

God, Why Won't You Heal?

For years I asked God why He wouldn't heal my special needs son. The answer came in a way I least expected—and forever changed my view of healing.

Sitting at the dinner table one evening, my 4-year-old son surprised us with a profound question about his older brother. "Daddy," Jaron said, "why did God make Caleb with special needs?"

Gathering my thoughts, I responded, "What did you ask, Son?"

Jaron repeated his question: "Why did God make Caleb with special needs?"

Caleb, who was 8 years old at the time, was born with a deletion on his No. 2 chromosome, resulting in developmental disabilities, intellectual and physical delays, muscular dystrophy and autism. Caleb has never spoken a word.

I paused, trying to find a way to express my thoughts on a level he could comprehend. But honestly, part of my own heart still struggles with the "why" of it all. I'm not sure any parent can fully satisfy this question, though many have found great comfort in the plans and purposes of God.

Finally, I broke the silence and began explaining how Caleb was like any other boy except due to his "special needs" he had to interact differently. God had a plan when he created Caleb and wanted to use him to touch other peoples' lives. I told Jaron that one day when Caleb went to heaven he would be healed. He would run, talk and play like all the other children.

My answer seemed to appease our questioning theologian for a moment. But then he rolled his head around, looked up to the sky and asked, "Why doesn't God just heal him now?"

Such a simple question—with a complicated, sometimes heart-wrenching answer!

We told Jaron that it wasn't God's desire to heal his brother right now, but that God loved Caleb very much whether he could speak or walk or talk. All people are created in God's image, and we bring Him glory by being who He created us to be. I spoke of the gifts and abilities Caleb has and how he can have a full life despite his disabilities. I also reassured Jaron that my answers may not make complete sense because sometimes we simply have to trust God even when we don't understand His ways. In short, I told him that Caleb did not need to be healed.

At Caleb's birth, the answer didn't seem so simple. At that time I couldn't yet accept Caleb for who he was—I needed him to be healed. I experienced anger, grief and depression over his condition and felt that my prayers fell silent at heaven's doors. My God seemed impotent as my world crumbled. My biblical theology was out of alignment as I labored to interpret Scripture out of my experience, instead of allowing Scripture to interpret my real-life experience.

This theology was one that erroneously emphasized God's will for all to be healed—no exceptions! Sickness, disability or ailment all resulted from a lack of faith, or the work of Satan, or sin in one's life, or a combination of all three. At the time of Caleb's birth, my support group was comprised of friends functioning under the same theology who prayed for my faith to be increased, for Satan to be bound, for sins to be confessed and for Caleb to be healed! And when he was not healed, it was a clear indication that God's favor no longer rested on me. I later discovered that this "faith theology" is actually "fear theology" that focuses on the "works of man," whose authority and healing is solely based on one's perfection of faith. I was in a dangerous, downward spiral and needed a new, God-centered perspective.

Who Needs Healing?

When we see our children through an eternal perspective rather than an earthly perspective, there is much to celebrate. Psalm 127:3 says that children are a reward from the Lord, while Psalm 139:13-14 tells us children are “fearfully and wonderfully made” by God, who knit each of them together in their mother’s womb. According to Scripture, Caleb was perfectly designed by God. And though I may not have understood completely, I should have at least been able to accept Caleb and work through my wounded emotions.

Many young children have irregular sleeping patterns, and Caleb was no exception. I remember one night when he was 2 years old, he awoke crying and I went to his room as usual to comfort him until he went back to sleep. As Caleb dozed off, I lay down on the floor and asked why God had not *fixed* Caleb. I thought: *All the therapies, all the doctors’ visits and all the special time and attention aren’t going to help Caleb’s development. It won’t fix him! Think of all the glory You would receive, Lord. The testimony of his miraculous healing would reveal Your glory to so many!*

At that moment I sensed the presence of God filling Caleb’s room. Without a sound, these words flooded clearly into my soul: *Son, aren’t you glad that I didn’t require you to be fixed before I accepted you?*

I couldn’t move. I couldn’t speak. I could only reflect on the words that pierced my heart and mind. And in this revelation, an understanding of my heavenly Father’s unconditional love burst into my soul. I was praying for Caleb’s brokenness to be fixed and instead I came to grips with *my own brokenness*. Suddenly, it became clear to me that God, the Creator of the universe, the incarnate Word made flesh, the Spirit who moved within man, loved me unconditionally regardless of my own performance, abilities or even holiness. It was because of God’s own love, goodness and existence that I can cry out with

confidence, “Abba, Father ... Daddy!” (see Rom. 8:15).

I also realized how utterly selfish, earthly and unloving I’d been to my own son, upon whom I had placed such high requirements. With tears running down my cheeks, I held my sleeping son in my arms and said, “Caleb, I love you just the way you are, for who you are, and I don’t need you to be fixed. You are my son and I’ll love you unconditionally from this day forth whether or not you are ever healed.”

That moment changed my life. Despite my failures, I have been able to accept my son and rely upon God to form me into the father I want to be. That night, for the first time, I realized that it wasn’t Caleb who needed to be healed—it was me.

Reflecting back on that experience in Caleb’s room years ago, I am amazed that I could have been so blind to the gift that God gave me in my son. On the other hand, I can’t ignore the real disappointments and challenges that daily accompany life with disability. Our family has experienced a great deal of pain and suffering throughout this journey, and as Caleb gets older the challenges will increase. As much as I love my son for *who* he is, I do not always love the way he is. But at the same time, he is amazing and continues to be my greatest teacher. Without a spoken word, Caleb touches more hearts for Christ than a lot of Christians I’ve known.

For His Glory

For many, it seems as if God receives more glory through miraculous healings than through the person who experiences joy and peace amid disability without ever experiencing healing on this earth.

This view came up two years ago at a Bible college in Belgrade, Serbia, where I taught on the subject of “Theology and Disability.” I was using biblical and modern examples of those with disabilities whom God has used without healing them

such as Joni Eareckson Tada and Nick Vujicic. A fiery, young student named Philip then proceeded to ask, "Tell me how God can possibly be glorified by *not* healing Joni and Nick since healing them would surely display His great power?"

I understood his question. It's the same one I worked through years before in seminary and on my own personal journey with Caleb. Philip articulated the doctrines he'd been exposed to by faith healers, as well as other views on divine healing. Then I challenged him with this question: "Joni and Nick have led millions of people to faith in Christ or a deeper walk with Christ, even though they haven't been physically healed of their disabilities. Can you name one person in history who has had such an impact on Christ's kingdom by being healed?"

Philip could think of no one. My point to him was not to deny healing and the glory God receives through it; rather, it was to challenge him with his belief that healing *had* to happen for God to be glorified. He was so convinced that healing was only of a physical nature that he had overlooked the fact that biblical healing is first and foremost of a spiritual nature.

Biblical Healing

This is not to suggest that healings have not occurred and resulted in people finding Christ. The New Testament uses many Greek words for both physical and spiritual healing: *sozo*, *hugies*, *iaomai* and *therapeuo*. For example, in Matthew 9:22 when Jesus spoke to the woman with the issue of blood, He said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well (*sozo*)" (NASB). In the next chapter, Jesus commissioned the 12 disciples for ministry and gave them the mandate to "heal (*therapeuo*) the sick" (10:8).

These examples are instances of physical healings—that is, to completely cure a condition. But healing is also for the soul. Though sometimes used for physical healing, *sozo* and *iaomai* typically carry the meaning of spiritual healing, which is the

primary focus of New Testament healing. For example, Ephesians 2:8 reads, “For by grace you have been saved (*sozo*).” The same is true for 1 Peter 2:24: “By His wounds you were healed (*iaomai*).”

Spiritual healing is the salvation of the soul, and though people are sometimes “cured” from a disease or disability by a miracle, therapy or medicine, this does not mean that true spiritual healing has taken place. Healing refers to “being made whole” in spirit, as in our healing from sin.

There is a misconception that “wholeness” is the absence of any deficiencies in our bodies or lives, but everyone has deficiencies. Wholeness is a matter of contentment based on a relationship, not the physical. Christ’s primary mission was to redeem man for eternal life and a right relationship with the Father (see John 3:16). Spiritual healing includes a right relationship with God—that is, salvation and a dedicated life of surrender. Christ’s secondary mission was to restore right relationship with others (see John 17:20-21). Therefore, spiritual healing involves a right relationship with the body of Christ and the community in which we live.

When a cure was the means to accomplish this restoration, then Jesus did so. Otherwise, His ministry was to the heart and soul of mankind. For example, in Luke 5:17-26, Jesus healed a man lowered to Him through the roof of a house by forgiving him of his sins (restoring him to God). He didn’t immediately cure the man physically because the man was already in community, as evidenced by his caring friends. Only when Jesus discerned the thoughts of the Pharisees did He cure the man—“*so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*” (v. 24). Even in curing the man Jesus’ focus was on true healing—a right relationship with God.

What He Really Needs

I was recently at a conference with Joni in which she was

interviewing a good friend of the Joni and Friends ministry, Robin Hiser. Robin was born with Down syndrome and has lived an active and fruitful life. She has an amazing love for God and people, using her skills and gifts to minister to youth across the nation. Watching Robin worship or hearing her pray brings an appreciation for who God created her to be—just as she is.

During the interview, Joni asked Robin what advice she wanted to give to parents who might have a child with special needs. Without hesitation Robin stated there are two vital things for parents to remember: “The first,” she said, “is to always remember that the greatest gift you can give your child is love—unconditional love. And the second thing is just as important: No matter what, accept them just the way they are—the way God created them.” At this point the tears were running down my face as pictures of Caleb filled my mind.

Maybe you also have a son or daughter with special needs. You too may struggle with anger, depression or disappointment with God over your child’s disability. Your cries are real and God hears you. He feels your pain. But when we properly place healing in the light of eternity, we realize that physical and developmental disabilities on this earth are temporary, while spiritual healing is eternal. God has responded with salvation and restoration (healing)—the greatest response He could have given. When life is lived out in the love and support of the body of Christ, of family and community, then the context is set for a life of celebration and wholeness.

My son Caleb may not be healed according to the traditional definition, but I can assure you he has been healed from a scriptural perspective of relationship and love. So the next time a 4-year-old theologian questions you about healing, you may want to simply reply with a question: “What healing does he need?”

Steve Bundy serves as the vice president at Joni and Friends (JAF), overseeing the Christian Institute on Disability and International Outreach. He and his wife, Melissa, know firsthand the joys and challenges of parenting a child with special needs. He is co-author with Doug Mazza, JAF president and COO, of an upcoming book, *Another Kind of Courage: Becoming God's Man in a Family Affected by Disability*. A licensed minister, Steve holds a B.A. in Theology and Missions, a Certificate in Christian Apologetics and an M.A. in Organizational Leadership. Visit for more.