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Three Sermons on  
*Work and Faith*

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***God's Call in Our Daily Lives***  
by Gary Klingsporn

***The  
High Calling  
of Our  
Daily Work***

*Making a real living connects you to a bigger picture,  
a grand design, an abundant life.  
Each of us has only a small part to play, but what a part!  
It's the high calling of our daily work.*

– Howard Butt, Jr., of Laity Lodge  
*TheHighCalling.org*

## **A Note from the Author**

During the past decades, there has been alarming evidence of a profound disconnect between faith and daily life among people of faith in North America. Studies and surveys consistently show a dichotomy in people's lives between the church and the world, Sunday and Monday, faith and work, faith and daily life.

Within the past few years, however, increasing efforts have been made to address this disconnect between faith and daily life. A growing body of literature is now focusing on a theology of work, the meaning of calling and vocation, relationships between faith and culture, the church and the world. Internet websites, blogs, and ministries, along with other multimedia initiatives, conferences, and study centers, are expanding the conversation around these issues. These are welcome and needed developments.

Sermon Notes from *TheHighCalling.org* seek to contribute to this conversation. The theme of the sermons is daily life and work as calling and vocation. The sermons could be used as individual offerings or developed as a three-part series under a title such as "God's Call in Our Daily Lives" or "Work as Calling and Vocation."

I have chosen one passage from the Old Testament, one from the Gospels, and one from the New Testament Epistles, in part, to encourage future reflection on these themes from all portions of the Scriptures. The three outlines are:

**Sermon 1: God Calls Us (Exodus 3:1-12 / Call of Moses)**

**Sermon 2: You Are My Beloved (Mark 1:9-11 / Baptism of Jesus)**

**Sermon 3: Love in Action (1 John 3:16-24 / Let Us Love Others)**

## **Sermon 1: God Calls Us**

### **Exodus 3:1-12**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

**Theological Point:** God speaks into our ordinary lives, transforms everything by his presence, and calls us to do his healing and liberating work in the world.

### **Introduction: When the holy happens**

#### **A. Holy Ground**

#### **B. God Calls Us**

#### **C. But Who Am I?**

### **Conclusion: I will be with you.**

**Introduction:** Moses was herding ordinary sheep on an ordinary day in the wilderness of Sinai. There was a bush—an ordinary, scrubby bush. Suddenly the holy happened. Everything was transformed. Nothing in Moses' life was ever the same again.

The opening of a sermon on this story could be as simple as the above five sentences. The preacher could then tell the story by vividly describing the scene in more detail: the barren wasteland of Sinai; the dark, foreboding mountain; the flame of fire from the bush; Moses turning aside to look, then taking off his sandals; and the Voice calling out to him: "Come, I will send you to bring my people out of Egypt."

The story is about calling and vocation. It's about the extraordinary breaking into the ordinary. It's about hearing and responding to the call of God in our lives. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says of

the story, “Moses had his ordinariness broken. He had to rethink the faith and the life of his people. Moses discovered that his life was saturated with the reality of God. . . . And he wondered: What could be different about the purpose of my life because of the reality of this God?” (*The Threat of Life: Sermons on Pain, Power, and Weakness*, Fortress, 1996, p. 23).

Calling, vocation, purpose. Another way to begin this sermon might be to tell a story of one’s own experience of the call of God. Or one might tell of a simple experience of the awareness of the presence of God—a sacred or holy moment, no matter how small. Here’s an example:

My wife Debra and I were sitting on a park bench overlooking a small lake. We were having our morning coffee and talking about the day ahead—the ordinary stuff of life. When our two daughters’ names came up, Debra suddenly paused and got a faraway look in her eye. After a long silence she said: “My job description as I’ve known it as a mother for the last twenty years is coming to an end. Soon I’ll no longer be able to bury my face in the smell of their soft morning wake-up hair. I won’t be running last-minute things up to the school anymore. They won’t come bounding in the door, full of life, at the end of the day. The defining priorities of my life as a ‘mom’ will end. My world is about to be redefined. I don’t know what my new job description is going to be.” Then with a tear in her eye she said, “There’s a loss in that.” Together we sat in the silence of the morning sun, the wind on the water, the trees stirring in the breeze. Debra had just named our new reality as empty nesters. In its own strange way, that moment became a sacred moment. Something holy happened. In an ordinary conversation on an ordinary morning, we suddenly felt the presence of God.

Telling that kind of story grounds the sermon in a modern-life experience with which everyone can identify. As one then transitions to the story of Moses, the preacher’s own personal story serves as a backdrop to help listeners identify with Moses’ story.

**A. Holy Ground.** When the holy happens, when we experience God’s presence, or God speaks to us, all is transformed. “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (v. 5).

Here the sermon might briefly explore the concept of “the holy” in ancient Israel. God’s holiness requires respectful distance, but God’s presence also transforms everything at hand. The burning bush in the barren, lonely desert of Sinai is a sign that God often comes and graces the lowly, appears in the common places of life, and speaks a word. We can experience God’s presence anywhere, anytime, at work, school, home. God’s presence happens to ordinary people going about their ordinary routines. So it’s important to be watching and listening for those moments. This point is important in helping people avoid the common disconnect between their faith and their daily life and work.

The words of Frederick Buechner come to mind: “Taking your children to school and kissing your wife good-bye. Eating lunch with a friend. Trying to do a decent day’s work. Hearing the rain patter against the window. There is no event so commonplace but that God is present within it, always hiddenly, always leaving you room to recognize him or not to recognize him, but all the more fascinatingly because of that, all the more compellingly and hauntingly. . . . Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness—touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it—because in the last analysis, all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace” (*Now and Then*, Harper & Row, 1983, p. 87).

**B. God Calls Us.** “I have seen the suffering of my people in Egypt; I have heard their cry; and I have come down to deliver them. . . . So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt” (vv. 7-8, 10). God calls Moses to a task. There is work to be done. The call will change his life forever.

Here is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of our work as calling and vocation. There is in the Protestant tradition a rich body of reflection on this subject. Martin Luther saw all means of livelihood and productive work, even the most mundane and unpleasant labor, as marks of Christian vocation and response to God. John Calvin said that all our actions, not just our work, are a response to God’s calling.

Taken seriously, this means that our work and all we do in daily life are our vocation. All work given us by God is therefore holy and is done as a service to God.

In our day, Parker Palmer has spoken of the importance of listening inwardly for the call of God: “Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening. . . . Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear . . . It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God” (*Let Your Life Speak*, Jossey-Bass, 2000, pp. 4, 10).

“So come, I will send you to bring my people out of Egypt.” Here the preacher might ask: So what is your calling, your vocation? What is the work to which God calls you? Are you living out your calling? Some writers suggest it is helpful to think in terms of our various or multiple callings in our work, relationships, leisure, family, and community. So the question might also be: Are you living out your callings in your different roles in life?

For the notion of multiple callings in life, see Douglas Schuurman’s book, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Eerdmans, 2004). Schuurman distinguishes the primary calling of all Christians to love God and neighbor from the multiple particular callings in which we carry out the command to love.

The story of Moses invites us to take off our shoes and listen for the Voice of God’s call, God’s guidance, and reassurance.

**C. But Who Am I?** Moses’ initial response to God was, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (v. 11). What a human moment! The call was overwhelming and filled with risk. Moses felt fearful and inadequate. He was reluctant to go. Don’t we all feel that way at one time or another? Just as it isn’t always easy to hear God’s call in our lives, it isn’t easy to live out our call. But we don’t have to do it on our own, nor can we.

**Conclusion: I will be with you.** The sermon might end with God’s response to Moses, “I will be with you” (v. 12). While in the remainder of the story, Moses offered further objections to the divine call, eventually he went. God’s “I will be with you” sustained him from the mud pits of Egypt all the way to Mt. Nebo. That same promise of divine presence gives us hope in our journeys. Created, redeemed, and called by God, we also are given the assurance of God’s presence and power every step of the way. And that makes all the difference.

**Connection to Faith and Daily Life:** The story of God’s call in Moses’ life invites us to reflect on our own calling and vocation. Our work and all we do in daily life are a response to God’s call. We discern our calling and vocation by listening for God, and we are promised God’s presence as we live our call daily.