

The Downside of Healing Prayer

The more I get to know God, the less I understand Him. He is obviously the most creative person in the universe, which means that He will never be predictable, He will always surprise you, and He doesn't view things the way us "normal" people do. Simply put, He is God and we are not.

That being said, I've spent the last 10 years of my life chasing after him with a video camera, attempting to capture glimpses of Him moving around the world, and by doing so, hopefully giving both myself and the world a tiny glimpse of His character. And after a decade of filming God, I can confidently say that while I don't know if I understand Him any better, I certainly do love and trust Him more than ever.

While making my two Holy Ghost films (*Holy Ghost* and *Holy Ghost Reborn*) I traveled to Brazil to film with evangelist Randy Clark at one of his annual Youth Power Invasion trips. Basically, hundreds of young people (roughly age 15-30) travel to Brazil to learn how to pray for healing. They are then thrown into the fire at a giant crusade, and are pegged to be the ministry team for the thousands of people who come forward for healing prayer. (You can see an example of this in the YouTube clip at the beginning of this article)

For my purposes as a filmmaker, I singled out a handful of kids who had pretty much never prayed for anyone in their life. I didn't want to talk to the ones who were old hands at healing prayer, I wanted the frightened ones; the ones who doubted that anything would happen as much as they hoped it would. Talking to them, a few things became immediately clear.

First, they were all terrified to pray for healing. Their terror, obviously, was rooted in the fear that when they

prayed, nothing would happen. For years this is what kept me from praying for anyone. There is a natural tendency to play things safe in life, which is why stepping out in faith-fueled prayer is such a leap for many people. On the one hand, you fear disappointing someone and making them doubt whether God loves or cares about them. But drill down deeper, and I think the true apprehension lies in our own thoughts and fears about God and our own relationship with Him. If He doesn't move when we pray for someone, what does that say about us? Stepping out and being dropped isn't just embarrassing, but it can also be devastating to our own faith.

Believing in someone who is invisible is hard enough. Believing in an invisible God who is silent when we pray is almost too much for many people to take. Better to hedge our bets and play it safe when we pray, so that both the person we're praying for and we ourselves don't get disappointed. I watched this fear play out with one of the young people I filmed in Brazil, and it was both painful and confusing. This young woman had never prayed for anyone before, but she had come to Brazil hearing amazing stories of how God moves and she wanted to be a part of it. Add on the fact that she was being filmed by the "Finger of God people" and she was more than confident that she would see miracles. But when she started praying for people, nothing happened. Time and again she would pray, and the person would admit that they didn't feel any better. And I watched as her face fell more and more, until by the end she was questioning her own faith in God.

I believe that healing should be a normal aspect of our faith, and that boldness in our faith should be pursued and cultivated. But there is a downside to healing prayer, and it's something everyone must face. Not everyone you pray for will be healed. In fact, for many people, most of those you pray for may not be healed. The question then becomes: what are you going to do about it? Are you going to continue on in pursuit of a radical God who loves immensely but cannot be

fully understood? Or are you going to shy away from the embarrassment and disappointment to focus more on a faith that is built on principles and devotion, and less on risk and faith?

I think the thing that often gets lost when thinking about praying for healing is the fact that, at the end of the day, it's not about us anyway. If we realize that we can't take credit for the times when God does move and someone is healed when we pray for them, then likewise we can't take credit for times when God, for whatever reason, doesn't move when we pray. God doesn't need a publicist, He is perfectly capable of defending His own honor. When we shy away from our duty as believers to pray for the sick and the broken, we are ultimately saying that it's more about us than the people we are supposed to be loving. When we think we need to protect God from Himself, we elevate ourselves to a kind of pseudo-godhead where we are claiming to be more merciful and prudent than the one who made us.

There is a downside of healing prayer, but it isn't the disappointment that comes when nothing happens. At least it shouldn't be. The true downside of praying for healing is the tendency we have to make this prayer more about us than about the one we are praying for. Once you remove faith and love from the equation—faith in God and love for the one you are praying for—you've left the realm of relationship and replaced it with religion. And while it is natural to feel a pang of disappointment when our prayers for healing go unanswered, it should never debilitate us into doing nothing.