

# SMALL GROUP LEADER GUIDE

## Caught Up / Week 1

### BEFORE GROUP

#### BOTTOM LINE

God doesn't compare you to others.

#### SCRIPTURE

*2 Corinthians 10:12 NLT*

*2 Corinthians 10:18 NLT*

*Proverbs 4:23 NLT*

#### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To encourage students to shift their focus away from comparison and instead toward focusing on who God made them to be.

#### THINK ABOUT THIS

A series on comparison is unique in that it can cross all ages, phases, and stages of life. This isn't just a middle school experience; it's a human experience! No matter who we are, we're all likely to find ourselves caught up in

comparison. That's what makes this conversation so important for middle schoolers. They're in a phase where so much is changing—their bodies, their friend groups, their reputations, their hobbies, their rules. With that, they're also primarily motivated by fitting in or belonging with their peers. Those two things combined are a recipe for comparison! The changes they experience make them look around and wonder how they compare to those around them. And the need to belong leaves them comparing how they size up next to others and what they could change about themselves in order to be seen as enough. So, as you lead this week, remember that you're encouraging them toward steps of self-awareness that will help them not just in middle school, but as they grow and deal with comparison on a larger scale.

*This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don't feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.*

### DURING GROUP

#### DO THIS (EXPERIENCE) 1

To start your time together, your group is going to play a game that celebrates what they have in common with each other. Read each of the options below one at a time. If they'd choose the first option, students will move to the left. If they'd choose the second option, they'll move to the right.

- *Beach or mountains*
- *Juice or soda*
- *French toast or pancakes*
- *Pizza or burgers*
- *Taylor Swift or Selena Gomez [Or insert two artists you know your students love!]*
- *Sports or music*

#### DISCUSS THIS

1. What surprised you that you did or didn't have in common with other people?
2. On a scale of "Never" to "All day, every day," how often do you think most middle schoolers compare themselves to others?
3. What's one way someone might compare themselves to others?
4. Tell us one way comparison usually makes you feel. *[Use the provided Feelings Wheel to help your students identify their feelings.]*
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how easy is it for you to believe God doesn't compare you to others?
6. What's one thing that might change if you believed God doesn't compare you to others?
7. What does it look like to guard your heart from comparison?

#### DO THIS (EXPERIENCE) 2

Hand out the provided journal sheet to help your students discover how they're feeling when it comes to comparison and how they can guard their hearts going forward. Lead a discussion based on what everyone wrote.



# BREAKING FREE FROM COMPARISON

TO AVOID LETTING OURSELVES GET CAUGHT UP IN THE NEGATIVE PARTS OF COMPARISON, WE HAVE TO STOP IT WHERE IT STARTS: OUR HEARTS! FILL OUT THE BELOW SECTIONS TO HELP YOU STOP THE CYCLE OF COMPARISON.

## MY FEELINGS

WHAT AM I FEELING?



## THE CAUSE

WHAT'S CAUSING THIS FEELING?



## THE STEPS

WHAT STEPS DO I NEED TO TAKE TO BREAK FREE FROM THIS?



## HOW TO CELEBRATE

WHAT CAN I FOCUS ON AND CELEBRATE IN MY LIFE INSTEAD?



GUARD YOUR HEART  
ABOVE ALL ELSE, FOR IT  
DETERMINES THE COURSE  
OF YOUR LIFE.  
(PROVERBS 4:23 NLT)



# GAME

## Bobbing for . . . ?

*This game is written to be played as a stage game but can be adapted to an all-skate or small group game.*

### OVERVIEW

Pairs will compete head-to-head in a “bobbing for apples” style contest. The twist? Teams will be blindfolded, and they’ll bob for a mystery item.

### WHAT YOU’LL NEED

- 6 students split up into 3 pairs
- 2 buckets filled halfway with water (Buckets should be large enough to fit students’ heads.)
- 3 pairs of mystery items to bob for (spam, tennis ball, onion, etc.)
- 2 blindfolds
- Towels for clean up
- A high energy playlist and a way to play it for the group
- Leaders to clean up the play area
- *Optional: A short table to place the buckets on*
- *Optional: Prizes for the winners*

### HOW-TO

#### PREP

- Fill the two buckets halfway up with water.
- Place the table (optional) and buckets toward the front of your audience. Buckets should be low enough for students to put their heads into.
- Place the mystery items close to the table but hidden from view.
- Place a blindfold next to each bucket, and towels and prizes within easy reach.
- Queue up the high energy playlist.

#### PLAY

1. Choose 3 pairs of students.
2. Have the first team come forward, with each player standing behind a bucket.
3. Ask each player to put on a blindfold.

4. Hold up the mystery item the team will be bobbing for so that the audience can be in on the surprise. (Make sure your audience knows to not say what the item is out loud!)
5. Place one mystery item in each bucket.
6. On your “Go!” (and when the music starts), contestants will retrieve the item from the water without using their hands. The first to do so wins!
7. When you have a winner, leaders will give each student a towel to clean up.
8. Leaders will reset the play area while you bring the next team up, select a new mystery item, and repeat the game!

*Note: Ask your players about any food allergies they may have before challenging them to bob for the mystery items.*



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Caught Up / Week 1

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

## SERIES SUMMARY

A 3-week series about comparison **with Toni Collier**.

**SERIES BOTTOM LINE:** Breaking free from comparison.

**WEEK 1:** God doesn't compare you to others.

**WEEK 2:** Celebrating is better than comparing.

**WEEK 3:** Choose to see yourself the way God does.

## SCRIPTURE

*Oh, don't worry; we wouldn't dare say that we are as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant! (2 Corinthians 10:12 NLT)*

*When people commend [or compliment and praise] themselves, it doesn't count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them (2 Corinthians 10:18 NLT).*

*Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life (Proverbs 4:23 NLT).*

## TEACHING SLIDES

All scripture, bottom lines, and prompts that are bolded in this script are also provided as teaching slides for Premium Tier Subscribers.

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## OPTIONAL MEDIA

### OPTIONAL MEDIA available in the Annual Subscription to the XP3 MS Media Package:

- Caught Up Countdown Video (10 minutes)
  - Caught Up Week 1 Teaching Video
  - Caught Up Week 1 Integrated Teaching Video
  - Caught Up Week 1 “What Are You Obsessed With?” Interactive Video
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## TEACHING OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

- Tell someone next to you about the most recent thing you were obsessed with.
- *Tell a personal story about the last thing you got totally caught up in.*
- We’ve all been so obsessed with something that every part of our lives seems to be completely caught up in it.
- We all have the potential to be caught up in comparison.
- Comparison is when we compare something about ourselves against something about someone else. *[Give relevant examples].*

### TENSION

- Comparison can take over every part of our lives, including our thoughts, words, actions, and relationships. It can lead us to believe things that aren’t true.
- When we compare ourselves to others, we can start to believe their lives are better than ours in some way. *[Give relevant examples.]*
- Comparison can make us feel disappointed, frustrated, or hopeless. It can also motivate us or make us feel good about ourselves.
- No matter how comparison makes us feel, it never takes us anywhere; the cycle never ends because we’ll always find something else to compare.
- There has to be a way to break free from comparison.

### TRUTH

- Comparison is part of being human. People thousands of years ago wrote down their struggles with comparison.
- Paul was a leader in the spread of Christianity, and he wrote letters to encourage people and help them learn about God.
- Paul said this about comparison: *Oh, don’t worry; we wouldn’t dare say that we are as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant! (2 Corinthians 10:12 NLT)*
- Even though Paul was talking about false teachers who were bragging about their spirituality, he was basically saying that comparing yourself to others isn’t good, smart, or helpful.

- Paul wanted us to know that when we compare ourselves to others, we're going to get caught up. *[Give relevant examples.]*
- Paul continued: *When people commend [or compliment and praise] themselves, it doesn't count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them (2 Corinthians 10:18 NLT).*
- The truth is that comparing ourselves to others doesn't matter or count for much; what matters is how God sees us.
- We can break free from comparison by looking to God for our worth, value, and identity.
- Because God designed and made us, God doesn't need to compare us to anyone else.
- The way God sees us is shaped by the love God has for us.
- When we get caught up in comparison, we can remember that to God, we're always enough.
- God doesn't compare you to others.

## APPLICATION

- In Proverbs, we read this wisdom: *Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life (Proverbs 4:23 NLT).*
- Comparison starts in our hearts.
- If we want to avoid getting caught up in the negativity of comparison, we need to stop it by guarding our hearts.
- We can guard our hearts by . . .
  - Paying attention to our feelings and noticing when we're comparing ourselves to others.
  - Finding out what's causing us to compare and talking with a trusted adult about how to break free from that comparison.
  - Celebrating what we have and thinking of what we're thankful for, what we like about ourselves, and the good in our lives.
- God doesn't compare you to others.

## LANDING

- All of us struggle with comparison, but we don't have to struggle alone.
- Small groups are a great place to talk about comparison and become more aware of it.
- Question: What's one area of your life you tend to compare to others?

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## NOTE TO THE COMMUNICATOR

*Caught Up* is a series about comparison created in collaboration with Toni Collier. As you lead your middle schoolers through this series, make sure you check out the awesome additional resources Toni pulled together to help you, your students, and your volunteers believe the truth that, with God, we're all enough just as we are. Listen to the roundtable discussion curated specifically for ministry leaders and volunteers, participate in three short self-care challenges each week explained via audio and video, and learn something new in the list of resources designed to help leaders and volunteers continue on the journey of breaking free from comparison.

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## THINK ABOUT THIS

A series on comparison is unique in that it can cross all ages, phases, and stages of life. This isn't just a middle school experience; it's a human experience! No matter who we are, we're all likely to find ourselves caught up in comparison. That's what makes your message so important for middle schoolers. They're in a phase where so much is changing—their bodies, their friend groups, their reputations, their hobbies, their rules. With that, they're also primarily motivated by fitting in or belonging with their peers. Those two things combined are a recipe for comparison! The changes they experience make them look around and wonder how they compare to those around them. And the need to belong leaves them comparing how they size up next to others and what they could change about themselves in order to be seen as enough. So, during your talk this week, remember that you're encouraging them toward steps of self-awareness that will help them not just in middle school, but as they grow and deal with comparison on a larger scale.

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# TEACHING SCRIPT

Caught Up / Week 1

PRELUDE SOCIAL WORSHIP STORY GROUPS HOME

## BOTTOM LINE

GOD DOESN'T COMPARE YOU TO OTHERS.

## INTRODUCTION

4 MINUTES

Hi everybody! I'm \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm so glad you're here as we kick off a new series today. We're going to spend the next three weeks talking about something that I think has the potential to change the way we see ourselves and others. But before we get there, let me ask you a quick question.

What's the last thing you were so obsessed with that nothing else seemed to matter? Turn and tell a friend around you right now! *[Pause for students to share their answers.]*

### OPTIONAL MEDIA available in the Annual Subscription to the XP3 MS Media Package:

- Caught Up Week 1 "What Are You Obsessed With?" Interactive Video

### TELL A PERSONAL STORY

*Tell a story from your own life that illustrates the following ideas . . .*

- Talk about the last thing you got totally caught up in.
- This could be a TV show, a movie, an artist, a team, a video game, or a hobby. Bonus points if you have a picture or video clip to share here (just make sure it's age appropriate!).
- The goal is to illustrate for students what it looks like to be caught up in something. Focus on how, in that time, every thought, word, choice, etc. was consumed by this one thing for you.

We've all been there, right? No matter what it is that pulled us, we all know the feeling of being totally obsessed with something. Every word we say, every thought we think, every choice we make, every little thing we do. Every part of our lives seems to be completely caught up in that thing we're into!

Well, this series is actually called *Caught Up*, and it's all about something that every single one of us has the potential to get caught up in: **comparison**.

You've probably heard about comparison before, right? It's **when we compare something about ourselves against something about someone else.**

You love your brand new shoes, until you see the pair that someone else in your small group has.

You think your grade is good, until you hear about the grade your best friend got.

You're feeling good about how many views you got on your last TikTok, until you see how many your friends are getting on theirs.

That's comparison! And if we're not careful, it's something we all have the potential to get caught up in!

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## TENSION

2 MINUTES

Here's the difficult thing about comparison: It has a way of taking over every part of our lives. Our thoughts, our words, our actions, our relationships. They're all impacted when we're caught up in comparison! Eventually, it has a way of leading us to believe things that just aren't true.

When we compare ourselves to others, we can start to believe their lives are better than ours in some way. Because they have so many followers on YouTube, or made the game-winning shot, or got to take that girl to the school dance, or have more friends than we can even imagine having. Comparison tells us they have everything we think we want. Because of that, we start to think their lives must be better than ours. Of course, nobody's life is actually perfect! But even if we know that's true, we still get caught up in the comparison.

When that happens? That can bring up all kinds of stuff!

For some of us, it's **disappointment.** We look at what they have, and it makes us disappointed in what we have.

Others of us get **frustrated.** The fact that someone else has what we think we deserve just doesn't feel fair. And that makes us mad!

Maybe for you, the feeling comparison brings into your life is **hopelessness.** No matter what you do or how hard you try, you think you'll never be able to get where they are or have what they have.

Or maybe, comparison **motivates you.** Instead of giving up, you decide to try harder, push faster, do whatever you have to do to get to where they are.

Comparison may even help you **feel really good about yourself.** In a way, it helps you feel good about what you have, which isn't a bad thing at all! But when it makes you believe you deserve all those things more than someone else? That's not a feeling you want to get caught up in!

No matter how comparison makes you feel, here's the thing: **It never really takes you anywhere.** As soon as you reach the thing you want, you find something else to compare. It's never enough. The cycle never ends.

I don't know about you, but I'm sure there has to be a way to break free from comparison.

# TRUTH

3 MINUTES

The good news for us is that we're not the first people in the world to get caught up in comparison, and we definitely won't be the last! It's part of being human! Thankfully, the humans who lived thousands of years ago just after the time Jesus was alive on Earth wrote down a thing or two about their struggles with comparison.

The passage we're going to look at today was written by a guy named **Paul**, a leader in the spread of the Christian faith. Paul often wrote letters to encourage people and help them learn more about God. In the letter we're going to look at today, Paul addressed what it looks like to get caught up in comparison.

Here's what he said:

***Oh, don't worry; we wouldn't dare say that we are as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other, using themselves as the standard of measurement. How ignorant! (2 Corinthians 10:12 NLT)***

Here, Paul was specifically talking about some false teachers who were bragging about their spirituality to others. However, I think the truths he shared here can still help us with what we're talking about today.

Basically, Paul was saying, *"Listen, comparing yourself to other people isn't good. It's not smart. It's not wise. It's not helpful. Let's not do it, okay?"*

Why? Well, I think what Paul wanted us to know was that when we compare ourselves to each other, we're going to get caught up.

When we hold our real life up to someone's life on social media, when we compare the way our family looks to the way another person's family looks, when we look at what we have in comparison to what someone else has . . .

We'll always end up losing. We're never going to break free from the cycle.

That's because we're looking in the wrong place! I know this is true not only because of the way comparison makes us feel, but because of something else Paul said in this very same letter. Take a look:

***When people commend [or compliment and praise] themselves, it doesn't count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them (2 Corinthians 10:18 NLT).***

Don't miss Paul's point here! It's not about how we compare to other people. At the end of the day, that stuff doesn't matter. It doesn't count for much in our lives.

What does count is this: how God sees us. That's where we can look to find our worth, our value, our identity. That's where we can break free from comparison! **God doesn't compare you to others.**

See, God made us. God designed us to be just the way we are. Because of that, God doesn't need to compare us to anyone else. The way God sees us is shaped by the love God has for us. That's the way God wants us to see ourselves, too! Instead of getting caught up in comparison, we can choose to remember that in God's eyes, we're always enough. Because **God doesn't compare you to others.**

## APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

There's just one more truth I want to share with you that I think can help us here. It's some wisdom from a book called Proverbs:

***Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life (Proverbs 4:23 NLT).***

Comparison starts in our hearts. So, if we want to avoid letting ourselves get caught up in the negative parts of comparison, then we have to stop it where it starts: our hearts! As this proverb says, we have to guard our hearts.

Here are some ways you can do that this week:

1. **Pay attention to your feelings.** Notice the way your mood or outlook changes when you start to compare yourself to someone else. Do you feel disappointed? Frustrated? Angry? Anxious? Those feelings may be clues that you're caught up in comparison.
2. **Find out what's causing it.** What are you looking at, thinking about, or doing when you start to feel those things? What's causing your negative feelings of comparison? If it's something in your control, take a step away from it. Close the app, turn off the TV, take a break from that friend group for a day or so. If it's something you can't control, talk to someone who can help. A parent or small group leader is a great person to start with here! They can help you identify steps you can take to guard your heart and break free from what's causing comparison in your life.
3. **Celebrate what you do have.** Instead of filling your heart with comparison, fill it with celebration for all the things you do have! The things that you're thankful for, the things you like about yourself, the good in your life. In fact, focusing on the way God sees you is a great place to start! When you're tempted to compare, fill that space in your heart with something better! Fill it with things that remind you of the truth that **God doesn't compare you to others.**

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

Every single one of us struggles with comparison in different areas of our lives. The good thing is that we don't have to struggle alone! One of the reasons we have small groups is to give you a place to talk about these things and become more aware of them. I hope you'll open up about how you may be struggling to break free from comparison with your group today.

As you do, I want you to think about this question: **What's one area of your life you tend to compare to others?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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