

Dennis Bennett: God Does Want to Heal Everybody

We have a hard time believing God wants to heal everyone for one rather obvious reason: Everyone doesn't get healed. But perhaps we will see no more than a trickle of healings until we settle in our minds that God indeed wants to heal everybody.

Does God want to heal all His people? I know that if I preach uncompromisingly my conviction that our unchanging God does indeed want to heal everyone, just as the Scripture says, people in the service get healed.

I know that if I allow the idea that there are some people God does not want to heal, then not many are healed. At St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seattle, Washington, as people pray and lay their hands on one another during Holy Communion service, many are healed. Recently, a woman cried out with joy as she received her hearing. Two people said they came into church with knee injuries and were healed. This sort of thing has been going on at St. Luke's in one way or another for 20 years. This is no recent outpouring, no "crest of the wave" experience.

Each time we pray like this, there are healings, some seemingly minor—sore throats and headaches—others dramatic. Several weeks ago a person recovering from foot surgery, in great pain, experienced total healing and walked out without crutches. These healings do not come as a result of some specially gifted person—clergyman or layman—praying for the sick one. They come as just "plain ordinary Christians" praying for one another.

But does God want to heal everybody? When I permit myself to believe that God does not want to heal everyone, the results

are depressing. Not many are healed. I feel this is because each person has the thought in his or her mind that "perhaps I am the one God doesn't want to heal; perhaps God has some purpose in keeping me sick" and so he or she is hindered from really taking hold of God's promise.

On the other hand, I do not believe in telling good Christians that they are un-healed because of a lack of faith. But I don't believe we are going to see more than a trickle of healing until we have really settled it in our minds that God indeed wants to heal us—that there is no doubt about it. In spite of the scriptural evidence, we have a hard time believing God wants to heal everyone for one rather obvious reason; everyone doesn't get healed. I am confronted daily with people whom I admire and whose love for God I cannot question, yet who remain sick or handicapped or even die. How can I believe God wants to heal all, when two of the closest and dearest people in my own life were not healed, but died?

There are a lot of Christians who do not believe God wants to heal everyone. A movie is being widely circulated and viewed right now in the Christian community that attempts to convince us that God does not want to heal everyone—that there are some whom He leaves sick or injured in order that they can show their fortitude under affliction, show that they love God in spite of the fact that He leaves them in pain or handicapped.

What we often don't see is that this kind of situation does not bring glory to God. It calls attention rather to human endurance and faithfulness. It doesn't say "look how great and loving God is," but "look how courageous and faithful this human being is to put up with his or her suffering and still remain loyal to God, even though He doesn't seem to be helping them."

We have to admire the strength and patience of people who continue to love and trust God in spite of chronic sickness and disability. But we cannot say that their continued

suffering brings honor to God. Would it make us admire a human father to show that he has intentionally neglected his children's health in order to prove that they would continue to love him anyway?

It is surprising how far well-meaning people will carry this idea. We were in a meeting some years ago where the chairman told us of a young lady in the community who had been cruelly injured in an auto accident and after some weeks in pain had died. She had been a strong believer and all through her ordeal had testified to her love for God. Because of her faithfulness, some in the town had accepted Jesus.

Our chairman expressed the opinion that not only had God used this girl's loyalty to bring people to Jesus, He had actually planned the whole thing—that He had caused or allowed the accident and terrible injury to this child. My spirit cried out against it! Can you imagine Jesus planning an automobile accident in order that one of His people could be mangled for evangelistic purposes?

How amazing it is that such ideas still thrive in the Christian world, even though biblical evidence is totally against such. If there is one thing the Bible has to say all the way through, it is that God is ready to heal His people of all their sickness. Psalm 103:2-3 is one example: "Bless the Lord, O my soul ... who heals all your diseases."

Even better than that, He wants to keep them in health, if you read Isaiah 40:31. Reread the eighth through 15th chapters of Matthew to remind yourself how Jesus Christ operated. Notice the continuous flow of healing. Notice that Jesus denied no one:

"When the evening came, they brought to Him many who were possessed with demons. And He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all who were sick" (Matt. 8:16); "Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their

synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matt. 9:35); "He called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease" (Matt. 10:1); "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8); "But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great crowds followed Him, and He healed them all" (Matt. 12:15).

Healing the sick is one of the major signs of the Holy Spirit's work. Jesus spent most of His time healing sick people. When John the Baptist sent to inquire whether Jesus was the Messiah or not, the answer Jesus gave was: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:5). Healing was and is a sign of the Good News. It is one of the clear proofs by which God shows us "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" Whenever in Christian history there has been a revival of the Holy Spirit's power, people begin to get healed. Whenever the Holy Spirit gains freedom in people's lives, one of the first things He does is to bring healing, both to them and through them. It isn't just in the Bible. Throughout Christian history, God has again and again shown us that He wants to heal.

Why do good Christians back away from this happy truth? Why is sickness still determinedly glorified, made the subjects of movies and books, held out as a way to bring people to Jesus? Do you ever find Jesus saying "Look how all these sick people are following Me faithfully in spite of the fact that I have refused to heal them?"

Actually, very few people would question that Jesus wants to heal them. It is the Father they have doubts about. It's all very well to talk about Jesus' mercy and love. Everybody knows

Jesus is tenderhearted and would never want anyone to be sick or suffering. But what about the Father? His ways are inscrutable and past finding out. You never know what He is going to do. Jesus became human—He understands—but God, the Father, is a mysterious entity not averse to hurling a few thunderbolts or devastating Sodom and Gomorrah. When we think about the Father, we almost automatically slip back into the Old Testament, forgetting that Jesus came to bring us a new picture, a true picture, one that the Old Testament did not have precisely because Jesus had not yet come. Yet even the Old Testament assures us that God is our Healer.

Jesus said to us so clearly “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” and that He and His Father are just alike (John 14:6-12). Jesus said “Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do. For whatever He does, likewise the Son does” (John 5:19). Jesus told us He was simply carrying out His Father’s will in the things He was doing: “For I came down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

If Jesus healed everyone who asked Him and a lot who didn’t, and if Jesus only does what His Father wants Him to do, then the Father must want to heal everyone. How can it be otherwise? If Jesus is the perfect image and expression of His Father, then the Father is no longer a mysterious God, hidden in the sky somewhere, ready to hurl destruction and condemnation. No, He is a Father who has revealed Himself in the Person of His Son, Jesus. He revealed Himself through what Jesus said and did. Why not accept that revelation?

We have the problem that many are not healed. Many who believe and trust receive no miracles. And thus the hard question returns: Does God want to heal everybody?

I could give an answer that our God does not do what He clearly says He will do. I could tell them that He is erratic and inconsistent. I could say that He heals here and there,

but only at His whim. I could say that God has some purpose in wanting these people to continue being un-healed. I could write books or produce movies saying that.

But if I do, I contradict the clear witness and Word of the Scriptures. I simply have no backing for such a position.

We do, of course, alter our ideas to fit our experience. "God says He will heal me. I prayed and asked Him to and He didn't. So He must have altered his policy" Yet, if you are watching TV and the picture goes fuzzy, do you immediately call the TV station and tell them there's something wrong with their transmitter? No, you would first try to adjust your TV. If you couldn't fix it, you would call in a repairman.

But when we don't seem to be getting a clear picture from God, when we don't seem to be receiving what He says He's sending, we immediately respond "Oh, there must be something wrong with God's transmission. Perhaps He's turned the power off." We invent explanations about how God stopped sending the Holy Spirit's power after the apostles died or after the Bible was written.

Recently a leading evangelist revived the old explanation that God just uses things like healing for a sort of bait to get people to come to Jesus—but that after they have come, He doesn't do it anymore.

I hear people saying, "You can't go around telling good Christians they don't have enough faith!" No, you certainly shouldn't do that. It's simply cruel to say to someone who is seriously ill, "If you just had a little more faith, you would be all right. Grit your teeth, shut your eyes and try harder to believe. Make a positive confession!" It's so easy for the person who isn't sick to say such things to the one who is. It's like saying to a starving person, "If you just trust Jesus He'll take care of you" and not give them any food. Yet it is true the reason we don't get healed is that we fail to

receive from our Father what it is He wants to give us. There can be no other explanation that will fit what the Bible says.

If you have read the Scriptures and if you have met the Lord and have been baptized in His Holy Spirit and know how much He loves you and are convinced that He does want to heal you and you're not healed, then obviously your attention should be given to making yourself more open to receive. You should not blame yourself and condemn yourself if you do not seem to be cured or if you have to continue to take medication or treatment for your condition.

Don't try to force God's hand by giving up medication or other needed helps. But on the other hand, you should not blame God. He doesn't want you sick.

Don't stop praying. Don't stop trusting God for your healing no matter if it seems not to come right away. Is it that you don't have enough faith? That depends on what you mean by "faith." Faith is simply openness to receive what God has promised. The reason we are so hesitant to imply that someone doesn't have faith to be healed, is we think they don't love Jesus or they don't trust God. No, no! It just means they're not yet open to receive the particular healing they need.

Faith is a focused thing. You have to have faith, that is, openness to God, to receive for a particular need. For example, I have great faith about getting healed from a head cold. I haven't kept a healed cold for years and years because I ask someone, usually my wife, to pray for me and I get healed.

If I get a chest cold, however, I have a harder time. You know why? I'm more scared about the chest cold and I have a harder time being more open to receive God's healing for it. The same is true of more serious things. If a doctor tells someone they have a condition that is critical or even potentially fatal, they may find it difficult to cope with that condition. They

begin wondering if even God can touch such a thing.

Healing is a tender subject. I've been through enough in my lifetime to not want to put anyone under pressure or condemnation about it. Yet if I allowed myself to say, for myself, or anyone else "I guess God doesn't want you healed," I am inviting the person to stop praying about it, to resign himself to his condition. Even if I allow myself to say, "I guess it isn't time for you to be healed," I am wrong, because again there is nothing in Scripture that would say God delays healing us. Jesus never put anyone off. To say "God will heal me someday" can be a way of avoiding the challenge to trust Him for healing now. I don't ever want to encourage people to think that God has refused them or that He would ever refuse them, because Jesus refused no one.

Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive." The original Greek text can be translated in the progressive present tense: "Be asking ... " or "keep on asking"

I know of a woman who prayed for five hours that her sight might be healed and at the end of five hours she received the healing. Those who have read Guy Bevington know that he would sometimes fast for days about some sick person's healing. He wouldn't stop until they were healed. Smith Wigglesworth was the same way. Why is this persistent prayer necessary? Is it because God is unwilling and has to be persuaded to finally give in to us just to get rid of us?

That, again, would be a strange way for a loving Father to behave. It's not the reason. We need to continue to pray because we need to break through the barriers that are keeping us from receiving. What kind things? We're getting some vitally important insight on that today. We are coming to realize that often the reason we cannot open ourselves to receive the good things God has for us is that we are subconsciously prevented. We are hampered, not by our conscious thoughts and attitudes, but by the hurts and fears

that lie hidden deep in the recesses of our souls where Jesus has not yet been allowed to reach.

We are finding that as people allow the Lord to penetrate those areas, there is often not only a new release of spiritual joy and freedom, but physical healing follows, sometimes dramatically, as happened this year in Victoria, British Columbia, when one of God's children was instantly healed of two fatal diseases as her friends stood around her and helped her let Jesus perform inner healing. If you are seeking physical healing and can't seem to break through to receive, you would be wise to seek healing for your inner self as well as your body. A large number of people at St. Luke's and in many other places are involved in praying for this type of healing.

Jesus healed people first of all because He had compassion on them. He was sorry for them and didn't want them sick. His second reason for healing was so that the world could see the kingdom of God at work. "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, no doubt the kingdom of God has come upon you," said Jesus (Luke 11:20). Some may believe that watching the courage and endurance of people in sickness leads people to Christ and I do not deny that this is true. But I think a far greater number will come when they see Jesus working through His people to heal the sick and set the captives free.

As in the New Testament, when people see God's healing love at work, they will accept the Savior who wants to save or rescue not only our souls, but also our inner selves and our bodies.

The salvation Jesus offers includes the health and strength of the physical body. Let us not be satisfied until we have received that gift too.