

How To Get A Miracle

1. Warm up: Jeff told about how, when he was a kid, he heard the Bible story about God giving Gideon a miraculous sign. So Jeff asked for a sign. He asked God to turn his green truck red while he was asleep. God didn't do it. ☹ When you were a kid did you ever ask God for something silly?

2. There are lots of miracle stories in the Bible. In our own time, we also often hear stories of miracles. We're told that the Apostle Paul himself worked mighty miracles. With just a word, he healed a young woman tormented by an evil spirit. With a simple touch, he restored the life of a boy who'd fallen from a third story window. Acts 19:11 says, "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them. . . ." Yet when Paul himself really needed a miracle of healing, he couldn't get it. Read Second Corinthians 12:1-10, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. As we discussed last week, Paul felt the need to defend himself as a legitimate apostle because certain other Christian leaders were questioning his legitimacy and stirring up conflict in Corinthian Church. So in the first part of our reading, Paul defends himself by "boasting" about visions God gave him. One of those visions was of heaven. Look again at what Paul says in verse 4? What do you think he means? What does verse 4 tells us about heaven?
 - b. After "boasting" a bit to validate his apostolic authority, Paul then reverses course and speaks openly of his weakness. He tells the story of his "thorn in the flesh," probably a problem with his eyes that made him nearly blind. Most of us have physical ailments of some sort, or other types of limitations, that we wish God would take away because we feel they hold us back. Do you? What are they?
 - c. Paul's first instinct was to ask God for a miracle of healing. After all, God had used Paul to work great miracles for others. How do you imagine Paul felt when God wouldn't give him a similar miracle of healing?
 - d. When in your life have you asked God for a big miracle, only to be disappointed? How did that feel?

3. We all experience what Paul did – unanswered prayers for miracles. Yet we continue asking because, if human experience teaches us anything, it's that sometimes miracles do happen.
 - a. Have you ever witnessed a miracle or been close to someone who has? What happened?
 - b. What are the strongest logical arguments against miracles? In spite of those arguments, do you believe in miracles? Why or why not?

- c. If God would give you one great miracle in your life right now – one wish granted – what would it be?
4. Unfortunately, we all know that miracles are rare and unpredictable. In today’s scripture, Paul offers some thoughtful insights as to why. After asking for miraculous healing of his ailment, Paul says, “God said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. . . . For whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” II Corinthians 12:9-10. With these words, Paul is introducing us to a different kind of miracle. When we think of a miracle, we typically envision a miraculous change of our outer circumstances, i.e., an overt miracle of physics or biology. What Paul actually received was miraculous strength to triumph over his affliction, i.e., a covert miracle of spirit.
- a. Jeff asked, “Which is the greater miracle – God miraculously restoring Paul’s eyesight or God miraculously using a nearly blind man to travel the world, conquer the Roman Empire with Good News of Jesus, and write a third of the New Testament?” How would you answer that question – which was the greater miracle – and why?
 - b. Jeff said, “If you are a person of faith, in every single situation a miracle is available – and will be delivered – if you have faith. But which kind of miracle – overt or covert – that’s up to God. We always want an overt miracle of physics and biology. But God’s purposes are often most powerfully accomplished through covert miracles of spirit.” Do you believe that, for a person of faith, a miracle is available in every situation?
 - c. Jeff shared a story about a man racked with cancer who wanted a miracle cure. Instead, prayer resulted in a miracle peace and joy settling over him, so that his last few days of life were his best days ever. That’s an example of a covert miracle. Do you agree that “God’s purposes are often most powerfully accomplished through covert miracles of spirit?” Why is that?
 - d. Have you ever experienced a covert miracle of spirit, i.e., a situation where despite great weakness or affliction, God did something great through you or through that circumstance?
5. Jeff suggested that we learn to pray the way Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Matthew 26:39, “Jesus prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.’ Yet not what I want, but what you want. . . . If this cup cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” In other words, Jesus began by asking for an overt miracle – for a miraculous deliverance from his outer circumstance of impending death. But he was also open to the fact that God might want him to triumph through the cross, rather than escaping it. Does that way of praying make sense to you? Think again about your answer to Question 3.c. above. If God doesn’t give you the

overt miracle you'd like to have, what possible form might the covert miracle take?
In other words, how might God's strength be manifest in your weakness?

II Corinthians 12:1-10

It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ²I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. ³And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— ⁴was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

⁵On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. ⁶But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷even considering the exceptional character of the revelations.

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too conceited. ⁸Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹but God said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.