More time spent with fewer people leads to greater lasting impact for the Kingdom of God.

BSU Christian Challenge
New Mexico State University
Study Series

CONTENTMENT
Consider the Lily
By Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)
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There was once a lily that grew in an out-of-the-way place by a little rippling brook. It lived in happy companionship with some nettles and a few other little flowers that grew nearby. The lily, to use the true description of Scripture, was more beautifully arrayed than Solomon in all his glory. Moreover, she was carefree and happy all the day long.

Unnoticed and blissful, the time slipped by like the rippling brook that murmurs its song and is gone. But it happened that one day a little bird visited the lily. It came again the next day. Then it stayed away for several days. Then it came again.

Now this seemed to the lily a strange and inexplicable thing: inexplicable that the bird did not remain in the same place like the little flowers nearby; strange that the bird could be so fickle. But...this little bird was a wicked bird. Instead of putting himself in the lily's place, instead of rejoicing in her beauty and sharing the job of innocent bliss, the bird would make himself important by the consciousness of his freedom and by making the lily feel her bondage.

The little bird was also talkative. He talked loose and fast, true and false, of how in other places there were a great number of lilies far more magnificent than she; there was also a joy and cheerfulness, a perfume, a splendor of colors, a song of the birds, that surpassed all description. So spoke the bird, and its stories ended as a rule with the remark, so humiliating for the lily, that she, in comparison with such glory, looked like nothing. Indeed, she was so insignificant that it was a question whether she had any right to be called a lily at all.

So the lily began to worry. And the more she listened to the bird, the more worried she became. No longer did she wake up happy in the morning. She felt herself imprisoned and bound.

She began to be taken up with worrying about herself and her circumstances all the day long. It is all very well, she said to herself, once in a while, and for the sake of a change, to listen to the murmuring of the brook. But day in and day out eternally to hear the same thing, that is much too wearisome.

It may be pleasant enough, she said to herself, once in a while to be in an out-of-the-way place and lonely, but to be forgotten like this all my life through; to be without company, or be in company with stinging nettles, which after all are no society for a lily—that is not to be endured.

And then to look so inferior as I do, said the lily to herself, to be so insignificant as the little bird says I am, O why was I not put in another place and in different circumstances? O why was I not a Crown Imperial? For the little bird had told her that
the Crown Imperial was regarded as the most beautiful among all the lilies, and was an object of envy to all other lilies...

During all this, the little bird flew to and fro, and the lily’s unrest was fostered by every visit and every parting. At last she confided all her heart to the bird. One evening they agreed that a change should take place next morning, which should put an end to her worries.

Early next morning the little bird came. With his beak he pecked away the soil from the lily’s root, so that she might be free. When this had been done, the bird took the lily under his wing and flew away. It had been arranged that the bird should fly with the lily to the place where those magnificent lilies bloomed. Then the bird was to assist in replanting her there, to see whether, by the change of place and the new surroundings, the lily might not succeed in becoming a magnificent lily...envied by all the others.

Alas, on the way the lily withered! Had that worried lily been content with being a lily, then she would not have worried. And had she not been worried, then she would have remained where she was, where she was in all her beauty.

The lily is mankind. That wicked little bird is the restless cogitation of comparison, which roams around far and wide, inconstant and fickle....

If then, with the movement of the bird to and fro, comparison has worked up our worries to a passion and got the worried one torn loose from the soil, that is, from willing to be what he was intended to be, then it seems for a moment as if comparison had now come to fetch the worried one to his desired goal. And come to fetch him it certainly does, but only as when death fetches a man. For it allows the worried one to die on the wings of despondency.

_But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding._

_II Corinthians 10:12 RSV_

This excerpt comes from Consider the Lilies (1850), Part II of Edifying Discourses in a Different Vein, translated by A.S. Aldworth and W.S. Ferrie, the C.W. Daniel Company, Ltd., 1940.