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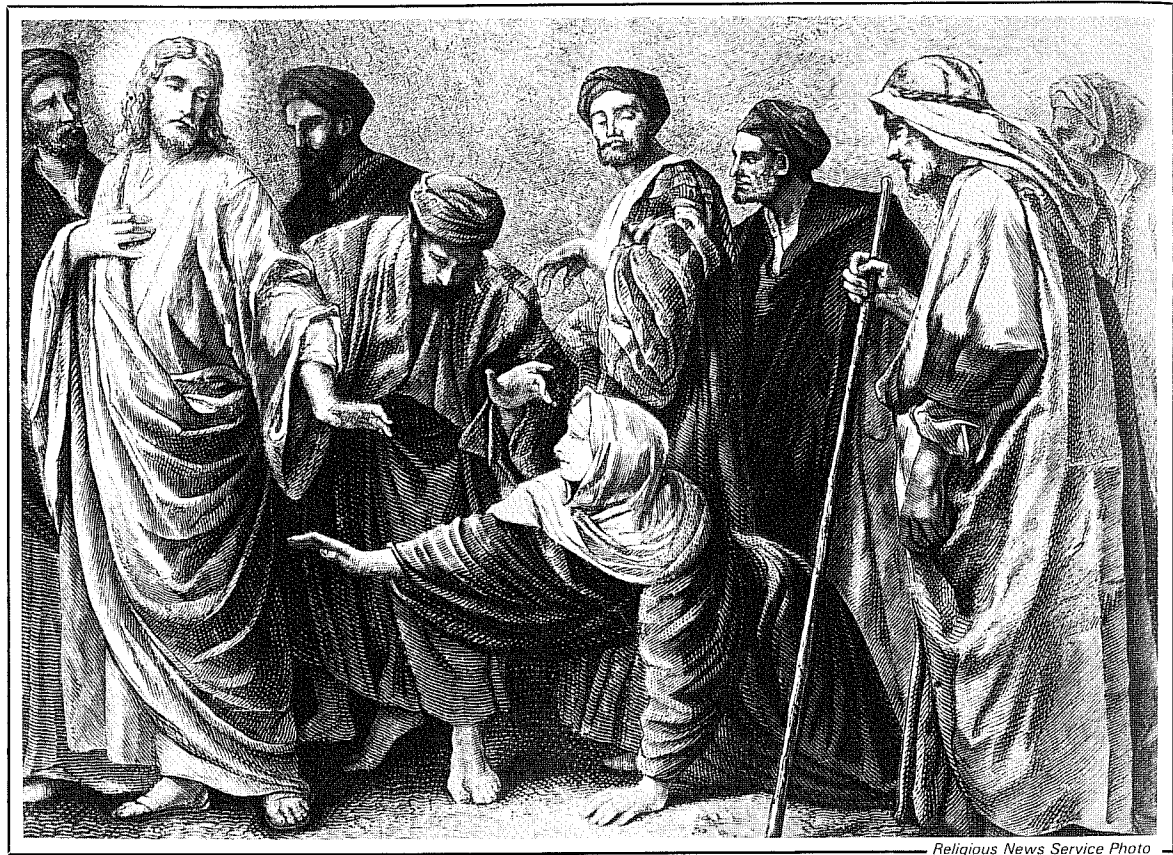
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Does God Heal Today?

by Elmer L. Towns



Religious News Service Photo

Matthew 9:21-22 — “If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.”

Common Misconceptions

It is no wonder the average Christian is confused about faith-healing: whether God heals, how He does it, and who gets healed. Misconceptions of faith-healing abound.

Many people think of healing as lines of poor, sick people in a tent, who wait for a fast-talking, slick-dressed evangelist called a “faith-healer” to dramatically lay hands on them so they will be instantaneously delivered from chronic illness, and may, in a moment of elation, throw down their crutches and dance. But that image is changing. Today the tent has become a city arena, or the faith-healers have taken to the airwaves and ask people to lay their hands on the television for healing. Their false concept of faith-healing is surrounded by gimmicks and lengthy appeals for finances.

The typical church member thinks of healing in terms of a minister who visits the sick in the hospital. Neither minister nor patient expects a dramatic intervention by God. The pastor prays weakly, “Lord, bless the doctors and give them

wisdom...lay Your healing hand on Your child...Amen.” There does not seem to be much faith or healing.

Now consider the sociological theologian who denies the supernatural aspect of Christianity. He reinterprets the events of healing in Scripture to mean a change in someone's personality; physical illness is reinterpreted to mean psychological illness or social malfunction. These humanistic ministers in ecclesiastical clothes teach that God heals through psychological understanding, or God heals through reestablishing human relationships.

Some extreme dispensationalists teach that God healed in Bible days but that era has passed and today there is no more divine intervention into physical malady. They teach that the purpose of God is not physical healing (signs and wonders), but that today He uses secondary instruments such as doctors, medicine, or surgery.

When most people think of faith-healing, they do not associate it with fundamental Christian ministers. They think, either sincerely or mistakenly, of the laying on of hands, intercessory prayer, or of being “smitten in the spirit.”

Almost no one thinks of the first word in the term "faith-healing," yet faith is the bottom line of healing. Faith is the only quality that can move God to intervene in life's affairs, especially in divine physical therapy.

Three Attitudes Toward Healing

In approaching the topic of faith-healing, three clear facts are evident from Scripture. First, God still heals some people who are physically sick, but He does it by answering prayer.

The Lord will alleviate physical suffering or intervene to reactivate physical functions that have ceased in the deterioration process. To say that God does not, will not, or cannot heal is a denial of the biblical teaching of the nature of God. James wrote toward the end of the age of the apostles (those with divine ability to heal), pointing out that healing was available to Christians apart from the gift of healing. In James 5:14-16 we are given several conditions that a person must meet to be healed. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

The second clear fact about healing is that not every person who has prayed for physical healing has been delivered from his suffering. Instead, God glorifies Himself through their sickness or suffering. Paul, who prayed for and witnessed the healing of others (Acts 19:11,12), also prayed for his own healing, but was not healed. He had a "thorn in the flesh" which apparently was a problem that caused him both physical and psychological suffering. Paul testifies, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (2 Cor. 12:8). God did not heal Paul but gave him grace that he might become spiritually mature through this weakness and bring glory

to God. As a result he testified, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:9).

Three, when God heals, the results are only temporary. Because every man has a sinful nature, the body will progressively deteriorate unto death (Rom. 5:12). Everyone eventually dies. No one should glory in the healing but in God who gives life and strength.

How to Apply Faith for Healing

When God heals, it may be in response to a simple prayer or to unceasing prayer. At other times God seems to ignore prayers for healing. Why does God work instantaneously for some, yet seem to turn a deaf ear to others? Perhaps God is waiting to teach some spiritual lessons to those who seek His medicine. The simplicity of healing or God's reluctance to heal only reflects the complexity of the purpose of God in our lives. Note the following principles.

1. *Go back to the original FAITH commitment.* After salvation by faith, the Christian lives by faith (Eph. 2:8,9; 2 Cor. 5:7). As a Christian he yields his entire life, including his body, to Jesus Christ. Therefore, when he suffers pain and needs physical deliverance, he must again yield his body and its members to Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:1; 6:13). The Lord may have a plan for him that does not include health or deliverance from pain. If it is God's will for him to suffer, then his desire—even with intercessory prayer—will not be met. Perhaps Fanny Crosby would never have written hundreds of life-changing hymns if God had taken away her blindness. Perhaps Joni Eareckson, a paraplegic, has glorified God through her paintings and testimony in a greater way than if she had never been permanently disabled in an accident.

Should a Christian desire healing? The question is, "Is he willing to remain ill for the glory of God?" If he is unwilling to let God do anything with his body, even allow him to suffer, maybe he does not have a basis to pray for deliverance. If he is not yielded to Christ to accept healing or sickness,

then his prayer for relief may not be granted.

2. *Call for the elders to pray.* Most faith healers reverse the biblical command; they call for the sick. The Bible commands to call for the elders, described in Scripture as pastors. In wisdom, elders know the spiritual condition of the person and whether he is in fellowship with God. Hence, they can join the sick in believing the prayer of faith for healing. Also, the act of calling for men of God to pray is an expression of faith. The Christian is saying to them, to the church, and to God that he wants God to control the circumstances and believes that God can.

3. *Confess sins for healing.* Wrapped up in the admonition to call for the elders is the statement "If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another" (James 5:15,16). If a Christian has sinned he should follow God's plan for restoration. If the sin has been public, he should confess publicly. If the sin is against another person, he may have to confess to that person. When the sin is private, he will probably confess it only to God (1 John 1:9). In some cases he may share his private problem with the pastor, knowing he will pray for him. But no human can forgive sin, nor does he have authority to pronounce forgiveness of sins.

4. *Pray for specific healing for a specific sickness.* When James said, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick," he used the Greek word *euchomai* for "prayer," which means to ask specifically. I believe that first, a Christian should ask God for wisdom in seeking out the correct doctor to treat the illness. Second, he should pray that God would give the doctor wisdom (James 1:5) so that in his treatment he may find the cause of the illness and apply therapy or medicine. In the third place, he should pray specifically that God would intervene beyond the limits of modern technology to heal the malady.

5. *By faith recognize the natural healing processes.* On several occasions Jesus did not heal instantaneously. When Paul prayed over Eutychus in Ephesus, apparently he was not healed immediately. After Paul prayed, he "talked a long while, even until the break of day, so he departed" (Acts 20:11). Later the young man was presented to the

church, where everyone rejoiced. Apparently the full healing took place after Paul had finished his sermon, ate his breakfast, and left the church.

When praying for healing, remember God may instantly heal the sickness, but at the same time He may allow the natural processes of the body to restore health. Even a doctor knows that when he operates or prescribes medicine he is not healing the patient. The body naturally heals itself after a tumor is cut out or a malignant organ is removed. If God performs a miracle regarding your sickness, He may allow your physical body to regain its previous strength through the natural process of diet, rest, or exercise.

6. *Recognize that God heals through "intermediate" instruments or means.* When James teaches us to call for the elders, he adds, "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14). Some commentators interpret "oil" to mean medicine, implying some were perhaps doctors who applied medication for healing. Some commentaries teach that "oil" is the Holy Spirit and a person needs His "baptism" or anointing to be physically healed. God does work through medication. Men made in the image of God have the ability to discover the functions and disfunctions of the human body. Through medical science, doctors possess advanced technology to treat physical problems far beyond the expectations of our grandfathers. Because God the Creator knows the biology of a man, He can control the functions through divine intervention or through the use of modern medicine which He has made available through research.

Those who refuse to consult with medical doctors are not acting in faith, but sheer stupidity. If God had not chosen to use doctors, He would not have allowed Luke the physician to travel with Paul, perhaps extending the apostle's usefulness so that the gospel could be spread around the world.

7. *Healing cannot go beyond the nature of God.* Some Christians presumptuously ask God to do what He has never promised or to act against His nature. One faith-healer claimed that a person was healed so he could see through a glass eye. Not to be outdone, a second faith-healer claimed that he turned a glass eye into a real one. Faith-

healers have claimed that people have grown fingers or new organs, or they have made other claims contrary to the nature of God. In the act of healing, God removes the cause of pain or He relieves suffering. He may activate an organ or limb that had ceased to function or heal by stopping deterioration.

For example, to heal a man of cancer, God can respond to his prayer of faith and remove the cancer. But would God create a new organ that has been destroyed by cancer? If God would do that, He would again enter into the role of Creator. The Scriptures teach that "He had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen. 2:3). This does not mean God could not create a new organ, for God can do anything. But God does not show us all His power at once. God could continually heal a person so that he outlives Methuselah, or never dies till this earth is judged. But God abides by His plan for man.

Conclusion

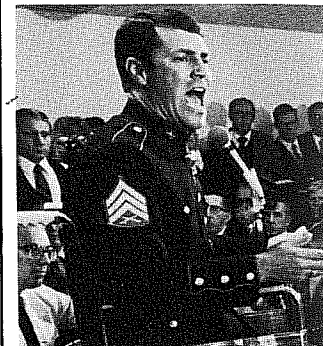
The average Christian has a number of misconceptions about healing, and when he gives it consideration, he seldom thinks about the *faith* aspect of healing. Those who want to grow in faith cannot deny its biblical use in healing. Actually, Christians have no estimation of how often God has healed people in response to the "prayer of faith." In keeping with the total teaching of the Bible, no one should *minimize* the fact that God will heal today. At the same time, healing should be viewed in the total light of revelation and not *maximized*. The main emphasis is never on the act of healing or the person healed. The primary focus should be Jehovah-God who heals. □

CORRECTION

Ronn Read, '78 LBS was incorrectly listed as starting Immanuel Baptist Church, Quincy, Illinois. Rev. Read planted Lighthouse Baptist Church in Quincy, Illinois, in January of 1982.

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