

Thailand: comparisons

Crippling

May 19, 2015

I once heard it said that comparison is the thief of joy. I know that's true, because I have experienced it myself. I also know many of the individuals I work with experience it, as well.



Stacie Aguilar When I first arrived here, I learned pretty quickly about the ideals of beauty in Thai culture and Asian culture in general. I also learned about the lengths that some Thais would go to achieve these ideals of beauty—particularly ladyboys. Working with ladyboys is not easy. Outreach with ladyboys is not much easier, either. In essence, they are men wanting to be women, many who are in the process of transitioning, and most of what they are is artificial. We sit in the bars surrounded by walls made of mirrors and try to talk to them, and sometimes all they can do is stare at themselves.

It astounds me how absolutely absorbed they become looking at their reflection. And honestly, who can blame them? Most of them have smoother, straighter, longer hair than I could ever dream to have. Their waists and arms are thinner, their lips and curves fuller than mine. They probably know more about makeup and fashion than I could ever know. I go into the bars sometimes and cannot help but feel slightly self-conscious. I think about how I could never look like that, but then I remember, no one looks like that. At least, not naturally.



The Thai people love their royal family. This display contains a picture of the Thai princess. I can't help but feel compassion for these ladyboys. Their life revolves around how beautiful and feminine others think they are, and opinions are always changing. Compared to females, they have to try so much harder. I may not look like any of these ladyboys, but I have never had to prove that I am a woman. I just am. It's a difficult life for them, because no matter how much beautiful they may become, the beauty never lasts.

I think about how they compare themselves and how hard that is to never be satisfied with who they are. I realize that I do the same thing in my own way. I compare myself to the other missionaries here in Bangkok and wonder if I am doing as much as them. I wonder if my passion is enough, if my work is enough, if I am enough.

The truth is I am not. Thankfully my God is. I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 12:9 when the Lord says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I may not be perfect, but it is through those imperfections that God is able to shine so brightly.

Ephesians 2:8-9 also says "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." To be given grace is to be given what you do not

deserve, something you did not earn. I did not deserve to be loved by God. I just am. We just are.

Joy comes from understanding God's grace. It comes from realizing we do not have to earn our place with the Father; we just have to accept that Jesus already did what was necessary for us to come to God. We do not have to try. Yet, sometimes our pride gets in the way of that. We want our work to mean something, and to think that it doesn't matter can sometimes be difficult. The truth is, our actions still matter, but they do not determine our worth. God loves us regardless whether we are a pastor or a prostitute. When we understand and accept God's grace, there is no room for comparison. God is working in you and God is working in me and truth be told, it looks different for all of us.

I keep on wanting to compare myself, not just to the people around me, but even to who I was back home. Being here has truly reminded me that we are all the body of Christ and that we all have different functions. I may not have the same gifts and abilities as those around me, but I have my own, and together we can do what God has called us to do and be who God has asked us to be here. It's been a tough lesson to learn, but I'm thankful I have been able to learn it.

Moving to another subject, this past month, my co-worker Rebekah and I had the special privilege of helping in a transition house for trafficked woman. We spent our time with a 27-year-old Ugandan woman who was trafficked to Thailand a couple years ago. She has two children, two sons who are 6 and 8 years old. She was a hairdresser back in Uganda and was tricked by people saying they had a job for her in Thailand. She was brought here illegally, which made it hard for her to leave after realizing that she would not work as a hairdresser. We just learned last week that she finally will be able to return home May 20 to see her family again. It will be sad to say goodbye to her, but we are so thrilled to see this beautiful woman be rescued.

Stacie Aguilar, a recent graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso, is serving with an anti-trafficking ministry in Thailand through [Go Now Missions](#).