

### **Warm-up Question or Activity**

Choose one and pursue it as a group.

1. Activity – keep it fun.

Go around the group with each person answering one of these questions. Start with one of the less-talkative members and let them pick first.

- My best friend growing up was \_\_\_\_\_. Why?
- My best quick tip to an engaged or newly married couple would be to \_\_\_\_\_. Why?
- I struggle in connecting with my neighbors for Christian discipleship because \_\_\_\_\_. Why?
- The last time I invited a non-family member to church was \_\_\_\_\_. Tell us about that.
- The worst or most forgettable car/truck I ever had was a \_\_\_\_\_. Tell us more about that.
- My best or favorite or most memorable car/truck was a \_\_\_\_\_. Tell us more about that.
- I've picked a life verse – it is \_\_\_\_\_. Share why it means so much to you.
- When I have an opportunity to tell a (clean) joke, the one I like telling is: \_\_\_\_\_.
- It helps keep me humble to tell funny/embarrassing stories about myself. Here's one: \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Question - This one takes a little thought. Give everyone a moment to answer.

- To learn something new about one another - think of a glorious moment in your life that you can share with the group. A sports victory? An academic honor? A job promotion? Being recognized or selected for a role? Some other achievement or recognition? Share those moments as a group.

### **Can You Relate?**

Set in the toxic context of “the comparison game,” this week’s Scripture confronts us with the challenging question of whether we really value Jesus as highly as his Father does.

1. About 26 days into the excitement of having resumed work on rebuilding the temple, some men were pouring toxic discouragement on the effort by comparing this second temple to the splendor of Solomon’s temple. Ezra tells us:

*“... men who had seen [Solomon’s temple] wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this [temple] being laid....” (Ezra 3:12)*

Built with Solomon’s vast resources, the first temple was adorned in gold and splendor. And it housed the Ark of the Covenant. Not so with this, more modest, second temple.

- **Why is the human mind so relentlessly drawn to comparison?**
  - In your experience, is it about the same for men and women? How does it differ?
- **Why is comparison so toxic?**
- **Where do you experience this “comparison game” in your life?** Tell us about that.

2. An exercise for the group.

- Along the left edge of a sheet of paper, write down these five categories:
  - “Landscaping”
  - “Size”
  - “\$\$ Value”
  - “Cars in the garage”
  - “Quality/Furnishings/Job or apparent income of the owner”
- Then, thinking of the two homes nearest your own, write down alongside each of those five categories the number 1, 2, or 3 to rank yours compared to the other two.

Q#2, continued...

Look over those rankings. **Are you feeling some pain?** A hole in your chest or some faint stress or knot in your gut? If so, why?

**If not, tell us about another area of your life where you have experienced the toxic effect of comparison?** When are you most susceptible to being drawn into the "comparison game"? Kids? Colleges? Vacations? Body shape? Hair? Social media followers? Professional achievements? Rewards at work?

3. Amid earthly comparisons, God calls us to keep our eyes on Jesus. This second temple was not as outwardly impressive as Solomon's, but it had a greater glory: the Messiah Himself.

*"I own all the gold and silver in the world, and I could cover this temple with gold if I wanted to. But I'm going to do something better. Instead of **gold**, I'm going to fill this temple with **glory**, the glory of My Son."* (paraphrase of Haggai 2:7-9)

Close your eyes. Imagine if, after this meeting, you could either:

- (1) go home and be given a Lotto ticket that is certain to win you \$20 million in cash; OR
- (2) go to a nearby park bench for a certain, palpable face-to-face, one-on-one visit with Jesus.

Where would you go? Be honest. Home? Or to the park?

### Live It Out

**Let's go into this week with a keen awareness of worldly comparisons or earthly glory that turn our eyes away from the glory of Jesus. Day by day. Step by step. Moment by moment.**

- What do you want to take away from this discussion? How can you apply or build upon it in the weeks or months ahead? Write down your thoughts on the paper provided.
- SOAPS quiet-time journaling is a good starting point for living with more intentionality. This week, consider pledging with one of us to each doing SOAPS quiet time for seven days in a row, lifting one another up in prayer, and texting one another for accountability and support as we go through it.
- Try this experiment in starting off your day with a palpable awareness of your relentless struggle to keep God first in your life.
  - **How?** At least one day this week, **before you get out of bed** (making God your first priority of the morning), pick up your phone or tablet and start your day by playing *What a Beautiful Name* by Hillsong. Absorb the lyrics. Play them back in your head throughout the day. You can find it easily at this link (<https://youtu.be/r5L6QIAH3L4>) or by scanning the QR Code:
  - **Report back** next time on how that went.



**Encourage members of the group to commit time to praying for one another, encouraging and meeting one another's needs, fellowshiping together, and interceding for the other members. Contact absent group members and encourage them to continue to meet and to return together at the next scheduled gathering.**