

The Key to Overcoming Inertia

Written by Bill Perkins

I've always been fascinated by trains. I used to lay in bed at night, before falling asleep, and imagine climbing into a freight car and traveling across the country. Even now when I hear a faraway train whistle from the deck of my house it stirs up an urge to travel.

I've also developed a curious compulsion that's triggered while waiting for a train to pass at a railroad crossing--I count cars. A long train can have 110 loaded cars--each weighing 100 tons.

One Car at a Time

Have you ever wondered how a locomotive can overcome the inertia of so much weight? We're talking about 12,000 tons. Even though the locomotive may weigh 270,000 pounds and makes 3,200 horsepower (some generate 7,000 horsepower) generating over 64,000 pounds of thrust it could never pull 12,000 tons from a dead stop. The fact is the locomotive doesn't pull them all at once. It only pulls one car at a time. The engineer does this by backing up the locomotive so that all of the slack is removed from the couplers as the cars are bunched together.

While in motion, the brakes are set enough to prevent coasting, and the train comes to a stop. The engine then starts forward having only to pull one car at a time to get it rolling, which it can easily do for about an inch, then the second car is pulled, and so on until the slack comes out of all the couplers. By the time the caboose is pulled, the engine is sometimes traveling as much as 10 to 15 miles an hour.

That would explain why the caboose crew is taught to set facing the engine with their back against the seat, and their heads tight against the headrest. As they hear the machine gun-like pop-pop-pop of the couplers they know they're about to jerk forward. (Notice that the train in the picture has four locomotives and 200 cars--just do the math on that baby).

Once moving, a train can crash through a steel-reinforced concrete wall that is five-feet thick. And we've all seen images of cars and trucks unfortunate enough to get hit by a train.

A One-Inch Block of Wood

But all of that forward momentum can be prevented by placing a one-inch block of wood in front of and behind the eight drive wheels of the locomotive.

You've Guessed the Point

I suspect you've already guessed the point I'm about to make. Right? God doesn't expect you to instantly pull the entire weight of the vision he's given you. The dream may be too big for you to realize in a moment. The inertia may be too great for you to quickly overcome.

But if you'll start, one car at a time, you can create enough momentum to pull the next car and the next and the next. The end result may not be felt or seen for some time--like the caboose at the end of a train. But once in motion, the momentum of what you've got going will be unstoppable.

A Few Who Told a Few

I think that's why Jesus started his world-wide movement with a few men who told a few who told a few who told a few. And it's why, in the parable of the talents, the master praised the faithful servant by saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:21).

This week I want to encourage you not to worry so much about the entire weight God has called you to pull. Instead, focus on the single task at hand. Apply yourself to getting one car to move an inch. If you'll do that, your forward momentum will carry ahead what follows. But first, find the blocks that are keeping you from moving, and knock them out from under your wheels.