

The Gift of Healing

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. Good to see you. As we continue our series on the gifts that God gives us, this morning we come to the gift of healing, which I thought was ironic because I haven't been well over the weekend, but here I am by the strength of God, so that's great. The gift of healing is one of the most extraordinary and dynamic gifts of God that we can experience, yet strangely, it's one of the most controversial, misused, misunderstood, and if not handled well, one of the most damaging of the gifts, unless we use it as directed. And sadly, I've known this scripture to be used in false teaching, yet we have to realize that God wants to heal, longs to heal, but not always on our terms. And I think to paraphrase it with the beginning really helps, because often we come to healing with that dangerous, because it can often lead to feelings of guilt and disillusionment when prayer isn't answered in the ways we have expected in our own understanding or thought process. This often manifests itself in that implication is that the suffering Christian didn't quite believe enough, or maybe is hiding some sort of sin. These misunderstandings about faith and healing have frankly destroyed some believers. We need to come with this really in the grace of God, because this morning we will hardly scratch the surface of this, and in your home groups I think,

I hope that you'll go much deeper into this as you think about this whole thing about healing, healing, because healing always comes from God at his discretion. You know, and I'm sorry if that disappoints us, because our ways aren't necessarily God's ways. And I think we need to remember that, because as evangelicals we can get lost in that great idea, of course it is, that God loves us so much, yet the danger is we can often treat him like a slot machine, where we put the prayer in and we expect it immediately delivered in the way we expect it, and the way in which we have expected him to answer our prayer in that particular moment. And let's not get blinkered on this, because it's not just about physical healing. It's about healing, physical healing, that's it. We're going to come back to that later. I think we need to have a reality check, really, when we come to think about healing prayer and God's gift of healing. Because the fact is, and I'm sure we all know that, that one day we will all breathe our last, we will die and we will go home to be with the Lord. That is the reality of life.

At some stage, whether that is sudden, after a long, debilitating, painful illness, after a tragic accident, sadly at whatever age, death can't be hidden away. It's a reality, it's a reality that we are called as human beings to encounter. Yet we know that in confidence, death for all of us is not the end. Jesus is our hope. Jesus is our savior. Did I hear a spontaneous amen? Yes, I did. Well done. And this thing that he died and rose again to save us, he has gone before us to prepare a place for us with him. We believe in trust in the saving power of the cross and resurrection. Jesus said, which is easiest to say, your sins are forgiven or say, rise up and walk? The crowd wanted Jesus' healing power, but they didn't want the healer himself. It's an interesting point, isn't it? Perhaps nothing changes. People want the miracles, but not the cost of following Jesus. People need Jesus as their savior, acknowledging all that he did for them and for us personally on the cross. And not just a few miracles that get lost, because sadly, we see so many miracles day in and day out in people's lives, lives. And sadly, it's all put down to coincidence. God is there day in, day out, healing, working, doing all that he does, and we don't acknowledge it. And yet for some people in our communion later, we will proclaim Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will... Amen. Yet death happens. And we experience the pain of that deeply. Even Jesus wept when he encountered the death of his friend. Our loved ones will die, and that's painful, and I yo. Yet for some, that prayer for healing will be earthly death itself, that step into glory. My mum's prayer in her final weeks was to go home and be with dad. That's what she prayed. And she prayed it often, and so did I with her in the final stages of her life.

[5 : 53] God graciously answered her prayer. She was ready to go home. The final healing, as it is often referred to, especially if you've suffered long and you're in great pain. We seek the gifts given by God to use for his purposes, for his glory, and not claiming it for ourselves. It's a tough subject. John Wimber said, the ability to hear what God is saying, to see what God is doing, and to move in the realm of the miraculous comes as an individual develops the same intimacy with and dependence upon the Father.

How did Jesus do what he did? The answer is, was found in his relationship with the Father. How will we do greater works than these, which Jesus promised, by discovering the same relationship of intimacy, simplicity, and obedience? It's a tough subject, people, but we've got to get to grips with it. We are called to pray, knowing that healing is possible, and it's God's gift to bestow that gift at particular moments and in time. We come faithful. We come expectant. It's not ours to demand, despite whatever teaching we may have had. And, you know, I've heard it maybe as you have. You know, I demand this healing in Jesus' name. I demand it. You know, that grates with me. You know, yes, I pray in Jesus' name, but who am I to demand in his grace and his love? It is within God's gift that we come open and we pray. We pray in the confidence we know. We come expectant of all that he is in the power of the Holy Spirit, but who am I to demand? I'm not sure that's helpful, and frankly, when I hear it prayed, it just sounds a little bit rude. We are called to pray and the power of him who knows through his own pain and sacrifice. Let's knock another ball out of the court too, which I think is really helpful on a morning like this. This is not a faith competition.

You know, I've picked up the pieces of people who were told that they weren't healed because they didn't have enough faith. That is dangerous and that is damaging. You know, faith, we are told, can be as small as a mustard seed. In James 5, we are told it's a prayer offered in faith. We come with faith. You know, we offer prayer for healing in faith, whether that's for ourselves or whether we offer that for others seeking God's healing at that time. And so often we focus on physical healing, yet there is so much more to the gifts of healing. It changes lives when you see it and you experience it in other people. I don't know whether you've experienced that. When I've seen that in the lives of other people, it encourages me and empowers me. Healing always comes from God at his discretion. He offers an invitation to dive deeply into faith with honesty and submission, trusting him whatever the outcome. God's plans are perfect.

One of my favourite films is an old film. It's from 1999. It was called Leap of Faith and it was with Steve Martin. It was one of the few films that he made which wasn't a comedy and in this he plays a fake faith healer in America. It's where the circus comes to town, full of people who are already prompted and primed to step forward and say they've been healed. And the break-off is that he takes a lot of money from people in the process. Boyd arrives, a young boy who at one of these fake healing rallies is actually drawn forward by the power of the Holy Spirit seeking healing. And Boyd isn't part of their charade at all.

[10 : 36] And he comes forward to the anger and the astonishment of Steve Martin and all his cronies because they believe he's going to show them up for who they are. Martin is confronted with the experience of a true healing. He's never experienced that before. For him it's been all smoke and mirrors and it's all been fake.

And quite frankly he's devastated and he's convicted. And the following conversation goes where Boyd comes to him afterwards as we'll see and asks him and says but you healed me. You healed me.

But the fake healer has to say that actually it's not me and points to God. It all points to God. He can't continue in his healing, in his ministry that he continued, that he's this fake. He leaves because he's seen the genuine article. He's seen God at work.

Healing comes in all sorts of areas of our lives. It's about healing relationships. It's about healing misplaced pride. It's about healing of the past, sins forgiven, healing injustice, healing of mistrust, healing of deceit, healing of prejudice and preference, healing from greed, addictions, hate, resentment. You list it. You can pray for it and the Lord can heal it.

Yet so often I've seen Christians, long-standing Christians, who have received blessings throughout their life, who have walked away from God and have walked away from the family of Christ because one prayer, albeit huge, one prayer wasn't answered in the way they expected or wanted.

[12 : 39] You know, we need to trust God in all things. Even in our disappointments, we seek earnestly the gifts of the Spirit. Earnestly seek them, even in our disappointments. Here's one I heard seriously that damaged a church and I knew that so well. Wasn't one that I was part of, but a

colleague was. There was a lady whose husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer and he was dying. Both were committed Christians and the local church prayed for him. The elders of the church were adamant that he would be healed. The church gathered, the church prayed, the man died.

The pastor sadly seemed really disillusioned. Seed saw it partly as a failure on his part that prayer hadn't worked and he avoided the man's wife and it was never explained to the church. There was no communication. People didn't talk about it. That was it. It was shoved under the carpet and that was gone. Nobody actually grappled with this idea of what they saw was unanswered prayer.

But one day the pastor bumped into the man's wife in Waitrose and almost apologetically he said to her, because frankly he'd been avoiding her, and said, I'm really sorry your husband wasn't healed. What do you mean, she said? He wasn't healed. He was completely healed. Totally. The pastor looked really bewildered and she said, I'm really sorry to say, but my husband was one of the most angry, vociferous and vengeful people. She said, I'm really sorry to tell you that, but all you saw was his Sunday face. Under the surface was simmering throughout our married life of upsetting business partners, saying hateful things to our children, yet always managing to put on his Sunday face just so that he could come to church and put on this persona. He even fooled you, pastor. Yet when he was dying, we all prayed that he would be healed. And in the last few months of his life, he was. He reconciled himself to everyone who he had crossed and he had upset down the years, even with our own children. And most importantly, he reconciled himself with God.

[15 : 34] We had the most wonderful marriage in the last few months of our life. So please don't apologize. Yes, my husband died, but he was completely healed. His soul was restored.

Isn't it interesting how we go to the 23rd Psalm that we pray when we're praying for healing? He restores my soul. I've prayed with people as you have. And often I'm not really sure what I'm praying for for healing. And neither should we be. The gifts that we can be given in any setting, at any time, come Holy Spirit. Bestow the gifts you want to use in us and through us.

And allow the Lord to do what the Lord wants to do in healing. We know because there is often an underlying issue that hasn't been named that the Lord wants to address. You know, we ask the Holy Spirit to come as healer, as comforter, to give wisdom and discernment. So to sum it up today, spiritual healing is not a talent or a magic power you acquire.

To everyone who has the Spirit, all believers, gifts are given as directed by God. The outcome is also determined by God. Also, earnestly seek the gifts. Be humble and courageous.

And as we heard in our confession this morning, don't miss the opportunities. Don't miss the opportunities to pray with people and seek what the Lord wants to do. Seek God's will as you pray for others. Don't as often as is so easy to be done is to be pressured by emotion into one particular area because perhaps God wants to do something else in that time of healing as we heard in our story.

[17 : 46] And invite the Holy Spirit to come as you say, not my will, but yours. Because I remember somebody us praying that as well. Not my will, but yours. Model honest faith in the midst of suffering.

This often leads others into a healing relationship with God. And before we pray for healing in others, seek the healing in our own life. As one person said, if the pipe is blocked, how can the Spirit flow freely?

And finally, many don't realize that they are sick and in need of a saviour for their sin. Seek healing for them, pray earnestly for them, and don't resist the gifts. So, Jesus uses prayerful opportunities to make an audacious point about who he is and why he came, to bring about better healing. And through the gift of healing, he also demonstrates the mercy and love which continue to attract many people to him through us today. And which Christians seek to emulate. And I hope we will, as we do that in faith, as we seek to grow his kingdom. If you're hazy on any of this, and it's a tough subject, there's an alpha course just after Easter, and we'd love you to sign up. Let's pray.

As we seek healing and to be open to the power of your Holy Spirit, Lord, would you come as we seek your healing?

Father God, we welcome you into each and every area of our life to heal and to seek healing. We ask not because we should, but in the power of the cross that we may. And we trust in your purposes and your presence in our life.

[20 : 12] And Father, for those that are seeking your healing power today, Lord, would you come and meet us in that place? Would you come and heal? Would you come and heal past issues? Would you come and bring your call to forgive, to free us and heal us from resentment, anger, hate?

And the Holy Spirit? Would you come and heal and restore that which those words have bound us for to so many years, that you have come to free us in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen.