your commitment easier to keep.

1.6 SHOT TO THE HEART

Killing comparisons doesn't mean just identifying the bad influences in your life and cleaning them out. The second practical thing you can do to kill comparisons is to celebrate other people's successes. When you see someone else being blessed in a way that you hope to be blessed, celebrating with them can purify the intentions of your heart.

Did someone else get the job you wanted? Try this prayer: "God, you must have had a reason to bless them. Thank you, Father, for your blessings in that person's life." When you see someone else get that thing you've always

wanted, try thanking God instead of wallowing in jealousy: “God, thank you so much that your hand of blessing is on them. Please continue blessing them.” Celebration sends a kill shot right to the heart of envy.

I wrote this book during a very busy season in my life. I was really looking forward to the next opportunity for my family to take a vacation, and I started seeing pictures online from a couple I know who were traveling overseas. Dublin, Ireland. Edinburgh, Scotland. Topped off by snowmobiling. Across a glacier. In Iceland. And this was all on the same trip! “Thank you, Father, that they’re having such a great time,” I prayed. “This trip is such a big blessing to them.” Suffocate the flames of envy with a blanket of gratitude.

Not celebrating the blessings of others also affects how God works through our lives. Back here in my normal, everyday life, I’m convinced that when I can’t celebrate for others, I actually limit what God

Celebration sends a kill shot right to the heart of envy.

wants to do through me. Our church is almost twenty years old. Throughout those years, we’ve been blessed with seeing the number of people we’re able to reach expand—except for two seasons. When I look back on those periods when we weren’t growing, I recognize that both times I was carrying significant sin in my heart.

Not only were we not reaching new people in one of those seasons, we were actually losing people. At the time, our church had two locations, and on Sundays I used to drive back and forth between them to preach. On that drive, I passed a small church. It was obviously struggling and had only eight to ten cars in the parking lot each week. I would pray for them sometimes, something like, “Father, bless this little church. Please help them find their stride.” But to be honest, even as I was praying that with my lips, in my heart I felt proud. I was thinking, “Whew! I’m sure glad our church isn’t going through that.” It was a sick kind of pride that involved carefully counting their cars every time I passed by.

This isn’t the sort of thing I say often, but I really believe God spoke to me. Now, just to be clear, I’m not saying I heard the audible voice of God booming

in my car. But I can honestly say that I felt a sort of presence, a power that filled my car, and I clearly heard these words inside my head spoken by a voice that wasn't my own: "Would you really be happy if I blessed them? And if I blessed them more than I am blessing you?"

I realized that my honest answers to those questions would not honor God. "Nope. That would not really make me happy. Bless them a lot, God. Just please don't bless them as much as you're blessing our church." I felt sick in the pit of my stomach when I saw that my heart was impure. My heart wasn't about building God's kingdom; it was more about building my own kingdom. And that is a very dangerous place for a pastor to be.

I started praying about it right then and turned it over and over in my mind for several days. Then I repented sincerely. I cried out, "God, I really want to come to a place where I want you to bless other churches more than you're blessing ours." God honored that prayer and changed my heart so that my life became completely about his kingdom again, and then he blessed our church again with growth.

The next thing I'm going to say, I can't prove. It's not in the Bible, so take it with a grain of salt. But in my heart, I live this as if it's true: perhaps the reason God is not blessing you with something you want is because you're not celebrating God's blessings in someone else's life. Just as I don't want to take God's blessings in my life for granted, I want to always celebrate his blessings in the lives of others, because we're told to "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom. 12:15). I don't want my life to be about me. Jesus calls us to something better, something higher.

1.7 A CONTINUAL FEAST

A third way to kill comparisons is to cultivate gratitude. I read an excellent definition of envy that went something like this: envy is resenting God's goodness in other people's lives and ignoring God's goodness in your own life. That's powerful stuff.

38 liking jesus

Speaking of powerful, here's another verse on this topic that I just love: Proverbs 15:15 says, "For the despondent, every day brings trouble" (NLT).

All of us know someone like this. (You might even be a bit like this.)

- "Man, I can just tell today's gonna be a bad day."
- "Well, isn't that just great! It's going to rain all day tomorrow."
- "Just checked the markets. The economy's in the toilet for sure."
- "My kids are always so difficult. Every day it's the same thing."
- "I sure do hate this car. It's going to give out any day now. I can feel it."

The despondent see every single day bringing more trouble. They can't see the blessings because their glass is always half-empty.

But Proverbs 15:15 doesn't end there. That's only the first half. The second half says, "For the happy heart, life is a continual feast" (NLT).

Are people who start the day miserable living in the same day as people with a happy heart? Of course they are! The difference is in what they're looking for. Despondent people are looking for trouble—and they find it. People with a happy heart are looking for God's goodness—and they find it!

If you want to look for the bad in this world, you will certainly find plenty. Trouble's not hard to find. But have you considered looking for the good? There is just as much of it, if not more. If you'll just look for the blessings of God, you'll find them!

"For the happy heart, life is a continual feast."

Every time I read this verse, I am reminded of my dad. Of all the things I admire about my dad—and there are a lot—the thing I admire most is his positive perspective on life. Every time I call my dad, he says the same thing.

"Hey, Dad, how's it going?"

"Son, life is good!"

Despondent people are looking for trouble—and they find it. People with a happy heart are looking for God's goodness—and they find it!

This is another of those things that, when I was younger, used to kind of annoy me. My dad said this so often, I thought it was automatic, just something he said.

I remember when he was battling to recover from a serious stroke that could have taken his life. Very concerned, I asked him, “Hey, Dad, how you doing?”

Without missing a beat, he answered, “Oh . . . (*cough, cough*) life is good.”

“It doesn’t sound good, Dad!”

“What? No, it *is* good.”

One day I finally asked him about it. I said, “Dad, do you realize that you always say, ‘Life is good,’ no matter what’s going on? No matter how you’re really doing?”

A funny thing about my dad is that he loves to communicate in baseball terms. For example, if I’m preaching, he says I’m “on the mound.” Then instead of saying, “Preach well,” he says, “Keep ’em low and inside.” When I was surprised that he was so positive even though he had significant stroke-related issues, he said, “Well, Craig, I say that life is good because it’s true. Son, you know I could have died. The way I see it, I’m living in extra innings right now. It’s true. Life is good.”

I love that! My dad says “life is good” because he genuinely believes it is, no matter what. It’s in his heart. And he’s right!

It’s all about perspective.

“For the happy heart, life is a continual feast.”

Some people believe that Solomon wasn’t just the richest man of his time but that accounting for things like inflation, resource distribution, and population density, Solomon was the richest man of all time. That guy said this: “Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don’t have” (Eccl. 6:9 NLT).

You want to have a nonstop party? Enjoy what God has given you, instead of longing for what you don’t have. Be thankful for what God has given you, instead of resenting other peoples’ Instagrams: “Oh, I wish I had their life!” Guess what? They’re longing for your life in ways you don’t even know about!

The next time you feel tempted to say, “I hate my stupid car,” try praying instead, “Thank you, Lord, that I have a car that runs. I’m grateful that I’m blessed to be in the 8 percent of all people in the world who own a car. Thank you, God, for my wonderful car!”

When you are tempted to say, “I wish I had a bigger house,” try praying this instead: “Thank you, Lord, that I have a roof over my head—and indoor plumbing that works!” Do you realize that half of the people in the world don’t have that? Clean, running water inside their house? That’s amazing! It’s a significant blessing from God, and we should and can be grateful to have it.

Are you tempted to complain, “My life is so crazy right now. I’m just so busy”? Why is your life so busy? Because you have a family? Because you have children? Because your healthy children are involved in activities? With friends they enjoy? Because you have a thriving community that you’re contributing to? Try praying instead, “Thank you, God, that I have so many opportunities to bless other people. Thank you for giving my life significance. I’m so grateful that you have given me so many people in my life that I care about.”

With Christ’s help, let’s kill comparisons. Envy is earthly and unspiritual. It’s demonic. Every evil practice is bound up in envy. Instead, let’s celebrate the blessings God gives to others. Social media should be a place to see what’s happening in the lives of those you love, not a place that makes you envious. Let’s rejoice with those who rejoice. Let’s cultivate gratitude.

Let’s worship our God not because he gives us everything we want but because he is worthy of our praise. Let’s worship him because we’ve learned the secret of being content, whether we’re living in plenty or living in want. That secret is that we can do all things through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who gives us strength.

Because Jesus is all we need, let’s pursue him with our whole hearts. Let’s not just *like* him; let’s *love* him.

Because only in him will we find true joy and true contentment.

Only he is life, and only he truly satisfies.