

## Transcript-81

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast. On today's episode I've got a special guest with us and we're going to be discussing a topic that's fascinating to me and I think will be very interesting to you. We're going to be discussing miracles and how important the miraculous is in both in the Bible and in the Christian life so.

Shea Houdmann

Our guest today is Doctor JP Moreland. He is the author of A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles. Dr. Moreland is one of the leading evangelical thinkers of our day. He is a distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology and the director of the Eidos Christian Center. He has degrees in philosophy, theology and chemistry. He has written many books. Several which have been very helpful to me in my Christian walk, especially in the philosophical arena, which is not typically my specialty. So Doctor Moreland, welcome to the show.

Doctor Moreland

Well, Shea, I'm so glad to be with you. Thanks for inviting me.

Shea Houdmann

So Doctor Moreland, what led you to write A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles?

Doctor Moreland

That's a great question. I became in my 52 years of ministry, I was growing increasingly saddened by the fact that we weren't having the kind of impact on the culture that we ought to be given our numbers. So 6-7 years ago I decided to study the book of Acts with a fresh eyes. And I was looking for what was uppermost in their minds, in maturing, and believers, and winning people. And I then followed that up by looking at the first four centuries of the church, and I interviewed an expert in the church fathers, and I came up with the conclusion that there were three things.

Doctor Moreland

Now, these aren't all that matter, but these were three central things that you find in Acts and going forward. One of them was the cultivation of a distinctive Christian mind. Knowing what we believe and why so we can not get sucked into cultural ideas that are harmful. The second was the cultivation of a Christlike character centered around a tender heart. That was drawn toward affection toward God and others. The third thing surprised me, and it was the manifestation of the spirit and the Kingdom's power through signs and wonders, and that continued all the way up to the 4th century or so.

Doctor Moreland

And throughout church history, well, I had experienced people that were into that sort of thing is a little bit goofy to be honest with you, but I began to attend a vineyard church 19 years ago, and some vineyard churches are not good, but this one is. And I saw miracles and things happened that I had never seen in my life. In the book I breakdown five different kinds of miracles and I explain how to recognize

them. But ask specific answers to prayer, miraculous healings. Hearing God's voice in six different ways outside but under the authority of Scripture. The manifestation of angels and demons and then near death experiences.

Doctor Moreland

And So what I did Shea I theologized this through the present power of the Kingdom, not spiritual gifts. I do happen to believe that all the gifts are for today, but I'm not going to die on that hill. I think that one of the ways that the Kingdom of God is manifested is Paul says it is not in words but in power. So that's what motivated me because I wanted to give up my brothers and sisters a credible account they could trust about seeking God for more of a supernatural lifestyle, and that's why.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, well I find that very interesting. Most of my theological training since I became a believer in my late teens has been from cessationist, those who do not believe their miraculous gifts are functioning. But thankfully, with that in mind, I'd never lost it. I never had any doubt that God still performs miracles, so to me, like this miraculous spiritual gifts, whether it's tongues, prophecy, and so forth to me is you can separate that from God performing miracles, and I wouldn't even consider myself a strict cessationist anymore. But like you said, a lot of what I've experienced in charismatic churches. I like your term goofy and then not necessarily done in agreement with what the Bible teaches in first Corinthians 14 for example.

Shea Houdmann

So I have some concerns about what's taking place and being called the miraculous gifts of the spirit, but in terms of God performing miracles, I have absolutely no doubt that God is performing more miracles than we are even aware of, and God has done some amazing, miraculous things in my life and people who are close to me in their lives as well. So no doubt about miracles, but. Coming from my background, it almost seemed to me like there were some people who were almost embarrassed by the idea that gospel performed miracles. Have you found that as well? And why do you think that is?

Doctor Moreland

Absolutely well, yeah. Good question. By the way I'm with you on what you just said. So what I'm trying to do is present a book that opens people to seeking God's interventions more with more confidence but with wisdom. And so you can judge for yourself whether I've accomplished that.

Doctor Moreland

But there the reason that people are embarrassed and don't think that God's acting as much as he really is in our culture is number 1. They're embarrassed because they've sort of absorbed a naturalistic view of the world. And that science is kind of what really tells us what's real, but we have hope at least that Christianity is true, or we have some kind of faith in it that's sort of blind, but the miracle stuff is a little bit out there.

Doctor Moreland

And you know, if you go around sharing that with people, you're going to, they're going to think you're cuckoo. So I think it's the embarrassment and the absorption of naturalism. Without knowing it, nobody

would say I'm a naturalist in the church. But we've allowed too much of that to seep into our being in the fiber of our bones. The second one is and I can document this and I mentioned it in the book Shea. Is that I go to churches and I ask how many of you have had a specific answer. A prayer that you know was God. And by the way, in the book I tell how to recognize the miracle from an act, just a mere coincidence. Well, 80 percent, 90%. How many of you have had God direct you specifically? Same thing.

Doctor Moreland

How many of you know of somebody or one step removed that was healed 70%. But the problem is we don't talk about these things with each other and so we get the impression that nothing is happening in my church when there's a ton happening, but we don't share it because we're a little bit hesitant.

Doctor Moreland

We don't want to come across as spiritual braggers if we see God intervene. So in the first chapter I list 8 specific things you can do to grow in your confidence of the supernatural world. One of them is when you go to your Christian friends, start asking them this question. Say listen here in the last year have you ever seen God do anything that you would say it just had to be an intervention by God and it just could not be explained any other way. I'd love to hear about that. You would be surprised if you start asking that question. The encouraging faith building stories you'll hear from your brothers and sisters.

Shea Houdmann

So you mentioned this briefly, and as part of your book I really enjoyed. How do you separate or distinguish between a miracle and a coincidence? I think the word. You used 'cause. A lot of people find that wow that's seen. The odds of that happening by chance seem outlandish, but I'm still kind of hesitant to call it a miracle, but I really don't know.

Doctor Moreland

Well, there you go and see one of the reasons God acts in the world for us is intervened specifically is to show compassion and to build our confidence in him and so you see something and you say, Oh my, this had to be God, and then the next day you start saying, you know, but that could have been a coincidence and it starts eroding your confidence. That you should sustain because you saw God act and so this principle is important. Now in the world we see all the time, something a cause will produce an effect. And sometimes the cause is just some natural object, like a flash of lightning causes a tree to split.

Doctor Moreland

Now that's just a natural cause that produces an effect, a tree splitting. Sometimes the cause is the act of a personal rational free agent. And so when I go in and see their table set in a certain way, I don't try to explain that by the laws of physics and chemistry. I do what we do every day in court and that is, I say there was a person who did that that had the know how to do it and they had some motive or intent in in setting up that table. And I think it's because we're having our Chinese neighbors, not our Mexican neighbors 'cause of the way the table set.

Doctor Moreland

So we do this all the time. In fact in science like archaeology or forensic science and others, there has been a principle that has been developed that's used by scientists and I apply it to the Christian life and it goes like this. Whenever two things are present, you can know beyond any reasonable doubt that this event was produced by the act of an intelligent rational agent. The first one is, the result has to be highly improbable.

Doctor Moreland

But as you pointed out, that's not enough, because if you and I were playing bridge and we were playing for a \$500 kitty. And I was a dealer and on the 1st deal I dealt myself a perfect bridge hand and won the 500 bucks on the 1st deal. You'd probably be suspicious, and rightly so. First of all getting that hand is unbelievably improbable, but your hand is every bit as improbable as mine. In fact, if somebody predicted the specific 13 random cards you got before the deal, we'd wonder if something was wrong. So high improbability is necessary.

Doctor Moreland

But you need something else, and that is this event is special for some reason, besides the fact that it happened. Now look at your hand, there's nothing special about your hand, except it was the one that happened. Or you got. It's just some random hand that you received. But my hand has an independent specialness. Besides the fact I got it, namely the rules of bridge, before we even sat down, specifies that there is one specific hand that if you get that you win. Well, my hand is highly improbable, but it's independently special. Besides the fact I got it and that is beyond reasonable doubt that I cheated.

Dr Moreland

The Democrats actually used this years ago to sue a Republican and they won this in court. Because in the state of Ohio there were eight districts having their in House State House voting and there were eight, seven or eight parties on each ballot. But when the ballots were produced in every district, the Republican candidate was first. Now that's extremely unlikely. But so would any other random one if it showed up on all 8 districts. But what got this guy in court and he lost, was that having a Republican first, whoever first guarantees that they get more votes because they're first and the Republican was in charge of printing the ballots.

Doctor Moreland

So it was his desire for his party to win, plus putting them first that would give him a better chance that it was independently special that indicated it was done on purpose by him. Now when I have an answer to prayer. Or if there is a very specific need that I have that's been really troubling me and something highly unlikely that it will ever be satisfied, and there's something that happens that is highly unlikely, but it's special because it was what I was praying for or it met this need I was longing for.

Doctor Moreland

That is really strong evidence according to the secular principle. It's not a Christian principle. That this was done by a rational free agent, but in this case a really big one. It would be, you know, God, not a finite agent, so that's how you can tell the difference.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so in preparation for this interview someone asked me so, Jay, what would you point to it's the most hard to deny miraculous event from God and just as we describe it, briefly, so after we launched Got Questions and we started translating our articles and other languages. Some of these languages were pretty difficult to find translators for, and my wife being the more spiritual and often more wise person like well Shea, have you tried praying and asking God to provide the translator for this particular language is like, oh, why didn't I think of that? Well, so we just pray, Lord, please provide a translator for this language, and literally within a couple days I receive an email from someone say I love your website, been using it for years. I don't know if there's any way I could possibly serve or help and just to let you know, I live in this country and I'm fluent in this language, so I don't know why I'm contacting you, but let me know if you can use any of that, and it was kind of like did God just like sovereignly lead someone to send me an email he didn't even know why he was sending it because he was the answer to the prayer for a translator for that language, and then he ended up serving as our first translator for that language for a couple of years.

Shea Houdmann

So that's something like. The odds of that being a coincidence is just astronomical, and to me that's a that was a powerful confirmation that God hears our prayers and got answers them in his timing in his way.

Doctor Moreland

It's beyond reasonable doubt. Just look how likely was that to happen? Well, it's off the charts, unlikely. But secondly there was something special about that event. Apart from the fact that this guy wrote you, namely. That was a need that you guys had specifically and you'd prayed about it. So it's the combination of the specialness of that particular outcome, plus the fact that there was not a chance that it would happen indicates beyond any reasonable doubt that this was done on purpose by God.

Doctor Moreland

And this is used in court cases to decide guilt. You know that guy had a motive and it's unlikely this person would have died this way and whatever, so. That great example.

Shea Houdmann

So what would you say, what are some of the dangers, the risks of the body of Christ diminishing the importance of their miraculous in our lives?

Doctor Moreland

Well, there are dangers that go both ways, but I think that Christian religion teaches us that God is not just transcendent, but he's with us. That he not only is with us, but he loves us and that he had co laborers with us to use us for his Kingdom. Now there are times when he has invited us to pray, and even to pray for the sick and to try to discern his voice. You have to be wise about that, but there are ways that God can lead and guide us in under the authority of Scripture.

Doctor Moreland

And so we're if we just make it all about what's in the scriptures. Then what we're missing is the spirit part of it, and I think it needs to be word spirit, and specifically the Spirit's power to work alongside us. I

can tell you that my faith has been enormously strengthened. From the accounts that I put in the book, there's something like 50 cases in there Shea, and I vetted them very carefully. I interviewed people. I gathered evidence and I didn't put accounts in this book that I'm not confident. And when you read them, I don't know about you, but I find my heart being my gosh this is just unbelievably great, you know. And it gives me a faith, strengthener, draws me nearer to God. I sense He really does know I'm here and He loves me. You know?

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so maybe a little bit even a little more practically speaking, how would you say recognizing the miraculous and even talking about it, sharing it with others is important in order to build up our faith, to encourage us to build up in community together.

Doctor Moreland

Well, yes, absolutely. And I for example, I suggest that people give a little contribution to the Jesus film and get their newsletter 'cause it comes out a couple of times a month. And it reads like acts chapter 29. I mean, these film crews are seeing things that happened in the book of Acts.

Doctor Moreland

So what this does for a community? Is it when you go back and then read the word it starts jumping out at you because somebody in your fellowship just saw something like what you're reading and it kind of makes the Bible just become more even more alive. And it causes people to have an expectation that is not presumptuous because I have in the book 14 reasons that I've thought through carefully why God doesn't answer prayer, 'cause we've all experienced the frustration with God when he doesn't answer and we think what's going on up there, you know. But there, but there are reasons and this can help us. But that's what it does. It brings people together with a greater sense of boldness and courage and intimacy with God I think.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, and I really like how both in your book and then earlier in this recording you've talked about that there are some extremes on both sides. Whether it's denying miracles or embracing everything, how do you personally like strike the balance? To recognize OK, I want to embrace the miraculous, I want to realize that God is a God of miracles, and he still performs miracles. But a lot of what I'm seeing over here seems like abuses. Seems like that's not scriptural. So how do you strike that balance?

Doctor Moreland

Yeah, I think number one you mentioned it I want to make sure that what's going on is not contrary to the Bible. Now if something happens that the Bible doesn't comment on, then I'm free to use wisdom and follow the evidence wherever it goes. But if something is contrary to Scripture, it's out for me. Because that's my authority.

Doctor Moreland

Secondly, I take a page from Jonathan Edwards who experienced this kind of miraculous outbreak when he was pastoring and he wrote a book called Religious Affections about how to handle this. And he basically said that you need to not prejudice whether this is the spirit of God or just somebody wanting

attention, but what you want to judge is the long term fruits that it produces in that person's life. Does it cause them to want to lead a holier life? Does it cause them to want to draw nearer to God and obey him and become more aggressive about sharing their faith? Or does it get him off on a tangent? And it all becomes about prosperity or about my miraculous gift or whatever that is not good. So I tend to evaluate it that way.

Doctor Moreland

I use this principle, this designed filter I use to make that judgment, and then I want to see if the people that are doing this are word oriented. Do they study the word in their church? Is it taught well? Do they read books that are solid? And if the answer to that's no then I'm afraid they probably live their Christian life based on emotions and emotions are wonderful servants but terrible masters.

Doctor Moreland

And so I get a little bit worried about people that are like that. So those are some principles. Then you know you just have to kind of intuitively sense do you think this person credible and you read their body language and that sort of thing.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so it's very interesting, so this has been the Got Questions podcast with Doctor JP Moreland, author of A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles. Let me tell you, it's a funny story, but it's a great read. It can get a little heady, a little philosophical at times, but I think that's good. 'cause I think a lot of people need to think about these things from that perspective, but one of the other Got Questions employees was reading the book and she told me that at one point she felt like her head was going to explode and then very shortly thereafter you say in the book you at this point you may feel like your heads about to explode. So you correctly read how some people would be reading that section of the book.

Shea Houdmann

So just briefly, before we close. The book A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles we will include links to where it can be purchased and where you can learn more about Doctor Moreland in the show notes and the description on YouTube and at [podcast.GotQuestions.org](http://podcast.GotQuestions.org).

Shea Houdmann

Just briefly, who was the book for? Who would you encourage to acquire a copy of this book.

Doctor Moreland

Primarily Christians who want to see God do more through them, and in and around their lives. They want to learn how to how to be more effective in prayer. And to understand why God doesn't respond. So it's for those people who want to see the Kingdom advanced and don't want to dismiss the intervention of God just out of hand. I hope that this will draw them closer to the Lord. It'll increase their faith and confidence and there they'll be willing to step out with more courage and boldness than before.

Shea Houdmann

Fantastic so again, Doctor Moreland. Thank you for coming on the show. I enjoyed our conversation today.

Doctor Moreland

Been a great time. Thank you for inviting me.

Shea Houdmann

All right this. Has been the Got Questions podcast. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.