

CHAPTER 19

DIVINE HEALING

*what about sickness and death?
...and how about healing and life!*

Before reading further, consider how you would answer the question: How sure am I that God will heal me if I ask Him?

Are you sure God will heal me?

In the previous chapter, we saw that we can ask God for anything according to His will, and He will answer us (1 John 5:14–15). However, we must ask in faith, with nothing doubting (James 1:6–8).

We now want to consider praying for healing. It is one thing to trust God to provide for a financial need, but quite another to trust Him for healing. When it concerns our health, we want to be absolutely sure – our lives may depend on it!

How can we be confident that our prayer will be answered, especially if we know someone who prayed and was not healed? How can we reach the place where we are able to release our faith?

Can God heal?

The first thing we need to be sure of is that God is able to heal. We should not struggle to believe this, because God made the world and everything in it. He gives life and breath to everyone (Acts 17:24–25). If he were unable to heal, He would not be God.

Mark 10:27...all things are possible with God (NIV)

Having established that God can heal, we will now look at the times when He healed people and consider how He healed them.

Has God ever healed?

Before the Great Flood, people lived to extraordinary ages. The oldest recorded person was Methuselah, who died at the age of 969 (Genesis 5:27). It is inconceivable that people could live this long without God protecting and healing them from time to time.

Later on in the Old Testament, God promised healing to the Israelites and linked it to their behaviour.

Exodus 15:26 He said, If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his

commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you (NIV)

(See also Deuteronomy 28; Exodus 23:22–26; Numbers 21:8–9.)

We also see specific instances of healing, such as Abimelech (Genesis 20:17), Miriam (Numbers 12:13–15), Naaman (2 Kings 5), and Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:1–6).

In the New Testament, there is a dramatic increase in healing through Jesus' ministry. He healed all who came to Him (Matthew 8:16–17). Notably, Jesus cast out many demons that were connected with sickness – something we do not see in the Old Testament.

Nicodemus recognised that God was behind these healings.

John 3:2... Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him (NIV)

After Jesus ascended to heaven, healings and deliverances continued through His disciples. Peter healed a man crippled from birth (Acts 3:1–10), the apostles performed many signs and wonders (Acts 5:12–16), Peter raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36–42), Paul healed a lame man (Acts 14:8–10), and Paul healed many people on Malta (Acts 28:8–9).

When we examine all these passages, we can conclude that God has indeed healed many people.

How did Jesus heal?

This question puzzled the Pharisees (Luke 20:1–8). They could not understand how Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons. From our perspective, it might seem obvious – Jesus is the Son of God and can do anything. However, Jesus' own statements suggest otherwise.

Jesus made it clear that He was sent by the Father, that He came to do the Father's will (John 6:38), and that He could do nothing independently of Him (John 5:19).

John 5:30 By Myself I can do nothing... (NIV)

The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus like a dove at His baptism (Luke 3:21–22). From that point onward, He began to minister in power. There is no record of Jesus performing miracles before He received the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14). For the first thirty years of His life, He did not minister under this anointing. His first miracle – turning water into wine – occurred shortly after His baptism (John 2:11).

Jesus' own words indicate that the power He exercised was an anointing given to Him for a specific purpose:

Luke 4:18–19 The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD (NKJV)

This anointing came from the Father at His baptism.

Acts 10:38...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him (NKJV)

How did the apostles heal?

The apostles clearly received their power from Jesus.

Luke 9:1–2 Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (NKJV)

(See also Luke 10:17–20).

We can infer that this power was given for a particular task at that time. It was not simply to heal the sick as an end in itself, but to preach the Kingdom of God, which is the greater purpose (see Luke 10:20).

Jesus was able to share His anointing with others so that the same mission could be fulfilled. Because He had close personal contact with His apostles, He could oversee their ministry. Even when they were physically apart from Him, they could not operate independently of Him.

John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing (NKJV)

When Jesus died, His personal ministry on earth came to an end, and He took His place at the right hand of the Father. Because He is now in heaven, He no longer ministers in the same way to heal the sick or raise the dead. Presumably, His disciples lost the anointing they had received directly from Him, and their ministry of preaching the Kingdom and healing the sick came to a stop.

However, God had a plan for the work to continue, but it would happen a different way. Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit before continuing their ministry (Acts 1:4–5).

John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. (NKJV)

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus reminded them again:

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (NKJV)

After they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), they began once more to preach the gospel and heal the sick. This anointing was for all people – the anointing they had previously received was limited to Israel (Matthew 10:5).

We might ask why the apostles did not receive the Holy Spirit at the same time as Jesus. The reason is straightforward: Jesus had not yet died on the cross, and sin had not yet been dealt with. The apostles had to keep distant from God. Jesus needed to die, be raised from the dead, and ascend to heaven before the Holy Spirit could be given.

Why God raises up healing ministries

God raises up healing ministries to get our attention. Supernatural healings confirm that God is alive and that the gospel message is true, making it easier for people to believe (John 10:38). The apostles prayed for signs and wonders so that they could preach the word with boldness (Acts 4:29–30).

Healing is also a way for God to express His love and compassion toward us (John 11:33–38).

When Jesus healed and delivered people, He was fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Matthew 8:16–17 with Isaiah 53:4). These passages pointed forward to the atonement that Jesus purchased for us when He died.

Does God heal today?

Logically, if God healed people in the Old Testament, and He healed people in the New Testament, we would expect Him to continue healing today.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever (NIV)

The following passage indicates that healings depend on faith, not on who performs them or the timing of the healing. Therefore, it is still applicable today.

Mark 16:15–18 And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be

condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover (NKJV)

Some may argue that if God heals people today, everyone would know about it. But we should not be surprised at this lack of publicity, because we live in a world dominated by scepticism and unbelief.

Divine healing is difficult to prove

Modern-day healings are not recorded in the Bible, so we have to use less reliable sources to confirm that God is healing today.

It is possible to witness healings during meetings where ministers pray for the sick. However, such meetings are relatively uncommon, and onlookers are often a long way from the person being healed. Observers can only go by the individual's reaction and testimony.

Personal testimonies are far more common, but they are not always completely reliable. Several factors contribute to this:

1. God designed our bodies to heal naturally, so some recoveries may be natural rather than supernatural.
2. Most people seek help from GPs, clinics, hospitals and medications. Therefore, it is not always clear whether a recovery resulted from medical treatment or divine intervention.
3. People may exaggerate claims of healing (intentionally or unintentionally) to glorify God or encourage others to believe God will heal them.

Despite these challenges, it is a mistake to dismiss healing testimonies outright, especially if they do not fit our preconceived world view. The Bible places great value on testimonies. The Gospels and the book of Acts are full of eye-witness accounts.

Some people struggle to accept divine healing and require high levels of proof before they are convinced. If we adopt an attitude of scepticism, we will be less likely to witness healings. One time, Jesus could not heal because of the level of doubt and unbelief among the people (Mark 6:1–6).

It takes faith for divine healing to happen, but it also takes faith to believe it happened.

Is God willing to heal me?

So far, we have focused on people with an anointing to heal others. But these people are not always around when we need them. Therefore, we need to consider personal prayer. Can we pray for our own healing?

Most people will pray to God when they are desperately sick, regardless of their relationship with Him. However, prayer alone is not enough – we need to pray in faith, confident that He will heal us.

James 5:15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the ill person well... (NIV)

In practice, Christians often struggle to release their faith. How can we be certain that God will heal us?

We can find assurance in the way Jesus ministered when He was on earth. He healed everyone who came to Him (Matthew 8:16–17). This provides a clear indication that He is willing to heal us today.

What about doctors?

Some argue that God has provided hospitals, doctors and medicines for healing, so there is not the same need for divine healing when Jesus ministered. They see it as God's provision to us and say that God heals through the doctors.

Without doubt, medical science has helped multitudes of people to overcome or manage their sicknesses. As time goes on, its ability to help continues to increase.

However, for the most part, we need to accept that the medical system does not glorify God or point people to Jesus. Although many Christians work within healthcare, their workplaces are heavily influenced by secular thinking and sometimes by alternative religions. Prayer is often discouraged or not allowed.

There are also serious issues with medical healthcare as a whole:

1. Medical science favours the rich and wealthy over the poor – something at odds with Jesus’ calling (Luke 4:18–19). Many sick people cannot afford treatment.
2. Despite huge amounts of research, medical science has great limitations in its knowledge of the human body and disease. Clinical decisions are based on imperfect knowledge and can be wrong.
3. There is practically no consideration that sin could be a cause of sickness.
4. Medical science views sickness only on a physical level, whereas the Bible shows us demons can be a cause of sickness. They need casting out before healing can come.
5. Medical treatments are nearly always destructive. Surgery causes harm before it can do good, and medication has side effects.
6. The senseless killing of unborn children is practised extensively within the health systems of most countries. Other questionable practices and treatments are also condoned.

In Acts 3, when Peter and John healed a man who had been lame from birth, many people came to hear about Jesus. Man’s system of healthcare, advanced that it is, simply cannot replace praying to God for healing.

Is it God's will for me to be sick?

This is probably the greatest question we face concerning healing. Has God got a reason for us to be sick? Perhaps it is a test of faith, a necessary part of character development, a way to draw people to Christ, or something intended for His glory?

Much teaching has been given on the benefits of suffering and on how to endure sickness. As a result, we may have become conditioned to believe that sickness comes from God.

Acts 14:22... We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God... (NIV)

Yet if we accept sickness as God's will, why do we do everything we can to get well? And who ever prays for God to make them sick?

3John 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers (NKJV)

The idea that God wants us sick clearly needs to be challenged. One way to do this is to consider whether it was ever God's will for Jesus to be sick.

Did Christ suffer sickness?

We know Jesus experienced hunger (Mark 11:12) and thirst (John 19:28). He also became tired (John 4:6) – something that might seem surprising for the Son of God. He suffered pain and death at the crucifixion, which He willingly endured for our sake. He was tempted and learned obedience through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

But was He ever sick?

One might argue that because He was the Son of God, sickness had no power over Him. Yet Jesus was made fully human, lower than the angels (Hebrews 2:9), so potentially He was weaker than the devil and his angels.

In theory, Jesus could have become sick. However, there is no record of Him ever being sick, and all the evidence suggests that He lived a healthy life. He was righteous and lived under God's protection. There was no reason for God to afflict Him with sickness, as it would have hindered the work He was sent to do. Nor did the devil have any grounds to impose sickness on Him, because Jesus never sinned.

This has significant implications for us.

Healing is in the atonement

When Jesus died for us, He was more than an innocent sacrifice. He endured temptation and overcame the devil, making Him a righteous sacrifice.

He died in our place so that our sins could be forgiven. But He also died so we might share in His righteousness. If we receive this by faith, we will stand uncondemned before God and we will enjoy the same protection from the devil that Jesus had. The devil will have no legitimate basis to inflict sickness on us as we are counted perfectly righteous, just like Jesus.

The Bible indicates that God's solution for sin also includes healing from sickness.

Matthew 8:16–17 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.' (NIV)

(See also Isaiah 53:4–5.)

Psalms 103:2–3 Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases (NIV)

Implications

When Jesus died on the cross, He provided a way we could have our sins forgiven. We ask God to forgive us, not because we appeal to His goodness or mercy, but rather because of Jesus taking the punishment rightfully due us. We know God will forgive us because Jesus died for this very reason. There is no need to persuade or convince God to forgive us because that would be doubting His word.

The same principle applies when we pray for healing. There is no need to convince God to heal us, as Jesus has already provided healing for us.

God expects us to receive our healing by faith

When we pray for healing, we need to move from merely hoping that God might heal us to believing that He will heal us. This can be difficult, especially when we are in pain or discouraged.

The father who brought his sick child to Jesus struggled with this very issue:

Mark 9:23–24 Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (NKJV)

Having others stand with us in prayer – especially those with strong faith or gifts of healing – can help us release our own faith. James encourages us to call for the elders of the church to pray for healing (James 5:14–15).

What if I do not get healed straight after prayer?

We should not be surprised if healing does not come immediately. Whenever healing occurs, God is glorified and His Kingdom is advanced. This directly undermines Satan’s kingdom. Because of

this, Satan resists our prayers in an attempt to prevent them from being answered.

We must therefore learn to stand firm, fight spiritually, and assert our authority over him.

How do we know we will overcome Satan?

Our confidence in overcoming Satan is rooted in the atonement.

Revelation 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death (NKJV)

We saw earlier that Jesus is a righteous sacrifice which brings us more benefits than if He was just an innocent sacrifice. Now we want to show that Jesus is also a victorious sacrifice.

Jesus not only resisted the devil, He defeated him. On the cross, Jesus broke the devil's power, and God vindicated Him by raising Him from the dead.

If Jesus had remained in the grave, our sins could be forgiven and we could be declared righteous, but we would not have the power to force the devil to retreat.

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (NIV)

Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father:

Ephesians 1:20–22... He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet... (NKJV)

Because Jesus died in our place, we share in His victory by faith. We too are seated with Him in this exalted position.

Ephesians 2:6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus (NIV)

From this position in Christ, we have authority and power over the devil.

James 4:7 Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you (NKJV)

(See also 1 John 4:4.)

Conclusion

Although divine healing is seen in the Gospels and the book of Acts, it is not emphasised to the same extent elsewhere in the Bible, despite being one of our greatest needs. For example, Paul's letter to the Romans focuses primarily on salvation, righteousness, overcoming sin, and the relationship between the Jews and Gentiles. Similarly, his letters to Timothy make no direct emphasis on healing.

God's primary concern is the advancement of His Kingdom – seeking God, loving others, doing good, and overcoming sin. When we are sick or in pain, our focus can easily be drawn inward. However, if we learn to trust God for all our needs, including healing, we place ourselves in a stronger position to be used by God for the promotion of His Kingdom.

Questions to consider

1. Is it good to pray for preferential treatment when we are sick – for example, to be seen before others or treated by the best doctors?
2. Are there any circumstances in which we should not pray for healing?
3. Can we still receive healing if we experience moments of doubt?

