

## Introduction to the Healing Ministry of Jesus Christ

by Doug Brown

When one reads the Gospels, a significant part of Jesus' ministry was healing various kinds of sickness and rescuing people from demonic oppression. Matthew summarizes Jesus' ministry - *"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people"* (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). Moreover, Luke offers a similar summary - *"When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people ..."* (Luke 4:40-41). We are told that Jesus' healing ministry was motivated by compassion (Matt. 9:35-38; Mark 1:40-42).

Jesus delegated his authority and power to heal and cast out demons to his followers as well (Matt. 10:1f; Luke 9:1-11; 10:1-9 ; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Acts 1:1-8). A review of church history, especially the first four centuries, reveals that Christians continued this healing ministry delegated by Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ramsey MacMullen, professor of classics at Yale University, writes as a historian that the main reason for the explosive growth of Christianity in the first three centuries was primarily because the pagans were impressed that Christians healed the sick and cast out evil spirits.<sup>2</sup>

### The Big Picture

If we are to understand the healing ministry of Jesus, we must understand the larger biblical context for his ministry. The Bible begins with the account of Creation (Gen. 1&2). We see humanity in a garden paradise enjoying the abundant life of God's Presence and blessing. Life is marked by a certain wholeness and harmony in which everything is rightly related to everything else.

Humanity was created uniquely in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). As unique creatures we were given the capacity for reasoning, emotions and relating to God and each other. We were blessed to live in God's love and under His gracious rule. As God's representatives, humanity is graced with the authority and capacity to see God's rule extend throughout the earth. Humanity's very existence and purpose is expressed in its privilege to enjoy life with God and extend His glory and rule throughout the earth. God is the ultimate Source of Truth, health, and happiness. Therefore, the key to the ongoing wholeness and harmony in creation is maintaining the proper ordering under God's rule.

Tragically, Adam and Eve rebelled against God's gracious rule when they succumbed to Satan's temptation to be "like God" (Gen. 3). Because of their disobedience, they were evicted from the Garden of Eden (the place of God's manifest Presence) and the Tree of Life (the symbol of God's abundant life support). Through this disobedience, sin with all its devastating effects entered God's good creation like a deadly computer virus.

As their ancestors, we have inherited all the tragic consequences of their rebellion (Rom. 5:12-21). Therefore, there is no part of us, including our body, mind, will, or emotions, which is not adversely affected by sin's ravages. Moreover, our relationship with God and every other person is affected by sin so that we do not experience the joyful wholeness with God or others that was God's original design.

Whereas God's original design was for all of creation to experience a joyful wholeness in right relationship with Him, now everything is marred by sin to various degrees. Satan, having deceived Adam and Eve into agreeing with him about God, was able to gain a measure of authority over the earth. Jesus refers to him as the "prince of this world," who now exercises his cruel rule to deceive and destroy all that God has made (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; 1 John 5:19).

Because a certain authority over the earth was delegated by God to Adam, another man must now win that authority back from Satan. Jesus, as the last Adam, has won that authority back in his life, death, and resurrection (Luke 11:1-28; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15).

Jesus came announcing the good news (Gospel) of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15; Luke 4:18-19, 43). Jesus was bringing God's rescue and restoration mission to recover all that was lost in the Fall (Luke 19:10). What God had promised to Israel and all peoples was now becoming a reality in Jesus Christ. God's rule and healing power were breaking into human existence in a way previously unknown. The various miracles, healings and deliverances were signs demonstrating the reality of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ as well as God's power to restore His original design back in creation. Where Satan seeks to destroy, Jesus offers again the abundant life of God (John 10:10; 1 John 3:8). One day all of creation will flourish in God's joyful wholeness (Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 22).

Jesus came to rescue sinners from the power of sin and Satan, and he came to restore us to a joyful wholeness in himself. In Jesus Christ repentant sinners are now able to have their sins forgiven and begin to experience a deep healing within themselves. We are now able to begin to receive God's love and love others in His Name. As Brad Long and Cindy Strickler write,

*Christian faith in Jesus Christ crucified meets and joins this hidden river of pain in order to bring into it the extraordinary promise of healing. Jesus has come to 'bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners' (Isaiah 61:1). He works within us to heal us from the inside out. He also sets us free from the bondage of our heart to share with him in the healing of others.<sup>3</sup>*

## The Meaning of Salvation

Mary was told by Gabriel to name God's son "Jesus," which in Aramaic is "Yeshua" (Luke 1:32). Yeshua means "Yahweh is Salvation." Therefore, in the most basic sense Jesus came to bring the Lord's salvation. But what is meant by our salvation in Jesus Christ?

The Greek verb for "save" (sozo) also means "to heal, to make whole, rescue, restore." Therefore, we see that salvation in Christ includes the idea of a saving activity that restores the whole person and eventually the creation. Jesus offers us the very life and love of God to rescue and restore us spiritually, relationally, emotionally, and physically. We might characterize our salvation as a restoration to joyful wholeness in Christ.

After his baptism in the Spirit, Jesus began his public ministry with his claim to be the fulfillment of God's promise in Isaiah 61:1-2. Essentially, Jesus declared his Messianic mission to be one of preaching and demonstrating the good news (Gospel) of God's freedom and healing, rescue, and restoration. Moreover, he indicated that he was fulfilling God's promise in Isaiah 35, which is a picture of the joyful restoration of those redeemed by the Lord (Luke 7:18-23).

We see Jesus ministering essentially four kinds of healing:

1. Spiritual healing – the deepest & most important healing when our relationship with God is restored by the regeneration of our hearts/spirits.
2. Emotional healing – those disordered emotions caused by past hurts begin to be healed and reordered so that we are able to more deeply receive God's love and love others with His love.
3. Physical healing – the sickness or injury to our bodies is healed.
4. Deliverance from demonic oppression, which can cause any of the other kinds of sickness.

Francis MacNutt summarizes the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ as follows:

*In traditional terms, Jesus saves us from personal sin and from the effects of original sin, which includes ignorance, weakness of will, disoriented emotions, physical illness, and death.*

*Some of this freedom will unfold only in the deepened life that takes place after our physical death. But even now the process has begun:" The Kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus is freeing us from sin, from ignorance ("the Spirit will lead you into all truth"), from weakness of purpose, from disoriented emotions, and from physical sickness – from all the sickness, therefore, that destroys or lessens our humanity – in order to give us new life, a new relationship of love and union with his Father*

*through the power of the Holy Spirit. The saving power of Jesus frees us from all those elements of evil that prevent us from entering our new life with God.*

*Jesus, therefore, came to do two things:*

- 1) To give us a new life, a loving relationship of union with his Father and with himself, through the Holy Spirit.*
- 2) To heal and free (save) us from all those sick elements in our lives that need to be transformed so that the new life may freely enter in.<sup>4</sup>*

### Does Jesus still heal people today?

There are two basic reasons we should answer “yes” to this question. First, there is no place in Scripture where we are taught that Jesus will stop healing people when it is His will to do so. In 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Paul describes the way the Holy Spirit will manifest Himself through various expressions of gifts for the common good of the Christian community. Two of the manifestations of the Spirit are “gifts of healings” and “the working of miracles.” It was clearly Paul’s understanding that the Christians in Corinth would experience these gifts expressed among themselves as God willed it. In the same way, Paul spoke of the miracles in the church in Galatia (Gal. 3:5).<sup>5</sup>

Second, the history of the Church reveals that Jesus has never stopped healing people.<sup>6</sup> While there have been periods where the ministry of healing was very rare or misdirected and misunderstood, the Lord has not stopped healing people. Today some dramatic healings are being routinely reported in Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East.

To affirm the validity of Jesus’ healing ministry today is not to affirm certain extreme positions held by some in the church. The spiritual gifts are not badges of maturity. The person manifesting these gifts is not necessarily more mature or righteous than anyone else. Paul clearly says that these gifts are given by the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:11). Moreover, they are given “for the common good” so they are meant to be expressions of love.

Furthermore, we must not say that anyone manifesting a gift of healing will see everyone they pray for healed. Again, the Spirit manifest itself in “gifts of healings” according to the sovereign will of God (1 Cor. 12:11).<sup>7</sup> Paul’s phrase “gifts of healings” suggest the Holy Spirit will manifest His knowledge and power in any number of ways to heal various sicknesses.

Lastly, we must not conclude that the sick person lacks the required faith if they are not healed. While faith is important, there is no clear formula revealed in the New Testament for the role of faith. The fact is that how, when, and to whom healing happens is a profound mystery. Contributing to the complexity of any situation is also

the potential interconnectedness between our physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational dimensions.

### Why Doesn't God Always Heal the Sick?

This is the question that often arises when we take seriously the call to pray for all kinds of healing. This question has been the basis for spiritual and relational abuse and fallout; therefore, we must approach it with humility, honesty, and compassion.

I refer you to the attached appendix to read Sam Storm's answer to this thorny question in his excellent book, "Tough Topics – Biblical Answers to 25 Challenging Questions."<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

While many in the Church have neglected Jesus' ministry of healing, we should pursue the knowledge and wisdom necessary to offer this ministry to others in Jesus' Name. In fact, we are encouraged to seek these gifts if they are subordinated to love (1 Cor. 13:2; 14:1). The ministry of healing is to be expressed wisely, lovingly, and faithfully in a church under the authority of the elders (James 5:13-18).<sup>9</sup> We should seek to learn as much as we can about praying for all kinds of healing so that as many as the Lord wills may receive this ministry.

Currently Jasona Brown is our Director of Formation and Prayer. She oversees the development of our various wholeness ministries including various kinds of healing prayer, as well as referring people to appropriate professional counselors.

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<sup>1</sup> *Healing* by Francis MacNutt (Ave Maria Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> MacNutt, p.13 (referring to *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A.D. 100-400*).

<sup>3</sup> *Let Jesus Heal Your Hidden Wounds*, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> MacNutt, p. 39-40.

<sup>5</sup> These Scriptures do not support the belief that these gifts were only to validate the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, and therefore, they ceased with the disappearance of the founding apostles who wrote our New Testament.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Healing Reawakening* by Francis MacNutt (Chosen Books 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Paul is a good example: sometimes the apostle Paul was given gifts of healing, and sometimes he wasn't (Acts 14:10; 16:8; 19:12; 20:9-10; 2 Cor. 12:8-9; Gal. 4:13-14; 1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20; Php. 2:26-27).

<sup>8</sup> *Tough Topics – Biblical Answers to 25 Challenging Questions*, Sam Storms (Crossway 2013).

<sup>9</sup> The EPC's Position Paper on the Holy Spirit "affirms the gifts of the Holy Spirit as biblically valid for today, and counsels that they be exercised under the guidance of God's Word and the authority of the local Session." In James 5:13-18 we see at least three kinds of prayer for healing: (1) praying for yourself, v. 13; (2) the Elders praying for the sick person with the prayer of faith; and (3) Christians praying for each other, v.16.

## Why Doesn't God Always Heal the Sick?

God loved the apostle Paul. Yet God sovereignly orchestrated Paul's painful thorn in the flesh and then declined to remove it, notwithstanding Paul's passionate prayer that he be healed. We are not apostles. Yet, God loves us as his children, no less than he loved Paul. We don't know the nature of Paul's thorn (although see chap. 21 for an attempt to identify it), but each of us has undoubtedly suffered in a similar way, and some considerably worse. We, like Paul, have prayed incessantly to be healed. Or perhaps knowing of a loved one's "thorn," we have prayed for him or her. And again, as with Paul, God declined to remove it. Why?

It's hard to imagine a more difficult, confusing, and controversial topic than why God chooses not to heal in response to the intercessory pleas of his people. I don't profess to have all the answers, but I think I've got a few. I'm sure that this chapter will provoke many to anger and frustration, while others, I pray, will find a measure of comfort.

In the final analysis, virtually everything about healing remains a mystery. I don't mind saying that I'm weary of those who

claim to reduce healing to a formula or a manageable cause-and-effect phenomenon in which we can know with certainty why some are healed and why others are not. I labor in this chapter to avoid falling into that trap. That said, I would like to suggest that the reason why many are not healed may *possibly* be answered in any of seven ways.

### **Seven Possible Answers**

1. Although we must not give more weight to the role of faith than does the New Testament itself, we must be willing to acknowledge that occasionally healing does not occur because of the absence of that sort of faith that God delights to honor. This does *not* mean that every time a person isn't healed, it is because of a defective faith, as if healing inevitably follows a robust and doubt-free faith. But it does mean that faith is very important. How can we conclude otherwise in view of the many texts that closely link healing to someone's faith? I hope you'll take the time to pause and read these passages: Matthew 9:22, 28–29; 15:28; Mark 2:5, 11; 5:34; 9:17–24; Mark 10:52; Luke 17:19; Acts 3:16; 14:8–10; James 5:14–16.

In my book on spiritual gifts,<sup>1</sup> I ask, “Why did Jesus emphasize faith?” Neither he nor his Father needs it. They could have orchestrated life such that something other than faith would be the condition on which they would heal. They are not hampered by the faithlessness or prayerlessness of the sick person or those who pray for his or her healing. The reason Jesus emphasized is this: *faith glorifies God*. Faith points us away from ourselves to him. Faith turns us away from our own power and resources to his. Faith says: “Lord, I am nothing and you are everything. I entrust myself to your care. I cling to you alone. My confidence is in your word and character no matter what happens.”

Faith is not a weapon by which we demand things from God or put him in subjection to us. Faith is an act of self-denial. Faith is a renunciation of one's ability to do anything and a confession that God can do everything. Faith derives its power *not from the spiri-*

<sup>1</sup>Sam Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, 2nd ed. (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2013).

*tual energy of the person who believes, but from the supernatural efficacy of the person who is believed: God!* It is not faith's act but its object that accounts for the miraculous.

2. Sometimes healing does not occur because of the presence of sin for which there has been no confession or repentance. James 5:15–16 clearly instructs us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another that we may be healed. Again, please do not conclude from this that each time a person isn't healed it is because he or she has committed but not repented of some specific sin. But in *some* cases (not necessarily all) this is undoubtedly true. We have to reckon with the possibility that lingering bitterness, anger, resentment, envy, or unforgiveness in our hearts is the reason why God withholds physical healing from our bodies.

3. Odd as it may sound to hear it, healing may not happen because the sick don't want it to happen. Jesus asked the paralyzed man in John 5:6, "Do you want to be healed?" What on the surface may appear to be a ridiculous question is, on further examination, found to be profoundly insightful.

Some people who suffer from a chronic affliction become accustomed to their illness and to the pattern of life it requires. Their identity is to a large extent wrapped up in their physical disability. I realize that sounds strange to those of us who enjoy robust health. Why would anyone prefer to stay sick? Who wouldn't jump at the opportunity to be healed? But I've actually known a handful of folk who in a very real sense enjoy their dependence on others and the special attention it brings them. They are convinced that the only reason people take note of them and show them kindness and compassion is their affliction. They fear that if they were healed, they would lose the love on which they've come to depend. To them, remaining sick is a small price to pay to retain the kindness and involvement of those who otherwise would simply ignore them.

Then, of course, in some instances people don't want the responsibilities that would come with being healthy. To their way of thinking, it's easier (and perhaps even more profitable) to remain the object of others' beneficence and good will than it would be to be healthy and thus expected to get a job and show up nine to five



on a daily basis. This is not a common phenomenon, but it does happen in a few cases.

4. We must also consider the principle articulated in James 4:2, where we are told that “you do not have, because you do not ask.” The simple fact is that some are not healed because they do not pray. Perhaps they pray once or twice, and then allow discouragement to paralyze their petitions. Prayer for healing often must be prolonged, sustained, persevering, and combined with fasting.

5. Some are not healed because the demonic cause of the affliction has not been addressed. Please do not jump to unwarranted conclusions. I am *not* suggesting that all physical disease is demonically induced. Of course, it is interesting, is it not, that in Paul’s case God used “a messenger of Satan” to inflict the thorn? There is also the case of the woman in Luke 13, who had “a disabling spirit [or, a spirit of infirmity] for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself” (Luke 13:11). According to Jesus, “Satan” had “bound” her (Luke 13:16; see also Acts 10:38). It takes considerable discernment, time, and patience to determine whether an illness has a demonic cause, together with even greater commitment to praying for the individual in question and leading him or her to address the reasons for such spiritual oppression. When these factors are ignored, healing may not be forthcoming.

6. We must also consider the mystery of divine providence. There are undoubtedly times and seasons in the purposes of God during which his healing power is withdrawn or at least largely diminished. God may have any number of reasons for this to which we are not privy, whether to discipline a wayward and rebellious church or to create a greater desperation for his power or to wean us off excessive dependence on physical comfort and convenience or any number of other possibilities. If this leaves you confused, that’s why it’s called a mystery!

But what must we say when the problem isn’t the absence of faith or the presence of a demon or the refusal to repent or the failure to pray or a lack of desire? How then do we account for ongoing physical affliction, as in Paul’s case? I strongly urge you to read the next point carefully.

7. Oftentimes there are dimensions of spiritual growth and moral development and increase in the knowledge of God in us that he desires *more* than our physical health, experiences that in his wisdom God has determined can *only* be attained by means or in the midst of or in response to less-than-perfect physical health. In other words, healing the sick *is* a *good* thing (and we should never cease to pray for it), but often there is a *better* thing that can be attained only by means of physical weakness.

More important to God than our physical health is our spiritual holiness. This isn't to say that the body is unimportant. God isn't a gnostic! He values and has redeemed our bodies and now dwells within them as his eternal temple. But while we live in this corrupt and decaying world, inner and spiritual conformity to the image of Christ often comes only at the expense of or at least simultaneous with physical deterioration and suffering (see 2 Cor. 4:16–18).

Let me personalize this principle. If I believe Romans 8:28, that God sovereignly orchestrates all events in my life for my ultimate spiritual good (and preeminently for his ultimate glory), I can only conclude that, all things being equal, if I'm not healed *it is because God values something in me greater than my physical comfort and health* that he, in his infinite wisdom and kindness, knows can be attained only by means of my physical affliction and the lessons of submission, dependency, and trust in God that I learn from it.

## Conclusion

In the final analysis, we may never know why a person isn't healed. What, then, ought to be our response? In the first place, don't stop praying! Some people find this difficult to swallow. Many times I've been asked, Why should Paul bother to pray for release from something that God wills to inflict? The answer is that *Paul didn't know* what God's will was in this particular case until such time as God chose to make it known. And neither do you or I with regard to any particular illness we may suffer.

If the Lord had never said in response to Paul's prayer, "No, it isn't my will that you be relieved of this thorn," Paul would have been justified, indeed *required*, to continue to pray for his heal-

ing. I once heard my friend Jack Taylor put it this way: “Never cease praying for healing until you are shown otherwise either by divine revelation or by death!” If, like Paul, you are able to discern, through some prophetic disclosure or other legitimate biblical means, that it is not God’s will now or ever to heal you, you may cease asking him to do so. Otherwise, short of death itself, you must persevere in prayer. You never know but that God’s long-term will for you is complete healing after he has for a season accomplished his short-term sanctifying purpose.

In Paul’s case, the only reason he ceased asking for deliverance was that God, in effect, told him to shut up! “No, Paul. I’m not going to heal you. It isn’t my will in this instance that you be set free from this affliction. Rather, I have a higher purpose in view: your humility and my Son’s glory manifest in the context of your ongoing weakness.” And Paul in effect replied: “Okay, Lord, I’ll shut up and submit to your merciful purpose in my life. I know you love me and desire what is ultimately of greatest good for my spiritual growth. Therefore, my prayer now is that you maximize in me the beneficial effects of this pain. Don’t let me miss out on any spiritual good that might come my way from this malady. Teach me everything I need to know, and sustain me that I might be a platform for the glory of Christ and a source of comfort to other suffering saints.”

I’m sure there are other ways to account for why God chooses not to heal, but I trust that these have proved helpful. There is much I do not know about this matter, but of this I’m quite certain: God’s grace is sufficient in all circumstances so that we, “for the sake of Christ” (2 Cor. 12:10), might learn that in our weakness his power is made perfect!

### ***Recommended Reading***

Lawrence, Peter. *The Spirit Who Heals*. Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway, 2006.

Storms, Sam. *The Beginner’s Guide to Spiritual Gifts*. 2nd ed. Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2013.

Tada, Joni Eareckson. *A Step Further*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.