

Breaking Barriers

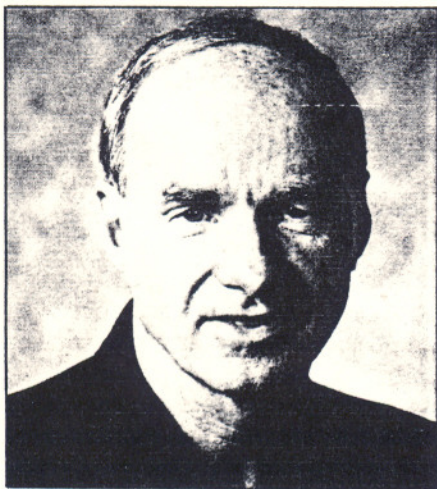
BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

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. 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 began experimenting with different styles. Instead of hopping across the ring, he began to spin, like the discus throwers. Four years later he won the Olympics again—and broke the unbreakable barrier by tossing the shot 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 70 feet, and today's world record is held by Udo Beyer of East Germany with 72 feet 8 inches.



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This month, in Los Angeles, someone is sure to throw it even further.

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. In fact, the record is held by Sebastian Coe who ran the mile in 3:47—13 seconds less than the impossible barrier.

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 11½ inches. Then an enterprising young athlete began experimenting with a fiberglass pole and soared over the impossible barrier. Today the world record is held by a young Polish athlete who jumped 18 feet 11½ inches. That's eight feet higher than Irving Baxter jumped when he won the 1900 Olympics.

This summer there is a good chance someone will come close to the 20-foot mark—all because one man broke through.

That same Irving Baxter, by the way, won the 1900 Olympics with a high jump of 6 feet 2 inches. For years the experts said the impossible barrier in the high jump was 7 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 backwards—head first." Critics called his unorthodox style the Fosbury Flop. But he broke the impossible barrier, and today's world record is held by an East German at 7 feet 8¾ 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 two years ago when I lost all that weight. 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 four months later I still had (and have) 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 has come easy. With each one I have had to overcome someone who said, "It can't be done."

This is true in my struggle to break through to holiness, in my battle to bring my marriage to the place of perfect unity, in my fight to overcome selfishness and fear. "You'll always be the way you are," the experts say.

But like O'Brien, Bannister, Fosbury and the rest, I am determined to break through.

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 he is in the center of God's plan and that God is working out His plan through him, that man is invincible.

All because a Man broke through. ☪