

CHRISTMAS

Miracles

Big Idea Discussion Guide

Session 1 - Asking for a Miracle



Series Big Idea

As we journey through the Christmas season this year let's ask God for a miracle wherever and however we need one.

Big Idea

God wants us to ask Him for whatever we need, including things that will take a miracle to happen.

Ice Breaker

Miracle, The Miracle Worker, Miracle on 34th Street, Miracle Maker ... just four of the better known movies with "miracle" in the title. What feelings or memories do they evoke for you? Or what other "miracle-related" movie is your favorite?

Introduction

We all have things happening in our lives that are way outside our control, things that we just can't fix or make happen on our own. Those things are the subjects of our discussion this week. We want to challenge you to ask God for nothing less than a miracle.

A miracle can be something that is astounding and completely unexplainable like a baby being born when the doctors said that medically it wasn't possible. Sometimes it can be something that might seem less miraculous but you had no ability to make happen: a broken relationship restored, a job found after two years of unemployment, a financial situation turned-around. The point is NOT whether it's "clearly" miraculous. The point is, it is something big in your life and you are powerless to make it happen, and if God doesn't get involved in it, then it's not going to happen.

1. Have you ever seen God work a miracle in your life or someone you know? Share the story with your group.
2. Is there a situation where you are in need of a miracle this Christmas time? Can you share your need with the group?

We will start with the story of the first ever Christmas miracle, a story that will inspire us to still expect miracles from God today.

Zechariah's story

The story is from Luke 1. It centers on a couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth. We are reading from the Message version.

"During the rule of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest assigned service in the regiment of Abijah. His name was Zechariah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth. Together they lived honorably before God, careful in keeping to the ways of the commandments and enjoying a clear conscience before God. But they were childless because Elizabeth could never conceive, and now they were quite old.

It so happened that as Zechariah was carrying out his priestly duties before God, working the shift assigned to his regiment, it came his one turn in life to enter the sanctuary of God and burn incense. The congregation was gathered and praying outside the Temple at the hour of the incense offering. Unannounced, an angel of God appeared just to the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was paralyzed in fear.

But the angel reassured him, "Don't fear, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. Elizabeth, your wife, will bear a son by you. You are to name him John. You're going to leap like a gazelle for joy, and not only you - many will delight in his birth. He'll achieve great stature with God."

Zechariah said to the angel, "Do you expect me to believe this? I'm an old man and my wife is an old woman."

Remember, only once in a priestly lifetime could you be chosen to go into the temple on behalf of the people. So if you're a priest and you're expecting God to show up, it should be at this time--yet a God thing happened and Zechariah still didn't believe. The expectation for God to intervene was nowhere in his life.

3. Can you sympathize with Zechariah? How would you respond if an angel appeared to you and told you that God was going to step in and do a miracle in your life?



The angel responded to Zechariah's skepticism:

"But the angel said, 'I am Gabriel, the sentinel of God, sent especially to bring you this glad news. But, because you won't believe me, you'll be unable to say a word until the day of your son's birth. Every word I've spoken to you will come true on time – God's time.'"

God gave Zechariah a sign. He proved to Zechariah right away that He who promised to bring a miracle baby has the supernatural power to strike a man mute.

4. What lessons do you think Zechariah might learn as a result of being unable to speak for such a long time?

So how does the story end?

"When Elizabeth was full term in her pregnancy, she bore a son. Her neighbors and relatives, seeing that God had overwhelmed her with mercy, celebrated with her."

On the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child and were calling him Zechariah after his father. But his mother intervened: "No. He is to be called John."... They used sign language to ask Zechariah what he wanted him named.

Asking for a tablet, Zechariah wrote, "His name is to be John." That took everyone by surprise. Surprise followed surprise – Zechariah's mouth was now open, his tongue loose, and he was talking, praising God!

A deep, reverential fear settled over the neighborhood, and in all that Judean hill country people talked about nothing else... Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit."

So God provided a miracle for Zechariah and Elizabeth. They gave birth to a son in their old age, a son who would grow up to be John the Baptist and prepare the way for Jesus. And it wasn't just about the miracle itself either—through it God changed Zechariah's life, and He even impacted all who were involved with the miracle. God was in the business of bringing people miracles and changing their lives through them. And He still is.

The Problem of Doubt/Disbelief

We follow a God who says things like:

"I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?" Jeremiah 32:27

"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Matthew 17:20

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Philippians 4:6.

So then why aren't we asking for miracles every day?

5. Which of these reasons for not asking for a miracle do you most identify with? Explain your answer.
- A. God doesn't do that anymore.
 - B. Other people have bigger problems.
 - C. God won't come through for me.
 - D. I don't want to look foolish...or make God look foolish.
 - E. God can, but would God do that for me?
 - F. Other (please explain)

What To Do: Just Ask

We all have reasons for not asking for a miracle, but we should ask anyway. Ask and keep on asking.

Zechariah's miracle came in the form of a son he had longed for probably longer than anything else he ever wanted. God used this miracle baby not just to bless Zechariah and his wife, Elisabeth. This small child grew up to become the man who prepared the way for Jesus and the good news that people can find their way back to God.

6. Think about that thing that is so big and bold and beyond anything you could ever make happen that you talked about in question #2. If you didn't feel able to share then, can you now? Spend some time praying for each other. Ask God to give you a miracle.

Next Steps

Spend some time each day this week praying and asking God for your miracle and those shared by the members of your group. Remind yourself of God's promises in his word. Journal what you think you are learning this Christmas season and share your thoughts with someone you trust.



1. Give people time to think and answer this first question about miracles. Don't jump in too quickly with your own story.
2. This will be a difficult question for some people to respond to but there will be another opportunity later on for additional thoughts.
3. Zechariah was the last person we might expect to have doubts! Honest answers are OK. Many of us have to "see it to believe it".
4. Taking away the power of speech might lead Zechariah to more creative ways of communication. Given the effort it would take to make himself understood he might have learnt to think more before he "spoke". He would certainly have done more listening. He could have more time to spend with God.
5. Group members will have different reasons for holding back on their requests. Allow people time to explore their doubts and fears.
6. The final question. Support people who were silent earlier as they share their story now. Find a creative way to encourage your group to pray for each other.

Community Christian Church

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CHRISTMAS *Miracles*

Big Idea Discussion Guide Session 2 - Make Way For a Miracle



Big Idea

A miracle is not something you just ask for and then wait and see what happens. We need to make way for a miracle.

Ice Breaker

How do you get ready for a trip? Do you get your suitcases out a week before you go away and start making lists or are you a last minute, shove-it-all-in sort? Or, do you get someone else to make all your preparations?

Simeon

As characters in the Christmas story go, Simeon is not very well known, but we can learn something important from his experiences. Simeon shows us how to make way for a miracle. His story is found in the second chapter of Luke, 25-33

"Now there was a man named Simeon who lived in Jerusalem. He was a righteous man and very devout. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he eagerly expected the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, "Lord, now I can die in peace! As You promised me, I have seen the Savior You have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and He is the glory of your people Israel!" Joseph and Mary were amazed at what was being said about Jesus."

A. PARTNERSHIP

Simeon shows us about how to make way for a miracle in partnership with God. The Bible describes Simeon as a "righteous man and very devout...filled with the Holy Spirit". That means He was close to God. "Devout" means loyal. "Righteous" means rightly related. So Simeon was a man who was loyal in his relationship to God...his life was partnered with God; and when it says the Holy Spirit was upon him, it means it was clear that God was present in his life.

1. Did you start praying for a miracle last week? Remind others in the group of the miracle you are asking God for, or share what you'd like to start asking for.

When we pursue our miracle from God, Simeon reminds us it's something we don't do on our own, but in relationship, in partnership with God. God wants to partner with you in the miraculous. In fact, that is his greatest motivator in doing the miraculous, so that people come to know Him more and more and in a deeper and more powerful way.

If you're already seeking your miracle, are you thinking of God as out there somewhere picking apart your miracle application ready to stamp "reject"? Or are you coming to God and saying to Him, "Thank you for loving me and walking beside me. I want to partner with you in this miracle"?

2. How do you think the idea of being in partnership with God could affect the way you pray?

B. PARTICULAR

The next thing Simeon teaches us about miracle-seeking is to seek a particular miracle. He was looking for a particular miracle in his lifetime -- He asked to see the Messiah. The particular miracle he wanted was to see the baby who was born to be Savior and King. He wasn't hanging out around the temple in general, he was at the most likely place possible to see and experience the particular miracle he sought.

It takes courage and faith, to ask for something in particular. Is the miracle you are asking for a "be with me" or "help with that" kind of thing? Or is it particular? Too many times we somehow think it's more spiritual to pray "if it be your will", a sort of catch-all kind of praying about things in general, but that's not how Simeon was seeking his miracle. E.g. if you need a financial miracle you might ask for a particular amount, or for the healing of a particular condition if you need a physical miracle.



James 4:2 says, "The reason you don't have what you want is because you don't ask God for it..." God doesn't need us protecting his reputation by asking for things in general so he can help us in general.

3. Do you tend to make specific requests when you pray? Why or why not?

C. PROACTIVE

Look what it said Simeon did before the miracle happened: "Moved by the Spirit, he went to the temple courts." God told Simeon to go to the temple and he went. He didn't just sit there waiting for the miracle to come to him. He was proactive. God wants us to put ourselves in the places where His miracles are most likely to happen. For Simeon, that was going to the Temple, because that's where newborn babies were dedicated. He moved his feet and was proactive, not passive about what he had asked God to do.

4. What proactive move could you be making right now to partner with God in the miracle you are asking for?

D. PATIENT

Simeon was incredibly patient. God had told him "someday before you die you will see your miracle". We don't know how long Simeon waited. When he got his miracle, he was ready to go ahead and die. He might have been waiting a lifetime.

5. Would you describe yourself overall as a patient person? How long do you honestly feel you can wait when you ask God for something? If you have an experience of waiting for God to answer your prayers please share it with the group.

God's timing is never off. A part of Simeon being a righteous and devout man was the loyalty to God that was nurtured in him over the years. God can grow us and mature us through waiting like He can in few others ways.

E. PRAISE

The Bible says in Luke 2:28: "Simeon took him (the Christ-child - his miracle) into his arms and praised God." Praise is an important part of making way for a miracle.

The temptation is to enjoy the miracle and its results; to put the focus on the gift instead of the giver and focus on the miracle instead of the miracle-maker. But the miracle was not complete until Simeon had praised God for the miracle. Even while we are waiting for our miracle we can be grateful for what He's already done for us. We can agree with the psalmist,

"Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Psalm. 103:2)

6. Think about the miracle you're asking God for. Then look at the words we've talked about today. Which of these words are you applying when it comes to your miracle? Which one or two have you overlooked? Which ones do you need to go to work on when it comes to your miracle?

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Next Steps

Start with one of the steps you know you need to take to make way for your miracle. Write it down in your journal and keep praying for your needs to be met. Make sure to take note of what God is doing in your life while you wait and praise Him for the changes.



1. Time for a recap from last week.
2. Being in partnership suggests a conversation. God, what are you already doing? What part do I play? What do you want me to do?
3. Being specific is often a personality thing. Some might feel they don't want to tell God what to do. Others generally used to asking directly in many situations. Allow conversation about moving towards specificity.
4. Creative answers are good here. Learn from each other's ideas.
5. Remember patience is listed as a fruit of the Spirit. As we walk with God patience grows in our lives.
6. This might be an opportunity to split into smaller groups to give everyone an opportunity to be honest as they think about their next steps.

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Big Idea Discussion Guide Session 3 - Waiting on a Miracle



Big Idea

What God does in us while we are waiting is just as important as what we are waiting for.

Ice Breaker

What is the longest line you have ever waited in? Was it worth it?

Introduction

In this series we have been talking about asking for a miracle, asking for something that when it happens you can only say, "That's something that God did. Only God could make that happen."

1. Have you identified your Christmas miracle yet? Remind the rest of the group what you are asking for. Has there been any progress or are you still waiting to see God intervene?

Many of us will still be waiting for God to answer our prayers. One of the most important things we can learn while we are waiting is the important truth that what God does in us while we are waiting is as important as what we are waiting for.

Waiting is difficult. Not many people like to wait for anything and yet we seem to spend much of our life waiting for the rest of our life to happen.

2. Share a story of a time when you had to wait for something—and it turned out to be well worth the wait. Did God do anything in you during that wait? What was it?

Lewis Smedes talks about waiting this way,
"Waiting is our destiny. As creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hope for, we wait

in the darkness for a flame we cannot light. We wait in fear for a happy ending that we cannot write. We wait for a "not yet" that feels like a "not ever".

3. Do you identify with this quote? Has your past experience made waiting a frightening experience for you? Why or why not?

The Journey of the Wise Men:

A familiar part of the Christmas narrative is the story of the wise men (or Magi) who came looking for the baby Jesus. They had a long journey before they found Him. Here is the account of their adventure from the book of Matthew 2:1-12:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.' " Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too might go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.



4. Have you ever thought about why the wise men decided to follow the star? What reasons do you think they might have had for leaving their homes?

One of the things this story tells us is that waiting doesn't have to be just waiting. Waiting is a journey.

5. The wise men travelled for a long time. What lessons might we learn about waiting from the wise men?

Towards the end of their journey the wise men appear to have tried to take a shortcut and landed in Jerusalem where they had to ask for help in finding Jesus. As a result Herod ended up ordering the death of every male child in Bethlehem under the age of 2.

6. Have ever tried to take a shortcut to getting your prayers answered? Was there a price to pay for doing that? Share your story. What did you learn from the experience?

Whatever miracle we are seeking, we must be careful of trying to get God's will our way.

The wise men thought the miraculous star would lead them to a king but they got so much more than that. When they finally made their way to Bethlehem God brought them face to face with His own Son. God used their desire for meeting a new king (what they wanted most) to bring them face to face with THE King (what they needed most).

It is hard to accept that many times the miracle we need most is not what God can do for us but what God will do in us. The truth is that no matter how badly we want what we want, what God is doing in us while we wait is as, if not more, important than what we are waiting for.

7. Do you agree with this statement? How hard is it to accept it? Explain why.

Ultimately, whatever miracle God might or might not do in our lifetime, there is only one miracle that we absolutely need to have, and that is a personal relationship with Jesus.

The wise men were probably travelling for at least two years. Maybe more. Some of us have already been waiting for our miracles for longer than this. It takes amazing faith and strength and determination to keep waiting. Receiving a miracle and being truly changed by it are two different things. Miracles are signs on the road directing us and leading us to God but too often we just fixate on the miracle itself, like fixating on the road sign and missing the scenery on the way.

8. How do you think you can avoid fixating on the road signs and instead keep your eyes on God? Share your practical ideas with each other.

Conclusion

Our miracle may come tomorrow, or next week, or next year, or it might even never come in the way we want it but we know what God is doing in us while we wait is as important as what we are waiting for.

*"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."
(Philippians 1:6)*

Next Steps

This week concentrate on what God is teaching you while you wait for your miracle. Write your thoughts in your journal and thank God for what He has already done for you.

And remember--don't stop praying when the Christmas season is over! Hold on to what God has started in you.



1. Most people will have a specific request by now. Progress reports will vary.
2. Allow people's stories to encourage other members of the group.
3. People with positive stories will be less frightened than those who have had bad outcomes after waiting. Encourage honesty. We will see the benefits of waiting as we progress.
4. Some people will never have thought of the "why" before. We know that the wise men were aware of prophecies regarding a star but other reasons for why these wise men joined the trek are unknown. Think why might you have wanted to join in on the adventure.
5. A long journey or waiting period requires patience, determination, courage, and perseverance... The wise men would have given up lives of considerable comfort for their uncertain trek.
6. Taking a shortcut can be compared to taking back control when we have declared God to be in charge. Stories will vary from the dramatic to the less spectacular. Learn from each other.
7. Talk about how difficult it can be to actually live out your belief that God really does know best.
8. Some practical ideas might include, staying in community, taking time to read and pray, journaling what you see God doing in your life and sharing those blessings with others.

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