

Compared
to Who?



A
PROVEN
PATH
TO
IMPROVE
YOUR
BODY
IMAGE

Heather
Creekmore

"With its real-talk conversational tone, *Compared to Who?* is a field guide for the modern woman living in our crazy-making culture of impossible beauty ideals and the futile pursuit of bodily perfection. Despite her claim to exemplify the ordinary, Heather has written a book with the potential to accomplish something truly extraordinary. Comparison is a prison—and the truth within these pages is enough to set captive women free!"

—**Jena Morrow**, author of *Hollow*

"*Compared to Who?* is a much-needed, gospel-centered approach to the titanic struggle women face when they look in the mirror. Creekmore's voice is refreshingly honest, and she comes alongside the reader as a friend, helping women leave behind the idol of beauty and embrace the outrageous beauty of Jesus. Compelling, well-researched, and a helpful read."

—**Mary DeMuth**, author of *Worth Living: How God's Wild Love Makes You Worthy*

"If you've ever wanted to find freedom in the body you've been given, this book is for you. Heather takes you by the hand, and with solid biblical principles, exposes the lies about beauty. She'll help you feel differently about the body you have—not the one you *think* you need. You'll find freedom on these pages."

—**Jennifer Dukes Lee**, author of *The Happiness Dare* and *Love Idol*

"In *Compared to Who?* Heather Creekmore is so real you'll feel like you are having a sleepover with your hilariously honest best friend. By the time you are done with this book, you'll have no excuses left. Ultimately, we all want to feel beautiful, but first we have to decide that we are. This book is a call to a higher level of understanding about our worth, our bodies, and our futures. And if you are as honest as Heather is, you'll be changed for the better—heart, body, and soul."

—**Jennifer Strickland**, speaker, author of *Beautiful Lies*, *More Beautiful Than You Know*, and *Girl Perfect*, URMore.org

"Real, raw, relatable, and refreshing. Heather speaks my language. She put words to the very things I and many other women subconsciously do and struggle with. She tells it like it is, cuts out the clichés, and powerfully challenges her reader—all with grace, humor, and Truth. Every woman should read this book!"

—**Jordan Lee Dooley**, Founder of The SoulScripts, author of *COLLEGE* and *BeLoved*

"Heather Creekmore holds up a biblical mirror for each of us to look into as we battle body image issues. With both humor and camaraderie, this gifted author tenderly unlocks the door to our self-made prison of body hatred. Heather invites us to join her in embracing new levels of freedom from our cycle of chronic comparisons. With concrete questions to think through after each chapter, this book is a must read for anyone who looks at herself and thinks, 'If only . . .' Grab a friend—or your daughter—and let's start a healthy, Christ-centered discussion on both the root of our body image issues and the solution."

—**Jani Ortlund**, Renewal Ministries

"Heather Creekmore dives into the underbelly of what most women need to hear, and don't hear enough—how our battle isn't with our bodies, but with our hearts. She gently, and often with delightful humor, leads readers into a deeper exploration to find hope and a contentedness with the bodies God created and then encourages us to step out into this world as the beautiful and whole women God meant for us to be. Every woman and young girl should read this book!"

—**Lee Wolfe Blum**, speaker, mental health practitioner, and author of *Table in the Darkness: A Healing Journey Through an Eating Disorder* and *Brave Is the New Beautiful*

"Heather Creekmore gets it. She's compared herself to other women and has felt empty, minimized, and alone. But she's also experienced the power of God to live differently. So if you're ready to finally dig up the deep roots of your own body image issues, Heather is just the right guide to lead you into freedom."

—**Margot Starbuck**, author of *Unsqueezed: Springing Free From Skinny Jeans, Nose Jobs, Highlights, and Stilettos*

"Finally! Someone is tackling this important issue by aiming at the roots. Heather refuses to offer platitudes or quick fixes but instead takes us to the real battle—the one that rages in our hearts. Reading *Compared to Who?* is like sitting down with a wise friend who's determined to see us move toward deeper healing and freedom. This book is both convicting and refreshing."

—**Kendra Dahl**, blogger, Kendradahl.com

"Heather bravely says out loud the embarrassing body shaming thoughts women silently struggle with despite the church's message that we are loved just as we are and society's anthem that every woman is beautiful in her own way. With relatable stories, study questions, and Scripture, *Compared to Who?* brings a fresh look at the root of the issue and what the Bible says about finding freedom, once and for all, from the body image battle that plagues our mothers, daughters, and friends."

—**Rachel Randolph**, author of *Nourished: A Search for Health, Happiness, and a Full Night's Sleep*, <http://www.thenourishedmama.com/>

"As a pastor's wife and women's ministry leader, I've had countless conversations with women about body image and their relationship with food. It is perhaps the most common struggle we have, even among Christian women. That's why I'm grateful for Heather Creekmore's new book, *Compared to Who?*—because the church so desperately needs biblical resources on this issue, and this book is both heart-level and helpful. I will be recommending it to many women."

—**Christine Hoover**, author of *Messy Beautiful Friendship* and *From Good to Grace*

"Heather Creekmore is addressing a significant and important issue that is as old as time. Since Eve, I doubt there has ever been a woman who has been completely content with every aspect of her body. And even Eve, once tempted by what was 'pleasing to the eye' fashioned a fig leaf to cover parts of her body. Indeed, the goal of this important book is to help countless women get back to the 'garden' and stand before the only mirror that really matters: her Creator. And believe God, just like Eve once did, when he says, 'It is good.'"

—**Roland C. Warren**, President/CEO of Care Net and author, *Bad Dads of the Bible*

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LEAFWOOD
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COMPARED TO WHO?

A Proven Path to Improve Your Body Image



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Introduction

It's the first week of January. You pick the year.

Every. Single. Year.

Turn on your television this early in the month and—unless there's a freak blizzard—I promise you this. The weather will not be the lead news story.

No. First and foremost in every program's lineup will be a segment on how you can improve your body this year. New year, new you! Lose the weight, finally! This is your year!

We eat it up. Maybe this *is* my year!

On one mild January 2, I plopped myself down in front of the *Today Show*. Favorite purple coffee mug in hand, I waited with great anticipation for the special “weight loss and your health” segment to begin.

Oooh . . . what will they tell me? What juicy weight loss or exercise tip will they give to transform my life? Is Paleo still the hottest diet, or should I follow something better now? Are carbs bad and eggs good now? Or do I have that backward?

A surge of excitement rushed through me. Maybe it was just the coffee.

Back from the commercial break, the segment began.

“Kids, keep it down.” I yelled. “Mommy needs to hear this! Quiet!”

Volume up. I settle in. Nice anchor banter. Hmm . . . cute dress. Good to see you, too.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Enough with the small talk. Get to the good stuff. Some child will need a drink refill or a potty trip soon. I don’t have all day here, people. Spill the hot secrets already.

“So, what should we do to meet our weight loss or health goals this year?” The smiling host tossed the question to her guest like a hot potato. *Finally!*

Here it comes. This is going be good. Where’s my pen?

“Well, Savannah, the number one thing that people can do this year if they want to lose weight is to watch what they eat. If they consume only healthy, highly nutritious foods and then add some exercise to their daily routines—those unwanted pounds will melt off.”

Are you kidding me? Did she really just say to eat right and exercise?

Wonk. Wonk. Wonk.

What’s Your Story?

I know we just met and all, but I need to confess something. I struggled with my body image most of my life. And I tried just about everything out there that I could think of, find, or afford to change it.

Nothing ever worked.

Until recently, that is, when God took me on a journey through my body image challenges and showed me (in ways that I never expected) how I could find true freedom and healing.

But, unlike the hype and letdown of a January 2 news story, I hope to offer you something unexpected in the pages that follow. In fact, my goal is to completely change your perspective on the

whole body image issue—in ways you'd never even guess! I'm not going to just tell you, "It's what's on the inside that counts." (This is, to me, the Christian equivalent of "eat right and exercise.") Instead, I want to motivate you to pursue a fresh level of freedom that stale clichés could never inspire.

I weave my story into this book. I'll just be real—it's not amazing. I've never been a supermodel. (Or even an average model—although at age eighteen I *did* get to wear a shiny beige pantsuit for a small-town Chamber of Commerce fashion show. *Yeah, it was kind of a big deal.*)

My tale exemplifies the ordinary. But for that reason, I hope you can relate. It's the testimony of how God helped me—a "normal" girl—who believed (sometimes obsessively) that her life would be better if only she were more beautiful.

When I write it out like that, it sounds a little silly. How shallow of me, right? (I'm turning pink from embarrassment as I type.) Yet, it's true. My thought life should have centralized around endeavors with greater meaning, but instead I spent a lot of my mental energy and time pursuing a better body. If I could just be thinner, then I could be happy—or so I believed.

Perhaps the same holds true for you. Maybe you know you struggle. Or maybe you've never admitted to anyone that your thought life orbits planets of worry over your size, shape, or appearance. It's possible that you know you wrestle discontentment with the mirror but never knew what to call it.

Here we'll call it body image. This will be a safe space for us to talk about it—the good, the bad, and the "I can't believe anyone else does or thinks that"—openly. Statistics show that most women engage in an internal war in this arena. If those stats are true, then there's a good chance you struggle, too. I want you to know you have a friend right here who understands that battle. That's also

how I hope you'll read this book—like advice from a friend who's been there and is navigating her way out.

If you are weighed down with insecurity or feeling not good enough, or if your negative body image plagues you and impacts your ability to find peace and joy in other areas of this life, I pray God will use this book to reveal his rescue plan for you.

There is hope for victory in your personal battle to be beautiful. Your journey starts here when you ask this question: Compared to who?

Part One

The Spiritual Root

of Our
Body
Image
Issues



Click Here to Feel Better

"Beauty does not make you happy. A size two does not solve your insecurity. The prettiest clothes and the shiniest hair in the nation is not the combination you need to stop being consumed with how you look. In fact, just the opposite may be true."

—CAMERON RUSSELL, Victoria's Secret Model

Thigh dimples. Belly pooch. Saggy breasts. Stretch marks.

I love to see them.

No. Not on my own body. Yikes! Of course not. That would be silly.

I mean, I have them. We all do. Okay, *most* of us over the age of nineteen bear at least one of these signs of fallen humanity. There are a few fortunate ones out there. But gravity will find them, too. Eventually. It *always* wins.

There is one place where cellulite, love handles, and flab look fantastic. That's on the body of a celebrity.

The better she appears on screen, the more so-called imperfections I want to see.

Click here to see her ugly beach photos.

Click here to see the unedited photo.

Click here to see what she really looked like after she gave birth.

Click here to see her without her makeup.

Sure. Why not? Tabloids and gossip sites happily give us what we want—blown-up photos of celebrity flaws circled in red ink like missed answers on a test.

Did you ever wonder why we like to see them? Why we're happy to look at another woman's so-called body defects?

I have a theory.

I think it's because cellulite, deflated bosoms, and other flaws on the allegedly flawless affirm the average woman's existence. Or, mine at least.

That is, they *seem* to. I expected clicking on those "average" photos would help my problem—make me feel better.

Now my perspective has changed.

Supermodel Letdown

During my formative years, our culture decided to set apart certain female specimens as emblems of beauty. This league of women stood out above all the rest. (Literally, not only were they taller than the average girl, but they also had long legs and minimal body fat, allowing them to appear to tower over us all.) These ladies weren't just models, but supermodels.

"Oh how wonderful it would be to look like that!" So the teenage me thought. It's been a few decades, so I'd be hard-pressed to name too many of them now, but one name I'll never forget is Cindy Crawford. I admired Cindy because, in an era where it seemed like being blonde meant being beautiful, she had brown hair.

And so did I. (Until I figured out how to color it, at least.) She also had a mole. That little brown dot on her face didn't seem to

bother her a bit. Yet I had a mole about the same size on my wrist that I obsessed over. Cindy gave me hope. Maybe, someday, my mole could symbolize hotness, too. *If only I could find a way to look more like Cindy Crawford . . .*

Fast-forward a few decades to last month. I sat at my computer scrolling through Facebook when an intriguing photo of my former idol floated by. The picture showed what looked like an unretouched image of Cindy wearing black lingerie, a boa, and a magician-caliber top hat—a recent magazine cover that never made it to the editing department. In it, the supermodel appeared with belly flab, cellulite, and stretch marks. Her untoned thighs looked as dimply as mine. *Were they touching in the middle?* Her stomach bore the marks of pregnancies and age. *I guess my stomach is okay if that's how Cindy's looks! Fabulous!*

Cindy Crawford's cellulite made my day.

I watched as the photo received an abundance of social media attention. (I blog about body image. This wasn't lame. I prefer to call it research.) More viral than the swine flu, millions shared the imperfect cover photo and applauded Cindy.

"What courage she has to let us see that she's real!" some said.

"She's still gorgeous, but now we can all feel a little better about our normalness," others commented.

"She did it on purpose," they speculated. "She wants to be a help for all those struggling with the way they look!"

The supermodel offered a lifeline to the wave of women engulfed in negative body image and everyone cheered.

Until her husband got romantic.

Cindy's husband, Rande Gerber, posted a picture of his love lying by the pool in an orange bikini. He captioned it: "She got flowers and I got her."

So sweet.

Except for one little detail. His Instagram post looked nothing like the leaked *Marie Claire* flabby photo from a few days earlier. There was no sign of stretched skin or dimpled flesh on that forty-nine-year-old's body.

What?

Those other photos, it turns out, were fake. Someone air-brushed Cindy's body to look more regular—a cruel joke on those of us who seek affirmation from flabby celebrity photos.¹

Cindy Crawford just may have a perfect body. (Or a talented plastic surgeon . . .) Comparison bites us in the cellulite. Again.

Compared to Who?

Can we just be honest? Even when real, those celebrity cellulite photos never actually satisfy. They draw you in; you look, and you seem to feel better for a few minutes. But, like searching for comfort in chocolate chip cookie dough, an hour later your stomach aches.

That gut-level unrest—that's called comparison. And comparison cures nothing.

When you feel comparison surge inside, you better cue the *Jaws* music. Nuh-nah, nuh-nah, nuh-nah, nuh-nah. . . . Comparison plays nice at first. "Hey, you are doing just fine." (The music gets louder.) She lets us swim in contentment. (The music gets even louder.) Then, all of a sudden, boom! She finds someone doing "better," shows us how we don't measure up, and yanks us underwater like a shark going for the kill. Her bite leaves a mark, and she drowns us in shame.

Comparison hurts—it hurts our relationships, our children, our marriages, and (most of all) it hurts us. Comparison distracts us from our purpose while keeping us entangled in its petty contests.

I never thought I'd write a book on this topic. Comparison's the one voice in your head you don't want *anyone* to hear. I'm thankful that only God has the superpower of reading our minds.

I'd rather no one knew about the times I wondered if I wore a larger or smaller clothing size than someone else. I'd rather no one heard how my brain analyzed her hair, or her clothing, or her shape, or her skin, and then compared it to my own.

That stuff is private. And kind of embarrassing.

Confessions of a Chronic Comparer

Motherhood introduced me to a brand-new realm of comparison. Admittedly, I compared myself to the other women around me long before a baby boarded my belly, but once I was with child, the opportunities to compare multiplied.

I compared my weight gain to that of every other pregnant woman I knew, saw on TV, read about in a magazine, or heard someone else talk about. Sure, I understood it was healthy to gain, but deep down I wanted to know where I stood in my own imaginary competition where the skinniest pregnant woman wins. I compared others' custom nursery themes to my "nursery in a bag" set from the Target clearance rack. I compared what strollers they bought, what birthing classes they took, and the cuteness of their maternity wardrobe. I thought pregnancy made me tired but, seriously, all that comparison proved just as exhausting.

The baby arrived. Soon, keeping up in the game became even more complicated. Like a sponge, I absorbed every nugget of hearsay data on how other babies progressed. *Her baby slept through the night. Her baby ate on a perfect schedule. Her baby sang the alphabet song—at nine months old!* Consumed with where my little guy fit into the mix, I panicked. He hadn't smiled. He hadn't rolled over. Sleeping, yeah, that wasn't happening.

Would he be slow? Was there a problem? Was I doing something wrong? Or, worse, was I just a bad mom (already!)? If comparison was a disease, I suffered chronically. I needed to stop, but I didn't know how.

The mommy comparison game is rough, but it's not the worst. Of the many ways women can—and do—compare themselves, it's the physical comparisons that can cause the most damage. When we look at another woman's body, compare it to our own, and then decide that having a different build, hair, height, or weight would somehow be better, an internal war begins—a fight with our body image.

My friend Sydney said she first felt the shark bite of comparison at six years old. She noticed her friend's legs were skinny, while hers were thick and muscular. From there, her battle escalated. She fought condemnation. "You should look better, eat better, and exercise more . . ." echoed in her head all through her teen years. Shame told her she was unacceptable and that she'd have a hard time finding a boyfriend or a husband with legs like that.

Can I tell you something difficult? If you saw a picture of Sydney, you wouldn't think her legs were large. At all. Sydney's problem was with her body image—not with her body.

I've struggled in the same ways. In fact, I hesitate to share with you the depths of my depravity in the body image arena. Disordered eating, weight obsession, exercise dependency, and insecurity—I wrestled them all. Satan told me the same lie he told Sydney—that my legs were too big. And that one thought ignited a firestorm of body image issues that continued for decades.

I am frightened for you to know the details of my struggle, like the fact I still sometimes hide candy wrappers in the trash can instead of placing them on the top. It might disturb you to know how badly I wished I could throw up after binge eating. You may be turned off to hear that I fight hard not to walk into a room full of women and mentally divide them into two categories: thinner than me and not thinner than me. I share my secrets not to humiliate myself, but with the hope that my honesty will help others know they aren't alone. Because, truth is, those of us who struggle often

feel like we are the only ones trapped in the crazy land of body worry. For that reason, few talk about it.

I find it hard to talk about sometimes, too. Writing seems easier, so I started a blog. I found the more I wrote about my personal struggle, the more emails I would receive that said, “Thank you. I thought I was the only one who had thoughts like this!” Eventually, I titled my blog *Compared to Who?* (For all of my badge-carrying friends in the grammar police, I know you’d rather it read *Compared to Whom?* I’m sorry. It just sounded too uppity!) As I began to write more on the topic and speak with women about body image issues directly, I noticed a common theme—their body image struggles seemed to stem from comparison’s bite.

Comparison Is “Abs”olutely Silly

Comparison lies to us. It never regards the truth. It leaves out important details about age, lifestyle, genetics, ethnicity, and, oh, like a million other important factors when it tells us we should look different. I think of a woman I met through the blog last year named Whitney. She’s ethnically, genetically, and regionally (she lives in the Northeast) predisposed to having pale skin. Yet comparison sneaked in and whispered, “You aren’t beautiful. You are too white—like Casper, the friendly ghost. That’s ugly.”

I’ve also brawled against comparison’s ridiculous jabs. Many other women do, too. I know this because some women lack a filter between their mind and their mouth and have clued me in to the (otherwise secret) struggle.

It happened as I waited for my daughter’s dance class to finish. Moms aren’t actually allowed in the dance studio because, here in Texas, we take our kindergarteners’ extracurricular activities very seriously. Having moms inside the classes would be dangerous. (Think: Lifetime Channel’s *Dance Moms*.) So, instead, we sit in this

small waiting room during the forty-five-minute class and, because making conversation is so 1997, everyone stares at their phones.

Right before class ended, the studio door opened. Every head popped up from its screen-slumped position, expecting to see a line of six-year-olds exit the room. But instead, an older girl—one of the dance studio's helpers—walked out and closed the studio door behind her. As this lone girl maneuvered her way through the gaggle of waiting moms, she got a few stares. She wore a bright, sports bra-type tank top and black spandex dance shorts. She had a cute little body for a soon-to-be preteen, and everyone noticed.

Or at least one woman did.

The front door had barely shut behind her when one of the moms (the one without a filter) loudly asked the crowd, “Did you see her abs?” We all had. Her sculpted core looked magazine perfect. But she was barely ten. Her skin had never stretched so that her entire abdominal region could reorganize to accommodate a growing baby (or four in my case). We were a group of moms and this girl, she had likely just finished the third grade! *The third grade!*

No one responded.

So this mom (who obviously worked out and was some sort of abs aficionado) just kept talking.

“Wow, I wish my stomach looked like that.”

Crickets.

Then she involved her own little girl, whom I guessed to be about five years old. While patting her daughter's belly, she made the following statement about the child: “She doesn't have any abs at all.”

Too stunned to say anything, I stared at her blankly. At least, I hope my expression appeared blank and didn't reveal what I really thought. *Did a grown woman really just covet a ten-year-old's abdominal muscles out loud?* She first compared her body (a full-grown woman who carried and birthed the child she had in

tow) with that of a pre-tween girl. Then, she taught her daughter how to do the same (with an appropriate amount of dissatisfaction).

Comparison. It's silly.

Chapter Mirror



Watch this video message from Heather for extra encouragement as you dive into this book:

ONLY AVAILABLE WITH PURCHASE OF THE COMPLETE BOOK.

Note

¹Elizabeth Vanmetre, “Cindy Crawford’s Leaked Un-Retouched Photos Are Fake, According to Photographer,” *Daily News*, March 2, 2015, www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/cindy-crawford-leaked-photos-fake-photogr-article-1.2134876.

A Body Image Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

You know my heart and my struggle. You understand the wrestling match I'm in, trying to meet a cultural standard of beauty and knowing that in you is where my *true* value can be found. Today, please help me to remember Jesus's great sacrifice for me that had *nothing* to do with what I look like.

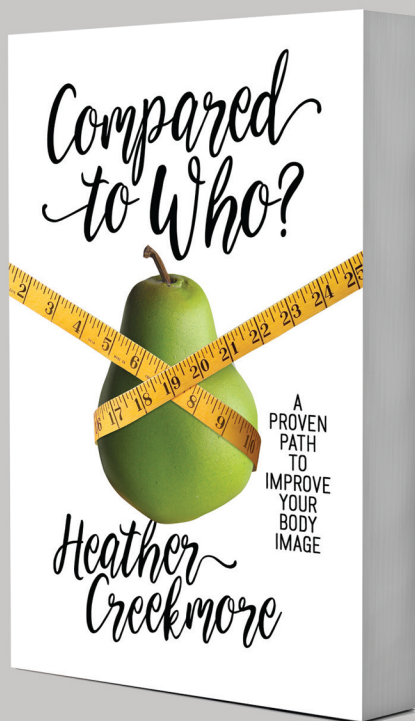
Help me to know that *I'm already enough with Jesus*—no matter what the scales or magazine covers say. Keep my focus this day on *you*, your kingdom, and your love and *off* my perceived body flaws. Remind me that my purpose for today is far greater than figuring out how I compare to *her . . . or her . . . or her*. Help me to aspire only to look and be more like *you*.

I need your strength, dear God. Please fill me with your spirit and empower me to fight this battle well today.



Writing from her personal battle with weight and appearance, Heather will encourage you to see your body image struggles from a fresh perspective. Heather's humor and honesty will encourage you, while her practical, grace-based approach will offer a path to follow to find the freedom you crave.

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About The Author

With grace and humor, HEATHER CREEKMORE writes and speaks hope to a woman's struggle with comparison and body image. As a certified group fitness instructor, Heather's twelve years of work in gyms allowed her to directly encourage women wrestling with discontentment over their bodies. She now hails from Dallas, Texas, where she lives with her husband, Eric, a pastor and Acts 29 church planter, and four young children. Heather connects with thousands of women weekly through her speaking and blog called Compared to Who? (www.ComparedtoWho.me).



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