THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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MOVING MOUNTAINS: AND OTHER HARD THINGS FOR THE NATURAL HUMAN TO DO

Michael Manning

Isaiah 40:3-4 mentions valleys being filled in and mountains being brought low. When I want to visualize a physical example of something that is like what Isaiah describes in these verses, I think of the Castaic to Tejon route of Interstate 5 in southern California (colloquially called the Ridge Route or the Grapevine). With a reasonably powered car and favorable traffic and weather conditions, the motorist can comfortably traverse this 40-mile segment of eight-lane mountain freeway at the posted speed limit of 65 miles per hour. Building this segment of highway was very difficult. To prepare the roadbed, mountains were cut through, and the removed soil was used to fill nearby canyons. Many heavy-duty machines were used for many years to complete the massive earthworks. Over 57 million cubic yards of dirt were moved. That amount of dirt is more than 13 times the amount of concrete in Hoover Dam, on the Colorado River.

In the New Testament, we learn that the fulfillment of the prophecy of **Isaiah 40** is through John the baptizer. **Luke 3:3-6** confirms,

> *And he* (John the baptizer) *went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "*

It was prophesied of John the baptizer that he would move mountains, yet nowhere do we read that he, Jesus, or any of Jesus' disciples ever physically moved mountains or physically prepared any type of path or road. So, how did John the baptizer move mountains?

Let's continue to look in **Luke 3**, continuing to **verses 7-9**,

> *Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."*

In John's instructions, he is helping the people to move the "mountain" of selfishness by redirecting some of their "soil" of time and resources toward those in the "valley" of need. In doing so, they are showing care and compassion toward their neighbor.

John knew that some of those who came to him might have been interested in forgiveness, but they had no intention of making any significant changes to their sinful ways. True repentance is more than just saying we're sorry that we sinned and asking God to forgive us. We must also change from our selfish, sinful ways. We must bear fruits worthy of repentance. If we do not bear good fruit, we will be cut down and thrown into the fire. John moved mountains by encouraging people to change their hearts with God's help and to bear good fruit.

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Let's look at how he did that. **Luke 3:10-11**, *"So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."*

In John's instructions, he is helping the people to move the "mountain" of selfishness by redirecting some of their "soil" of time and resources toward those in the "valley" of need. In doing so, they are showing care and compassion toward their neighbor. This can benefit the hearts of both the giver and the receiver and make both hearts more receptive to the truth, forgiveness, obedience toward, and salvation of Jesus. These types of actions show love toward our neighbor and love toward God. They please God.

John gives further instructions to two specific groups of people in **Luke 3:12-14**,

"Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

God cares how we treat other people. It can be easy to take advantage of others when we are in a position to do so, particularly when such practices are common among other people in positions similar to ours. And when we start a habit of not treating everyone honestly and fairly, it can be very difficult to stop that habit, especially if we're receiving a financial or other benefit. If we truly desire to bear fruit by treating others the way God wants us to, we need to pray to God, believing that he will act, and we need to forgive trespasses against us. Then, God can forgive us and help move our "mountain" of selfishness and sin into the sea. (see **Mark 11:12-14** and **Mark 11:20-26**)

Also, when we treat everyone with care and compassion, people will notice that there is something different about us in a positive way. They can see God's love through us. He will be glorified. Often, an opportunity can present itself to share the gospel. This can happen more successfully if we truly are concerned for others and they can clearly see that concern.

Without the help of powerful machines, it would have been virtually impossible for humans to move the mountains between Castaic and Tejon in order to prepare the roadbed for that segment of Interstate 5. Similarly, without the help of the all-powerful God, it is impossible for us to move our mountains of sin and selfishness that can make our path to glory so difficult, or even impassable.

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The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah 40:3-5

A DOOR OPENS

Tom Bishop

There is a famous saying, "*When one door closes, another door opens*." The full quote gives more understanding: "*but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the ones which open for us.*" This popular adage, often attributed to Alexander Graham Bell, serves as a timeless reminder that setbacks and disappointments are often stepping stones to new opportunities. It encourages us to maintain a positive outlook, even in the face of adversity, and to believe that better things are yet to come.

It is not always obvious when a door is closed, and opening doors is not something that just happens spontaneously. It takes effort, thoughtfulness, and prayer to determine when to. It is also not a solitary task. When we work alone, it is more difficult to see the whole picture clearly.

Even Jesus, as he was doing ministry, sent people ahead to herald the word (**Luke 9:6-12**). A key phrase in this passage is, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of*

the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Christ knew that time was a precious commodity, and many hands make for quicker work

Paul is a perfect example of the door subject. Before Christ intervened, his path was to become a Pharisee. He studied the law and prophets under excellent teachers. He was sure his path was righteous when he dragged men and women into prison to stop "The Way" in its tracks.

Christ didn't just shut that door, but slammed it tight on the road to Damascus. Many new doors were opened that day. There were many positive responses to Paul's ministry. He was obviously a gifted teacher, although his analysis of his own in-person teaching skills was self-deprecating. He labored day and night to repair the damage from his pre-conversion efforts.

Even with his many successes, doors continued to close; still, he was not deterred. He simply moved on to the next opportunity. His old life friends were never far behind him, making every effort to destroy his successes. The phrase "*two steps forward and one step back*" applies very well to his ministry, but even there, he was always gaining a step.

The book of Acts lists multiple examples of doors slamming shut on him and what he did next. In **Acts 13:14-52**, he preached in Pisidian Antioch to Jews and Gentiles. **Acts 13:48-51** conclude,

> *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. And the door is shut. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium.*

This process was typical of many of the places where Paul preached the word during his ministry. His style was not just to preach until opposition made it impossible to continue, and then move on to the next opportunity. Sometimes he would return to those same places once the dust had settled to strengthen the believers (e.g., **Acts 14:23-28**).

Paul was not a one-man show. Other dedicated teachers traveled with him. Sometimes they worked together, and sometimes their paths diverged. See: **1 Timothy 1:3**, **Titus 1:5**, and **1 Thessalonians 3:2**.

Paul acknowledged the work of others who were working in the field. In **1 Corinthians 3:6**, Paul noted that while he planted the seed and Apollos watered, it was God who brought the growth. Apollos was a gifted speaker, and once he had been brought up to speed by Priscilla and Aquila (**Acts 18:24-26**), he was an extremely valuable tool in spreading the Gospel. The letter to the Corinthians follows up in the very next verse by saying, "*So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*" The ultimate arbiter in any of our earthly efforts is God.

Here are a few simple steps that may help when spreading the word in Christ's ministry.

1. Establish the groundwork for your dialogue before jumping into the meat of your message. If we establish a personal relationship with people, they are much more likely to be receptive to the message we bear.

2. If you don't get a positive response, move on, but don't be too hasty in any conclusion. All good things take time.

3. That doesn't mean that you should give up. It may just not be the right time. The seed may take a while to take root. Come back later. It may also be possible that someone else may be able to open the door that was closed to you.

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Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may known how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:2-6

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If you plan to attend, please register so they can estimate attendance for housing arrangements, class planning, and meal preparation.

The congregation looks forward to seeing you and studying God's Word together!

https://2026oneweek.my.canva.site/

Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; let such as love Your salvation say continually, 'The Lord be Magnified!'

Psalm 40:16

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2026

June 13-14.....Vandalia, IA
June 29-July 3.....Midwest Bible Campout
July 18.....Family VBS, Old Lamine, Rural Blackwater, MO
July 26-31.....One-Week Meeting, Riverside Rd, Ozark, MO
August 23.....White Oak, MO

Additional details for these and other upcoming meetings can be found by visitiong the Gospel Message website. You can use the QR code below to navigate to the relavent page.

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