

# TIME FOR A MIRACLE

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I need to speak with you today about the journey the Lord is leading us on—what we’re calling our “remodel project.”

Our original remodel project was “paid for.” The sale of a little less than half of our property was going to cover the entire project, with money left over.

Marisol shared with me a concern that had been growing in her heart: that the project left no room for faith, there was nothing required of the congregation; no room for a miracle, no room for God.

Today, as the remodel draws near, some (including me) are concerned about our lack of money.

I am more concerned about our lack of faith. We have some options for getting more money. We have no alternative to faith in God.

Let me share with you several ways in which God has encouraged me.

## GIDEON’S STORY

The story of Gideon focuses on his struggle to overcome fear and trust God to see him through to victory.

*Judges 6:11 NLT* Then the angel of the Lord came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites.<sup>12</sup> The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, “Mighty hero, the Lord is with you!”

<sup>13</sup> “Sir,” Gideon replied, “if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? And where are all the miracles our ancestors told us about? Didn’t they say, ‘The Lord brought us up out of Egypt’? But now the Lord has abandoned us and handed us over to the Midianites.”

<sup>14</sup> Then the Lord turned to him and said, “Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!”

<sup>15</sup> “But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!”

<sup>16</sup> *The Lord said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.”*

Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it Yahweh-Shalom (which means “the Lord is peace”).

Then, at God’s command, he pulled down the altar to Baal and cut down the altar of Asherah.

*Judges 7:1 NLT* So Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon) and his army got up early and went as far as the spring of Harod. The armies of Midian were camped north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. <sup>2</sup> The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, tell the people, ‘Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home.’ ” So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight.

<sup>4</sup> But the Lord told Gideon, “There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not.” <sup>5</sup> When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the Lord told him, “Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream.” <sup>6</sup> Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream.

<sup>7</sup> The Lord told Gideon, “With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home.”

From 32,000 warriors down to just 300. 99% of the troops went home!

*Matthew 22:14 NLT* “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

We are the remnant, that 1%! But that’s what God likes to work with. Here’s another example:

<sup>1</sup> *Samuel 14:6 NLT* “Let’s go across to the outpost of those pagans (Philistines),” Jonathan said to his armor bearer. “Perhaps the Lord will help us, for nothing can hinder the Lord. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!” (NIV: Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.)

God can do it either way! I love the armor bearer’s response:

<sup>7</sup> “Do what you think is best,” the armor bearer replied. “I’m with you completely, whatever you decide.”

## COUNT THE COST

Nipping at my heels over the last few years has been the principle of “counting the cost” that Jesus mentioned.

*Luke 14:28 NET For which of you, wanting to build a (watch)tower, doesn't sit down first and compute the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? <sup>14:29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish the tower, all who see it will begin to make fun of him. <sup>14:30</sup> They will say, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish!'*

Why? Because I know, as you also must, that we do not have enough money to pull this off. It will take nothing short of a miracle.

Do I care about becoming a laughingstock? Yes. But I care about something else more.

(Before I tell you more about that, let me say something else... )

When a person's pride is intact, he or she will do everything within their power to protect their reputation. But once your reputation has been slandered, or you've lost your job and your esteem, or your holdings have been bankrupted and your credit score ruined—you just may have been set free!

Your failure may have brought you release. You no longer have to pretend or prove how good or how capable or how successful you are. All of that is behind you now; everyone knows.

The bubble has been burst and your illusions about yourself have vanished. You can just relax and be who you know you are. Who God has always known you are.

So, yes, there's still enough vanity in me to care somewhat about what others think. But it is no longer a determining factor for what I will do.

Here's what I care about MORE: I care about pleasing my Savior, about following the Father's plan. I care about hearing His voice and obeying Him.

Jesus was not speaking about constructing buildings; He was speaking about becoming His disciple.

He used a common adage (conventional human wisdom) to illustrate a spiritual truth.

If you intend to become His disciple, don't think of it as a casual matter. It will cost you everything—everything you have today and everything you receive tomorrow. Are you prepared to give everything to Him? Are you willing to live for Him? To die for Him?

Conventional wisdom is not the revealed truth here; absolute surrender is.

## **GOD'S WISDOM**

When we started down the road to remodel our aging building in June 2002, I knew that our plan to sell church property in order to finance the renewal of what remained ran counter to conventional wisdom.

I shared the plan with men of God whom I knew would disagree, because I needed to hear their arguments and see if what I thought I heard God say would stand the test. It did.

And then the congregation, in an unexpected show of unity, agreed and voted to move forward. There are people sitting in this room today, who had told me they were opposed to the idea, and then, in response to the Spirit of the Lord, changed their mind and voted to go ahead.

Besides the decision to start, and the subsequent decisions to continue, we did two things that are most significant to me:

(1) We determined to tithe the proceeds from the property sale, and did so even after we lost almost \$5 million and it became clear that we could not proceed with our project.

This encourages me greatly as I look to our future, for God has promised to bless those who tithe for honoring Him with their money. We happily sowed more than \$75,000 into building churches and schools, feeding and educating children, training pastors and preaching the Gospel around the world.

Concerning the practice of tithing our increase God has said, "Test Me in this." He has never failed that test; I do not believe He will fail it this time!

(2) We believed that the Holy Spirit would speak and operate *through* the body of His people, rather than without them.

As a result, we have practiced and encouraged full disclosure, even when the news wasn't great, and have patiently listened to each point of view before reaching a decision. In this way, we have preserved the unity of the church and maximized the grace of the Spirit of God.

My faith is not in our dollars (though I hope God will send us more), nor even in our friends (though I hope they will rally to help us), but in GOD, without whose help our efforts would surely fail, despite dollars and friends.

*Psalm 20:7 NET* *Some trust in chariots and others in horses, but we depend on the Lord our God.*

*Isaiah 31:1 NET* *Those who go down to Egypt for help are as good as dead, those who rely on war horses, and trust in Egypt's many chariots and in their many, many horsemen. But they do not rely on the Holy One of Israel and do not seek help from the Lord.*

One thing that must increase is our active dependence on the Lord, seeking His help together. We simply do not make time enough to pray together.

I have urged fasting and prayer throughout this year, and there has clearly been an increase among us, but group prayer is still a major deficit. Whether early morning or early evening, I have only been joined by one person in each time frame.

Why isn't this a higher value among us? Tell me what we can do to improve this.

Are we actually trusting in something other than the Lord?

If we do not pray, how do we demonstrate our dependence on God?

If we do not worship, how do we demonstrate our thanks to Him?

## **DAVID AND GOLIATH**

When the army of King Saul were confronted by the Philistines, they were all dressed like soldiers and stood in array like soldiers, but for fear they refused to act like soldiers.

When young David brought supplies to his brothers and saw how the giant Goliath taunted Israel's army, he was moved not to fear, but to action.

*1 Samuel 17:32 NLT* *"Don't worry about this Philistine," David told Saul. "I'll go fight him!"*

*33 "Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth."*

*37 The Lord who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!"*

*Saul finally consented. "All right, go ahead," he said. "And may the Lord be with you!"*

<sup>40</sup> [So David] picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them into his shepherd's bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd's staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine.

<sup>41</sup> Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him, <sup>42</sup> sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy. <sup>43</sup> "Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods, yelling, <sup>44</sup> "Come over here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!"

<sup>45</sup> David replied to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven's Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. <sup>46</sup> Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! <sup>47</sup> And everyone assembled here will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the Lord's battle, and he will give you to us!"

Not with sword and spear—God is not dependent on our gear or our skills. He may use them if we offer them to Him, but He never requires them.

The Bible's most notable stories are of human resistance—in some cases, resistance to God's will, which is always devastatingly costly; but in many other cases, resistance to the natural dependence on human resources, preferring instead to intentionally trust God against insurmountable odds, always with a glorious outcome.

For instance, in Babylon, the three companions of Daniel faced the outrage of King Nebuch-ad-nezzar because of their faithfulness to God.

### 3 HEBREW MEN

*Daniel 3:13 NIV* Furious with rage, Nebuch-ad-nezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> and Nebuch-ad-nezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuch-ad-nezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Faithfulness to God is not dependent on a certain hoped-for outcome or the promise of pleasantness.

In fact, the times when faithfulness is plain for all to see is when circumstances are adverse and hopes are dashed.

When Jesus is multiplying loaves and fishes, everybody wants to be His friend; but when He speaks about dying to self and taking up your cross obediently, the crowds quickly dwindle.

You may tell yourself that you love God when things are going well, but you'll only know for real when you're in the pits.

## **HEAR, O LORD!**

Have you been WAITING for the Lord to act? There IS a time to wait, and there is also a time to ACT.

Faithful believer that he was, Daniel prayed and read from the Scriptures every day—even when he was in captivity.

In the course of his reading through the writings of Jeremiah, the prophet, he came to chapter 25:11-12, which specifically numbered Israel's years of captivity in Babylon, after which God promised to release His people. Daniel realized that they had reached that very time. It was time for their captivity to end.

However, he did not close the book and sit back and fold his hands to wait expectantly for God to change the situation. Instead, he set himself to seek God with prayer and fasting, asking God to do the very thing He had promised.

What an instructive example! Just as we lean on God's promises in order to fulfill His will, God leans on our prayers in order to fulfill His promises. When you find a promise in the Word whose time has come, set yourself to pray it along. Listen to Daniel's prayer.

*Daniel 9:17 NET "So now, our God, accept the prayer and requests of your servant, and show favor to your devastated sanctuary for your own sake. <sup>9:18</sup> Listen attentively, my God, and hear! Open your eyes and look on our desolated ruins and the city called by your name. For it is not because of our own righteous deeds that we are praying to you, but because your compassion is abundant. <sup>9:19</sup> O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, pay attention, and act! Don't delay, for your own sake, O my God! For your city and your people are called by your name."*

It is time for us to pray, “Our God, accept the prayers and requests of Your servants, and show favor to Your dilapidated sanctuary for Your own sake. O Lord, pay attention and act!”

We must demonstrate our trust through our prayers.

Now, at last, Marisol’s prayers have been answered! There is room for a miracle and we need the Lord to act.

There is room for the church to be the church. To come together to the sound of the trumpet and work for the Lord. We are the remaining 1% (like Gideon’s band)!

We will calculate the anticipated costs of our project. That’s how we will know how much to ask God for, how much we need Him to act. The miracle I anticipate will be much more than cash.

We will connect with friends and fellow churches and the RV Volunteer builders. We will appeal to the Church, near and far.

We will ask others to pray with us. We will ask others to help us. Through it all, we will ask God to act.

Just yesterday, I saw a clip from a Gospel movie in which Jesus was speaking with His disciples. He said, “Don’t look here or there for the Kingdom.” Gesturing to His chest, He said, “The Kingdom is within you.”

Friends, Jesus never did that. That was an inaccurate portrayal.

The King is within you. But the Kingdom is among us.

That is to say the Kingdom is revealed (made manifest) in the midst of our life together, by the way we worship, by the way we regard one another, by the way we serve together.

We may call it our “remodel project,” but God calls it our “revival project.” It’s far less about renewing the building than it is about renewing us.

That is the miracle for which I am praying: that we will be the church—the kind of people—to whom God will entrust such a wonderful gift—a remodeled building suited to our renewed worship, our renewed love, and our renewed service.

Are there any armor bearers in the house? Will you pray with me in that vein? Let’s trust God together and discover His miraculous grace.