

This episode is a follow-on companion to a previous episode, the one titled “The Promise and Perils of Benchmarking *Companies*.” Well, this one shifts the theme to focusing on *individuals*—that’s right, today we’re looking at “The Promise and Perils of Benchmarking Individuals.” And an astute understanding and fruitful application of that requires a very specific, very intentional framework.

But here’s the thing. When we spoke about benchmarking companies, we first looked at the promise, then looked at the perils of benchmarking companies. But now, as we look at benchmarking individuals, we are reversing the order: first, we’re going to look at the perils, then the promise. But why? Because handling the substantial perils first allows the amazing promise of benchmarking individuals to emerge.

In short, here’s the big idea about benchmarking individuals that overwhelms all other considerations: the overriding point about the perils and promises of benchmarking individuals *lies not with the people you benchmark per se...instead it lies with your mindset and preparations for benchmarking before you ever start!* That means *it doesn’t matter who you are benchmarking to if you are not appropriately benchmarking from the right personal framework!* Wow, that’s both sobering and ripe with opportunity! So, we start with perils of benchmarking and comparisons to others by engaging some deep Bible wisdom.

First, the peril of “wrong targets” for comparison. Paul wrote this to the Corinthians: “Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.” (2 Corinthians 10:12 ESV) So...here’s the caution: when we compare ourselves to *those who commend themselves*, we are already off base! Can you think of some supposedly great leaders who commend themselves—nonstop? Oh, surely not! Ha! Hey, the truth is, it’s perilous for us to classify or compare ourselves to such clueless people...and the current era’s many subcultures are chock-full of ‘em!

Second, the peril of “the wrong goal” for benchmarking to others. Paul wrote this to the Galatians (1:10). “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” That’s right, a believer’s rightly-oriented benchmarking to others is solely to seek the approval of a loving God Who wants us to be fruitful for His Kingdom!

Third, the peril of “judging others” to the detriment of ourselves. Matthew 7:1-2 says, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” The Pharisees were certainly quick to judge others to their supposed detriment, and this verse says the peril is calling judgment upon themselves. And, yeah, beyond the Pharisees of old, many modern-day judges *today* call judgement upon themselves!

If we don’t get that broad message, how about the specific Pharisee who’s portrayed as standing alongside a tax collector saying, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.” This sentiment can be found in virtually every political opinion in modern life—in fact, most often in pious self-righteous religionists! But the fact remains; according to God, those who heap condemnation on others will find their later position quite uncomfortable.

...And last in our list of perils is “wrongful conformity.” Paul wrote an admonition to the Romans in the first seven words of 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world...” And the reason this is last on our list is that *the antidote* to not being conformed to this world completes this sentence. So let’s hear the whole sentence at once: it’s a well-known recipe that’s divided by the word “but.” Here’s the full instruction: “Do not be conformed to this world, *but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” Now, for the promise...

Yeah, first we look at *the promise of “being transformed by the renewal of our minds.”* Now, that doesn’t happen by some specific, magical act of God’s unilateral, deterministic sovereignty. Rather, believers must act to discern in the testing. And how do we discern? Here’s a very key way how Jesus told us to do that:

the promise of benchmarking individuals happens when we gain necessary discernment by learning from the Holy Spirit. John 14:26 is where we find Jesus teaching that *the Holy Spirit teaches all things*. But that doesn't make learning automatic! Here's an ancient anecdote that can help us close the teaching loop...

An Anglican Bishop and philosopher in the 1600s, Dr. George Berkely, was allegedly the first to position this now-famous question: "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" The answer, according to Berkely, is "yes, it did make a sound, because God heard it." ...Now that's quite funny and makes us smile, but it's a classically unhelpful academic witticism. Yes, witty but impractical.

You see, there's a common, practical problem in Christianity with that when it comes to the Holy Spirit's teaching. Let's change Dr. Berkeley's tree proposition to this: "if the Holy Spirit is teaching and no one is listening, does the Spirit's teaching automatically turn into applied wisdom?" The obvious answer is "no."

And since there has been so much clear foolishness perpetrated by so many Christians for the past twenty centuries, it's certain such folks were *not* listening to the teaching of the infallible Holy Spirit. Some even claim with certitude that they know exactly how the Holy Spirit is limited...or they even disdain that the Holy Spirit is active in Christians' lives nowadays at all! That's sad. And the consequences are great!

So, here's the summary of this second point about the promise of benchmarking individuals: believers must gain God's prescribed, necessary discernment by listening to the Spirit! And that discernment originating from God is so wide-ranging as to work to effectively and wisely benchmark individuals.

Third, the promise of "the practice of counting others more significant than ourselves." Yes, there's this: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3) And Proverbs 22:4 says, "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." And then Paul: "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment..." (Romans 12:3)

Hey, humility is the only real path to position yourself to learn from the example and words of others.

Fourth, "put these practices in place such that they are in the very fiber of your being." In sports, this is called "muscle memory," where making three-point shots in basketball, for example, becomes part of who you are. For truly great Christians, the renewal of minds, the learning from the Holy Spirit Himself, and the saturation of humility in our lives is what positions the Christian to benchmark first to God vertically and to the very best of others horizontally.

Now, once these perils and promises that encompass practices that position us for our best character and mindset, *only then* are we truly ready to benchmark to the best engineers, IT workers, cashiers, accountants, teachers, and executives. And that goes for exceptional mothers, fathers, givers, and neighbors, too! But remember: almost every person has some bit of excellence for us to consider! Philippians 4:8 synthesizes so very much for us regarding benchmarking individuals and what they do...

"...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." Yes, the astute believer can discerningly find these *whatevers* in many a *whoever*!

But the fool is one who routinely judges all and condemns widely with arrogance and misplaced self-confidence. And in contrast, the wise find ways to love everyone while working on their own personal characteristics and habits. This includes effective benchmarking to the very best *whatevers* and *whoevers*! For wise Christians, that's the very reason why they work to conform to the Son of God (Romans 8:29).

Frankly, all this is a joyous, stress-relieving way to live life: we know that, like any military engagement or sports contest, the battle of benchmarking individuals effectively is won—first and foremost—by our intentional focus on and personal command of the perils and promises we outlined. Then, we must avoid the condemnation of others...love everyone as ourselves...all the while astutely zeroing in on the best *whatevers* and the *whoevers* doing them! *All that actually yields the promise of benchmarking individuals!*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. On a scale of 1 to 10—with 10 being best—what would you consider your current level of your focus on and mastery of the perils and promises of benchmarking individuals? And on a scale of 1 to 10, how are you doing in recalling and applying the perils of benchmarking individuals? Discuss.
2. Over time, have you found that many of the individuals that others believe are wonderful to benchmark to in business...and politics...and the Christian world actually fall far short of the worthiness of true benchmarking? Discuss.
3. Take some time and reflect for a week or two—deeply considering and applying the “perils and promises” identified to ensure you have the proper mindset and preparation for benchmarking individuals. Be sure to use the necessary reflection and effort to do that.

Then, given your personal profile, identify the top five “reachable” people you think you should benchmark for the next season in your life. Then put that identification aside, returning to it one year from today to assess your growth and progress.