

A story from Chicken Soup For The Soul, Believe in Miracles.

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A Crisis of Faith

Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.

~Mother Teresa

In 1996, our troubled marriage left me emotionally exhausted. I was totally consumed with my husband's problems and I didn't know who I was; I had lost my identity. While he chose to cope with life's problems in his way, I comforted myself with food, leaving me 100 pounds overweight. My once-sculpted, athletic body was just as disfigured as the rest of my life.

Eventually, my marriage ended in divorce and I struggled to make ends meet for Jimmy, my two-year-old autistic son, and me. Desperate to find some purpose in life, I began attending church and adult Sunday school.

One Bible study was different from most. It was about listening to God. Scripture was used to show how God speaks to his people through a relationship with Him. After lacking purpose and direction for so long, I enthusiastically soaked up every bit of information on the subject.

As a single parent, I needed a way to provide for my son and me. My former career as a fitness trainer was now behind me. I decided to study counseling in college. First, I received my associate degree and then went on to pursue my bachelor's degree. We barely got by on child support, food stamps and work-study jobs at school. Juggling my new Bible study, school, and single parenting was tiring. But each night after tucking my little son into bed, I would study until the early hours of the morning in hopes my tenacity would pay off eventually.

With graduation approaching, I grew even more eager to receive divine guidance as I moved into my new counseling career. I went to Bible study, prayed and listened attentively for Him to speak to me, but He was silent.

One day, I received a notice in the mail to attend a routine benefit re-certification appointment at the Department of Social Services. I did not anticipate anything unusual.

Getting ready for my appointment, I quickly applied a little make-up. Just a few curls in my hair, and I would be ready to go. Soft curls began to fall over my shoulders. While looking at my

reflection in the bathroom mirror, I basked in the thought of how I would be a college graduate by this time next year.

Looking good, Lori, I thought to myself as I pondered a similar hairstyle for graduation night. Suddenly, and completely contrary to what I was thinking, the idea went through my head that things were not going to go as planned at my appointment. Winding another lock of my hair around the hot brush, I heard a voice whisper in my head, "When you get to your appointment, you will get bad news, but don't look for a job. I will provide."

Pausing for a moment as the hot steam rose from my curling iron, I wondered if this could be God's voice speaking to me. Abruptly, my thoughts were interrupted by the chiming of the hallway clock warning me that I was running late. I dashed out the door to make my appointment, like Cinderella leaving the ball at the stroke of midnight.

Upon arrival, I was sent to a different department. I was directed through the dark green hallway of the century-old building and down the stairs to the basement. It was now starting to seem strange that I was not asked to complete the usual paperwork with my regular caseworker.

A young, dark-haired man met me at the first office at the end of the hallway. He did not even ask me to sit down. He stood glancing down at his clipboard and said with a half-smile, "Congratulations on receiving your associate degree!"

"Thank you," I replied proudly.

The devastating news came like I was standing right in the middle of a hurricane. Again, looking down at his clipboard, he informed me, "You are no longer eligible for benefits since you now have an associate degree." My hopes and dreams of graduation were shattered.

Jimmy was not yet in school, and his special needs prevented me from putting him into full-time childcare so that I could work.

I sank into a nearby chair, buried my head in my arms and sobbed. The man with the clipboard stood there quietly, not even offering a tissue, while tears drenched my shirtsleeves.

After arriving home, I grabbed a washcloth from the hall closet to wipe the tear-stained mascara from my face. Looking down at the curling iron on the sink, I was reminded of that voice, and I took comfort in what had been foretold to me in the mirror.

A week passed, and no miraculous jobs appeared. Maybe I was just rationalizing because I didn't want to face the idea of giving up college. My faith wavered.

Almost two weeks passed, which seemed like an eternity. How long would I have to wait? Surely God wanted me to provide for my son and me, but nothing was happening. I remember praying,

“Lord, we are literally down to our last penny. I believe you asked me not to look for a job. This waiting is greatly testing my faith. I am tempted to take matters into my own hands. Who could blame me for doing so? Please help my unbelief.”

While sitting at the kitchen table lamenting over a cup of a tea, the phone rang.

“Hello, Lori. This is Marianne from the YWCA.” She was my former supervisor.

“Oh, hi, what can I do for you?” I inquired.

“Well, the trainer I hired left without any notice, and I wondered if you would like the position,” she said.

Hesitantly, I said, “I haven’t exercised in years. My certification has expired, and I am studying to become a counselor.”

“That’s perfect!” she interjected. “I am in need of an instructor for a beginner class that would offer support groups to deal with emotional aspects of eating. You could get back into shape with the others!”

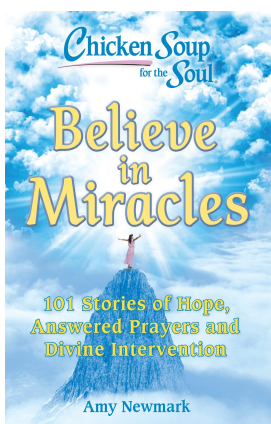
“Sounds interesting, but what about my certification?” I asked.

“Don’t worry; I can certify you,” she reassured me.

My heart raced with excitement. Caught up in the moment, I was almost ready to accept the job offer when I remembered that my special-needs son suffered when he was away from me for too long.

Almost as an afterthought, she added, “And we have childcare right here if you need it.”

Today, I am working on my master’s degree and my son is preparing to graduate from music college. As I write this, I am reminded of how far I have come in my faith since that day when a still, small voice spoke to me over a hot curling brush.



I have heard of God speaking through a burning bush, but I never expected a burning brush!

About Lori

Lori is an online minister, speaker, author, counselor, and photographer in Buffalo, NY. She has written for The Art of Autism, a social entrepreneurship project that supports over 500 autistic artists around the globe. She holds a Bachelor's degree in counseling and studied

postgraduate coursework in family systems pastoral counseling. She is a team member at Samaritan Pastoral Counseling Center, Online Minister at Pendelton Center United Methodist Church.

Lori's son, James Jagow is a guitarist, arranger, and composer who happens to be on the autism spectrum Lori and James enjoy working on films about autism such as Diffability Hollywood, by Espocinima, Normal People Scare Me Too, produced by Joey Travolta's Inclusion Films.

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