

Make Sure You're Climbing the Right Ladder

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Stephen Covey, a business man, teacher, and writer once made this statement: "Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success. Plus, leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall". Stephen Covey was big on business efficiently. However, it is all wasted if you have your ladder against the wrong building. There are times when you have to move the ladder. Elon Musk had done an audit on USAID this past week and stated the department should be closed because it is too corrupt and too deeply infected with bad management and leadership. There are times when trying to fix a bad business is not worth the try. I was once asked by my superiors at Weis about a store and what should be done about it. We had fixed a lot of the problems, however, the deep-rooted problem with the employees could not be fixed unless they were fired. I told my superiors to close the store and forget about it. The problem was the store did make a profit, so it was kept open. The last time I heard about the store, it went back to the way it was – bad management and poor employee ethics. A good business will look at areas that may need to be shut down for the good of the business. So, Stephen Covey is saying to make sure you don't put all your energy into something that will not become successful or make sure you are the right person for the right job. You don't want all your hard work to go for nothing. When we climb the ladder of life, we have to make sure we are not on the wrong ladder. What do I mean by this? Well, let's take a look at some Scripture.

Let's turn to Philippians 3: 1 – 21 where we read this, "3 Finally, my brothers,[Ⓜ] rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God[Ⓜ] and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the

flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law,^{ca} blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Straining Toward the Goal

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

As we read this piece of Scripture, we see Apostle Paul making a statement about his life before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus where he was going to persecute Christians. Paul lets us know that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He was from the tribe of Benjamin – a good tribe to be part of. Paul also tells us he was a zealous Pharisee who was good at his job. Plus, Paul doesn't mention it here, but he was also a Roman citizen. Paul was climbing the human ladder of success. He had one of the top jobs as a Jew. They made good money because of all the money they received by ripping people off at the Temple in Jerusalem. Paul was a well-educated man which was not common among the

Jewish people at this time. Plus, he was a Roman citizen which was huge during this time period. I'm sure that during this climb, Paul thought he was on the right ladder to success. His family was probably happy with his success. Also, Paul still hadn't reached the top of the ladder. He wasn't the top Pharisee yet, but it may have been on his mind. Most people like to climb the ladder of success. There is nothing wrong with that as long as it is for good reasons and done in an ethical and moral way. Paul was riding high. He was almost at the top. As Paul states in verse 6, he was faultless in his work – he followed the law perfectly. He was a good Pharisee humanly speaking. He was climbing the ladder and maybe he thought persecuting the new followers of Jesus would help his cause. What we do know, Paul started to persecute Christians after the death of Stephen with zeal. In fact, we read this in Acts 9: 1 – 9, “Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord’s followers, so he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them – both men and women – back to Jerusalem in chains. As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! He fell on the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?’ Who are you, sir?’ Saul asked. And the voice replied, ‘I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ The men with Saul stood speechless with surprise, for they heard the sound of someone’s voice, but they saw no one! As Saul picked himself off the ground, he found that he was blind. So his companions led him by hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days. And all that time he went without food and water. (NLT, 1708)”

Paul’s whole world changed. He met Jesus in a zealous way. It’s amazing how Jesus can reach people in the way that is needed. Paul, who was zealous for his cause, had to meet Jesus in a powerful way. He was made blind. Paul was knocked off his ladder of success. Paul was made anew by Jesus. Paul became a new person in Jesus Christ. Paul was now starting up a different ladder. This ladder goes to Jesus and not the world. Paul had a new outlook on life. We read this in Philippians 3: 7, “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the

surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ. (NIV). Paul now sees everything before the Damascus Road event as a loss for the sake of Jesus. In other words, he no longer put such high regards to the things the world sees as being important. Paul was no longer a Pharisee. Paul would see his Roman citizenship as only as something to help advance the message of Jesus. In fact, Paul states all of these worldly things he was trying so hard to cling to had now become garbage in verse 8. The ESV we read earlier used the term “rubbish”. The KJV uses the term “dung”. The Greek term Paul uses here is “skybalon” which means rubbish, refuse, dung, can refer to any number of rotten, decaying things, all that is worth getting rid of (Strong’s Concordance)”. Paul now saw what was important in life. He saw what he was trying so hard to accomplish before his meeting with Jesus as something that was decaying and worth getting rid of. To Paul, that ladder he was climbing was rubbish and dung compared with his new life in Jesus. This new ladder Paul was climbing helped him to see what Jesus sees. Jesus states this in Matthew 6: 19 – 24, “Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty, and where they will be safe from thieves. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be. (NLT, 1416)” So, Paul no longer cared to please the world like most people would do. He no longer cared about the ladder of success this world treasures so much. Paul now saw what was more precious to him.

Paul tells us this in verse 9, “And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. (NIV)” Paul had spent his early life focused on learning the law of God and the laws the Pharisees had added onto God’s laws. Now, Paul sees what is more important. He now sees how important it is for God’s righteousness to flow through us by the working of the Holy Spirit. Now, we have the law within us because of God’s righteousness. Paul saw how more precious that is than trying to do it the human way. This is why we pray for each other so that His Spirit can make us righteous because we know that it is important for our relationship with our Lord.

If you study Paul, you'll find that he is zealous in his relationship with Jesus like he was a zealous Pharisee before meeting Jesus. If you look at verses 10 – 14, you see what now is so important to Paul. First Paul states he wants to know Christ to the point in becoming like Him in His death. On this new ladder Paul is climbing, he now wants to spend his time knowing Jesus and taking part of the Lord's sufferings as well. This is how much Paul had changed after his meeting with Jesus. All the old is dung to him and now he wants to live out Jesus in every way even to the point of suffering for Jesus. Are we as committed to Jesus as Paul was?

Then, Paul talks about how he has not yet obtained the top of the ladder. He will press toward the goal to win the prize for which God had called him to. When we climb the worldly ladder, it's for the whole world to see and we use it to feed our pride. When we climb the ladder to Jesus, all we care about is pleasing Him in every way. Even Paul realized he needed to continue on climbing that ladder. We look upon Paul as a great Church leader. Of all people, he should have already reached the end of the ladder. We have to understand that the ladder we climb goes straight into heaven. We don't finish the climb till the Lord calls us Home to live in perfect peace forever and forever.

Finally, Paul reminds us in verse 20 that our real citizenship is in Heaven. We must stay focused as we climb that heavenly ladder. We do this so we don't get caught up in the earthly things that can weight us down. I took a class this week online at the Lutheran Seminary. It's a far-left school and right now they are in despair mode because of election. They don't know how to handle it and they are scared to death of conservatives. I was thinking about how I survived the past four years. I didn't like the policies of the past President, but I didn't allow that to make me miss a step on that ladder to Jesus. My relationship with Him is more important than politics which is an earthly thing. Yes, I care about what goes on, but I know what is more important so I continue to press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me (verse 14). Let's make sure we are climbing the right ladder and let's keep focused on Jesus with everything we have. We will not be disappointed.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publisher, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996

Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.