

A Little Stroll Through Space

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There were giants in the earth in those days.
-Genesis 6:4

Imagine, if you will, that you and I are giants. Not just ordinary giants, but giants so large that, compared to us, the Earth is a blue ping pong ball about 1-1/2 inches in diameter.

If you can imagine that, let's take a walk. (Even giants need exercise.)

When we begin, we may appear to be walking very slowly. But appearances can be deceiving: as super-sized giants, we'll be moving extremely fast. Consider:

We'll assume (for the sake of convenience) that both of us are 6 feet tall. That's 48 times larger than a ping pong ball. Since the Earth is 8,000 miles in diameter, as supergiants we'll be 384,000 miles tall.

If we also assume that our normal walking strides are half our height, or 3 feet, each super-giant step we take will cover 192,000 miles. At a walking pace of 2 mph, we'd be moving faster than the speed of light, so we'll slow down a bit. The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second; I don't know about you, but that's plenty fast enough for me! At that speed, we could circle the Earth nearly 7-1/2 times in one second!

So lace up your Air Jordans and let's begin.

*In a little more than a second we pass the bb-sized **Moon**. It looks like a roly-poly bug curled up.

*In 8.3 minutes we pass the **Sun**, which is as large as a 12.5-ft. water tower compared to our ping pong ball Earth. (*See the photo, opposite. -Ed.*)

*Three minutes later we pass sun-baked **Mercury**, the size of a marble.

*Three minutes after that we pass **Venus**. It looks like a cloudy crystal ball shrunk down to the size of a golf ball.

*About 20 minutes into our speed-of-light walk we pass tiny **Mars**, about half as big as our pint-sized Earth.

*An hour and a half beyond the Sun we stroll past **Jupiter**, the size of a washing machine.

***Saturn** is next, 37 walking minutes beyond Jupiter. The rings are lovely; we'd like to stop and examine them, but we still have a long way to go.

*Next comes **Uranus**, nearly an hour and a half beyond Saturn.

*Finally, after more than 4-1/2 hours of walking at the speed of light, we pass **Neptune**.

Are you tired? I am, so, let's stop walking and ride the rest of the way. We aren't finished yet; in fact, we've just begun. Our destination is **Alpha Centauri**, the 6th-brightest star in the night sky.

At a distance of 4.3 light-years from Earth, Alpha Centauri is the second-closest star to the Earth besides our Sun. (Its companion star, **Proxima Centauri**, is slightly closer at 4.2 l.y. from us.) But on the scale we're using in our fantasy walk, Alpha Centauri is just 75,300 miles from Earth.

Of course, we'll need a vehicle large enough to carry a pair of super-sized giants. When that vehicle reaches 60 mph, we will be traveling at 28 times the speed of light.

For safety's sake, let's hope there are no other cars nearby when we accelerate to 134 mph, or 64 times the speed of light. (If you're a *Star Trek* fan, that would be Warp 4.) We may as well take a nap and get plenty of rest, because at Warp 4 speed the trip to Alpha Centauri will take us 23 days.

What's that you say? You can't afford to stay away that long? Okay, let's floorboard it and accelerate to Warp 8, the fastest speed that **Captain Kirk's** *Enterprise* could go. It's 512 times the speed of light. At that rate – which at our scale translates to 1,075 mph -- we'll reach Alpha Centauri in three days.

If you want to get there faster than that – well, you're out of luck.

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