

FOUNDATIONS FOR
LAITY RENEWAL

Transforming Daily Life

719 Earl Garrett Street
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Three Sermon Outlines on

Work and Faith

***Management: The True Art
of Faith and Work***

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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

Management: The True Art of Faith and Work

Introduction to the Sermon Series: For a decade now, *leadership* has been the rage. Scores of bestselling books tout the important skills of organizational leadership. *Management*, on the other hand, feels like a boring stepchild to the all-important leadership role. Leadership is about envisioning the future and creating the team to pursue it; management is about the nuts and bolts of daily implementation of the organization practically living out the goals of leadership. Leadership seems to get the front-page press; management feels buried in Section D.

This sermon series, however, draws us back to the importance of *management*, giving it the focus it deserves. In fact, these sermons demonstrate that *management* is actually *the most important thing any person does on a daily basis*. A lofty claim, I know. But these sermons will touch the lives of all who hear them and not just those who are actually *managers* at work, but everyone who has been given the gift of life to enjoy and apply to Kingdom goals.

The preacher will want to do a word study of *oikonomos* (οἰκονόμος) and related forms of the noun. [In modern Greek, the diphthong *oi* is pronounced long e: e-ko-NO-mos—from where we get the English word: “economy”]. *Oikos* is house; *nomos* is law, rule, ordering. The *Oikonomos* is commonly thought of as the household manager engaged in the ordering of the household affairs. *Oikonomos* refers to how we individually manage things (1 Peter 4:10), how we manage the relationships of those closest to us (Luke 12:42), and as a manager at one’s place of business or among partners (Luke 16:1). These three arenas of *oikonomos* form the three sermons in this series: management of our individual lives, of our households (those closest to us), and of our larger sphere of relationships, particularly the workplace.

In addition, I make a rather bold assertion that these three arenas of life are not only those places that we are called to manage well, but that we are to manage with love. In fact, you can interchange the words! We are called to manage well our personal lives which is a practical way to love ourselves. We are called to manage well the relationships of those closest to us which is the practical way of loving them. We are called to manage well our larger sphere of relationships, meaning, to live out God’s love in the world in substantive ways.

[Note: the theologically inclined preacher may want to draw upon Trinitarian theology: the economic Trinity. The economic Trinity is about what God *does* in the world as acts of love. One could argue that God manages God’s own internal life and the way the Lord interacts with Creation.]

I suggest, then, that *management*—though often thought of as something rather boring and routine—is actually the thrilling place of love in action in the three spheres of life.

The series is based upon the *Shema* of Israel: Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and The Great Commandment of Jesus: Matthew 22:36-40.

Here is the course of our journey in the proclaimed Word:

Sermon 1 – Self-Management

Sermon 2 – Managing Your Closest Relationships

Sermon 3 – Managing Your Colleagues and Partners

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www.cladisconsulting.com/blog is a blog on building collaborative management teams for best results.

Sermon 3: Managing Your Colleagues and Partners

Text: Our third sermon in this series returns us to the Scripture from the first sermon, though our focus this morning is on verse 31.

Mark 12:28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?”

29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;

30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Theological Point: The first four of the Ten Commandments are about how to love God; the second six commandments are about how to love our neighbor and be in community with one another. Jesus summed up the law with the “Shema” of Israel (Deut. 6:1f) and Leviticus 19:18—*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.* In Luke’s version of this account (Luke 10), Jesus is asked, “Who is my neighbor?” He responds with the Parable of the Good Samaritan as a way of saying even those whom are thought of as outside the covenant community—even outcasts—are our neighbors. It seems clear that the commandment to love our neighbor means we should love the world and view the whole world as a mission field (John 3:16)—there are no boundaries for the love of God.

Hermeneutical Connection: God has planted us in a place to reach a community beyond our closest friends and family. This is the third sphere of management addressed in our sermon series. We are using the term “management” to mean the ordering of our lives to live out the love commandments of God. We are called to live God’s love in the arena of the workplace and other associations. This is best done when we have strong internal management of our lives and after we have first paid attention to managing the love of God in our closest relationships. Strength builds on strength as we reach out from our inner circle to the larger circle of our associates and acquaintances.

Introduction: The preacher may want to re-introduce the sermon series here or before the reading of Scripture. These three sermons are about *management*. We think of management as something that goes on in businesses and involves job descriptions, evaluations, and human resources departments. We’ve suggested, however, that management is about the right ordering of our lives for the best results and meaningful living. These sermons relate to work in that the best way to be an able manager of relationships at work is first to be able to manage one’s self (first sermon) and then to be able to manage one’s closest circle of relationships (sermon two). Then, we can effectively manage our relationships with colleagues and partners (sermon three). We’ve also suggested that *management* and *love* are closely related because, as Christians, we are called to order our lives and conduct them in a loving manner. In this sense, to love others means to manage well how we relate to other people.

Illustration: The preacher may want to revisit the illustration of the architect & builder we’ve been using for this series (see sermons 1 and 2 for it). Or, another way of saying the same thing: The deep roots of a tree symbolize our personal lives. Are we developing strong roots that go deep into the Word and sustenance of God (Ps. 1)? Then we focus upon the trunk representing the management of our relationships closest to us: is it strong and sturdy, able to withstand the fierce storms and blazing heat that will surely come? Lastly, we focus upon the fruit-bearing branches that reach out tall and far—they are able to grow strong and bear good fruit because the roots and trunk are healthy. Today, we focus upon those branches: how we manage our relationships in the larger community and bear fruit there for the Kingdom.

For many of us, the “larger community” as a sphere of exhibiting Christian love is primarily the workplace. So, this sermon relates well to us connected to people on a regular basis who are not our closest of friends. For others, this “larger community” would be our broader sphere of associates and friendships.

A. Pray for Your Colleagues

In order to manage well our relationships at work, and thereby love well with the love of Christ, begin with prayer. It is a bit unusual for many to think of living their faith at work, so start with baby steps and pray over your workplace. Such prayer is a very real and concrete way to begin to introduce a sense of your faith where you work. Pray for the top executives to lead well, pray for your colleagues and their various concerns as you get to know them, and pray for your customers. Make prayer your constant companion at work—this is the first step.

Illustration: C. S. Lewis said, “The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.” The same could be said of work. Walking into your office or place of employment, chances are a flood of anxieties and concerns wash over you and you feel your stress rising. Try taking a moment to pray—offer the day to the Lord and all the encounters you will have. Watch the difference it makes when you give your everyday workaday to God!

B. Collaborate with Your Colleagues to Build Trust

After you have spent some time praying for your workplace, consider working on building solid work relationships with your colleagues based on collaboration in order to build trust. Relationships at work or in the community are often established on the basis of competition—we feel insecure if we are not battling it out for a place at the table of decision-making. Consider instead to look for the strong gifts of those around you and collaborate them. Comment on how well they do certain things. Join with them to complete key projects, working as partners rather than feeling like you have to defend your turf or control all the outcomes. Be a team player and value the other members of the work team. By so doing these things, you build trust with your colleagues and normally better work results happen as well.

Illustration: Charles Osgood told the story of two ladies who lived in a convalescent center. Each had suffered an incapacitating stroke. Margaret’s stroke left her left side restricted, while Ruth’s stroke damaged her right side. Both of these ladies were accomplished pianists but had given up hope of ever playing again. The director of the center sat them down at a piano and encouraged them to play solo pieces together. They did, and a beautiful friendship developed. [<http://www.fbchsv.org/dhwp/?m=200606>]

What is interesting about this Osgood illustration is his comment that a beautiful friendship emerged. He focused on the relationship rather than the quality of music. Collaboration builds trust, and trust is an important ingredient both for good business results and also what follows next.

C. Witness to Your Colleagues

Once you have baptized your workplace with prayer and also taken advantage of opportunities along the way to build trust, you now have a good entre to giving witness to Christ in normal and natural ways. Giving witness to Christ may mean a visit to the hospital when a colleague takes ill. It may mean helping a friend move. Giving witness may also mean taking advantage of a relationship built on trust to share naturally how God has entered your life and made a difference. All of these things are examples of bearing fruit for the Kingdom and creating a way to draw others to the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

Illustration. “Larry Julian, a business consultant and author of *God Is My CEO* (which has sold more than 75,000 copies), says he has found an incredible receptivity in corporations to hear what he has to say.” I am seeking more ways to bring my Christian faith into the corporate world where I have spent much of my life. There is an openness that has not been there before.”

That openness is partially evidenced by the number of Christian affinity groups that have been birthed within the past decade. The Coca-Cola Christian Fellowship was formed in 2001, with 275 people attending the first meeting at their world headquarters in Atlanta. Across town, at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Angie Tracey launched the first government-approved Christian association in an agency, The CDC Christian Fellowship Group. Similar groups have been established at American Airlines, Intel, Texas Instruments, and Sears. In fact, the Christian fellowship at Sears even has its own choir and has produced a professionally recorded CD, underwritten by the company.” [<http://www.christianitytoday.com/workplace/articles/issue9-faithatwork.html>]

There are many ways to live faith out in the workplace. One such way is to build fellowships such as these. Others are led to minister one on one with people in quieter ways. God has equipped you to live out your faith in the world in some way, giving witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

But don’t make the living out of your faith in the world your first priority. Yes, we should always be aware of such opportunities. But make sure that you are also managing your own life in a way that keeps you personally healthy and connected to the Lord. And make sure you are managing your closest relationships at home and with close friends, because you certainly don’t want to forsake them for some great cause: a mistake many have made. Rather, sinking deep personal roots into the soil of God, and growing a strong trunk of family relationships, you are then in a great position to send off all sorts of fruit-bearing branches for the Reign of God!

So . . . where are you now? Needing to sink those deep roots? Realizing you’ve abandoned the trunk for the branches? Or, is it now time to branch out and take God into the world in an even greater way than you’ve ever imagined?