

The
Miracle
Man

Our purpose at Reach A Life Today is to:

- Encourage people everywhere to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
- Equip believers with resources to share their faith.
- Excite believers to reach out with His love everywhere every day.

Published by Melissa Woods with Reach A Life Today ministries. www.ReachALifeToday.com

The Miracle Man 2014 by Melissa Woods

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*“Jesus went through all the
towns and villages,
teaching in their synagogues,
proclaiming the
good news of the kingdom
and healing every
disease and sickness.”*

(Mark 9:35)

“That I may know Him.”

(Philippians 3:10)

Foreword

Do you need a miracle? Well, you've come to the right place! These are true stories of lives transformed by the miraculous power of the Living God! I hope you will imagine yourself in their shoes, and experience the great love of Jesus, the Mirade Man.

We're not going to just fill our heads with information about Jesus. We are going to plop ourselves right down in the middle of each story. Imagine ourselves there. As if what is happening, is happening to us. As if what Jesus is saying, he is saying to us. These stories were written to help us do just that... to imagine what each person was thinking and feeling, and how each one connected with Jesus.

I hope you love reading this book as much as I loved writing it. My inspiration was the wonderful book, "Jesus, the Man Who Loved Women", by Bruce Marchiano. Bruce taught me to look for Jesus' heart in every verse, and that has made all the difference in the world! Come, let's dive in, sink deep, and soak ourselves in these accounts of Jesus reaching out to ordinary people, not so different from you and me, and those you will share this book with. Right?! And we will experience Jesus reaching out to us all... and I pray, a mirade!

Love,

Melissa

Chapter 1 **It's a Miracle!**

*“Take courage, son;
your sins are forgiven.”*

(Matthew 9:2)

Poor guy. He's paralyzed. Let's call him Sam. How did this happen to Sam? We don't know. We don't know if Sam was born paralyzed, or if he'd had some tragic accident. But the thought of it, even today, sends shivers up our spines! And thank God we can feel those shivers! For your limbs not to respond. For them to lay motionless day after day. How awful. Not to be able to hug your family. Not to be able to scratch that itch. Not to be able to take care of your most basic needs. No end in sight.

It's tough enough to be disabled in this day and age, with all the modern technology. But Sam must have had it super-rough. My friend, Frank, who has late-stage ALS, has the coolest wheelchair with an amazing computer system that he can operate with his tongue. ALS is tougher than tough, but at least Frank has some mobility. He can communicate, surf the net, operate TV, and maneuver through his house. But for the man in our story, all he had was a pallet. Sam lay on that pallet all day, every day, day after day, with no hope of ever getting up again.

And in the quiet of the night, alone with his thoughts... I think Sam was plagued in his mind even more than in his broken body. "I must be cursed", he figured. "I have done some really bad things. This is my punishment. That's what the religious leaders said. God is really really angry with me. But I can't undo what I've done. I can't take it back. I can't take his anger away. All I can do is suffer under his judgment. And, as for after I die, I can't bear to let my mind go there. If this is his punishment for me in this life, I'm

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sure I'm in for even worse then." Hope against hope, I wonder if Sam prayed, "Lord, I know I don't deserve it, but will you please forgive me? Will you help me?" Sam didn't feel forgiven at all. Sam felt forsaken and alone. As bad as paralysis is, to have God against you.... to feel forsaken by him and alone... is even worse. Poor Sam.

But Sam had friends.

What a blessing. From just the little bit we learn from this short story of only eight verses in the Bible, these friends were the best kinds of friends. As we try to imagine ourselves back in the day, I have an idea it was something like this. I picture Sam's friends as construction workers. Maybe Sam had been hurt on a construction site. From the story, it seems like Sam's friends were pretty strong... and industrious. I have a feeling that one day when they were walking home after a long day's work, they saw a huge crowd and everybody was celebrating. Jesus was back in Capernaum, and he was healing people! Healing anything and everything! Anybody and everybody! One person was shouting, "I can see! I can see!" Another was shouting, "I can hear! I can hear!" Someone who had leprosy was shouting, "I am healed!" Wherever Jesus went must have been a wild scene. Rejoicing and celebrating! Joy with complete abandon!

So I imagine Sam's friends looking at each other, and probably without even saying a word, running as fast as they could to go get Sam! There was no time to

waste! Jesus was in town and they had to get Sam to Jesus, pronto! When they got to Sam, I can picture them all grabbing an edge of Sam's pallet and telling him as they hurried out the door, "You're gonna get healed Sam. There's a man named Jesus, and he's healing everybody. Don't worry buddy. We're gonna get you to him and everything is going to be alright!"

I wonder how Sam felt. I wonder what was going through his mind. What? Huh? This is all happening so fast! Healed? As great as being healed sounded, I wonder if Sam had some serious apprehension. By some holy man? If he is a holy man, he will likely know what I've done. He might tell everybody what I did, and then tell them that he's not going to heal me because I'm being punished. And then not only will I be paralyzed, but my shame will be all over town. And my worst fears will be confirmed. That I am under God's curse. And what if my friends reject me too, once they know the truth? I just couldn't take that. "Guys, maybe we need to talk about this... Wait... This is all happening too fast!"

The story goes that the place where Jesus was teaching was packed. You couldn't squeeze your way through the door, much less squeeze through four burly guys and Sam on his pallet. "What are we going to do? We can't miss this opportunity. We won't! We have to do whatever it takes to get Sam to Jesus. Think fast guys!" These were the kind of guys who did whatever it took to get the job done every day. If they needed a special tool for the job, there didn't run to the Home Depot. They just made the tool and kept on

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going. This Jewish home might have had outdoor stairs to its flat roof, but if not, I wonder if these guys just threw together a make-shift ladder. However it happened, in short order they were up on the roof with Sam, tearing through the roof. "Yep, we'll fix the roof later. That's the least of our worries. We're going to plop Sam down right in the front of Jesus." Nothing was going to stop them!

And, by the way, Jesus thought Sam's friends were terrific! The Bible says Jesus saw their faith. They likely didn't say a word, but Jesus saw their actions. I'm sure they got a big smile from Jesus, and probably a chuckle too. Just imagine Jesus standing there teaching, everyone in rapt attention, when all of a sudden the roof was being torn apart! Bits of roof falling and dust flying everywhere! You know some folks hollered, "Hey, what do you think you're doing?! Stop that!" That did not slow them down in the slightest. These guys loved their friend, Sam. They put themselves out, put themselves under potential ridicule, and possible danger, so they could help him. They brought Sam to Jesus. Of course, he couldn't bring himself. And even if he could, he might not have had the courage to go. To be blunt, Sam couldn't do much of anything for these great guys. They were the best kinds of friends. Selfless. Bold. Faithful. Caring. Let's learn from their gutsy example. Let's be good friends like Sam's friends. Let's bring our friends to Jesus in prayer. Let's share with them the hope found in walking with him. Let's put ourselves out... even under potential ridicule and possible danger. Let's help them have the courage to come to Jesus.

All the while, Sam was growing more and more anxious. What's going to happen? If this man they call Jesus is like all the other religious leaders, I'm just going to be condemned and criticized and humiliated, in front of everybody! But my friends say Jesus is different. They say He's not like that. They said He came to save, not to condemn. Hope. Maybe. Just maybe. Before Sam could tell his friends not to, Sam was dangling halfway between the ceiling and the floor. And there Sam was. Lying there helpless. Face to face with Jesus. There's no turning back now. Fear. Shame. Embarrassment. Kinda like us before God... whether we realize it or not. Sam can't even run away. He's trying to be brave, but I'm sure there were tears in Sam's eyes.

And Jesus knew it all. Jesus had known Sam from the moment Sam was conceived in his mother's womb. Jesus knew every moment of paralysis. Every sleepless night. He knew Sam's every thought. Every fear. Every disappointment. Jesus knew the guilt Sam felt. How condemned. How hopeless. Cursed. Forsaken. Things Sam's best friends didn't know. But Jesus knew. Jesus had prayed for Sam. Jesus' heart went out to him. The moment Jesus saw Sam, he reached right in to heal the spot that hurt the most. "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." (NASB)

What? That's not what Sam expected at all. Did Jesus say what I think He said? I'm forgiven? Sam hadn't said a word about his fear... or about needing forgiveness. "Don't be afraid. Be courageous. You

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ARE loved. You are NOT cursed. The purpose of this paralysis was not because God hates you. It was intended to show the great power of God in you. Listen to my words. Your sins are forgiven. You are not in trouble. I'm not angry." Sam just looked into Jesus' eyes. There was genuineness in His eyes that Sam knew he could trust. He knew that Jesus knew. Knew everything. Jesus knew... and He forgave. It was more than poor Sam could take. It was more than Sam had ever dared to hope. Could it be? Sam could tell that Jesus had the power to back up those powerful words. I'm not forsaken! I'm forgiven! It was like the weight of the world has been lifted off Sam's shoulders!

I wonder if Sam's friends even realized that the paralysis had caused him to think seriously about His relationship with God. To realize his need of forgiveness like never before. His need for everything to be alright between him and God. Sometimes, being so busy with his hectic life, he had squashed that basic need of forgiveness with all the noise. But lately Sam had had a lot of time to think. Actually the thought of his relationship with God was always on his mind. I wonder if Sam's friends scratched their heads a little as Jesus was talking with Sam about all this forgiveness stuff. Like, yeah, yeah, get on with it... we didn't bring him here for forgiveness. We want to see Sam walk! Hurry it up! But Jesus knew. And Sam knew. This was just between the two of them. And that was all that mattered.

Lord, may every illness, every tragedy, every heartache, every need, drive us to connect with you at the deepest level.

Sam was reeling with the loving truth he had just received! I am forgiven! I am loved! Sam realized that his friends were right. Jesus wasn't like other religious leaders. Jesus truly cared. He was there to set Sam free.... in his spirit... and in his body. Jesus was a true friend. I doubt Sam even heard the discussion between the Pharisees and Jesus. If Sam did, he probably realized that the ones most to be pitied were the Pharisees, not him! They were so far from God, even though Jesus was standing right in front of them. So far from forgiveness and peace.

But the Pharisees weren't happy about Jesus forgiving Sam. Not one bit. They thought Jesus was blasphemer, by forgiving sins that only God can forgive. Jesus knew their thoughts. But what's so different about Jesus is that he was going to take this opportunity to reach them with his love.

I have to confess how I used to read stories about Pharisees. I discounted them. Tossed `em. They were the villains of the story. Pharisees enter scene - the crowd yells "Boooooo". I was being a hater just like them! I was completely missing Jesus' heart! I stopped in my tracks one day when I realized that Jesus was trying to reach the Pharisees too. "Oh. Jesus cares about the Pharisees." Hmmm. Have you thought about that? He really loves them. Jesus uses every situation to draw, to teach, to woo, and to help

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each and every one come to know him. Some will. Some won't. But Jesus doesn't discount anyone. He doesn't want anyone to miss out. He wants everyone to turn from their rebellion that is destroying them and be united with him. Really. As you read the story, watch Jesus as he is wooing those cold-hearted, hard-hearted, mean-spirited, hypocritical sorry excuses for humans. Because he loves them. Jesus knows the religious rulers' lives are empty without Him. And that being religious is just a façade for the reality they could have, if they would only be humble like Sam on his pallet.

Isn't Jesus' love something else? His love makes me shake my head in wonder. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God." That is God's love.

Thank God that God loves like that.

So what was the Pharisee's problem? Jesus was on their turf. At least what they thought was their turf. They basically told Jesus, "You're supposed to play OUR game. We're in control here!" Their pride made them do and say things that were completely absurd. Guilty. We've all done it. We have wanted OUR way. They could not wrap their heads around the notion that God was in bodily form, right there in front of them... even when he did miracles right before their very eyes. When Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven", He was saying, "Sam, I am God, and I forgive you for your sins against me." These guys knew exactly what Jesus was saying. But they refused to humble themselves as children and accept plain truth, even

when they saw Jesus do miracles only God can do. They refused to accept that Jesus is the One who grants forgiveness. Because if Jesus was God in the flesh that would mean that THEY were rebelling against God... THEY were the outsiders... THEY were unforgiven, and THEY would have to change. No way. No matter how powerful... how indisputable the evidence, most of them hardened their hearts and stiffened their necks, refusing to accept Jesus.

Jesus knew everything going through their heads. And he also longed to heal Sam. I bet Jesus gave Sam a wink and a nod, as if to say, "Be patient just a little while longer while I patiently teach these "teachers of Israel"." I'm sure Sam was most willing to be the object lesson.

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?"

They didn't answer a word. Stone silence. Their hearts were harder than stones. Typical. When we refuse to be honest, we usually just say nothing. Pride and cowardice are a deadly mixture. Of course, the answer is that only God can do either. A child knows that. They knew that too. The only logical answer was to accept Jesus for who He was! Jesus obviously had the authority to do both. But they refused to admit it. Plus, if they said anything against Jesus, the people would see right through their jealousy and hypocrisy. So they watched and they seethed. But

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Jesus knew what they were thinking. It was surely very plain on their faces.

Didn't these "teachers of Israel" know Proverbs 29:1? "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy." They were treading on very thin ice! And they knew better! But instead they condemned Jesus as a blasphemer – because He claimed for Himself the attributes and rights of God. Jesus did miracle after miracle after miracle. Time after time after time. Another time, Jesus told them, "Don't just believe because of my words. Believe because of my works." See the miracles with your eyes. Accept me in your heart. But instead, they called him evil. How evil it is to call good evil!

So Jesus was giving them yet another opportunity to soften their hearts. Here's what happened. "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house. And he arose and departed to his house."

Imagine you're Sam. Jesus gave him that look as if to say, "Don't worry about what anyone else thinks. Don't let their cruelty bother you one little bit. You and I are good. Now watch my actions. Rise and walk." And Sam did! He jumped right up for the first time in a very very long time... maybe even in his whole entire life! Can you imagine what thoughts were running through His head? "I'm walking! Jesus said to rise and walk, and here I am actually walking!"

Jesus said my sins were forgiven. I'm going to believe that too!" It didn't matter what anyone had ever said that had broken his heart, just as badly as his body was broken. It didn't even matter what the religious leaders had said, that he must have done something unforgivable, and that this paralysis was proof that God was against him. Now Sam knew better. Jesus said to rise and walk. And he did! Jesus said he was forgiven. Sam knew that was true too!

Imagine the wonderful celebration! I can see Sam hugging Jesus so tightly, telling him how very thankful he was... for everything. And Jesus beaming as he shared Sam's joy and wrapped his arms around him. This one was lost and now he was found! All of heaven celebrates! I can see Sam's friends jumping down off that roof, getting a group hug with Jesus, beside themselves with joy! Bigger than any Super Bowl victory by far! I can imagine Jesus telling Sam's friends how very proud he was of them, and each one of them believing in Jesus for themselves, not just because he had healed Sam. And I can see the Pharisee's sulking, with their arms crossed, completely missing out on the joy of Sam's complete restoration.

Sam's mind must have been racing as fast as his feet were. He picked up his pallet, and headed home with his buddies, just as Jesus said to. This time Sam's friends got to walk beside him, rather than carry him on that pallet! Maybe on the way, they all ceremonially tossed Sam's pallet into a dumpster! Not gonna need THAT anymore! And they laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks. Can't you

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