



Chapter 6

PRAYING FOR DIVINE HEALING

We were in a seminar at the Soul Survivor NSW/ACT conference learning about how God heals today and someone had a word of knowledge that there was someone present who had a stomach ache. A young girl stood up and said that she had suffered from stomach aches for a long period of time and, in fact, it was hurting right then. A group of about ten teenagers all stood around the girl and began to pray and command the pain in her stomach to go away in Jesus' name. We asked her how the pain was and she said it had reduced a little.

The thought then came to mind that we should pray a particular phrase over her - "this healing belongs to you because of what Jesus has done on the cross." After we'd prayed that prayer the pain in her stomach again went down. She said that the phrase was one that her youth group had used, we had no idea but just felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to pray that. While we were waiting for direction from the Holy Spirit, the thought then came to mind that each of the ten of us praying for her should command the pain to go away however we felt led (we were all from different church traditions). One by one, each prayed a simple prayer and when the final person in the group prayed for the sickness to go in Jesus' name, the girl looked up and said, "All the pain is completely gone." Praise Jesus! We were certainly not experienced in praying for healing - but were happy to pray multiple times and follow the Lord's promptings.

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Does God heal people? Overwhelming evidence from Scripture, along with my own experiences and the experiences of others, have convinced me not only that God does heal people, but that He does so *frequently*. If one were to explain the healings seen in the gospels and in Acts, the least complicated explanation would be that they happened as described. Having witnessed God perform similar miracles in people's lives today, personal experience supports that explanation. Unfortunately much of the Church has turned away from this ministry and has suffered a great loss as a result. For many of us the struggle is not in believing that God *can* heal - after all God can theoretically do anything He likes - but rather that He *does* or *will* heal, and will do so through '*me*' and '*my*' prayers. I firmly believe, though, that praying for divine healing should be a normative experience for disciples of Jesus. And I don't mean just the *twelve* disciples. I mean disciples like you and me; every day followers of Jesus. The aim of this chapter is to explore why that can and should be the case before looking at how praying for divine healing can be practically incorporated into the prayer ministry model described in chapters 3 and 4. Indeed when we look at the ministry of Jesus we see that divine healing was a significant part of his mission. Therefore it too should become a significant aspect of prayer ministry.

'Divine healing' is the preferred term used when discussing this topic. This is to intentionally separate it from other forms of healing claimed and sought after in other practices - New Age movements, psychic healing and the like. It also differentiates it from the natural healing that occurs in our bodies as a result of our natural immune system and cellular responses, in the way that a wound heals over time for example. I also differentiate it from medical or scientific approaches. When we discuss healing here I am referring to it from a distinctly Christian perspective, that is, to cases in which Jesus intervenes *directly* through supernatural means to bring about healing, often in response to prayer.

Divine healing comes from God and is a demonstration of his grace available thanks only to the atoning work of Jesus (Is. 53:4-5; Mt. 8:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:24). In today's context it is also a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9) and God often, although not exclusively, uses human vessels to channel His healing. Jesus gave authority to his followers to pray for the sick (Mk. 16:17-18; Mt. 28:18-20; Lk. 9:1-2; Lk. 10:1,9,19) and as followers of Christ we should follow his example and do so. God, though, is always the one who heals the person! He gets the credit! Divine healing is not limited merely to physical healing but also includes mental, emotional and spiritual healing. In some cases these are tied together

and the healing of inner hurt for example can also bring physical healing. Divine healing contributes towards the process of wholeness, as will be discussed.

Why pray for healing?

There are many reasons why we should pray for healing. Of course it is a powerful demonstration of God's love and kindness, His personal nature, His constant redemption of His creation and His desire to include us in the advancement of the Kingdom. These reasons are more than enough. But I want to answer this question more fully by focusing on the ministry of Jesus and the message he brought. Central to the synoptic gospels is Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Indeed his arrival announced the coming Kingdom. His name 'Jesus', or 'Yeshua' in Aramaic, means "Yahweh is salvation." It was probably not an uncommon name in the first Century BC but in this case it represented the message brought by the one who bore the name. Yeshua saw his mission on earth as being a mission of salvation. This mission was not only meant in the spiritual sense. The Anointed One came to announce the year of the Lord's favour. This included freedom from diseases and from evil spirits and sight for the blind (Lk. 4:18-19; Lk. 7:20-23).

We must understand that, unlike us in the Western world, the Hebrews thought of people as whole persons, body and soul together. They were not separated or divided into two separate parts. Personhood included the body, the emotions and the spirit united as one. When they spoke of healing they did not simply think of healing the soul or healing the physical body, but of saving the whole person. When we understand this concept we can see that the healing acts of Jesus, and his disciples, were more than simply acts - they were a demonstration of a message! More than that, they *were* the message; the message that Jesus sets people free, that Jesus saves! Not only did they help provide evidence that what Jesus was saying was truth, the acts were themselves the sign that Jesus saves and restores. The concept of healing and the concept of salvation overlap. Healing the body is never *just* physical, saving the soul is never *just* spiritual. Deliverance for the whole person combines these concepts. Healings are therefore signs of the presence of God's Kingdom ushered in through Christ.

Once we understand that the message of salvation brought by Jesus included the healing of spirit, emotions and physical body, it's easy to see why he sent his disciples out

to both preach and heal the sick. Divine healing is a gospel advancer. It proclaims the Kingdom of God. We see this in Luke 9 and Luke 10, where Jesus sends out not only his selected group of twelve but also seventy-two others. Luke then demonstrates this concept through the basic theme of Acts. The book of Acts shows that the early Church, not only the apostles, had the same power to preach, heal and cast out demons as Jesus had! The church in Jerusalem along with the gentile churches started by Paul all carry on in this fashion, linking preaching with healing just as Jesus did. The reason: because Jesus was *still* the one doing the healing and the world still needed to hear the good news of the gospel! The world today still needs to hear (and see) that Jesus saves. It needs to see that the Kingdom of God is at hand, that the salvation Jesus offers is not a theological construct but a personal reality. Francis MacNutt phrases it wonderfully,

“I believe that the ministry of healing is what lifts the central doctrine of redemption and salvation from the realm of the abstract into the reality of men’s lives.”¹

With all this in mind it can therefore be said that we pray for the sick out of obedience to Christ, who is our model for ministry in faith and practice, and obedience to God’s word. That is a fundamental reason, regardless of whether or not we see healing take place.

Our issues with divine healing

What is perhaps the most difficult to believe is that healing can be an ordinary, common activity of Christian life. As mentioned most of us do not have an issue with the concept of healing. God being all powerful could theoretically heal if He so desired. The issue often lies in the false belief that God no longer desires to heal and even if He did, He would not use regular ‘you and me’ in the process. Growing up I probably fell into that latter category. I never had a theological issue with the concept of God healing people, I simply felt that praying for people was someone else’s job and He wouldn’t use me. I mean, that’s why the church employs pastors and ministers, right? Best to leave it to the professionals who know what they’re doing. The problem here is that this view has a positive feedback loop. We do not step out so we do not see much healing. We do not see much healing so we don’t step out. We then conclude that we’re not ‘qualified’ enough to minister and thus leave it to those that are, whoever they may be.

By focusing on our unworthiness to pray for the sick, the 'Who do you think you are?' view, we have taken a seat on the bench and removed ourselves from the action on the field, from the joy of seeing Jesus' extend his Kingdom through us. On the whole, the Church has lost the normative nature of divine healing and in doing so we've tragically lost a critical aspect of our identity. By New Testament standards Christians are to pray for the removal of sickness. It is supposed to be one of the signs that, "...accompany those who believe." (Mk. 16:17 ESV). Instead of focusing on our unworthiness we must focus on God's abundant *goodness*. He desires to heal his people and longs to use you and me to do so.

One of the difficulties that may make this so hard to grasp is a common misinterpretation of suffering. Slowly but surely many of us have lost sight of the God of love demonstrated in the kind of healings Jesus exercised, and instead replaced it with the view of God as one who allows us to suffer and wrestle with sickness for the goodness of our souls. This idea is what we call a 'redemptive' view of suffering. The road of the cross was suffering, therefore suffering due to sickness is not evil but a blessing in disguise, a cross we are to bear. Even if God's healing was accessible He would prefer we take the higher road, the road of suffering. If that is the case, though, how then are we supposed to regard sickness? Are we merely passive in our approach, accepting it as God's will?

While we can't entirely disregard a redemptive role of suffering - God can use illness as a means of purifying our faith and turning our attention toward Him - it's safe to say that Jesus certainly didn't hold this view in regards to sickness. *Every* time Jesus met evil he confronted it as an enemy. This goes for both the spiritual and the physical. As we've discussed he did not just come to save souls and leave physical bodies in suffering. He viewed people holistically. He came to save the whole person, body and soul (Mt. 8:1-3). Indeed God can, and does, work through suffering, working all things for eventual good. At times, though, we've over emphasised the redemptive value of suffering and lost sight of the goodness, love and character of God. When we do this we warp the good news of the Gospel. Redemptive sickness is the exception, not the rule. Simply because God *can* work through suffering, including sickness, does not mean we are to react passively to it. Jesus understood sickness as an enemy and was certainly not passive in confronting it. He is our model of faith and practice and we must not ignore his approach to sickness. Jesus did not see benefits in sickness for the person. Instead he healed people everywhere he went and equipped his followers to do the same (Mt. 9:35-38; 12:15).

Learning how to pray for healing

Praying for someone's healing, whether that be physical, mental, emotional or spiritual healing, can follow the same model as the general prayer ministry model explained in chapter 3. Once again we can not extrapolate a formula for praying for healing anymore than we can for any other form of ministry. Jesus ministered healing in a diverse number of ways. God is always the healer and it's impossible to confine Him to a formula. All that this model does is provide a good starting point for prayer ministry which may be replicated in almost any setting. When praying for healing there are simply some additions which are helpful in tailoring the model for this specific type of prayer ministry. This discussion will apply most directly to a ministry time in a local church context, but obviously this model can be used anywhere from the street to the workplace, and I encourage you to do so! After all, the context matters little and the heart and practice remain consistent.

The gift of healing is often poured out when gathered together in a communal context and is regularly, although not exclusively, given in partnership with other gifts, particularly words of knowledge (see chapters 7 and 8). Words of knowledge are often given by God to help us follow where He is working. God also gives us words of knowledge in order to increase our faith: the faith of the person with the condition, the faith of those who will pray with them and the general level of faith in the room. When a specific word of knowledge is given and someone responds, the general sense of the presence of God working in the room is increased in the community, along with the expectation that He will work powerfully. Together they lay a good foundation for healing to occur. That's not to say that words of knowledge are a *necessary* prerequisite for healing. God can (and often does) heal even when someone's condition has not been announced by a word of knowledge. I have been in gatherings where several people have been healed and not one word of knowledge was given. Often the setting for healing is simply whenever the need arises. Praying for healing during or directly following a worship time is potentially an ideal setting as people's hearts are naturally prepared to receive from God and are open to His Spirit.

Interview > Invite > Wait > Respond > Direction

When it comes to actually praying for the person, follow the same model as previously discussed, starting with the interview. This is not a medical examination, it simply helps us find out what to pray for. While a medical examination aims to find the right diagnosis, when it comes to prayer ministry we are looking for right discernment. We don't need to spend a long time discussing symptoms or convoluted personal case history. A simple question such as, "Where does it hurt?" is usually sufficient. Listen to the answer in two ears. Give one ear to the person and the other to God. We should be asking the Spirit to give us information, particularly about the root cause of the disease, and also for direction in how to pray specifically in this situation. Even if the ailment is physical we ought to be aware of the possibility that some other form of inner healing may also be needed. This knowledge comes in a natural way, very similar to intuition, except while intuition has its origins in human emotions, this knowledge comes from God. It may also be a mental image, or a word may come to mind. More often than not, this is God guiding us in how to pray.

The interview should also include some way of rating the symptom being prayed for. For example ask the person to give a pain rating, out of ten, where zero is no pain and ten is unbearable. Depending on the symptom, a movement rating might be helpful. For example how far the injured knee can stretch out. The purpose of this is simply so all involved can have a vague measurement in which to gauge whether the prayer has resulted in improvement. Not every symptom can be assessed in this way and this step is not critical in the process.

Interview > **Invite** > Wait > Respond > Direction

The next step is of course to invite the Holy Spirit to come and minister with a simple yet specific prayer related to the healing need. We are inviting both His manifest presence to fall on the person being prayed for as well as those who are praying. Lay hands on the person and ensure that their posture is open to receiving. Of course on this point we must always ask permission out of respect for their personhood. Laying on of hands is traditional Christian practice when praying for healing in particular (Mk. 16:18). For whatever reason there does seem to be some sort of 'current' of healing power that

often flows through the person praying and into the sick person. Jesus was aware of this when a woman suffering from bleeding touched the edge of his cloak (Lk. 8:43-46). It seems that this is a transfer of God's power and is often felt by people when praying for healing. If appropriate, it is useful to lay hands on the specific area that needs healing. Alternatively, get the sick person to put their hand on the area and then lay a hand on top of theirs. Again, ask permission to do so.

This is also the time where we can verbally articulate a prayer for healing. Be specific, short and positive in the prayer. Jesus rarely spoke long prayers when ministering healing. Articulate what it is that we are asking God to heal. Being specific tends to increase our faith and helps us to visualise what we are requesting, the muscles relaxing for example or the swelling decreasing. Ensure that this prayer is positive. Don't focus on how horrible the condition is but emphasise the goodness of God and His desire to make us whole. Personally I do not like the phrase, "If it is your will." This seems to weaken the prayer somewhat and conveys that we don't believe God *ordinarily* wills wholeness and healing for His children. The 'if' seems to bring more doubt than faith. We believe it is indeed God's will to heal and this should be emphasised! It's important to be listening to God and following His leading.

After some time a positive 'word of command' can be given. This is an actual speaking to the condition and, with the authority given to us by Jesus, commanding it to leave in Jesus' name. There is power and authority in the name of Jesus (Lk. 10:17; Acts 3:6, 16:18) and speaking a confident word of command with the authority of the Kingdom often releases healing. An example of a word of command might be something along the lines of, "We say to this infection, 'leave now' in the name of Jesus." In Luke 4:38-39 we see Jesus rebuke the fever and it left. He also commanded deaf ears to be opened (Mk. 7:32-35). At this point it may be helpful to encourage the person to use their mind's eye to 'see' Jesus removing their condition. Matthew 8:17, quoting Isaiah, says, "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." (ESV). This exercise helps build faith and reminds them of the victory Jesus has already won. It can also be helpful to have the person themselves ask Jesus to heal them. This reminds them of who it is that offers them healing. We see Jesus ask Bartimaeus, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mk. 10:51). I believe He still asks similar questions to us today.

Interview > Invite > **Wait** > Respond > Direction

The next step is simply to wait and watch. While doing so it is helpful to pray quietly in the spirit, i.e. pray in tongues. This is very useful when not knowing what to pray as the Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:26-27). See chapter 9 for further discussion on this point. Ask Jesus for more information, particularly regarding the root cause of a condition. Physical symptoms are sometimes the result of spiritual or emotional issues which require healing. Sometimes the power of these need to be broken in order for physical healing to be released.

Interview > Invite > Wait > **Respond** > Direction

After waiting and watching we can respond appropriately to where the Spirit is leading. If the Lord has given more direction or information, act on this. For example the Holy Spirit may have informed you that an ailment is the physical manifestation resulting from an inner fear. In a similar positive way as before, break the power of this over the person with a word of command such as, “We break the hold that fear has over this person’s life in the name of Jesus and we command fear to leave.”

Now is also a good time to ask the person if they notice any change to their condition. For example if the pain was previously rated at a 7, has it decreased at all? Sometimes pain may have partially decreased but some still remains. This is an indication God is definitely working but more time or further prayer might be required. Mark 8:23-25 shows Jesus healing a man suffering from blindness in two stages. Only after Jesus placed his hands on the man’s eyes for a second time were his eyes fully open. If there is no evidence of healing, continue praying and asking the Lord for direction, following which post prayer direction is advised.

Interview > Invite > Wait > Respond > **Direction**

Post prayer direction is advised both when the person is healed and when they are not. Directing people towards post prayer pastoral care is hugely beneficial, even if it is simply to help them process their experience with others. When someone has been healed, advise them to go back and see their doctor or psychologist if they have been

seeing one previously, particularly if the healing is partial. They may yet require further medical treatment and even if they do not, which is wonderful, it's always beneficial to have a medical professional confirm the change to their condition. Also, some conditions are a complex interaction of spiritual, psychological and physical elements. Further prayer counseling may be useful or required, particularly if there are strong emotional elements associated. This is especially important for cases of inner healing.

The reality is that not everyone is healed as a result of prayer. There is no one reason why this is the case. In part it is due to the realm in which we live, being part of the Kingdom that is breaking into the now but has not yet come in its fullness. The new covenant never promises healing for all now. What it does promise is forgiveness of sins. While our sins are forgiven without delay, divine healing does not necessarily work in the same way. There will be a time when we are given whole bodies, but that is not a guarantee in this age. We live in a time between the two comings of Christ. Indeed Christ has secured wholeness as part of the atonement but we still live in a time that longs for the fullness of the Kingdom to come.²

There may be numerous other reasons in addition to this as to why the person was not healed. False beliefs or false value attached to suffering, habitual and unrepentant sin, a lack of faith on behalf of the person or the person praying and a failure to identify root causes and pray accordingly are all possible inhibitors to healing. However, if the person has not been healed, do not go through and label them with all the possible reasons as to why. Instead remind them of God's unceasing love for them displayed on the cross. This alone, not their healing, is the greatest demonstration of love in all history. Encourage them to respond for prayer again in the future. Praying for divine healing is concerned about the person and not just with whether or not they are healed of their condition. They must know that you love them and that God loves them. Offer the person words of compassion and comfort for they may be feeling frustrated. Encourage them to continue to seek God in prayer themselves. In many instances healing takes place over time.

While divine healing isn't guaranteed to us in this life, what is certain is the part we are to play. When it comes to divine healing we are to pray, "Your Kingdom come," and then put our trust and faith in Jesus' grace, sovereignty and lordship. Regardless of whether or not healing comes to someone in the now does not change the status of that person's position in the Kingdom as a son or daughter, loved by God. Nor does it change

the hope of guaranteed wholeness that will eventuate in the coming age. We do not have a right to label any reason why, or why not, someone is healed, nor to presume that unless healing comes there is something wrong with the person's faith. Healing is always thanks only to God's grace and goodness.

The truth is we do not know why some are healed while others are not. That is not for us to decide. Our role is to be obedient. After all it's obedience to the word of God that is our primary reason for praying for divine healing. I still go on praying for God's Kingdom to come in the lives of my non-believing friends, for their hearts to be drawn closer to Jesus and for them to enter into a personal relationship with Him, even though I may not necessarily see evidence of much change from day to day. It is the same with healing. Even if I see no one healed as a direct result of my prayers, I will continue to step out and pray, for I believe that is what Jesus modelled for us. I can guarantee though, more people will experience the grace of God in the form of divine healing if we pray for them than if we choose not to. If one person's life in one hundred is changed as a result of our prayer, then God's Kingdom has broken into our present and it will have been so worth it. That person will experience greater wholeness and have an amazing testimony of God's grace. In my experience, though, if we faithfully pray for healing we will see the Kingdom advanced far more regularly than that! I encourage you to step out and pursue God's leading in this way as part of a holistic approach to ministry.

The main pointers:

- Divine healing comes from God and is a demonstration of his grace available thanks only to the atoning work of Jesus. It is also a gift of the Spirit.
- We have authority to pray for the sick.
- It can be normative for followers of Jesus to pray for healing. Jesus qualifies us to do so.
- Divine healing contributes to the process of making us whole and demonstrates God's loving kindness.
- Praying for healing fits into the same prayer ministry model discussed in chapter 3.

Interview > Invite > Wait > Respond > Direction.

- Providing post prayer direction is especially important when praying for healing.
- We pray for the sick out of obedience to Christ, motivated by love and mercy.