

05

God & Grass Skirts

WHAT'S THE SAME | TAKE JESUS TO WORK

Jesus keeps diving deeper and deeper into the storehouse of our hearts through this sermon. He is slowly breaking down barriers that may be keeping us from more of the Father's presence in every area of our life.



In both of our verses this week, it's "take Jesus to work day." He knows that worry over our work is just another thorn that can puncture the soul, slowly draining it of trust in God. But a transference of toil for rest will do an incredible freeing work in us.

First things first, Jesus wants us to consider the work of God's hands instead of our own. He brings to our attention two things that have absolutely nothing to do with work at all: the flowers and the grass. So what do these things represent in regards to an anxious free work life? Let's see.

The grass represents things rooted in the temporary things of this earth. These things include our jobs. Our appearance. Our health. Our money. And the role that each of these can play in either building up or tearing down our faith.

The flowers represent growth without toiling or spinning. Jesus uses the words *κοπιαῶ* and *νεῖθῶ* to explain that flowers do not “engage in wearisome labor,” or “labor unto extreme fatigue”. For the flower to fully realize its potential, it must rest and rely on the work that is happening all around them.

**FOR THE FLOWER
TO FULLY REALIZE
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RELY.**

Grass and flowers do not dress themselves. They cannot water themselves. They cannot make the sun shine or keep bugs at bay. They are reliant on the Creator and the Gardener for their clothing and care. They don't worry about the rest.

When I was eight, I went to a tourist attraction in Hawaii with my family. After a routine stop to the bathroom, the drawstring inside of my shorts decided it no longer wanted to draw. I remember my mother trying to fix them, but it was no use. There were tears. Mortification. Despair. Then my mother did something I will never forget. She bought me one of the most beautiful, ornate Hawaiian grass skirts I had ever seen. Somehow she tied my loose drawstring into the skirt lining and I was saved. I felt stunning.

Throughout the day, other tourists would stop us and ask for a picture of the little girl in her gorgeous grass skirt. My mom had taken my shame and clothed me in dignity. It was her doing, not mine. I had done absolutely nothing to dress myself in such splendor. All I did was recognize I had broken shorts.

In this scripture, Jesus aligns our eyes to the simple beauty of a life free from toil. He drapes us in an identity free from anxiousness over our work, because the work has already been done. To work without toiling is to have the courage to trust that God doesn't need your fatigue to fulfill his plans. Psalm 138:8 says, “The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me.”

He doesn't need you checking all the right religious boxes. And he doesn't need you slaying your to do list. He wants you to keep your eyes on him in the seasons where you're too worried to even catch your breath. He wants you to surrender your plans, so your plans don't run away with your heart. He wants you to own your broken shorts, so he can clothe you in a grass skirt.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT | SPINNING SPLENDOR

Between these two accounts, the only difference is the way these sections begin and end. In Matthew, Jesus starts with a question about clothing, to remind all who were listening not to look to the external for internal worth.

And at the end, Luke finishes with an exclamation and Matthew, a question.

To the disciples, Jesus is adamant that a lack of trust in God's provision is a direct correlation to the size of their faith. To the crowds, Jesus poses an open ended invitation—*have you ever considered why you only trust yourself to get the job done? Is it because you don't trust God to do a good job?*

And both accounts use the same guy as a cautionary tale: Solomon.

To the original hearers of this sermon, Solomon had no comparison. He was the gold standard of success. There would have been some serious shock and confusion among the crowds when Jesus compared the most intelligent, famous, and well-dressed king in Israel's history to a pretty flower—*and the flower wins?*

But Jesus knew Solomon's story inside and out. He knew how God felt about the inner workings of Solomon's heart.

When Solomon became king, God asked him what he would most like to have in this world. He responded, "an understanding heart". God was so stoked by his request that he threw in loads of money and favor "to enable him to govern God's people effectively."¹ But over time, Solomon's heart split right down the middle; his own glory began to eclipse God's.

**SOLOMON'S
HEART SPLIT
RIGHT DOWN THE
MIDDLE.**

And then one day, Solomon "built a high place" for his wives to worship *their* gods. Worrying over women who didn't love the Lord was direct disobedience for Solomon and yet he "clung to them in love."² Solomon's gift of an "understanding heart" couldn't thrive in thorn-bound soil. He started to make bad decisions. He started to go gray in the areas God had clearly made black and white. God's word was choked out and Solomon's kingdom ultimately collapsed.

Jesus knows his Dad couldn't care less about the appearances Solomon was trying to keep up. Jesus says that the flower of the field is better dressed than the most dapper man in town because the flower is simply doing one job: reflecting the glory of the Maker.

WHAT THAT MEANS | LOOKING GOOD, GIRL

Jesus doesn't ask us to consider the toil-free splendor of the flowers because he wants us to quit working and live off the land without direction or

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purpose—he uses this terminology so we aren't tempted to take credit for what we perceive to be the work of our own hands.

When we attempt to take credit for what plot twists God is writing into our lives, Jesus is shoved backstage and we are certain we can hit all the high notes ourselves. When Jesus loses his spotlight in our lives, it isn't too long before our work, our success, our failures, and our future run the whole dang show. And we are anxious about every single minute.

The Message version of Philippians 4:6-7, hits this on the head:

“Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.”

INSTEAD OF WORRYING, PRAY. Anytime we try to displace the cross from within the everyday experience of our lives—from the center of who we are—our minds and hearts will be robbed of peace. H. H. Farmer wrote that a life lived for self never goes well: “You can't go against the grain of the universe and not expect to get a few splinters.”

Greatness isn't good for the human soul. Allowing God to do great things through us? That's when the human soul thrives.

Jesus even said himself, “And now, One greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42). Jesus compares himself to the one man in history that the Jewish culture would've associated the utmost of material and spiritual favor with—and he says *I am greater*. I don't have a nice home, let alone a palace. I don't have loads of gold and women. I don't have political power. I don't have any outward evidence of splendor, but I do the will of my Father. And that is greatness. That is worthwhile work.

Jesus finalizes this part of his sermon in Luke with a rhetorical question, *O you of little faith?*

What areas of your life do you reserve big faith for? When bad things happen, does your faith shrink and in moments of blessing does it grow? If we want to be free from worry over the work of our hands, we have to ask him to replace our fear of failing with reverent fear over what God is doing in us

and through us.

I recently found that grass skirt my mother bought me in a storage closet. It was badly wrinkled and crispy, faded and brittle. It's now quintessential fire-starter material. Just like the grass that Jesus says is alive one day and burned the next. Everything breaks down at some point. This is what we need to understand about the fading splendor of self-glory, it'll always find its way back to ash.

But the clothing and the covering of God? That lasts forever. And dang, does he make us look good.



DISCUSS

Why do you think Jesus asks us to notice things like grass and the flowers in relation to our work, instead of things like hammers and saws?

When you hear the word “work” what do you think of? What do you do for “work”?

Why are “toilsome” activities not in alignment with the will of the Father?

Do you believe God wants to clothe you in beauty and splendor? Or do you have more of an ash and sackcloth view of his style for you?

Can you think of ways to invite God into the work you are currently doing now that maybe you haven’t considered in the past?



READ & REFLECT

Read the account of Jesus' crucifixion in John 19:28-30. In verse 30, what does Jesus say of the job he came to do on your behalf to fulfill the will of his Father?

The word "finished" is *tetelestai*, which means paid in full. Do you know what it is like to try and pay off a debt? How much work does it require?

Read the places where Jesus' finished work on the cross fulfills scripture in Psalm 69:21. Then read John 4:13-14 and John 7:38-39.

Commentators note that it is striking that the One who was dying of thirst is also the One who is living water. Why do you think this is how God chose to fulfill the finished work of Jesus?

Hint: Was Jesus' very last need met? Does sour wine quench thirst?

Why does dying to self and denying our thirst for things that won't satisfy further fulfill God's purpose for our lives?

PEACE PRACTICE | REST

This week, rest. If you feel like you've been spinning and toiling over something in particular or in general, confess to your group what that area has been. And every time you are tempted to throw yourself into the spin cycle over that thing, ask to be encouraged by the Spirit that God doesn't need your fatigue to fulfill his plans.

First Look

Luke 12:29-30

And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them.

Second Look

Matthew 6:31-32

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.