**Motivational Mondays interview:**

**Jim Davidson – *Airing* 06.07.2021**

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:02] Six years ago, Jim was climbing Everest when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, releasing avalanches all around his team destroying their only escape route.

Trapped at 20,000 feet, this became the fight of Jim’s life.

It was the largest earthquake Nepal had seen in 81 years, and would come to be known as the deadliest day in the history of Mount Everest.

Today, Jim shares his story of resilience, determination, and finding a way to survive when it seemed like there was no way out.

*This* is Motivational Mondays. I’m your host Max Irzhak, and joining us is Jim Davidson.

Jim, welcome to the show!

**Jim Davidson** [00:00:38] Thanks Max, great to be with you.

**Max Irzhak** [00:00:41] Six years ago, you were climbing Mount Everest when the largest earthquake in 80 years hit Nepal, killing nearly 9,000 people on the ground, and triggering an avalanche that would lead to the deadliest day on Everest.

Take us back to that moment on April 25, 2015 when everything changed.

**Jim Davidson** [00:01:00] Yeah, I had been a climber for 33 years, and I'd always dreamed of going to Mt. Everest.

And I had kind of worked my way up over three decades of climbing. And finally I'm in position after all the training, and the skills-acquiring, and the practice sessions — I'm finally leaving from Base Camp at 17,500 feet, up to Camp 1 at about 20,000 feet. We get to Camp 1, exhausted but doing okay, and at 11:56am when we were resting in our tent, all of a sudden we heard a rumbling noise come off one wall. It’s an avalanche! Well, we’re kind of used to that because there’s avalanches on Everest every day, they’re usually a mile away, you can hear them but no big deal. But this one got louder and louder, and before we could figure out if that one was actually dangerous, a second avalanche came off a second wall — this one’s coming down 6,000 vertical feet — and both of them are rushing towards our tent.

Well, obviously something’s really wrong, we’re trying to scramble out of the tent — and before we can get out the door, our tent lifted in the air about 8 inches and dropped back down; and then lifted into the air again and that’s when the waves of the earthquake were rippling through the glacier beneath our feet. And suddenly we found ourselves in the midst of the biggest earthquake in 81 years in Nepal.

**Max Irzhak** [00:02:08] 18 of your teammates lost their lives that day on the mountain, plus the nearly 9,000 people in Nepal. I can’t even imagine the mental toll that that must have on a human being.

Talk to me about post-traumatic growth. How did you overcome this tragedy and went back 2 years later to complete the climb to the top of Mt Everest.

**Jim Davidson** [00:02:30] Yeah, when traumatic things happen, it is stressful. Those can be small things that happen to a single individual, or it can be something community-wide, or even internationally — like pandemics and earthquakes. Those traumatic things can bring stress — it’s absolutely natural and normal response, and we have to struggle with that for a while. I’ve been through other incidents that caused post-traumatic stress and it’s not easy to kind of put your life back together after something bad happens. We kind of hope the bad thing is gone, and life will go back to normal. But it’s not quite gonna go quite back the same way because things have changed — big things have changed. That’s part of the harsh reality, part of the hard work we all have to do after something difficult happens. But psychologists also noticed that after a bad thing happens, sometimes people actually grow from it. They can find new sources of strength, new levels of commitment, new awareness — and that’s post-traumatic growth.

So post-traumatic growth has a lot of promise that says “after you go through something bad, it can take some time to tease out the wisdom, the strength, the lessons that you can take with you”. Now it doesn’t make post-traumatic stress go away, but it is sort of a strength that you can take with you to that next challenge, or that next opportunity. And so, you know it’s a rough journey when things happen — whether it’s a tragedy in Nepal or the pandemic we’re all in. but if you take some time to think about it and go “you know, from now on, i’m going to do X. From now on I'm going to try to be more Z.” And that’s how we grow over time; that’s post-traumatic growth.

**Max Irzhak** [00:03:58] How do you build this mindset of resiliency? Is it something that you trained for? Is it something that just came naturally to you?

**Jim Davidson** [00:04:05] I think you build it over time. I think people are born maybe — like most things — you have a natural inclination at birth, and your upbringing counts, but it’s absolutely a learnable skill. And as I share in my book *The Next Everest*, for me that learning came from working with my Dad in doing industrial painting jobs. When I was a young person, like 9 or 10 years old, I was climbing ladders. By the time I was 12, I was walking roofs without any safety ropes on. I could operate a crane before I could drive a car, literally. These were kind of crazy things, but what they taught me was to go a little bit outside of my comfort zone over and over again under the mentorship of people who knew more than me — my dad and all my uncles who painted. And so over time I learned to do a dangerous job with a small team, and get the job done. So it’s kind of a slow upward spiral. But that’s kind of an unusual background that I had. For other people it might be just taking very small steps outside your comfort zone — if you can walk 2 miles, maybe you can try and walk a 3.5 mile race, a 5k. And if you could do that, maybe you can run a 6-mile race. Maybe you can even run a half-marathon if you train hard enough! That slow expansion of your skillbase turns you into a better version of you, and makes you more resilient — either for the next job, the next race, or the next thing that happens in life.

**Max Irzhak** [00:05:25] You have this fascinating mindset when it comes to taking on challenges. I’ve heard you say that “choosing a challenge that scares you forces you to become more.”

Can you elaborate a bit on this?

**Jim Davidson** [00:05:36] Yeah, if you pick a challenge you’re comfortable with — let’s say a person can run 5 miles, and you say “I want to pick a big challenge for myself; i’m going to try to run five and a half miles” — well that’s not a very big goal, you’re *highly* likely to be able to do that, and probably do it pretty well. But if you’ve always run 5-mile races and you go “I wonder if I could try to run a marathon” — oh my goodness. Or if you’re a musician and you’re pretty good with your buddy playing in the living room, what if you actually got on stage and tried to perform in front of a group. If that scares you and makes you nervous, that’s probably the right goal. Because if it doesn’t make you nervous, you know it’s within your capabilities — you’re not going to learn much, you’re not going to grow much. So by picking a goal if it makes you scared or nervous, that means it’s going to force you to do more and become more than you ever were before. Now you’re shooting in the right range.

**Max Irzhak** [00:06:28] Confidence and fear are both equally contagious. How do you demonstrate confidence as a leader, even when you’re afraid?

**Jim Davidson** [00:06:37] Yeah, when that big thing crops up, what I say is if you’re thinking to yourself “somebody needs to do something about this”, you’re probably right, and that someone is probably you. Now that doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy, or that you have all the answers. But if you’re looking at an injustice, you’re looking at a problem that can be solved, and you’re getting upset — you’re thinking somebody needs to do something about this. Yes! You’ve got the skills. You’ve noticed it, you may not have all the answers yet, but it’s your time to step forward and lead. And you may have reasons why you can’t do that — you don’t know enough people in the community, you’ve got other obligations. But you see the problem, you’re halfway to the solution just by feeling the problem and wanting to engage with the problem — that’s when it’s your turn to step forward and lead. And it comes at different times for different people, and obviously it might play to your skillset. But most of the time when you step forward, you probably have *some* of what you need, but not everything. And that’s kind of like the goal-setting thing — if it makes you nervous, it’s probably the right goal, it’s probably the right moment to step forward and lead.

**Max Irzhak** [00:07:39] “Determination against all odds” that’s a concept that’s not really new for you. I actually learned about your story on Animal Planet when you appeared on an episode of “I Shouldn't Be Alive”.

Can you tell us the story of you and your buddy Mike Price, and how you overcame adversity when it seemed like there was no way out?

**Jim Davidson** [00:08:00] Yeah, that was a pivotal point in my life of course. My good friend Mike and I were climbing Mount Rainier in the state of Washington. It was a difficult route, so it took us about 3 or 4 days to climb it — just the two of us tied together. And I had been climbing for about 10 years, so a pretty good skill set. Mike had been climbing 14 years — so more than me, and he was an instructor for Outward Bound so he was kind of the senior member of our team and really a mentor for me as an alpine climber. We summited Mt. Rainier on a difficult route, a beautiful day, started descending and it was June 21st, 1992 — first day of Summer so it’s the longest day of the year; the sunniest day of the year. And on our way down, we’re crossing this glacier, and the glacier is covered in snow, and the snow can form bridges, and these bridges can span across big cracks called cravasses — glacial crevasses in the ice. Well, one of those snow bridges collapsed, and dropped me into a crevasse, Mike and I were roped together and it dragged Mike in as well. And the two of us tied together dropped 80 feet inside that glacier, and landed on a small snow bridge.

I was very lucky to survive that fall. And I did that because my partner Mike had done his job and slowed me down as I fell the first 50 feet. But, very sadly, my partner Mike didn’t have someone behind him to slow him down, so he fell the full 80 feet, got some critical injuries and passed away very quickly. And I tried to save him with CPR but it didn’t work. So i’m devastated at the loss of my friend, i’m wracked with guilt, i’m standing on this tiny slow ledge 80 feet inside a glacier. And when I looked up, the walls above me went vertical and then overhanging — and I thought “this can’t be done, that’s it, I'm dead”. And I felt ready to give up at that point really. And that’s when I had to look inside myself and try to find some source of resilience, some source of determination to try and climb out of that crevasse.

**Max Irzhak** [00:09:44] What did you pull on, what inside you propelled you to get out of that hole?

**Jim Davidson** [00:09:51] Well, i wanted to escape — i was married and i was about 29 years old, i had a career in front of me and all those kinds of things — i definitely wanted to escape. But I didn't think I had the skill set or the courage to even try. And to tell you the truth as I shared in the book *The Ledge*, I thought about not even trying. I thought you know if I just lay down and go to sleep in the cold, no one will know — I won't have to be accused of cowardness or anything because no one will know, just me. I’ll just lay down and fall asleep in the cold inside the glacier and that will be it. But I realized I couldn't do that! I mean my partner Mike had just done his job and slowed me down for the first 50 feet as I fell in that crevasse — and that’s what allowed me to survive that incredible fall. I can’t dishonor everything that he just put on the line to save me. And I also thought about working construction and industrial painting with my dad, how he taught me to work in a small team, to never quit when someone is counting on you to do whatever is necessary to get the job done — even if it’s miserable and scary in the moment. And I thought if I quit now before I even try, I'm dishonoring Mike, I'm dishonoring everything my dad taught me — I can't do that. So I realized I had to try at least to honor the things they taught me, and that’s what got me going.

Now it was a brutal climb, it was about 5 hours up an overhanging ice wall, and i fell many times, and i had to figure things out. And i thought “I might not even survive this. And if im not going to survive this why am i going through so much torture of myself? Maybe again i should just hang on the rope and go to sleep.” But I realized I'm just going to give it everything I've got all the way to the end, because that’s what other people had taught me to do. So i think it’s looking inside yourself and finding that inner-source resilience — that’s where determination comes from. And for me, it was my friend Mike and my dad, but for you it might be people that raised you or your faith, or your grandmother, or the people that are counting on you — that’s an incredible source of resilience that can see you through some pretty tough times.

**Max Irzhak** [00:11:39] Tell us about your new book *“The Next Everest: Surviving the Mountain’s Deadliest Day and Finding the Resilience to Climb Again”*.

What’s the #1 lesson you want people to walk away with after reading it?

**Jim Davidson** [00:11:56] Well i was first driven to write the story because i survived this earthquake and avalanche series that we talked about in 2015. As a geologist I thought I was probably a skilled person to try and share that story of why it happened, how it unfolded on the ground — that was kind of the obvious source; sort of a logical decision. But when i went back to Everest in 2017, i realized that the accumulation of all the good things and the bad things that had happened to me over this now 35-year climbing career — that that’s where the real lessons were that refined me into a better version of me, including all the setbacks — the sad loss of my friend, the rescues i had helped out and volunteered on were very difficult — i had to give up different summits up in Denali up in Alaska to help other people out. But those crafted me into a better version of me. And that’s what allowed me to go back and try Everest — even at age 54 in 2017. And when i got near the summit, as i shared in the book — sometimes you hear about “oh climbers are conquering things” — that phrase is so silly and so ridiculous, i laugh when i hear someone say they’re going to conquer a mountain. Because nobody can conquer a mountain, not even the smallest hill in Central Park can be conquered by a human being. We’re very miniscule specs on this planet. We’re just lucky to be there, and extra lucky if we get back down safely and in a healthy manner.

When I got towards the summit of Mt. Everest, what i felt was really really grateful and really really humble. I felt humble to be there, and I felt grateful that I didn't give up along that long path of success and some failures. I felt grateful that a lot of people helped me get that far. So that’s what i wanted to share in *The Next Everest* was to look back at that and honor those roots that got you where you are, and to try to move things forward a little bit, be the best teammate you can, bring those strengths and those understandings of yourself and the world back to your community — whether that’s your family or the community you work in, try and bring those lessons in and help other people and lift them up. Because whether you’re getting through an earthquake or a pandemic, whether you’re climbing a mountain or running a marathon, we kind of take turns lifting each other up. I help you now, you’ll help me later, hopefully we’ll both help that stranger if they’re in some trouble. And that’s really what climbing mountains and climbing Mt Everest taught me is to try to do your best and lift up others whenever you can.

**Max Irzhak** [00:14:12] Jim, you’re tremendously inspiring. I’m grateful that you’re with us today, and that we got to have this conversation.

I encourage everyone to grab a copy of Jim’s new book *‘The Next Everest’*.

Just follow the links in the description below.

We’ll see you all back here again next week for Motivational Mondays!