

# 8. The Holy Spirit Gives Gifts of Healing and Miracles

## Opening question

Have you ever experienced or witnessed a miracle, God supernaturally breaking into the normal way of things?

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## Fact check: the complexity of miracles

Ask: what makes it hard for you to believe that God will do miracles when we ask?

It is much easier to believe that God never heals or that He always heals (and thus the “problem” of healings not happening is our fault) because neither of these positions require a great deal of thought. But the Bible presents us with truth more complicated than that. The summary phrase for this is that the Kingdom of God is “now and not yet” – it has begun to break out but has not completely triumphed yet (Hebrews 2:8-9).

The New Testament is full of miracles but there are also glimpses of them not happening:

- In John 5:1-9 there are “a multitude of invalids” but Jesus seems to have healed only one of them.
- In Acts 12:1-17 James and Peter are both imprisoned; whereas Peter is miraculously set free, James is executed.
- In Galatians 4:13-14 Paul recalls that he had a “bodily ailment” which was “a trial” to those who hosted him in Galatia. There’s no mention of it being healed.
- Paul tells Timothy to “use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Timothy 5:23). He doesn’t tell him to pray for healing.
- We can also note that every person who has ever experienced a miracle, even being raised from the dead like Lazarus (John 11), eventually died.

Faith which acknowledges that miracles don’t always happen but keeps eagerly trusting and asking God for them is described in what Daniel’s companions said to King Nebuchadnezzar when he threatened them with death for disobeying him, Daniel 3:16-18.

Although our focus in this session is spiritual gifts of healings and miracles, it’s important to keep in mind that God is healer in all sorts of ways. In his book *The Life You Never Expected*, Andrew Wilson describes the four kinds of healing God does:

1. He has given our bodies natural healing ability (i.e. Mark 6:31 talks about resting and eating, which help our bodies recover their strength)
2. We can be healed through medical practices (the early Christian Luke was a doctor, Colossians 4:14, and Paul suggested that Timothy take some wine for his illnesses, 1 Timothy 5:23, which can be considered a kind of medicine. The fact that God made our bodies comprehensible and with healing ability also encourages us to see medical intervention as part of His goodness to us)
3. Miraculous healings (these are seen throughout Scripture)
4. Eternal healing (1 Corinthians 15:26 declares that Death will be destroyed at the end of this age, and Revelation 21:4 promises that in the new age, “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”)

## Discussion

Why do think there is complexity regarding miracles? Does thinking about this make you more confident that God can do miracles, or less?

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### Fact-check: miracles in Jesus's ministry and ours

Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and this included power for the miraculous:

- Read Luke 4:17-21 (see also Luke 4:14, 5:17, and Matthew 3:22-30 in which Jesus gives the credit for the deliverances He performed to the Holy Spirit).
- Read Romans 8:11 to be reminded that the same Spirit lives in us, God's people!

Why did Jesus perform miracles? Read these verses for a variety of reasons and consider whether those reasons are still valid today:

- Matthew 14:14
- Luke 5:23-26
- Luke 7:11-17
- Luke 18:41-43
- Acts 2:22

Jesus commissioned all His followers to do the things He did (Matthew 10:1 , Luke 10:1, 9, John 14:12-14) and the New Testament shows us Spirit-filled people obeying Him:

- Acts 5:14-16 (Peter, filled with the Spirit in Acts 2:4 and elsewhere)
- Acts 19:11-12 (Paul, filled with the Spirit in Acts 9:17 and elsewhere)
- Acts 6:8 (Stephen, described as filled with the Spirit Acts 6:3-5)
- Acts 8:5-7 (Phillip, described as filled with the Spirit Acts 6:3-5)
- 1 Corinthians 12:9-10a (unnamed people in Corinth, Paul's language suggests that receiving spiritual gifts of miracles and healings is something that happens on multiple occasions)
- Galatians 3:5 (unnamed people in Galatia, Paul's language suggests that the Spirit working miracles is something that happens on multiple occasions)
- Hebrews 2:4 (unnamed people who preached the gospel)

All of God's people are instructed to pray for the sick and "earnestly desire" spiritual gifts of healing and miracles:

- James 5:14-16 (this mentions elders praying in verse 14 and everyone in verse 16)
- 1 Corinthians 12:28-31 (not everyone will get these gifts but everyone should ask)

### Discuss: Growing in faith

Faith isn't always necessary for miracles but it is often associated with them (Matthew 9:2, 22, 15:28, Acts 14:8-10, etc.) and it is another gift of the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9). What has helped you grow in faith that God is willing and able to perform miracles today?

How can we make sure that the caveats of the first section ("the complexity of miracles") don't dull our faith or cause us to be passive about something we have been commanded to do?

We should expect that the gifts God gives us will grow as we use them faithfully. We accept varying levels of power in other spiritual gifts, such as prophecy and teaching, and we don't dismiss them for being less than perfect; the same should go for miracles and healings. Don't despise the day of small things

(Zechariah 4:10) but believe that God will grow what He gives to you as you co-operate with Him. The only way that this can happen is if you begin to try.

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### **Do it: Praying for miracles**

God's presence is accompanied by His power, and loving Him is the basis of everything we do, so it's great to start by worshipping Him together and celebrating all His goodness.

A powerful prayer to lead into praying for the miraculous is Acts 4:29-30, and the follow-up line in verse 31.

You could pray for people in the room who need a miracle, or for people and situations elsewhere. Ask those who feel they have faith for miracles to lead the way, and encourage others to follow them.

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### **To reflect on during the week**

In his book, *Surprised by The Power of The Spirit*, Jack Deere writes, "The most important thing I have done in my pursuit of spiritual gifts has been to pray very specifically for the gifts I felt the Lord wanted to give me... Probably the second most valuable things I have done in my pursuit of spiritual gifts is that I have attempted to use them on a regular basis." (pp.178, 179).

Start doing both of those things this week and see what God does through you!

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### **Advice for praying for healing**

From, *Everyday Supernatural*, Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft (p.173 on):

- "It is our responsibility to ask and pray; it is God's job to heal."
  - Ask for a brief, simple description of what the person wants to be prayed for.
  - Follow the lead of the Spirit (Jesus didn't use a formula when He healed people or performed other miracles). You can speak to the situation (as Jesus often did). You can invite the Spirit, then watch and listen to what He's doing – keeping your eyes open helps with this.
  - Lots of talking isn't necessary but it's helpful to ask questions occasionally: has the pain level reduced, has God said anything to the person you're praying for, etc.
  - "Carry on praying until you sense that the Spirit has finished ministering or the person has had enough."
  - It's so important that the person being prayed for knows that they are loved and valued by God.
  - If necessary, encourage them to ask for prayer again at other times, because persistence can be important (Luke 18:1-8).
  - "Let's pray kindly, expectantly and persistently."
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### **Recommended resources**

A popular-level book about miracles is *The Case for Miracles* by Lee Strobel. If you want something in-depth and academic, try *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* by Craig S. Keener.