

Breaking Barriers (July 1984)

Although I never placed better than third in any track meet, I spent a lot of time in college practicing the shot put. In my sophomore year, an Irish-American by the name of Pat O'Brien won a gold medal in the Olympics by throwing the 16-pound iron ball 57 feet. It was a new world record.

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Experts said O'Brien might be able to do a few inches better if he practiced, but no one would ever be able to break the 60-foot barrier. But Pat O'Brien experimented with spinning like the discus throwers. Four years later he won the Olympics again and broke the unbreakable barrier by tossing the shot put 60 feet 11 inches.

From that time on, every shot putter worth his salt has gone beyond 60 feet. In the 1980 Olympics a Russian threw the shot put 70 feet, and the world record was set by Udo Beyer of East Germany with 72 feet, eight inches.

All because one man broke through.

Remember the four-minute mile barrier? No one, the experts said, would ever be able to run the mile in less than four minutes. Then, in 1954, a young medical student by the name of Roger Bannister did the impossible. He broke the barrier. Today, every world-class runner on the circuit can run the mile in less than four minutes.

All because one man broke through.

When I was in college, the experts said no one would ever be able to break the impossible barrier of 15 feet in the pole

vault. At that time, the Rev. Bob Richards held the record at 14 feet 11 1/2 inches.

Then an enterprising young athlete began experimenting with a fiberglass pole and soared over the impossible barrier. A record was established by a young Polish athlete who jumped 18 feet, 11 1/2 inches. That's eight feet higher than Irving Baxter jumped when he won the 1900 Olympics.

All because one man broke through.

That same Irving Baxter, by the way, won the 1900 Olympics with a high jump of six feet, two inches. For years the experts said the impossible barrier in the high jump was seven feet. Then a young man by the name of Fosbury said, "You guys are jumping wrong. Instead of throwing one leg over the bar first, you need to jump over the bar backward, head first." Critics called his unorthodox style the Fosbury Flop. But he broke the impossible barrier, and a new record was made by an East German at seven feet, eight and three-quarter inches.

All because one man broke through.

Breaking through is part of life. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matt. 11:12, NIV). In other words, the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who "break through."

When God told Joshua the promised land was his, it meant it was his to take. Every place he set his foot belonged to him, God said. The problem was the land was occupied. In order to put his foot down, he had to move someone else's boot.

By force.

Desiring a thing is not enough. You have to go after it. That takes commitment. And discipline. I discovered this years ago, simply wanting to be thin was not sufficient. Even positive confession wouldn't accomplish my desire.

I had to fight for thinness—one pound at a time. Even after achieving my goal three months later, I still had to fight to maintain it. For that which I have taken from the devil by force, I now understand, he would like to reclaim through chocolate ice cream.

No spiritual victory comes easy. It requires our discipline and effort. It takes the actual “work” described in James 2:14-26—the “works” without which, our faith is empty and useless as salt without flavor. It can be done.

At Calvary, Jesus broke the impossible barrier. He opened the door for all the rest of us to follow. Now in the power of His Spirit I can say: Once a man is satisfied, is in the center of God’s plan and God is working out His plan through him, that man is invincible.

All because a Man broke through.

Jamie Buckingham wrote 153 “Last Word” columns for Charisma magazine from 1979 to 1992. His singular voice was animated by a heart for Jesus and his baptism in the power of the Holy Spirit in 1967 at a Full Gospel Businessmen’s convention. Buckingham was the steadying force during the television ministry scandals of the 1980s, penning the seminal article on the PTL scandal, “God Is Shaking His Church” in May 1986. “Charisma Classics” are from his 1993 Creation House book, Look Out World, I’m Me.