

“Accessible, jargon-free and dealing with a struggle that women are very prone to, this will be a really helpful book for encouraging women to find their way out of a comparison-driven life.”

KATHY KELLER, co-author of *The Meaning of Marriage*

“This book is simple but profound—and profoundly helpful. The common problem of comparison is exposed for what it is. In its place comes biblical truth, giving life and health and wholeness.”

GRAHAM BEYNON, author of *Mirror Mirror and Emotions*

“We all know we compare ourselves with others. Sophie exposes the reasons why through clear biblical analysis, and I could not wait to read about the treatment. It is a real page-turner—a book to read and then read again.”

ANN BENTON, author and conference speaker

“This moving and compassionate book analyses some of our deepest feelings from the point of view of God’s word. It is confronting in places, but it points us to true contentment. I warmly commend it.”

CHRISTINE JENSEN, President of the Australian Mothers’ Union

“We all need help to take our eyes off the gifts we do or don’t have, so we can turn our gaze to the Gift-giver Himself. This book is a helpful guide for that process—it’s compassionate, honest, and truthful.”

CAROLYN MCCULLEY, author of “Radical Womanhood” and conference speaker

“Sophie’s examples are often funny, sometimes sad and always to the point. She takes us to God’s word, showing how to turn our attention to Christ. A must-read for women of all ages.”

BEULAH RETIEF, Dean of Women at George Whitefield College in Cape Town, South Africa

“I started this book assuming that it was written for other women. Within a few pages, I had started to recognise myself from the symptoms Sophie described. Full of clear insights, biblical wisdom and gospel hope, this is a book that every Christian woman should read.”

ELSPETH PITT, women’s worker at St Helen’s Bishopsgate, London

“In an age where we so often become the source of our own pain, heartache and discouragement, this book is a must read in helping us to unleash ourselves from ourselves.”

SARIE KING, conference speaker and blogger

Sophie de Witt

COMPARED

To Her

How to experience true contentment

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*To my precious daughter, Molly.
May you find true contentment in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

INTRODUCTION

I am a recovering CCS sufferer. I'm not completely rid of it, though since recognising the problem, I've started to get better. And I know that one day, I'll be free of it. My CCS—or, to give it its full name, Compulsive Comparison Syndrome—will be a thing of the past.

But since realising I was suffering from this syndrome, I've started talking to other women about it; and I've discovered that CCS is far more widespread than I had ever imagined. As I described my symptoms to others, they realized they were struggling with a perspective dominated by CCS, too.

In fact, although I don't know you at all, I'm fairly sure that you have CCS. That's not meant to sound rude! It's just that I've rarely met a woman who doesn't struggle with it.

And as we'll see, CCS promises us contentment, but it robs us of it. So I hope that, whoever you are, you'll find that as this book explains how to be free of this syndrome, you'll also discover how you can experience real, lasting contentment in your life: with who you are, what you're doing, and where you're heading.

We'll start by looking at our lives and spotting the symptoms and triggers of CCS. Then we'll move on to see what the Bible has to say about what causes it, and how it can be treated. And we'll end by thinking about how to live healthy and contented lives without CCS.

You've probably not heard of CCS before. But the chances are you'll recognise its effects in your life. Read on...

WHAT IS CCS?



“I put on an outfit I know I look good in, and I feel great—until I get to the party. Then I see someone who looks slimmer, or cooler, or classier; suddenly the woman looking back at me in the mirror looks fat, frumpy and dull. I just want to go home.”

“I’m a hard worker. I like knowing that I’m more conscientious than my co-workers. But I also find myself feeling resentful that they get away with doing so much less than me.”

“I’m 28, and single. I’m usually OK with it, until a friend gets engaged or I go to a wedding. Then I find myself thinking: ‘Why them? Why not me? What is wrong with me?’”

“My boyfriend loves me, I know that. But his ex-girlfriend, who dumped him, is much more attractive than me. I can’t help thinking: ‘If only I looked and dressed like her, then I’d really know that he really wants to be with me, and would pick me over her if he had the choice.’”

“I look at photos of myself from decades ago and feel so despondent. I used to be so much slimmer, with smooth

skin and no grey hair. Mind you, at the time I thought I was blobby and had frizzy hair... ”

“It’s always such an encouragement when I pick the kids up from a party and someone says how they were the best-behaved there. I’m proud of the way we brought them up; and I’m pleased that other people notice.”

“We don’t spend much money—we’re good at budgeting and finding deals. We know people who spend their money on all kinds of things they don’t really need. I’m glad we don’t splash the cash like they do.”

“Other women seem so caught up in keeping up with what others are doing. I don’t let myself get pulled into all that. I’m proud that I’m just me.”

One place it happens to me is in a shopping centre. When another woman around the same age as me passes by, I give them a quick up-and-down scan. It’s just a two-second appraisal. And as I look at them, I see that they’re doing the same thing with me—a quick sideways glance.

What are we doing? We’re comparing ourselves with each other. How does my figure match up with hers? Does she look more or less stylish/cool/effortless than me? Do I look as good as her without having spent the money she clearly has? On all these measuring scales, do I win, compared to her? Or lose?

Maybe for you it’s not other women in shops. But you’ll still do that glance of comparison. It might happen in someone else’s house. Or in the bar. Or on the beach. Or at the office or lecture hall. Or even at church, if you go. We spend our lives making these sorts of comparisons: measuring ourselves against others.

That's the sort of comparing that this book is about. And it's a compulsive kind of comparison; we keep on doing it. It's what I've labelled Compulsive Comparison Syndrome.

Why do we do it?

Pause for a moment before reading on, and just ask yourself:

When I compare myself with someone else, why do I do it?

What am I hoping to get out of it?

Maybe you had one of these answers, or something like it:

- *I don't know; I just do it (it's an unthinking compulsion).*
- *Because I want to know how I'm doing in life. Am I doing as well as I could be, or is there more I need to get or do?*
- *I want to make sure that I'm "normal".*
- *I need to make sure that I'm not missing out on something that others are enjoying.*
- *It makes me feel better when I realise I'm doing something better than someone else.*
- *Because my parents told me throughout my childhood to be a little bit more like my sister/other people's children.*

Underneath each of those answers to the question "Why compare?" is one of three motivations:

- *I want to know I'm worthwhile (I want to know I'm significant).*
- *I want to know that my life is as good as it could be (I want to be satisfied).*
- *I want to know that I've got what I need in life (I want to feel secure).*

Of course, sometimes it's a mixture of all three. Essentially, what I'm after is to make sure I've got as much, or more, of something than others, so that I can feel significant about who I am, satisfied about what I'm doing and secure about where I'm heading. CCS is a compulsive measuring of myself against the standards of others, desiring a higher position.

Who do we do it with?

Who was the last person you looked at and thought:

"I wish I had her..."?

How about:

"I'm so glad I'm not like her when it comes to..."

I'll compare myself with anyone. Strangers in a shopping centre, as I've said. Airbrushed models in a magazine. The owners of the houses on home improvement shows.

But most often, since they're most similar to me and I see their lives in detail most often, it's my friends, my family, the people I see most days. After all, when I compare my face to Angelina Jolie's, I've got several ready-made excuses: her skincare budget is probably more than our annual income; and, of course, she's probably been airbrushed. In my mind, she's in a different world to me. When I compare my children's behaviour to the kids of my friend who lives down the street, however, I don't have the same excuses. She's part of my world, and so that comparison has more of an effect on me.

But we can also compare ourselves with people who don't exist. Ever caught yourself comparing who you are now with who you were twenty years ago, or comparing yourself

with who you dreamed you'd become, or with other people's expectations of you?

It seems to me that most of us are comparing ourselves with others all the time, in all kinds of ways. That's the problem with a compulsion; it happens unconsciously, without us even really noticing it's happening.

But we do notice the feelings the comparisons produce—the symptoms of CCS.



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