



EXCERPT



Mythical Me *Finding Freedom from Constant Comparison*

October 22, 2019 | \$16, 152 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4395-4

Do you ever find yourself stuck in the comparison trap? Speaker and author Richella Parham knows what this feels like, often finding herself admiring one person's achievements, someone else's personality, another's skills, yet another's relationships or appearance. While there are no easy answers, Parham helps readers pick up practices that help us walk in the freedom of Christ with confidence in ourselves.

When Comparison Steals Your Joy

Why is comparison such a handy tool to pick up? Why is comparing ourselves with others so easy to do? Why does someone like me fall naturally into comparing herself to others?

While my physical illness contains a clue to my tendency to compare, I think another part of the answer can be found in the way I was taught as a child. My parents and teachers encouraged me to act a certain way or to learn a skill by comparing my actions to those of others. I heard things like:

- "Sit still like your sister."
- "Color inside the lines like Susie."
- "Throw the ball like Bobby."

Sometimes the directions were given in frustration or exasperation, but sometimes they were simply practical. Often the easiest way to explain things to a child is to provide a picture of a behavior by pointing out what another person is doing.

Those instructions arose from good intentions, at least in my case. After all, my loving parents and kind teachers wanted to inspire me. They were encouraging me to learn or improve particular behaviors or actions, and they pointed to the behaviors or actions of others as pictures of what I might aspire to.

In each of those instances, another person's behavior or action was held up as the ideal. My job, as I understood it, was to conform as closely as possible to those norms. The strategy worked. I learned to sit still, to color inside the lines, to throw the ball. Comparison was a handy tool. But it left an unintended legacy.

To be fair, I imagine that my parents and teachers sometimes used me as the exemplar as well. Maybe they said things like, "Pay close attention like Richella" or "Work hard on your homework like Richella," but those things didn't register with me.

What stuck were all the ways I didn't measure up.

Ideal conditions are hard to specify for many aspects of life, aren't they? Perhaps I should be able to walk a mile in less than twenty minutes or type at least sixty words a minute, but what should I think about my appearance? How should I feel about my personality? How can I assess my gifts and talents? And what about relationships? Conflicts? Big decisions?

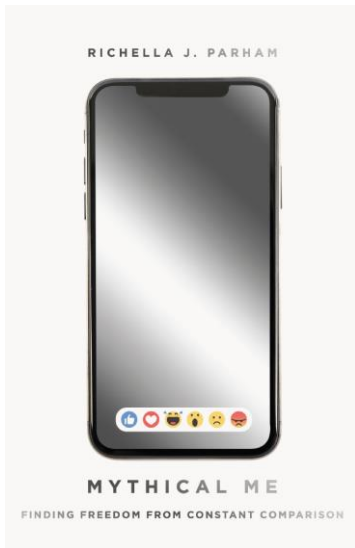
Faced with questions like those, I used the familiar tool of comparing myself to others. But the method that served me well as I was developing skills now left a lot to be desired. And as time went on, that tool became easier and easier to wield.



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Even as our twenty-first-century technology broadens our horizons, it gives us exponentially greater access to objects of comparison. With a simple click we can read friends' and strangers' Facebook statuses, see their photographs on Instagram, or peruse their Pinterest boards. While those platforms can be used for inspiration and for building community, they also provide the means for us to compare ourselves ever more ruthlessly to what others post and pin. And since each of those programs is available as a handy app for our smartphones, we carry our comparison toolboxes with us at all times.

Maureen O'Connor wrote "The Six Major Anxieties of Social Media" for *New York Magazine*, including a Facebook fear of personal failure, a Twitter fear of looking dumb, an Instagram fear of missing out, and a Pinterest fear of domestic inadequacy. In an article for *Relevant* magazine, in which he coined the term "obsessive comparison disorder," Paul Angone wrote, "Comparison has always been around. But now with the internet and social media it's taken our comparison problem to global heights. . . . We now have the opportunity to compare ourselves to everyone. Every. Single. Day."

Whether comparison is the thief of joy or simply can be a thief of joy when wrongly used, a lot of our joy is being stolen.

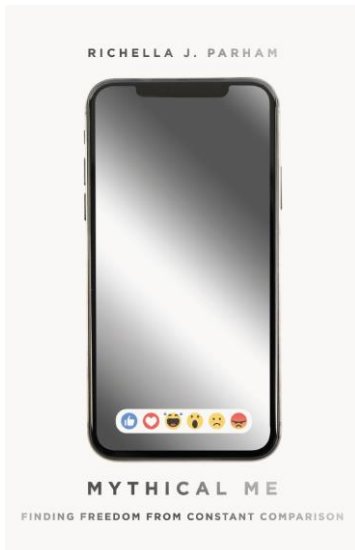
—From chapter 2, "What Is Comparison and Why Do We Do It?"



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I Wish I Could Be More Like _____?

*"Mythical Me is a sorely needed corrective to our contemporary culture's obsession with constantly adjusting our personal and public image to fit hopelessly impossible standards. The wonderful news is that *Mythical Me* not only provides an accurate diagnosis of these soul-crushing habit patterns, it also guides us step by step into transformative ways of living and thinking that are eminently practical and life giving. I recommend it highly."*

-Richard J. Foster, founder of Renovaré, author of *Celebration of Discipline*

"It's so easy to say, 'Don't compare yourself to other people,' but how do you practically live out that simple advice? How do you let go of the exhausting experience of thinking you have to be better than the parade of perfect people online? How do you let go of the mythical me who never makes mistakes? Richella has done the hard work of answering those questions and many more in a beautiful quest to wrestle comparison to the ground. I needed this wonderful book, and if comparison has ever prevented you from experiencing the joy of your own life, you might too."

-Jon Acuff, author of *Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done*

"Finally, a book that is not just a slew of pithy but powerless platitudes urging us to bootstrap ourselves out of a habit that leaves us crushed under the twin weights of not enough or less than; instead, it is a practical path illuminated by God's Word that actually leads us toward contentment and a healthier Christ-centered mindset."

-Robin Dance, author of *For All Who Wander: Why Knowing God Is Better Than Knowing It All*

"For years I've been teaching people that things don't have to be perfect to be beautiful. That applies to people too, but often we allow our lack of perfection to cripple us, never realizing the beauty we possess as beloved children of God. We end up comparing ourselves to each other relentlessly, looking for the security that could already be ours if we learned to embrace the love of God and one another. In sharing her own struggles and the wisdom she's discovered, Richella points the way out of the comparison trap."

-Myquillyn Smith, author of *Cozy Minimalist Home*

*"For years Richella Parham has been a kind and consistent voice of truth in my own life. Now her hard-won wisdom is available to anyone who struggles with comparison, inviting readers to find hope and healing in the circle of Trinitarian community. *Mythical Me* is a thoughtful blend of personal story and solid theology, and I'm grateful to Richella for writing it."*

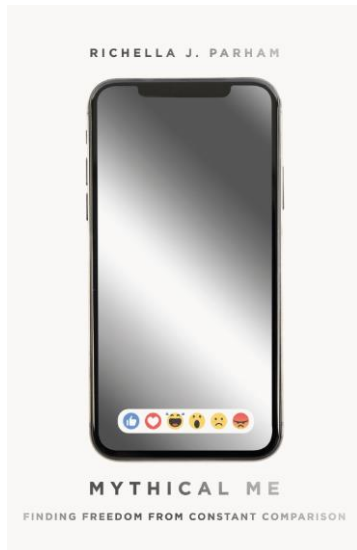
-Emily P. Freeman, author of *Simply Tuesday* and *The Next Right Thing*



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"Have you wrestled with the thought, I wish I could be more like . . . ? In this beautifully written, deeply personal, much-needed book, Richella Parham plumbs the depths of one of the most subtle, soul-deadening practices of our age: constantly comparing ourselves with others. In an age of compulsive comparison disorder, this book is a must-read. If you feel stuck in the steel trap of comparison and long not only for freedom but for a way to embrace the fearfully and wonderfully made person God has created you to be, this is the book for you."

-James Bryan Smith, author of *The Good and Beautiful God*

"With the rise of social media, we are not only tempted to compare ourselves to those around us, but also to the millions of people online that we have never met in real life. This type of exponential comparison can seriously damage our souls. If you have ever struggled with comparison (and who hasn't, right?) then this book is for you! In it, Richella unpacks the comparison trap we all find ourselves in, helps us better understand who we are in Christ, and offers practical solutions for daily contentment and joy."

-Traci Hutcherson, lifestyle blogger at *Beneath My Heart*

"In *Mythical Me*, Richella Parham offers practical, next-step wisdom, all rooted in rich theological insight and offered with companionable, encouraging candor. If you're looking for some empty jargon and the illusion of a quick, easy fix, this book is not for you. But if you're finally ready to embark upon the slow, difficult, beautiful journey toward becoming yourself, you won't find a better guide."

-Carolyn Arends, author, and Renovaré director of education

"The beautifully and poignantly written book, *Mythical Me*, is full of helpful, practical advice to meet comparison where it exists and conquer those feelings of inadequacy. I applaud Richella for her transparency, honesty, and gentle approach to this overwhelming challenge we all face."

-KariAnne Wood, author of *So Close to Amazing*

"Richella Parham, if we allow her, guides us deep down into the caverns of our hearts where we each have the opportunity to stare ourselves in the face. As we stare, we see how much our tendency to compare ourselves to others corrupts us all. Comparison isolates and malforms us. But Parham doesn't leave us stranded in a cavern. She skillfully guides us toward the path of healing and wholeness. I am astounded by her vulnerability and her wisdom. What a phenomenal guide she is—take and read!"

-Marlena Graves, author of *A Beautiful Disaster*



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Richella Parham is a writer, speaker, and the author of *A Spiritual Formation Primer*. She serves as vice-chair on the board of directors at Renovaré, and she is also the worship coordinator at The Gathering Church and a member of the Redbud Writers Guild. Richella lives in Durham, North Carolina, with her husband, Jack. Visit her website and read her blog at impartinggrace.com. Follow her on Twitter: @richellaparham.

Who Are You Comparing Yourself To?

What motivated you to write *Mythical Me*?

Richella Parham: In a nutshell, I wrote the book I wish I'd had years ago. I've struggled with comparison for most of my life. Constantly comparing myself to other people caused me real distress, including insecurity, anxiety, and problems with relationships. When I searched for resources to overcome it, nothing I found helped me. So my motivation was to create a resource that would offer a fresh perspective on the problem of comparison and provide real help to people trying to escape the comparison trap.

What is the main message in *Mythical Me*?

Richella: We are prone to comparing ourselves to other people. Some of us may even go so far as to create a Mythical Composite Woman or Man—a hypothetical person possessing the best qualities of all the people we admire. We compare ourselves to our custom-made mythical person, always coming up short. This constant comparison is the thief of joy.

How does your book help us fight the comparison trap?

Richella: *Mythical Me* explores the ways in which comparison robs us of joy by disrupting vital connections in our lives. The book outlines a path to a life designed and modeled by the Trinity—a life of confidence, compassion, and connection.

Mythical Me is distinctive in that it combines biblical insight and solid theology with deeply personal stories to consider the issue of comparison. The book uncovers the myths comparison tempts us to believe, reveals truths to replace those myths, and lays out a path for taking hold of those truths.

What do you hope readers take away from *Mythical Me*?

- A greater understanding of the issue of comparison, including good and bad forms of comparison. It's not helpful to lump all kinds of comparison into one category.
- An understanding of the insecurity that underlies comparison, and knowledge and strategies to overcome it
- Greater understanding of the nature of God and assurance of God's love for them
- Inspiration to embrace a life of confidence, compassion, and community



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