

An Answer to Prayer: God's Extraordinary Miracles (A Look at Why We Serve)



When you think of miracles those that are extraordinary leap out: healing a blind man, feeding 5000 people, parting the waters of the Red Sea. But isn't a miracle defined by God intervening to give a different outcome to that which is normal/expected? No one expected the funeral procession leaving Nain to become a celebration of life for the widow's son. Who would have thought that a large group of people could survive 40 years on something called "manna" falling to the ground six days a week?

But is it any less a miracle when you show up at someone's door and bring hope, by that act, bring them hope? Isn't it a miracle when neighbors deliver boxes of food to a family in need? Doesn't God often answer prayers by raising up people to meet a need? This study invites you to look again at some of the greatest miracles of the Bible—how they flowed from simple acts of faith and how such miracles helped faith to blossom. As you see these miracles then maybe, just maybe, you will remember a time when God lifted your spirits when someone reached out to you. I pray you will be able to look back in your life and smile as you remember a time you felt blessed as you gave yourself in service. Isn't that a prayer answered as well—to see God bringing wonder and joy to the one who is served and to the server?

It is my prayer that you will look at your life and realize that as God has answered all your prayers, He would be so bold and so good as to use you to be an answer to the prayers of others. **Make a Resolution** to be an answer to prayer. Open your life to God placing you in the right spot to make a difference. Be part of the miracle!

Lesson 1

Miracles flow from the ordinary, but require “extra” effort



Miracles Usually Don't Just Happen— God Uses People to Start Most Miracles Off

Remember the young boy who offered his lunch to Jesus as the disciples had been tasked with feeding thousands in the wilderness? He knew they were rounding up food. He had no idea Jesus would use his five loaves and two fish to feed 500+ people. He simply offered to help when asked.

Something miraculous came out of that ordinary act of service, but the boy was certainly not the star of the show. People enjoyed the lunch and marveled at Jesus and what he could do. I wonder how many even realized the start of this miracle was Jesus giving thanks for five loaves and two fish contributed by one young boy. (I hope the disciples did.)

How many miracles happen in the context of one person doing some “ordinary” thing. I don't mean like normal duties. The act may be normal, but it comes from one person doing more than required—stepping out to do something “extra.” Extra effort is nice, but what can the 60¢ a pre-schooler donates to the building project accomplish? And while it is commendable for a neighbor to shovel the drive next door—but is that really “miracle” material? What does writing a personal note, volunteering to serve on some church team, or even a “How are you doing?” question accomplish? Alone these will not change anything/anyone—but placed into the hands of Jesus, these acts often become part of God's answer to the prayers of people crying out for help—and the catalyst to MIRACLES! Just think—you can be an answer to someone's prayer!

A. All She Did Was Sew For People Acts 9:36-42

1. Identify two miracles in this account.

2. Acts of service don't have to be "You gotta see to believe" feats to be conduits for miracles. What was Dorcas known for? How were peoples' lives touched by the way she lived (which comes out as they mourn her death)?

3. Dorcas had a gift for "sewing"? It was not a miraculous skill, but how did that gift become part of many miracles? The real gift of Dorcas was to love others enough to reach out to them.

What can you do—which may seem "ordinary" to you, that others in this discussion group may not be able to do? Celebrate the unique nature/gifts of **EACH** person in the group.

4. Celebrate that God has given each of you the capacity to love (His grace in us). You just need to figure out how to use your "ordinary" gifts in extra-ordinary ways. But you also have to do something else. You need to go the "EXTRA" mile. You need to serve. God makes miracles happen when people serve one another, but there are many times when needs go unmet. Discuss. (How does Philipians 2:19-21 fit into your discussion?)

B. Community Within the Early Church Acts 4:32-37

5. Do you see any miracles in Acts 4:32-37? Do you see peoples' lives being changed? What is God doing (the miraculous) here and how?

C. For Discussion



6. How many miracles is God doing that go unnoticed today because we are looking for the extraordinary when God chooses to work through those who go the “extra” mile doing the “ordinary” to help others in the name of Jesus?
7. We love Jesus for saving us from sin and death. This miracle was accomplished by his sacrificial death on the cross. It wasn't as impressive as his calming the storm or raising Lazarus back to life again. Where people had earlier seen strength and wonder in Jesus; on the cross they only wondered what had gone wrong. What makes the cross such more powerful than other miracles is that by his sacrifice, Jesus was able to change the lives of people for all of eternity. People pray for all kinds of things, but what we all seek is to be made whole. That is what Jesus does and when we help others it is Jesus we must bring. How is that done?
8. “Make a Resolution” is an invitation for all of us to commit to being part of the answer to the prayers people lift up to God. Do you see that your listening to a friend going through difficult times might be God's answer to their prayer for help? Explain.
9. Do you trust God to do something miraculous (extraordinary) through your doing something ordinary? Discuss how reaching out to volunteer is testimony of our belief that God still does miracles?

D. Closing Prayer time

Share situations that members of the group are facing now and situations that people you know may be facing. Lift these situations up to God in prayer and make this part of your prayer, “God, what would You have me do to be part of the answer to their prayers and ours?”



Lesson 2

Do You Pray Expecting to See the Wonder of God in Life?

Remember the boy with the five loaves and two fish? What if he had not offered his lunch to Jesus? Would the people have been left hungry? We will never know. Jesus could have fed them with a snap of his fingers, but he chose to allow the young boy to be part of it. If you know what happened that day, you know Jesus used the miracle to teach his disciples a lesson. That lesson was to expect Him to do

the miraculous. It was a lesson perhaps taught by the boy.

Lesson 2 is designed to help you realize that faith not only allows us to think God might do the miraculous, but that it is logical for us to expect him to do the miraculous. Attitudes (and actions) change when we expect God to act. Serving, volunteering, does not happen because we are trying to be good people—it happens because we believe God is working in, and through, us to touch peoples' lives. God wants to work miracles—do you believe that? Are you willing to be part of his miracles?

A. Pray for Boldness & God to Act Powerfully Acts 4:23-32

1. Peter and John had been called on the carpet for a healing miracle where a lame beggar was given healing rather than a couple of coins. Peter had said to the man, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." (Acts 3:6) Would you dare say such a thing if you did not expect God to act? Is it possible that we act too timidly today—because we do not expect miracles from God?

2. When Peter and John returned to the community of believers a prayer was offered that recognized God power in the face of opposition from political figures (Ps 2, Herod and Pilate). They realized that those who opposed God actually ended up doing just what God had planned for his plan of salvation to play you.

So what did that group of Christians pray for? (vv. 29-30)

3. Discuss God's initial response to their prayer. (vs.31)

4. Now discuss the response of those who prayed. What did they do? (vs.32)

B. Part of the Plan John 15:9-17

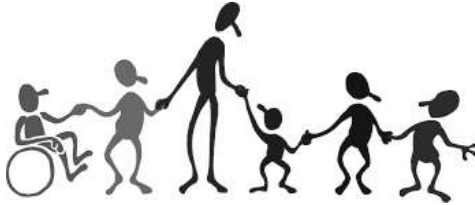
The Christians of Acts 4 prayed for God to help them to be bold enough to be part of His plan to bring healing to people in Jesus Christ. In essence, they prayed to be part of God's answer to the prayers of people.

5. John 15:15 shows that God looks at us as partners in this whole process. That is an amazing thing—but it does require we get out of our chairs and act. In this passage he calls us friends as opposed to servants. What does Jesus say is the difference? Discuss. Do you know "the Master's business?"

6. What does Jesus call for us to do in John 15:9-17? What does he expect of you and me? How can we begin to fill that role?

7. Verse 14 is translated, “*You are my friends if you do what I command.*” This can be misunderstood to say we are his friends if we choose to obey him. A more accurate translation is that our doing what he commands is how others see that we are his friends. I would offer this translation: “You are my friends, as you do what I command.”

There is the temptation to do things because we think we must prove ourselves. The gospel says we do good things because we are friends of Jesus—friends to whom Jesus has given His heart. Discuss this in light of our effort at Trinity to encourage people to volunteer—to serve.



C. For Discussion

8. Do you know anyone who is connected to miracles? Most of us don't. Yet every one of us has seen miracles happen. Talk about things/situations where you would say, “I think that was a miracle.”

9. Read James 1:5-8. What is the danger of praying without any expectation of God answering that prayer (may couch prayer in terms God giving comfort—but may pray for healing in one breath and wonder when the funeral will be in the next)?

10. What is the danger of miraculous expectations in prayer--calling for God to bring healing/give a job/restore a conflicted relationship?

D. Closing Prayer Time

Pick out a couple of situations members of your group are aware of or facing right now. Pray boldly for God to act, then discuss what team members might do to provide God a great scenario in which to do a miracle. (e.g. if praying for a job the rest of the group can do legwork to provide interviews, if praying for healing how can group members encourage the one who needs healing, if for restoration in conflicted relationship how can group members build those conflicted up to believe restoration possible and in their best interests.) Pray, then act with expectation.

Advice for Prayer:

1. Praise God
2. Thank God that you can come to Him in Jesus, and for His promise to provide.
3. Boldly ask what you want—do not hold back.
4. Surrender to His will—acknowledge both His power and his authority. Ask God to do that which would bring glory to his name—and thus blessing to you (whatever that may be).
5. Ask how this situation might help others to experience the gospel of Jesus.
6. Having placed all things in His hands, say “AMEN!” and go on with your life in peace.



Lesson 3

Putting Ourselves in Position for Double Miracles

Let's go back to that boy who offered his five loaves and two fish to Jesus. A lot of things happened that day. Jesus fed thousands of people, he taught a valuable lesson to his disciples and a young boy not only was able to be part of a miracle—but that boy went home with the wonderful blessing of having been touched in an eternal way by Jesus.

Miracles have a way of doing that to us. I have been part of many short term mission trips and have seen thousands of people whose lives were touched in powerful ways by God. I have seen people cry who could see for the first time in years and others whom God lifted from poverty (spiritually and financially) to be leaders in his church. So what is my biggest take away from such mission trips. The most common miracle I have seen is in those of us who have gone on the trips and come back home changed. We marvel at what we have seen and the people we have met. We are humbled by the powerful ways God works and the wonderful way He can bring people from different cultures together through the love of Jesus.

Miracles are like boomerangs—they come back to us pouring out more blessing than we were ever able to give. So a boy gives five loaves and two fish to Jesus, thousands are fed from that lunch, the boy himself is blessed by Jesus allowing him to be part of such a miracle—and the boy probably ate more than five loaves and two fish himself at that meal. The Bible tells us they all ate until they were satisfied—full. Jesus is like that; he is a double miracle kind of guy. Want to see for yourself? Put yourself in a position for miracles to happen.

A. “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” II Kings 6:8-23

Elisha had been part of many miracles of God. He had seen Elijah taken to heaven in a fiery chariot. Just before this reading he had acted boldly and God had caused an axhead to float (vs.6). Elisha had asked a widow to bake him bread using her last oil and flour, and God miraculously kept refilling her flour and oil containers until the famine had ended, and in the middle of all that called on God to raise her son back to life from the dead (chapter 4). He had told Naaman, a leper, to bathe seven times in the Jordan River for healing—and God did it (chapter 5). It seems that the more Elisha sees God do, the more he expects God to act. His life became bigger—he who was part of many miracles was blessed with ability to see God (a miracle).

1. How does it work? Read II Kings 6:8-12. What happens every time the king of Aram plans an attack on the Israelites? This definitely is a God thing, but what did all of this do for Elisha’s reputation? God certainly blessed him in many ways.

2. Not everyone saw things the same as Elisha. When the king of Aram heard of Elisha he took action. Read II Kings 6:13-16. What did the king do and what did Elisha’s servant see? How did the servant react?

3. All these people were seeing the same thing and yet they all saw things differently. The Aramean army saw an easy assignment—a whole army coming to a tiny village for one man. The servant saw the same thing only he found himself on the wrong side of all the swords. He was terrified. What do you think Elisha saw?

4. Read II Kings 6:17. What did Elisha pray for? How do you think Elisha came to see this situation so very differently than everyone else? Do you believe God still surrounds his people, you and me, with armies of angels? Is it a miracle to see that reality?

5. Now, read the rest of the story (II Kings 6:18-23). What did God do to:

Show his power?

Reveal his mercy?

Change the vision of the servant, King of Israel and others?

B. Eager To Do What Is Good Titus 2:1-15

6. Read Titus chapter two. Paul is instructing Titus what to teach various groups of individuals. I want you to think what people these groups would have influence over—part of the reason they are to be taught to live such “godly” lives.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Teach them</u>	<u>Sphere of influence</u>
Older men		

Older women

Younger men

Slaves

God is always looking how to reach others as he works powerfully in our lives. It is the way he operates. He is always thinking of how he can bless you—and by doing so—bring blessing to others. He will never be satisfied until “every knee” bows “at the name of Jesus.” (Phil. 2:10) God loves double miracles. He loves to make miracles happen as you and I live in the confidence of faith and the in the shadow of His love. But it is as we reach out to others that he bombards us with his miraculous love.

7. Look beyond the actions! What are the goals given for godly living and godly teaching?

Vs.5

Vs.8

Vs.10

Wait for it . . . Wait for it . . . Wait for it!

8. What is the basis from which God answers the prayers of people? What scenarios are fertile ground for God to work miraculously? Start with the last six words of vs.14. Then read all of Titus 2:11-14 to get the context. Write out below those last six words (at least in NIV & ESV)

How does this impact you as you consider how to serve God?

It all begins with our eagerness (zeal) for doing good! We are not a people who perform miracles. We are people who have tasted God’s grace in Jesus. We have seen that His death has given us life! We have been called by God to be His sons and daughters. **We don’t do miracles, but we act believing that God will.** We

are called to do that little bit “extra,” reaching out to people in “ordinary” ways in the love of Jesus. But in so doing, we keep our eyes open for God to do the “extra-ordinary!” We expect miracles. In fact we are to live so others might see that we are waiting for God to act in extra-ordinary ways to help people.

9. Discuss volunteerism in this context.

Why do we volunteer/serve?

How do our little ordinary deeds accomplish great things?

How can we help others see more in us than “nice people?”

C. For Discussion:

10. Want a final thought? Discuss what Jesus said the night of His arrest and the implications of what that means for our lives:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

John 13:34-35

11. There are different motivations for serving and each shapes one’s attitude. Consider the following two motivations and talk about the attitude you want to bring as you consider how you might serve:

--I should help others because that is what Jesus tells me to do.

--I know that people are praying to God for help. I wonder whose prayer God might answer through my life and what I do today.

12. We earlier discussed (Lesson 2) that Jesus calls us friends, not servants and yet He sees himself as a servant. How do we reconcile this. (Note: St. Paul identified himself in most of his letters as a “servant of Christ.”) If we are “friends” with Jesus, should we still be servants?

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45)

D. Closing Prayer Time

Discuss how your view of how God often uses people to be part of His answer to the prayers of those in need. To understand this is to realize that our serving/volunteering is so important to God. Our reaching out to others opens the door for Him to do miraculous things.

Thank God in prayer for the many people He has brought into your life who have been a blessing to you. Pray that the members of this group would live to be an **Answer to Prayer!**



Lesson 4 Begin the Process

This is a three week study, but you are certainly invited to meet one more time as you ***Make a Resolution***. Enjoy the discussion of “next steps!”



Where is Your Heart Leading You?

Begin with a round table discussion on things each member of the group would be interested in doing. Do not focus on specifics, but think in general terms. Help each other to explore possibilities. (One of the challenges of ministry at Trinity is that people wait to be asked to serve in some specific area. Our prayer is that this culture changes to where people come to the church with ideas of things they are passionate about—things they are willing to work to make happen.) Here are some thought starters to help you:

- What do you have a passion for? (children, community involvement, missions, support of seniors, worship, music, education, spiritual development, leadership, etc.)
- What have you done in the past that you enjoyed?
- What touches your heart when you hear it spoken of?
- Consider areas of ministry that stay on your mind—excited at doing/frustrated not happening.
- Think of people whose lives you wish better for: children, youth, impoverished, broken families, addicts, etc.

What is the Scope of Volunteerism?

Read Acts 2:42-47. Discuss how the early church engaged all its people in ministry. The church is not based on serving, but on bringing people together in Jesus Christ. (Though it is difficult to help someone see how much you love them if they are hungry and you don't offer any food.) The gospel is holistic, thus the church engages in every aspect of a person's life. What do you see in Acts that shows the church involved in:

- Fellowship?
- Study of God's Word?
- Spiritual support of one another?
- Physical support of one another?

Make a Resolution: Action and Accountability

Encourage one another to take specific steps to get involved in one or two ministries. These may, or may not, be connected to Trinity—but are connected to people. Determine how you can follow up in several weeks to hold one another accountable.

Pray to be an Answer to Prayer

Close with a time of prayer, thanking God for His entering into your life through Jesus. Pray for ways in which you can all bring Jesus into the lives of others by how you live yours.

