

PREPARING FOR A MIRACLE
Steven M Conger
April 15, 2007

Have you ever really thought about what a miracle is?

I have struggled with that word all week long.

If you look up the definition of the word, you will not get a great deal of help. Because the word has a multitude of meanings and nuances.

This morning, I titled my sermon: *Preparing for A Miracle*, can one “prepare” for a miracle?

There are predominately two ways of looking at the word **miracle**.

One way would be using a “religious” definition:
miracle, derived from the old Latin word *miraculum* meaning "something wonderful", is a striking interposition of divine intervention by a god in the universe by which the ordinary course and operation of Nature is overruled, suspended, or modified. (Wikipedia)

A better way of saying it is a miracle is when there is DIVINE INTERVENTION

A second way of looking at miracle is probably the way that we more commonly use it. We really don't mean “divine intervention”, but what we do mean is an event that was statistically improbable — such as surviving a tornado or an illness. Or an event that is wondrous — such as the birth of a child.

Sixteen years ago today, Nancy and I experienced just such a miracle with the birth of Lindsey!

Just to be clear, I am defining miracles in two ways.

1. A supernatural event in which God breaks the rules of nature, and alters the course of history.
2. An event that results because of super-effort or inexplicable participation.

Many would say that both of those understandings can be found in the story that I want to share with you this morning.

Mark 6:30-44 (The Message)

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Mark 6:30-44 (The Message)

The apostles then rendezvoused with Jesus and reported on all that they had done and taught. Jesus said, "Come off by yourselves; let's

take a break and get a little rest." For there was constant coming and going. They didn't even have time to eat.

So they got in the boat and went off to a remote place by themselves. Someone saw them going and the word got around. From the surrounding towns people went out on foot, running, and got there ahead of them. When Jesus arrived, he saw this huge crowd. At the sight of them, his heart broke—like sheep with no shepherd they were. He went right to work teaching them.

When his disciples thought this had gone on long enough—it was now quite late in the day—they interrupted: "We are a long way out in the country, and it's very late. Pronounce a benediction and send these folks off so they can get some supper."

Jesus said, "You do it. Fix supper for them."

They replied, "Are you serious? You want us to go spend a fortune on food for their supper?"

But he was quite serious. "How many loaves of bread do you have? Take an inventory."

That didn't take long. "Five," they said, "plus two fish."

Jesus got them all to sit down in groups of fifty or a hundred—they looked like a patchwork quilt of wildflowers spread out on the green grass! He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples in turn gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. They all ate their fill. The disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers. More than five thousand were at the supper.

I think that this is one of my favorite biblical stories — Found in all 4 Gospels, and a couple of times in both Matthew and Mark. Because, even after reading it carefully, the story is not clear how the miracle happened. Thus, we are left to interpret it to the best of our ability.

Did God miraculously create all the bread and fish?

Did bread and fish just drop out of heaven?

If so, what can we learn about how we can "prepare for a miracle."

Or did something else happen.

And if it was something else, what can the story teach us, as we too prepare for a miracle?

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Lets take a few minutes to look at this story from both perspectives and see what it can teach us about preparing for a miracle.

If this story is about supernatural intervention, then we need to ask ourselves, did anybody do anything that could have caused this intervention to take place? Or is the intervention arbitrary, or at least, unpredictable?

So let's ask ourselves — What did the Disciples do to prepare for this miracle if it was supernatural intervention?

1) Did the Disciples have faith that God would provide?

When his disciples thought this had gone on long enough—it was now quite late in the day—they interrupted: "We are a long way out in the country, and it's very late. Pronounce a benediction and send these folks off so they can get some supper."

Jesus said, "You do it. Fix supper for them."

They replied, "Are you serious? You want us to go spend a fortune on food for their supper?"

It would appear that the Disciples did not show any particular level of faith that God would provide for the hungry people. As a matter of fact, the Disciples were concerned that they did not have enough money to go and buy enough food.

2) Did the Disciples ask God to provide?

Clearly the story tells us that the Disciples felt put upon by Jesus to provide for all these hungry people. They clearly did not pray to God and ask God for the food.

Jesus, however, does pray and thank God

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It seems to me, that this story does not teach us anything about how to prepare for a miracle, unless of course, you have Jesus hanging around with you. But Jesus calls for the miracle, not the disciples, they don't even seem to realize that a miracle is possible, nor do they seem to suggest a miracle is even necessary. "Send them home." is their response.

Now let's try to look at this story from the perspective of a miracle, not being a supernatural phenomenon, but rather an inexplicable phenomenon. This time, I think, it is possible to see how the miracle happened.

The Disciples tired and grumpy, want Jesus to send the people home. Jesus seeing that a miracle was possible, invited the Disciples to participate — they don't understand, so Jesus invited the people to make the miracle happen. He does that by inviting everyone to do the same thing he does, which is share all that they have.

The result — 5,000 are fed and there is lots of food left over.

So what can we learn about miracles from this story.

1. You must believe the miracle is possible.

Jesus knew that there was more than enough — if everybody shared. The question was — would the people catch Jesus vision?

2. It takes many people to make it happen.

Jesus did not feed the people by himself — the disciples did not feed the crowds by themselves either.

3. It takes everyone doing their part.

Imagine if some started saying NO, I won't share, I want to keep what is mine. If that had happened, it would have been easy for it to snowball into a disaster, but when everyone does their part, the opposite happens — not only do people share, but they share more willingly and more generously.

Why am I talking about this?
Because we too, are preparing for a miracle.

Five years ago, we began making our dream of a new fellowship hall come

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Why am I talking about this?
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Five years ago, we began making our dream of a new fellowship hall come

true. In Nov. 2003 we held our first event in this new hall.

In the last 4 ½ years — thousands of lives have been touched by the events that have taken place in our fellowship hall.

- ◆ worship
- ◆ open gym
- ◆ winning at life
- ◆ UMW luncheons
- ◆ youth group events
- ◆ 50th anniversary celebrations
- ◆ fish fries
- ◆ rummage sales
- ◆ volleyball — basketball
- ◆ buttons & bows
- ◆ boy scout events
- ◆ chamber of commerce
- ◆ state gathering of Church women united
- ◆ rehearsals for the performing arts centers
- ◆ showers and parties

Where would we be if we had not built this hall?

This campaign that is being called REACHING OUT TO THE FUTURE has four purposes.

1. TO HELP PEOPLE GROW TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY
By challenging people to become like Christ: who lived a life of faithful commitment, sacrificial love, and generous giving.
 - Through a sermon series "Restoring Misplaced Values"
 - Through a family devotional guide
 - Through personal testimonies
2. TO RAISE THE FUNDS TO PAY OFF OUR FELLOWSHIP HALL
By having a COMMITMENT DAY, on May 13th where every family and individual in our church can make a cash gift and a 3 year giving commitment to Reaching Out To The Future.
3. TO BUILD FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY IN OUR CHURCH FAMILY
By having all church soup suppers which will allow our family - to get acquainted, share information, and pray for our church.
4. TO CELEBRATE GOD'S LOVE TOGETHER
By recognizing what an impact our fellowship hall has made for Ridge Church and the community.

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I want to invite up some of the leadership of our REACHING OUT TO THE FUTURE campaign, and let them share with you our goals.

John: "Pastor Steve, being a part of the Ridge Church family has been one of the great blessings of our lives. This is a church that really ministers to the real needs and hurts of people.

For 50 years, our church family ministered in some dynamic and creative ways, then five years ago, we seized the vision that had been brewing for at least the past 20 years of building a fellowship hall that would allow us to minister to the community in some amazing ways! Paying off our mortgage and moving toward phase 2 is essential if we want to make a difference for God.

Depending upon how much money we are able to raise, we've established three different goals for REACHING OUT TO THE FUTURE. Today we are publicly announcing these goals:

Dick: Our most basic goal is called the "PAY DOWN THE MORTGAGE GOAL" The amount we need to reach this goal is **\$700,000** dollars. This is the minimum we must raise to continue to pay off our mortgage without the expense negatively effecting our current ministries. This should be no problem at all to reach for a church our size. Our church gave this much 5 years ago when we began to build the Hall, and we are much larger today.

Tanya: Our intermediate goal is to raise **\$1,200,000** dollars. We've named this goal the "**COMPLETE OUR FELLOWSHIP HALL GOAL**" If we are able to raise this much, we will be able to completely pay off our currently indebtedness for our Fellowship hall. This is also a very realistic goal for a church family our size.

John: Of course, what we really would like to accomplish is paying off the mortgage on the fellowship hall and being able to complete phase 2 of our long range plan --- which is remodeling the old education wing. So our ultimate goal is to raise **\$2,000,000** dollars through our REACHING OUT TO THE FUTURE Campaign so we can remodel the old building at the same time. This is a challenging, but achievable goal if each of us takes the challenge seriously.

The cost of paying off our mortgage for our church family is too great for only a few to carry. It will take all of us sacrificing together. But if each of us does his or her part, we know we can reach these goals.

Dick: That's why the theme of our REACHING OUT TO THE FUTURE

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Campaign is *"Equal Sacrifice, not Equal Gifts"* This way everyone, from the young child to our oldest attender can have a part in this project. We believe God is going to use each of us in some way to do a miracle and we're looking forward to reporting back to you on Victory Sunday the results of what God has done! Thank you!

I don't know about you, but that is exciting. But it also is a huge challenge — we must all work together to make this miracle possible.

You are gonna be stretched.

What can you expect to happen?

Over the next four weeks I think you can expect the following things to happen.

- 1) You can expect to see some miracles. As you let God work in your life through the devotional — through your prayer life — great things are gonna happen.
- 2) You can expect to grow spiritually. Jeff and I are going to challenge you and take you deeper than ever before in your commitment to Jesus. If you are not interested in growing spiritually — the next few weeks are gonna be kinda rough for you.
- 3) You can expected to be hassled over the next four weeks. And I am not saying by me — you are gonna be hassled by your conscience or evil or satan or whatever you want to call it. You are going to have to deal with all of your excuses that have kept you from giving a tithe to God.
- 4) You can expect to experience joy during the next four weeks. This church is going to get happy. It always happens when people give. Some great things are going to be happening here at Ridge Church!

I'll be honest with you. You can expect three kinds of reactions in the next four weeks. There's going to be some people who are going to grow and who are going to give no matter what happens. They're spiritually mature people. They don't even need a growth emphasis.

There are some people who are not going to grow and not going to give, no matter what happens. We don't wait on them. Some of them are just in personal pain. What do you do when people are in personal pain? You minister to them. You help them. You say, "We're here to help you." When

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you're in pain, you're pretty selfish. All you can think about is your own pain. I am, when I'm in pain. So are you. So we help those people.

Others, just out of materialism or something else, they don't want to grow and they don't want to give. Fine. If you don't want to be a part of this campaign, don't! It's your loss. But don't rob the rest of us of the joy of giving and growing.

Then there are going to be those people who catch the vision and say I want to be a part of what God is doing. I want to be a history maker, a legacy leaver. I want to leave something for future generations. I want to do something with my life that's going to outlast me. This place is going to outlast all of us when we're long dead and gone.

As we close, I want you to do two things: One, I want you to start praying, "God, help me to really grow in the next forty days. Help me to grow spiritually in the next forty days." Two, pray, "God, give us a miracle in our church family." And watch what happens.

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