

After the Miracle *What then?*

FAITH AND MIRACLES
By Donald E. Lindman

SEVERAL DECADES HAVE passed, but I still remember Arshad.

He showed up at church one Sunday morning with a glow on his face that told the world something wonderful had happened. His olive skin accented dark eyes that flashed with excitement and framed a smile that just wouldn't stop.

Before long we knew his story. He could hardly wait to tell it. And as he talked, we discovered that not many months earlier, Arshad's life had been a disaster. Within weeks, he had lost both his job and his family. Alone, without work and with only a little money, he left Detroit and headed for that mecca of the despondent and despairing – California.

But Los Angeles didn't offer Arshad any more than he had left behind in the Midwest. There were no jobs or friends waiting for him in the City of Angels. With nothing more to live for and nothing left to live on, it wasn't long before he found himself leaning over the railing of a bridge, thinking about how easy it would be to jump.

For some reason, though, he didn't. A self-professed atheist, Arshad didn't have God to turn to. Yet that's exactly where he did turn. While thoughts of suicide flooded his mind, he prayed: "God – if there is a God -- help me!"

And with that prayer, Arshad stepped back from the edge.

As he walked to the foot of the bridge, he spotted a newspaper on the pavement. A discard like himself, it seemed to offer a little companionship, so he picked it up and took it back to his room, stopping only long enough to spend his last money on a loaf of bread; Arshad hadn't eaten in three days.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER that could only be described as a miracle, even by an atheist.

As he sat on his bed looking at the want ads, the first job Arshad spotted was one he could do, and the position was being offered only a few blocks from his hotel. He applied the next morning and got the job on the spot. After several months, he had saved some money; slowly, his thoughts began turning back to Detroit.

He wanted his family. He felt differently about them now. So Arshad called his wife, told her what had happened, and asked if she would take him back. Her response was curt: No.

But Arshad was determined to go home again. He quit his job, packed his few belongings, and hitchhiked out of Los Angeles.

His first ride took him to San Antonio. The second got him to St. Louis. And the third went all the way to Detroit.

Back in Detroit, Arshad contacted his wife, who still wanted nothing to do with him. But Arshad was persistent. His new smile and the peace that had replaced his hostility and restlessness finally won her over. She moved back in with him. He found a new job. The world couldn't have been a better place.

And the atheist headed for church.

That's where I met him. We were thrilled by Arshad's testimony, and Arshad was thrilled with God's miracles in his life. He was reading the Bible

and praying with an intensity and enthusiasm that put most older Christians to shame.

Arshad was in church every Sunday. You could count on it.

At least, you could count on it for a couple of months. But then he began missing an occasional Sunday. Soon it was every other Sunday.

He had excuses, but the glow was gone from his face, the sparkle from his eyes, and the smile from his mouth.

WE FINALLY WERE able to piece together what had happened. The miracles that had filled his life and been the foundation for Arshad's faith had stopped. Life was rapidly becoming normal for Arshad, and he couldn't handle it. If there were no miracles, there was no God. At least, that was his thinking.

Eventually, we lost track of Arshad. I've often wondered what happened to him. It's one of those things I may never find out.

But Arshad nevertheless got me thinking about what faith really is. We who face problems beyond our ingenuity, ask questions beyond our wisdom, and bear burdens beyond our strength often daydream of how nice it would be if God would just work miracles in our lives – as in New Testament times.

We watch television programs and hear preachers talk about needing the faith to believe in miracles. We hear testimonies of people being healed, or getting incredible sums of money unexpectedly, or being tremendously successful at their jobs, all because of miracles God had performed in their lives.

Wistfully we wonder, *Why is our faith so small? Why can't we just trust God for those miracles that seemingly happen to others?* We forget that Arshad would probably have been on one of those programs, too, had they known about him.

Miracles happened during the ministry of Jesus and in the early chapters of Acts, during the infancy of the Christian Church. But even in the Bible, the miracles seemed to slow to a crawl by the closing years of the New Testament.

SOME PEOPLE EXPLAIN this by saying that the brightly burning flame of faith was already beginning to go out in the lives of those people. Worldliness, lukewarmness, and a "normal" outlook were starting to take their toll.

But I wonder if it wasn't really just the opposite. Spectacular miracles were needed to bolster the faith of spiritual infants. But as their faith grew deeper and more mature, the question of how to live victoriously amid life's day-to-day problems became more important.

Sickness is a part of life. It takes more faith to live victoriously with a debilitating illness than it does to be rescued from the crosses everyone else is called on to bear. We all wish for the easy way out, but it is a greater witness to stand strong in the storms of life than to be excused from facing their fury.

Arshad didn't understand that. His idea of spirituality was a continuous parade of miracles. But real faith involves riding out the storm in the boat with Jesus, not constantly asking Him to be calming the sea. **CD**