

Melva's Corner



Together We Can

June 4, 2007

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Central Truth: “. . . when I got to the top, I was on the shoulders of lots and lots of people.”

King Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes writes “You are better off to have a friend than to be all alone, because then you will get more enjoyment out of what you earn. If you fall, your friend can help you up. But if you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble. If you sleep alone, you won't have anyone to keep you warm on a cold night. Someone might be able to beat up one of you, but not both of you. As the saying goes, ‘A rope made from three strands of cord is hard to break’” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

It has been six years ago now that Erik Weihenmayer did a most extraordinary thing. He stood atop the 29,035-foot peak of the world's highest mountain. He conquered Mount Everest as one member of a team of nineteen hardy, determined souls. Oh, yes. There's one other thing. Erik is blind.

In order to be the first blind person ever to achieve this feat, the 32-year-old American knew he had to be part of a larger group committed to the same goal. He put his full faith and confidence in sighted people such as Eric Alexander, Luis Benitez, and Jeff Evans. They arrived at their goal on May 25, 2001.

In an interview with a CNN reporter on the afternoon of his success, Erik spoke by phone of the “team accomplishment” he had shared. He spoke of sponsors, people who were on the mountain with him, and many who were not there but who had prayed for him. “I felt like, when I got to the top, I was on the shoulders of lots and lots of people,” he said. “It wasn't just me standing there.”

The same thing can be said of every great achievement. If a single researcher in her lab makes a monumental discovery, it was on the basis of what hundreds of others contributed through their work and publications in the field. Even if it is an athlete or musician whose great moment is unshared on the field or stage, there are hosts of people who inspired, taught, and otherwise made their contributions to that one bright, shining moment.

There are some worthwhile and challenging goals you have for your life that will be too much for you alone. It isn't a sign of weakness but wisdom to realize you will need help. So don't hesitate to surround yourself with people of similar goals, more extensive experience and skills superior to your own. The best way to learn is to attach yourself to others who already know more about what is important to you. And here's a fact that may surprise you: Most of them will be eager to share their experience and insights with you.

Erik admits to be "scared all the time" on his ascent. But he continued to trust his partners — and kept putting one foot in front of the other.

In your career, family, or personal spiritual life, the notion of going it alone will be a mistake. If you are willing to stand on the shoulders of others, you can go places that otherwise would be out of reach.

If you doubt it, just ask Erik Weihenmayer how he got to the top.

Another story I would like to share occurred in the year 1904. People at the World's Fair in St. Louis had walked for hours in the hot sun, and they were ready for something to cool them off. That's why they lined up for what seemed like miles in front of the booth of Arnold Fornachou to get a taste of his frosty ice cream.

The problem was that Arnold's ice cream was so popular he quickly ran out of paper bowls. The moonlighting teenager scrambled to keep his potential customers by washing and reusing the few ceramic bowls he had on hand. But no matter how hard he worked, many people grew tired of waiting and wandered off in search of another treat. That's when an unlikely partner emerged to save the day.

His name was Ernest Hamwi, a pastry chef who had grown up in Damascus, Syria. In the booth next to Arnold's, he was selling a wafer-thin Persian confection called a zalabia. That is . . . he was offering them, but no one was buying them.

When Ernest saw his neighbor's plight, he was struck with a great idea. Grabbing a warm zalabia, he twisted it into a cornucopia shape and rolled it in sugar. Then he ran over to Arnold's booth and offered it to him. Still scrambling to wash bowls and wait on customers, Arnold didn't understand what the older man had in mind. But when Ernest handed an ice cream scoop atop a confection cone to a waiting customer, Arnold instantly got the message. A huge smile spread over his face, and in no time, the two men were working side by side—Ernest made "edible bowls", Arnold scooped ice cream. Back then, they were called "World's Fair Cornucopias," and they were the hit of the fair. Today, we simply call them ice cream cones — and they're still a hit.

Today, remember that we earn and enjoy more when we work with others, as well as experience comfort and strength when we need it.

Scriptural References:

"You are better off to have a friend than to be all alone, because then you will get more enjoyment out of what you earn. If you fall, your friend can help you up. But if you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble. If you sleep alone, you won't have anyone to keep you warm on a cold night. Someone might be able to beat up one of you, but not both of you. As the saying goes, 'A rope made from three strands of cord is hard to break'" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).