BIG BOLD
EXTRAORDINARY
FAITH

A leap of faith must be from a solid footing on the Word of God, trusting
the God of the Word for whom we leap, while we don’t know where we are
going and how we will get there, but we know the God who sent us will
lead us and provide for us. - J. Falwell

BY ELMER L. TOWNS

SPRING 2009
BIG BOLD EXTRAORDINARY FAITH

Extraordinary faith can overcome insurmountable obstacles with limited resources, in difficult circumstances to the glory of God.

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EPILOGUE

Front Matter Big Bold Extraordinary Faith
Elmer Towns
WHY THIS BOOK?

This book represents my personal growth in faith from my salvation in 1950 to the present. It tells of some victories and some defeats. As I write this at 76 years old, I’m still learning, and perhaps I’ve learned as much in the past two years as any previous time in my life.

My experiences are so unique that I don’t think I can be a valid model for you or anyone else. I’m an author-teacher who loves to study, share and teach. If you’re a pastor, choose Jerry Falwell, Yonggi Cho, Bill Bright, or Billy Graham. If you’re in evangelism, choose Billy Graham or Bill Bright. Choose someone who has the same spiritual giftedness or calling as you.

I should apologize for an abundance of stories about Liberty University and Jerry Falwell, but Lynchburg, Virginia, has been my boot camp for 39 years. I’ve learned more about faith here, than at any other place.

I’ve written not to remind you of history, nor is this an academic doctrine book on faith. I want the stories to leap off the pages and burn themselves into your heart. I want this book to drive you to your knees to beg for the power of God in your life. Than can happen if you make it your passion to know God and experience His presence.
INTRODUCTION

“Faith is believing the unreasonable, the impossible, and the unexplainable, because someone else, in whom we have absolute confidence, has said it was so, and upon His word we believe it, without asking any further proof.” – M. R. DeHaan

Jesus said your faith could “move mountains.” If you haven’t moved any mountains lately, read on. This book is about faith principles of doing exploits for God.

BIG BOLD EXTRAORDINARY FAITH TO BUY A HUGE MOUNTAIN

Jerry Falwell, pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church and chancellor of Liberty University, was flying into Lynchburg, Virginia, with Bill Burruss, a local realtor and land developer, when Falwell said, “Is that land down there for sale?” It was 1,000 acres of the original property of Liberty University.

“Preacher, everything is for sale if you’ve got the right price,” said Bill Burruss, owner of Burruss Land Development of Virginia.

So what did Jerry do? Wearing a dark preacher’s suit, and wing-tip shoes he set out to walk the perimeter of Liberty Mountain to claim it for God. Jerry drove to the top of Candler’s Mountain to a vantage point where he could look out over the city of Lynchburg and over the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance. He knew that God had told Abraham to walk around the land that he would claim by faith. So Falwell began walking, and lost all sense of time. He walked the mountain through those familiar rabbit trails where he hunted as a boy. He reasoned that if Abraham could walk the limits of the Holy Land and claim it by faith, why couldn’t he walk the limits of “Liberty Mountain” and claim it by faith?

A few months passed, and then Jerry Falwell and Bill Burruss flew to Chicago to the corporate headquarters of U.S. Gypsum, having made an appointment to see the Vice President in charge of properties. They sat around a large display table where maps were unrolled. While
praying, Jerry ran his fingers over the perimeters of the thousand acres owned by U.S. Gypsum, and then he asked,

“Is that land for sale?”

“Preacher,” the Vice President said, “how did you know it was for sale?”

Jerry answered, “I didn’t, I just came because God directed me here.”

The vice president went on to explain that the preceding week, the Board of Directors had voted to divest itself of holdings because of its need for cash. The thousand acres on Candler’s Mountain were for sale and the asking price was $1,250,000.

“I want to buy it,” was Jerry Falwell’s simple answer. Bill Burruss blinked his eyes and gulped. Later when Jerry Falwell was asked, “Was that a leap in the unknown?” He answered, “It sure sounds like one to me.”

Falwell went on to ask the Vice President if U.S. Gypsum would finance the project if he would make a down payment.

“Yes,” the Vice President smiled, thinking Falwell didn’t have the money. Over his reluctance, he answered Jerry, “the corporation would be willing to do that.”

“How much down payment?” Jerry asked.

“A hundred thousand dollars or ten percent of the total, plus interest,” the Vice President told Jerry.

Again, with an almost depleted treasury back home, Jerry Falwell said, “God wants us to have that property; I’ll take it.” Then Falwell took out a check and said, “Can I give you $10,000 down and $90,000 in thirty days as a down payment?”

“Well . . .” the Vice President smiled even bigger. He didn’t quite believe that this person he thought of as a country preacher from Virginia could swing such a large deal, but he said, “Yes, we’ll take the $10,000 to hold the property.”

They agreed to the deal, shook hands, and a letter of agreement was typed up quickly.

Both the Vice President and Jerry Falwell signed it. Legal deeds and promissory notes would be
drawn up later. When Falwell gave the $10,000 check to him, the Vice President still was not sure about the deal and was inwardly grinning about the whole process.

As Jerry got ready to leave, right before walking out of the office he said, “By the way, could you hold that $10,000 check and not cash it for about a week, then it’ll be good.”

That’s when the Vice President broke into an uncontrollable laugh. The conversation was so preposterous that he didn’t quite believe what he was hearing. But he still went along with the deal, thinking he would never see Jerry Falwell again.

Back home, Jerry began to explain his vision to people he called Door Keepers. This group supported his TV program and University by giving $1.00 a week. Jerry had gone throughout Central Virginia distributing a pack of 52 business reply envelopes, stapled together. There were thousands of Door Keepers who upped their gift to $100 to buy Liberty Mountain. Eventually, the $10,000 check down payment was covered; and within 30 days, Jerry Falwell had raised $100,000 for the first payment on Liberty Mountain.

Is this a leap of faith in the dark? Is buying a piece of property when you don’t know where the money is coming from a leap into the unknown. You might not call it a leap in the dark because you have a different meaning for the word dark. Perhaps it is best described as “a leap into the unknown” to fulfill a dream God had planted in the heart of His servant who knew he was doing what God has commanded.” (See Chapters on Faith-Vision, and Faith is a Leap into the Unknown).

35 MILLION DOLLARS BY FAITH

In 1998 I was sitting in a planning committee meeting for Billy Graham’s training conference called Amsterdam 2000.1 Billy wanted to bring 10,000 evangelists from 235 nations of the earth. While all would be asked to pay their own expenses, most of them could not attend without significant subsidy. The Conference would raise funds in order to be able to help to pay
their expenses to Amsterdam, Netherlands, including airfare, food and accommodations for 10 days.

“I want to train them to do evangelism, just like I do it,” Billy said to the sixteen of us through John Corts, the Executive Director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (http://www.billygraham.org/). So, we were seeking to invite only evangelists who proclaim the good news of Christ, urge a personal response to Christ and provide nurture to incorporate new believers into local church fellowships.

Billy said, “My greatest legacy is not a school of evangelism with my name on it, but to have 10,000 evangelists, doing soul-winning the way I understand evangelism, and doing it in their own native tongue within the cultural expressions of their native home.”

Previously, Billy had organized Amsterdam 83 for 3,000 participants and Amsterdam 86 for another 6,000 itinerant evangelists. It had cost $35 million dollars. Now, 13 years later we were planning to train 10,000 more evangelists and there had been 13 years of inflation. But after skillful planning and careful budgeting that incorporated what was learned from previous mistakes and experience, the committee felt it could put on Amsterdam 2000 for the same per person cost of $3,500 or $35 million dollars for 10,000 participants.

I choked at the amount because I am not a great man of faith.

I knew how hard it was to raise money—mass mailings, radio appeals, pledge cards, myriad phone calls, visits and contacts; repeating the story and asking for contributions.. I thought to myself, “It’s not easy to raise $35 million dollars. I’ve never seen Jerry Falwell go after that much money.”

Then we were told, “Billy said, ‘It’ll be easy.’” The opposite of what I thought.

“I’ll write and ask 35 thousand people to give $1,000 each.” He went on to explain, “There are about that many people who have, over the years, each given $1,000 or more to the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.”
Then he added, “Raising $35 million will be as simple as writing a letter to 35,000 people and trusting God to touch their hearts and enable them to support the vision.”

Then I impulsively raised my hand, “I’ll give the first $1,000.”

What was insurmountable to me was a simple faith statement to Billy Graham. The Lord honored the faith and labors of His servants, and the funds were fully received for the conference; a testimony to God’s faithfulness to provide. The event actually saw more than 11,000 attending Amsterdam 2000 which was conducted with power, dignity and effectiveness, and within budget.

**FAITH TO BREAK CHURCH ATTENDANCE BARRIERS AND BUILD THE BIGGEST LOCAL CHURCH IN HISTORY**

I wrote the book, *The 10 Largest Sunday Schools and What Made Them Grow* in 1969 and the biggest church I had ever seen at that time had 6,200 people attending Akron (Ohio) Baptist Temple. I didn’t have faith to believe there would ever be one that reached 10,000 people for Christ, although I wanted it to happen.

Then I visited the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea ([http://english.fgtv.com/](http://english.fgtv.com/)), in 1987 and was blown away when I saw 78,000 people in small cell groups meeting weekly. Pastor Yonggi Cho told me he’d soon have 100,000 in attendance.

“Having 100,000 people attending one local church is the greatest miracle in the history of Christianity,” I thought at the time.

I have breakfast with Pastor Cho each time I visit South Korea. I want to learn faith from him; he says he wants to learn Church Growth techniques from me. The next time I was there, Cho’s church was averaging more than 100,000 people and Cho told me his next goal was 250,000 in attendance.
It reached that goal within a few years and then Pastor Cho again predicted, “We’ll have a half million people in attendance. To have 500,000 people—when I had difficulty praying for a half million dollars—stretched my mind beyond credibility.

“We’ll have 750,000,” was his prediction at our next breakfast. His church reached the goal in the 1990s.

Obviously Pastor Cho has mountain-moving-faith; he has built the largest church with Big Bold Extraordinary Faith. He retired in the spring of 2008 when his church averaged 750,000 people weekly.

FAITH TO WITNESS TO EVERY LOST PERSON IN THE WORLD

Bill Bright, a converted businessman, (http://www.ccci.org/) built the largest network or organization of Christian workers in the world, i.e., 25,000 paid and 553,000 trained volunteer Campus Crusade workers. Bill attracted almost a half-million Christian workers to his organization through his vision. He signed his letters, “Yours for fulfilling the Great Commission in this generation,” but shortly after realized his intention was that Campus Crusade for Christ or any one group could accomplish the task. He changed the words to “Yours for helping to fulfill the Great Commission in this generation.” Bill really thought that in cooperation with other Christian groups the Great Commission could be fulfilled in our generation.

Bill had a dream of making a Hollywood quality film to present the gospel in every language of the world—something that had never been done in history. He prayed for such a film for thirty-five years.

One day a man by the name of John Heyman, who was a Hollywood producer, came to Bill’s office to tell him of a dream he had to produce the Bible, book by book, in film. Bill, of course, shared his dream of producing the life of Christ.
Paul Eshleman, then director of the Campus Ministry, was at Lake Arrowhead, a few miles away, conducting a planning conference with CCC leadership. Bill made arrangements for John Heyman to present his proposal. That began the plan to present “Jesus” as portrayed in the book of Luke using only words spoken by Jesus from the Scriptures. Bill explained the film would use an unknown actor because he didn’t want the public to identify Jesus with the lifestyle of most well-known actors.

The first course of action was to raise the money for the film. An Executive Seminar had been previously scheduled. Bill invited John Heyman to make his presentation of the film at an evening dinner meeting. He explained it would be produced in the Holy Land and the budget would be $6 million.

Nelson Bunker Hunt and his wife, Caroline, were in attendance at that conference and were seated with the Brights that evening. Bunker turned to Caroline and asked, “Do you think we could underwrite this film?” Her answer in her beautiful southern accent was, “Oh, Bunker, I think that would be wonderful.”

The film (entitled JESUS) was produced at a cost of $6 million. Note what is said about the JESUS Film Project.

Initiated by Campus Crusade, the full-length JESUS film, which depicts the life of Christ, has been in circulation since 1979 and has been the most widely viewed film in world history. The JESUS film has been viewed more than 6 billion times in 234 countries and has also become the most widely translated film in history (1,052 languages). More than 225 million people have indicated decisions to receive Christ in response to the JESUS film.*

*Information from Jesus Film Project as of January 1, 2009

By the year 2000, in partnering with many Christian groups and the use of the JESUS film, the message of Christ had been taken to every country in the world. It was considered by some that would mean the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Then before his death, Bill began to sign his letters, “Yours for helping to fulfill the Great Commission each year until our Lord returns.” Under the leadership of Steve Douglass, the mission statement is broadened and...
reads, “Helping build spiritual movements everywhere, so that everyone knows someone who truly follows Jesus.”

SUMMARY

Jerry Falwell had faith to pray for buildings because he was a builder, and he built the world’s largest evangelical university. Billy Graham has faith to pray for souls because he is an evangelist and he won more to Christ than any one in history. Yonggi Cho has faith to use innovative methods to build the world’s largest local church because he is a church planter. Bill Bright used his business ability and organizational skills to build the world’s largest evangelistic network. This book will tell you where different leaders have had great answers to prayer, but different ones in different areas. It will help you find the area where your faith will have the greatest results.

Section One has eight faith principles that can be found in some of the greatest leaders of Christianity, but are missing in most average people. They are Relationship-Faith, a Faith Leap, Brinkmanship-Faith, Faith –Priority, Faith-Vision, Convergence-Faith, Faith-Transfer to Followers, and Faith-Balance.

I’ve written this book out of my life-long search to build stronger faith, and I know all too well I’ve not reached that goal; I’ve been friends of some of the greatest men and women of faith in the past 50 years. What I’ve learned from them, I pass on to you. But I also realize my personal frustrations and failures. I wish I were a greater man of faith. I challenge you to learn what you can from these pages, then reach out in faith to touch God; and finally, allow Him to touch you.

Written from my home
At the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains,

Elmer L. Towns

FRONT MATTER ENDNOTES
1 Amsterdam, Netherlands, was selected because it had the largest convention center in Europe, i.e., the RAI Convention Center. Also, national airlines had direct flights from major capital cities of the world, and it had one of the most open borders of any western nation allowing representatives of every nation to visit the Netherlands on a visa.

2 Publisher: Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI: 1969. This title became a multiple-listing best seller. C. Peter Wagner, Fuller Theological Seminary, said of this book, “It is the first book to examine the mega-church and the first book to examine American Church Growth.”