

FOUNDATIONS FOR
LAITY RENEWAL

Transforming Daily Life

719 Earl Garrett Street
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Three Sermon Outlines on
Work and Faith

Living Life Under God

David Garland

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

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Sermon 1: Ecclesiastes: Living Life Under God or Just Under the Sun

1. The Situation

The author of Ecclesiastes—he calls himself the preacher—sets down his thoughts about life, and, on the surface, his basic attitude seems to be that it is all meaningless. He reflects on the span of life from youth to wise sage and charts the plunge from the pinnacle of power to the valley of deep spiritual darkness. The Hebrew word (*hevel*) that is variously rendered “vanity,” “absurd,” or “unknowable” appears fifty-seven times in the book. He highlights the absurdity of existence.

That opinion may resonate with some today. Stephen Dunn’s poem “On the Way to Work” captures how some people feel about life. In the poem, he is on the way to work and spies a bumper sticker on a car that broadcasts a driver’s philosophy of life: “Life is a #\$%&. And then you die.” Why people would want to trumpet this view I do not know, but for all too many life seems pointless, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,” according to Macbeth. I would submit that this is the problem with living life just under the sun. The preacher is right: It *is* all vanity of vanities.

The preacher is a wise man, wealthy, well-educated, a member of the elite. He sounds like a king going through a mid-life crisis. He had it all, but now he wears of life and wonders “What does it all mean?” With all his blessings, he reflects on his life lived under the sun and concludes there is nothing new under the sun.

2. Pursuing Knowledge

First, he tried pursuing knowledge (Eccl 1:13–14). He acquired all the wisdom he could, but it did not bring him what he wanted. He grumbles, “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Eccl. 12:12). Many people know that when it comes to education, you can kill yourself by degrees. He did not find peace and says, “I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind.” Whenever we double the diameter of our knowledge, we triple the circumference of our ignorance. He concludes, “For in much wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow” (Eccl. 1:16–18).

3. Chasing After Pleasure

Next, he says that he tried pleasure (Eccl 2:1–4). He did what all the advertisers tell you to do: “Eat, drink, and be merry.” He had houses, vineyards, gardens and parks, slaves at his beck and call, a harem of women concubines, silver and gold to get whatever his eyes desired, and the leisure to enjoy it all (Eccl. 2:4–8). But all this chasing after pleasure only feeds a relentless churning of more

desire. It is a law of spiritual physics that all the things we have now are devalued by the things we want next. The result of all this pleasure seeking was this: “So I hated life” (Eccl. 2:17).

4. Drowning Oneself in Work

Next, he says, “There is nothing better for mortals than to find enjoyment in their toil” (Eccl. 2:24). That is true. Work brings us a sense of fulfillment, but many people drown themselves in their work. Wayne Oates invented the term “workaholic” in one of the fifty books he published. It arose from a re-examination of his own devotion to work when his young son called his secretary to make an appointment to see him. He realized that he had become an “ergomaniac.”

People give their lives to work, devote themselves to it, but, when it slides into workaholism, it can lead to an early death and make life miserable while it lasts. Just working for work’s sake was not the answer for the preacher.

5. Building a Reputation

Next, the preacher says, “A good name is better than precious ointment” (Eccl. 7:1). He worked on building his reputation, making a name for himself. Lloyd George said acidly of Winston Churchill that he would make a drum of his own mother’s skin in order to sound his own praises. Today, you can even hire an “Online Reputation Manager.”

People may try to build or save their reputations, but reputation is not reality. Hyping one’s reputation on earth ignores that ultimately one must face God’s judgment. God, who is no respecter of persons, is not impressed by our earthly approval ratings.

6. Facing God’s Judgment

The preacher had tried everything under the sun, and then he realized one can live life just under the sun or one can live under God and in obedience to God. He warns, “Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, *but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment*” (Eccl. 11:9). The lesson from God comes at the end of this book in the epilogue: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13–14).

Here is the secret to life: “Fear God and keep his commandments.” Studying, pleasure, work, and reputation are important in life, but the secret to life is living in obedience to God, conformed to the life and death of his son Jesus.

On April 18-19, 1981, there was a 33-inning game between two minor-league, Triple-A teams, the Rochester Redwings, the farm team of the Baltimore Orioles, and the Pawtucket Red Sox, the farm team of the Boston Red Sox. That marathon game went on until 4:00 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning. Two future Hall of Famers played: Cal Ripken, Jr., for the Redwings and Wade Boggs for the Red Sox.

Dan Barry, in his book, *Extra Innings*, asked the players and fans, “Why did you keep playing? Why did you stay?” His reporting led him to these answers: “Because we are bound by duty.” “Because we aspire to greater things.” “Because we are loyal.” If one would do that for a minor league baseball game, what should one do if one intends to live life under God? We do not live our lives just under the sun but under the God who made the sun and sent his Son that we might have life. We are bound by a greater duty. We aspire to greater things. We are loyal to a greater purpose. We have a greater work to do.