

Jesus Heals. Or Does He?

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This image is inspired by a photograph taken by the author, Jos van den Hoek, at Loch Sport, Victoria, Australia 2015. The two ladies are Jennifer van den Hoek and Marlene Parsons. The image is a tribute to Marlene Parsons.

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The major writing project subject is individually chosen by the Trinity student. I have decided to write about this subject following many years of searching, and earnest contemplation. The contents of this book also reflect and continue the previously published titles, *Something's On The Boil; A Discovery Of Prayer And Healing*, and *Don't Be Afraid Just Believe*.

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Special thanks,

To Jennifer, my wife. Thank you for your love, tolerance, patience and encouragement.

To Trinity Bible College and Theological Seminary. Your requirements in training Christians to think is exemplary.

To my daughter, Jasmine van den Hoek for taking so much time to discuss the much-needed editing and formatting in preparing this material.

A note to the reader:

I have been struggling with the issue of healing from a Christian perspective for years. This goes all the way back to my teenage years when a good friend passed away from a long struggle with cancer. The circumstances surrounding his life and my struggles are published in my first book: *Something's On The Boil; a Discovery Of Prayer And Healing*. Following publication, I thought I was finished but after pursuing healing further I wrote my second book: *Don't Be Afraid – Just Believe*. This second book has been withheld from publishing for almost a decade as I continued to wrestle with all the issues surrounding health and healing. Doubt, disbelief, pain and despair but to name a few. All the while friends, relatives, patients and other loved ones have continued to fall by the wayside often after painful struggles with illness.

This book follows a period where I have studied both Christian attitudes and beliefs as well as medical perspectives about faith, religion and healing. This book views healing in a new light. Jesus remains “the light of the world” (John 8:12).

You may find that what you have expected to read including many of the 'usual' texts on healing used by many modern authors are absent from this work. This is done purposefully. Christian bookstores abound with books on Christian healing. Few however, critique healing results, false doctrines or false theologies. This work is different in that it examines modern medical research as a tool by which to gauge Christian healing claims. That is to both validate and to refute them. Modern research is beginning to show evidence that religion and or spirituality has some health benefits. This is surprising from the point of view that medicine has distanced itself from religion in favor of scientific evidence and practice.

Research cannot replace theology but it can perhaps validate theology in terms of healing. Theological ideas or interpretations may be bent to suit a listener's ears and yet prove to be incorrect. This work is not an attempt to amplify or validate a Christian theology of healing but rather to hold it accountable in order to prevent the pain, despair and disappointments, often associated with enthusiastic claims of healing. This is not something to be afraid of but rather embrace. Jesus Himself instructed validation of healing.

Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." ¹

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Introduction:

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” (Matthew 4:23)

Jesus heals. Or does He? In a religious or spiritual context, news that Jesus heals is good news. However, the context of physical healing in the Christian church, or body of Christ, is so diverse that instead of healing, the news that Jesus heals can also be devastating. There are innumerable people who claim to have been healed in Jesus name.²

There are also many false and unsubstantiated claims.³ There are even legal cases where Christians with good intent have caused bodily harm and even death by instigating inappropriate healing methods.⁴ Radical faith in Jesus has also caused preventable deaths when Christians have refused readily available medical care or purposely neglected common safety precautions.^{5, 3.} From the verse below we learn that radical preaching is nothing new.

“Nevertheless, we know that during the imprisonment when Paul wrote Philippians, some Christians preached in such a way as to make things harder for him (Phil. 1:15). They probably did so by emphasizing the radical, revolutionary dimension to his preaching, the kinds of things that got him into trouble with political authorities.”⁶

There is no standard of care for healing in the Christian church as a whole.⁷ “Guidelines are needed to set recognizable and acceptable standards of conduct and to develop a common understanding of good practice; therefore, they should be written for all people, lay and ordained, who are involved.”⁸

“Across the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Union and the Orthodox Churches, there is no overall coordinating body or formal linking of networks for advisors, clergy and laity involved in the healing ministry.”⁹ This is only a shortlist or an insight into how diverse the healing ministry can be within the church as a whole.

Within the body of Christ today there exists two extremes or opposite poles. One that assumes the spiritual gifts have ceased, (Cessationism) thus, there is no 'gift of healing'. At the same end of the spectrum are Christians who simply do not believe that God is active in healing in any beneficial way. How many of us have also encountered angry Christians who hold God responsible for not saving their loved ones who have died, or who have suffered extreme and insufferable circumstances of poor health?

“Cessationism is the position within Christianity that the Charismatic Spiritual gifts (speaking in tongues, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, interpretation of tongues, etc.) ceased with the closing of the Canon of scripture and/or the death of the last apostle.”¹⁰

The opposite pole, or extreme, also exists. There are Christians who may be regarded as healing 'crusaders'. Those who promote Jesus as healer with supremacy over all diseases. Unfortunately, this end of the spectrum also leaves many returning home in pain and unhealed, sometimes feeling rejected by God, unloved by Jesus, or angry enough to give up on faith. They may give up on faith for healing but also faith in Jesus Christ because they may have prayed, fasted, been anointed, confessed their sins and studied their Bibles only to continue suffering and perhaps even more so than before.

“From time to time evangelistic rallies are organized by Christian groups with publicity about ‘healing miracles’. Some Christian doctors have interviewed those who were told when they attended such rallies they had been healed and failed to discover medical evidence for it. From this and other evidence we have seen, we seem to be moving towards the view that, whatever happened in the past, today God does not normally work through that which can be defined as miraculous,”¹¹ says the Church of England’s Archbishops Church Council. Thus, although there are Biblical guidelines of healing based on Scripture and precedent, there is no agreeable doctrine that all Christians adhere to.¹²

"Jesus heals" is a statement of faith. Is it the same to say "Jesus heals" is a statement of fact? Although similar, they are quite different. To support the argument that "Jesus heals" is a statement of fact, there must be evidence of that fact. Where can this evidence be found? Is it found in the convinced Christian’s heart? Is it found in the mind of the healed Christian? Is it found in Scripture? Is it found in the personality or character of Jesus Christ? Is it found in a medical blood test, an M.R.I. scan, a neurological test, or in a petri dish? Is it found by witness to that fact? All of these parameters are examples Christians may overlook, ignore or cast aside as insignificant evidence against the premise that Jesus heals today.

Against the folly of the apparent unfounded Christian beliefs are the medical facts, patient records, and natural progression or attributes of diseases or other medical conditions. A simple example is whooping cough (Pertussis). If an affected child were infected with Pertussis and became progressively ill, a parent might be desperate enough to call on God for help. Once infected, the disease has to run its course. If a parent were to take their child to the church or sacred site for healing what could one expect?

Secondly, if that child was to respond positively to a cry out for God to help and be instantly healed, would we be reasonable in attributing that healing to God? Within reasonable boundaries, "yes" would be a fair answer¹³. What if information later came to hand that the child was brought to God on the ninety-ninth day of his illness. Of course, we may answer somewhat differently and philosophize about the circumstances, to be fair, but why is day ninety-nine important? It is important because the Chinese call Pertussis the "one-hundred-day cough" ^{14, 15}. Did God heal the child? Is there reasonable doubt?

Even though we have two opposing views about the question whether or not Jesus heals today, we have to allow for both views within the Christian faith. Both cases could be considered, to some extent, to be correct. What's more is that the church has to be more responsible in its claims because it has, in some cases, brought severe damage to the faith and the image of Christ through the eyes of those with unfulfilled promises and declarations of healing.^{16,17}

"Jesus heals" is indeed a wonderful statement. The church as a whole should embrace and celebrate the entirety of what it means to say "Jesus heals". In doing so, it should also accept that there comes a responsibility to lift up that claim to the glory of God, defend it and respect it, but also to guard it from abuse. When healing comes from God, it is a beautiful thing. When we misconstrue what belongs to God and His sovereignty, we deface the beauty of God's works. Imagine the house of God as a beautiful palace. Who would allow others to defile its beauty with graffiti? The church should know better.

How then is the church to defend the healing faith? Faith is not like standardized medical care. The medical model claims to be a scientific model, although the science is not necessarily

complete. The starting point of defending the statement, "Jesus heals" has traditionally been to refer to Biblical texts to support a spiritual premise or truth. However, another starting point may be to agree with the Statement that Jesus does not heal and work backwards from there. If we can agree that reasonable doubt exists against the view that Jesus heals, then we can also agree that there can be reasonable doubt against the point of view that He does not. In this way what is admitted or 'confessed' first is what we do not know about certain things. From there we have a better starting point to examine the facts and then gather evidence which may appear credible rather than the reverse.

Christians all over the world may be encouraged by saying "Jesus heals". This gives them hope when there may otherwise be none. This gives them strength when they are exhausted. This gives them rest and peace in the full sense of the words. This gives the assurance that God's will be done. This binds them together, to care for each other and to take pride in being active in the process of acting upon God's word and being involved in healing the sick. 'Jesus heals' is not only good news for Christians, it is a validation of the Christian premise that Jesus is alive and He, by way of The Holy Spirit, is actively engaged in the daily events of every believer's life. The following pages search for a balance between reason and doubt in search of reasonable evidence to the fact that Jesus heals today.

Definition of terms:

Christian:

Christian or Christianity refers to the Christian faith with the confession of Jesus Christ as the son of God. Christianity includes all the denominations. Christianity includes the acceptance and understanding of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Church:

The church refers to the body of Christ as a whole in the broadest sense of the word including all the formal denominations and independent churches who proclaim Jesus Christ as the son of God.

Healing:

Healing in the terms of this paper generally refers to physical healing. That is to say that objective pathologies are reversed to normal. It does not mean to simply feel better, to think one is better or to claim healing where it has not objectively occurred. Healing may include the expectation that some illnesses may regress in time in accordance with the normal progression of disease.

Medical:

Medical refers to both the medical profession as a whole but may also include a wider definition to include alternative therapies or allied health professions. The medical profession is more specific to limit the definition to medical professionals. In some instances, medical may also refer to some degree of professional training. Although modern medical treatment is the most prominent form of healthcare available in the western world it has its limits, risks and mistakes. Medical care is far from perfect and yet it is essential.

Religion:

Religion refers primarily to the larger world religions as being an organized faith.

Spirituality:

Spirituality is a loose term with no specific focus. In terms used by Dr. H. Koenig, Spirituality, in terms of research, can mean 'almost anything'. Spirituality would thus include many of today's 'new age' concepts and philosophies.

Research:

When using research to validate a taken position on something it should be remembered that research is not infallible. Research may be manipulated or even withheld from publication particularly when it demonstrates negative outcomes. In broad terms, research claims and conclusions in this study are used to demonstrate a wider scope of thinking. Christians sometimes need to reconcile hard facts with their theology or doctrine. Medicine also needs to understand that research may never prove to be conclusive in spiritual or religious realms. God is not limited to the research findings of man.

Chapter 1: Jesus heals. Or does He?

“In NT times Greek medicine had a dominant influence in the Mediterranean world. Although the practice of medicine was still in a primitive state, Hippocrates and other Greek physicians of this day laid the basis for modern medicine by rejecting magical explanations of diseases and through careful observation attempted to give a rational basis for medical treatment.”¹⁸

Most Christians agree that Jesus of Nazareth healed the sick. In fact, we believe that God has healed the sick in the Old Testament as well as in The New Testament. Why do we believe it? The most obvious answer is because it is in the Bible as scripture and as such we can trust God and His word. Even though we do not have all the details, we have learned to trust God’s word. We are not necessarily medical scholars, nor do we have to be to believe that Jesus healed the sick. We believe that God has a sovereignty beyond what we can understand, beyond medical and scientific knowledge, and beyond any of our own comprehensions.

“Though man is made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27), yet the nature of God in every way infinitely transcends that of man. Both the thoughts and the acts of God surpass man’s understanding. Men find it hard to pardon those who have offended them; God can pardon, and ‘pardon abundantly.’”¹⁹

In the current, predominantly secular, medical model, God plays no role nor is the person considered to have a spiritual part. The person is only considered to be a physical being with a mental component.

“The present clinical, psycho/social model used in medicine typically does not acknowledge spirituality as a factor in the etiology and symptomatology of illness, sickness, and disease. The patient is seen primarily as a secular human being and not as a spiritual human being.”²⁰

Historically, however, medical treatment has not always ignored the spiritual. “Following her martyrdom, Apollonia was made a saint by the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Coptic Christian churches. She was made the *patron saint* of tooth problems by the Catholic church, and medieval sufferers of toothache were often advised to address a well-known prayer to her. Importantly, historical research has shown that this advice was dispensed by physicians—showing that medical practice in this period involved a combination of natural remedies and spiritual advice.”²¹

Again, if God plays no role in medicine today, and the spiritual component is absent, how then can God play any role within the medical model of healthcare? How can God be credited with healing the sick? How can a person appeal to God if the patient himself is not considered to have a spiritual component? What is a Christian doctor to do?

“While the supernatural or spiritual origin of disease may no longer be widely accepted, medicine is always part of the belief systems of specific cultures and time periods, and is only one of many linked ways in which people encounter and explain disease.”²²

It follows then that, from a Christian point of view, the medical model is guilty of neglecting the whole person that is defined as a combination of both the physical and the spiritual aspects of the person. The following pages will demonstrate that by ignoring the spiritual aspect of man, medicine fails to address the whole person and as such may be neglecting important aspects of healing. How

then have many Christians come so far to accept the medical model of healing as God's method of healing today?^{23,24}

In an attempt to demonstrate that Jesus heals, Christians have to move away from a blind faith model where it is considered incorrect to, at the very least, have questions. Questions do not necessarily attack faith, rather they strengthen it. Apologetics is a Christian attempt to defend the faith with both reason and theology.

“Apologetists. The name given to the Christian writers who (c. 120–220) first addressed themselves to the task of making a reasoned defence and recommendation of their faith to outsiders. They include Aristides, Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, Minucius Felix, and Tertullian. They belonged to the period when Christianity was first making converts among the educated classes, and was also in conflict with the State over its very right to exist. Their objective was to gain a fair hearing for Christianity, to dispel popular slanders and misunderstandings, and sometimes to show that Christians were loyal subjects, and to provide for this purpose some account of Christian belief and practice.”²⁵

Anyone who has spent any time pondering the question of God's involvement in healing today will have encountered the question of faith. Christian extremism has been guilty of claiming that God's healing has on occasions not occurred because of one's lack of faith.

“Recently I had knee-replacement surgery. I was surprised that my brothers and sisters in Christ rebuked me for having this operation because I didn't rely solely on prayer and intercession for my healing.”²⁶

How does one research the physical or medical model to find evidence that Jesus heals? Firstly, one has to consider the possibility that medicine does not have all the answers. One also has to consider that medicine has its own limits in research. Even though modern medicine is far more advanced than it was a decade or even a century ago, one would think that it will also have its limits in the future. Even while developing a slightly more tolerant approach to spiritual issues, medicine cannot control all of what we can call 'man'. Secondly, one has to accept that there may be no satisfying answers, and thirdly, one has to be aware that one of the most common research findings is that often more research is needed to support their claims.²⁷ Fourthly, one must understand that when research into faith and spiritual matters is conducted with public or government funds it cannot exclude other religions. Thus, modern research may fall under labels such as "religious" or "spiritual", where God may be any God, and faith may be any faith.

How does Christianity or the church find evidence that Jesus heals? Although the church has a historical record in the Bible coupled with a spiritual witness²⁸, the individual is left to weigh its truths.

"We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:32)

Evidence extrinsic to the Bible commonly includes testimony of people claiming to have experienced divine healing, beatification in the Catholic church, spontaneous reports of healings through the ages but also medical reports or declarations of miraculous recoveries by certain individuals.

"When a patient is extremely ill and/or dying, and the family expects a miraculous recovery, this situation can be very challenging to physicians, particularly when there is

certainty that the miracle will occur (from the patient's point of view) through divine intervention. A practical approach is therefore provided to clinicians for engaging families that anticipate the miraculous healing of a sick patient. This strategy involves exploring the meaning and significance of a miracle, providing a balanced, non-argumentative response and negotiation of patient-centered compromises, while conveying respect for patient's spirituality and practicing good medicine. Such an approach, tailored to the specifics of each family, can be effective in helping a family come to a place of acceptance about the impending death of their loved one."²⁹

The following chapters will attempt to show that there exists a realm of knowledge and an aspect of faith that may contribute, and possibly be responsible for, a part of health and healing which we as yet do not fully understand.

Chapter 2: Health

Who are the sick? The obvious answer is, those who are suffering from ill health. Contrary to the medical aspect of health which ignores the spiritual, medicine does consider mental health. Christianity has many Biblical examples of ill health including the physical and mental but also spiritual, which is often characterized as the demonic.

Health is defined by the *Dictionary of Bible Themes* as “a state of physical and spiritual well-being, which Scripture declares to be possible only through faith in Jesus Christ.”³⁰

*“Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin.”*³¹

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”³² Interestingly, the WHO recognizes mental and social wellbeing but it does not state the ‘spiritual’. The Christian definition of health includes the spiritual and it also recognizes the essential care of the physical body.

*“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.”*³³

Although both definitions of health include the body and mind, only the Christian definition includes the spiritual aspect of health because it is essential to our being. In John’s letter, he opens with a rather friendly and familiar statement linking the whole person including the soul with health. He writes: