

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 1: Self-Management

Deuteronomy 6:1 Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the LORD your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy,
2 so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.
3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.
4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.
5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.
6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.
7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.
8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead,
9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
10 When the LORD your God has brought you into the land that he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—a land with fine, large cities that you did not build,
11 houses filled with all sorts of goods that you did not fill, hewn cisterns that you did not hew, vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant—and when you have eaten your fill,
12 take care that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

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: Jesus stayed consistent with the tradition of Israel in summing up the Torah of God with two great commandments: loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength (interestingly, Jesus adds “mind” as well), corresponding with the first four of the ten commandments; and loving our neighbor as ourselves, corresponding to the final six of the ten commandments (cf. Lev. 19:18). Jesus’ short response sums up the call of God’s people. For Israel, it meant they followed the law in order to be found righteous before God. For Christians, the Great Commandment of Jesus is to be followed as a response to grace and the way of life for a Believer. Love—for the Jews and also the Christians—is not just a feeling or a thought: it is action. Love is lived out as a way of life. Sometimes American Christians are tempted to think that to love God is to *believe correctly*. Certainly there is a place for *orthodoxy*. However, love is a verb, and *belief* in both Hebrew and Greek are hardly passive. *Belief* is lived out in love as demonstrated by the Son of God who took on human flesh and dwelt among us, exemplified love in his mission and service, and died for us that we might share in his resurrection and redemption.

Hermeneutical Connection: Love for God and neighbor can be understood as lived out practically in three ways: first, love of self; second, love of those closest to us; third, love of the larger community of our neighbors, colleagues and partners. Since *love* is something that we *do*, it can be interchanged with the word *management*. For example, *self-love* is proper *self-management*, since management is the *doing* or the *living out* of the objectives of life (“to love the Lord your God with all your heart, . . .”). Our first sermon, then, is about *self-love* or proper *self-management*.

Introduction to Series: The preacher may want to introduce the sermon series here or before the reading of Scripture. Some of the thoughts I’ve written to introduce the series can be modified by the preacher for the introduction. The key will be to try to get people to think of *management* as something other than pushing papers, filling out job descriptions,

or bureaucratic human resources offices. Try referring to all the interest in leadership over the years along with the many books and conferences. But what about management? It seems to get a back seat to leadership when, in fact, it is the actual *doing* of the goals and objectives of leadership: the actual *implementation of the vision!*

Here are some analogies: the architect draws up the plans (leadership: casting the vision), but the engineer and contractor actually *build it*. An author may have dreamt up a fantastic recipe, but the chef is the one who actually cooks it and serves it up. We can talk all we want about Christian love and envision its reality, but at some point we have to strategize about how to actually *do love* as the Scripture calls us to do. It is *belief in action*.

The Preacher may want to draw in his/her word study of *oikonomos* mentioned on page one.

It might be helpful to explain the basic logic of the sermon series:

- I. We are called to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and our neighbor as ourselves.
- II. Love is action. Management is how goals are actually lived out and accomplished. One could say that management is a way of loving: an ordering of how we do the works of love.
- III. There are three spheres or arenas to live out the management of love.
 - A. Self. We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves: the management of self-love.
 - B. Our closest relationships: we are called to love those whom God has given us for the “long haul”: family and close friends.
 - C. The larger community of colleagues and partners: we then expand our management of love to the larger community around us.

The three sermons follow the outline of these three arenas of life (A, B, and C above).

Introduction to the First Sermon

The first arena of love is one’s self: the able management of one’s self or self-love. [Word of caution: be careful when preaching about self-love, because, in the pew, there is a large amount of self-loathing. You will hit an emotional nerve preaching on this topic, so be gentle in guiding your congregation to a good place of self-love].

I suggest you google “self-loathing” and note the many resources available to you to quote or comment on. Self-hatred is a far too common problem. Many, if not most people, have trouble loving themselves. And yet, our ability to love others stems from our own acceptance of ourselves as loved by God. In this introduction, you have the opportunity to mention baptism: that at the baptism of each one of us, God tore open the heavens, anointed us with the Spirit and said to you and me: “You are my child in whom I delight, beloved of God.”

Self-love begins by drawing in deeply the truth that we are loved so much by God.

If you use video in worship, consider <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ifibwk5o40>. If you do not use video, it might work just as well to tell the congregation about Norm Miller (CEO of Interstate Batteries) and his bold decision to produce such a commercial for his company (see <http://corporate.interstatebatteries.com/godslove/>). The key in this video is that the characters who love others are first filled with God’s love—that is the source of love pouring out.

Another way to talk about this: I have a decorative fountain at home that pours water over several tiers of slate. I can stare at it for a long time, watching the different ways the water travels down to the pool below. But there would be no water flowing out if there was no reservoir below! Love cannot pour out of us until it has first lodged within us!

We can talk about self-love using the three distinctions of the human self as defined by the ancient Greeks: mind, body, and soul.

A. Love God with All Your Mind

Self-management, which is self-love, is about keeping your mind in line. If your mind tells you often that you are unlovable, you believe an evil message. The Gospel begins with you: your belief and conviction that God so loved YOU that the Lord sent his only Son to die for YOU. There are so many messages out there: about weight, beauty, physical fitness, style and fashion, and a drive for success—a plethora of images that are designed to make you feel *less* about yourself so you will buy *more*.

Self-management, self-love, is about keeping first and foremost in your mind that you are a child of God, beloved of God, cherished and of great value!

Illustration. [The best illustrations come from the preacher's heart and life experiences. Look there first.] Even though this website is called "Tinybuddha," it's about changing your thoughts and can be related to what we believe about God first loving us: <http://tinybuddha.com/blog/2-ways-you-think-yourself-unhappy-and-10-things-to-do-about-it/>.

To really love ourselves we must change our thoughts to conform to what God believes about us: that we are so lovable the Lord searched the universe for us and died for us that we might live! This is truly thought-management!

B. Love Your Body

[Caution: this is a difficult area for many people! They will obsess on their physical imperfections. Keep this section focused on health issues.] We love our body by taking care of ourselves. If you don't like the way your body looks, then it is even more important to love your body, because only by loving it will you take care of it. In fact, your body is not your own: you are a *manager* (steward) of it for God! And God loves you, all of you including your body, so it's time to love your body too! Management of our health means that we believe our bodies are temples of God's Spirit, and we are called to healthy lifestyles to be good managers of our bodies.

The preacher here can address this emotion-laden topic with some humor to help people get the concept. You can talk about the time you were staring at a chocolate doughnut and an apple next to it. The debate going on in your mind—which to choose! Identify with the difficulty of making good choices for your health. Talk about your own struggles in this area (after all, this is a safe place for a preacher to share his or her "sins"). Allow your congregation to share your struggle and also your growing desire to take care of yourself and manage your health better.

Alternative: I think it is important to preach about loving your body, because it is the source of so much pain for people. However, if this is too awkward for the preacher, loving God with all one's might is also a good direction to go. The question would then be: how do we manage our energy? We may say we love the Lord, but the way we "spend" or "invest" our might (energy) is less about God and more about things that are hardly important. Think of energy as money: how are you spending it? Check out *Time* magazine's article on how we spend our time: <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1549394,00.html>. We are managers of the time and energy God has given us: are we investing it well?

C. Love Your Soul

You might consider dividing this third section into two sub-categories (or pick one of them): soul as the seat of one's psychological health, or, soul as one's spiritual center.

Soul as the seat of one's psychological health (Gk: *psyché*). We also love ourselves by managing our psychological health. To do so involves self-reflection about our behaviors and attitudes. When life doesn't work, or when we fail at managing anxiety well, masking pain with medications or becoming encumbered with addictions—it's time to love oneself enough to get well. Preacher: be careful here as well! Many in the pew, including some you would never imagine, struggle with addictions or obsessions that have them greatly troubled. As you speak, you are being a pastor, carefully and lovingly addressing difficult problems.

Try speaking quietly and saying something like: *For some of you, you've been masking deep pain in a way that is unhealthy; or, you've fallen prey to a serious addiction that has the potential of significant self-destruction—it's time to face the problem and begin to love yourself enough that, with God's help, you can be free.*

Illustration: There are many, many illustrations of people who have been set free to be more healthy psychologically. See <http://www.testimonyshare.com/god-healed-me-from-anxiety-and-depression/for one>.

We love ourselves and manage our lives well when we pay attention to those things that keep us from being fully free.

Soul as one's spiritual center. You can also focus on the importance of cultivating a spiritual life with God as the key to self-love and able self-management. We love ourselves by keeping the focus of our lives on Jesus Christ. We love ourselves through the spiritual disciplines (spiritual joys) of prayer, worship, discipleship, and giving. For those who enjoy Trinitarian theology, one could focus here on the social trinity as a model for human community. One could say that God could not bring into being all of creation nor could the Lord work the grand plan of redemption unless God's very self-essence was love. While we are not God, we are created in God's image and meant to imitate God's self-love by also loving ourselves. To love ourselves means to be immersed in God's love to the degree that we deeply feel God's love for us.

Illustration. The difference between white wine and red wine is that the latter has been poured over the skins of the grape. In a similar way, our lives must be repeatedly poured over the love of God until we begin to take on the color of God's love and become like the love of God. We can only do this by being daily immersed in that love, daily poured over it, to begin to reflect its vibrant color and essence.

Conclusion. *Preacher: narrow in on your congregation. After a good pause . . .*

This is perhaps the most difficult of my three sermons. The Lord is asking us here to do something that is very difficult: love yourself as God loves you. Some of you are so used to self-loathing, this feels like an impossibility. Others of you feel okay about yourselves but are missing out on the full depth of God's love for you and, therefore, the full depth of how God can love through you.

Hear these words from John 3:16—For God so loved [say your name], that he gave his only begotten Son, that if only you would really *believe* in Him, you would not perish or languish in self-destruction and feelings of hopelessness, but know abundant life, not just when you die, but . . . NOW!