

## Do You Believe in Miracles?

### [Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18](#)

Some of you may remember the 1980 Winter Olympics. For Americans in general, 1980 was a difficult year. 52 people had been taken hostage in Iran and negotiations for their release were not going well. Economic times were difficult. We had just emerged from a decade marked by the end of the Vietnam War, where none of our veterans were honored or recognized. It seemed to be a time when there was very little for Americans to be proud of as American citizens. That was the year a group of young college students did the impossible by winning a significant hockey game against the Soviets – a mature team of trained competitors very accustomed to winning. These American college students skated against all odds and won a significant victory for the United States, coming from behind as underdogs often have to do. And if that wasn't enough, two

days later they did it again, defeating Finland for the gold medal in hockey, once again coming from behind to take the game. If any of you saw that game you might recall what the announcers were saying as the clock ticked down the last seconds – “Do you believe in miracles?” That Olympic event is now commonly known as the ‘Miracle on Ice.’ So I ask you, “Do you believe in miracles?”

God was asking Abram to do just that – believe in miracles. Our story from Genesis shows Abram a man who has no children from his wife Sarai. We could talk a lot about how Sarai tried to take matters into her own hands and set the stage for Abram to have a child with her handmaid, Hagar, but I think we can leave that one for another sermon. The bottom line is that Sarai was barren so hence Abram had no descendents. In a society that marked your wealth by the size of your household,

this was not a good combination. But we have also seen as a pattern that when a woman was barren and then eventually conceived a child, that child was quite special. We will see this as the case with Abram and Sarai's son Isaac.

Notice the names of our characters – Abram and Sarai. We know that later in the story God changed their names. We also know that names are very important in the Hebrew language. Abram's name became Abraham which means 'father of many nations.' How odd that God would choose this name for Abram considering his situation. An old man with no children will find his name to be 'father of all nations.' I think God was asking Abram the same question – do you believe in miracles?

What miracles are you looking for today? When I returned from Santa Fe, I shared a slide show that I had entitled, "Looking for Miracles." Many of the groups we visited were

searching and trusting in the miracle to come. For the unemployed, undocumented immigrants we helped in the park, the miracle was a job to survive another day. For many of us that miracle holds true as well. I am thinking everyone here has been touched by this downturned economy. Many are out of work and seeking some way to pay their bills and care for their families. The ones I have met want to work – they want a job to go to and complain about! But jobs are scarce. What I found with the immigrants in the park is that in spite of the odds against them, they came everyday on the hope of a miracle.

Others are looking for the miracle of healing. I have shared many times about my little cousin Serena and her struggle with cancer. I know at times her family is angry with God, wondering why things like this happen to someone as innocent as a child. Yet I read the journal Serena's mom posts every day.

I see her perseverance and her persistence and her hope. I see her grasping and claiming a miracle for her daughter. Perhaps there are others here struggling with health issues. Do you believe in miracles?

What miracle are we seeking for our church? As this body of Christ, what are we reaching out and trusting God to provide? It is interesting that the dynamic of a small church seems to boggle the minds of the ‘experts.’ In the time of the mega-church, many point a finger at the small churches and claim the problems exist there. Yet we see small churches endure trials time and again and still step out in faith. We see small churches in general believing in miracles. I am not naïve enough to claim this is true for all small churches, as a number of them no longer exist. But those who put God first and care for neighbor second are the ones who are enacting miracles in their neighborhoods.

There is a ministry that I have talked about with some here and I would like to eventually have us consider. This ministry, known as “Angel Food” has networked with non-profit organizations, predominantly churches, to purchase quality food at discounted prices so that churches can pass on the discounts to neighbors. Basically, one pays \$30 for a \$60 box of food. There is no screening process to see if you are in need – and these days many are in need. The reason I bring this up is that the vast majority of distributors for ‘Angel Food’ are small churches with 50 members or less. Small churches are reaching out to their communities to meet a very specific need in their neighbors’ lives. Small churches are taking a stand in their community to meet a physical need while opening their facilities to share the gospel. Small churches are believing in miracles.

One of my instructors at Wesley, Dr. Lew Parks, was just recently recognized as a full tenured educator. Dr. Parks specializes in the small church, having pastored several over his career. He makes these observations about small churches.

“I use the phrase Dynamic Equilibrium to describe a better script for small churches. A church in healthy equilibrium is (1) multi-generational; (2) sees itself through God's eyes (mission, marks, biblical images, election, priesthood of all believers, and always reforming); (3) cherishes its corporate story but wants to write a new chapter; (4) creatively adapts to changes in its environment; and (5) grows in members and stewardship at a pace that offsets losses and increased demands. The drama of a small church is not the drama of growth goals hit or missed but the drama of endurance against incredible odds over extended periods of time.”

I believe a message for church leaders is that small churches are here to stay because they believe in miracles. Small churches have maintained the model of the ancient 'house' church so that ministry could be done in a setting where everyone knows your name. Small churches are the backbone of this country similar to small businesses being characterized as the same. The uniqueness of small churches is this – when the focus of the church remains on Almighty God, miracles happen, Amen? When we put aside our differences and celebrate our commonalities, miracles happen. When we go out and meet people where they are without judgment for their mistakes, miracles happen. When we claim our stance as a beacon of light in a dark world, miracles happen.

So I ask you again, Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe in miracles? Hard times

will come. Difficulties will put us into a corner. Trials will come to hammer us into the ground. We are the underdogs. But our coach and partner and guide is Almighty God. God makes a way when there is no way. Do you believe in miracles? Amen.