

Mt. Everest. Every year during the month of May, adventurers travel to Nepal in an attempt to climb Mt. Everest, the highest mountain in the world. The cost of this adventure is around \$65,000. Not a poor man's sport. In my former congregation in Bay City, Michigan, there was a pastor who served there for 38 years. His name was Emil Kasischke. He had a son, named Louis. Louis was an attorney for a number of years in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. He was the CEO of Pella Windows and served on executive boards of other major companies. I knew Louis personally, since he visited Trinity Lutheran Church from time to time, and was a generous financial supporter of Christian education. Louis had a passion, and it was mountain climbing. He had climbed all the major peaks in the world. One was left. Mt. Everest. He was 54 years old. He went into training. He joined Rob Hall's expedition to climb Mt. Everest. On May 10th, 1996, Lou made a decision that saved his life. He was only 400 ft from the summit, when he decided to turn around and head back down. 8 other climbers weren't so fortunate. They died that day. Until the avalanche of 2014, it was the worst disaster in a single day on Mt. Everest. Movies have been made of the climb. Into Thin air in 1997 and Everest in 2015. When I lived in Bay City, Michigan, Lou presented the story of his climb to the members of my congregation. In 2014, he authored the book, "After The Wind". He presently resides in Harbor Springs, Michigan.

Have you ever climbed a mountain before? Do you realize that you are climbing a mountain right now? Living your life is like climbing a mountain. This section of the Bible teaches us all kinds of lessons of how to climb the mountain of life successfully, until we finally reach the summit, which is heaven. Today we will learn, "How To Climb Life Mountain."

The first thing God tells us it to do here is to "watch your step" - "be very careful, then, how you live your life - not as unwise but as wise." Literally, watch how you walk. Don't be unwise, be wise. What does it mean? The next verse gives us the answer: "making the most of every opportunity." A Christian understands that every day on this planet counts - every step is important. As I climb this mountain, I come across opportunities to show love to God, and opportunities to show love and kindness to others.

Christian climbing the mountain of life is always looking around carefully, making the most of every opportunity for that chance to show the love of Jesus to someone else. Maybe it's an act of kindness to a fellow Christian. Maybe it's a listening ear to someone who needs to express how they feel. Maybe it's a conversation with that person in your life that doesn't believe in Jesus. As I walk through life, God wants me to look for the opportunities he gives me to glorify him and to love others. That's what it means to be "careful how you live your life, not as unwise but as wise."

Have you been careful with your life this way? The next verse says "Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." To be foolish means that I don't get it. I believe in Jesus, but my faith is so shallow that I don't know why I'm here in this world. I'm just living my life for the here and now, living for myself. Making my money, focusing on pleasure - that's what life is all about - a good life. Don't be foolish, God says. Instead, "understand what the Lord's will is." What is God's will. Three things.

First, in John 6: 40 it says, "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life." It's a relationship. God says, "I want you to develop a relationship with Me." 1 Corinthians 1:9 "God who has called you into fellowship with His Son,

Jesus Christ.” Circle “fellowship”. God wants to be your friend. That is so mind blowing, it’s amazing. God says I want you to have a relationship with me. Your sins have created a wall between us. And yet my Son gave up his life to pay for your sins, so that we can be connected to each other again. I want the whole world reconnected to me. So when we have a focus here at Trinity of outreach to people who don’t know Jesus, The Father is saying, “Way to Go Trinity, that is according to my will.

Second, it is the will of God that we be careful when we study and teach His Word. There are so many false prophets out there who come up with their own radical interpretation of Scripture. When I teach people, I want to always to make sure Scripture actually is teaching what I am saying. The Bible says in Jeremiah 23:28, “Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.”

Third, God wants us to follow the ten commandments not as suggestions, but as a guide for our lives. He wants us to live holy lives that honor Him. In I Peter 2:15 it says, “It is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” One of the saddest things today, is that many Christians are Unidentified Flying Objects. No one can tell that they actually follow Jesus as they fly around the neighborhood. Their mouth, values, focus on life issues and commitment to the church, all demonstrate that the Savior they hold dear is not very dear.

And what do you do when life starts to stress you out? When you’re hiking up the mountain of life, and your legs start to get tired and your backpack starts to weigh you down? It says here, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery." Can you imagine trying to climb a difficult mountain, and when you’re halfway up and you’re out of breath, you pull out a bottle of alcohol and start drinking? Anyone that climbs mountains will tell you that this is not only unwise, it can be lethal.

And yet, this is exactly what people sometimes do, including Christians, when life gets difficult. The abuse of alcohol - why does our culture have such a problem with excess? You can get drunk, our culture says, just as long as you don’t drive or hurt anyone. But that’s not what the Bible says. Have you ever done this before? You’re stressed out from the day, and you need something to help you deal with the stress - you turn to alcohol, and one drink leads to another and another. As a result, You don’t sleep well and are all dragged out the next day.

Don’t do that, the Bible says. It’s a sin. It leads to debauchery, which is a word that encompasses all the bad things that happen after abusing alcohol. If life is stressing you out, if you’re looking for something to help you deal with the challenges of life - then fill yourself up, the Bible says, not with an excessive amount of alcohol - but instead, with the Spirit. Turn to the Word - and fill yourself up with the Holy Spirit. Fill yourself up with God’s promises of strength and wisdom and joy. Fill yourself up with God the Holy Spirit.

So how carefully have you been living your life? How have you been coping with the stress? Have you been making the most of every opportunity to give glory to God, and to love others? Or, have you been hiking recklessly up this mountain, missing opportunities, not sure what God’s will is, and not dealing very well with life’s challenges. Be careful how you live, the Bible says. Have you been wise or foolish? "All have sinned, the Bible says, and have fallen short of the glory of God." Each one of us has fallen down on this hiking trail, too injured by our own recklessness to make it to the summit, too weighed down by our own sins to be able to get

up and climb the mountain of life and reach the summit of heaven.

But someone appears on this mountain of life right next to us, and that someone is Jesus Christ. And he takes all of those sins in our lives, all of those moments of regret, and he throws those sins off the mountain. He can do that, because he paid for our sins on the cross. He hiked up another mountain, that mountain called Golgotha, and there he carried on his back the heaviest load anyone has ever carried - the sins of the whole world. And there on that mountain of Calvary he died for all of your sins. Every one of them - paid for, and you are forgiven. And then after dying, Jesus rose from the dead, to show us that there is hope, that we will someday make it to that summit, that we will someday stand at the top of that mountain when we're in heaven - it's a guarantee.

When we fall down, Jesus reaches out his hand and lifts us up. And then he climbs the mountain of life with us - "Surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age," he says. Every step we take, he steps with us, our eternal companion, the one we can lean on when we are weak, the one we can rejoice with when we are strong.

And so we climb, and as we do, we encourage each other: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." When you're hiking, you gotta keep the conversation going - it keeps your spirits up, when the backpack gets heavy, when the legs get tired. We need each other, as we climb this mountain of life. And we need more than just the small talk about the weather or the Manatees at Crystal River. It's a nice place to start, but we also need to hear from each other that thought from the Psalms - that God is my refuge and strength - we need to hear that thought from the hymnal - what a friend we have in Jesus! Speak to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Encourage the Christians that you live with, that you work with, that you worship with.

Sing and make music in our heart to the Lord, the Bible says. We sing to God as we walk through life. And what do we sing about? "Always giving thanks, in everything" - Can you hear the emphasis here? ALWAYS give thanks, IN EVERYTHING. When the hiking trail is nice and level and there are beautiful views and the weather is perfect - I give thanks. And when it's uphill and rocky and there are no good views and it's raining, I give thanks. Because even in those difficult times of life, God brings blessings - the challenges of life cause the promises of God in the Bible to become more real to me. My failures and shortcomings cause Jesus' death on the cross to mean more to me. When we face problems, when we feel lost, we appreciate our baptisms more, we pray more passionately and fervently. Isn't it comforting to know that no challenge comes our way unless God allows it for our good. And so that is our song to the Lord every day as we climb this mountain - ALWAYS giving thanks to God IN EVERYTHING.

When you're trying to climb a mountain, it's probably not going to work out when the top, the peak, is covered by clouds. You can become discouraged, negative. But when you can see the summit, when you can see the top - then, the pain, the fatigue - you fight through it - because you're almost there.

Let's keep our eyes on our goal. Don't let the world obscure it. Our goal is heaven. And the entrance is the cross of Jesus Christ. Keep your eyes focused on that goal. And may God bless you as you get close and closer to the summit. Someday, We'll both together pound the flag of victory on the summit. Amen.