

MARK HAMPTON AS TOLD
BY ALYSSA WILKINSON

THE MIRACLE EXPERIMENT



LIFE LESSONS IN LEARNING TO LIVE
CONFIDENTLY BY THE SPIRIT AND
THE MIRACLES THAT FOLLOW

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1

THE MIRACLE EXPERIMENT

BEFORE SITTING DOWN AND CRACKING OPEN THIS BOOK, YOU FLIPPED ON A light switch. (Probably.)

I'm just guessing wildly, of course. You could be reading in broad daylight while you wait for your turn at the DMV, you could have one of those clap-on, clap-off lights and haven't touched a light switch in twenty-five years, or perhaps you prefer to read in the dark by the light of your tablet screen. I don't know. Like I said—I'm guessing here.

But the odds are high that you grabbed this book, padded over to your favorite chair in the house, and flicked on the lamp. Either way, the act of reading takes light.

That's what I'm getting at with all this—you need light to read. And I want to use that idea to illustrate something—something that has changed my life.

That light didn't just spark into existence from you touching that light switch. The miracle of the light streaming onto the pages of this book and allowing you to learn and grow and apply what you read in order to change as a person started long before you ever picked this book up, and long before I ever thought about writing it. That light came from a long series of preparations and innovations.

Before the light switch, there were the electricians who worked long hours to wire your home for electricity. Before them, there was the building of your local power plant and the infrastructure needed to deliver that power to your home. Back in 1879, Thomas Edison invented the first long-lasting light bulb, and before him, Benjamin Franklin tied the key to a kite. And long, long

before that, in ancient Greece, Thales rubbed amber on a piece of silk and recognized the existence of static electricity.

There are thousands of years and discoveries in between you and your reading light and Thales and his amber that I'm glossing over here. Thousands. An incredibly long chain of discoveries that led to the remarkable time that we live in, where we have access to light at any moment we may desire or need it. That's really something.

But this book isn't about electricity. This book is about miracles. And revelation. And how to increase both of those things in your life. So why am I spending so much time discussing the light you're using to read? Because miracles, just like the light that pours from a lamp, don't begin when you simply flip a switch and see the result. Like the long string of small experiments that led to us having harnessable electricity today, the inception of any miracle is long before we actually recognize it. It starts with tiny recognitions and actions inspired by spiritual promptings from a loving Father in Heaven who desperately, *desperately* wants to be present and involved in our lives.

The miracle of Moses parting the Red Sea didn't begin when the water lapped over the edge of his sandals. It didn't even begin with the plagues, or Pharaoh, or the burning bush. The miracle of the Red Sea began long before Moses started tangibly recognizing the hand of God in his life. It probably began during his forty long years shepherding in the desert of Midian, or even before that as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Before Moses could free the Hebrews, he had to learn to *act* on the voice of the Spirit in his life. Receiving and reacting to revelation needed to become a daily practice—a *lifestyle*—before he could ever participate in miracles that would bless the lives of God's chosen people. And he was forever changed by that way of life.

As children of a loving and all-powerful God, we have the privilege of His guidance through the Holy Spirit—a gift that can be as transformative as it is instructive, and one which very few of us fully utilize. God *wants* to bless you. He *wants* to guide you. He *wants* a reciprocal relationship with you. He *wants* to utilize you in His great, eternal work as an instrument of miracles to lift and love His other children.

Do you believe that? Really? Truly?

You *can* live a miracle-filled life.

You don't have to be Moses or Peter or anyone extraordinary to do so. All you have to do is be willing to listen and willing to act. If you're open and looking for the ball, God will pass it to you. You can be sure of it. I promise you can.

You might be wondering how I can sit here with a smile on my face in one of the most cynical ages in history and promise you miracles.

The short answer? I've experimented upon God's word, and I have lived it in my own life. I see miracles every day.

Every. Single. Day.

Some are large and impressive. Most are small and go unnoticed by the world but are powerfully significant to those who experience them. No matter the size and the impact of these events, all are miracles. Life is full of them if you take time to look around. I didn't always see them, but over decades of practice and being changed through the process, I am blessed to live a life full of witnessing the goodness of God. And you can do so as well.

Some years ago, I found myself discussing this very topic with a good friend of mine, Rob. Were we truly open to being the "hands of God"? God tells us countless times in scripture that He can take even the most humble and simple servant and transform them into a powerful force for good. He took Joseph, a simple shepherd, and transformed him into a trusted adviser to the Pharaoh, inspired to save entire civilizations from starvation. He took Moses from a place of self-centered privilege to becoming a savior to his Hebrew people. He took Joseph Smith, an uneducated and (by all worldly measurements) unimportant fourteen-year-old farm boy, and molded him into the prophet of the Restoration.

I want to be very clear when I say we weren't comparing ourselves to these prophets, seers, and revelators. I'll be the first to admit that I'm a "small and simple thing" (see Alma 37:6). But as Rob and I talked, we recognized a gap in our lives, a gap where we "small and simple things" had room to get off our duffs and put God's word to the test. We wanted Him to know that He could trust us to help Him bring to pass "great things" (Alma 37:6). And so we devised an experiment: For one month, we would start each day with a sincere, heartfelt prayer to the Lord. We would ask Him to put in our paths opportunities to serve others, promise that we would be paying enough attention to spot those moments, and be willing to drop whatever we were doing when the Spirit tapped on our shoulders and nudged in whatever

direction He called. Then each night, we made a point to “report back” to Him in prayer.

The results of that first month were tangible. We were imperfect but eager students of the Spirit, and that was all God needed. Did we stumble and fumble our way through a lot of experiences? Absolutely. Did we miss chances to do God’s work? I hope not, but I’m sure we did. And did we feel uncomfortable and awkward at times? Definitely. But God doesn’t need pre-polished, pre-perfected servants to be able to put them to work. He just needs someone who is watchful and willing. And as rough and unpolished as we were, we were definitely watchful and willing. Within that first month, we saw countless little daily miracles. And even more importantly, we began to experience “a mighty change in [our] hearts” (Alma 5:14), which has taken what was meant to be a month-long experiment and transformed it into a way of life.

If you’ve picked up this book, I’m guessing that you also feel yourself drawn to follow the gentle guidance of the Lord and participate in miracles. I’m hoping that you find the experiences I share and the lessons I’ve learned to be helpful and encouraging, and that you find yourself willing to “experiment upon my words” (Alma 32:27) and put God’s promises to the test. This book has been organized as a workbook of sorts, with each chapter containing doctrinal observations followed by “miracle case studies” and journal questions intended to take you from a passive reader to an active participant in the same experiment Rob and I tried.

Just like the light you’re using to read this book, there is illumination waiting for you, offered by the hand of a generous and loving Father in Heaven. Through this book, we can work together to lay the network of wires and do the things necessary to connect you to the Spirit so that you can “flip the switch,” be bathed in God’s light, and have the ability to spread the miracle of that to others around you. Are you ready? Well, then, let’s get started!

MIRACLE MOMENT WITH MARK

As I think is most often the case, one of the most powerful miracles I’ve ever witnessed happened in the midst of real tragedy.

It happened over twenty years ago now, on a cold, snowy night. At that point in time, I found myself in a leadership position working with the young

men in my church, and I recognized a need to find some common ground with a few of them who were struggling.

Well, I have a passion for hunting, and these boys loved to hunt, so in an attempt to make a connection, I invited them and their fathers down to our ranch in Southern Utah for a little goose hunt the weekend before Christmas. It was going to be a short trip—the plan was to allow for just one morning of hunting and then head back home. Even though the morning was successful, one of the boys was not able to harvest his goose, so we decided to stay for the evening flight.

By the time the evening hunt was over, it was dark, and it was *cold*. I was ready to get home, and we had a few hours of driving ahead of us.

Anyone who knows me well knows that I don't lollygag on a road trip. I'm usually the kind of person who says, "Run in and grab your goodies while I'm pumping the gas and then get back out here, because as soon as I'm done fueling up, we're hittin' the road!" You'll end up sprinting down the highway behind me if you don't make it back in time.

But this evening, unlike any other time I've ever made this drive, something was different. A warm, relaxed spirit erased the urgency I typically felt. When we got to a small gas station outside of Green River to fill up, something told me to take our time.

I wasn't looking for a spiritual prompting, and I don't think I even recognized it as one at the time, but God stepped in and made a simple suggestion: "Mark, slow down." So we bought a few sandwiches and sat inside the convenience store to eat them and relive the events of the day—something very uncharacteristic for me. There's a micro-miracle right there: God prompted me to alter my behavior from my usual.

In the process of us sitting to eat, I noticed a man walk in, pay for his fuel and some treats, and carry them out to an old Suburban full of children. There must have been seven of them in there—all dressed in Christmas clothing and bouncing around happily. They hit the road, and a few minutes later, we followed suit.

By this point, it was very, very late at night, and I was a bit worried about getting my friends home later than planned. It must have been around 11 o'clock. The night was pitch black, with no moon. We started driving north, and as we settled in for the long ride home, I noticed headlights flashing and

what looked like a big burst of light about a quarter mile ahead of us—then darkness. As we got closer, we pulled up to a horrific scene.

A driver in the southbound lane had somehow drifted into the northbound lane and struck the Suburban with the family in it, head-on. The impact was so great that both cars had spun around and now blocked both lanes of traffic. The three men in the smaller southbound car had died instantly from the terrible injuries they had sustained—that's how bad the impact was. A shudder ran through me.

I could see the headlights of an oncoming vehicle, heading south toward us, so I pulled our truck around the accident, parked in the middle of the road, and turned on my emergency flashers in hopes that the oncoming vehicle would stop in time. We could hear children crying in the mangled Suburban. I still can hear the sound of them.

I'll forever be grateful for the young men and their fathers who were with me that night. The second micro-miracle within this tragedy was that one of the fathers I had with me was a military man. I called him "Sergeant." He was accustomed to emergencies and took charge of the situation immediately, barking out orders.

"If they're crying and moving around on their own, get them out and get a blanket on them. It's freezing—let's keep them warm! If they're not moving, don't move them. There could be a spinal injury."

Those were our orders. We all went to work, doing what we could for all the passengers of the vehicle. As we helped the terrified children into our arms, we discovered that on the floor of the front passenger's side, there was a woman, barely visible. The dashboard and windshield had caved in with the impact of her body, and she was now slumped against the door, covered in her own blood. She needed help. Desperately.

Grant reached around the seat and held her up.

"Mark," he said, "get out there, open the passenger door, and see if you can hold her back steady."

I did as I was told and knelt on the asphalt behind her. Leaning forward, I put my forearms against her back to stabilize her, placed my pointer fingers under her jaw, and held both thumbs at the base of her skull to hold her still.

It felt like we sat that way for hours, cheek to cheek, locked together, with her fighting for her life and me just doing the best I could to keep her calm and insist she keep breathing.

We were facing the driver—the man I had seen in the convenience store. He was unconscious and pinned behind the steering wheel. Someone reached in and felt for a pulse, then draped a blanket over his head. He was gone.

The young woman I was holding started to shake. The driver was her brother, who had taken them down to the prison to visit a family member for Christmas.

She was crying now—a horrible, gurgling sound that became louder as she struggled. She could hear the cries and fear of her children and tried to ask for them.

I just kept saying, “Mom, you’ve got to live. Your job is to just keep breathing. That’s your only job—you keep breathing, and I’ll do everything else. We’re taking care of the kiddos.” I couldn’t bear the thought of her dying in my arms.

“We’re good people,” she whispered.

Good people going through a tragic, tragic moment in life. The only thing I could think to do in that moment to relieve her suffering was to ask if she wanted a priesthood blessing. “Yes,” she whispered.

And so, without moving my hands from under her jaw, I blessed her. And guided by the Spirit with words that were not mine, I proclaimed that she would survive—and that she would live to take care of and raise her children. Looking at her crumpled, broken body, it seemed impossible. However, in the darkness of the night, a loving Heavenly Father knew this family and was there. I have no doubt that the words of that blessing came from God.

We sat there for what seemed to be an eternity, waiting for emergency services. This was back before cell phones were common, and we were miles from any services. Finally, the police and the ambulances arrived.

They stabilized this young mother and took her away, then firemen hosed me down because I was covered in her blood and gasoline from kneeling on the pavement. And that was that. I remembered taking in a breath of fresh air once they loaded her into the waiting ambulance. She was going to get help.

I turned around and peered back into the car and found a kind, gray-haired woman sitting inside, holding one last child—a little boy. She had stopped to help and had climbed into the Suburban to be with him. His eyes were big, round, and scared.

“Oh, who do we have here?” I asked.

“This is Mark,” said the woman.

I looked at the trembling boy and mustered up a smile. “Hey, Mark. My name’s Mark too. We’re going to be good friends. Your mom is going to be fine. She’s got help, and now we’re going to take care of you.”

The paramedics soon came and took little Mark with them. There was nothing left for us to do but head home. The drive back was very emotional for all of us. I remember reaching Price Canyon on the way to Soldier Summit when I finally gained the composure to say, “Well, at least all the children survived.”

One of the boys in the back of the truck managed to choke out the words “Not the baby. He died in my arms.” We all cried the rest of the way home.

The next day was a fast and testimony meeting at church, and to my surprise, that struggling young man—maybe for the first time in his life—stood, walked to the pulpit, and bore a powerful testimony. He testified that God’s plan of salvation was real and that he had seen the priesthood in action. That night changed his life. It changed all of our lives. That’s micro-miracle number three within this tragedy: the way each of us was changed for the better by going through something so difficult.

I’m going to fast-forward now to about one year ago, a little over twenty years since the night of that accident. I was invited to attend a sales meeting for one of my companies, even though I have long since retired. I agreed to attend the meeting but didn’t feel I added much value. But after it was over, I saw one of the men who was visiting our company heading my way from across the room.

He shook my hand.

“Are you Mark Hampton?” he asked.

I said that I was.

“You saved my life.” Surprise must have registered across my face. “I’m Mark Hardy,” he added.

He was the little boy who had been in the back of the Suburban that night. Little Mark! We reconnected with their family and were able to visit them in their home a few weeks later. We learned that his mother, Shannon, had suffered a punctured aorta in the accident. She should have bled out within minutes, but she lasted hours sitting there on the pavement with me that cold December night. Her back was also broken—and to this day, she’s still living in a wheelchair—but she survived. In fact, she’s thriving. And just as

the blessing promised, she has raised all her children to be incredible, faithful, and educated people with amazing families and many grandchildren.

I sat across from her at the dinner table that evening and was able to tell her that her sweet baby boy died in the arms of a young man who loved him. She never knew that and had always wondered how he had passed, hoping he hadn't been alone. Reconnecting with that beautiful family was a miracle. Her survival was a miracle. Having a man with military experience there to help that night was a miracle. Slowing down enough to be there in that moment was a miracle. And the way that young man changed after hearing a priesthood blessing was a miracle.

Now, I'm not saying that I want anyone to go through such an immense tragedy just to hear a blessing. I would never want that. But there were countless little miracles within the tragedy, and perhaps that's the greatest miracle of all—that God meets us in the midst of our most horrible moments. He may not be able to step in and keep things from happening (because I believe that many hard things in our life are the natural result of living in a fallen world), but He does often intervene and say, "How can I take this moment and make it easier for my beloved child?"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What do I want out of this journey? What is my purpose in picking up this book?
- Do I currently truly believe God can utilize me in His work? Why or why not?
- Am I willing to listen to promptings and act on them? If not, what is hindering me from being open to that?
- Have I prayed to ask God if He is real, if He loves me, and if He needs me?

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