

The Challenging Question That Brought a Miracle

It was dark inside the chapel, the small generator just able to help two or three light bulbs pierce the darkness. The worship was moving, as Pepe led us on his guitar. A number of locals joined in, but many remained quiet and subdued. I preached a message that seemed to stir people's hearts, although it was difficult to tell as I was unable to see most of their faces because of the dim light. I concluded my message and said that we would be happy to pray for anyone who was sick so that they could be healed. Just as I finished this confident proclamation, my heart sank.

My eyes had immediately fallen upon the mother of the young girl whom we had been unable to help that afternoon. There, lying across her lap in a lifeless form, was the little girl. I walked across the small dark space, trying to stir my faith. I talked to myself: *This morning you saw an amazing miracle; you can do it again.* Strengthened by such thoughts, I knelt down at the mother's side to examine the little one. She lay still, eyes rolled back in their sockets and unmoving. Her body was floppy and unresponsive. I tried to find a pulse without success. I tried to stimulate her into some sort of reaction, but all to no avail. About twice per minute a small gasp exited from her lips. Cheyne-Stokes breathing, or the death rattle as it is sometimes called, indicated imminent death. She was literally dying in front of our eyes; any breath could be her last.

I summoned the people with me to prayer—with a sort of confidence that seemed to encourage them. We called on the God of miracles to do it once again; only this time we needed to see resurrection not just healing. About 20 minutes passed, and I kept checking to see whether there was any change or indeed if she had actually stopped breathing. There was no

improvement, and each breath threatened to be the final call. I became angry with God. How could He not answer my prayers? How could He perform a miracle in the morning and allow this child to die in the evening? I prayed with more fervor, demanding a miracle from God—no change. I prayed some more, my emotions starting to boil over into my prayers.

After about 30 minutes I lost all control of my emotions and, giving up, walked away. My anger toward God spilled out. “Why, why, why?” I asked Him. I had no idea what other people around me were thinking; I was not sure I even cared.

As I ran out of things to say to God, He asked me a question:

Why are you praying?

I thought that was obvious, but suddenly revelation entered my consciousness. Since that morning I had been rehearsing in my mind how to tell the story of Otilio once I got back home, thinking how impressed people would be, how my reputation in the Christian community would rise. I realized that I was not really praying for the benefit of the young girl and her mother; I was praying for my own benefit, to have another story to tell, to look more impressive in other people’s sight. Love was not motivating my prayers, but rather power and influence. I started to cry at the realization, and I repented, telling God how sorry I was and how desperate I felt, somehow feeling responsible for this little girl’s death.

Then something unexpected happened, something that I had never felt or experienced before, something that would change my life. The Holy Spirit poured Himself into me. I felt warmth and overwhelming love. The compassion of God flooded into my being. It was as if God broke off a bit of His heart and gave it to me. All of a sudden I loved that young girl with an unshakeable love. I cared for her in a way that compared to the way I feel about my own wife and children. I wanted her to

live, and I did not care if I never got to tell the story. But surely it was too late.

The voice of God came to me once more, *Go to her again and ask the mother to put the child to her breast.* I walked back to the mother's side, understanding in a completely new way that love "always hopes" (1 Cor. 13:7). Hope stirred in me, and with compassion and authority I asked the mother to put the child to her breast. She looked at me as if I were crazy, but she did what I asked. She lifted the girl's head toward her breast and let it go, and the lifeless body slumped back over her lap.

"Please, do it again," I asked, and the mother complied. She put her hand behind her daughter's head and lifted her to the breast, and the girl started to suck, at first slowly, then hungrily. I stood back, amazed at the love and power of God in action. Ten minutes later the little girl was sitting normally on the mother's knee, full of life, looking around her, unaware that she was the center of attention and the cause for much rejoicing.

I walked away, thankful to God. I do not think I prayed for anyone else that night; I cannot really remember. My thoughts were filled with wonder at God and love for a young girl whose name I never knew.

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