

Tackling the Impossible

Have you ever set out to tackle the impossible? A quick look at history, both modern and ancient can reveal lots of occasions when someone accomplished what everyone around them thought was impossible. The first time a driver reached 60 mph at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the headline read, "I went 60 mph and lived." The same air of impossibility surrounded breaking the sound barrier. But that is just because most people have been conditioned into a narrow frame of reference.

On other occasions, pursuing the impossible has resulted in failure to reach the original objective, but discovery of that which was totally unexpected, like Columbus seeking a shorter route to the Orient and discovering a rather large land mass in the way. And even after this discovery, he refused to believe he had, which is why Native Americans are also called Indians.

In my business, tackling the impossible is routine. That's what we do. That concept is really hard to explain to bankers who want a reasonably predictable route to profit. I suppose that it is predictability that people the world over crave. But even in that craving, there is a dichotomy. Predictability is boring. Certainly, we want our paychecks, our government, our weather to be predictable so we can do the fun stuff – that which is out of the ordinary.

Even my eventual conclusion about tackling the impossible is predictable, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; nothing is impossible with God." So, my real question is, do we set out to tackle that which the earth-bound mentality calls impossible? If we don't, if our religion is predictable, it will be based on sight, not faith. And, just like a society or a science that circles the wagons around the safety of probability and natural results, that religion will become trite and useless. We should crave those excursions into the unknown, into the impossible, if for no other reason than it makes life interesting.

But in attacking the impossible through faith, there is a point of view that is very important. If, from where we stand, the workings of God are defined as interruptions in the natural order of things, God will always be a mystery, unpredictable, unnatural, out of control, unreal. Instead we need to stand at the other end, seeing the truth from God's point of view, as an integral part of reality, as spirits who are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Looking at the universe from God's point of view gives a whole new perspective.

Here's an example: nuclear fission, the stuff from which we get atomic bombs and also nuclear power plants for producing electricity for cities and for gigantic naval vessels. For people who do not understand how it works, it's really scary stuff. Why would you take bomb materials and put it in populated areas? What if it blows up? Those who understand how it works have trouble comprehending public fears. But even those who understand such things understand it only to a certain point. The present scientific understanding of nuclear fission is based entirely on probability. No one knows why a nucleus decides to break up at a certain moment in time, it does it when it wants to. But, if you have enough of those fissionable atoms, you can reliably predict that a certain number of them will disintegrate in a given period of time – within certain limits, not absolutely precisely. We have measured the breakup of atoms for a considerable length of time, and it is reasonably predictable, so we build electric generating facilities close to populated areas using bomb-making materials that are poorly understood because of the confidence we have based on this experience. It works, so we use it, even if we don't know the exact mechanics of why.

Isn't that how people view God? Some have no understanding, so God is unpredictable, scary, and something that safety conscious people should avoid. God could severely

Tackling the Impossible

compromise the environment, and has on several occasions. But, those who include God as a normal part of reality have a lot more confidence. God's actions are more sensible, beneficial, and safe. We may not understand all the mechanics involved in the actions of God, but that does not prevent us from integrating His power into life. We may not have the slightest clue how God is going to accomplish what I just prayed about, but I know that He will make it work out in my best interests, so I can be thankful whether I ever physically see the results or not. It's like being in the military. Information is distributed on a need-to-know basis, and needing to know is above our pay grade.

This morning, I would like for us to consider some of the more outrageous features about the reality that God sees. We call them promises. In order to operate in God's reality, we need to include in what we call natural some probabilities or predictions from God that, although we do not know the exact mechanics of each one, we have confidence that they work – confidence to the point of building the power plants that run our lives based on these partially understood probabilities.

I think the most difficult promises to handle are those that deal with everyday life. They force us to act on our faith in terms of things we can see, touch, and handle, not faith that begins and ends with anticipation of a non-physical reward. For this morning, I have picked eight.

First, how did I assemble my list of promises? I could have gone to a Christian bookstore, or found a book on-line, that contains all the promises of God found in the Bible. Such books are available, although of varying degrees of accuracy and completeness. But, I have found that such books, even the good ones, are not productive shortcuts. I recommend an approach that Sharon and I have done more than once as an exercise with people with whom we have been studying. As a group, we read through the entire New Testament specifically looking for promises from God. Of course, we pay attention to the context to be sure that the promise should be applied to Christians in general, which in itself is good educational objective. We assign fairly large chunks of Scripture to each person in the study, and share our findings the following week. We have compiled lists of between 300 and 400 such promises. Certainly we have missed a substantial number. But, even our partial list is very instructive about faith. Either we believe that the promises are good, or we don't. Either we set out to take advantage of the power and reliability of God, or we don't. Either the lights come on or they don't. I have selected several promises that relate to everyday life as illustrations of what should be our world view, our reality from the viewpoint of our spirits, who are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

There is a process we need to go through with every promise of God, so I'm going to describe the process along with Promise #1, then come back and look at the eight promises in that light. So, here's the example promise: Promise number one – Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food and clothing] will be added to you." That is much easier to sing than to live. One of my seven characteristics of saving faith is, in order for what we call faith to be what God calls faith, that we must act on the promises of God. And a promise of God, by definition, does not come with a step-by-step instruction manual by which we can predict the path to the outcome. That would be walking by sight, not by faith. Further, the promises of God are, by definition, impossible. If they were possible, we would be walking by sight and not by faith.

So, what are we to do with promises like this one? I think there are three really important steps: (1) Decide if you really want it. That may sound strange when talking about a promise of

Tackling the Impossible

God, but Matthew 6:33 and American culture do not mesh well. Am I willing to accept a standard of living substantially lower than the one I have now? Several faithful people in the Bible did not have much. That could be me. Do I want to go there?

If we decide that the promise is worth the risk, then there is step (2): Open the toolbox. God has provided a set of tools to enable us to work out impossible promises. We will look at some of those after considering the promises.

And, step (3): Stay between the ditches. Because the mechanics of the promises are not well defined – by design – we can go to extremes in our applications. The right ditch turns the promise into practicality, explaining away anything that might require God to act, like those who pray for the doctor to be competent rather than the sick person to get well. This turns faith into sight. The left ditch overcorrects and assumes that God must be working in the way I conceive, and confidently assert the truth of that which I neither understand nor can prove, turning faith into hallucination, like seeing the hand of God in my miraculous cure from the 24-hour flu in just one day.

And why should I go through this process? Two reasons. (1) If I am to have what God calls faith, as opposed to what most people call faith, then I must make my decisions based on what God has promised. I can't do that unless I know what He promised. Do you see the importance of developing faith in everyday life? Both mine and yours? Having begun by the Spirit, are we now being perfected by Law?

We need to know and teach and act on those promises in particular that relate to everyday life. And there is a boatload of different promises. I think God did that so that we could grow faith, rather than having to jump into it all at once. Like Jude 20, "Building yourself up on your most holy faith." 1 Peter 2:2, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." Or 2 Peter 3:18, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Thessalonians 1:3, "Your faith grows exceedingly and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other." It's sort of the reverse of what God did to Pharaoh in Exodus. If God had hit him with plague number 10 right out of the box, I suspect he would have been overwhelmed. But no, God gave him the ones his magicians could reproduce first. Each plague was just a little bigger than the previous, allowing Pharaoh to develop calluses on his heart a little at a time, to get dulled down, insensitive to the power of God. In our case, we are undoing the calluses. Theoretically, we should be able to make the jump to all the promises at once. But, due to our baggage and dust-mite-sized faith, we generally settle for baby steps of faith – attacking a promise we can handle right now, so we can handle next time one that just last week seemed to be beyond the pale. Your little step may not be the same as my little step. Maybe I can handle the anxiety promise and you can handle the money promise, but not vice versa. But we see that the other is acting on that promise that is beyond me, and I am built up, better able to tackle another impossible task.

Which leads to reason number two (2): How do we cure what ails the Kingdom of God in the 21st century? Enforcement? Centralized authority? Exclude those who have more problems than I do? No, we build their faith. How do you handle the complainer, the gossiper, the grumbler? By asking, "I see that you take issue with your brother's behavior. How do you plan to build his faith? Because, we both know that if his faith grows, the behavior you don't like will go away." If we know the promises, the tools, and the ditches, we can guide others to greater faith, creating that fellowship, that connectedness of spirits that comes from walking in the light together, another impossible task.

Tackling the Impossible

So, here's my short list of impossible promises about everyday life. I'll describe each one in order to prove that it is truly impossible, not just the natural result of being a good person. Then, I'll describe the tools in the toolbox. As we go along, I'll briefly address the ditches: questions to ask yourself in order to prevent turning faith into sight or into hallucination.

I already mentioned Promise #1, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God." To put it in different words, "Prioritize." How is that impossible? The difficulty comes in trusting that food and clothing will work out if I shift my priorities to the Kingdom. I see a lot of potential for baby steps here – perhaps an hour at a time. You cross the boundary into faith when you take one step past what you can see. Want to change a congregation? Don't blow them away with huge steps of faith. Most of them are carrying too much baggage to take big steps. Give them baby steps. They will gain confidence, cast off some encumbrances, and run with endurance the race set before us.

Here's Promise #2, 2 Corinthians 9:6 – 11, after describing the magnitude of the famine relief funds collected by the Macedonian Christians and encouraging the Achaian Christians to do the same, Paul wrote, "But this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written, 'He has dispersed abroad; He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.' Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God."

God has promised Christians that they will have the cash money for every good deed: an abundance for every good work, enriched in everything for all liberality. The promise is plain enough, although it definitely lacks in those details that would make me a lot more comfortable. In such cases, I like to ask up front, "So where are the ditches?"

Of course, on the walking by sight side, I'm sure we can all cite a multitude of examples where individuals or congregations have walked by sight and not by faith in matters of funding for good deeds. Having a personal or an organizational budget is a good thing, until the budget begins to limit what we will allow God to do. But I think the more insidious evil is when we sadly but confidently proclaim that it must not be God's will that we do this or that because He did not supply the funds. That implies that I (1) understand God's economics, and (2) that my faith was so great that I am confident that I was able to see all the opportunities God placed before me, and there just were not any. Not likely.

In the other ditch, walking by hallucination, are those who confidently assert that God has opened a door because the project was funded. We need to keep in mind that God is not in the habit of signing checks, so the source of the money actually is unknown. We want to fulfill a good work, we pray, the funding arrives. How are we to respond? Many people, upon receiving funding, praise God for answering their prayer. I wonder what God thinks about that? "Let's see, he prayed and he waited for a visible result before thanking me for it. Where's the faith in that?" If you get what you prayed for and thank God, you are late, you are walking by sight. Ask and thank in the same breath. Thank God for what? The money hasn't arrived yet. Thanking God for handling your request at the time of the request will make you consider the options of what you are asking. It might prompt you to ask for improved sight – to recognize the opportunities God is creating. It might prompt you to ask God that He use a bigger stick this

Tackling the Impossible

time, to get your attention. Have we considered that perhaps what we see as an answer to prayer is a diversionary tactic by the representatives of watered-down religion? Making confident assertions about things we really do not know diverts us from focusing on picking up the next impossible task. Would you call a prophet legitimate if he predicted the past? That's what we do when we proclaim that God has answered my prayer. If you have faith, you will talk about it before it happens.

But, how far out on a limb are we supposed to go? I have known and have read about people who have wandered off the road into the "tempting God" ditch. For example, back in the 19th century, a group of Restoration missionaries decided that God wanted them to take the gospel to Palestine. But they did not know the language. They were convinced that, if they had faith, God would give them that knowledge when they arrived. It didn't happen. What was the problem? A lack of faith? No, misplaced faith. They tried to manipulate God so that He would have to grant their request on their terms. The same is concept applies to funding for good works.

So where is the narrow road between the ditches? That's where the toolbox comes in. In short, we just need to be open to unusual sources of funding and unusual timetables. We need to pray not just for the funding, but for the clarity of spiritual vision that we can see the opportunities, because the opportunities are there. It's a promise. We need to step a little beyond what we can see, but also be flexible enough to change directions when the fog lifts.

Moving along to my third promise, from Philippians 3:15, "Therefore let us, as many as are perfect, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you." If I were to say to you, "When you mature, you will agree with me," that would be condescending and counterproductive. I don't think Paul was being condescending. He was communicating a promise from God concerning a miraculous unity such as Jesus prayed for in the Garden, from John 17:20 – 21, "I do not pray for these [apostles] alone, but also for those who believe through their word; that they may all be one, as You Father are in Me and I in You; that they may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me." One of the evidences that Jesus is God was planned to be the miraculous unity of Christians. Historically, how well have we done on that? What about that promise in Philippians, "God will reveal even this to you"? The sad history of the church shows that we can thwart the promises of God and destroy the evidence that Jesus prayed for.

How do we put this promise into practice? Again, that's a toolbox thing. Where are the ditches? I emphasize the ditches because knowing where they are helps sound a warning when, with all the best of intentions, we start using natural-man thinking to deal with God. In the right ditch are those who think they have arrived, so the ideas of others are judged by my perceptions, which I assume are God's intentions. We need to remember that even those who "think otherwise," as Paul called it, thought they were right, walking by faith, walking in the light, standing on the truth. Even if you prayed about it, that does not imply that God now endorses your opinion, even though you are convinced that you and God are together on this, and you can even quote your favorite verse to prove it. I think a good reminder here is the death certificates recorded in each county courthouse. Death certificates are issued for those whose hearts have stopped beating for a certain length of time. I think the church should issue a death certificate for anyone who hasn't reversed an understanding in over a year.

In the other ditch are those who decide that differences don't matter. Of course those differences matter. At least one if not both parties misapprehends something important about

Tackling the Impossible

God. Every letter in the New Testament with the possible exception of Philemon devotes at least some space to warnings about bad teaching. But remember, the vast majority of those whom the various authors were describing thought that they were speaking the truth.

Where's the middle ground, the narrow road? The answer is to study with those with whom you disagree. I did not say to teach them, I said to study with them. Paul called the fellow "brother" who hadn't quite gotten straight that idols were not really gods. If we study out the difference as equals, we can make progress. My belief system must be on the table, not just the other person's. I should even help the other person make his case. The objective is not winning or losing, it is finding the truth. Even if the question seems insignificant, like where do dinosaurs fit in Genesis, it's still important because an accurate understanding of truth is important. So, where's the impossibility in that? When have people ever sought the truth calmly and rationally? In taking this improbable path, I give God the opportunity to teach me.

Promise #4, sticking with Philippians, in 4:6 – 7, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." As you can see, one of the tools for activating this promise is in the same sentence, prayer. The next two verses contain more tools. We will get to that. Right now, let's just look at the promise. The defeat of anxiety; the attainment of peace of mind. The pharmaceutical industry would take a serious hit if more people put this into practice. We are studying with a recovering addict who has told us that anxiety was the impetus that propelled him into addiction – again and again. Now, he reads Philippians at least once a day. He's been clean for more than six months.

Promise #5, from Hebrews 12:28, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." This is at the conclusion of a section about people being rejected and about terror and the earth being shaken. We can read Romans 3 and put ourselves in that picture of falling short of the glory of God, or join in Paul's lament, "O wretched man that I am!" in Romans 7 or "Who is adequate for these things" in 2 Corinthians 2. We have a promise of serving acceptably. The same promise is repeated in Colossians 1:9 – 12. How do we have confidence in this promise? Of course, the answer is in the toolbox. How is this promise useful? Many, many Christians have been taught that they are defective, weak, unworthy – and that it is not going to change. If they are lucky, they will be the last ones in just before the gate clangs shut. That's an accurate assessment if you have not yet opted out of the justice economy in favor of the faith economy. But we have grace, by which we serve God acceptably.

Promise #6, from James 1:2 – 4, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Here's an application that relates back to promise #3. Note that this promise refers to the testing of your faith, not just testing your body. I've noticed a common but strange attribute among religious people; they don't like to discuss their faith with those who disagree with them. Perhaps this is because they have had a long and sad history of such discussions that have ended badly. But in trying to avoid the ugliness, two promises are ignored. God is not given the opportunity to resolve the misunderstanding, and it is anyone's guess whose understanding God is trying to correct: you, me, or both. And, we are rejecting an opportunity to develop patience and its perfect work. If the other person gets angry, that's not your problem. The other person is simply revealing an

Tackling the Impossible

ungodly character and a probable lack of the Spirit. Alternately, some people justify not discussing topics of disagreement because the topic under consideration is not, as they put it, “a salvation issue.” I have not found that list in the Bible yet. The concept of there being salvation issues and non-salvation issues stems from a legalistic mentality of minimum requirements.

Promise #7, from James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” The same idea is also in Ephesians 1:17 – 19, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.” We can know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. We can be the recipients of godly wisdom. Believers are not stuck in the twilight zone, never quite figuring things out, just reacting to the unexpected. We do not need to be satisfied with our present level of ignorance. Faith is the gateway to wisdom, knowledge, and hope.

And Promise #8, from among the hundreds I could have chosen, the ability to overcome, as in 1 John 5:4, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.” The same promise of putting to death the deeds of the body, of overcoming every temptation, may be found in Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 10, Ephesians 6, Hebrews 2 and Hebrews 4. To state the same thing from a positive direction, we have the promise of being partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and of attaining to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

These are just eight of the more than 400 promises of God directed toward the modern Christian. From the natural man’s point of view, they are impossible. And why are they impossible? I think Peter put it best in 1 Peter 4:10 – 11, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and dominion forever and ever.” Let him do it with the ability which God supplies. As each one has received a gift.

There is a difference between a talent and a gift. If you were an accountant before becoming a Christian, and afterwards you became church treasurer, that would not be exercising a gift. God gives gifts to the faithful, not to unbelievers. That is exercising a talent, something you would have whether you were a Christian or not. Of course, as good stewards, we should make good use of our talents. But Peter’s point is to exercise your gift – something given to you by God after you became a Christian so that you could cause God to be glorified. Outsiders can tell that something bigger than you did it. The unity Jesus prayed for back in John 17 is an example. Normal people do not make unity work. We do. The world takes one step forward and two steps back in regard to behavior. We bring our bodies under control. The world has theories with holes. We make life make sense. They are anxious. We are not. They seek to have enough stuff and never do. We seek to have enough of God, and always do.

But, God knows where we came from. He has not set us up to fail again, and again, and again. He has given us a full toolbox. I had a hard time picking which tool to describe first. I finally decided to go with the obvious, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” Or Hebrews 4:12,

Tackling the Impossible

“For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Knowing the Word gives us confidence that the promises are real. God has done it before, so I have confidence that He will do it again. The only way we will know which promises are really from God and which are from an overactive imagination is from the Word. That promise about having an abundance for every good work would be outrageous if it were not in black and white. To grow faith, people need to read the Word – not verses from here and there, but the Word. I have been teaching a series on Wednesdays called “Seeing the Bible from 30,000 Feet.” We started with the shortest book of the New Testament and are working toward the longest, one book per week. The sequence is the baby step concept. If I can get them to read Philemon, maybe, week by week, I can move them up to reading James all at once. Next week is 1 Peter. They have been amazed. The New Testament makes sense, is interesting, and easy to understand.

Tool #2, Singing. Ephesians 5:18 – 21, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.” We have some control over how powerful the Spirit in us will be. That’s exciting. How do we do that? Singing. Tying it together with the first tool, Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” This is one unlikely tool. But, this is a tool God gave. Faith will be built by singing quality Christian songs. I say quality songs because so many are just fluff. But finding a quality song with an excellent message gives us a teaching tool we might not otherwise have. Some talented, or gifted, songwriter has put together a message that I may not have the talent or gift to produce. But I can still communicate effectively, in a distinctly rememberable way, the things of God.

Tool #3, in no particular order, prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.” Romans 12:12, “Continue steadfastly in prayer.” And we have that promise in Romans 8:27, that the Spirit that dwells within us makes intercession according to the will of God. Our sloppy thoughts and motives get straightened out on the way there. This is one of the ways to dispose of anxiety. Have you ever awakened in the night and been unable to fall back asleep because of anxiety? Sharon and I raised three daughters. Any of you fellows with daughters over the age of 10 know what I am talking about. The first two cost me a few sleepless nights. The third one taught me to pray.

Tool #4, Time management. Ephesians 5:15 – 16, “See then that you walk carefully, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” And Colossians 4:5, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.” In Romans 8, Paul wrote about the creation being subjected to futility, corruption. I think he was writing about our scientific observation of a property called entropy, the second law of thermodynamics, that things tend toward disorganization. We are to rescue bits of time from the downhill slide by talking with outsiders. That’s how we seek first the Kingdom.

Tool #5, Practice Conscious Thought Control. Philippians 4:8, “Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything worthy of praise – meditate on these things.” By this we overcome.

Tackling the Impossible

Tool #6, Love. Romans 5:5, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” If God did not provide that love to believers, there would be no hope for unity.

And the last tool I will mention, although there are many more, is fellowship. 1 John 1:7, “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” Or the last verse of 2 Corinthians, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” Fellowship is connectedness of spirit. This tool helps us put faith into action by seeing our connection with Christians the world over. We are reminded of that connection through the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper. It’s not just me and God. I’m connected to myriads and myriads of faithful spirits who all have the same goals and values. I can take this improbable step into the unknown because an uncountable number of fellow spirits are connected to me and they are all vitally interested in that step of faith.

Here’s how a lady in Fulton described it. She said, “I always wondered how Jesus was going to come back in the clouds and gather up all the faithful. This explains it. He only has to grab one. They’re all connected.”

How do we start taking those baby steps of faith? How do we encourage others to take those baby steps of faith? That’s the question I asked of those who lead in Fulton just last week. One of them said, “In my class last week, we looked at Mark 8. Jesus feeds four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish (the second such feeding), and has a confrontation with the Pharisees about signs. Then, He and His disciples get in a boat and they head for the other side of the lake. The disciples had neglected to bring provisions. Jesus said, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.’ They thought He had found out about the fact that they had forgotten to bring food. Jesus responds, ‘Is your heart hardened?’” I think my friend David is on to something. Usually, when we think of hardened hearts we think of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, or the Israelites in various bad periods. Mark 8 is describing the Twelve. Jesus is chastising them for not seeing, hearing, remembering what He had done and failing to draw a conclusion of faith. When did the fog lift? When they hit bottom. When this amazing man with whom they had traveled for three years was arrested, tried, and executed. They were in deep despair. Their world view had collapsed. They were finally ready to remove the filter through which they saw everything. Then He came back. Faith took over and the impossible became routine.

Where are we in that process? Do we decline to act on these promises because they don’t fit our world view? Because we have filtered out the impossible? I can tell you that it is much easier to learn from the disciples than to go through something similar.

The biggest problem is lack of expectation, perhaps because the promises are too outrageous, or perhaps because we don’t know what the promises are. Either way, we communicate our failing to those whom we teach.

It’s like an inner city neonatal intensive care unit with babies hooked to all sorts of machines because of various indiscretions by the parents. We can’t bring ourselves to turn off the machines. That would be barbaric. But it is terribly expensive. And the babies have little if any chance for normal life.

We’re like the parents of those damaged infants. Those babes whom we brought into the kingdom are in the shape they are in because of whatever we were smoking when we taught them. So now we keep them alive with highly skilled specialists and superb facilities at tremendous cost in the hope that a few will survive.

Tackling the Impossible

History can be defeated – by faith – even baby steps of faith. My baby steps encourage others to take baby steps, and soon we are off to the races.

In Fulton, a year ago, I gave a 10-minute talk on the possibilities of opening an ACE school. And, I made some pointed remarks about 2 Corinthians 9 and the promise of an abundance for every good work. One young man saw clearly that it was not possible, but, four months later, set about to test the waters. He has told me that he never really believed that it was going to work. He wanted to bail out numerous times. He could not begin to fathom where the money would come from. School started three weeks ago with eight students, four from outside the congregation, and a positive bank balance.

My brothers in Pakistan whom I have never seen in the flesh, all formerly devout Muslims who now serve and teach Jesus without the often crippling influence of the acculturated Christianity of the industrialized world, continue to thrive in a war zone under constant and real danger because of their impossible faith. They wrote us to commend the outcome of our faith.

Baby steps start out unsteady with frequent falls. But before you know it, faith runs, jumps, and climbs.