

11 MEASURING BY COMPARING

2 Corinthians 10:12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Most of us judge and rate things most of the time on a relative scale by comparing with something we already know as a benchmark. And almost always, we would be measuring ourselves against something better or higher. This can produce a relentless and unhealthy pressure to be perpetually keeping ahead and doing better. Such an approach to measuring can have the following flaws:

- The comparison varies according to the benchmark, which is itself often subject to change. There is no fixed or stable benchmark but a shifting standard. It gets frustrating playing a game with moving goalposts.
- What we pick as our benchmark depends on what we already know from previous experience. But there may be other standards we know little or nothing about. In other words, such comparisons are neither absolute nor exhaustive but quite arbitrary.
- The process does not take into account the uniqueness of each person or situation. Many things in life simply cannot be compared by ranking one against another, because the difference is qualitative, not quantitative.

This scripture says that it is not wise to compare ourselves with one another. Yet it is a very prevalent practice that permeates much of our lives – in jobs and schools, even in church and ministry. Such baseless comparison results in misdirected motivation. Much time and energy is wasted in barking up the wrong tree and chasing the wrong dream. When this is multiplied over time and distance in life, the colossal losses arising from such misplaced investments in life are staggering.

The only way to steer clear of this pervasive mindset is to keep faithful and true to what you know the Lord requires of you. *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).* If you are without clear conviction or principle, you become vulnerable to being tossed to and fro by such comparisons. We need to set our face like a flint to keep from being swayed or entangled by what others might think or say, or by the vain imaginations of our own minds. The true test of whether or not I am on target is whether I am doing what He requires of me, not what I desire or what others expect me to do. The crucial yardstick I need is His.

Jim Elliot’s life was taken, together with four others, by those he gave his life to reach at the age of 29. His death immortalised these words he wrote in life: *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”* If we dare to trust and be true to God’s calling in life, we shall find no loss but instead, incomparable and immeasurable gain.