

# I Met a Miracle

The story of my own encounter  
with the claims of Christ  
and other remarkable stories

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## Introduction

I love personal stories. I love testimonies. I love hearing about how an encounter with God changes people—how it transforms their lives. Perhaps my all-time favorite is this story—the story of my father’s turning point—his conversion.

I can still remember sitting in evangelistic meetings as a child, listening to my dad tell about the Friday night he shook his fist at the heavens and said “Holy Spirit, leave me and never come back!”

That Friday night was his crossroads moment—his turning point. *I Met a Miracle* was first published more than fifty years ago, but the story of how an encounter with Jesus changed one man’s life—and through him many other lives—is timeless.

In the pages of this book you’ll read the story of how my precious dad, George E. Vandeman was changed through meeting Jesus. As you read, I hope that you, too, will have an encounter with the Saviour. May every turning point in *your* life lead you to Jesus!

Connie Vandeman Jeffery  
Associate Speaker—*Voice of Prophecy*  
October 2012



## Chapter 1

### *I Met a Miracle*

It was on a Friday night that I shook my fist at God.

Five minutes before it happened you would have written me down as a decent, respectable, promising young man with drive and dedication and—well, going somewhere. But inside I was riot and revolt and rebellion and civil war and guilt—all rolled into a bored, frustrated kid, generation gap and all.

I kept my distance from anyone over thirty. In fact, I wanted little to do with anyone or anything that reminded me of my early background.

My father was a minister. I don't mean the kind of minister who marches in parades and preaches politics and goes to jail for causes he believes in. Not that he would not gladly have followed his conscience to prison if there had been a need. But things were different in those days. Concern for people was not concentrated in the streets.

But my father understood men. He helped men. He won men. And I watched and listened and was deeply impressed. I learned even before my teens that sermons do not come from mental discipline and wide reading and scholastic achievement

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alone—however essential these may be—but from life.

There wasn't a trace of phoniness in my father, or in my family, or in my home church, as far as I can remember. That was one problem I did not have. Rather than being turned away from religion by people who didn't live it, I was constantly being drawn back to it by the compelling demonstration of God's power to change lives—drawn back, I say, while I was trying desperately to escape.

You see, I had this hang-up about freedom. I didn't want to be restricted. I didn't want to be fenced in. I didn't want to be inhibited. I wanted to make up my own rules. And as a minister's son, I was being watched. And I didn't want to be watched.

It was more than that. Early in my teens, gnawing away at my restless mind, came the first faint suggestions that God might someday call me into the ministry. I confess that the idea surprised me. And it was to surprise those who knew me even more.

These were convictions I was determined to stifle. For however appealing my home background, and however insistent the call of God to my young heart, I determined to stifle the inner voice and discover life for myself.

I hadn't heard about the evils of the establishment in those days. So I would be wise, I thought. I would safeguard my future security by preparing to be a civil engineer. I'm not sure whether I really wanted to be a civil engineer, or whether I just didn't want to be a minister. I knew, of course, that if God wants a man to go to Nineveh—wherever that Nineveh may be—no other place will do. And, besides, I had a lurking suspicion that the thing I was fighting was the thing I really wanted. I was all mixed up, and unwilling to admit it to anyone, much less to myself.

I tremble to think of what I so narrowly escaped. No, there were no brushes with the law. There was nothing in my



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conduct revolting to society or even embarrassing to my family. No scandals to live down.

I know now that conversion is easier for a man whose sins are etched in deep scarlet. Such a man, unless he has completely silenced the voice of God to his heart, knows where he stands. He knows he needs God.

But I was gripped by something worse. Mine were respectable sins. I was lost in the church. And don't let anybody tell you it can't happen. Because it can. Please believe me. It is altogether possible to accept a theory, to be satisfied with a form of religion, and yet be lost—lost in the church.

Oh, I would go to church and hear a sermon, and I would be concerned. I would read the newspaper and see events following Bible prediction like a blueprint, and I would be troubled. But when I tackled my own natural weaknesses—and sometimes I did want to tackle them—I was completely helpless.

I think that was the real problem. Religion, at least my experience with it, seemed to be very weak on the how. And of what use is a religion that doesn't work?

And so I rebelled. What else was there to do? I took up with every respectable symbol of rebellion. Long hair and beads and guitar it would have been, if it had happened today. Of course a guitar, for instance, doesn't necessarily mean rebellion. My daughter Connie plays one—and I love it. But for some—a symbol. I took up with those who were “in” at the time. I'm thankful that chemical rebellion wasn't popular.

I became so weary of boredom and defeat that I tried to run away from conscience. But, thank God, conscience—unless you kill it—will never let you go.

God did not leave me alone, though I wanted to be left alone. Like a man who has taken too many sleeping pills, I needed to be walked and walked and walked. And God was

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right there. And it made me uncomfortable. I didn't want Him that close.

I felt like global war inside. And the war was not de-escalating.

Finally I could stand it no longer. It was a Friday evening, and I was seated in a meeting where my father was speaking. There he stood—my ideal of a minister, my ideal of a man.

He was speaking to the entire congregation, not to me in particular. But every word he said cut like a knife. I got up and walked out of the meeting and moved restlessly into the shadows. I shall never forget those moments. In that still summer evening, looking up past the trees into God's own sky, I actually shook my fist at the heavens and said, "Holy Spirit, leave me! And don't ever come back!"

Thank God, that prayer was never answered! But breathing those words, the shock of having said them, did something to me. At least the words were prayer, though bitter in their defiance.

This was the climax to a long series of events in which the evil one had been overstepping himself. I had been doing things that surprised even myself. And now, by my own defiant words, I was thoroughly shocked. For the first time I saw the fine print on the devil's contract. And I decided to break it.

Little did I dream that I was standing on the threshold of a transforming experience that would dwarf all my former visions of personal happiness and satisfaction. I was to learn a secret that would not only change my own restless soul, but would do the same for any man who is secretly longing to know.

And that is what I want to share with you in these pages. Not just my own story. Rather, growing out of it, building upon its discoveries, focusing from many angles, I want to introduce you to my Lord. I want to talk with you about some of the questions that so perplexed and confused and haunted

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me—until I found the way out. I want to do this because I know that the questions that tapped so insistently at my mind must have tapped at your mind, too. For really we are all alike. The problems don't change with generations—only the vocabulary, only the scene.

Is there such a thing as peace of mind? Is there any cure for guilt? Are prayers ever answered? Can God really change a man? How does He do it? What sort of commitment is required? And how deep is a man's involvement? What risk does he take?

The questions are not profound. Neither are the answers. You will not need any theological background to understand this book. And if you have picked it up expecting to find entertainment, or involved philosophy, or unique literary beauty, you will be disappointed. This is a book for the man in need, the man confused, the man defeated, the man at the end of his rope. A man who is sinking doesn't want oratory. He wants a lifeline. And that is what this book is about.

But back to my story. For many months the secret I was seeking seemed to evade me. I set out at once to reconstruct my life, to set my house in order, to realign my thinking and my goals. I knew what was right. But religion, I say, seemed to be weak on the *how*. *Information* was not enough. I needed *demonstration*—in my own life.

What worried me was that no matter how vigorous were my attempts at self-improvement, I repeatedly failed. Yet strangely enough, when I asked older Christians how to succeed in my personal life, how to break the power of wrong habit, their counsel was simply, "Try harder."

Listen. If anyone tells you to try harder, tell him he is wrong! I know, they may not call it *trying*. They may call it self-discipline. They may offer you some psychological formula, some new secret for tapping a power they say is within you, even some very worthy involvement in the needs of society. But

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is it not the same old *trying*—trying to lift yourself by your own power? It doesn't work. You can try until you are weary. You can try until you are worn out. But still your weaknesses will mock you. Trying only focuses attention upon yourself. It is a power outside yourself, the power of the living God, that changes and transforms. The only way to get into the kingdom of God is to be born into it—by a miracle. It is just that simple. But I didn't understand.

And so, although it sounded a little too much like self-hypnosis, I whipped up my determination again, flexed my muscles, and made another try. But before long my willpower relaxed, and I found myself right back where I started. This resulted in discouragement. And if there was anything I did not need, it was discouragement. Or did I? At least it jarred me into action.

Evidently something was wrong here—something terribly wrong. I dropped to my knees. I opened the Bible. For if this business of Christian living was genuine, there would have to be a more adequate demonstration of it in my life. Certainly there ought to be more to the gospel than another chance after every defeat.

Now came the surprise. As I opened the Scriptures, I found no emphasis on self-discipline. Instead, I found such words as these: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Jeremiah 13:23. And the words of Jesus: "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? . . . Neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." Matthew 7:16-18.

No wonder it could not be done by rigid mental effort! No wonder all my noble resolutions were about as strong as ropes of sand!

And then imagine how I felt as I discovered in the seventh chapter of Romans a description of the very conflict I was experiencing like a broken record. Listen to Paul's words,

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beginning with verse 15, as Dr. J. B. Phillips has translated them: "My own behavior baffles me. For I find myself not doing what I really want to do but doing what I really loathe. . . . My conscious mind wholeheartedly endorses the Law, yet I observe an entirely different principle at work in my nature. . . . In my mind I am God's willing servant, but in my own nature I am bound fast, as I say, to the law of sin and death. It is an agonizing situation, and who on earth can set me free from the clutches of my own sinful nature? I thank God there is a way out through Jesus Christ our Lord."

A way out! That brought courage. Evidently the difficulty was in my own sinful nature. I began to understand why it is that a man sins. I realized that this planet is in rebellion against a good and loving God, and that a fallen, corrupt, degenerate nature has been passed on from generation to generation, that sin and disobedience and rebellion have so warped and undermined the perfect nature with which God originally endowed man that it is utterly impossible for any man, in his own strength, to live for God.

No wonder I had made so little progress in solving my problems. How could it be otherwise, so long as my fundamental nature was unchanged? I had attempted to cover conflict and defeat by outward discipline. I had been content to keep my objectionable traits of character, while I grasped frantically for grace and poise and personality to cover them up. But I was missing the real point.

How often I had seen it in others! For it is one thing for a hostess to keep sweet and charming at a social function when a guest soils her lovely gown—outwardly calm while she is burning inside. It is one thing for an employer to be courteous to a bungling workman, a blundering customer, when influence and reputation are at stake—though all the while hate burns in his heart. But it is quite another thing to have a power inside that will take away the hate and the burning.

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I saw that patching up the outside could never heal the inside. I could not cover defeat with culture, or weakness with personality. I must have a power that could go deeper than that, or forever live with a mocking heart.

But light began to dawn. Hope sprang up as I read such words as are found in 1 Thessalonians 5:24: "Faithful is he that calleth you, *who also will do it.*" He promises to do it. And I had been trying to do it myself.

And then I read Jude 24: "Now unto him that is *able to keep you from falling*, and to present you faultless." Here was not partial victory—the kind I was experiencing.

And 2 Peter 1:4 solved the problem: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature.*"

I saw now why simply working at it had proved so disappointing. Evidently God had planned to do something deep and fundamental within me, and I had not permitted it. It was a new nature that I needed.

A friend helped me one day with a very simple illustration. Let us suppose, he suggested, that a timber wolf should watch and admire the habits of a flock of peaceful sheep and decide that that is the way an animal ought to live. Suppose he attempts now to live just as a sheep lives. Would not that wolf have a difficult time? Would he not be likely to slip back to his old way of life? Grass might seem quite tasteless as he remembered feeding on some carcass.

But suppose that God by a miracle known only to the Creator should transplant into the wolf the nature of a sheep. Then would it be difficult to live like a sheep? Not at all.

Well, it helped me. The possibility described in 2 Corinthians 5:17 now made sense. How had I missed the very thing I needed? Listen: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

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I stood in wonder before the utter simplicity of God's plan. How could it have been so difficult to grasp? Did it need to be? Would a God so anxious to save us reveal the way in words we could not understand? Surely not.

Unfortunately, the language of religion, its familiar vocabulary, like the repetitious chiming of a bell, sometimes just doesn't register. We hear the words so often that we scarcely hear them at all. How many times my father had tried to tell me the secret! But I never got the message.

It was amazing how all the Scripture statements on this subject now seemed to fall into place, as in an almost-completed puzzle. The incident related in John 3 became more vital to me than I had ever dreamed possible. You will remember that Nicodemus—a man thoroughly respected, highly trained, possessed of a dignity and culture rarely seen in those times—came to Jesus by night. And there under a Middle Eastern sky the Saviour of men kindly but forcefully probed to the heart of his problem as He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Strong words, these. And Nicodemus did not understand. He questioned the possibility of rebirth. But Jesus pressed home His point again: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

My wonder deepened at these words of Jesus. Evidently such a transformation is possible. But how could it be brought about? God did not leave me without an answer—one that had been there all the time: "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:13.

The new birth was not something that could come about through *the will of man*. No wonder I had failed!

True, I had changed direction. I had decided to break my contract with rebellion. I had faced the unpleasant task of confession. I had felt the remorse that Peter must have felt

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when he betrayed and denied his Lord. I had come to the place where I could say, "I am sorry. No one else is responsible. I am to blame. God help me!"

All this was opening the floodgates for the change I needed—the new birth. But nothing I could do could bring it about.

Unquestionably I was facing a miracle. And did I, George Vandeman, master of my own future—did I have to submit to a miracle? Evidently. For the man who is attempting to remake himself without God is attempting an impossibility. The Christian life is not simply a modification or an improvement of the old. Rather, it is a transformation of a man's nature that for all practical purposes recreates him. He is a new man. Since the day I discovered that secret, my deepest satisfaction has been on seeing the new light in the eyes of men and women as this truth dawns.

It all came about so effortlessly. And I had tried so hard! Listen: "No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 173.

No one sees the hand. But the miracle is there!

Tongue cannot tell it. Pen cannot write it—the peace this transaction brings to the human breast. This is the transforming secret that was to dwarf every youthful dream into insignificance. I learned it the hard way. But I learned it never to forget!

Let me take you back to that night when I stood in the shadows, looking up at the stars. Had I been examined that night on the theory of truth, I would have passed with flying colors. In fact, if my father had been called away by some emergency, I think I could have preached his sermon at least with clarity. But it was not theory I needed—or clarity. *It was life!*



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I knew then and there that if ever these lips or this pen were commissioned to share truth with others, power must attend it or it would accomplish nothing. I knew even that night the terrible responsibility of the ministry. For no man or woman is ever the same after he has confronted the claims of Christ.

I knew then, as I know much better now, that it is possible for men with eternal destinies at stake to accept a theory of truth and yet lose out. For without the transforming process that comes alone through divine power, the original tendencies to sin are left in the heart in all their strength, there to forge new chains and impose a slavery that the power of man can never break!

I had so narrowly escaped such a slavery that I determined no one within the hearing of my voice would ever step back into life unaware of its danger. God help the man who rests passively and unafraid under the shadow of a superficial profession, an outward cloak of religion! He is the man I sincerely pray my ministry may help.

I realize now that the struggle of that night under the stars was in reality the beginning of my ministry—and the reason for it. God knew that the real desire of that lonely heart was just the opposite of the words that escaped those lips. The desperate cry of the soul—that His Spirit might *never* leave—is the prayer He heard that night. And forever I thank God!