

*So You Prayed
For a Miracle*



**LUTHERAN HOUR
MINISTRIES**

People Of Christ With A Message Of Hope

**SO YOU PRAYED FOR
A MIRACLE...**

by Rodney A. Kvamme



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Revised edition

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Miracles and Non-miracles

Have you ever prayed for a miracle? Could you use one right now? In times of crisis, even people who doubt whether God exists call out, “God, help me!”

Do miracles always occur when we ask for them? Sometimes yes. Sometimes no. We live in a world with a mixture of both miracles and non-miracles.

Jan was pregnant when her doctor discovered two growths in her uterus he feared were cancerous. They would have to be surgically removed. Although it would be a complete hysterectomy, Jan’s doctor was quite sure the fetus in her womb had already died. All attempts to detect the baby’s heartbeat had produced negative results.

Many people were praying for Jan and her baby. The night before the scheduled surgery, her doctor ran several pre-surgical tests and also listened one last time for a heartbeat in Jan’s womb. After checking the test results, he came into her hospital room shaking his head.

“Well, prayers have been answered,” the doctor reported. “I can hear a baby’s heartbeat, and there’s no more evidence of those lumps. You may as well go home because I’m canceling the surgery. You are simply a very healthy, pregnant woman.”

There were a few frightening moments during the remainder of Jan’s pregnancy, but she is well today — and so is her strong little son.

Another couple was excited about the prospect of having a child. They prayed together often for a safe delivery, and everything seemed to be going well. Then suddenly in the seventh month of her pregnancy, the woman went into labor. She was rushed to the hospital where Heidi Dawn was born two months premature. But within twenty-four hours, the preemie infant died of a lung deficiency.

* * *

Herman was usually a gentle, soft-spoken man, but one day he came to me in a rage. In a clenched fist, knuckles white and arm trembling, he held a letter.

“Why did they have to send this to me now?”

It was a photocopied Christmas letter, an annual news update from a friend in another state. The letter contained good news. His friend had contracted a form of cancer which was deadly, painful, inoperative, and fast-spreading. Then, in glowing terms, came the story of his friend’s immediate and complete healing.

The letter was intended as an invitation to join the celebration of thanksgiving, but Herman didn’t feel like rejoicing with his friend. Herman’s wife was in her last days with cancer. Like the man who had written the letter, they had prayed. Their entire church had prayed. But Herman’s wife had not been healed. She died shortly after Christmas. The letter from the friend had been written in such terms of “success” that it left Herman only deeper in the valley of failure and despair.

* * *

Marv's back was broken in a car wreck. Wherever he went, doctors told him to accept the fact that he would never get up from his wheelchair. But Marv testified that the accident had brought him a new sense of peace God that outweighed the problems and pain.

He also rejected the doctor's predictions as the final word on his condition and he began to walk — first with crutches and then only a cane. The day he took his first steps without a cane, Marv came to church so we could kneel together at the altar in thanksgiving to God for a miracle.

Another younger man I know who also broke his back has remained in his wheelchair now for several years. He has no hope of ever being able to get up from it.

* * *

What shall we say about such a mix of miracles and non-miracles? How can we live confidently in a world where some people experience miracles while others just as desperately in need live without one? How can we honestly rejoice with those who are healed and not add to the discouragement and despair of those who are not relieved of their illness, pain, or handicap?

Sometimes miracles grab center stage. Other times hurting people are left with nagging questions and unmet needs. Assuming God is the One who works miracles, why does He run the world this way? Does He know what He is doing? This is the question with which we will wrestle in this booklet.

Case History of Someone Who Lived With and Without Miracles

Let's begin by considering the case of someone who lived both with miracles and without them. I must admit he has me somewhat puzzled. I don't know quite what to make of him, and I would be interested in your reaction. His name is Paul the Apostle, and his case is reported in the Bible. Perhaps you have never heard his story, but it is very pertinent to our question.

People take many kinds of trips these days. Some are propelled by rocket to outer space. Others are propelled by drugs to places still farther out. But Paul claims that he has been on a trip to heaven. That's right! He is not sure that he went there bodily, but he was there. Yet, he has given only evasive answers to questions regarding the trip.

It sounds to me as though he is letting his imagination run wild. If Paul does have this special connection with God, you would expect it to show more in his life. For example, he has a pretty severe health problem that he cannot cure or control. Some people have diagnosed it as a type of epilepsy, others think it has something to do with his optical nerve. He has other physical problems, too, as well as an unusual number of troubles and difficulties that are not physical in nature.

If I were Paul, I would make a deal with God and trade a few visions for a few healings — exchange one miracle for another,

more practical gift from God. I could get along with less visions if it meant being rid of epilepsy, couldn't you?

Well, what do you think of such a fellow? Doesn't Paul's life seem to be an odd mixture of miracles and no miracles at all? He had no shortage of visions, revelations, and messages from God that were miraculous and mysterious in nature. On the other hand, there were some very unmiraculous factors in his life. He speaks of this mixture of miraculous and unmiraculous in the same sentence: "*And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated*" (2 Corinthians 12:7). This thorn in the flesh was never defined, but it was a physical ailment that was bothersome to Paul, and likely of a conspicuous and embarrassing nature.

The problem plagued Paul so that he repeatedly called out to the Lord, pleading that this malady be removed. But three times the Lord gave him a quite unmiraculous "NO!" as His answer. It was, of course, more than a simple turn-down. There came to Paul a steady and confident assurance of the Lord's grace and power to sustain him and to enable God to use him in spite of the handicap. Nevertheless, this man of great faith carried in his body a continuing desire for divine healing that was never fulfilled.

If we think our lives are a perplexing mix of miracles and non-miracles, life was even more so for Paul. How could he accept this inconsistency? What kept him going? What gave him hope? If I were him, I would have

screamed, “God, You’re erratic, capricious, unpredictable, and undependable. I’ve had it!” Instead, Paul kept on trusting God, because the Lord had told him, *“My grace is sufficient for you”* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

What does that mean? For you to live in a world of miracles and non-miracles, you need to understand what grace is. According to the dictionary, “grace” means undeserved love, but God has a better way of defining grace. He defined His love for us most thoroughly in a person — Jesus Christ. It was because Paul knew Jesus that he could survive in a world with both miracles and non-miracles. Maybe by taking a look at Jesus we’ll learn how to survive too.

The Miracles of Jesus

Out of all the people in human history, why are we seeking answers to our questions from Jesus Christ? First, Jesus is not a fictional character in an ancient legend. He is a true historical person who really was born, really lived, and really performed the miracles the Bible reports. In fact, no one did more miracles than Jesus. No one is even close.

Second, Jesus Himself was a miracle. The Bible says He was not only a human being, He was also God. In order to communicate His love to us, God the Father sent Jesus His Son to live among us as one of us. God living as a human being here on earth. Now there is a miracle. No wonder Jesus is still relevant today.

Let's focus on this question: Why did Jesus perform miracles of healing? We will discover He accomplished three purposes.

1. *The healings of Jesus released people from a physical problem.* The four Gospels of the New Testament include references to more than 60 instances of physical healing. There are no reports of things like ingrown goiters, stiffness of the neck, or desire for alcohol being removed, the types of "beneath the surface" healing that are claimed by those who make a profession of it today. Healings such as these may have taken place, but the Gospel writers report only big league stuff like withered hands taking their normal shape, blind eyes seeing, deaf ears hearing, speech impediments removed, lepers made whole, a severed ear being re-attached.

Besides these major events recorded with some detail, there are many verses in the New Testament that encapsulate hosts of miracles of healing. Mark says, "*And He healed many who were sick with various diseases*" (Mark 1:34). John sums it up this way: "*But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were everyone of them to be written, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written*" (John 21:25). There can be no doubt, therefore, that a major part of Jesus' ministry was to release many people from major physical ills.

However, even in Jesus' day, people lived both with and without miracles. For example, because of the unbelief Jesus confronted in His home town of Nazareth, "*He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid hands*

upon a few sick people and healed them" (Mark 6:5). We also need to remember that even those who were healed by Jesus ultimately fell victim to some physical problem at another time which caused their death. Their miraculous healing did not make them immune to all future suffering and loss. They were still subject to the limitations of an imperfect fallen world. They were still vulnerable human beings in spite of the miraculous changes Jesus had made in their condition.

2. *Besides being physical release, the miracle healings Jesus performed also were the fulfillment of prophecy.* When Matthew described how Jesus relieved Peter's mother-in-law of a fever, as well as healing and cleansing others, he said, "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: *'He took our infirmities and bore our diseases'*" (Matthew 8:17). Jesus' healing miracles occurred within the context of a much larger purpose, one that God had set up from the creation of the world: to free us from our guilt and evil.

To assure John the Baptist that He was the promised Messiah, Jesus said to John's disciples, "*Tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them"* (Matthew 11:4-5). These acts of healing were to be proof to John that Jesus was the Savior God had promised He would send.

But the mission of the Savior was to bring more than relief for the physical ills that troubled people. He had come to suffer for us. He endured the pain of beatings and

crucifixion so we could be forgiven. He was subject to physical death so that we might stand blameless before God. Jesus came to do more than heal people's bodies. He came to work a greater miracle affecting both bodies and souls, the miracle of salvation, the miracle of restoring us to a forgiven and fulfilling relationship with God.

This leads to a third point about Jesus' miracles of healing. *They were acts of "dynamic forgiveness."* The Bible uses the phrase "mighty works" to describe Jesus' miracles. The phrase comes from the Greek word "dunameis" which is at the root of English words like dynamite and dynamic.

In Luke 10:13, Jesus said, "*Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works (dunameis) done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.*"

Chorazin and Bethsaida were cities on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus had performed miracles. Jesus was connecting His "mighty acts" of healing with His larger purpose, namely, to bring people to the point where they realized they were sinners, felt sorry about their sinful lives, and then accepted the forgiveness Jesus offered. The miracles of healing were demonstrations of an even more powerful action behind them, the forgiving of sins.

To say that these miracles were dynamic forgiveness, or forgiveness in action, means that through them forgiveness was meant to invade the lives of the healed and of the people who witnessed the healing. The lame man leaping, the one who was blind now

striding along in new confidence, the one who was a leper now no longer apologizing for being alive, the woman who was bent over now walking straight and tall before men and God — all these were more than mere physical changes. Forgiveness had touched their lives and given them newness on the inside to match their newness on the outside.

When a miracle takes place on center stage, or even if it doesn't take place at all, there is large writing on the back wall of the stage that we had better not overlook. That writing includes words like "FORGIVENESS" and "SALVATION."

The Miracle that Never Fails

Why could Paul of Tarsus keep trusting in Christ through the "thick" of miracles and the "thin" of non-miracles? Because Paul knew Jesus had healed him of his greatest malady, a broken relationship with God. On the cross Jesus *"bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows....He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities"* (Isaiah 53:4-5). "Transgressions" and "iniquities" are simply big words for all the dirt that we do against others and against God. These sins build a wall between us and God. When Jesus died on the cross for your sins, He tore down that wall.

Picture what occurred — and did not occur — when He died. Jesus, the Son of God, stood accused by His enemies, even though He had done nothing wrong. God the Father did not intervene with a miracle to liberate Jesus. He was condemned to die. Then they

took Him to the hill called Calvary to nail Him to a cross. God the Father did not interfere with a miracle to rescue Jesus. In fact, when God performed the non-miracle of allowing His Son to die for your sins and mine, it was really His greatest miracle of healing ever.

A man lay in a hospital bed waking up from cancer surgery. As he regained consciousness, he worried whether his surgeon had been able to rid his body of the deadly growth. Before long, his surgeon entered the room with the answer. "I got it all!" the doctor rejoiced, "You don't have to worry, I'm sure I removed all the cancer."

That's exactly how it is with Jesus. His rising from the grave on the third day after His death, was His way of shouting, "I got it all! You don't have to fear punishment for your sins, I paid for them all on the cross. You don't have to fear death or eternal punishment. I removed every evil deed that stood between you and your Heavenly Father. I got it all!"

And, do you know what is the greatest thing about Jesus' miracle of salvation? This miracle always works! This healing always happens! Whenever someone sincerely expresses sorrow for their sins and humbly trusts in Christ to remove them, they are gone forever.

Some people reading this booklet may have never approached God in this way for His healing forgiveness. I encourage you to do so. You won't be disappointed. To receive this miracle, all you have to do is trust in

Christ to provide it. Pray for this healing and God will provide it, full and free.

If this is your desire, stop reading for a moment and tell God about it. Confess your wrongs to Him. In faith, claim Christ's healing as your own. Thank God for the miracle of turning you back to Him.

Living with Miracles and Non-miracles

Trusting the miracle of Christ's forgiveness and salvation is the essential step to learning to live with miracles and without them. When you have the greatest miracle of all nestled right in your own heart, you can endure the times when God in His wisdom does not perform other miracles. Yes, there will be times when miracles we hope for will not take place. Remember, we saw this in the case study of Paul the Apostle. Here are a few more details from his life.

Paul's conversion to faith in Christ included miracles and non-miracles. Before he was a believer in Christ, Paul was a fanatic opponent of Christianity. One day he traveled to Damascus to arrest believers there. On the way, he was confronted by a blinding light and Christ spoke to him. Now there's a miracle! But after Paul came to faith, some enemies plotted to kill him, and he had to leave town in a most unmiraculous manner, by being lowered over the city wall inside a basket!

Have you heard about Paul's miraculous release from the prison in Philippi? An

earthquake shook the prison, opened the doors, and unfastened the prisoners' chains. But this event was preceded by an unmiraculous happening in which Paul and Silas were dragged before the city rulers, stripped, and beaten badly with rods. No miracle saved him there.

Paul gives a summary of his experiences in 2 Corinthians 11. For a man who could work miracles, the list reads like a catalog of missed opportunities. *"...Imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea;...in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches"* (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

A mixture of miracles and no miracles characterized the ministry of the Apostle Paul. He preached about Jesus Christ and accompanied his sermons with the working of signs and wonders. Although the signs and wonders served as Paul's credentials and certified him as an apostle, they had the same priority in Paul's ministry as they had in Jesus' ministry. That is, they were subordinate to the preaching of the Gospel.

Paul's primary ambition was not to be a great miracle worker but to be a faithful proclaimer of the Good News of Jesus Christ. He could live very well with miracles, but he

never lived on miracles. That's a good thing, for his life and ministry was a strange blend of both the presence of miracles and the absence of them. Paul, in that regard, was a member of the same club as you and I.

We have said that miracles of healing were physical release, the fulfillment of prophecy, and dynamic forgiveness. Finally, they also were a foretaste of heaven. In a way, each healing restored someone, in part at least, to the condition God had in mind for human bodies at the creation of the world. The return to Paradise, however, was temporary for the ones healed were not removed from a sinful world.

At the same time the healing miracles were a preview of that complete restoration pictured in Revelation 21:1-4: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, 'Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"*

Any healing that comes in this life is a foretaste of heaven. Healing that does not come now will come eventually for God's people at the end of the world and will make heaven all the more grand.

Miracles of healing are still possible, and God be praised when they occur. Whenever physical help comes to us, directly or indirectly, whether it is the disappearance of a tumor or relief from a simple cold or headache, the healing must be a reminder of an even greater miracle, the forgiveness of sin and the coming of salvation through Jesus Christ.

But if the miracle does not come now, if you continue to suffer pain, if the illness becomes worse and the handicap still confines you, that does not mean that God has abandoned you. Release from sin has still come. And with that comes a peace of mind that enables you to continue believing God's love. Along with such peace God also can give the patience to endure a physical burden He has not lifted. Such peace of mind and such patient strength are miracles from God which bear witness to His presence as powerfully as any miracle of healing. There is a blessing from God for each of us, then, whether we live with — or without — miracles.

Celebrate "God-Incidents"

Even though miracles may not always take place, we can still confidently pray for God to heal and work, according to His will. He is beside us with the ability to do more than we could ever ask for. Miracles have not taken place when uncommitted people sit back and expect to be entertained by them or ask for them to reassure a faltering faith. But when we relate our entire life to Christ, especially as we acknowledge and share Him as Savior and Lord, we will understand that what we

used to call “coincidences” are really “God-incidents.”

Learn to revel in God’s “natural” order even more than in His “unnatural” interference with that order. For example, an instantaneous healing is a blessing, but natural and continual good health is a greater blessing.

The stilling of a storm is helpful, but an exchange of days with sunshine with days of rain is more beneficial.

We would call it a miracle if the sun stood still for an hour, but isn’t it wonderful that it continues its faithful rising and setting?

To be raised from the dead is magnificent, but for life to go on uninterrupted by death is better yet, and the promise of eternal life is best of all.

To be freed from an evil spirit is a cleansing, but to know total forgiveness in Jesus is to be made really clean.

Even your reading of this booklet is a God-incident, not a coincidence. He is already involved in your life. I want to assure you that through your openness to Him, He will continue to lead you confidently and adventurously through this world and into the next as you live with and without miracles.

An Air Force Chaplain once said, “I believe in divine healing, because all healing is divine.” God is terribly short-changed when it comes to being properly credited for healing. Perhaps 95 percent of the prayers for healing uttered at the bedside of patients are answered with the patient being released

and returning home well or much improved. Yet this is often labeled “natural” recovery, while a case of “divine” healing must be attested to by a patient leaping from his bed and running from the hospital with sheets and blankets waving in the wind behind him.

How can such unfairness to God be avoided? Here is one way: Whenever you have an ailment, large or small, take your case to Jesus first of all. A simple prayer will do: “Lord Jesus, I want You to be my specialist. You are the Great Physician and I am glad You will take my case. Thank You for the relief I’ll experience, no matter how or how soon it will come.” The help may come after a visit to the doctor or a trip to the hospital. In any event, you will be able to relate the relief to your original “Specialist’s” care for you, and your healing will be properly credited.

A Word about “Faith” Healing

Faith can be a problem in healing if the faith is centered in the sick person. In my ministry I have followed a trail of troubled people who were mistreated and misinformed by zealous, would-be healers. They were told that Jesus was never sick because He had perfect faith and was without sin. Therefore, sickness is proof that either a person has inadequate faith or some unconfessed sin. When healing does not take place, these poor victims of spiritual quacks are left with their maladies plus the added agony of a bruised spirit. The “faith-healer’s” record remains intact, because any lack of healing is not his fault,

but the fault of his faithless, sinful patients.

Faith is also a problem if it centers on the physical condition we want changed rather than on the One who has the power to effect a change on our life. There is a lesson to learn from blind Bartimaeus when he said, "Son of David, have mercy on me." He did not say, "I'm blind, and I am exercising great personal faith in asking You to make these blind eyes see." A similar lesson may be learned from the leper who said, "Lord, if You will, I can be clean." He did not say, "I am convinced all my leprous sores will disappear, so go ahead and prove me to be right."

The "faith" in faith healing is faith directed to a Lord who is compassionate and powerful. If the pain subsides, it is the Lord, not my faith, who accomplished it. If the pain persists, it is not a judgment upon my faith. I must simply continue to lean on my Lord in whom I believe. He has not deserted me.

A friend of mine has cancer. Several people have "prophesied" that he will be healed. He has been told to accept his healing now and thank God for it already, even though the signs and symptoms of the cancer remain and increase. No New Testament healing ever involved such sanctimonious pretending. But my friend feels he is failing the Christian community which has been praying for him.

"What is the matter?" he asks. "Don't I believe enough?"

I admit to him that neither one of us knows the end of the story. Healing may come and we will celebrate together. But healing may not come. Then we will sorrow together, but

not without the hope of endless life in heaven. In the meantime, I tell my friend, there are dozens of people who are grateful for the witness he is giving as a man of faith in the midst of great trial and pain. They see in him the kind of hope they need to keep going.

A tear forms in his eye, he thanks me.

No miracle here? Of course there is a miracle. Regardless of the matter of healing, there is the impressive miracle of a mortal man assured of an eternal and perfect life because he is a forgiven, restored child of the heavenly Father. There is the miracle of a change in someone else's life through the way this man balances his problem with his trust in a loving God.

The answer to why some are healed and others are not resides in the mind of the all-powerful God. But that same all-powerful God has openly willed that the greater miracle of eternal health and welfare for soul and body be the experience of every person. That is the miracle which never fails.

Prayers for a World with Miracles and Non-miracles

For the Miracle of Forgiveness

Jesus, You are my sin-removing Savior. When You stood trial before Your accusers, God the Father did not intervene to rescue You. When they nailed You to the cross, again the Father did not perform a miracle on Your behalf. I know why. God had a higher plan, a plan to rescue me from my guilt and the eternal punishment I deserved for my sins.

Through Your death in my place, You took up my infirmities and carried my sorrow. You were pierced for my transgressions. You were crushed for my iniquities. By Your wounds I am healed. Lord, I humbly trust in this great miracle that You performed to provide me healing from my greatest problem. Dear Jesus, You gladly endured the penalty I should have received. I praise You, God the Holy Spirit, for granting me this faith which restores me to a living, peaceful relationship with God. May I continue strong in this faith and not falter, come what may. For You are always with me. You will never leave me or forsake me. Amen.

In Times of Trial

Great and Mighty God, I have come to a time of testing. Although things are hard, I am forced to come through. Let me face the challenge with an added measure of Your strength. Fill me with Your power, that I might do what must be done. When difficulties are the greatest, be my Champion and Support. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

For Trust Despite Difficulties

Dear Father, help me to accept living in a world of miracles and non-miracles. I bring my needs and concerns before You. I know You can heal and deliver. However, in Your wisdom, sometimes You provide power to endure a difficulty rather than deliverance from it. In either case, I accept Your will. In either case, I will praise You. I trust Your gracious wisdom, because You have already performed for me the great miracle of salvation through Jesus Christ. Help me to believe that as Your child, the sufferings of

this present time are not worth comparing with the glory which shall be revealed to us in heaven. Amen.

For Joy

Be my comfort and strength, O God, and let no sorrow overwhelm me. Touch my heart with renewed joy over Your love and let my faith be firmly grounded in your Son, Jesus Christ. May I always find joy in sharing the Good News of Your forgiving love with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

For Faith

Dear Lord, of all the gifts for which I'm thankful, none is more treasured than the gift of faith, received in Baptism and nurtured through Your Holy Word. Help me always to value this gift above all others to the end that I may be constantly reminded that "where my treasure is, there my heart shall be also." In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

So you prayed for a miracle....

Do modern day miracles really happen? Have you seen them in other's lives, but never felt they occurred in yours? The miraculous healing done by Jesus was widely described while He was on earth. However, what constitutes a healing miracle now? why would some people experience a seemingly miraculous healing while others do not?

In this booklet you'll discover why Jesus performed miracles of healing. today, many people wonder why miracles don't happen, when seemingly they have taken all the appropriate steps to ask for healing. While the miraculous healing done by Jesus was very visible, the most important miracle He performed was to provide eternal life for all who believe!



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