

Restore Series (11) Physical Healing // Steve Sutton

Introduction

It is impossible to talk about shalom or sodzo and not address physical healing, which is what we are going to do today. Which is quite ironic given I've spent most of the week in bed sick!

My first full-time ministry role was as an Intern Pastor at Charlestown Baptist Church in Newcastle, NSW during the mid 1980s. It was a conservative and middleclass church that experienced an unexpected move of the Holy Spirit. Healings and other signs and wonders began to happen regularly to and through people who did not believe in those kinds of things. It was nothing but a sovereign move of God.

I recall very clearly one of the healings we saw at Charlestown during that time. I received a call from a congregation member asking me to visit a non-Christian friend of theirs who had attempted suicide. They were on life support, unable to be treated and there was a possibility that the person might have brain damage. Their prospects of recovery weren't good at all.

When I went into ICU to pray for this guy I came face to face with a corpse. He was skin and bone and had a tracheotomy in his windpipe. I was in my early 20s, pastorally inexperienced and I felt incredibly embarrassed talking with someone who was unconscious and also praying for them in front of the nursing staff. So without any real conviction that anything would happen I prayed a very brief and wimpy prayer and then quickly left.

A week later I went to visit the hospital again. I arrived at ICU to be told that person I'd prayed for had been moved to the Renal Ward. When I went down to the room he was in I discovered the man, who a week earlier was like a corpse now sitting on his bed, eating an orange and talking with his mum. I was amazed. He had no memory of my visit. All his mum knew was that for some unknown reason – the previous Monday afternoon – the very time that I'd prayed for him he began to improve and regain consciousness.

It's a wonderful story and one of the many stories that Charlestown Baptist had during that season of God's intervention.

However, there were also other stories. Around the same time of this healing there was a family in the church; the wife had been diagnosed with a life threatening sickness.

The church came together to fast and pray for her healing. There was a strong conviction amongst her family and the church that she would recover. And yet sadly she died, leaving behind a devastated husband and children – and a very perplexed church. Why were some people being healed and others weren't?

I tell these two stories because for me divine healing was then and is now something of a deep mystery. There are definitely occasions when God comes and removes or relieves sickness and pain. And yet, there is also the reality that even when there seems to be great faith for healing – sickness continues. Pastorally, I find this very challenging.

With this in mind let's begin by taking a look at healing in the Old Testament.

Exodus 15:26 I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.

Psalms 30:2 O LORD my God, I cried out to You, And
You healed me.

Psalms 107:20 He sent His word and healed them

Psalms 103:2-3 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget
not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who
heals all your diseases

Jeremiah 17:14 Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed

Jeremiah 30:17 For I will restore health to you and heal
you of your wounds,' says the LORD

Jeremiah 33:6 Behold, I will bring health and healing; I
will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace
and truth.

Isaiah 53:5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he
was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that
brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are
healed.

Isaiah 58:8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear...

Under the old covenant – healing was clearly one of God’s promises to Israel. In fact, one of God’s covenant names is Jehovah Raphe, which means ‘the Lord our healer’. God’s name represents God’s nature.

When we step into the New Testament, the promise of healing continues and there are an abundance of examples of healing seen in the ministry of Jesus...

Matthew 4:24 News about Jesus spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them.

Matthew 12:15 A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill.

Matthew 14:14 He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Matthew 15:30 Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.

These are Scriptures from the Gospel of Matthew, but these stories are repeated as you know throughout Mark, Luke and John. Depending on how you classify things the Gospels mention about 50 specific healing events involving Jesus.

I think it is important to remember and put things into perspective though – all healing is only temporary.
Every person that Jesus healed eventually died!

We see a continuation of divine healing in the church after the death and resurrection of Jesus...

Peter

Acts 5:15-16 As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around

Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

Philip

Acts 8:6-7 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

Paul

Acts 14:8-10 In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

The Bible also talks about the gift of healing...

1 Corinthians 12:7-9 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit... gifts of healing

v28 And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing...

So the Bible teaches that there were people in the church with a unique gift and ministry of healing and James goes onto say that one of the roles of elders is to administer healing to the sick, he writes...

James 5:14-16 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

However, I think it's really important to counterbalance the Bible's teaching on healing with the following verses...

1 Timothy 5:23 Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

2 Timothy 4:20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I (Paul) left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

Galatians 4:13-15 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn... I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

It is clear that healing is not an absolute in the Bible.

Healings continue to be recorded throughout every era of the church:

The early Church Fathers (AD 100-500): Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Ambrose and others document healings

The medieval era (AD 600-1400): There's a beautiful story of St Francis of Assisi healing a cripple

The reformation era (AD 1500) The Quakers

Modern era

- The Pentecostal movement in the early 1900s
- 1950s healing revivalists
- John Wimber in 1980s
- Here in Australia Cannon Jim Glennon from St Andrews Cathedral in Sydney – Wednesday Night Healing Service thousands of documented healings

It seems as though every era of the church has believed in and practiced the ministry of healing.

Catholics and Anglicans formally hold strong positions of belief and practice regarding the ministry of healing. The Anglican Church at the 1920 Lambeth Conference declared:

“Within the church... systems of healing based on the redemptive work of our Lord ... all spring from a belief in the fundamental principle that the power to exercise spiritual healing is taught by Christ to be a natural heritage of Christian people who are living in fellowship with God, and is part of the ministry of Christ through his body the church.”

At the 1958 Lambeth Conference the following statement was made: 'The church as the body of Christ is charged with a commission to heal the sick. By evoking the response of faith, the pastoral and sacramental ministry of the church allows the Divine Grace to act creatively and so determine the issue of health in ways beyond our present scientific methods of measurement.'

These are great statements.

Transactional or Sacramental

Certain sections of the Church view healing as transactional – that is they see faith as a form of currency that is able to buy or negotiate healing from God. If you have enough faith then you can get healing or for that matter anything you want from God

I strongly disagree with this because the emphasis is on us and often leads to guilt for the sick person. I prefer to take a sacramental view of healing.

A sacrament is a means of imparting Divine life and grace. In church tradition the sacraments related to the

ministry of healing are anointing with oil and the laying on of hands.

In obedience and trust in God, we lay hands on the sick and anoint with oil believing that Divine life and grace is being imparted to the person being prayed for.

That grace will either bring physical healing or comfort and strength in the face of illness. Either way God's grace is active and present in a person's life.