

[ By John W. Nichols ]

# HIKING UPHILL



**M**y father loved to share a favorite story from his childhood. Perhaps you've heard the one about walking uphill to school in deep snow, both ways? As a child I was impressed with the hardships Dad overcame in gaining his education. In my teens, I grew tired of the story and rolled my eyes when the subject arose. Looking back from adulthood, though, I realize there's truth to be gleaned from Dad's old yarn.

I love to hike and find that uphill work is part of nearly every excursion. Looking upward from the base of a steep hill can be intimidating. I expect a spectacular view at the top, even as I wonder if I have what it takes to conquer. I anticipate the sense of accomplishment, if I can keep my heart from pounding out of my chest until

I reach the summit.

Each climb begins the same. At some point I end my deliberations, draw a deep breath, and take the first step. That step is followed by a second, then a third, and before I realize it, I am making progress toward my goal. There are no shortcuts to overcoming the challenge.

On a recent climb I paused at the halfway point for a breather and considered that many of life's experiences seem like I'm ascending mountains. Think about these examples as you add your own to the list.

- Overcoming a bad habit
- Buying a home
- Saving sufficient funds for retirement
- Funding my child's college education
- Living in harmony with

- certain difficult people
- Conquering a chronic health issue

Life throws down the gauntlet, and we need a strategy for conquering. How can we survive? I find it helps to look at each obstacle as an uphill hike and proceed accordingly. Consider this plan:

- Start slowly. Take time to acclimate and find a rhythm.
- Set a reasonable pace. Consider that life is more of a marathon than a sprint.
- Rest often. A break allows time for my heart and breathing to return to normal. The brief respite will energize me for the next push.
- Occasionally look backward to review progress. Noting how far I have traveled motivates me to move ahead. I can overcome this hill.

- Fix my eyes on the goal. The top may seem far away at the start of the climb, but each step brings it closer.

• Keep stepping. The urge to quit will be strong. Recall the words of Jim Valvano, former North Carolina State University basketball coach, who urged us, "Don't give up...don't ever give up!" Break a journey into its smallest parts, and we will find a series of single steps. I sat in solitude on the mountain top and allowed my eyes to trace the path back to the base. Whew! That was a tough walk, but climbing made me stronger. I'm ready for the next hill.

Before he served as King of Israel, David was a shepherd. He lived life outdoors and walked many miles in his sandals. David's message offers encouragement to us as we journey.