

FOUNDATIONS FOR
LAITY RENEWAL

Transforming Daily Life

719 Earl Garrett Street
Kerrville, TX 78028

Three Sermon Outlines on
Work and Faith

**“God Loves Our Work
and Our Words”**
Randy Kilgore

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

God Loves Our Work and Our Words

NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Randy Kilgore offers us a unique opportunity. After a twenty-plus year career in business, most of which was spent in senior human resource management positions and serving three governors on state education commissions, and having received his M.Div from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 2000, Randy is now a workplace chaplain and author. As a writer, Randy has released six volumes of workplace Bible studies and two books: *Made to Matter: Devotions for Working Christians* (Discovery House Publishers: 2008) and *Talking About God in the 21st Century Workplace*. Many of the ideas in the sermons come from his books if you want to delve more deeply into this topic. His writing also appears regularly in magazines and online. As a minister, Randy offers over 500 devotions and dozens of Bible studies at www.madetomatter.org. He is also a part of the exciting new Theology of Work Project www.theologyofwork.org, where you'll find dramatic new data on what God says about work in his Word. Randy has dedicated his life to faith in the workplace and has written important content to help those who struggle with connecting their everyday work life to their Christian faith.

Sermon I: Workplace Faith: It's More Than You Think!

Sermon II: Five Things Non-Christians Wish Were True About Their Christian Coworkers

Sermon III: Calling: The Road Not Taken Was Right All Along???

Sermon I: Workplace Faith: It's More Than You Think!

Theme: God Loves Our Work *and* Our Words.

Key Truths/Outline

1. Workplace faith is more than just ethics, more than doing the right thing.
2. Workplace faith is more than a place to do evangelism.
3. Workplace faith is more than making money to give to churches and missionaries.

Key Passage(s): Genesis 1:28-30; 2:15

Introduction:

A common angst occurs in many American homes on Sunday evening; the dread of returning to our jobs. Whether you work in the home raising a family or in an office raising venture capital, the stress of our daily routines often makes Sunday evening the most miserable night in America. Why?

If I asked you to shout out reasons this is true, we'd likely hear words like stress and pace and pressure. Some would say boredom while others would say it's a bad boss or coworkers. Still others would say there's no meaning or purpose to what they're doing or that it isn't interesting to them. All of these responses would be accurate, because all of them reflect the feelings experienced by those expressing them.

With so many issues and attitudes causing the Sunday night stress, how could anyone hope to find wisdom that would be helpful to more than just a handful of people? More to the point for those of us in the church, what does the Bible have to say that might be helpful?

More than you think. In fact, that's the title of today's message: Workplace Faith: It's More Than You Think!

Three great myths hold back Christians who work. Christians have been taught by the culture, and even in some instances by the church, that faith is about living moral lives and talking about Jesus. How boring that must sound to most! In fact, workplace faith is more than just ethics, more than just evangelism, and more than just making money to give to the church.

Let's examine those points this morning.

Point 1: Workplace faith is more than just ethics, more than doing the right thing.

- a. One of the great temptations of Christians is to reduce Christianity to a slogan or a simple mission statement; a mission statement that almost always has ethical living as its center.
- b. This troublesome trend doesn't happen just in the workplace, but in fact is found in nearly every area of life, from sportsmanship in athletics to lyrics in music.
- c. Ethical living is a post-salvation issue; a key point in a discipleship manual. It is not a central tenet of Christianity. To make our Christian faith at work about ethics and doing the right thing is to shift people's attention away from grace and on to performance-based faith.
- d. In fact, we offend people of other faiths, and even those with no faith, when we suggest that Christians live better lives than others. Worse, we lead people to believe Christianity is about cleaning up our acts so we're acceptable to God.
- e. This is why St. Francis' quote: "Share your faith; if necessary, use words" is so damaging. It encourages the myth that Christians look better than non-Christians. This just isn't true. We look better to God because He sees the robe of Christ's righteousness enveloping us, but we see a work-in-progress faith; as do others when they know us well.
- f. So, while Christians should be trying to live ethical lives out of gratitude for what Christ has done for them, workplace faith and even workplace evangelism have to be more than just about doing the right thing. In fact, work itself has to be more than just ethics.
- g. In fact, from the very beginning, work has been one of the Three Big Things Scripture invokes Christians to do in their lives: The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-42), The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), and as our Scripture reading this morning states: The Creation Mandate (Genesis 1:28-30; 2:15). Part of living life as God intends it is taking care of his Creation...every part of it.
- h. This means that even before you utter a word of witness, and even before a single coworker knows you're a follower of Jesus, you are serving God by showing up to do your job. Doing work, tending any part of his Creation, is one of the ways we express our love for God, and since God is at work with us where we are, it is also one of the ways we commune with him. This gives Colossians 3:10 and 3:23 new meaning when viewed with this perspective.

i. And when we do our work as if doing it for God, we discover the labor is as precious to him as the preaching of a sermon or the efforts of a missionary. Now even the factory floor and the cubicle become holy ground.

Point 2: Workplace faith is more than a place to do evangelism.

a. Once we discover workplace faith is more than *doing* the right thing, it is necessary for us to discover it is also more than *saying* the right thing. In other words, workplace faith is not just about evangelism opportunities.

b. In fact, it should be stressed here that while faith isn't just about ethics, that doesn't mean Christians don't have to live ethical lives; they do. Likewise, as we stress in the next few minutes here that workplace faith is more than just evangelism opportunities, we're not saying that evangelism has no place on the job; it does.

c. Christians can establish themselves as good workers and as caring coworkers before venturing to open up cold-call-style conversations about faith. Why? An incompetent worker will be considered incompetent in faith; and a coworker who lacks compassion and warmth will have his/her motives questioned when they start talking about faith. Better to begin by listening to Peter when he warns Christians to "be ready to give an answer" (1 Peter 3:15); in other words, to answer questions about faith first and hold off on initiating those conversations until after competency and compassion are established.

d. Sometimes it's even wrong for Christians to talk about their faith at work. These include: 1. When talking about our faith distracts us or our coworkers from the task at hand on the job, we should stay focused on the task at hand. 2. When our coworkers aren't interested, we should stop pressing. 3. In the face of ridicule or insincere challenges to our faith, silence is usually the best response. 4. When an answer to one question will move the discussion down a rabbit trail and away from Christ, we should avoid the rabbit trail and wait for the conversation to regain its focus, or redirect the conversation.

d. (Alternate or additional anecdote:)

Christians sometimes engage in religious activity when they should be working. Bible reading and conversations about God with coworkers are good things—in their appropriate place and time within the boundaries of the rules of the workplace. However, any of these activities may become harmful to the Kingdom when they displace time and efforts appropriately owed to the task at hand.

One of the first missionaries for the African Inland Mission, Willard Hotchkiss served for forty years in the Kenyan region, breaking new ground for the faith while struggling daily to have enough to eat and to provide for his family and those under his care. Along the way he learned important lessons, one of which is recorded in his book *Then and Now in Kenya Colony* (Fleming Revell, 1937).

"Missionaries are often criticized because their adherents so often divorce religion from life. The charge is true enough, and the missionary is usually the first to recognize the fact and to mourn over it. Nor does it help matters to retort that the same thing is true of so-called Christians at home. This world will be a different place to live in when Christ is dominant in the counting house as in the church; when the Spirit of Christ permeates the weekday activities as the Sunday devotions; when the Bible rather than the card deck becomes conspicuous in the home."

He continues: "Sometimes I have gone about the mission plantation and have found the young men sitting in the shade of the trees, reading their Bibles. Now no one, least of all a missionary, can be unmoved when he looks on the fruit of his labors. And this was the very thing I had given life for—to teach these people to read the Word of God. But a perfectly good thing may, under certain circumstances, become a bad thing. These lads were being paid to do a job of work. So, instead of commending them, I had to point out that under the circumstances, they were actually dishonoring God by reading his Word. When they took time which belonged to their employer and used it even to read the Word of God, they were guilty of theft."

e. Often Christians are so nervous about evangelizing while at work that they do so like a nervous actor on stage the first time: They blurt out all their lines at once. God is in control of the fruits of all our efforts our words and our work, and therefore we can relax. Talk about God as it is natural for you, and don't feel like you have to give the whole Gospel account in one sitting. Sometimes all God wants from us is to get a single point of the Gospel story across, and he then uses others to add to what we've started. Prayer and the Holy Spirit are good guides to believers who stay in close touch with God.

f. So, just as we're not there only to live clean lives and do ethical activity as a witness to God at work, so too are we not there merely to evangelize. Remember, work itself is service to God; work itself is an expression of our love for him; and an expression of our gratitude to him.

g. Workplace faith is more than clean living, and it's more than evangelism. It's also more than making money to give to churches and missionaries.

Point 3: Workplace faith is more than making money to give to churches and missionaries.

- a. When Christians discovered God didn't call them all to be missionaries and clergy members, a sort of second-class citizenship settled into the body of Christ. Those that can, do; and those that can't, make money to send to those who can. Nothing in Scripture supports this notion, and most pastors spend their whole careers trying to get their parishioners to understand their value rests well beyond their money.
- b. While some Christians may be using their money to keep actual Christian service at an arms-length, most Christians wonder if the work they're doing is as important as the work they might do if they quit their jobs and went "full-time for God." For most, the answer is no. God gifts his children with unique gifts, and these fit unique roles within that Creation Mandate. Some of us are called to tend parishioners and others to tend the parish, while others are called to tend a garden or a family or a manufacturing plant or a corporation. We must go where we're gifted, and even there—as we'll find in another message—God often grants us freedom in choosing where we serve him...and how.
- c. In fact, simply examining the three over-arching "command" principles—to love, to testify and make disciples, and to tend Creation—we see very different gifts and very different jobs within those gifts. Some gifted with the ability to demonstrate love and compassion may find themselves better suited to caregiving and teaching positions, while those given to "tending" may be better suited to more stoic, but no less important, positions.
- d. And while our gifting makes us specialists in particular areas, it doesn't free us up from the duties of the over-arching commands. We all must still tend Creation, even if it's merely as responsible consumers; we all must tell others about Jesus, even if it's only those closest to us; and we all must love and serve one another...always.
- e. Now in case you thought you were going to slip out of here without hearing about money and giving, you're wrong. It's true God doesn't want you to think the only reason you're working is so you can tithe; but it's equally true God expects his working Christians *to tithe*. But the tithe doesn't give meaning to your vocation; it is at best a side effect or fringe benefit of doing what God has gifted you to do.

Conclusion

When God created humans, he created us to be so much more than automatons who mindlessly do his bidding. In fact, it is precisely why John uses the term "overcomer" to describe us in eternity. We have overcome the temptation to reject God and his authority and have instead embraced his love and mercy. It is a theme that runs through all of Creation, and certainly it runs through the single biggest consumer of our waking hours: Work. While our gratitude for Christ's sacrifice demands that our lives be surrendered in service to him, even that service extends beyond the things we once thought holy and separate: churches and church service.

We honor God best when we find our gifts and we take the redemption we've experienced in Christ into the areas of our culture where we're most gifted and most excited. Workplace faith is indeed more than ethics, more than evangelism, and more than money: It is everything you do.

Sermon II: Five Things Non-Christians Wish Were True About Their Christian Coworkers

Theme: Hopeful Expectations Beneath the Public Rancor

Key Truths/Outline

1. The negative public face of the Christian faith crumbles in work relationships.
2. The relationships formed at work harbor hopeful private expectations we can meet.
3. Understanding hopeful private expectations helps us change the *public* face of the Christian faith.

Key Passage(s): Luke 7:1-10

Introduction:

Shortly after the terrorist attacks of September 11, American Christian churches began to notice a spike in attendance. Depending on which source you looked at, attendance increased an average of 20% in most urban areas as people sought to make sense of this Pearl Harbor-style attack on American soil. That was good news; people turning to Christianity for answers.

Here's the bad news: By February 2002, this spike had completely disappeared, and they'd taken some who were already there out with them. While we can (*and perhaps should on another day*) sort out why those people left us, (#1