

Healing

I was recently listening to the story of someone's relative who is suffering from a severe health problem, one that had been ongoing for a number of years. The family had enlisted the best medical help. With feelings of frustration and maybe even a little anger, they talked about the many prayers to God for healing. But there was no improvement. *Why* didn't God heal this person—a long-time, faithful member? Many of us remember hearing of or even experiencing miraculous healings years ago. But where is God's healing today?

That question can lead to many others. What are the conditions for healing? Doesn't God promise to heal us? If we aren't healed, what are we doing wrong?

We can be overwhelmed with all the questions and thoughts that come upon us, not only when we see others who are sick, but especially when we ourselves are afflicted. So, let's take a fresh look at Scripture and understand healing from God's perspective.

"O LORD my God, I cried to You, and You have healed me. O LORD, You have brought up my soul from the grave; You have kept me alive, so that I should not go down to the pit" (Psa. 30:2-3). There is little doubt about the meaning here. The word *cried* literally means to "cry for freedom from trouble" and the word *healed* means to *mend* or *cure*. Here, David was on the verge of death and gives credit to God for preserving his life.

David was a man who was well acquainted with hardship. He endured years of attempts on his life by King Saul. Absalom, his son, murdered another of David's sons, Amnon, and later tried to usurp the throne, which forced David to flee Jerusalem for a time. There were many such situations that David endured; some he brought upon himself, while others seemed to be without cause. Even so, God delivered him at *appropriate times*—even though David endured some trials for years. One important lesson is that David always *acted* as he was able, rather than doing nothing, while patiently expecting God's will, intervention, and deliverance. Remember Goliath? David *went out* to fight him instead of expecting God to destroy him. David knew that God would work *through* him and not *for* him.

"But unto you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, and healing will be in His wings. And you shall go out and grow up like calves of the stall" (Mal. 4:2). This is another scripture we often read; however, the context deals with the return of Christ. And the word for *healing* is different from that of Psalms 30:2. Its meaning is *curative*, but in this context refers to *deliverance*. In fact, the whole chapter is focusing on the Day of the Lord. Verses one and three tell us the Lord will destroy the wicked and *deliver* His people.

One scripture we really need to understand is Isaiah 53:5. We know that Jesus suffered and died for our sins, and it is through His suffering that we are healed: "But He *was* wounded for our transgressions; *He was* crushed for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace *was* upon Him; and with His stripes we ourselves are healed." The word *healed* is same word used in Psalms 30:2.

However, the primary purpose for the suffering and death of Christ was to "pass over" our own death—wherein Jesus became the *Intercessor* for our transgressions (verse 12). This is picked up in chapter 54, which is obviously millennial. Notice Isaiah 54:5, which says "your Maker *is* your husband." When will that occur? When we become the bride of Christ at His return!

But what about the blessings mentioned in Deuteronomy? God most definitely makes a promise of healing to His people! Let's read it: "And it shall come to pass, if you hearken to these judgments to keep and practice them, *then* the LORD your God shall keep with you the

covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers.... And the LORD will **take away from you all sickness** and will put none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you know, upon you. But He will lay them upon all who hate you” (Deut. 7:12, 15).

There are two things we must understand as we read this. First, God is promising that He will remove the sickness (malady, anxiety, calamity) from the land that *He brought* upon the Egyptians. Read of the blessings and cursings in chapter 28, and notice especially verse 60: “Also, **He [God] will bring on you all the diseases of Egypt** of which you were afraid. And they shall cling to you.”

We live in a land that has forsaken God; and, just as He told the ancient Israelites, this country now has diseases that were never heard of just a generation ago. These are brought about by God and will only get worse. What did Jesus pray of the Father? “I do not pray that You would take them out of the world, but that You would keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). Sadly, this leaves us vulnerable to the same diseases.

Here’s another key passage: “And the prayer of faith shall save the sick one, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:15). Many turn to this scripture when the topic of healing arises. So what does it say? The prayer of faith shall *save* the sick. Although it is in the Greek, the word *save* has basically the same meaning as *heal* in Malachi 4:2; that is, it means to *cure* but refers more to *salvation*.

Perhaps when he wrote this, James was thinking of what Jesus said about Lazarus in John 11:4: “But after hearing *this*, Jesus said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it.’ ”

God and Jesus see things from an eternal perspective. Although Jesus knew that Lazarus was physically dead, He also knew God could easily raise him again. That is why He said his sickness was *not* unto death. Death, from Jesus’ perspective, is eternal; so Lazarus was really just sleeping and Jesus was there to awaken him.

This brings us to the second thing we must understand about healing. God’s covenant with ancient Israel was a promise of *physical* blessings—land, children, good health. Healing for them was *physical*, so that they might have long, prosperous lives. Still, physical death was their end. The New Covenant is spiritual, so the promise is eternal life—the end of death! Those under the Old Covenant sought physical healing, but those under the New Covenant seek spiritual, eternal healing. We know that physical death is like sleep from which God can easily awaken us.

Does this mean God no longer heals those who are physically sick? No. However, miraculous healings have always been, and still are, on a case-by-case basis. David and Hezekiah were healed; God chose to do so because He still had work for them to accomplish. Even so, there were many evil kings of ancient Israel who lived and reigned much longer than the few righteous ones. God isn’t focused on our number of years upon this earth. Jesus overcame death for us, so God’s promise to us is now about healing *spiritual death*. Our infirmities and death in this physical life are not God’s greatest concern. Our personal, eternal salvation is foremost in His mind.

Experience tells us that God doesn’t heal every one of His children, and this was true even among the apostles. Three times Paul beseeched God to heal him of a painful affliction—likely a disease of his eyes (Gal. 4:14-15)—and three times God refused (II Cor. 12:7-8). Did God refuse because Paul lacked faith? No, but God had a greater purpose: “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you; for My power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, most gladly will I boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (II Cor. 12:9).

Even though God had healed people through Paul, including a young man who had died,

Paul did not receive such for himself. It wasn't God's will. Paul understood that God knew how to bring him to perfection, and thus rejoiced in his own suffering because of the eternity to come: "For **I have experienced being brought low**, and I have experienced abounding. In everything and in all things I have been taught both to be full and to hunger, both to abound and to be without" (Phil. 4:12).

Paul's affliction was probably a major turning point in his life. There can be no doubt that Paul was very zealous for God and his direct approach easily offended others. He was merciless with Peter in rebuking him for his dealings with the Gentiles. Barnabas and Mark also felt Paul's sting (Acts 15:36-39). But notice something about the books of Romans and I Corinthians. Paul wrote both of them, and whenever he mentions mercy it is always in the context of *God* showing mercy toward *His* people. However, starting with his second letter to the Corinthians—the same book in which he described the "thorn in his flesh" that God refused to heal—Paul begins to talk about God's mercy toward *himself* and about his own feelings of mercy toward others. Through his sufferings, Paul was perfected in mercy.

Indeed, his later writings reflect a different Paul. He writes with more empathy and desires God's mercy for himself and others. It is a dramatic change from the Saul who once went around arresting and murdering people in the name of God. The new Paul showed great mercy toward others because he understood their pain through his *own* sufferings. What kind of man would Paul have been without suffering in the name of Christ? It warrants some thought, because God is more interested in our *hearts* than in our well-being in this physical life.

We cannot comprehend *why* God does or doesn't heal unless we understand that people only rise to their full potential through adversity. Just as Jesus was perfected by his sufferings (Heb. 5:8-9), God allows us to suffer to bring us to perfection. Notice: "Now if *we are* children, *we are* also heirs—truly, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if **indeed we suffer together with Him, so that we may also be glorified together with Him**. For I reckon that the sufferings of the present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:17-18). For this reason, God has promised that trials *will* come upon us.

Read the following verses carefully, as *suffering* is part of the cost of eternal life:

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you shall have tribulation**. But be courageous! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"*Where* they established the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and *declaring* that **we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God**" (Acts 14:22).

"So that we ourselves are boasting about you in the churches of God because of your endurance and faith **in all your persecutions, and in the tribulations that you are bearing**. *Your faith and endurance are* a visible testimony of the righteous judgment of God, so that you may be counted worthy of **the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering**" (II Thess. 1:4-5).

"**If we endure [suffering], we shall also reign together with Him**; if we deny *Him*, He will also deny us" (II Tim. 2:12).

"And indeed, **everyone who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted**" (II Tim. 3:12).

"Beloved, **do not be surprised at the fiery trial among you which is taking place to test you**, as if some strange thing *were* happening to you" (I Pet. 4:12).

Trials, suffering, and persecution come in many forms. Some are about jobs and money, some are about a spouse or children, some involve the Church, some are in the form of illness or injury. God will use whatever He deems necessary to help us overcome so that He can develop

His righteousness in us.

It is certain that God has healed in the past and probably will continue to do so—but it is all *according to His will* for our eternal salvation. Still, healing from God **requires something from us as well**. Note these passages:

“This *man* heard Paul speaking; who, after looking intently at him, and seeing that **he had faith to be healed**” (Acts 14:9).

“And He [Jesus] did not do many works of power there **because of their unbelief**” (Matt. 13:58).

“Confess *your* faults to one another, and **pray for one another, that you may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man prevails much, being effective**” (James 5:16).

We know that Christ’s suffering and death placed Him in the position of our *intercessor* with God—for our forgiveness and our healing. Beyond faith, we must pray with fervency.

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *him*; and if one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with *him*” (I Cor. 12:26). How can someone suffer when someone else suffers? Godly love. If we truly have the love of God in us, we cannot be cold witnesses to the suffering of others. Any member of a family who is sick will get the full support and help of the rest of the family—if there is love.

God seeks out those who sigh and cry over the abominations of the world—*as well as the sufferings of others*. “Be mindful of prisoners, as if you were imprisoned with *them*; and think of those who are suffering afflictions, as if you yourselves were in *their* body” (Heb. 13:3).

Still, none of this will *guarantee* that God will miraculously heal any one of us. Why? Besides the fact that God promises to *test us* so that we are perfected, there is another, more subtle, reason. All the suffering and disease that comes upon our brethren has a *dual* purpose. Those who suffer are a test *for others*. James tells us that it is not enough to simply *have* faith—we must *act* on our faith: “My brethren, what good *does* it do, if anyone says *that he* has faith, and does not have works? Is faith able to save him? Now then, if there be a brother or sister who is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; be warmed and be filled,’ and does not give to them the things necessary for the body, what good is it? In the same way also, **faith, if it does not have works, is dead, by itself**. But someone is going to say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ *My answer is*: You prove your faith to me through your works, and I will prove my faith to you through my works” (James 2:14-18).

Clearly, if we know of a brother or sister in need, whether it is due to sickness or disease or some other condition, our faith is proven through our response. The closer we are to someone, *the more God expects from us* because we are more familiar with their needs. Knowing of someone’s needs is where we find opportunities to serve.

“[God] Who comforts us **in all our tribulation**, in order that we may be able to **comfort those who are in any trial**, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. **For to the degree that the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also our comfort abounds through Christ**. And if we are in distress, *it is* for your comfort and salvation, which is being worked out by **your enduring the same sufferings that we also suffer**; and if we are comforted, *it is* for your comfort and salvation (and our hope *is* steadfast for you); knowing that **as you are partners in the sufferings, you are also partners in the comfort**” (II Cor. 1:4-7). Those who have experienced trials have developed strength and faith that they can share with others, so that they too might be encouraged by the example of someone who really understands. This is why support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous are so successful.

So, have we answered the question about the apparent lack of healings in the Church?

No. Maybe this generation has more to learn with the approaching Tribulation. Perhaps, living in this age of godless and loveless people, we need to *grow more in godly love* through the sufferings of others. Maybe people needed more encouragement in times past in order to endure the divisions and strife in the Church that occurred on a global scale.

Healings seem to occur mostly for three reasons: 1) to encourage our faith (especially those who are new); 2) to cut short a trial before it becomes unbearable; and 3) to allow a particular work to continue. Regardless of the reasons, be absolutely confident in one thing: God is preparing us individually and collectively to become His children in His eternal kingdom. Therefore, He is most concerned with our ultimate, *spiritual healing*.

“They are the ones who have come out of **the great tribulation**; and they have washed their robes, and have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14). Through trials of disease, sickness, injury, loss, hunger, thirst, cold, and many other sufferings, look to God and Jesus the Christ while not forgetting your brethren. For when trials come upon us, our hope lies *above* us; and yet, through God, many times our help comes from *among* us.

“Now may the God of all grace, Who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a little while, Himself perfect you, establish, strengthen, and settle you**” (I Pet. 5:10).