

Three Phrases for the Daily Climb

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God”
(Acts 20:24).

It’s time to take an examination. Don’t sweat it. It won’t hurt or be difficult. Maybe we could call it “taking inventory.” We are specifically looking at three phrases and three phases of life; your life.

For every twenty who enter the ministry, by the time each reach retirement age, only one will still be in the ministry. Consider those that graduated from Bible school or entered ministry with you. How many are no longer in the ministry? (The statistics are not much different when you consider members rather than ministers.)

Too many have come through the front door, have left through the back, never to return. My greatest regret is that we have lost too many that once were part of the family. My greatest tears have been shed over those that have disqualified themselves from the ministry. Some have walked away from the truth. Others have sadly fallen into fornication or adultery. Others became offended, feeling they were abused, or squabbling over maintaining leadership territories and positions. Sadly, like the African proverb says, “When the elephants fight, the grass gets hurt.”

The Scripture commands: Bring forth fruit. And it promises: Your fruit should remain (John 15:16). Perhaps, you are like me. I long for the complete work. To bring forth fruit and that it would remain. I want to count gains for the kingdom of God; not losses. I long to be part of the building process; and never be found tearing down what God is trying to build up. Most of all I never want to be found on the AWOL (Absent Without Leave) list. I want to keep going; keep climbing.

My Life – my gift from God
My Course – my assignment from God
My Ministry – my gift back to God

Warren W. Wiersbe is a fabulous writer. In reading through his classic *The Bumps are What You Climb On* there was a chapter “How to Keep Going” that grabbed attention. It provides the seed thought for this lesson.

Paul did not count his life of any value. What he did value was to finish the course and the ministry. “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course, and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus...” (Acts 20:24, *ESV*, emphasis mine).

A close look at this verse reveals three phrases for the daily climb. They are personal. They are mine!

They are:

- My Life
- My Course
- My ministry

My Life

Paul knew his life was a treasure. Warren Wiersbe said, “His life was not a treasure for him to guard; it was a treasure for him to invest...”

“So if you're serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ—that's where the action is. See things from his perspective. Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life—even though invisible to spectators—is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too—the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ” (Colossians 3:1-4, *The Message*).

Place your life in God's hands:

“So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you” (Romans 12:1-2).

God has a great plan for your life. Conform to it. Run with it! Live it! It requires daily pulling yourself onto the altar of sacrifice and surrendering our lives for His highest purpose.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11, *NIV*).

“The LORD Almighty has sworn, “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand” (Isaiah 14:24, *NIV*).

Reverend Kenneth Haney, UPCI General Superintendent, reminded us we need to pay the price for revival. He called us back to the preaching and way of the cross. Self-denial is the way to the heart of this world. He told a story of a communist boy, standing on a street corner, with tattered clothes, propagating communism. Someone walked by and said, "You're paying a big price for communism!" The boy responded, "When you're changing the world, no cost is too great."

Leonard Ravenhill in *Meat for Men* wrote, "Recently, we visited an elaborate and opulent temple in the Far East. This experience reminded me of one Christian visitor who, overwhelmed with the ornate place and its static wealth, asked a heathen worshipper, 'What is the actual cost of erecting a temple like this?' The startled devotee replied in pained surprise, 'What is the cost? This temple is for our god, and for him we never count the cost.'" Give God your best. Never count the cost. No cost is ever too great!

My Course

The "course" speaks of life's race. We are all assigned our own track; our special lane. Wiersbe said, "The important thing is that we obey the rules, keep running for the prize, and stay in the correct lane." Paul's aspiration was to run his race well. He kept his eyes in his own lane; not that of someone else.

Yes, there will be obstacles that come our way. No one promised it would be easy. In fact, "race" comes from the word that means "agony." It's tough. It's worth it. You can make it. There are patriarchs of old cheering you on. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1, *NLT*).

Give it all you've got: "I don't know about you, but I'm running hard for the finish line. I'm giving it everything I've got. No sloppy living for me! I'm staying alert and in top condition. I'm not going to get caught napping, telling everyone else all about it and then missing out myself" (1 Corinthians 9:27, *The Message*).

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but [only] one receives the prize? So run [your race] that you may lay hold [of the prize] and make it yours" (1 Corinthians 9:24, *AMP*).

It's easy to get perturbed—or even perplexed—when reading this verse; especially if you have a competitive spirit or attitude. It's also easy to get discouraged with this verse. Why run the race, if only one gets the prize? But, perhaps this is different. We all run the race. It is a personal pursuit prescribed and designed just for us. And each of us can finish the course.

“You were running superbly! Who cut in on you, deflecting you from the true course of obedience? This detour doesn't come from the One who called you into the race in the first place. And please don't toss this off as insignificant” (Galatians 5:7-8, *The Message*).

Let us be careful never to do anything that will disqualify us from the race or ministry, and be destructive to our Christian lives.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7, *NKJV*).

We are not in competition with anyone else. Everyone can run his own race and win his own prize.

In life's race there are times when we trip, falter, give up, and occasionally retreat. What should we do? Get up and keep moving. It is not how one starts the race or how fast one runs that is so important, but how one ends.

“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong...” (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

You just can't keep a godly man or woman down. Trip them time after time. They won't stay down long. They'll jump back on their feet again. Why? They are in a race. They are destined to win!

“If you fall to pieces in a crisis, there wasn't much to you in the first place” (Proverbs 24:10, *The Message*).

God is your strength. Don't fail under pressure (*NLT*) or falter in times of trouble (*NIV*). And if you do fail, falter, or fall; get up again. Dust off the dirt, and keep running. Heaven is your goal! “Well done” is your expected commendation.

Don't look back. Keep your eyes on the goal. “By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back” (Philippians 3:12-13, *The Message*).

“This is the only race worth running. I've run hard right to the finish, believed all the way. All that's left now is the shouting—God's applause!” (2 Timothy 4:5-8, *The Message*).

My Ministry

Each of us has a vision to fulfill. We are to make jam-packed proof of our ministry. God has placed us all in the body. We are not all the same. We do not operate the same. There is strength in unity and in our diversity. Each has different gifting, talents, and ministries. We are

not called to compete with each other, but to complete one another. Learn to operate within your ministry. When you use your talents, God will perfect them for His glory, and may even give you more talents. Remember the parable of the talents. You lose what you don't use. Use and God will give you more. The purpose of ministry is to prepare God's people for acts of service in God's kingdom (Ephesians 4:11-12). We are here on earth to advance the kingdom!

As is often said, it is important to be in submission to those that are over us. Submission is being under the protection of another; usually someone in higher authority. That casts a different light on things. We are not enslaved. We are not beaten down or belittled. We are protected. We complete. Working together, in harmony, we accomplish our maximum for God.

"Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:26). They were willing to risk all—to give all—for Jesus.

"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power" (Ephesians 3:7, *NIV*). A lot has been said and written about "servanthood." Being a servant is foundational in God's kingdom. How can one tell whether he or she is really a servant? That's easy. Check how you respond when treated like a servant. It's not so easy or glamorous then, is it? We are not merely a servant to humanity, or to our spouses. No, when we were converted we became "a servant of this gospel." The things we do for the kingdom, we do for the Gospel's sake, so that the truth is spread to the four corners of the earth.

"...And *that* they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to everyone that helpeth with *us*, and laboureth" (1 Corinthians 16:15-16).

They were spending their lives in service to God's people (*NLT*). They were consecrated and devoted to the service of the saints (*AMP*). They could be looked up to, acting as our examples, and giving us something to aspire to.

We don't usually think of hazards and addictions in a positive light. In these two verses it is upbeat, healthy, and productive. An "addiction" is when the body is in a state where it depends on something for its normal functioning. The body cannot cope without the substance and goes into withdrawal. We are dependent on ministry—following God's will—for our daily sustenance. When witnessing to the Samaritan woman, Jesus rejected food from His disciples, and explained, "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing the work" (John 4:34, *NLT*). It was the food that kept Him going. He was addicted to fulfilling His mission.

We can also be addicted to God's Word: "I have not gone back from the commandment of His lips; I have esteemed and treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12, *AMP*).

Wiersbe concluded, “My life—my course—my ministry. It would be good to repeat those three phrases at the beginning of each day, for they help us take inventory of our spiritual experience.”

Let’s review:

My Life	It is my gift from God.
My Course	It is my assignment from God.
My Ministry	It is my gift back to God.

We are pilgrims on the earth; just passing through. We are climbing onward and upward. Keep the expedition in perspective by taking inventory of the three phrases for the daily climb. See you at the top!

Study Questions

- As stated in this lesson, what did the Apostle Paul value? _____

- For every twenty people that enter ministry, how many will still be in the ministry when reaching retirement age? _____

- What three phrases taken from Acts 20:24 serve as the foundation for this lesson?

- What did Warren Wiersbe say about Paul’s life being a treasure? _____

- According to Colossians 3:2-4, who is our life? _____

6. According to Romans 12:1-2, what should we do with our lives? _____

7. What did the young communist (in this lesson) say? _____

8. What was the response of the heathen worshipper when asked the cost of the temple? _____

9. The word "race" comes from the old world and means what? _____

10. What should one do when he falters or falls in life's race? _____

11. What is meant by submission? _____

12. What happens when we use our talents? _____

13. Explain how we are servants of the Gospel. _____

14. Explain what is meant by the addiction recorded in 1 Corinthians 16:15-16. _____

15. Why was Jesus not hungry in John 4:33-34? _____

16. What are the three things we should take inventory of each day? _____

Additional Notes

