

A close-up photograph of a person's hands pouring water from a woven basket into a large, shallow earthenware bowl. The person is wearing a red and brown striped garment. The water is captured in mid-pour, creating a dynamic splash. The bowl is made of reddish-brown clay and has a greenish-yellow patina. The background is a soft-focus green field.

MIRACLES

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S LANGUAGE

HELEN TODD

WHY DO WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND?

Miracles are a controversial subject among non-believers and Christians alike. Do they contradict the laws of nature? If so, and if God created nature, does God contradict Himself? Do miracles happen in modern times? Can Christians perform miracles?

Through my ministry experience I have concluded that miraculous manifestations of God are His language of choice to communicate with people. Precise and perfectly-timed language that is purposed to teach, exhort, provide and to accomplish the Master's Plan.

Jesus in Matthew 16 becomes angry with the Pharisees and frustrated with his disciples over the issue of miracles. He rebukes the Pharisees calling them “a wicked and adulterous generation looking for a sign” Matthew 16:4 (NIV), and a moment later reprimands the disciples accusing them of having little faith and not understanding or even remembering His miracles of multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

The common denominator that made Jesus angry was the poor interpretation of God's language of miracles. God cares about our understanding of this language because it is a “litmus test” of the heart. How we relate to the miraculous reveals where we stand in our relationship with Him.

Most Christians fall into three categories. The first attribute miracles to the days of old - the times of Jesus and the apostles and the times before them. The miracles accomplished their purpose and there is no need for God to demonstrate His power today. The other category has an insatiable appetite for seeking out signs and wonders and sometimes inventing them. The third category remains undecided, because they either have not yet experienced the miraculous or don't know what to think about it. The desire for the proper understanding and usage of the language of miracles sets us on the path to spiritual maturity and a deeper intimacy with God.

GOD SPEAKS RUSSIAN

The very first miracle I experienced as a Christian was a linguistic one. As a twenty-year old college student, I had grown up in a Communist country where miracles were not allowed. I was taught that nothing contradicts the laws of nature. Yet, one day I was on a tram full of people going to see a movie with a group of friends and suddenly I heard a voice say: “Follow me.”

I knew these words were not spoken by anyone on the tram and that they were directed to me. Nobody else around me seem to hear it. I realized I had just experienced the supernatural and I never forgot it. Looking back, these words were crucial for a girl who was a new Christian and had absolutely no plans or dreams of becoming a missionary. It validated me as His servant later in life, helping me through doubts and insecurities. In my first experience of the language of miracles, God spoke Russian.

DOES OUR FAITH LEVEL INFLUENCE THE MIRACULOUS?

Because World Missions Alliance is a non-denominational ministry, those who come with us on the mission field bring a different denominational position concerning miracles. This in no way has limited God in using the language of miraculous even with those who don't believe miracles.

In the 1990s a gentleman (we will call him Bill) contacted us about going to Russia on a mission trip at a specific time of the year. Bill belonged to a denomination that did not believe in praying for the healing of the sick, but rather in praying for God's will for the sick person. The trip he signed up for was with a team from a charismatic church led by their pastor. Neither Chuck nor I were traveling with the team. We discussed the situation with the pastor – he did not mind Bill joining their team. Bill, also aware that he was joining people of different theological views, said it was fine with him if he was not expected to do things he was not comfortable with. What happened during this mission was later told to us in two different accounts – the pastor's and Bill's. This always reminds me that God has a wonderful sense of humor.

The ministry took place in a city south of Moscow. Our Russian staff rented a movie theater and promoted nightly meetings in the local newspaper and radio. People packed the movie theater hungry to learn more about God and receive a free Bible. The American pastor at the end of the meeting announced that his team will be praying for the sick. Bill was asked to oversee Bible distribution at the other corner of the stage. As the crowd streamed towards the prayer team, an older lady headed towards Bill. All the translators were at the other corner helping to interpret prayer. The lady pointed at her hand - it was deformed and not functional. She looked at Bill expectantly. He tried to communicate to her that the prayer team was at the other side, but she wouldn't leave. Bill reluctantly touched her hand and prayed "Oh Lord, let your will be done." She screamed as if in pain and ran out.

The next evening, the lady came up to Bill after the service. With the help of a translator she was thanking him for praying for her and showed him the hand that now looked perfectly straight. While Bill looked at the hand in great amazement, the other team members were praising God for the miracle.

God spoke to the Russian lady that He was not a myth, as she had been taught by the Communist Government. God showed Bill that He did not fit in the box of Bill's experience and His power was not limited by the extent of Bill's faith. God spoke to all the people present that night. He spoke to us as we heard the testimony and to you as you are reading it today.

His power is available to us today as it was in the past and it is not necessarily dependent on the level of our faith.

HOW TO CREATE THE ATMOSPHERE FOR THE MIRACULOUS?

Sometimes people come to the mission field with the high expectations of the miraculous and feel disappointed when nothing supernatural happens. "Did I miss God's will? Have I misheard His calling?" they wonder.

What is our part in the language of miracles? How do we speak it?

The greatest miracle in the history of World Missions Alliance was also the first one. It happened in Siberia at the end of a wonderfully successful mission. The team boarded the bus, ready to head to the airport and catch the flight to Moscow. Chuck Todd (the president of World Missions Alliance) was still inside the hotel saying good bye to the Russian ministry partners.

A team member ran up to Chuck to report that an elderly lady from Louisiana, Rosella, passed out on the bus and the two registered nurses on the team could not find any vital signs and pronounced her dead.

Losing a precious woman of God at the end of such a successful mission seemed unthinkable. Shock and sadness of the news mixed with the concern for the logistical complexity of the entire situation. Will the entire team miss the flight to Moscow? How will they get back? How to get the body back to America? These were the thoughts racing through Chuck's mind as he headed towards the bus. Suddenly he heard a noise coming from the bus unlike anything he had heard before. It was a sound of many voices united into one. This unearthly sound was the voice of unity. The team members, Baptists, Charismatics, Methodist and Assemblies of God all prayed at the same time and with the same purpose. Whether they believed in miracles or not, this situation was not an acceptable option for any of them.

By the time Chuck got on the bus, Rosella opened her eyes. She traveled on several more trips with WMA after that incident before she passed away peacefully in her hometown.

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” Matthew 18:20 (NIV). We create the presence of God and the atmosphere for the miraculous by our fellowship with each other and by the unity and purity of our intention.

GOD'S LOVE LANGUAGE

Sometimes God uses the language of miracles because He wants us to know He understands ours’.

In the Republic of Georgia, we visited a scientist whose wife had an undiagnosed mental illness. She was an intelligent and educated woman in her mid-60s and suddenly became delusional, occasionally violent, and suicidal. She was Catholic and always kept a Bible by her bedside. We were invited by their relative to pray for her.

The husband was a well-respected physicist who had published works and was a self-proclaimed atheist. The woman received our prayer graciously but when we tried to share with her about having a personal relationship with Jesus, she shut down. The husband was touched by our prayers and listened intently to the Gospel message. At the end of the conversation he was willing to pray and ask Jesus into his heart. “I just wish I could feel him,” - he said wistfully before closing his eyes in prayer. “Lord Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross for my sins, that you resurrected and have the power to forgive my sins. Please come into my heart....” he prayed and then suddenly started jumping like a child who had received a long-awaited toy. With beaming eyes and a happy grin, he declared “I felt Him. I felt Jesus come into my heart.”

DIFFICULTIES OF LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE

Understanding language of miracles requires study and practice, just like learning any foreign language. You must immerse yourself in the native environment – the Word of God – to study the patterns. You must practice it.

Jesus promised that we can use the language of miracles. “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” John 14:12-14

We don't become instantly fluent in it without study and practice, and, occasionally, embarrassing episodes of misusing it.

When Chuck moved to Russia, he did not speak a word of Russian. Life in a city where you can't speak or read was extremely difficult. He was fully immersed into the native environment of the language, but this was not enough. He hired a tutor and learned just enough vocabulary to be able to order a meal at a restaurant, get a cab, or buy groceries. One time at a restaurant he asked the waitress to bring him some sugar. He couldn't understand why her face turned red and she broke into giggles at his request. Later, when he repeated the conversation to me, he mispronounced the word "sugar" and made it sound like the word used to identify a female dog.

When we mispronounce the language of supernatural it is just as silly.

One of the most effective ways for evangelism in Muslim countries are house visitations. We are frequently invited into homes to visit and pray. If the hosts are church members, they invite unsaved friends, neighbors and relatives. In a relaxed, informal atmosphere over tea with pastries, and fruit, people open to us, share their concerns and are often willing to be prayed for and sometimes even invite Jesus into their hearts. Often miracles happen during these house visitations.

Once we were invited into a home where a young woman suffered from an unidentified malady. She was withdrawn, hostile towards her family, incredibly shy and spent most of the time in seclusion. When we arrived at the house she was sleeping in her room. Her family asked us to pray for her. Without seeing the girl or speaking to her somebody on the team diagnosed her as demon possessed. Then, without asking the permission, several headed to her room to cast out demons. The chaos broke out in the girl's bedroom. Some were binding demons, others were loosening them. Some claimed the windows had to be open to let the demons out, others were demanding to shut the doors and windows. The young woman woke up from all the commotion and was greatly frightened by the foreign speaking strangers in her room. She started crying and screaming. That exorcism did not end successfully, mostly due to lack of strategy and unity.

Jesus's disciples had difficulty understanding the language of miracles. He sounds frustrated and disappointed: "Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Matthew 16:9-11 (NIV)

When Jesus warns them of the spiritual danger their minds are fixated on something very earthly – the lack of bread. Never mind that just shortly prior they had witnessed two miracles of the multiplication of loaves and fishes.

CAN WE INITIATE THE LANGUAGE OF MIRACLES?

Our needs, our lack, our problems, and our “mountains” initiate the language of the miraculous. When they exceed our natural abilities, they become a portal into the unsurpassable power of the Father. It also gives God a way to communicate His unending love for us.

The second biggest miracle in the history of World Missions Alliance happened about a decade after the first one. In Ethiopia we were asked by a pastor to visit a village that had no running water. The village was controlled by a witch who was also the healer. The pastor from Addis Ababa had been visiting the village frequently intending to build a well for the people and show them the love and power of the real Healer. Our purpose was to pray for spiritual breakthrough in the village. Since the people were very poor, the pastor proposed to buy food and soap for 30 families. We purchased rice, sugar flour, and two bars of soap per family and yellow plastic bags to package the gifts.

When we arrived at the village the pastor told us that there had been a mistake and we had to provide food for 40 families. He was very nervous that our lack of provisions would be negatively perceived, creating animosity between him and the people and, as a result, hurt the future ministry.

The decision was made to distribute what we had and then purchase more supplies to cover the rest. Due to the shortage, flour, rice, and sugar were carefully weighed and measured – 2 pounds of each per family plus two bars of soap. Thirty yellow bags were lined up and a person was designated to write down the name of everyone who received provisions in order to know exactly how many were left. When the announcement was made that only 30 families should get in line and the rest must wait, the villagers did not cooperate. They all lined up to receive the yellow bags. They all did. All 40 families. Where did extra 20 bars of soap, extra 10 pounds of flour, rice, and sugar come from?

The miracle of multiplication was astounding to our team, it opened the eyes of villagers towards God, and served as the promise of success to the pastor from Addis Ababa. A year later he completed the well in the village.

A TOOL FOR THE DIVINE STRATEGY

The language of miracles is always multifunctional and strategic. Its message is timeless and rarely benefits just one person.

A great example of a strategic miracle happened in Iraq. We were invited to a house where a young woman had lost the ability to speak. She wasn't born deaf or mute. Suddenly one day she quit speaking. Her family were neither Muslim, nor Christians but they believed in God. They were desperate because doctors could not help their daughter. We laid hands on her and asked God to touch her. She spoke instantly, surprising herself, her parents, and even us. As humans we never quite get used to the language of miracles.

The family was besides themselves with joy. They came to church that evening and all three gave their hearts to Jesus.

We returned to Iraq a year later and they invited us to their house again. We thought they wanted to feed us dinner to thank us, as is tradition in the Middle East. When we got to the house it was packed with over 30 people, their neighbors, friends and family members, all wanting to hear about the God who did such a great miracle. Many of them accepted Christ that evening.

The people in the Middle East are particularly drawn to the miraculous. Islam teaches them the reality of God. It even teaches them to respect Jesus as a prophet. When a miracle happens before their eyes in the name of Jesus, it is an easy transition for them to accept that He is more than a prophet.

When ISIS drove many people from their homes in Iraq and Syria, many of them sought safety in the Kurdish autonomous region in Northern Iraq. We had the opportunity to visit one of the largest refugee camps there – the Domiz camp. It was built to accommodate 30,000 people, however, by the time we visited it was housing close to 100,000. We came to distribute food and blankets to some of them and do a special program for the kids. We were not allowed to share Christ with them. The leadership of the camp was Muslim, and they even assigned their own translators to us from the camp to ensure that we don't create any problems. The two young Muslim men who helped us translate were refugees from Syria. One of them was a school teacher. They were friendly, helpful, and spoke great English. We invited them to join us for lunch. During the meal the team members were discussing the previous night's house visitations and some of the miraculous healing that happened. Frankly, we forgot that our new friends were sitting at the table as well. They were listening. After thanking us for the meal, the school teacher said: "If all of this that was shared is true, I can tell you the entire refugee camp will be willing to come to your church."

WHEN GOD DOES NOT ANSWER

We have a wonderful guide to the language of miracles in John 14. Jesus explains to the disciples that He is the way and He is also the destination. (John 14:6-11) In the earthly realm the miraculous is the mere representation of His presence. When a miracle happens through your prayer, you testify to the world that His presence is in you. The condition for this indwelling is: “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” John 14:2 (NIV)

What happens when our prayer for the miraculous is not answered? Does it mean the presence of God left us? Does it mean that we have stepped outside of God’s will?

I believe the key to these questions is in verse 27:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” John 14:27 (NIV)
He does not give us answers as the world would. He does not speak to us as the world does. His ways are magnificent and often unexpected.

In 2005, we had to give up a lovely office space due to increase in rent and a tight ministry budget. We moved the office into the basement of our house and stayed there for the next five years. I call them the “basement years.” They were difficult on many levels. Our ministry was growing and maturing in a way of a seed germinating underground – the results of this growth and maturity were not visible to the naked eye. Sometimes it felt that we were stuck, spinning wheels. One day, I felt particularly discouraged and cried out to God in my prayer: “Lord, will we forever be stuck in the basement?”

Shortly after we were hosting our annual conference. A dear brother from India, pastor Sabu came to attend. I had not met him before since Chuck led all the India trips. He slipped into the auditorium after the session had already begun. I wondered who he was. After the session he came to me and said: “The Lord gave me a word for you”. As he prayed for me, he prophesied many things about our ministry and me personally. One of them particularly caught my attention: “World Missions Alliance will have a beautiful building” he said. I was moved to tears by God’s love. He sent a man all the way from India to respond to my desperate cry! Pastor Sabu stayed for couple of days after the conference, we talked for hours. He really encouraged Chuck and I to believe every word of the prophecy. “You must believe God for the most beautiful building in Branson,” he urged.

Branson, among many other things, is known for its shows. They line the main “strip” highway 76 with theater buildings big and small. Pastor Sabu encouraged us to act in faith on the prophecy that God had just brought through him. “What is the most beautiful building in Branson?” he asked. Next things we knew, we all drove to one of the theater buildings, marched around it seven times and then buried a quarter in the ground as a “seed” for the money that will come for its purchase.

A couple “basement” years passed. One night, we received a desperate phone call from a dear ministry friend, Charlie. His wife, Charlotte, who had been a faithful World Missions Alliance missionary for years, had suddenly suffered a brain aneurysm and was in a coma. Next morning, she was flown by helicopter into a hospital in Albuquerque.

Charlotte was in her mid-60s. She was full of life and love for Christ. On the mission field she was a powerful intercessor, keenly aware of spiritual warfare in her prayers for the rest of the team. She was very sensitive to God’s voice. When He called her to go, she went, even if her flesh was saying no. She would call our office with the same greeting “Top of the morning to you!” We all loved that energetic greeting. A few days prior she had just signed up to go on the next trip to Ethiopia. Her coma was a complete shock.

After few more conversations with Charlie, a decision was made that I would fly to Albuquerque to pray for Charlotte and encourage Charlie. The report from the doctors was distressing. They recommended taking her off life support.

My flight connected in Dallas. I had to run to the sky train to make a tight connection. Trying to catch my breath I noticed a woman nearby looking directly at me. She was middle aged, dressed in black, dark hair with strands of gray and sparkling black eyes.

I lowered my eyes to avoid her stare and noticed a large silver angel pin on her blouse. She got off one stop ahead of me and on the way out turned back and gave me a big smile. At that moment I noticed a resemblance between her and Charlotte. It was not enough to call them identical but enough to make me feel chill run down my spine and then an overwhelming sense of peace. Everything was going to be alright!

Charlie picked me up at the airport and we immediately drove to the hospital. Charlotte was motionless with her eyes closed and her salt-and-pepper hair contrasting the white sheets. Her face was beautiful and peaceful. Somehow, I felt that she was aware of our presence. We prayed for several hours pouring all our faith into these prayers. It was too early for Charlotte to go to heaven, she had so much to offer to people around her.

She had the desire to proclaim the Gospel in the nations. I was certain that any moment she was going to open her eyes, sit up and say: “Top of the morning to you!” Charlie and I would laugh and say: “It is four o’clock in the afternoon, Charlotte!” What a witness that would be to the young doctor, who with chilling confidence had told Charlie earlier: “She is not coming back. I suggest you make your decision quickly.”

Hours went by. Charlotte was still motionless. “I don’t want to make this decision, Helen” said Charlie as he dropped me off at the hotel, “I want God to make the decision.”

The next morning, on the way to the airport, I got a call from Charlie. Charlotte went to heaven. Before I could feel the disappointment of a failed prayer, I remembered the woman with the angel pin and her smile as she left the train and once again, I felt peace.

About a month later Charlie called. He shared that Charlotte and he had made an investment that produced a good return. He wanted to use a certain sum from this investment to commemorate Charlotte’s passionate involvement with WMA.

A few weeks prior to Charlotte becoming ill we had stopped by a building for sale, two miles away from our house. It once belonged to a real estate agency owned by a woman. The elegant building reflected her good taste. We admired it at as we drove passed it every day. After the real estate business closed the building was repossessed by the bank and was in a foreclosure. Though we weren’t in a financial position to purchase a building, for some reason, we called the number on the sign and requested to see it. We had never been inside. It was spacious and as impressive inside as its lovely exterior – cream colored moldings, beautiful light fixtures, hardwood floors and a fireplace in a wall with stone trim. Everything was in great working condition. It was ready for someone to move in. The price was good too. The bank was anxious to sell it. The realtor gave us some private time in the building and Chuck and I prayed that if it was God’s will that he would give us the funds. We knew it would take a miracle.

When Charlie mentioned the amount of money he wanted to donate in memory of Charlotte, it matched the price of the beautiful building.

We moved into “Charlotte Beck Missions Center” in the beginning of 2011, after five years of operating from our basement.

Every morning when I walk in, Charlotte smiles at me from the photograph on the wall as if saying “Top of the morning to you” in the language of miracles. Since I still retain some of my Russian accent after 23 years of living in the United States, I suspect I will always struggle with the language of miracles. I look forward to eternity where I can become fluent and it will become my native tongue.



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