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Damaging Comparisons

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Damaging Comparisons

Sisters Kendra and Connie Evans were much alike, except that Kendra was an “ugly duckling” in comparison with her blonde, blue-eyed, younger sister. The difference had been repeatedly noted even in childhood.

“What a perfectly beautiful child!” strangers had exclaimed over Connie. And through the years, Mrs. Evans never tired of hearing this praise for her younger daughter.

“Connie is a pretty child,” she would reply. “It’s just too bad that her sister couldn’t have shared her good fortune.” Kendra was just as intelligent as Connie, but Connie brought home nearly perfect report cards. In junior high school and in the church youth group she was elected an officer year after year. In high school, she became homecoming queen.

At 16, Kendra suddenly became the center of attention—when she became a serious problem.

“Why don’t you get out and make friends?” her annoyed mother asked. “If you’d only show a little of Connie’s gumption ...”

Teachers asked why a girl as capable as Kendra failed to show more initiative “like her sister.”

The comparisons burned Kendra. Through tears of defeat she saw no use of trying when the competition was so strong. She gave up and withdrew into a shell.

Mrs. Evans showed great disgust. The more disgusted she became, the more angry and withdrawn Kendra became. Finally she was brought to me as “a problem child.”

Probing, I discovered that the girls’ father had been too busy to enter into the family’s life and their upbringing had fallen to Mrs. Evans. In his rise in the business world, Mr. Evans had neglected even his wife. She in turn had tried to get satisfaction from two superior daughters, and while Connie had brought her recognition, Kendra had caused her distress and shame. Thus she was quick to praise one and criticize the other.

Mrs. Evans was able to see and admit her error. She needed to see her daughters' needs, not use her daughters to meet her own needs. Would Kendra accept the truth that God's commendation, not humans', is important, as is stated in 2 Corinthians 10:18 "For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends"?

Kendra came to see her own responsibility and came out of her self-exile. Daughter and parent got on with new understanding. Though Kendra didn't have the beauty of her sister, her spirit became lustrous, and there was no keeping it from showing through to the outside.

[Dr. Henry Brandt shares insights from various counseling sessions with parents. The names and certain details in these true case histories have been changed to protect each person's identity and privacy.]