

The Story of Three Woodsmen

I remember the first several weeks at Messiah College as one of the mountaintop experiences of my life. College for me was the first time that I entered the world as "Me". I had always been someone's son or someone's younger brother. Everyone knew my last name because of Dad's local retail business.

I remember the first day of registration at Messiah. No one could pronounce my name, and no one had ever heard of Elmira. I thought it was so cool!

I loved that mountaintop. What I didn't realize was that it would be years before I began to understand who I am, and the process is still not complete. There were valleys, rough roads, and other mountaintops to follow. College was just the beginning.

I remember that several lessons from my freshman year at Messiah related to a simple story told by a professor. It went something like this.

Once upon a time, there were three woodsmen. All shared the goal of providing for their families.

The first woodsman woke in the morning, looked out his window, and saw many other woodsmen heading for the forest. They were big strong men carrying sharp loud chain saws. They were driving 4-wheel drive trucks and bulldozers and seemed to have a pretty big head start. The first woodsman looked in the mirror at what he thought was a weak undeveloped body and then looked at the old rusty ax that lay next to the door. He said to himself that there was no way he could compete and decided to go back to bed.

The second woodsman woke in the morning. Grasped the ax by the door and ran to the forest. When he reached the woods, he started whacking away at every tree he saw.

The third woodsman woke in the morning and ate a good breakfast. He spent an hour sharpening his ax. He packed a bag with enough food and water for lunch and snacks. Then he

headed for the woods where he met up with other like-minded woodsmen. They spent the day working together and selected the trees that were most appropriate for firewood.

I was challenged with many lessons from this story. The first was never to be afraid to compete. It is natural to fear the unknown and it is easy to extend that fear into the fear of failure that disabled the first woodsman.

I can recall many occasions when I looked around and said to myself that there was no way that I was qualified for the task in front of me. However, in many cases the problem was lack of knowledge that could be obtained, lack of skills that could be learned, and lack of experience that could be gained.

I remember looking at what other people were doing, including my own father, and saying I will never be able to perform like that. I now believe that many people have the same feelings at similar stages in their lives.

The lessons to be learned from the second

woodsman are difficult to convert into absolutes. I believe that he may have been successful, or he may have failed. His heart was right, and he had a great deal of energy. History is full of success stories built on drive and work. However, I believe that the second woodsman's life could have been a little easier if he used a little more brainpower. I do not believe that one should always look for the easy road. But there are times when logic shows an easier way to higher goals.

The third woodsman showed the right stuff. He prepared himself for the day that was ahead and then worked hard with others through the day.

The story of the three woodsmen concludes with the following:

We are not sure what happened to the first two woodsmen. However, the third woodsman retired in the evening: confident that he had done the best job possible with the resources that were available to him, thankful that his house was warm, and pleased that the day's accomplishments included helping provide firewood for a poor widow who lived nearby.

“To whom much is given much will be required.”
Many people try to limit this obligation to financial resources. However, I believe it relates to all gifts and talents God has given to each of us.

Getting to the end of our days confident that we have fought the good fight and kept the Faith is a goal that I did not fully appreciate until later days. Over the years I have seen more and more people reach these final days. Those that appear happy are comfortable with whom they are regardless of their holdings and accomplishments. Success is a state of mind not a collection of material possessions.

“Seek first the Kingdom of God. All things work together for good. In whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Be confident that the good work that has begun in you will be completed. To whom much is given much will be required.”

Matthew 6:33

Romans 8:28

1 Corinthians 10:31

Philippians 1:6

Luke 12:48