

Mcgregor Baptist Church  
3750 Colonial Boulevard  
Fort Myers, FL 33912

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Matthew 17:14-21

(Bible Doctrines That Made America Great)  
**"YOU CAN BE A RUGGED INDIVIDUAL"**

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Pastor

Dr. Robert Schuller told us of a recent visit to Russia. When Boris Yeltsin heard that he was there, he invited Dr. Schuller to his office. There he was greeted by Yeltsin's second in command, and he was told: " You wond the recent election for us!"

Continuing on, the aide told Schuller how they were having such a difficult time in persuading the masses to let go of their dependence on the government for everything and to take a more progressive approach to their personal lives. Everyone was so used to the government, thinking for them, hat they had no self-confidence. They were very insercure that they could take responsibility for their individual lives.

And Yeltsin's forces almost gave up on trying to help them launch out in a progessive direction. Yet, when it was all done, their progressive party won the election. And they thanked Dr. Schuller for his help.

"How did I help?" he asked. By getting on TV every Sunday and encouraging everybody that "if you can dream it, you can do it." It finally started to get through that, with faith God and themselves, they could take responsibility for their individual lives.

What an interesting and massive result for the teaching of life of faith!

I'm afraid that we take such responsive faith for granted here in our great nation. We were founded and developed by men, who had faith, and who ran risks, and who dreamed dreams, and who succeeded with the help of God. This has been a nation where faith has created a rugged individualism. Individual men and women have had the faith to believe that they could make a difference and they could make a contribution and they could achieve a personal dream.

Behind each of our great institutions and businesses was some rugged individual, who had the faith to dare to achieve his dreams. It has been the American way!

I worry that we are about to lose this approach, which has made us great. The politicians keep trying to focus our attention on security and government-provided "entitlements." They will take care of us, by redistributing the wealth.

The emphasis on collectivism is trying to shove out the old ideal of rugged individualism. It is almost suspect to be a rugged individual. You are thought to be a maverick, and you are held down by increasing government regulations.

I don't look at it as being a maverick to be a dreamer, a risk-taker, a rugged individualist. It was the rugged individuals, who have advanced the cause of Christ and who have built, out

of a wilderness, the greatest nation on the face of the earth.

But thank the Lord, there seem to be glimmers of a turn-around. Here and there, voices are suggesting that people again boldly venture out into uncertain waters, in order to better themselves and their communities. Kweisi Mfume told the NAACP delegates that "we must find our way to do for ourselves," reversing the former mindset that the government owed black people reparations for the past injustices.

Green Bay Packer star Reggie White has started a program called "Urban Hope," to help people buy homes and start small businesses. He suggests that his people try cooperation in a vision for the future, rather than confrontation about the past. And people are again, venturing out, with hope and faith, that they can better their lives and the lives of others, individually, and not have to be wards of the government.

This is great. It excites me. This is part of the American dream. And it is based on the kind of venturesome faith, which is taught so clearly in the Word of God.

So I thought that I'd better include, in my series on "Bible Doctrines That Made America Great," at least one message on daring faith and rugged hope. I hope that I can convince each one of us that we can, with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, become rugged individuals with an unstoppable faith!

If you want to talk about self-confidence, listen to what Jesus promised His followers. Matthew 17:17,20: "If you have faith...nothing shall be impossible unto you." No obstacle can stop you. Just "speak to the mountain....and it will be moved."

This morning I want to offer you a primer for doing the impossible. I want to suggest to you some steps in moving mountainous obstacles. I want to show you how to become a rugged individual, like the ones who made our nation great with their daring to dream great dreams and their willingness to take great risks.

This process is not original, but it has changed my outlook on life. And I would like to share it with you.

If you are a young person, listen carefully. I can offer you a head-start on individual achievement. If you are an older person, there may still be time for you to achieve your "impossible dream."

The first phase of a rugged faith is...

I. **DREAMING** ( Philippians 2:13)

Every great success begins with a creative idea... a dream of what could be...that is born in the mind of someone. This is faith, taking its first cautious step: dreaming.

Faith begins with the act of imagining something better. "If you don't have a dream, how can dreams come true?"

Tell me, do you have a dream? Has some great challenge gripped your life? If you merely "live for pleasure," God declares that you are "dead while you live." But a dream will bring you alive! Lose yourself in one of God's dreams, and you'll start really living!

Now where do dreams come from? Philippians 2:13 tells us that "it is God who works in you, both to desire and to accomplish His good pleasure." A paraphrase might be "it is God

who puts in you a creative idea-a dream-and who will help you to bring that dream into a reality."

I believe that, when we are in tune with God, He will give us creative ideas and the faith to tackle them. God has always inspired godly men with great goals, which stretched their faith. Hebrews 11:1 reminds us that : " Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things no yet seen."

We must accept the dream that God give to us and begin to paint a mental picture of what we could accomplish, until we can see it clearly in our mind's eye.

This is the DREAMING phase.

By the way, we can share in someone else's dream. The dream, which excites our lives, doesn't necessarily have to originate in our own minds. But if we believe it is of God, we can pitch-in and help to make it happen. And what a joy it is in having a part in making it happen.

II. Phase 2 is **DESIRING**. (Proverbs 10:24) "The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted." This is faith, stepping into deeper water. It is wanting something so badly that some day, some how, somewhere, some time, you know that you will have it.

Listen, more faith is shattered by lack of desire than by real doubt. No man will ever believe that he can move a mountain, unless he really wants that mountain to move. But almost anything can be accomplished by that person, who really wants to succeed. But "where there's a will, there's a way!"

The faith, which makes all things possible, must make a commitment to the goal. Faith, if it is going to move obstacles, transform society, and change one's life, has to become a burning desire.

Perhaps that is why God allows problems to arise. Maybe this is how He sifts-out those, who really want His will, from those who are only talking a good game.

Take your dream. Form a detailed mental picture of it. As the sharp details become clear in your mind, your enthusiasm will mounth to a higher pitch. As you want the dream to become a reality more and more, you will plan and organize and reorganize and work, until you have clarified your goal.

But a word of caution: after you know what you want, you must be willing to evaluate and censor those desires. Moral questions must be raised at this point.

Is it right?

Am I confident that this is what God wants?

Is this for my ego or for the service of others?

Can I conscientiously expect God to be my partner in such a venture?

If the answers are "no," then stop and go back to the drawing board. If the answers are "yes," then you are ready to move on to...

III. Phase 3, which is **DARING**. (Proverbs 28:1) "The wicked flee when no man persues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."

Doubt, that we can do something, is often a lack of courage, which it takes to carry it out. Fear of embarrassment, along with fear of involvement and personal sacrifice, is enough to keep many a person from wanting to make a commitment to an idea, a dream, a project, or a cause.

Mountain-moving faith is not merely dreaming and desiring. It is a daring to RISK failure! You see, faith is making a decision, when there is no guarantee of success. If success is certain, then the venture is no longer an act of faith. Faith, without risk, is a contradiction.

How many churches never dare to risk anything? They are bastions of the status-quo. This is why many mission churches excite people, while an established church with better talent and programs can seem dull or "dead." There is no risk-taking....no adventuresome faith required.

This "daring" is what separates God's men. Often your brilliant scholars and your silver-tongued orators are not the great achievers. You see, it's not the brains and talent which move mountains. It is the faith! It is the "guts to get out of the ruts!" And God always smiles on faith.

But "without (daring) faith, it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrew 11:6). If we can ever run this church comfortably, with our own efforts and by not having to cling to God in faith, then we don't really need God. And nothing that we do will be pleasing to Him.

And please don't forget this: even indecision is making a decision. It is making a decision to miss a golden opportunity. It is a decision to fail!

Have you ever thought deeply about the place of risk in this thing called faith, about which we talk and sing so much around church? Only the faith, which dares to run risks, can move mountains and make things happen.

We cannot safely avoid:

### **The risk of disappointment.**

Many people figure that, if you never try, you will never lose. So they never try nor commit their lives to anything great.

Listen, I'd rather try something great and fail than to be afraid to even try.

Besides, you don't fail, if you try. Finding the guts to try is a victory in itself.

When I first entered the ministry, the Southern Baptists set a goal of "30,000 More By '64." They tried to start 30,000 more new churches by the year 1964. They frankly fell short of their goal. They only started 10,000 more. But that was 10,000 more than they would have started, if they had never dared to try.

Success is not necessarily reaching your original goal. Success is reaching your maximum potential. But failure is being afraid to even try!

**The risk of public criticism** is always present, when we dare. Face it: every pioneering project has been criticized by negative people. Columbus had the shores lined with scoffers, when he set sail for the new world. They made fun of the Wright Brothers and their strange-looking flying machine. They laughed Gershwin off the stage the first time that he played his new kind of music. I'd hate to tell you some of the things, which people said about me, when we started to build this church out here "in the swamps."

"Non-achievers" always salve their own consciences by criticizing achievers. "I pity the

guys who criticize and minimize the others guys, whose enterprise has made them rise above the guys, who criticize and minimize."

Now we must be willing to listen and to learn from our critics. They can often see things that we, in our enthusiasm, had overlooked. But we cannot surrender the leadership of the church to these negative influences, or we are dead in the water.

Don't let them stop you, if you know that God wants you to try something. God told Jeremiah to "be not dismayed by their faces." Dare to risk public criticism.

**The risk of imperfection** is another threat to faith. " I'm afraid that I can't do it right." But have you ever considered that "it's better to do something imperfectly than to do nothing perfectly"?

Once Norman Vincent Peale worked long and hard on a book. Convinced that it was not good enough, he threw it into the wastebasket. Fortunately, he picked it out and sold it to a publisher. It was called The Power of Positive Thinking, and it sold several million copies.

Fear is the biggest hindrance to moving mountains. "Playing it safe" strangles faith. May God give us Daring!

IV. Phase 4 is **BEGINNING**. (Joshua 3:15-16) "And as...the feet of the priests... were dipped in the brim of the water... the waters rose up in heap..." and parted.

God never does anything to help, until we make a move... until we make a beginning.

You have the dream. You have dealt with your fears and made a commitment. Now get going!

We all know people who think great ideas and dream daring dreams, but who never get started. They are still probably "playing it safe," by postponing things.

I've learned that real support, for a cause, never comes until we start doing something. God seldom performs a miracle, until we try. But I've seen unexpected help come out of woodwork, once we begin.

Someone has said: " Beginning is half done!" Whatever you dream, get started!

V. Phase 5 is **EXPECTING**. (Matthew 21:22) "Whatever you ask in prayer, Believing, you shall receive."

William Carey, the first modern missionary, said " Attempt great things for God, and expect great things of God."

Some folks dream, desire, consult, and dare to begin. But then they start to worry, wonder, and doubt whether they can really succeed. This in turn, causes them to hold back

and not give it all they've got. And they do fail.

But, when you expect success, you hold nothing back. You sink your last dime, spend your second-wind energy, and gamble your priceless reputation, confident that you will make it.

And when others see that you have given your wonderful idea all that you've got, they will march to your side and help you on to victory and success.

So keep on expecting!!!!

VI. Phase 6 of the kind of faith, which makes things happen, is **AFFIRMING**. (Matthew 17:20) "...you shall say this mountain, 'Move!'"

Faith is affirming success before it comes. Faith is making claims to victory, before it is achieved.

This is very difficult for most to do. Our instinctive sense of modesty and honesty tend to make us hold back from making public our confidence. We think it might look like presumption or boasting. So we say nothing and "hope for the best."

Some even do this with "saving faith." They pray to be saved and hope for the best, but they never show enough confidence to make a public profession of faith. That's why God insists that we must "confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus Christ," if we are to be saved (Romans 10:9).

No, our Lord tells us to "say to the mountain, 'be moved.'" Speak it out loud. Affirm your faith and confidence openly.

Tell me, was Paul "boasting" when he said "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me?" Was he exaggerating a bit? Or was this not an exercise of mountain-moving faith?

Mountain movers boldly predict success. Thus, they attract others, without whom they could not succeed.

Nobody likes follow a loser. And it's cinch, nobody can move mountains by themselves. So we must AFFIRM our faith!

VII: Phase 7 is **WAITING**. (Psalm 27:14) "Wait on the Lord. Wait, I say, on the Lord!"  
This is the "sweating phase" of faith.

In every project, there is a stage where you've thought it, started it, expected it, and affirmed it. Now you've passed the point of no return, but you still can't understand how it can possibly succeed.

Great and unexpected problems arise. But you cannot back down. You cannot run away. You can only keep going and hope for the best.

People come to me and say. "I've prayed. I've tried everything that I know. But still

things are not working out. What is wrong with my faith?"

It lacks only one ingredient: patience! You must learn to wait on the Lord.

At one stage of this project, in which you are seated, the county changed its mind on some regulations, the boiler died of cancer, and the foreman quit (saying, "This thing will never fly!). All we could do was to "wait on the lord." But the project did fly, eventually, praise the Lord!

Men, who succeed with some great dream, know that every project goes through phases, when there is nothing to do but wait. The danger is that we may be tempted quit. But don't!

We actually found that our set-backs were friends in disguise. Remember Hebrews 10:36: "You have need of patience that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise." This is the "waiting" stage.

VIII. Phase 8 is **ADAPTING**. (Romans 8:28) "And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good, if we love God and are fitting into His plans."

We all face some situations when our mountain just won't budge, in spite of all that we do. Then we must offer the profound and faith-packed prayer of our Lord: "My Father, all things are possible unto thee. Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done! (Mark 14:36).

This is the most supreme statement of faith. It is not a passive acceptance of defeat. It is a positive declaration of victory. It is "letting go and letting God" take over.

This is not a cop-out. This is ADAPTING. It is allowing God, in His own mysterious way, **to perfect our dreams!**

But just how can I surrender my dreams, or problems, to God? By exercising faith that God can make all things work together for good. Only God really knows what is best for us and what is bad for us.

So, if your mountain will not move, after all seven steps, then surrender it to God. He will either move it, help you go over it, or show you how to turn that mountain into a gold mine!

Not long after we were into this project, the county insisted that we move everything back 100 feet farther from the highway. That meant further engineering costs, filling in a lake, re-digging another, and adjusting all the way around. What a disappointment!

Then one day, as we drove down Colonial Boulevard, we noticed that the buildings were in place where you could see them all the way down Colonail. People still marvel and say: "Did you plan it that way?"

"No," I must admit, "but God adjusted it that way?" through what seemed, at first like a disappointment. But it turned out to be a perfecting of the plan. What we thought was a set-back turned out to be God, setting the buildings back where they could be seen as a beacon of hope.

Never forgot that "all things will work together.. in the end... for good."God has promised. We cannot lose, when we venture out in faith!

So be confident. Dream great dreams. Attemot great things. **Be a bold and rugged individual!** With God's help, you can do it.

That is the Biblical truth that helped to make America great!