



+ **YOU**

Winter 2024

Owning a Faith that Matters

**Sermon title:** Keep on Climbing

**To be used with Session 6:** Maturing Faith

**Scripture:** Philippians 3:5-14

**Connection with the study:** To complement the Bible Study “Maturing Faith,” this sermon concludes the series focusing on the Apostle Paul’s faith journey as described in his own words. The thrust of the message points to the need to keep intentionally growing in faith to avoid complacency and staleness in our Christian life.

### **Introduction:**

Next to Mount Everest, the Matterhorn has been a goal for many climbers from around the world. First ascended in 1865, this jagged, tooth-like mountain towers 14, 692 feet above sea level. The Matterhorn is located in the Swiss Alps near the border between Switzerland and Italy. Each year approximately 3000 people climb to the icy, snow-covered top of this legendary peak. The goal of each climber, obviously, is to make it safely to the top. Unfortunately, each year about 5 climbers will not complete the climb safely, dying either on the ascent or on the descent from the peak.<sup>1</sup>

The goal of our Christian life is to complete our spiritual journey well. Tragically, we all know people who have fallen away on the journey. In Paul’s words, they have “shipwrecked” along the way and have drifted away from their faith in Christ (1 Tim. 1:19). Our challenge as followers of Jesus Christ is to stay on course and keep climbing toward maturity in our faith.

In the letter to the Philippian Christians, Paul set forth three critical thoughts to aid his readers on the climb to Christian maturity. Each of these thoughts arose from Paul’s own life where he learned how to grow a maturing Christian faith.

### **Reject Wrong Priorities (Phil. 3:5-7)**

Achieving spiritual maturity begins with getting priorities in the proper order. In verses 5-6, Paul catalogued the many things that once were top priorities in his life. Each of these would have added to his status as a Jewish citizen. Each could have been considered a rung on the ladder of attaining a right relationship with God. These were traits to be bragged about. Paul, however, knew they were low-level priorities when compared with the wonder of all that Christ had done for him.

We, too, are confronted with many things that vie for top priority in our lives. The truth is, that the priorities we often focus on are temporary in nature and, in light of eternity, do not measure up. Each of us ought to regularly evaluate our priorities and ask the question: Will this priority matter five, ten, or twenty years from now? How does this stack up in light of eternity? To mature in Jesus Christ calls on us to reject wrong priorities.

### **Strive to Know Christ Fully (Phil. 3:8-11)**

The second truth that is essential is to make Jesus Christ the top priority of life. Paul spoke of “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” This was more than just an intellectual knowledge of who Jesus was or what He did. The thought conveys a close, personal, intimate relationship with Christ where every day the thoughts and decisions of the day reflect that relationship. The central component of knowing Christ is acknowledging and following Him as Lord—the boss and CEO of my life. I am listening for His voice as He speaks to me through the Word of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. As I hear His voice, I immediately obey joyfully, wholeheartedly, and completely.

To know Christ Jesus as Lord involves a total abandonment of anything I think will make me right with God and embracing all that Jesus has done, is doing, and will do in my life. It is a recognition that the only way I can stand right before God is through Jesus’s death on my behalf.

Inherent in knowing Christ is the effort to daily grow in Christian maturity. It involves a daily surrender to His lordship. Knowing Christ means that I take intentional steps in following Him closer and closer each day.

### **Keep on Climbing (Phil. 3:12-14)**

Paul surprises us in these verses. You and I would think that if there was anybody who had arrived in their walk with Christ it would be Paul. Yet he said, “I haven’t arrived yet! I’ve got a long way to go.” Such a statement involves tremendous humility. Throughout the testimony of Paul found in his letters, Paul continually spoke of not boasting in himself or his achievements. Instead, he chose to boast in the fact that he knew Jesus Christ.

A temptation facing any believer who is daily seeking to grow in his or her faith is to become prideful concerning their progress. Such an attitude can lead to disaster. As the old saying goes: “If you think you’re ripe, you’ll rot; if you think you’re green, you will grow.” Paul acknowledged that he was still green. “I haven’t achieved full maturity yet.” Paul knew that he needed to keep on climbing in his daily faith journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We, too, need to make every effort to pursue that deeper relationship with Christ. Like Paul, we need to continue to press forward as a follower of Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion:**

In the village of Zermatt, Switzerland, at the foot of the Matterhorn lies the Mountaineers Cemetery where some who died climbing the mountain are buried. One of those graves belongs to a seventeen-year-old New Yorker, Donald Stephen Williams. On his tombstone are engraved the words “I chose to climb.” (Several websites contain pictures of this grave such as <http://www.swisswintersports.co.uk/cemetery.php>.)

In the Christian life, we too, have a choice. We can be content with where we are in following Christ as a shallow Christian. Or we can choose to keep on climbing. My prayer is that this will be your testimony when you come to the end of your faith journey: “I chose to climb!”

*Dr. Sam Crouch is retired after 52 years in ministry. Sam was educated at Baylor University and Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife live in Tucson, Arizona where Sam enjoys writing, reading, yardwork, and cats. His latest book is [Clearing the Fog: Gaining an Understanding and Appreciation of the Old Testament](#).*

<sup>1</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matterhorn>