

The Essentials of Divine Healing

Introduction

We all know that God has the power to heal. But we often question if it is His desire to heal. We know that God wants us to persevere through suffering and assume therefore that through sickness we can grow more Christ like. This leads to uncertainty – “God may want to heal, but He may have loving reasons not to heal”. So when we pray for God’s healing, we pray our best prayer and then trust the outcome to God’s sovereignty.

But is this right? Is it sometimes God’s will is for us to be sick?

I have been trying to learn afresh from the Gospels and the apostles. The consistent message of the Gospels is that Jesus wants us to have confidence that God will heal sickness and that healing should always accompany the preaching of the Gospel.

Although many have glorified God through their faith, hope and grace in suffering sickness, there is no sound biblical basis for believing that sometimes God gives sickness to an *obedient* believer for His glorious purposes. Sickness or death may come through sin (e.g. Acts 5:5, 1Cor 11:30) but Paul’s thorn in the flesh (2Cor 12) is the only example of an affliction being suffered for God’s glory. This much argued over incident seems to me to be much more likely to have been struggles with oppressing thoughts or external persecution than a physical affliction¹.

Was there ever one who came to Jesus healthy and went home sick because that was God’s will for them? Jesus did not lay hands on anyone to make them sick so they could grow in godliness through suffering. Why not? Was Jesus too soft? Did He not know or agree with His Father that sickness was good for some people?

1. Luke says, “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.” (**Ac 10:38**)

This tells us plainly that when God acts for good, opposing the Devil, He heals sickness. God does not bring sickness, He brings healing. Just because God can turn a situation round for His glory does not mean God brought that situation about.

2. After Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath he said “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?” (**Lk 6:9**).

Jesus calls sickness destructive evil and healing saving goodness. How is it that we now blame God for the very things for which Jesus blamed the Devil? When God’s spirit comes in power healing always comes, no one ever gets sick under God’s anointing.

There is a great difference between God allowing people or cultures to suffer the consequences of their sin and God making people sick. Reaping and sowing is how sin and suffering comes. If we sow sin and unbelief we will reap sickness, if we sow faith and trust we will reap health.

Does God sometimes want His faithful people to be sick? Surely, the only sane conclusion we can come to is that God does not want sickness, but the church allows it. We are the product of a culture of highly developed unbelief. In God’s kingdom, darkness is driven out by light and sickness by healing. God delights in His Kingdom and wants us to share in it.

3. “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (**Lk 12:32**)

¹ I do not think that the “thorn” was physical sickness. Paul refers to all kinds of troubles as infirmities (2Cor 11:23-30) and qualifies sickness as “physical infirmity” (Gal 4:13). It might have been troublesome thoughts that he was unable to deal with or persecution. The OT law spoke of enemies being a “thorn in the side” by harassing Israel (Num 33:55). It seems quite possible he was referring to the constant stirring up of persecution wherever he went, which he described as “a messenger of Satan, to harass me” (RSV).

Our Commission to Heal

We are used to praying for the sick, but that is not what Jesus commissioned us to do. And in fact there is not one example in the Gospels of Jesus actually *praying* for healing². He simply healed through touch or a word of command.

4. When Jesus had called the Twelve together, **he gave them power and authority** to drive out all demons and **to cure diseases**, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and **to heal the sick**. (Lk 9:1)
5. After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go ... ⁹ **Heal the sick** who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' (Lk 10:1)

Notice that Jesus' commission was not to pray for the sick but to heal the sick. Anyone can pray, but it takes faith and obedience to heal. We should use the language that Jesus gave us and let it provoke our faith. For this reason I always say "I am going to such and such a place to heal the sick" rather than "to pray for the sick."

6. "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." (Jn 20:21)
7. "Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and *all of them were healed*." (Acts 5:16)
8. "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (Jn 14:12-14)
9. "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; **they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well**." (Mk 16:15-18)

We must remember that our motive for healing should not be our reputation, but God's glory and simple compassion:

10. "Jesus was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick" (Mt 14:14).

Jesus demonstrated healing, promised healing and commissioned us to heal. Let's get passionate about it and start to see inroads made against the deceit of Satan and see God glorified.

Firm Faith Pleases God

If you are born again then you are a believer; that is God has given you faith; the ability to believe Him and His word. This is the best way to please God - to have bold, courageous faith in His promises. When we truly and joyfully believe God's word we will eagerly and joyfully act on it.

Jesus assures us that coming to Him with our requests is not tiresome for Him, but rather it gives Him great pleasure to answer our prayers:

"But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (Lk 12:31-32)

The scriptures reprimands are not directed against those who ask or expect too much, but against those who ask and expect too little. His reprimands are only ever directed towards those who fail to believe and trust that God will do as we request and never towards those who ask God for anything (e.g. **Matt 8:26** "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?").

² James instructs us to pray for the sick "that you may be healed" (James 5:14-16). I am not suggesting that prayer for healing is wrong, only that it is not a substitute for actual healing. James clearly fully expects healing to result from prayer.

We often imagine reasons why God might not answer our prayer and if the answer does not come immediately we dream up possible reasons why God has not answered. Dreaming up excuses for God is not pleasing to God. Jesus does not commend this nor suggest any possible reasons for delay, on the contrary He says we should come as little children with simple unquestioning faith (**Lk 18:17**).

Jesus has not given us a single reason for doubting that God will heal when we pray, or grant us our request. Every one of Jesus' teachings and encouragements is designed to give us confidence that God will answer our prayers and heal when we minister healing (**Jn 14:12-14**).

Please God by keeping on asking and seeking and knocking until you obtain your request. This is not pestering God or trying to twist His arm, it is demonstrating faith in His promise that those who keep on asking will soon receive. God is very pleased when He sees us believing what Jesus said!

11. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." (**1Jo 5:14**)

If you want to please God, then be a believer! God is pleased with confident faith that presumes God will grant our request (**Heb 11:6**). If you have prayed then be determined to please God by believing and keeping on believing that God has granted your request and that soon you will receive it.

12. "no one who believes in him will be put to shame." (**Rom 10:11**)

There is such joy and peace in believing. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (**Rom 15:13**) So meditate on the promises. Imitate Jeremiah: "thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O LORD, God of hosts." (**Jer 15:16** RSV). Doubting is a miserable pastime!

Whenever we notice we are lacking in faith, ask "what are we thinking? Is this something Jesus commends or does He commend a different train of thought? Am I believing Jesus?" We must be obedient to Christ, steadfast in faith and give the devil no room or foothold for undermining our confidence in God. "Do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward" (**Heb 10:35**).

Faith is not a shot in the dark, it is not a raffle ticket for a prize. Faith does not say, "Oh well. That didn't work. I'll try something else." James warns against such half-hearted faith:

13. "But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord" (**Jas 1:6-7**).

If our faith wavers in this way there is something seriously wrong. Either our faith has not been placed in God, or we think that God is unreliable. Faith is the assurance that God has made a promise and that He is faithful, so giving up is not an option. The only excuse I will allow is that I am not yet fully Christ like. If Jesus were here in person He would certainly heal.

Oh you of little faith

There is a lot of confusion over the role of faith, leading most people to feel that faith is like gun powder in a fire work. The more faith you have the further it will go. Small faith can accomplish small things and large faith accomplishes large things. A scripture like this may encourage such a view:

14. Jesus said to the blind men, "According to your faith you will be healed"; and their sight was restored (**Mt 9:27-30**).

But contrast this with:

15. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (**Matt 17:20**).

We must be careful to learn from Jesus and the scriptures, not from our own assumptions. The Greek word *pistis* is translated either as "faith" or "belief"; they are one and the same word, derived from the word

meaning “convince” (i.e. persuade that something is either true or false). Whenever reading and thinking about *faith*, it is instructive to substitute the word *belief* and consider the meaning again. Belief is often a more tangible concept than faith. It is an “either/or” concept, not a “how much” concept. You can’t half believe that Jesus is the Son of God! The blind man in Matthew 9 had faith (belief) in Jesus and so was healed. It was not that he had the required amount of faith.

We may be particularly troubled in our understanding of faith by a repeated phrase of Jesus, “Oh you of little faith”

16. "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (**Matt 6:29-30**)
17. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. (**Matt 8:26**)
18. "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread." Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? (**Matt 16:6-8**)
19. "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" (**Mt 14:28-31**)
20. Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (**Mt 17:20**)

The last two incidents are particularly instructive. Peter walking on the water is one of the greatest feats of faith that any man has accomplished, yet Jesus accuses him of having little faith. How can this be?

The final incident is when the disciples failed to deliver a boy from a demon after the Mount of Transfiguration. The twelve had recently returned from their amazingly successful mission healing the sick and casting out demons and they were full of faith (**Mk 6:13**). So again, how can Jesus accuse them of having little faith?

When asked by the boy's father they clearly had faith since they attempted to deliver the boy rather than wait for Jesus to return. However the boy continued to convulse and, faced with this “evidence” of failure, they were left unbelieving. Unbelieving disciples could do nothing but wait for Jesus. Jesus was exasperated at their failure, calling them (literally) “unbelieving and having been perverted”. The disciple's initial and well founded confidence in God's power working through them to deliver was *perverted* by the evidence of their eyes and ears.

Jesus was angry with them for letting a powerless demon pervert their faith; their confidence in the authority they had previously exercised had evaporated. These disciples were double-minded. One minute believing they had authority, the next denying it – and all because a measly and terrified demon put on a show! James learnt from this incident and warned that a double-minded person would not receive anything from the Lord (**Jas 1:7**).

When the disciples ask why they failed, Jesus said it was because of their “little faith”³; but note that Jesus immediately says they only need faith “as a mustard seed”.

³ The two main families of Greek texts differ here. One says *unbelief*, the other *little belief*. Matthew frequently has Jesus reprimanding his disciples for having *little belief*, so I think it is a fair reading here as well. See Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8;

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Jesus had previously used the mustard seed as an illustration of the Kingdom of God, saying it was the smallest seed (Mk 4:31). Jesus cannot be contradicting himself, first saying they need bigger faith, then saying they only need the smallest amount of faith!

The Greek word translated “little”, *oligos* means puny (in extent, degree, number, duration or value – Strongs G3641). Short is a better translation, since it can be applied to all these aspects – “The road is short”, “the flour is short”, “the team is short”, “the meeting was short”, “I have been short-changed”. *Little* does not have the same range of uses. So the Greek can just as well mean “short-lived faith” which aptly describes the disciple’s in each incident above where Jesus uses this word. It also fits with James’ warning mentioned above about being double-minded.

So Jesus tells His disciples that it is not the quantity of faith that counts, just the presence of faith. “Because you have such short-lived faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matt 17:20). To think of faith as a quantity that we need much of is to completely disregard what Jesus said about the mustard seed. Peter had sufficient faith to get started, but when he saw the waves he let his faith evaporate. He had more than a mustard seed of faith, but it was short lived. Jesus said to Peter (literally), “You of short-lived faith, why were you double-minded?” (Matt 14:31).

The disciples just needed to maintain their faith. But their faith was shaken by the boy having a fit. Instead of running away in shame at their failure, they should have stood their ground and prayed. If they had got their eyes back on God instead of staring at the fitting boy they would have known that no demon can resist God’s authority. They would have laughed at the futile demonic display and cast it out with a word, just like Jesus did.

21. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised. (Heb 10:35-36)

It is not Big faith that inherits the promises, but Long faith.

Faith to Receive Healing

In addition to the faith of the person ministering healing, Jesus commends the faith of those receiving healing. Indeed, when amongst sceptical people we are told: “He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt 13:58 NKJV).

It is common for people to have the faith of the leper who “begged him on his knees, ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’” The faith that Jesus *can* heal, if only He were willing is hardly faith at all! It leads to pleading prayer. We need to inject faith with Jesus’ reply, “I am willing. Be clean!” (Mk 1:40-41). The leper’s prayer is a poor foundation for faith. Jesus gave His answer and we must receive it and stand firm upon it: “I am willing. Be clean!”

The two blind men had steadfast faith. They called out to get Jesus’ attention. When Jesus asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to heal you?” they replied “Yes, Lord”. Jesus said, “According to your faith you will be healed”; and their sight was restored. (Mt 9:27-30) These men knew that if they could attract Jesus’ attention, they would receive their healing.

Jesus made it clear that the faith of the recipient was an important factor in healing and the apostles followed his example:

“In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame 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.” (Ac 14:7-10)

So we see that faith in the one receiving from God is crucial. This is a big challenge in the developed world where the primary dependence for health is on the medical profession. But in all cultures, faith for a visible healing seems to be much more difficult than for healing aches and pains. It takes love and grace and care when ministering to a sick person with little faith. We must do all we can to help them catch our faith, confess the faith they do have and act on that faith in some way. Our faith in ministering will communicate and be responded to by those we pray for but in fact love is the most effective means of helping someone come to faith. A mighty man of faith who just goes along a line touching people does nothing to nurture the bruised faith of a hurting soul. But love will fan a flicker of faith into a bright flame.

Is it God's will?

"Ah!" someone will say, "But what if it isn't God's will for you to have what you ask for." To which I answer, somewhat simplistically, "But in my bible, I have it written that Jesus said it *was* God's will to do whatever we ask in believing prayer. So why don't you concentrate on doing what Jesus said, and let God worry about His part of the bargain?"

"Ask and it will be given to you; For everyone who asks receives;" (**Matt 7:7-8**) (this sentiment is repeated six times by Jesus in this passage, and it is also recorded by Luke).

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (**Matt 7:11**)

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (**Matt 17:20**)

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." (**Mt 18:19**)

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig-tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (**Matt 21:21-22**)

"Everything is possible for him who believes... I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (**Mk 11:22-24**)

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. (**Jn 14:13-14**)

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." (**Jn 15:7**)

"The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." (**Jn 15:16**)

"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." (**Joh 16:23-24**)

Jesus does not seem to be the least bit worried about what we might ask for. Any one of the many recorded encouragements to ask could have been qualified with "if it is God's will", but not a single such condition is found in the gospel record among nearly 30 such promises. Let us be honest. If a person says "But what if it isn't God's will for you to have what you ask for" then you can hope that they will take care to ask according to God's will. I do not see asking for the wrong things as the main problem that Jesus encountered. As it happens, we do read of Jesus correcting someone who asked Him for something slightly dubious:

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favour of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. **(Mt 20:20-24)**

Notice that although the disciples were indignant about this request, Jesus was not. There is not a hint of reprimand in Jesus' response. Indeed, He gives what He has the authority to give in meeting the request. Not once do we read of Jesus refusing a request or reprimanding someone for not asking in accordance with God's will. The problem Jesus confronted was not presumptuous faith but no faith. Jesus did not say "When the Son of Man comes will he find people believing God for the wrong things" but "Will He find faith on earth" **(Lk 18:8)** So I say again. You concentrate on asking God in believing prayer and let God worry about fulfilling His promise to grant your request.

It is evident that the apostles felt the need to add some qualification to these promises:

"Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him." **(1Jo 3:21-22)**

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." **(1Jo 5:14-15)**

"Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." **(Jas 4:2-3)**

"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." **(Jas 5:16)**

"Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." **(1Pe 3:7)**

Clearly a spirit filled believer who believes Jesus and takes His word seriously is never going to knowingly ask for something contrary to God's will. We can confidently come to God in faith-filled prayer for the abundance of His good gifts which the Father promises to give to those who ask him. The issue is not God's will, but our asking.

On the occasions when we really do not know what God's will is, we can confidently use Jesus's words from Gethsemane, "Not my will but yours be done." But when praying in accordance with God's declared will we do not need to use such words. We should pray single-mindedly for the result confident in Jesus' many promises to grant our requests.

Maintaining Healing

Many people who receive divine healing get sick again with the same sickness. Their healing does not persist. Jesus spoke about this:

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. **(Lu 11:24-26)**

The reason a Christian gets sick in the first place is because of an illegal intrusion of the devil. Healing prayer can drive out the sickness, but if that person does not close the door to re-invasion by maintaining

their confidence in God's promises, then Satan can easily re-establish his former position. This is a serious problem because it undermines faith for future healing. It is therefore essential that healing is followed by repentance, the infilling of the Holy Spirit and instruction on spiritual warfare. When Jesus healed He frequently said, "Go and sin no more".

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." **(1Jo 4:4)**

This simple scripture can help to strengthen a person's faith against re-infection. If any symptoms reappear, we can declare, "God is in me! There is no room for the devil as well." And so kick him out!