

“Have Miracles Ceased?”

By Joyce Erickson

Talk Given at BYU Women’s Conference 2010

Outline and Selected References

The subject: “Have Miracles Ceased? (Moroni 7:27): Seeing the Hand of the Lord in Our Lives.”

The description of the subject, as it appeared in the Women’s Conference Program:

“Miracles happen every day in our lives. Yet when we face challenges, it is easy to see only the dark clouds. How does recognizing the acknowledging the Lord’s hand and His tender mercies strengthen us? What is the relationship between gratitude for daily miracles and being guided by the Lord?”

Introduction

- The Savior performed many miracles and showed his love and tender mercies in many different ways when He lived on the earth. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, forgave the sinner, brought peace to troubled souls, and even raised the dead.
- Now, how do we personally feel the Savior’s love when he doesn’t live among us?
- Sister Susan W. Tanner said, “Often in our lives, those angels are the people around us, the people who love us, those who allow themselves to be instruments in the Lord’s hands. President Spencer W. Kimball said: ‘God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs. Therefore, it is vital that we serve each other in the kingdom’ (“There Is Purpose in Life,” *New Era*, Sept. 1974, 5). (“All Things Shall Work Together for Your Good,” *Ensign*, May 2004, 104, emphasis added)

Share Personal Experiences relating how I have felt the Lord’s tender mercies—and even experienced miracles—in my life

Cindy Getting Sick

In early December, 1972, when Cindy was 8 months old, she was crawling, sitting, and beginning to pull herself up around furniture. Then, for no explainable reason, everything changed. I laid her down on the floor one Saturday evening, and I noticed she was very stary-eyed. I waved my hand in front of her face, and there was no reaction. I immediately became very concerned, and, after telling Bruce, we took her to the military base hospital.

To make a very long story short, although Cindy spent the next 25 days in 3 different hospitals, the doctors could find nothing to explain her disease, and so released her from the hospital 3 days after Christmas. When we took her home, she had no meaningful use of any of her muscles; she could no longer sit up, roll over, crawl, walk, hold anything in her hands, or put anything in her mouth. She also had a terrible tongue thrust—which made it nearly impossible to feed her—and she cried all of the time. But, worst of all, she slept for only about 45 minutes a day!

It was such a monumental and an emotionally draining task to care for her that, after 3 weeks, I was exhausted, and very discouraged. I just didn’t know how I could go on much longer with so little sleep. It was a Sunday morning; Bruce had taken Michelle and Lara to Sunday School, and Cindy

was quiet, lying in her buggy. So, I decided to pray once again. As I knelt by the couch, I literally pictured the Lord in my mind and poured out my soul to Him. With much detail, I told Him how tired and frustrated and discouraged I was; I told Him how much I loved Cindy; how much I loved Bruce and Michelle and Lara, and how I just didn't seem to have any time or energy left for them after caring for Cindy. In short, I told Him how I really felt. I concluded my prayer with the question and statement, "Heavenly Father, what do you expect of me? I need to know." In return for my sincere and heart-felt conversation with Him, I actually felt His presence, and an overwhelming calming influence came over me.

Because my prayer was so meaningful, I immediately decided to reread a chapter in the book, *Spiritual Roots of Human Relations*, by Stephen R. Covey, which I had previously read. Hoping to find greater insight about prayer, I opened the book, and these are the very first words that I read: "I believe that *the Lord deals with his children largely in terms of their needs as he perceives them*, rather than their wants as they might perceive them. God's will is found in man's real needs, while man's will is generally embodied in man's wants." (Italics in original) As I read those words, I thought, "What in the world do I need worse than I need sleep?" With that thought, I found a pencil and piece of paper and began to list the things I thought our family needed. This is what I wrote: More effective personal and family prayers, better personal and family scripture study, better family home-evening planning and follow-through, and better family cooperation. I also listed some skills I thought we needed to teach Michelle and Lara.

As I completed my list, an indescribable sense of peace and comfort came over me, and I knew at that moment that I was going to be able to do whatever the Lord asked me to do.

Truly, that experience of feeling the Lord's tender mercies, along with a subsequent repentance and mighty change of heart that followed—as well as the many things I learned from that experience—have sustained me for 37 years, as I have tried to care for my family. That truly is a miracle!

Visiting Teachers Who Cared

Another event when I felt the Lord's tender mercies occurred around Christmastime, in 1977, when Heather was about six months old. She had been developing normally when, all of a sudden, she started showing very subtle yet troubling symptoms of retrogression in her development. I became very concerned and took her to see our pediatrician.

Because the changes in Heather's muscle control were so subtle, our pediatrician could see nothing wrong with her. Unconvinced, I made an appointment to see a physical therapist. Several days before the appointment, my visiting teachers came by, and during the course of our conversation they asked how my family was doing. Without any particular alarm, I mentioned that I was a little concerned about Heather's development and that I was taking her to see a physical therapist the following Friday. Little did I realize, but at that moment the "still small voice" whispered to those wonderful sisters that I would need help on Friday. So, acting on that prompting by the Spirit, one visiting teacher volunteered to watch Heidi, and the other one later secretly called Bruce and arranged to get a key to our house so she could clean our kitchen while I was gone.

Friday finally came. As I drove Heather to the clinic, I had a sick feeling in my stomach, a lump in my throat, and a prayer in my heart. I was trying to muster the courage to accept that which I had already suspected.

You can imagine how I felt when the therapist confirmed my worst fears and said, "Heather is definitely developmentally delayed and appears to exhibit symptoms of cerebral palsy." I was devastated, and all I could think about was getting out of that place and finding "a little corner of the world" where I could go cry and pour out my soul to God.

So, with a continuing sick feeling in my stomach and tears streaming down my face, I drove to Bruce's office to tell him the news. After an hour-long cry, and many unanswered questions, we had a very heartfelt prayer together in the van, and I left for home. On the way, I cried, wondered, and pleaded with the Lord, "Why another handicapped child? Cindy already takes so much time to feed; how am I going to be able to care for her and Heather and still have enough time and energy for my other children? Heavenly Father, please help me deal with this."

I finally arrived home, and what I experienced next I shall never forget. As I opened the front door, I was immediately hit by the aroma of freshly baked bread. Sure enough, in the kitchen on top of the stove were four loaves of bread. Then it suddenly dawned on me. The dishes were done, the kitchen counters were spotless, the floor was mopped and waxed, there was a new tablecloth (which was not mine) on the kitchen table, and the stove and refrigerator were clean. The kitchen was immaculate! Somehow my heart wasn't quite as heavy. Then I walked into the living room to set Heather's infant seat on the floor. There, the floor was vacuumed, the furniture was dusted, and on the television was a new vase containing a beautiful bouquet of freshly cut flowers.

With a less heavy heart, I went upstairs. There, I discovered the beds had been made, and the bedrooms and bathrooms were as spotless and shining as the living room and the kitchen were. The only thing that was out of place was all the folded laundry sitting on Michelle's bed. My entire house was clean and all my laundry was done—all at the same time!

As I entered my bedroom to pray, my previously heavy heart had now been filled with gratitude and love—gratitude for the gospel and an immense love for my visiting teachers, who had followed the promptings of the Spirit and asked five other sisters to help them that day! Although their cleaning my house didn't change anything about Heather's handicap, it helped me focus on something outside my immediate feelings of hurt and pain, and it helped me see that I really did have blessings to be thankful for. In a very real sense, it lightened my load and, in the process, taught me once again that the way we help each other is by serving and "bearing one another's burdens that they may be light." How grateful I am to have learned that lesson, for I believe it is central to the entire gospel plan. Truly, those are the Lord's tender mercies. Those are the miracles.

Jesus, Listening, Can Hear

The next example of the Lord's tender mercies has to do with an experience Heather had with Jean Ernstrom, who was her speech therapist at a school for the handicapped. At the outset, you need to know that Heather, like Cindy, had no speech, but unlike Cindy, Heather could communicate. That, in and of itself, turned out to be a monumental tender mercy—not just for me and my family, but for MANY others as well.

- Jean began her account of her experience with Heather this way: "It has been several years and I am still deeply touched how in one fleeting moment, with great power, the Spirit was manifest to me through two bright blue eyes. The eyes belong to Heather; a nine year old girl with a keen mind, infectious giggle, and a determined spirit housed in a very physically restricted frame."

- Jean then went on to explain how Heather communicated—a direct gaze meaning, “Yes,” and a blink meaning, “No;” how Heather brought great joy in the lives of others; and how she was proud of her membership in the Church.
- Then, Jean explained how on a Monday morning she began visiting with Heather about the previous weekend, and that Heather indicated to Jean that she attended Primary.
- Because Jean was a Primary chorister and loved music, she asked Heather if she had a favorite song.
- So, for two whole days—Monday and Tuesday—Jean guessed and guessed, as she tried to discover Heather’s favorite song.
- Jean even brought all of her Primary song books to school to try to find Heather’s favorite song.
- Heather liked all of the songs Jean sang, but none of them was THE song.
- I will now read Jean’s exact words.

Wednesday dawned a beautiful day. It was as if the day were created to reflect the beauty of what lay in store. Heather came to school more determined than ever that we find her song. Tucked in Heather’s wheelchair was the new green hymn book. I took Heather out of her wheelchair and situated her comfortably on her stomach in a beanbag. I positioned myself on the floor at her side. Page by page we made our way through the hymn book. With each page I sang the first phrase of the song and with each page Heather’s eyes closed in a definite no. We were more than halfway through the book and I’m afraid I began to doubt the possibility of any success in the adventure but I continued. As a matter of routine I turned to the next page and began:

“There is sunshine in my soul today...”

It was as if someone had stuck her with a pin. Heather jumped and smiled; her bright eyes looking directly my way. Together we laughed and reveled in the moment of completing a three-day search. So, after making certain Heather was comfortable, I said, “OK, now we can finally sing your favorite song.” With a smile on her face she listened as I began to sing:

“There is sunshine in my soul today
More glorious and bright
Than glows in any earthly sky
For Jesus is my light...”

As I began the chorus Heather mustered all the effort she could and joined in with occasional sounds only slightly more audible than a sigh but booming with spirit to sing with me...

“Oh there’s sunshine,
Blessed sunshine
Where the peaceful, happy moments roll.
When Jesus shows His smiling face
There is sunshine in my soul.”

As I sang the words to the last line she looked at me steadily, as if to say, "I like that part." I felt so grateful that we had found the song. Heather was so happy that it was worth the effort and then some. Little did I realize that the real message was yet to be discovered. I asked if she wanted the rest of the verses. She, of course, responded with a firm, "Yes." So, I continued singing:

"There is music in my soul today;
A carol to my king
And Jesus, listening can hear
The songs I cannot sing..."

"And Jesus, listening can hear the songs I cannot sing." Heather seemed to really come to life at that line in the song. Her reaction was so strong that I stopped. I looked at her as the reality and significance of the moment pressed on my mind. I queried, "Heather, is that it? Is that what you like about the song? Is it what you want me to know? That Jesus is listening and He can hear the songs *you* cannot sing?" She lifted her head and looked me straight in the eyes with excitement and yet almost relief evident on her face. The testimony had been borne.

I felt a great reverence at what was taking place. Feeling guided by the Spirit myself I ventured on to ask, "Heather, does Jesus talk to you in your mind and in your heart?" Immediately her little head again came up and her look was penetrating.

Knowing her close relationship with the Savior and feeling surely an answer awaited, there was one more thing I wanted to know. So with reverent anticipation I whispered, "Heather, what does He say?" My heart pounded as I viewed the clear look in her eyes as she awaited my questions so she could in fact share with me her insight. I feel that the Lord gave me the right questions to ask as I took a deep breath and proceeded. "Does He say, 'Heather, I love you?'" Her eyes were simply radiant as she confirmed that statement. I paused, swallowed and continued, "Does He say, 'Heather, you're special?'" With a new found energy source her arms began to wave with excitement and her eyes were as big as quarters as she looked into my face. I paused again with a lump in my throat and then followed with, "Does He say, 'Heather, be patient, I have great things in store for you?'"

What I next witnessed, I will never forget. Heather's head became erect; every fiber of her being seemed to be electrified as her eyes penetrated my own soul. She knew she was loved. She knew she was special. She knew she needed only be patient for great things are in store. The moment was too sacred for further words. I leaned forward and pressed her cheek against my own. Without any words, but with bright blue eyes as windows to a valiant soul, the truth was made known.

Yes, Heather, Jesus, listening, can hear.

Explain My Response to Heather's Story

Other Miracles and Tender Mercies

- Service rendered by people in Camarillo, California
- Service rendered by Centerville Relief Society sisters who came to our home in 2-hour intervals, for 10 hours a day, every week-day, for 6 weeks after I had surgery

- People who help Mark on a regular basis
- Our healthy daughters are worthy and active members of Church, extremely competent and talented, continue to help and serve others, just as they did while they were growing up
- A dedicated and faithful husband who has stuck by me and our children through a difficult situation where the divorce rate is about 85%.

The Greatest Miracle of all is not in healing an illness...

- Summarize my stories
- Elder Dallin Oaks said that "the greatest miracle is not in such things as...healing an illness, or even raising the dead... [A]n even greater miracle is a mighty change of heart by a son or daughter of God (see Mosiah 5:2). A change of heart, including new attitudes, priorities, and desires, is greater and more important than any miracle involving the body.... If of the right kind, this change opens the door to the process of repentance that cleanses us to dwell in the presence of God." (*Ensign*, June 2001)

Testimony

I know that Heavenly Father loves each of us personally; that He loves each of us so much that He helps us in terms of our needs rather than our wants; and that we each can help others feel the Lord's tender mercies by always striving to bear one another's burdens, and serving each other the way the Savior would serve if He lived among us here. I testify that He lives, that as we recognize His hand in our lives and are grateful for Him, we are better able to feel His divine strength and tender mercies.

Additional References:

- Elder Dallin H. Oaks gave a wonderful talk called, "Miracles," at a CES Fireside in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, on 7 May 2000. (See *Ensign*, June 2001, 6) Click [here](#) to view it.
- Elder Matthew Cowley, of the Council of the Twelve, gave a BYU Devotional talk, entitled, "Miracles," on February 18, 1953. (See *New Era*, June 1975, 39) Click [here](#) to view it.
- Elder David A. Bednar gave a marvelous talk in General Conference, where he testified "that the tender mercies of the Lord are available to all of us and that the Redeemer of Israel is eager to bestow such gifts upon us." ("The Tender Mercies of the Lord," *Ensign*, May 2005, 99) Click [here](#) to view it.

For a more complete version of this presentation, please go to our web site, <http://www.our-beehive.com/> and click on the Presentations link.

Stories used in this presentation are from © *When Life Doesn't Seem Fair*, 1995, by Bruce and Joyce Erickson