

Healing Service Training - Part Two - Common Questions

If what the Bible says about healing is true why don't we see more of them?

Unbelief definitely plays a part (Matthew 13:54-58 NKJV) And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?...Where then did this Man get all these things?" {57} So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house." {58} **Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.** Jesus' baptism had so changed Him and so endued Him with power that He could no longer fit into the mental boxes that people in His home town had put Him in. They said "Where then did this Man get all these things..?" they did not appreciate the equipping he had received (perhaps just received - see the parallel passage in Luke 4) . I think **wrong mental boxes** are a large reason why we see so few healings today. Here are a 12 common misconceptions put in "lay language" that I think stand in the way of a powerful healing ministry today...

(i). *The healings were "due to Jesus' divinity" were a "one off" and are not repeatable by us today.* (Covered in last weeks notes)

(ii) *Jesus wandered around in a beard and sandals then vanished.* His ministry in Heaven and the power He can send from Heaven are forgotten.

(iii) *The material world is solid and the spiritual world is sort of weak and fuzzy and not really real.* Yet by a word were the heavens and earth created and with a word they will be dissolved.

(iv) *You have doctors for diseases and priests for the soul.* Healing has been taken out of the province of religion and is no longer expected from it. People have been mistakenly divided into separate spiritual and physical compartments which "do not interact". But God is Lord of all.

(v) *Healing is something that saints do, it happens in the past and it leads to building shrines.* This is a bit like number 1 except that it involves bringing "the magical" element in and can lead to idolatry, relic worship, etc. This leads to two opposite dangers 1) darkness and superstition 2) thoroughgoing scepticism about the miraculous. Both cause damage to the manifestation of a genuine healing ministry by the laity.

(vi) *Respectable Christians don't engage in a healing ministry.* This is something that pressures me. Charlatans and "snake-oil salesman" have given the area such a bad name that people need a lot of courage to enter it and learn it.

(vii) *The Bible stories make me feel good but I'd be mad to take them too literally or to attempt to do them.* Many Christians treat the Bible as little better than motivational literature that "picks them up". It is like reading an inspiring biography that we can pick and choose the bits that we will align ourselves with. However it is a New Contract that we have been given and it should be studied like any contract to see what compliance is expected and what benefits can be gained. The Word activates the Spirit - but it must be the Word taken seriously and believed.

(viii) *I have to be in the right emotional state before God can use me and I am not there very often....* We are to preach the gospel in season and out of season and to heal even when we are tired, hungry, harassed and exhausted just as Jesus and the disciples did. (Mark 6:31, 2 Timothy 4:2).

(ix) *Healing is a product of something within myself; my own power, piety, intelligence, emotional intensity, fasting , rituals etc and if I do them at greater intensity then one day I will break through and see people healed.....* This is a terribly pervasive lie. It leads to enormous spiritual frustration and discouragement when the results don't show. When you are tempted to believe it just remember Jesus before His baptism -perfect in every respect in piety. Yet without miracle working

power (at that time). Human perfection cannot work the works of God until it receives the power that is from God. (Acts 3:12 NKJV) So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"

(Galatians 3:3-5 NKJV) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? {4} Have you suffered so many things in vain; if indeed it was in vain? {5} Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?;

Somehow believing, even naively, that our "goodness" merits God's power kills the "faith connection" stone dead. Hence Jesus warned about the "leaven of the Scribes and the Pharisees" and how even a little could ruin the whole lump of dough. (Matthew 16:6-16, Luke 12:1, Galatians 5:9).

(x) *The Good News has become just Good Advice.* The gospel is something we live in not something we live up to. It is "Good News" - the only thing you can do with news is accept it as true or untrue, to believe it or disbelieve it. We can live in it and take advantage of it or we can choose to ignore it, but we do not "live up to it". If you saw an advertisement advertising free Christian music and you believed it then you might get enthusiastic, tell your friends, then go out and get as much as you could. That is an appropriate response to good news. An inappropriate response would be to try to open your own shop or to pay for the music. The good news is that Jesus has made healing available. We need to accept this, believe it and live in it. The gospel is an accomplished fact that you announce so that others can take advantage of the offer. (Hebrews 9:12, 26-28, 10:10, Col 1:23, 1 Thess 1:15)

(xi) *This disease is too much for my faith.* The size of your God, not the size of your faith is what matters. When faced with cancer we forget that the Good News has been announced, that healing is available, that God is in heaven and Almighty. Like the ten spies we look at the size of the problem relative to something in us (our faith, resources, knowledge) rather than measuring the giants against the Lord. However Jesus said to his disciples after they had failed to heal someone... (Matthew 17:20-21 NKJV) So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. {21} "However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Mountains are bigger than disciples but smaller than God.

(xii) *I can't see **how** God can do it....* Many people need a "mechanism" to be explained to them before they can believe. "Just believe" is too nebulous an explanation. "How" God heals a cancer is important. For such people I take them back to Genesis and God's mighty Word activating the Spirit which created the Universe and transformed and ordered matter. God can create matter, destroy matter and renew matter. (Psalms 104:29-30 NKJV) You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. {30} You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth. (John 6:63 NKJV) "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. He can give Creation its shape and form. The spoken Word of authority can impart life, strength, healing and in combination with the Holy Spirit produce awesome transformations. (Genesis 1, 2 Peter 3:5-13, Colossians 1:16-17, John 1:1-3, Revelation 4:12)

2. What is the difference between the "gift of healing" and the normal Christians ability to heal? The gift of healing is a "charism" or "gracelet" as someone called it. All gifts are given "as God wills" (1 Cor 12:1-11) though they can also be sought (1 Cor 14:1). There seems to be two ways of gifts operating a) as temporary bursts that are "one offs" like Mary's prophesy. (Luke 2) B) As abiding gifts (like the prophetic gift on Isaiah etc). This also seems to be true with regard to healing. Most Bible-believing Christians have a "burst" when they pray for someone's healing and it occurs, much to their amazement. For a few it becomes a regular ministry and affects the whole way they view the church. There is no sharp dividing line between the gracelet and the full-blown gift and it seems that one can sometimes grow into the other with time, practise and an increase in faith. The gift is part of the Body and is to be used for its upbuilding in love (1 Cor 12-14). All Christians should be able to exercise healing prayer, particularly the elders of a

church.(James 5:14). All Christians should be able to minister healing to some degree though not all are “healers”. We cannot leave all healing up to the healers any more than we should leave all evangelism up to the few evangelists among us.

3. What is the role of the local church?

There is also a healing ministry role for the church as a whole. The assembled body of Christ is a powerful army and things happen in Bible study groups and in services that do not happen with just one on one ministry. One of the aims of this training is to increase the general level of faith for healing in the church so that we may become a community regularly ministering healing. Jesus wanted others in the community of faith to be also able to heal and sought to empower them to do so. The person with the gift of healing should ideally operate within a faith-filled believing community that is also being trained to heal the sick. Even Jesus had little success when the community around Him was filled with unbelief (Matthew 13:54-58). The church does not just provide a platform for healing to take place, it provides a praying, believing community that exercises healing through its eldership, its gifted members and through the Spirit working through it when it is gathered for worship. (James 5:14 ff, Acts 5:12-16, 1 Cor 12:4-11)

4. What about those who are not healed?

There were “unhealed” people in the Bible, Timothy had “frequent ailments” and Trophimus was left ill/recovering at Miletus. Paul’s response to the first was sanctified common-sense “take a little wine for your stomach and do not exclusively drink water..”. The second seems just to be acceptance of the fact (1 Tim 5:23, 2 Tim 4:20). Some of the Corinthians were sick because of unrepented sin such as immorality and abuse of the Lord’s supper. In such cases repentance was called for. If I may rephrase this question to be “How can we love those who are not healed..” I think the answer becomes easier. This shifts the emphasis from power to love and brings us back to centre. (1 Corinthians 13). The still sick person needs (1) To be loved, supported and cared for. (2) Have good common-sense applied including the use of appropriate medication . (3) Be able to confess any sin privately and with dignity. (4) Be encouraged to grow in faith as part of a believing community that is also growing and faith and praying for their healing. Jesus only blamed the disciples for lack of faith - never the sick person.

5. What about Paul’s thorn in the flesh?

The “stake in the flesh” was a Greek equivalent of a “sharp pain in the neck..” a metaphor for real hindrance and nuisance. It is disabling, painful and causes anguish of the soul and it brings the mighty low (as in the lion in Aesop’s’s fable that was brought low by a “thorn in the flesh”). The “messenger of Satan” seems to be an angelic hindrance. Some recent commentators have speculated that “the thorn” was someone who went around “rabble-rousing” inciting the Jews to kill Paul and hindering his ministry - perhaps Alexander the coppersmith. It could be either (1) a malicious human/group of people banded together against Paul (2) a malicious spiritual entity that aroused people against him. The opposition was so fierce and relentless that Paul was constantly thrown back on God in weakness. The consequence of the “thorn” is persecution and distress not physical sickness. (1 Cor 12:1-10)

6. Should Christians use medicine?

Some couples in Australia and America have been charged with manslaughter and child neglect for refusing medication to seriously ill children “in faith”. Such well publicised cases do not help the cause of the gospel. The gospel has four main aspects wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:30 NRSV) He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,. These four aspects of the gospel are not in competition but part of one seamless Whole - which is Christ Himself. Healing is a part of our redemption - the buying back of our body from the dominion of sickness. The wise faith-filled use of medicine can be Wisdom - which is also from God, in Christ. Proverbs urges us to use wisdom and to acquire it - and Biblical wisdom was always practical and effective. Luke is called “the beloved physician” and there are no injunctions in Scripture to put aside medicines. At least twice in the NT “household remedies” are invoked, wine for Timothy’s stomach ailments and “oil” for wounds and bruises (the Good Samaritan) which is seen as an appropriate act of compassion. There will even be medicine in heaven! The leaves of the tree of life will be used for the healing of the nations. Who these nations are is a puzzle but the fact

remains that their healing is provided for - by a medicine. (Rev 22:2). Though medicines existed in Jesus day He never exhorted the faithful to abandon them. He simply provided a more effective alternative. The refusal of medicine to a child merely to prove a religious point is seriously wrong and I believe "contrary to the faith". It seems close to Pharisaism.

7. Should Christians trust in doctors?

Our first trust should always be in God. Many people seek the doctors first then, if they are in really big trouble, they then go to their church for healing. May I tactfully suggest that it should perhaps be the other way around with prayer being the first reflex when one is ill. (2 Chronicles 16:12.) Doctors can be used and their advice heeded but they must not become the sole repositories of our faith.

8. What about home remedies, vitamin pills, physiotherapy etc?

The general attitude of Scripture is that of empowering people to live prudent, healthy, independent lives. I believe that a good knowledge of safe folk remedies - cures for hiccups and bee stings etc makes good Christian common sense and I would love to collect them and put them in a book one day. We need a Christian challenge to alternative medicine. Part of the reason for the Sabbath and the OT dietary restrictions was a physically and spiritually healthy lifestyle. A "kosher" diet is virtually free from parasitic infections, disease and association with the more common occult practices of the time. However Jesus made it clear that our diet does not make us clean or unclean before God. It may help our health but it has nothing to do with our spiritual status. (Mark 7:14-23)

9. Can a Christian participate in the use of alternative medicine?

There was a great deal of "alternative medicine" around in Jesus' day and in the Gnosticism that pervaded Asia Minor. None of it was recommended for the Christian and some of it seems to have been actively preached against particularly in Colossians 2. This is incredibly complex. If this is a real issue for you or your family the best I have read is the chapter "Christian Healing and Alternative Healing Movements" in "Sent To Heal" by Harold Taylor. My brief response is to divide "alternative medicine" up into a few compartments (1) Folk remedies outside of conventional medicine but which do work (eg aloe vera for stings). (2) Things like the "Kambucha mushroom" which claim to cure everything and are highly suspect. (3) Cures that require subscribing to a non-Christian or anti-Christian philosophy such as yoga . (4) Occult cures such as reiki, pendulum divination, use of divining rods for healing, magic crystals, the use of spells, sorcery or "white magic", channelling, witchcraft, colour therapy, use of diagrams with "special powers" etc. Category one is OK, category two mainly damages your hip pocket and your pride but can occasionally endanger your health,. Categories 3 and 4 are always wrong for a Christian. If in doubt -don't, seems good advice here.

10. What about Christian use of psychologists, counsellors and psychiatrists?

Gifts of wisdom and knowledge are given to the Church by Jesus to help the members edify each other. Part of Jesus' mission was (Luke 4:18-19 NIV) "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, {19} to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Spirit-filled counselling can bring real help and release the oppressed. Bad counselling oppresses people yet further. When seeing a counsellor ask yourself: Is the goal of their counselling compatible with Christian sanctification? Is their philosophy reasonably "Christian" or does it draw heavily on other religions? Do they explain their technique to you so that you can understand and evaluate it? Are they open to questions? Are they competent, disciplined, on-time and properly certified?