

God, Do You Still Work Miracles Today?

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God, I Have a Question Series

John 5.1-10

If you read the Bible for the first time, or even for the 101st time, what you are going to be struck with is how many miracles are reported in the pages of the Bible. You have the splitting of the Red Sea in the Old Testament, and the fall of the walls of Jericho as the Israelites march around the city. You have Daniel miraculously saved when he was in the lion's den, and Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego miraculously preserved even while they were in a fiery furnace.

And, of course, when we turn to the New Testament we read of miracle after miracle in the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. So we read of Jesus 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, walking on water, healing a man who was born blind, raising the dead. And we read of his followers in the book of Acts who were also working miracles. Peter heals a man who is paralyzed in the temple, and raises a woman named Tabitha from the dead.

You can't read the Bible without discovering miracle stories everywhere. And so the natural question that emerges is this: if God is the same God that we read about in the Bible, why don't we see miracles today? We have the same God; we have the same Jesus; we have the same Holy Spirit. Does this Triune God work miracles today?

I've been doing a series since Easter dealing with some of the questions that many churches tend to avoid. A number of the questions that I've dealt with have to do with hot-button cultural issues like "God, How Should Christians Relate to Gay People?" or "God, What Do You Think About the Taking of Life?" or even "God, How Do We Stay Civil in an Uncivil Society?" But today's question really concerns the nature of the Christianity that we're inviting people to practice. Is the Christianity that we're going to practice in the 21st century essentially non-miraculous? Does it only deal with the very important issues of justice, mercy and compassion? Is our Christianity there only to deal with getting us ready for death? Or must any biblically rooted Christian faith require that we also expect to see miracles today?

I've called my message, "God, Do You Still Work Miracles Today?" Let's pray.

John 5:1–10 (NIV)

5 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great

number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [4]
5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

Now, the first question that many 21st century people would ask when we read a story like this is: did this really happen. If you were there by the Pool of Bethesda on that particular day, would you have seen Jesus come and miraculously heal a paralyzed man? When we’re dealing with the question, “God, do you still work miracles today?” the first problem we encounter is the problem of belief.

The problem of belief

Let me give you the setting for this particular miracle. Here is what we read in vv. 1-2:

John 5:1–2 (NIV)

5 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.
2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

We don’t know what Jewish Festival it was that Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate. It may have been Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, or it may have been Shavuot, the Feast of Pentecost; we don’t know. But we read in v. 2:

John 5:2 (NIV)

2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

Bethesda means “house of flowing,” or “house of outpouring.” A century ago, critics of the Bible said there was no such place as Bethesda. That this whole incident was made up by the Apostle John. John really didn’t know the geography of Jerusalem very well because whoever authored the gospel of John was writing at a considerable distance from Jerusalem and was really ignorant of what Jerusalem was like before 70 AD when the Romans destroyed it. They said the reason John said there were five porticos there was because this was symbolic of the five books of Moses.

But archeologists at the turn of the 20th century actually dug up the Pool of Bethesda and they found it, indeed, had five porticos.

Then critics said that John had misnamed it. But in the late 1940's when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, we found the name of the Pool of Bethesda in one of the ancient scrolls. The scroll had been hidden away for 2000 years and it contained a reference to the healing pool at Bethesda. I actually got to see the Pool of Bethesda a few years ago when I was in Jerusalem.

You see, friends, the Bible is not simply a book of good moral stories like Aesop's Fables which never really happened, or a book of philosophy like Plato's Republic. The Bible is a book of history. In other words, if you dig down in the ground in Israel, as archeologists have been doing for the last couple of centuries, you are going to be able to dig up the stuff that the Bible talks about. It's right there. You can see it and touch it. This is reality. It is not an alternative universe or a book of myths.

OK, so the Pool of Bethesda actually existed in Jesus' day and he could have been there. But how do we know that he actually worked a miracle there by supernaturally healing a paralyzed man other than John's account in John 5? It is really interesting, but one of the best attested to facts of Jesus' life is the fact that he was a miracle-worker. All of the many ancient sources that comment on Jesus agree that Jesus performed miracles.

Not only the four Gospels and the Book of Acts and all of the letters we have in the New Testament and the Book of Revelation, but also non-Christian testimony from both Jewish and pagan sources. There is an enormous amount of material about Jesus outside of the Bible. And both Jewish historians writing at the time, as well as Roman historians, are in agreement. Jesus did miracles. Sometimes they say he did magic. But there was something supernatural about Jesus' life that all of the ancient observers of Jesus, not only in the Bible, but outside the Bible, Jews and Romans, agree.

So, why do we have such a hard time believing in Jesus' miracles even though we have all of these documents written by people who were friendly to Jesus and written by people who were hostile to Jesus? They agree that Jesus was a miracle-worker.

Well, without getting really complicated here, the Western world and we today are children of the Enlightenment. The intellectual movement grew in 17th and 18th century Europe in which people put their complete confidence in human reason and became increasingly skeptical concerning faith-claims in God. We put all of our faith in people and we took our faith away from God.

Now there was an Enlightenment philosopher named David Hume. He was Scottish and lived in the 18th century. If you've ever taken an Intro to Philosophy class in college, you may have had to read some of David Hume. Essentially, one of the things that Hume did was argue against the possibility of miracles. His argument was really a circular one. He essentially said this:

We know that miracles do not happen because no one living today has ever experienced a miracle.

And when Hume was offered testimony of people living in his day who said, “Wait a minute. I’ve experienced a miracle,” Hume dismisses them saying,

Their testimony of miracles can be dismissed since we know that miracles do not occur.

Miracles don’t happen because we don’t have any testimony of anyone living today who says they’ve experienced a miracle. And when someone says, “Wait a minute, I have experienced a miracle,” we dismiss that because we know that miracles don’t occur.

Now, 21st century atheists regularly quote Hume. I find that amazing since Hume was such a thorough-going racist in his writings. He readily admits that part of the reason he dismisses testimony of miracles from his own day was that many times these testimonies came from dark-skinned people and we can’t trust their testimony.

Over against this skepticism from Hume and the Enlightenment philosophy, here are the facts. Not only do we read about miracles in the Bible, but we read about miracles throughout the history of the church. Craig Keener, who is one of this world’s preeminent New Testament scholars, has written a 2-volume work titled

Book Cover – Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts by Craig Keener

I have never read anything in my life that is more convincing regarding the reality of the miraculous in our world than these 2 volumes by Craig Keener. He is a wonderful scholar and footnotes everything extensively. If you want to have your faith inspired and you are a reader, I would encourage you to pick up Keener’s books on miracles. You will read story after story of the miraculous. What Keener does is he first traces the miraculous miracles in church history.

Miracles in church history

The first few centuries of the Christian era were filled with healings and deliverances from the demonic. In fact, historians have said that in the first three centuries of the church the major way the church expanded in the world was through healing and deliverance. A significant factor in the conversion of the Roman Empire from paganism to Christianity was miracles.

In the 5th century, the brilliant St. Augustine, who was one of the most learned men of his day, did not believe in miracles in his early Christian ministry. But later on he completely retracted his earlier view because he had personal experiences of miracle after miracle

happening in his own church and with his own friends. Augustine actually created a depository of documents in his city in which he carefully documented the miracles that he and others in his church saw.

For example, one of his friends was a government official named Innocent. He was suffering from a long-term painful abscess that a previous surgery had failed to correct. Anesthesia wasn't available way back in those days and patients who went through painful surgeries often went into shock and died. And so Innocent was terrified at facing another surgery. He didn't think he could handle the pain.

Augustine and a few of his friends prayed for this man named Innocent. They were actually distracted because Innocent was crying so loud, begging God to heal him, so Augustine didn't feel their prayers were particularly effective. The next morning Augustine and his friends returned for Innocent's surgery. The doctors removed the bandages where this horrible abscess had been and they saw that flesh had grown over the area and it was completely healed.

Augustine records many such miracles that he personally witnessed.

During the Middle Ages the church continued to work miracles most commonly in the context of ground-breaking evangelism. Pagan Scotland was converted through miracles; so was England and Ireland. During the Protestant Reformation some of the Reformers reacted to Roman Catholic stories of miracles because many of these stories were associated with what were called relics including supposed piece of bread that Jesus multiplied in feeding the 5000. And then there were all these supposed nails taken from the cross in various places in Europe. Luther said there was enough wood from the cross to make Noah's Ark. And there was the supposed lance that pierced Jesus' side, only there were multiple lances in multiple places. And there was supposedly one of Jesus' baby teeth. In fact, there was his umbilical cord and even a piece of skin from his circumcision in some places.

The Reformers dismissed a lot of this as superstition especially when money was attached to going and visiting one of these relics. Nevertheless, the Protestant Reformers almost uniformly believed that miracles were occurring in their day. Martin Luther records a miraculous healing that he received and a miraculous healing that his wife received. He writes extensively about his friend, Philip Melancthon, who miraculously recovered from his deathbed after Luther personally prayed for his friend, Philip.

We see miracles continuing during the revivals of the 18th century. John Wesley records miracle after miracle that he personally saw in his ministry. And then what had been a stream became a mighty river of miracles and healings in the 19th century among holiness teachers and in the 20th century with the birth of modern Pentecostalism.

Keener's volumes contains hundreds of stories of miracles especially in the majority world. Let me tell you just one story from a man named Ed Wilkinson, who Dr. Keener interviewed. Ed Wilkinson is a neuro-psychologist. He was very skeptical about contemporary claims of miracles. He thought that a lot of this was really a product of neuroses, a way to avoid dealing with reality.

A few years ago Ed's 8-year old son, Brad, was found to have two holes in his heart. His condition impaired his lungs in addition to his heart. Surgery was scheduled for June. As June approached, Brad began giving away his toys because the surgery was really dangerous and there was a very real possibility that little 8-year old Brad would die.

One day he went to his father and said, "Can Jesus heal me?" Ed was overwhelmed by the question and said, "Well, let me get back to you on that." A few days later he was reading the Bible in Philippians 4.13,

Philippians 4:13 (NIV)

13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

He felt that the Lord had spoken to him that God could heal him. And even if he didn't, his son would have eternal life. There happened to be a meeting for healing at Ed's church and so he decided to bring his son, Brad. Most of the healing that was done that evening was emotional healing. Ed was pretty disappointed. But at the end of the meeting, the healing evangelist said, "Now, if there is any need for physical healing, why don't you come up." Ed brought 8-year old Brad up front. The healing evangelist asked Brad, "Do you believe that Jesus can heal you." Brad said, "Yes." The evangelist offered a simple prayer and that was it.

The following Sunday they went to the university hospital in their city and Brad went in for surgery. Ed wasn't allowed to go in. An hour later, the pediatric cardiologist, along with the pulmonologist and the risk management director of the hospital came out and said, "Ed, we need to talk with you." Ed thought, "There is something really wrong. The surgery was supposed to take 3 hours and then my son is supposed to go into recovery. They're done after an hour; something is wrong."

They took Ed into a room and showed film on a wall taken the day before. He said, "You see where the blood was leaking from one chamber to the next?" And then the surgeon showed another film and said, "A wall has grown where the leak has been." Ed was really traumatized. He said, "Where is my son? What happened to my son?" The surgeon said, "He's in the recovery room. There's nothing wrong with him." The day before he clearly had two holes in his heart. Now he didn't have any. The surgeon said, "We've occasionally seen this with infants, but I've never seen anything like this with an 8-year old one day after two holes were clearly visible on the x-rays."

Does God work miracles today? We not only face the problem of belief, but we face the problem,

The problem of anti-supernatural bias

Because of our Enlightenment heritage in the Western world when we hear stories of the miraculous immediately we wonder: maybe the original condition was misdiagnosed. Yes, I know you feel better and I know you claim that you were healed as a result of receiving prayer, but maybe you never had the condition that you think you had.

A friend of mine shared a personal testimony of a woman he prayed for who had severe epilepsy from the age of 6 to the age of 26. She was suddenly healed from that epilepsy after a session of prayer. She came back and her EEG was entirely normal. Her doctor, unable to believe the change, repeated the test two more times over the next few weeks. Finally, they accepted that she, indeed, was well. But they denied that this change could have come about as a result of prayer. They concluded that she must have been misdiagnosed. They had been treating her for 20 years for epilepsy.

Our anti-supernatural bias is so strong that frequently we engage in an argument that goes this way. If you claim you were healed, but you were receiving no medical treatment beforehand, then who knows if you even had the condition to begin with? And if you were receiving medical treatment beforehand and say that as a result of prayer, you were healed, we know that actually the reason you were healed is because of the medical treatment and not the prayer. You're darned if you do; and darned if you don't.

Let me tell you a story of healing that I personally witnessed. I have a good friend named Mike, who also suffered from epilepsy for about 20 years. He was taking 30 medications a day and was having several big and hundreds of small seizures every day. The doctors wanted to do brain surgery to sever the brain hemispheres because there was a potential that this would cut down on the electrical impulses. But the surgery also meant that he would have to have 2-3 years of rehabilitation. Mike didn't want the surgery.

Mike was in my small group and we prayed for him. We saw the power of God regularly come on Mike, but he wasn't healed.

I was going to go to a meeting with John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard Movement, in New York. John had an incredible healing ministry. So I asked John if he would be willing to pray for Mike and John said, "Sure. Just bring him to New York." So a few of us from Vineyard Columbus drove to New York with Mike. We had a private meeting with John and another man, who also had a healing ministry.

John simply said, "Holy Spirit, come!" Mike said it felt like a tornado went through his body. At another point, John felt the issue might be demonic and he forcefully commanded demons to leave. Mike flew off his chair.

After about an hour they finished praying. John encouraged Mike to get an EEG and he told him, “Don’t quit taking your medications, but you need to check with a doctor to see if you are healed.”

Well, Mike worked at the OSU Medical Center. He actually walked over to the doctor’s office and said he wanted an EEG. And incredibly, the doctor agreed and scheduled him for the next day. When the report came back his EEG was completely changed. From that day in 1989 when Mike received prayer till today Mike never had another grand mal seizure.

A few years after this incident Mike told the doctors what he had experienced. And the doctors said, “Oh Mike, you weren’t healed as a result of prayer. You were healed as a result of your medication. The medication finally took effect.” What an extraordinary coincidence. At the very moment Mike received prayer, he never had another grand mal seizure again, even though he was taking medicine for decades and it wasn’t helping.

Talk about an anti-supernatural bias. Sometimes if someone says they are healed, the response will be “Well, your condition was psychosomatic.” Now, there are many conditions that are psychosomatic and that a change of our emotional life will affect us physically. But it is hard to say that the closing of two holes in an 8-year old’s heart, or the complete disappearance of a cancerous tumor, or the healing of someone who is born blind is simply psychosomatic.

Sometimes doctors will say, “It’s just an anomaly. I know you claim that this is a miracle, but it is just an anomaly.” An anomaly in medical speak is simply “something we don’t understand.” In any other context, if we had this amazing coincidence of a simple cause of taking a pill and an extraordinary result, complete healing, we would say, “Hmmm, these two things are probably linked.” When we have this amazing coincidence of someone getting prayed for and then an extraordinary result, we say, “No, those two things are probably not linked – the prayer and the extraordinary result.”

You say, “Rich, if miracles actually occur, why we not see way more documentation in academic medical journals?”

I think there are a few reasons. Dr. Keener, in his second volume, helpfully cites a sociological study that found that most scientists who have a deep religious faith are silent about that faith because they fear disdain from their peers and discrimination in their careers. Some who have been vocal about their faith cited specific instances of discrimination. A number of doctors said they feared writing about specific healings they believed were the result of prayer for fear of losing prestigious appointments. They feared not receiving tenure.

The scientific community, by and large, is anti-religious. In a recent study only 1/3 of professors in the natural science profess belief in God compared to 95% of the general public. 1/3 of science professors at elite institutions agree that there was

No positive role for religious people, institutions, and ideas on their university campuses.

Despite this pressure there are actually academic articles written about the power of prayer in bringing about healings. But there is a strong bias against these kinds of things.

Well, Rich, if miracles occur why don't we see more miracles? There is a problem of belief. There is a problem of anti-supernatural bias. And then there is the problem of what I call technique.

The problem of technique

This man had worked out in his mind how his healing was going to come about. He explained it to Jesus in v. 7.

John 5:7 (NIV)

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

I love this. Can you imagine? He is explaining to Jesus, the one true healer. Jesus, let me tell you how this healing is going to come about. Have you ever done that? I've got to somehow get to my healing pool, Jesus. My emotional healing is going to come about when my mother finally acknowledges what she's done wrong. My emotional healing is finally going to come about when I have a baby. My life will finally come into line, Jesus, when you give me a husband, or a wife. We constantly present to Jesus what we believe our healing pool is rather than Jesus, you are my answer. I don't need a healing pool. What I need is you.

One of the things we discover in the ministry of Jesus is the absolute absence of any technique in healing. There are so many different patterns and methods in Jesus' healing. Sometimes he healed people with a touch, as he did with Peter's mother-in-law. Sometimes it was with a prayer like with Lazarus when he raised him from the dead. Sometimes it was a word of command, "Go. Rise up. Pick up your mat and walk." On several occasions he used spit and mud when he healed the deaf man in the Gospel of Mark, or the blind man in the Gospel of John. Other times he required the person to demonstrate faith. Stretch out your hand. Sometimes he healed in public, sometimes in private. Sometimes Jesus prayed more than once.

There is no technique. This is not magic. So we want to know do we need to stand a certain way when I pray. Do I need to put my hand on their head or shoulder? We think

there had to be some kind of way to manipulate the forces and if we can just figure it out it will be like putting a quarter in the gumball machine and getting a gumball out from the bottom.

No special prayer

When people hear of a miracle, an undeniable miracle, a miracle of the healing of infertility or the healing of a fatally ill child, the healing of someone from Hodgkin's or from cancer, they often believe that there must be some technique, some human formula that produced the miracle. Over centuries, the church has developed special prayers, special rites, and special rituals to pray or to perform for different kinds of problems. We don't see people in the New Testament performing some special ritual or special rites, praying a specially written prayer for this occasion.

Now I would suggest that most of us do not know how to pray biblical prayers for healing or for miracles. We often pray precisely in the way that Jesus told us not to pray. Jesus in Matthew 6.7 tells his followers:

Matthew 6:7 (NIV)

7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

We often fall into the trap of believing that God will not release a miracle unless we pray some lengthy, flowery prayer. I can't tell you how many times people have prayed for me a prayer that was well-meaning, it was meant to make me feel good, but it wasn't biblical prayer to God. Have you ever heard a prayer that goes like this, "Oh, Lord, Rich your servant is in need? He's done so much good for others. He constantly labors. He's such a godly person." You know, when somebody prays like that for me, internally I feel worse. I think, "Oh, God, help me. You know that I'm not worthy of anything."

The longer they go on about my holiness and how wonderful I am, as I stand before God, the more unholy I feel. By the end of one of these flowery, flattering prayers about me, I feel like falling on my face, beating on my chest saying "God have mercy on me, a sinner."

Do you know how to pray biblical prayers? Don't pray as if God awarded us miracles on the basis of our wordiness or our worthiness rather than simply as an act of his grace. Don't remind God of the recipient's goodness or worthiness. None of us deserve anything at the hands of God. We don't earn miracles. God's answers to prayers are acts of his grace, his loving kindness.

And don't inform God of the specifics of the medical diagnosis. God knows better than the physician precisely what the medical condition is and what caused it. Have you ever heard a prayer that sounds like a doctor informing a colleague of a medical diagnosis?

“Well, as you know, Lord, Joe seems to have cracked the upper portion of his tibia when he slipped skiing last Wednesday. There appears to be some collateral ligament damage, swelling around the knee, arterial involvement.” You don’t need to inform God.

You don’t need to beg God. As if God was a stingy person whose pity you had to invoke by getting on your hands and knees and beg. You know, our prayers reveal our thoughts about God. When someone is begging God, what is their image of God, that he’s Ebenezer Scrooge? That he’s the orphanage keeper in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver* that we have to come before him trembling and, you know, “please sir, can I have some more.” We pray unbiblically when we beg.

And we pray unbiblically and unworthy of God when we beat around the bush. Lord, help him to accept his position knowing that he is loved by you, knowing that you have his best in mind, and whatsoever occurs in the future whether you heal him or not, grant him the serenity to accept it and the perseverance to move on.” So often instead of being direct with God, praying to him the way that Jesus has instructed us to pray. Ask! Seek! Knock! People beat around the bush, they believe they’ll be heard for their many words. They believe that God first needs to be flattered for 25 minutes. Or we have to whip ourselves up into an emotional frenzy before we’ll obtain something from the Lord.

You know, there was a quality to Jesus’ prayers that is almost wholly lacking in the prayers of most of his followers. Jesus’ prayers were simple. He knew who he was talking to. There was great intimacy. The first person that we have a record of in Judaism who addressed God simply as “Abba”—father, daddy. Simplicity and intimacy and directness in the prayers. Much of the prayer time that Jesus spent with God was him listening to the father, not speaking; just getting in touch with the heart of the father. We talkers absolutely need to train ourselves to stop talking so much when we pray and especially when we pray for another. Train yourselves to not pray prayers of flattery regarding the person you’re praying for, whatever their position is in the church. Train yourselves to stop informing God as if he is ignorant or begging God as if he is stingy. Or flattering God or beating around the bush as if God doesn’t know what you need ahead of time. Train yourselves to be brief and direct and to incline your heart to listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Most of Jesus’ prayers were very short; they were prayers like, “Walk,” “See.”

No special person

John Wimber who I’ve mentioned before, used to tell the story of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday from the perspective of the donkey upon whom Jesus rode. You may know the story: Jesus got on the donkey and rode on the donkey into Jerusalem and as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, people along the roadway put down palm branches and their cloaks and garments and they bowed down as Jesus rode in and they said, “Hail to the King, save us, oh, Lord.”

Well John told the story from the perspective of the donkey. As the donkey is walking into Jerusalem, he sees these people putting palm branches before him and crying out “Save us, oh Lord. Hail to you King.” And the donkey thinks to himself, “I didn’t even know anybody knew me here. I haven’t been here for years. I can’t believe that everyone is calling me ‘king.’ This is incredible. I didn’t realize my reputation had traveled this far.”

Well, the point is it’s not you, donkey; it’s who’s on your back. And, if I might say this gently to those of us who are listening today, it’s not us, donkeys, our holiness, our power—it’s who’s on our backs. Miracles are worked by Jesus; not because we’re special, but because he is special.

Well, Jesus says something really interesting here in vv. 5-6:

John 5:5–6 (NIV)

5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

I think Jesus is getting at a fourth reason why we don’t see many miracles today. We have the problem of belief. We have the anti-supernatural bias. We have a problem of technique thinking that there’s got to be a methodology to seeing miracles. And fourth, there is the simple problem of not asking.

The problem of not asking

One reason why we see so few miracles is so obvious that we might overlook it and not see the forest for the trees. Many people do not experience miracles or healings because they don’t ask to be healed. They don’t ask for a miracle.

Many people have this erroneous idea that it is somehow more spiritual to suffer with a problem and not bother God with it rather than to ask God to free from that problem. The notion that a person who is sick and just endures it without ever asking for prayer is somehow better, more holy or more spiritual is a heresy that grew in the church over many centuries. There is no spiritual merit in suffering with a problem because you fail to ask God for help. James 4 puts it really plainly:

James 4:2 (NIV)

2 ...You do not have because you do not ask God.

Friends, it is totally acceptable to God to ask him to bless you. It is totally acceptable to God to ask him for a healing. It is totally acceptable to God to ask him to bless your family, to keep you from pain, to expand your influence, to have his hand on your life.

Ask. In fact, what God hates is not us asking; he hates it when we say like the church at Laodicea in the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 3:17 (NIV)

17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

God loves it when he acknowledges that we have needs that only he can meet. One more problem that we have in seeing miracles today. I've mentioned the problem of belief, the problem of anti-supernatural bias, the problem of technique, the problem of not asking, and here is the last problem.

The problem of timing

John 5:5-6 (NIV)

5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

One reason we often miss a miracle is because the miracle is delayed, so we believe it will never come. There is a tremendous mystery in the activity of God. I don't know why this man had to wait 38 years for his healing. We are not told by scripture why Jesus didn't come to him the day before or the week before or the year before and heal him, or three weeks later. I don't know why my friend, Mike, had to wait for 20 years to receive his healing. Why now and not some other time?

It is simply impossible for us to fully comprehend the ways of God. Someone sits in church for a decade. They listen to 500 sermons and on the 501st sermon something happens. For some reason listening that day the penny drops and for the first time that individual says, "Yes. I see now that my need is Jesus Christ," and that day having heard that 501st sermon, the person gives their life to Christ. Who can explain the miracles of God? Why the light suddenly goes on?

How many of you would say that you sat in church for years, you attended different churches growing up, you heard about Jesus maybe 50-100-1000 times. It had no impact at all. And then suddenly the light went on and you finally got it. Why? Why that day? That moment? And not the week before?

You know, two chapters earlier, the apostle John, when speaking about the Holy Spirit, said, "The wind blows where it wills. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it's coming from or where it's going."

Friends, it is so easy to give up and say, “Well, the wind is not blowing. Therefore God will never do anything in my life or in my loved one’s life. Therefore, I will never see the miracle that I’ve been seeking God for.”

The apostle Paul told his young assistant Timothy, “Timothy, preach the gospel in season and out.” In other words, preach the gospel when it is easy and it is harvest time and preach the gospel when the ground is hard and you are not seeing any fruit at all. Go to the gym when you feel like it and go to the gym when you don’t feel like it.

Sometimes you feel like you are just marking time with God, don’t you? There’s nothing special. You don’t have a nice tingly feeling in your body. You are not feeling particularly warm and gushy inside when you pray. You are getting up in the morning and spending time reading your Bible and praying. And then for some reason that we cannot explain, one particular morning you get up mark time and the wind blows in the room. God is there.

Listen, friends, we cannot make the wind blow. But we can put up our sails and catch the wind when it blows. So we pray. You can’t make the wind of the Holy Spirit blow, but we can be available and catch the wind when the Spirit blows. And we can see a miracle.

Let me tell you a story that just happened over the last couple of months. A pastor named Matthias, who works at the Central Vineyard, a church we planted about a decade ago here in Columbus, had a headache for a few days. He hadn’t thought much about it. After getting off of a phone call, his head started to hurt so badly that he asked the staff at Central Vineyard to pray for him. While they were praying, Matthias had a seizure. Between his seizures he was conscious. The staff prayed and they called 911. The squad came quickly. And as they were sedating Matthias, he was calling out to Jesus.

The squad took Matthias to Riverside Hospital and about 20 folks gathered, a few from this church and many from the Central Vineyard, in the waiting room to pray and to sing to God. The doctor told Matthias’ wife, Kim, that the surgery went as well as it could have, but he said it was the worst aneurysm he had seen in 20 years at Riverside. The aneurysm was in a very difficult spot. The coil that they put in his brain actually clipped off part of his brain and caused a stroke.

Over the next few days Matthias’ condition worsened. There was tremendous intracranial pressure that needed to be relieved by removing part of Matthias’ skull. The doctors told his wife, Kim, that he had never seen a brain so sick and that Matthias had died. He said Matthias still had reflexes, but he would never be capable of having any human relationships. In fact, the doctor said that Matthias had as close to zero chance of survival as you could get and that he was the sickest person in the hospital at Riverside.

They kept Matthias on life-support because his parents were coming in from Germany and they weren’t going to be until the weekend. He was treated as a dead person being

kept alive until his family arrived. Matthias' parents came in the day before Easter. They were obviously shocked by his condition. They had been told that he was really bad, but seeing him was really shocking.

His wife, Kim, had resolved in her heart that she needed to let him go. She said, "I didn't know if God would heal Matthias, but I believed he could and that we needed to take him off life support and God could even heal him then." So Kim planned on Monday, 10 days after Matthias collapsed in his office, to talk with his parents about removing Matthias from life support.

About an hour before she planned to talk with the parents, a nurse, who was a Christian, was in Matthias' room and saw some unusual movement. The neurosurgeon happened to be walking by at just that moment. The nurse chased him down and told the neurosurgeon that he needed to come into Matthias' room right away. The surgeon didn't believe that there was anything going on in Matthias, but to prove it, he walked into the room and said, "Matthias, if you are there, give me a thumbs up."

Matthias gave him a thumbs up with his left hand. The surgeon then grabbed Matthias' left hand and said, "Matthias, if you are still there, squeeze my hand." Matthias squeezed his hand. The doctor said, "Let go." Matthias let go. "Squeeze my hand." Matthias squeezed his hand again. The surgeon left the room and reportedly dropped some expletives at the nurse's station saying, "What the @#%&% just happened?"

When the doctor came by later he said he didn't know what happened, maybe, he said, because it's Easter; maybe because he's a pastor. He had no explanation.

Matthias was moved to a select nursing facility to be weaned off his ventilator. His wife said one night when she was sitting there with him, Matthias took her face in his hands. He started to play with her hair and touched her wedding ring. She knew she had her husband back. He started responding to her words. He would laugh at appropriate times and cry at appropriate times.

The doctor said Matthias would be blind. He's now seeing. He is beginning to talk. Please pray for a complete healing of Matthias. He has a really long way to go, but we've seen a miracle.

Listen, there are some of you who say, "I want to know this miracle-working God; I don't know him." Or you say, "I am not sure I know him." There is a miracle that can happen in every one of your lives – a miracle of conversion. If listening to these stories provoked faith in your where you say, "I need to ask God for a miracle, God has something for me." Come up!

God, Do You Still Work Miracles Today?

Rich Nathan

June 6-7, 2015

God, I Have a Question Series

John 5.1-10

- I. The problem of belief
- II. The problem of anti-supernatural bias
- III. The problem of technique
 - A. No special prayer
 - B. No special person
- IV. The problem of not asking
- V. The problem of timing