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Three Sermons on
Work and Faith

Commit Your Work to the Lord
by Steve McCoy

*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

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Introduction to the Series

Most working people struggle to connect faith to their work. It's only natural. Church is our spiritual habitat. Work is a place to make a living. While no one will argue that the Kingdom of God is with us in every circumstance of life, for many, the art of making a living can prove particularly spiritually stifling. In their minds, work and faith rarely meet.

Certainly, we all desire to see the Kingdom of God reach beyond the doors of our churches and into the mainstream of everyday life. That's what Sermon Notes is all about. Its purpose goes beyond being a sermon resource. It takes aim at helping germinate the idea that the Kingdom of God is very much alive in any office or cubical. Such an idea sounds simple but can be so foreign to those in the daily grind of surviving the workplace. As Dr. George Cladis, a regular Sermon Notes contributor, writes, "There is a real need for preachers to help congregants find ways to experience God in the workplace and infuse offices with spiritual meaning lest they become a secular wasteland."

For those of us in ministry, this is at the heart of what we desire—to help guide people to lives thoroughly connected to God in all that they do. So, our prayer is simple: We hope this powerful resource will assist you to guide others to include God in their everyday lives, even, and especially, in their work.

Sermon 3: Work & Stress

Text: Matthew 6:25-34: *Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?”³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

³⁴ *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Main Idea: In the high calling of our daily work, we regularly encounter stress and need the relief found in seeking God above all other things.

Context: This is the Sermon on the Mount. The audience are the disciples of Jesus, not the crowds (Matthew 5:1-2). But the crowds, as interested observers, were able to hear what Jesus taught his disciples about what life will look like in the new Kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating.

Introduction: We all want to be in control of our lives, but experience has taught us that we are not. The preacher may choose to insert a current event here, such as a tragedy (national or local) that will already be fresh in the congregation’s mind. Something that will reveal our anxieties.

The desire to be in control begins in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve had to do the one thing God said “no” to. It resulted in the Fall and the proclivity to continue on the path of control. But there is minimal control in this world.

Your work is one of the main things in your life that you use to bring your world under your control. It’s your source of income, and your income is your source of nearly everything else in your life: food, drink, housing, clothing, transportation, etc. It’s no wonder that our jobs are one of the highest reasons for stress in our lives (www.stress.org/job.htm).

The preacher may choose to significantly tweak the intro with statistics on job stress or important cultural information. For example, as I write this in February of 2009, it’s one of the most stressful times for Americans in decades because of the crumbling economy and jobless rate, among other things. The intro may also be tweaked to be less about money as the result of work and more about the stress of the workplace, of being an employee or employer, etc.

Transition: While it may be helpful to a point, God's remedy for stress isn't a vacation. It's a refocus on the right things, namely God himself.

1. Principle: Don't Be Anxious (Matthew 5:25)

Life is more than basic needs. Focusing on basic needs keeps us from focusing on what's truly important. If God has given us life and a body, why are we so worried that he won't give us everything else we need? (*The preacher may also choose to cross reference Romans 8:31-32 that makes this same point.*)

Jesus adds more detail to this principle, so we can see exactly how and why it works.

2. The Principle at Work (Matthew 5:26-32)

A. Don't Stress Over Life and Food (Matthew 5:26-27)

Why? Birds have what they need from God despite their lack of effort: no sowing/reaping. No barns to gather food into.

Being anxious gets us nowhere. It only takes up time in our lives, it can't add to it. And as we know, stress can damage us physically and actually make our lives shorter.

B. Don't Stress Over Body and Clothes (Matthew 5:28-32)

Why? Lilies of the field have what they need from God. No effort. Yet they are more beautifully dressed than Solomon, a wealthy king of Israel.

Caution: Jesus is not advocating laziness. Humanity has plenty of work to do, as we would all agree. We just aren't to let it stress us out because we think we have complete control.

God certainly cares for us more than grass that tomorrow will be thrown into a fire. God certainly cares for us more than the Gentiles who have no relationship with him. God already knows our needs.

(Matthew 5:33)

How do we resist anxiety and stress at work? How do we fight the compulsion to be successful? We put God first. He must be above our jobs, above our paychecks, above our mortgage, above all things.

This is an area of seeking, of pursuit. We are not passively blessed by God to not be anxious. We take our jobs and work and all the stress and worry involved and make it secondary to our seeking his Kingdom.

To seek his Kingdom is to seek first a new set of values and a new way of life (most specifically in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:5-7). We make this a priority, and we will discover fewer reasons for anxiety. The anxiety we feel will be replaced with a trust for God, knowing his supply for his Kingdom is infinite.

To seek his righteousness is to seek to live rightly as God defines righteousness. It's never to be satisfied with pagan living again, never to let sin and idolatry control us again. Instead we give up the need to be in control, and let God point the way to a better life pursuit. Then we experience the freedom from stress that we need.

But it's not just a seeking of these things, but also a promise: *seek these things first and all these things will be added to you.* We need these things, but we don't get them by pursuing them. We get them by pursuing God's Kingdom and the ways of the Kingdom.

Illustration: *I used to be a missionary to international students at the University of Kentucky. As many who work in college ministry do, I had to raise support from local churches to support my family and the ministry. Although we were often without the money in our wallets needed for current needs, there was one time we were truly in dire straights. We had no money (sometimes supporters aren't as consistent as you hope) and almost no food in the house. We didn't know what to do. I remember the effort we made in prayer, knowing that if God didn't provide, we were in trouble. The next day, a church member, not being told of our needs, showed up with a \$200 gift card for the grocery store. It was a remarkable work of God when we needed him most. God proved to be our faithful Provider.*

Let us never mistake the gifts of God for God himself.

4. Principle Restated (Matthew 5:34)

So Jesus restates the need to not be anxious. His reason: each day has enough trouble. Simply stated, Jesus is saying that each day God gives what's needed. We can trust that, along with the troubles of tomorrow, there will be an ample supply of grace.

Conclusion: Your workplace is probably a stressful place. Your job security may be an issue. Your coworkers or boss or employees may be adding anxiety to your life. Jesus says that worry gets us nowhere. The way of relief and freedom from work-related stress is to seek first the Kingdom Jesus brought with him in his incarnation and will consummate one day soon. Seek first the right way of living that he demonstrated and points us to. If God cares for the simplest parts of his creation, will he not care for us all the more?

These sermons were written by Steve McCoy. Steve is the Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Woodstock, Illinois, a distant suburb of Chicago. He earned an MDiv from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is married to Molly, and they have four children. Steve's blog, *Reformissionary*, can be found at www.stevemccoy.com.