

RELIGION IN THE **REAL** WORLD

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Where's *My* Miracle?

The unfairness struck me at a most inopportune moment. I was scheduled to offer the opening prayer before a packed sanctuary when, suddenly, I didn't know what to say to God.¹

From my place on the platform, I could see past the podium to where my aging father sat—a spot he'd staked out each Sabbath morning for years. Beside him was an empty place now occupied by his well-worn Bible. Just weeks before, my mother would have been sitting there, but she had died of cancer. Now both the pew and my heart contained a void.

The speaker at that moment was a woman a little younger than I. Flushed with excitement, she was telling how her mother, suffering from cancer, had been healed. “The doctors were as surprised as we were,” she told her smiling, attentive listeners. “God stepped in and performed a miracle for my mom.” Then she added, as happy tears moistened her cheeks, “Thank you for your prayers on her behalf. They were certainly answered. Praise God!”

“Praise God!” the congregation echoed.

She turned and walked off the platform, leaving the podium waiting for the next participant in the service. That participant was supposed to be me.

I'd spent my life reading, teaching, preaching, studying, counseling, and writing about God. I'd always considered Him to be the answer to every question, the hope beyond every disappointment, and the comfort for every fear. When my mother first told me she had cancer, I began praying for her healing and never stopped. But she died despite my—and many others'—prayers.

Where was God when my mother lay helpless in a hospital room? Where was God when her beautiful heart faltered and then fell silent for the first time in seventy-eight years? Where was *my* miracle?

I rose to my feet and began walking toward the podium. I could see my

dad sitting there alone, watching me with affection. He was waiting for me to pray to the God who had healed one person while letting another—someone precious to us both—slip away.

Hot potato

The question of miracles is a hot potato in the hands of many Christians. Some say miracles don't exist outside the pages of Holy Writ. Others insist that they've been direct recipients of supernatural manifestations of God's power. Looking at an event, if they see no explanation of how it occurred, they conclude that "God did it."

I believe this line of thinking contains one nagging problem. What constitutes "supernatural" changes with scientific discoveries—sometimes dramatically.

On a cold winter day, a young boy falls through the ice of his favorite pond. First responders hurry to the scene, and after thirty minutes of frantic searching, find his limp body and bring it to the surface. As expected, they feel no pulse.

A generation ago the boy would be considered dead. Not so today. Medical science has discovered that the life-force within a human body can become suspended in cold environments, such as icy ponds or snowy avalanches. Time isn't always the main determination of whether brain damage has occurred. With proper action, such victims can be revived with little or no ill effects. They can be "brought back to life." Actually, life never left them. It just hid itself in deep hibernation. Doctors even have a phrase that supports this finding. Before they pronounce someone dead, that patient must be "*warm* and dead." Barring traumatic, life-threatening damage to the body, if the person is cold—if the body's temperature has been lowered substantially—there remains a chance for revival even hours after the event.²

So do we label the recovery of a boy pulled from icy waters thirty minutes after he drowned in them a supernatural miracle? That's exactly what we would have called it a generation ago.

Or consider this story I heard directly from a woman I interviewed for a CHIP (Complete Health Improvement Program) radio broadcast. She'd received a death sentence from her doctor: "You have such advanced heart disease that we can't fix it. Go home and put your affairs in order."

That's when she heard about the power of plant-based nutrition. She abruptly changed her diet. Out went all animal products, refined foods, and

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processed oils, and in came whole fruits, vegetables, nuts, beans, legumes, and seeds. Within a year, she had dropped two hundred pounds. She rides her bicycle fifteen miles a day. Her death sentence has been lifted. A miracle? No. The changes she made to her lifestyle established new, healthy habits.

For centuries, hospitals were considered death houses, a cancer diagnosis was a one-way street to the graveyard, and up until the mid-twentieth century, a simple infection could set the stage for disaster. But by the “miracle” of research, hospitals have become hostels of hope for millions each year. Many deadly cancers have met their match. Infection’s destructive power is being mitigated.

So those who insist they’ve been the recipient of a miracle are in good company. We’ve *all* been so blessed at one time or another. We just didn’t call it that because we now understand how things work and how outcomes can be altered dramatically if given a chance.

More is less

There’s another element to miracles that needs to be considered. The closer we align our lives to how God intended for us to live, the fewer miraculous, supernatural events are needed to keep us going. We may not even require one except for the overarching miracle of staying alive in a world dominated by an evil power that’s 100 percent dedicated to killing us.

By keeping our minds and bodies healthy through proper diet, common-sense exercise, and the reduction of stress that trusting in and worshipping our heavenly Father brings, we may enjoy “none of these diseases” (Exodus 15:26, KJV) from which our less dedicated coinhabitants of this world suffer. Our hearts aren’t “failing . . . [us] for fear” (Luke 21:26, KJV). Our cheerful spirits don’t “drieth the bones” (Proverbs 17:22, KJV).

According to Dr. James Marcum, a cardiologist and author of the book *The Ultimate Prescription*, if we remove smoking, drinking, riotous living, cancer-promoting foods (animal products in all forms), and toss in proper hydration (using water, not soda or coffee), sufficient sleep at night, along with large doses of unselfish love, the need for miraculous intervention is greatly diminished.³ We don’t need a miracle. *We are* the miracle.

Even if we’ve ignored God’s guidelines or find ourselves suffering from the sin-generated effects of being six thousand years from the hand of the Creator, the miraculous power to stay alive, to heal, and to overcome disease that God implanted in each one of us can kick in when needed most. That, I

believe, is what saved the lady's mother. At other times, we may be too weak, too damaged, or too empty of resources to fight back, and we die. But that doesn't mean healing has failed. It's just been postponed.

The difference

Two individuals pray to God. One pleads for rain to water his crops. His ailing neighbor begs God to keep the land dry so he can plow his field the moment his strength returns. No matter what happens that day, someone is going to call it an answered prayer—a miracle wrought by faith.

If we're honest with ourselves, we tend to label something a miracle when what happens is to our benefit. That's exactly what the lady at the podium did: she praised God for the miraculous healing of her mother. Yet I asked for the same miracle and my mother died. Was I missing something?

I believe I was.

Someday my mom and I will be reunited. She'll be completely healed. What makes the two outcomes different? Timing.

If we label only those events that benefit us as miracles, we're overlooking an important truth. We're *all* recipients of the miraculous. We're *all* subject to divine intervention. We will *all* enjoy complete restoration of health and well-being. It's just a matter of timing. I must be willing to allow God's divine clock to tick away the days, years, and centuries as His story is played out before the watching universe. I must allow the randomness of sin, the unfairness of evil, the one-sidedness of circumstance to rule my world a little longer until the day Christ returns and restores that "one pulse of harmony" throughout time and space.⁴ Until then, some moms will live, and some moms will die.

I stepped to the podium and smiled down at the congregation. "Let's bow our heads for prayer," I invited. As the sanctuary settled into silence, I closed my eyes and spoke words freshly minted in my heart: "Father, this morning, here in this church, I thank You for miracles."

I stole a quick glance at my dad. He sat there, eyes tightly closed, his wrinkled hand resting gently on the Bible occupying the empty seat beside him.

1. This chapter, with minor editorial differences, was previously published as "Where's My Miracle?" *Signs of the Times*, May 2013.

2. Sam Parnia, *Erasing Death: The Science That Is Rewriting the Boundaries Between Life and Death* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), 259–292.

3. James Marcum, *The Ultimate Prescription* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011).

4. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005), 678.