



Laity Renewal Foundation

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Three Sermons on

Work and Faith

Sermon Notes

*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 to My Fellow Preachers from the Author of this Issue

Management gurus tell us that attitude makes all the difference in the workplace. Having a positive attitude impacts not only your own work, but also that of your colleagues. Thus attitude is essential to your contribution at work and to your hopes of career advancement.

But can you simply snap your fingers and magically create a positive attitude in yourself? Some might say yes, but many people find it more difficult to feel good about their work. So, if we agree that attitude is essential, how can we help ourselves have a positive one if this doesn't come naturally to us?

Moreover, does being a Christian help you have a good attitude at work? If so, how? What does God's Word contribute to this discussion of attitude?

I have developed three sermon outlines that respond to these questions: "Positive Gratitude," "Humble Servanthood," and "Mental Focus." Each of these sermons examines one facet of a positive attitude. Each facet is derived not from pop psychology or the latest trend among business books, but from the Bible, in particular, from Paul's letter to the Philippians.

I have prepared the three sermon outlines with the assumption that preachers will use one of the three as a stand-alone sermon on attitude. If you choose to do a three-part series, you'll want to rearrange things a bit to avoid needless redundancy.

In each of these outlines, I supply a basic sermon structure, exegetical insights, possible applications, and representative illustrations. You are encouraged to make this sermon your own. In particular, some of the illustrations are personal to my life. You can tell them in the third person, if you wish ("I know a man who . . ."). But your sermon will be stronger if my stories remind you of similar incidents in your own life, so that your illustrations are in the first person.

Finally, let me add a note about translations. For these sermons I have chosen to use the NRSV. I've done this because the translation is accurate and because it's the one I have used most in my own preaching. In my study, however, I use a wide variety of translations in addition to the original Greek, including the NIV, ESV, NLT, and the KJV. All of these translations do a fine job rendering the original language. If you preach from something other than the NRSV, you'll need to make a few adjustments from my outlines.

May the Lord bless you as you help your people develop a biblically sound positive attitude!

Dr. Mark D. Roberts
Senior Director and Scholar-in-Residence for Laity Lodge

Sermon 1: Positive Gratitude	Philippians 1:3-6, 4:6-7
Sermon 2: Humble Servanthood	Philippians 2:1-11
Sermon 3: Mental Focus	Philippians 4:8

Sermon 2: Humble Servanthood

Philippians 2:1-11

The Philippian Christians in Need of an Attitude Adjustment

In the middle of the first century A.D., the Apostle Paul planted a small church in Philippi. It was one of his strongest young churches, a congregation that shared in Paul's ministry from its very beginning.

Some years later, Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian Christians, partly to thank them for their financial support (4:15-20) and partly to deal with problems in the church. One of these messes involved two prominent church leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, who were not getting along (4:2-3). These two leading women, and perhaps others in the congregation who were taking sides with one or the other, needed an attitude adjustment.

Note: You may also want to pull some content from the beginning of sermon 3 on this same subject.

The Attitude of Christ

Paul calls the Philippian believers to think and feel in a new way: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus . . ." (2:5). The Greek verb translated as "let the same mind be in you" (*phroneo*) has to do not just with intellectual activity, but also with one's feelings or disposition. Thus several contemporary translations speak not of thinking, but of attitude:

"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had" (NLT, 2nd ed.).

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (NIV).

What is this attitude of Christ? Paul answers this question not so much with logical description as with poetic narration. In evocative language, he tells the story of Jesus' humility in verses 5-8.

- (5) Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
- (6) who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
- (7) but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
- (8) he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

First, Jesus, though "in the form of God," or as the NIV puts it, "in very nature God," did not hang onto his divine prerogatives (v. 6). Rather, he "emptied himself" and became human, even assuming "the form of a slave" (v. 7). The use of "slave" emphasizes the lowliness of Jesus' life and his sacrificial servanthood throughout his earthly life. Though he was God in human flesh, Jesus did not hobnob with the rich and famous. Rather, he lived among and loved the poor, the sick, the needy, and just plain folk. We might wonder if Paul had in mind Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet when he penned these verses of Philippians (see John 13:1-20).

The humility of Jesus didn't end with his incarnation, however. Rather, he humbled himself still further "and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (v. 8). Crucifixion, one of the cruelest

means of capital punishment ever devised, was reserved for the lowest of the low in the Roman Empire. The cross of Jesus represented the ultimate in humiliation.

Imitating the Attitude of Christ

Paul calls the Philippians who were puffed up with their own ideas and self-importance to have the attitude of Christ, an attitude of humility, self-sacrifice, and servanthood. What Jesus exemplified in his incarnation and crucifixion, the Philippians are to imitate in their daily lives. Just as Jesus gave up his privileges, so should they. Just as Jesus served, so should they. Just as Jesus sacrificed, so should they.

And so should we. The call of Scripture to have the attitude of Christ speaks to us just as pointedly as it once spoke to the Philippians. We too live in a time when people get so caught up in themselves that they neglect the concerns of others. Our workplaces are often filled with strife as colleagues try to out-position each other for raises and promotions. It can seem as if the self-promoting folk get all the rewards, whereas the servants are largely taken for granted. You can work faithfully in a company for a dozen years, only to lose the promotion you had expected to some brash, young outsider. How tempting it is to neglect that attitude of Christ and take on an attitude of greed and self-promotion!

Implications of a Servant Attitude

Yet when we embrace servanthood in imitation of Christ, then we can be set free to live in a completely different way. We'll find new joy in helping others. What we might have experienced as inconvenient distractions can become chances to live like Christ.

Illustration: You might replace the following illustration with an experience from your own life.

For example, a couple of weeks ago I was rushing out to do a few errands. As I said goodbye to my wife, she asked if I might get a couple of things for her while I was at the store. My response was about as far from the attitude of Christ as one can get. I was cranky and uncooperative. In the end, I did agree to do what she asked, but my demeanor created lots of tension between us.

On my way to the store, I reflected on how my attitude had poisoned an otherwise pleasant evening at home. In truth, I had plenty of time to do what my wife had asked of me. But I just didn't want to. I was too caught up in myself and my agenda to serve my wife.

How much more joy I would have had that evening—and my wife and my children also—if I had chosen a servant attitude. She would have felt loved and valued. I would have enjoyed making her happy. All the errands would have been completed with the same amount of time and effort, but the emotional payoff would have been immensely more positive for all concerned.

So it can be if we see our whole life, including our workplace, as a context for servanthood. This service might come in the actual functioning of our job, as we do what we're being paid to do. It might come, instead, as we care for the people around us, using free moments to encourage them, thank them, or listen to their concerns.

Such servanthood sometimes brings earthly rewards on the job. Our colleagues might appreciate our efforts and tell us so. The boss might even recognize us and reward us. But, all too often, servanthood goes unnoticed or unappreciated. The executive who graciously sets up chairs for the meeting gets overshadowed by her colleague who grandstands before the boss. The teacher who works extra hours to care for his students nevertheless gets a pink slip when the school district downsizes.

So, other than pure obedience to God's Word, what might motivate us to imitate the servant attitude of Jesus?

The End of the Story

We left Philippians 2 with the humiliating death of Jesus. If this were the end of the story, Jesus would have been long forgotten and would scarcely provide a model of the kind of attitude we should have in our life and work. But the crucifixion of Jesus was not the end. Rather, because of Jesus' self-sacrifice:

- (9) Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
- (10) so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- (11) and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus receives the greatest honor that could be bestowed on anyone: the very name of God and the worship that belongs to God alone. This passage looks forward to a time when all beings will bow before the authority of Jesus.

If we're living to serve the Lord in every part of our life, then we can be confident that our servanthood will be rewarded by him, even if it is ignored by our coworkers and superiors. When we embody the attitude of Christ, we know that God is pleased with our efforts. Moreover, we believe that God will one day reward us when we stand before his throne of grace. So we choose the servant attitude of Christ, partly because it's the right, God-honoring thing to do and partly because of the rewards that lay ahead for us. Thus we're able to serve the people around us even if our efforts are ignored or even scorned. We serve others for the sake and pleasure of our heavenly master.

Conclusion

Servanthood on the job isn't only for those in lowly positions. It's God's call to all, from the entry-level clerk to the CEO. In fact, when people in authority in a company act as servants to those under their charge, this can be a powerful statement of the self-giving love of Christ.

Illustration: Several years ago, my friend Mike took a new position as vice president of a large company. During his first few weeks on the job, he tried to serve his colleagues without regard to their official level in the firm. One day, he noticed a custodian laboring with some heavy boxes. "May I help you with those?" Mike asked. "Oh, no," said the custodian, noting Mike's executive appearance. "Really," Mike responded, "let me give you a hand." And so he did, spending only about two minutes helping move the boxes. When he was done, he looked at the custodian, who turned away in embarrassment. He had tears in his eyes. "You'll never know how much this meant to me," he said, finally. "In all of my years working for this company, nobody on your level has ever helped me like that."

As Mike walked away from that encounter, he felt grateful for the chance to have served another human being. He felt glad for the opportunity he had been given to demonstrate the servant attitude of Christ. And he knew that even though he'd never get any credit from his boss for what he had done, his Boss in heaven was delighted.