

God Has the Power to Heal

Most *Charisma* readers, from their own understanding of the  Bible, can respond with a resounding “Yes” to the question, “Does God really heal today?” But for me, it’s not just a scriptural truth; in the 41 years I’ve been praying for the sick, I have seen Jesus do some amazing things.

The healing that affected me the most personally was the one God gave Judith, my wife, at a time when I hardly knew her. Several of her friends had asked me to pray with her because her gynecologist had told her that she had a precancerous condition of the uterus and needed a hysterectomy. This diagnosis was devastating to Judith, who had just turned 30.

And so we prayed. The following morning Judith went to see the Christian surgeon who was to perform the operation. After a thorough examination he exclaimed: “You’ve been healed! Your tissue is bright pink, like that of a newborn baby.”

Judith was so stunned she just remained on the examining table, trying to take in the news. When her surgeon came back to the room some time later, he was surprised to see her still lying there, so he asked: “Why are you still here? You’ve just been healed. Go home!”

The life-changing outcome of the healing Jesus performed that day was that, several years later, we had two beautiful children—Rachel (now 27) and David (25)—who would not be in this world if that quiet healing hadn’t taken place 30 years ago. You can see why this one particular healing has touched us so deeply!

Of course, I have witnessed many other miraculous healings. One of the most extraordinary happened to Barbara Holmes. We first met her at a conference in March 1996 in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Friends brought her just for prayer, since she had been confined to bed, suffering due to constant back and

sciatic pain.

Barbara had received the best possible medical care at Johns Hopkins and Sloan-Kettering hospitals. She was taking 12 Percocet every day for pain, and even this high dosage, according to her, did not help her “searing leg pain.”

As a final resort her physicians had inserted a spinal cord stimulator into her side in 1995, with a wire implanted in her back that was attached to eight electrodes lined up and down along her spinal column.

She was the first patient at Johns Hopkins to receive the eight-electrode model of this apparatus. She had undergone six major surgeries already. None of them had helped to take away her constant pain.

At the conference a number of us prayed for Barbara from 10 p.m. until 12:35 a.m. During this prayer all the pain left—and in addition to her healing, she received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. At last she was free from pain after, as she says, a 10-year battle with low back and piercing sciatic leg pain. “Since that day my life, as I had known it, was gone,” she said.

Eleven months later, the healing was confirmed when one last surgery removed the metal rods and wires with the electric stimulator from her spine. But in Barbara’s view the most wonderful gift of all has been her deepening relationship with her Savior. “In Him I truly am a new creation. God is so good! He is my life,” she says.

Judith’s and Barbara’s testimonies are just two among the many healings that we have actually witnessed. They are, I believe, truly miracles in which God healed beyond the normal course of nature. Most of us love such testimonies, which fill us with joy and thanksgiving. But it must be noted that they are extraordinary.

I once asked my dear friend the Rev. Tommy Tyson, the Methodist evangelist who worked with Oral Roberts in the days of his tent crusades, how many miracles of healing he saw. He said that most evenings when thousands came, there were two or three healings that he thought would qualify as miraculous. Perhaps another 5 percent of the crowd experienced some degree of healing.

My own experience is even more positive. For example, in one conference we held, 183 people responded to a questionnaire about receiving healings: 12 claimed to have been totally healed; 92 received a significant healing; 57 had a partial healing; and three experienced no healing at all. These results are typical of those I have observed throughout my years in healing ministry.

It seems to me that when healing prayer is presented to people in an honest way, everyone is blessed. Even when the sick are not physically healed, they will be strengthened and comforted by the fact that those of us who pray demonstrate our belief that Jesus loves them in a very personal way and is on the side of life and love.

Evidence for the Benefits of Healing Prayer

More and more physicians are coming to recognize the value of healing prayer. A generation ago, Kathryn Kuhlman and Oral Roberts (City of Faith) established relationships with the medical community, as did many others, such as Dr. William Standish Reed, who holds an annual healing conference for physicians.

Doctors do not easily accept individual testimonies, but they do pay attention to the results of strictly controlled scientific studies. I had always wanted to do a scientific study documenting healing, and then I met a physician, Dr. Dale Matthews, on the staff of Georgetown Medical School, who

also shared this vision.

We came up with a plan by which we would pray for patients who suffered from a sickness that was *medically incurable*. We decided upon rheumatoid arthritis, a disease of the autoimmune system that affects more than a million patients in the U.S. The only treatment given is for pain, and it does not lead to a cure.

We arranged with Sally Marlowe, a nurse practitioner in charge of a pain and arthritis clinic in Tampa, Florida, to pray for 40 patients in two groups, combined with follow-up. The prayer teams were from our healing center in Jacksonville, Florida. We prayed for these groups of patients for three days, along with teaching them about spiritual issues such as the need to forgive. To qualify, each patient had to have at least six swollen joints and nine tender joints.

The results were truly extraordinary! The average number of *tender* joints at the beginning of the study was 16.8, but at the end of 12 months it was only 5.7. The average number of *swollen* joints at the beginning was 9.8, but at the end it was only 3.1.

Matthews wrote this up in a report published in the *Southern Medical Journal* (December 2000) and stated that the results were equivalent to an *effective new drug* coming upon the scene. (All the patients were already taking medications such as Prednisone.)

Four patients appeared to be totally healed. Another significant finding was that the patients' conditions did not deteriorate in the following year, as they would have if the changes had been due merely to the power of suggestion.

A Key to Healing

We have found that *time* is often the missing ingredient in healing prayer. Many healing ministers in our day have picked up on the idea of “soaking” prayer, and they see extraordinary results. In Barbara’s story at the beginning of this article, we reported that she received 2-1/2 hours of prayer. But how many of us are able to invest this much time in one person? There is a real price to pay in the healing ministry!

Jesus said over and over that we need to persist in prayer and not give up, even when there are no apparent results: “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). In Luke 18:1-7, “faith” seems to be equivalent to persistence and patience. Jesus praises those who cry out to Him “day and night.” How different from: “I said a short prayer for you yesterday. Why are you here again? Go home and claim your healing.”

One thing in the life of Jesus that astounds me is that He dealt with people individually. He did not try to save time by praying for large groups of the sick. Even though He had only three years of public ministry, He seemed to spend much of His time *one-on-one*.

We sometimes try to take the easier way by holding healing services for thousands of people. But we should be challenged by the amount of time Jesus invested in praying for sick individuals. He must have had a reason He preferred to pray for people singly instead of holding healing services. Why?

I have learned to accept the fact that there is a great mystery here, and I no longer trust easy answers to the problems of God’s will in relation to sickness. Tommy Tyson was one of my dearest friends, and for 30 years we preached and ministered together. Three times I was present praying for him when he was seriously sick, and he was dramatically healed those three times. In fact, on one of those occasions, in

Bolivia, he was dying (and had a near-death experience).

The next morning he was alive and well again. But then, six years ago, Tommy came down with several serious ailments at the same time. We were hoping that he might pull out of it one last time, but somehow we all sensed that this was his time to move on to his eternal life with Jesus—and we were right.

Our experience is that when we pray, *most* people receive some degree of healing, and when conditions are ideal—which they seldom are—the percentage goes way up. (Incidentally, large healing services are *not* ideal.)

For example, if we had 10 sick people come to us, and they each suffered from a type of illness that would allow us to be certain after we prayed that healing had taken place, and we had (1) teams of experienced prayer ministers and (2) two hours in which to pray and discern related issues, such as a need for forgiveness, then it would not be surprising to find that:

- ?two were totally healed;
- ?six were improved; and
- ?only one or two *seemed* to have nothing happen.

With all the incentives to pray—the words of Jesus, the marvelous testimonies of healing in our day—why is it that more Christians don't pray for healing? When I ask a group of people in church how many can remember their fathers or their mothers ever praying with them when they were sick as a child, the average number of those who respond is about 3 percent and 20 percent, respectively. How can this be?

One answer may be found in the teaching of John Calvin. He believed that healing shrines were a “papist” superstition. Because the faith of so many evangelicals goes back to Calvin's teachings, chances are that you have been taught

that, although Jesus truly healed the sick, healing stopped with the death of the last apostle.

Please don't be overly influenced by the negative beliefs of those around you. Remember that Jesus promised we would do even greater things than He did when He was on earth (see John 14:12). It's time for us to accept the challenge of laying hands on the sick and seeing them recover (see Mark 16:18).

Francis MacNutt, Ph.D., is chairman emeritus of Christian Healing Ministries Inc. (), in Jacksonville, Fla. He has written a half dozen books on healing, notably *Healing* (Ave Maria Press).