

FOUNDATIONS FOR  
LAITY RENEWAL

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*Transforming Daily Life*

719 Earl Garrett Street  
Kerrville, TX 78028

Three Sermon Outlines on

*Work and Faith*

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*Making Sense of Your Life*

Leslie Hollon

SERMON NOTES

*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

# The High Calling to Live Your Best Life

## Three Case Studies of What To Do and Not To Do

### Four Questions to Answer

Recently, I sat down to update my life mission statement. Specifically, I wrote an honest evaluation of where I am in life and what my commitments were for the future. My categories were: personal, husband and father, lifestyle, relationships, spiritual, health, financial, vocational, worldview, and legacy. The categories may be different from person to person but the point behind the categories is to help us think intentionally of how we can live our best life by trusting God in every way. This is brought into focus by answering four basic questions.

**A. Life Vision - To what dream do you commit?** What over-arching accomplishment do you pursue? The life vision expresses our innermost longings and is an extension of our best. Visioning enables us to dream the dream; modifications of the dream occur along the way. Evaluate the vision's cost and evaluate your determination to make the necessary investment.

Jesus challenged us by saying, "Be ye therefore perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, that is to grow in complete maturity of godliness in mind and character, having reached the proper height of virtue and integrity."(Matt. 5:48 Amplified Version). God's love gives us a vision to think worthily of a worthy life. Everything comes into focus through your life vision.

**B. Life Work – Does your vocation live up to its basic meaning—“to be called.”** A vocation should give tangible expression to one's life vision. The *vocare* should be fulfilling, exciting, and personally rewarding. Consequently, the *vocare* issue is both stimulating and frightening. God's love gives purpose to our talents. However, it is important to remember that the work we do to get paid for may only be a partial expression of our vocation.

**C. Life Relationships – Have you considered that the role of intimacy in life** is answered by deciding how to live with family and friends; or are you to marry? For biblical characters like Paul—God's best did not include marriage. For others—David, Aquilla, and Priscilla—it did.

If to marry, then whom? We learn a lot about ourselves by our choice of husband/wife. The issue of children raises the question about our responsibility for the next generation. Experiencing God's love frees us to decide what is God's individual best for us.

**D. Life Legacy – What results do you want from your life?** Do you want to accumulate financial wealth, enduring reputation, a body of work, imprints on other people's lives? The legacy is the offspring of your life vision. God's love broadens our vision to see the big picture. Be aware that every day you form your legacy.

The following three sermons seek to demonstrate what we can learn from the triumphs and failures of two famous biblical characters—Paul and David.

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## Sermon 3

### “David: Facing a Parent’s Worst Nightmare”

Selections from 2 Samuel 13-18

2 Samuel 18:33

*The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”*

#### **Central Truth:**

David’s lament for Absalom is among the most remorseful lines in the Bible. Understanding what caused this tragedy can help families avoid David’s regret and/or triumph over family tragedies that have already occurred.

#### **Introduction:**

In the pre-op room of a San Antonio hospital, while holding my parents’ hands for prayer before my dad’s surgery, the years rolled by in my mind. I reflected and remembered.

*These hands*, now touched by time, touched my body the moment I was born. *These hands* lifted me to their bosom. *These hands* changed my clothes. *These hands* held my hand while I walked my first steps. *These hands* assembled my Christmas toys. *These hands* clicked the camera to record my life. *These hands* showed constant love to my brothers, my sister, and me.

*These hands* bandaged our skinned knees and with a pat of encouragement said, “Get back out there.” *These hands* stirred the morning oatmeal and made our school lunches. *These hands* steered the car to and from the many places of our lives. *These hands*, along with our hands, worked sweat equity into making land and a house into a home. *These hands* threw the football and pitched the baseball. *These hands* dried our tears and showed us how to recover from life’s mishaps. *These hands* held the family Bible and the church hymnal.

*These hands* labored hard and paid the bills. *These hands* opened their billfold to buy us life’s necessities and opportunities. *These hands* opened books of learning and signed report cards. *These hands* handed over the car keys for outings of independence and kept the home light burning until our safe return. *These hands* showed us the door of adventure and then wrote letters to ease our homesick hearts. *These hands*, when needed, placed on our shoulders the message, “Be aware of God’s hope and beware of the Devil’s danger.” In countless ways, these hands blessed my brothers, my sister, and me. In countless ways, the hands of my mother and father built healthy, parent-child relationships. In contrast to my own experience was the relationship between King David and his son, Absalom.

#### **A Parent’s Costly Inaction (13:20-21):**

Absalom was responsible for his own sinful choices. However, he surely was deeply influenced by his father, David, including David’s sins against Bathsheba, Uriah, and others. David’s disconnect of his leadership responsibility for his children caused avoidable anguish.

Absalom’s half-brother, Amnon, raped Absalom’s sister, Tamar, but father David did not do anything to correct the wrong. Absalom seethed in rage. He was hurt. The son’s anger turned to bitterness, his bitterness to cynicism. Left to himself, Absalom concocted a plan to kill Amnon. “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger,” was Paul’s warning to parents who do not act when and as they should (Eph. 6:4, NRSV).

Amnon yearned lustfully for Tamar, his half-sister. Amnon acted out this lust by raping Tamar. After satisfying his sinful desire, Amnon “hated her more than he had loved her” (13:5). His sexual conquest complete, he then discarded her. “Get up and get out!” (13:15). Amnon had rejected Tamar’s pleas for family honor and decency.

Amnon’s abuse of power made his father, David, furious, but David failed to act (13:21). Why? Perhaps because David saw his own sins playing themselves out in his children, and these sins were too painful to confront. David had asked for and received God’s forgiveness for his sin with Bathsheba (see 12:13; Psalm 51:1), but there is no indication that he sought his family’s forgiveness. The children were left to work things out among themselves, and the result was moral chaos.

Absalom, seeing his sister distressed, asked whether his suspicions were accurate (2 Sam. 13:20), “Has that

Amnon, your brother, been with you?” Absalom protected his sister by having her stay in his house, but the multiple tragedies inflicted on Tamar left her “a desolate woman” (13:20). Absalom hated Amnon for disgracing his sister (13:33).

For two years, Absalom seethed with hatred. As anger had crouched at the door of Cain’s heart before he murdered his brother, Abel (Gen. 4:6-7), a vengeful anger now governed Absalom’s soul.

#### **The Deadly Results of Revenge (13:30-33):**

Absalom chose a family worksite to the north, Baal Hazor, near Ephraim’s border, as the place to murder Amnon and intimidate all his brothers. Each brother served as a royal advisor, and Absalom may have held them partially responsible for David’s inactivity in correcting Amnon (see 8:18).

When invited to attend Absalom’s sheep-shearing party, David cautiously granted permission for the royal sons to attend. Amnon, foolishly unsuspecting, played right into his brother’s scheme. He became the sheep who was sheared of his life. The party’s bloody climax came when Absalom ordered his men to murder drunken Amnon.

Panic ensued. David received a false report that “Absalom has struck down all the king’s sons” (13:30). David responded by the grief ritual of tearing his garment and lying prostrate on the ground. His servants did the same. However, David’s nephew, Jonadab, corrected the false report and told his uncle what he should have known on his own. Amnon’s death was “Absalom’s expressed intention ever since the days Amnon raped his sister Tamar” (13:32).

David’s sin against Bathsheba and Uriah infected his children. David compounded his and Amnon’s sins by never holding his son accountable for raping Tamar. Absalom’s anger grew as David failed to act like a father. Absalom’s bitterness bred hatred that unleashed fratricide, brother killing brother. Absalom fled into exile. David did nothing. The kingdom trembled.

#### **When Reconciliation Fails (14:25-15:10):**

Joab, David’s loyal but ruthless military commander, contracted with a prophetess from Tekoa to entreat the king to grant Absalom’s return from exile. When David discerned her intentions, she declared he was “like an angel of God in discerning good and evil” (2 Sam. 14:17; see also 14:20). But as a father to rebellious sons, David was foolish. In the case of Amnon and Absalom, David did not have the courage to act on his wisdom.

For two years, David shunned Absalom’s return to Jerusalem. By this time, Absalom himself was a father of three sons and a daughter named for his sister—Tamar (14:27). She was as beautiful as her father was handsome. Absalom evidently set the standard for good looks for Israelites. Across the kingdom they talked about his handsome features and perfect body. His hair, like that of Samson before him, was a sign of strength. In vanity he weighed his hair after each cut. Three pounds with each weighing meant he grew it long. The display of Absalom’s vanity about his hair foreshadowed his undoing (see 18:9, 14-15).

However, before that fateful day, Joab made it possible for the wayward prince to return from exile. Joab then influenced the king to stop shunning his returned son. Absalom wanted an audience with his father. He yearned for an audience with the king, saying, “...if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death” (14:32).

When David received his son, Absalom bowed down with his face to the ground. This ceremonial act of humility stirred the father-king to bless his son with a ceremonial kiss (14:33). Tragically, however, their reunion was not a reconciliation.

This father and son, although they were king and prince, could not afford to take shortcuts when establishing the trust they would need to build a new relationship. Sweaty work would be required to restore their broken relationship.

Absent reconciliation, Absalom returned to an attitude of treachery against his father. He assembled around him the symbols of power—a chariot, horses, and an entourage of fifty men. Using his princely position, “he stole the hearts of the men of Israel” (15:6).

After using this ploy for four years, thinking he had persuaded enough people to form a successful rebellion, Absalom deceived his father to get David’s blessing to return to their old home of Hebron for a worship service. David commissioned Absalom, whose name means *father of peace*, to go in peace. But peace was not Absalom’s purpose.

Spies of the deceitful son worked among the tribes of Israel, saying, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron’” (15:10). Belatedly, David realized that Absalom was positioned to launch a successful rebellion. A messenger told David, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom” (15:13). Pressed by circumstance, the king led a hurried retreat from Jerusalem, the city of David.

Later Absalom entered Jerusalem triumphantly as the self-proclaimed king. By grasping for the kingdom, he discounted the fact that he was not God’s anointed. He chose to show the people he was powerful enough to take all that had belonged to his displaced father (16:20-23). Absalom had sexual relations with David’s concubines. The insolent son’s sinful actions fulfilled one of the judgments Nathan declared against David (12:11-12).

### **Tragedy Intensified (18:6-15, 33):**

David’s strategies and soldiers prevailed against Absalom’s. The climactic battle in the forest of Ephraim was bloody. Twenty thousand men died (18:7). But one more death awaited the battle’s conclusion. The king had instructed his field commander, Joab, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake” (18:5). The soldiers heard the king give the same orders to all his commanders. But Joab determined that Absalom’s death was necessary to end the rebellion. Absalom’s hair evidently got tangled up in the long branches of an oak tree as he fled Joab. David’s soldiers refused to kill Absalom. But Joab, with ten of his armor-bearers, struck him dead.

David’s army rejoiced. David lamented. The king’s grief shamed the men. Joab told David to get a grip on himself. Otherwise the kingdom would be lost with no way to regain it.

“O my son Absalom! My son, my Absalom! If only I had died instead of you,” is among the most remorseful lines in all the Bible (18:33). David anguished in his knowledge that this family tragedy, played out in the kingdom of Israel, could have been avoided.

### **Lessons Learned, Lessons Applied:**

We can live the promise David and Absalom forfeited by learning from their pain. Learning is a responsibility and an opportunity. When reading the Bible, the reader must learn from the recorded successes and failures. Life learning is a basic reason God gave us the Bible. One of the Bible’s basic message is for parents to bless their children and for children to be blessings for their parents. Every child deserves to receive four blessings, whether the child is born, adopted, or befriended into a family. Blessings are biblical ways of giving power to another person.

- *Mixing joy into the child’s life* enables children to feel their importance. Children need to hear words of affirmation. They need to know, *you are special*, or *you are wonderful*. The joy of knowing we matter to God and God’s people lays a secure foundation for all of life. The gift of being delighted-in helps children give delight to others.
- *Molding memories worth keeping* is a second blessing children need. Each of us lives with memories, but not everyone lives with memories worth keeping. Worthy memories enable us to feel our worth in God’s eyes and help us make our way through life with reference points that show us what to do and how to do it. Good memories are molded when together we pray, worship, laugh, cry, play, listen, study, travel, work, sweat, keep promises, and forgive.
- *Modeling growth* for children grants them security in knowing there is a way to go forward. Success is being who God creates us to be and doing what God calls us to do. Seeing people model growth gives confidence to children as they become teenagers and to teenagers as they become more whole and holy.
- *Making eternal life* a normal topic of conversation enables children to know that God doesn’t abandon us—ever. Through Jesus’ own life, death, and resurrection, we are given treasures of salvation for today and endless tomorrows. To show another person how to live is to show that person how to die in the assurance that God has a home called heaven for everyone who knows the Way, the Truth, and the Life (see John 14:6).

Absalom’s given name revealed David’s hope that his son would be at peace with God, himself, his family, and his nation. Tragically David’s dreams were not realized. Instead of growing into his name’s promise, Absalom rebelled against shalom. But it didn’t have to be that way.