



Week 3 – Thorns & Thistles

1. In Genesis 1-2, Adam and Eve worked in the garden in an environment of **shalom (peace)**. But that peace was conditioned upon their obedience to God's command. They were to **keep (guard)** the garden through their obedience to his command.
2. When Adam and Eve **sinned** in the garden, every aspect of creation was affected. Peace was replaced with a **curse**. Everything in creation was affected by the Fall, including work.

"...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:17-19)
3. God's curse does not remove all of work's benefits (it still meets our physical needs), but work also produces "**thorns and thistles**," which symbolize the painful, unintended consequences of work.
4. Some of the "thorns and thistles" we experience with our work include:
 - Anxiety, illness, injury and **exhaustion**

"What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity." (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23)
 - A sense of **pointlessness**

"So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind." (Ecclesiastes 2:17)
 - **Envy** of others

"Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind." (Ecclesiastes 4:4)
 - Confusing work with **identity**.

"Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:4)
 - Making work an **idol**.

"We have an alternate or counterfeit god if we take anything in creation and begin to "bow down" to it – that is, to love serve and derive meaning from it more than from the true God."
Tim Keller – Every Good Endeavor
5. But there is good news! Through the **redeeming** actions of Jesus Christ, God is overcoming all brokenness caused by sin. "Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5)



Small Group Questions

1. Solomon says that work is “striving after the wind.” In other words, work in a fallen world makes us chase something we will never catch. What are you chasing with your work that you can never seem to catch?
2. God cursed work so that it would produce “thorns and thistles.” No one plans to grow thorn and thistles, yet they come anyway. What are some of the regular thorns and thistles you experience at work – things not turning out the way you planned?
3. Work also robs us of rest in a fallen world. Even when we are away from it, we still think about it. What anxious thoughts do you tend to have about your work?
4. The Tower of Babel in Gen. 11:4 illustrates how we are tempted to use work to reach for the heavens (become God-like) and make a name for ourselves (see it as our identity). How do you use work to make a name for yourself and to try and be God-like (in control of yourself and others)?
5. God’s original purpose for work was for it to be a means to serve him and others. Now the purpose of work is often corrupted by envy of our neighbors. In what ways is your motivation to work hard driven by envy (to get more recognition than co-workers, to earn money to keep up with your friends’ lifestyles, etc.)

Homework

As we shared in previous weeks, our goal for this study is to move beyond merely gaining information about work and to actually be transformed in our work by the power of God’s grace. But in order to experience transformation we first need to be clear on what exactly about us needs change. As you think about today’s topic and your answers to the discussion questions, write down 2-4 specific “thorns and thistles” you experience with work. Some of these may be the general brokenness of work in a fallen world (like an area of your job that you find very difficult or frustrating to do) or could be your own sin struggles (like the need to make a name for yourself). Try to include examples of both categories (general brokenness and your own personal sin).