

What Is It Like to Be a Christian on Everest?

I have had a life-long interest in Everest—starting at an elementary school assembly in a tiny South Dakota town where I listened fascinated as a mountaineer related tales from the first American ascent of the world's tallest mountain.

Since then, I've read a small library of books on Himalayan climbing. I've also stood on Everest's summit. Naturally, I wanted to see the new movie *Everest*.

The movie is a reasonably accurate portrayal of climbing. The characters in *Everest* struggle through some of the most dramatic and terrifying moments of their lives. As Rob Hall talked with his wife while stranded high on the mountain and doomed to die, one sad thought occupied my mind: In the midst of fear, hopelessness, and the uncertainty of life and death, there was no thought of crying out to God.

This was also my experience on Everest. No thought of God seemed to cross the minds of my fellow climbers, despite the stunning beauty of the mountain and the fear caused by extreme conditions. On my three Everest expeditions, I was the solitary believer in Christ, alone with my God in an unbelieving environment.

What is it like to be a Christian on Everest? I frequently talk with other believers who see my experiences on Everest as something extraordinary. But as a believer, I don't see it that way. What God requires of me on Everest, God requires of every Christian.

Like any other Christian, I want to do what God created me for. The 1996 tragedy dramatized in *Everest* was a turning point in my life and career. Reading Krakauer's book prompted me to write a film proposal, which landed me at K2 Base Camp

in the summer of 1999, where I filmed a series for National Geographic. Three Everest expeditions as a high altitude cameraman for other companies followed.

However, I've never felt that I pursued Everest. Instead, God has opened doors for me to climb. Once on the mountain, I learned something significant.

I am not a hot climber, but I'm comfortable and extremely competent at altitude. I saw that God had made my body for climbing. I adjusted easily to the thin air at altitude. When my oxygen failed an hour below the summit, I was able to continue to the top, film and descend. I did not lose my appetite high on the mountain, as many climbers do. I did not have to train hard to be fit for climbing. Clearly, I was doing what God had created me to do.

Sensing I was in the center of God's will gave me confidence and removed worry and fear. Does this mean it was all fun? Like every other Christian, I still had to persevere, even when doing what God had designed me for. I've eaten more *dal bhat* than I care to remember. I've missed the luxury of showers and gone months without seeing my family. I've exerted myself to the point of exhaustion.

Climbing the French Spur on Everest's West Ridge, I worked harder than I've ever worked in my life. Isn't this what God wants for each believer? Where are you competent? What are your gifts? What is the mountain that God has for you? Put your heart into it and work for the glory of God.

When I'm climbing, I'm like every other Christian working a secular job, surrounded by those who don't know Christ. My task is to walk the walk no matter where He has put me. Placed among mountaineers, I saw my contribution as one link in the chain Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase."

At K2 Base Camp, I grieved with climbers after the death of

their teammate, killed by rock fall high on the mountain. Though I was a newcomer to their mountaineering circle, they approached me with a request: Would I conduct Mehi's funeral? That was a rare chance to freely share my faith with other climbers.

Usually, the opportunities seemed smaller. Profane speech is the norm in base camp, but high on the mountain, in a tent alone with one other climber, the profanity would be gone. I might not have the chance to actually share the gospel with my friend, but maybe my presence would be the opening of that man's mind where the missing thought of God could enter and bear fruit someday. Though it seemed that no one noticed, some of my mountaineering comrades were watching my life. For what believer working in the world is this not also true?

As followers of Christ, God wants our worship. In 2006, I climbed to a place few people have ever gone. I arrived alone on Everest's snow-covered West Ridge and looked out over mountains that had loomed large in base camp but were now small hills below me.

In that moment my heart was full with the worship of God. I knew my fellow mountaineers would experience the exhilaration of reaching the ridge and the beauty of the view, but that they would not be worshipping God. Only I can return to God the worship that He has put in my heart. That is true for every Christian.

What brings you joy? Where has God put you? Wherever that is, give God the worship that you alone can give.

David Rasmussen has over 25 years of experience as a cinematographer and director of photography specializing in documentary films. His latest project, *Finding Noah*, a documentary about an archaeological expedition on Mount Ararat in search of Noah's Ark, will premiere nationwide for a one night only event on Oct. 8. For more information, visit .