

# Conquering your Everest

By Rex Morgan

**T**he death of Sir Edmund Hillary in January 2008 gave rise to a huge outpouring of respect and admiration for this outstanding New Zealander. Sir Edmund is remembered for qualities such as his courage in the face of obstacles, his grit, persistence and dogged determination, his generous humanitarian service to the people of Nepal, and perhaps most of all his remarkable humility.

I was privileged some years ago to interview Sir Edmund in his Remuera home for a magazine article. Our conversation focused on lessons we can all learn from the qualities that took him to the summit of the world.

The accomplished mountaineer spoke of Everests other than the one he had conquered – Everests that each of us faces in life. “Without a strong inclination to overcome and achieve, you simply wouldn’t try to climb Everest”, he pointed out. “It’s a tedious, miserable slog. But if you persist and get to the top, there’s a great

feeling of satisfaction. In life I think that everyone is battling a mountain like Everest, and the key to success is much the same.”

## Different kinds of Everests

Are you battling an Everest in your life? What did Sir Edmund mean by this? He went on to explain: “Mountaineering is just a very minor thing as far as the world is concerned – there are far more important challenges in life than climbing mountains. I believe most of the mountains left to climb now are social problems. Human relationships and the overcoming of problems in the social field are far more important than physical challenges – climbing mountains, crossing Antarctica and so on. The tougher challenges that exist are the dealings with problems such as social disruption and war. Whereas most of us can have little impact on whether nations drop bombs on each other, individually we should try to deal with the problems in our

immediate circle and not give up hope, doing our best to create a good environment around us.”

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**— Sir Edmund Hillary**

We all have our own mountains to climb, as nations and as individuals. Your personal Everest might be a serious health problem or disability, a daunting financial situation, difficulties with your boss or workmates, an unruly teenage child, a relationship on the rocks – the list goes on and on.

On the international level, Everest-like peaks confronting the world



include such scourges as warfare, poverty, crime, terrorism and weather disasters. There's not a lot we can do individually to fight these global troubles, but wouldn't it be great if the achievements of Sir Edmund would encourage us to face our personal problems with the courage and determination he exemplified?

### **An Explosion of Knowledge**

In recent years human knowledge in science, communications, technology and almost every area of existence has grown exponentially. The worldwide web has provided an explosion of global knowledge, with billions of pages of information available to anyone with a computer, all sorted into subject order by search engines within just a few seconds.

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But in spite of these incredible advances in knowledge, there are just as many personal and national problems, challenges and disasters as there ever have been. Financial problems, drug and alcohol abuse, rapes, murders, stress, and political upheaval continue to abound. If we compare these troubles to mountains like Everest, we are surrounded by the Himalayas many times over!

We are *still* facing many of the same problems faced by the ancient Egyptians and Romans, and the procession of other empires and civilisations that have risen and fallen throughout the annals of history. What have we learned over the centuries?

### **"Climb Every Mountain"**

The words of a famous song from "The Sound of Music" are very inspirational. *"Climb every mountain, search high and low, follow every byway, every path you know. Climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, till you find your dream. A dream that will need all the love you can give, every day of your life, for as long as you live..."*



These sentiments compare the experience of mountain climbing with the personal challenges we face. The goal of reaching a snow-clad summit is compared to the goal of reaching a destination in life. It might be the construction of a dream home, the maintenance of a satisfying marriage, a promotion at work, or a successful fight against a crippling health problem. The courage and determination shown by people like Sir Edmund Hillary can be applied in the realm of our personal lives to help us overcome obstacles like this, and to achieve our dreams.

Medical advances have been enormous, but our hospitals are still full to overflowing. Commercial and economic knowledge has surged ahead, but we still have company collapses and recessions.

Indeed, the knowledge explosion has actually spawned new and different problems. Thanks to the amazing advances in computer technology we can now add potentially catastrophic new plagues to the list besetting humanity – things like internet fraud, hacking, viruses, phishing, and cyber pornography.

Why hasn't the knowledge explosion made inroads into the troubles facing us? The reason is that these problems are not simply *physical* challenges. They include aspects that stem from *inside* us, from our attitudes, desires and moral weaknesses, in other words, our "human nature". They are matters of the "heart" or "spirit", and internal issues like this can't be fixed with purely *physical* knowledge.

#### **The Core of the Problem**

At the root of the problem is "human nature", the way that normal human beings think and act, which basically stems from self interest.

### **Peter Hillary's Perspective**

Sir Edmund Hillary's son Peter made an interesting comment on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his father's epic climb. He remarked that he felt there was too much focus on the physical climb and that we should rather reflect on the *meaning* behind that first ascent. *The NZ Herald* of 27 May, 2003 quoted Peter as saying: "More than the actual climb, we should be celebrating what the achievement represents – reaching a distant and difficult goal, overcoming the seemingly impossible, stepping out into the unknown."

Viewed from this perspective, the achievement is something we can incorporate in our own lives. All of us have times when we step out into the unknown, doggedly strive to reach a goal, and need to overcome odds which seem to be impossible. At times like this we need to call upon inner qualities such as those exemplified so brilliantly by Sir Edmund.

It's only very rarely that a person of the calibre of Sir Edmund Hillary strides on the world stage, with the unique mix of skills and courage he possessed. But we can all learn from the example he set and strive to apply the same sort of qualities in conquering the individual Everests we face.



Physical mountains can be climbed, material challenges of all types can be overcome, but when it comes to solving problems involving *people*, it is a different matter. When human nature comes to the fore, people are motivated by deep inner, often selfish inclinations, not always seeking the common good.

What is the answer to these inner, spiritual Everests that revolve around human nature? Clearly physical knowledge isn't enough. No matter how much we learn, it is not solving the deeper problems. Something is missing. We need help from somewhere.

Thankfully, there is a place where help can be found. God, the one who created human beings, has inspired a guidebook that provides spiritual knowledge to solve our inner problems. It's called the Bible.

Notice an example concerning one of mankind's most destructive recurring problems – our chronic tendency towards warfare. "What causes fights and quarrels among you?" asks one of the Bible writers, who then goes on to give the answer: "Don't they come from your desires...? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight."<sup>1</sup>

Wars are caused by *inner* attitudes such as lust or greed, stemming from inside the human character and will. These inner thoughts and desires come out in the open as physical acts of warfare.

### The Only Lasting Answer

So the only real lasting answer to warfare would have to entail a change in the heart or mind of human beings – a change in our "human nature".

How can that happen? Each of us could try our best to be loving, kind, gentle and peaceable all the time. That would be an immense help, but even the most optimistic of us wouldn't expect such a transformation is very likely to happen! However, since we're talking of inner, spiritual values, let's look at what the Bible says about the answer to human nature, the solution to the spiritual Everests facing the world.

The Bible explains that after his

### The Spirit Shines through Tragedy

In March 2008, seven young people lost their lives in a tragic canyoning accident in the central North Island. Six pupils and a teacher from Elim Christian College in Howick drowned when the Mangatepopo River rose dramatically in flash floods.

The nation looked on with amazement and respect as the parents of the dead youngsters reacted not with the bitterness, anger and even hate which could have been expected as a "natural" response, but rather with an atmosphere of kindness and forgiveness. The College, led by principal Murray Burton, reacted with the type of extraordinary love and grace which demonstrate the Holy Spirit in action. Mr Burton's initial response to the tragedy was recorded as: "The Christian faith is central to all that we do. It is in times like this when you measure how strong the faith is. It has taken a huge battering but we have an unwavering trust in God." Rather than giving vent to attitudes of blame, the families of the victims, although distraught with pain, were seen embracing and comforting the staff and guides responsible for the ill-fated trip.

Later it emerged that one of the students who died was Special Olympian Tom Hsu, 16, who had cerebral palsy. His teacher, Tony McClean, tried to save Tom by tying himself to the student, in an attempt to pull them both to shore. However, Tom weighed down his partner and they both tragically died in the rapids. In a reflection of Jesus' words that "there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for another", this gallant teacher put the life of his disabled pupil before his own. Here was another demonstration of the selfless love that comes from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit also comforts Jesus' followers with God-given wisdom and promises for the future. The Christian families of the Mangatepopo victims realise that this is not the end for Tom, Tony and the other casualties. The Bible assures us that those who have the Holy Spirit will inherit eternal life.



short life in Palestine ending in his crucifixion, before Jesus went back to heaven he promised to send a "Comforter" or "Helper" to be with his followers.<sup>2</sup> This was a reference to the Holy Spirit, who has the power to change our human nature.

A few days after Jesus returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit came and entered the disciples, causing their lives to be transformed from the inside out. The Bible describes some amazing changes that occurred in their lives, and affirms that the Holy Spirit is still available today. This Spirit works inside the minds and hearts, the deep inner thoughts and attitudes, of Christians, instilling love in them,<sup>3</sup> and helping them display qualities such as joy, peace, patience and kindness.<sup>4</sup>

Climbing a physical mountain like Everest depends on physical equipment, such as ice axes, boots and crampons. Climbing a mental, emotional, moral or spiritual mountain (such as drug abuse, marital strife, overweight, and financial traumas) necessitates moral or spiritual equipment, involving aspects of character, attitudes and inner qualities. This help is provided by the Holy Spirit.

Would you like some *spiritual* help to get you over the "Everests" you face? The Holy Spirit is available to everybody, and remarkably this encouraging and powerful gift is absolutely *free*! If you would like to know more about the Holy Spirit, why not visit a nearby church this weekend? Or please feel free to write to us and request our article on "The Holy Spirit".

#### References:

1. James 4:1-2
2. John 14:26
3. Romans 5:5
4. Galatians 5:22

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## For Every Hill...

For every hill I've had to climb,  
For every stone that bruised my feet,  
For all the blood and sweat and grime,  
For blinding storms and burning heat,  
My heart sings but a grateful song...  
These were the things that made me strong.

For all the heartaches and the tears,  
For all the anguish and the pain,  
And for the hopes that lived in vain,  
I do give thanks, for now I know  
These were the things that helped me grow.

It's not the softer things of life,  
Which stimulate one's will to strive;  
But bleak adversity and strife  
Do most to keep one's will alive.  
Over rose-strewn paths the weaklings creep,  
But brave hearts dare to climb the steep.

— Author Unknown