



Basileia

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Some Missing Links in Healing

Dean R. Merrill

I believe in divine healing. The truth of the matter is, I believe in it more than I understand it. I was talking with a pastor not long ago, a seasoned man now in his seventies who has pioneered six different churches, who said, "When people ask me why the Lord sometimes doesn't answer prayer I always say, 'Well, now, you have to remember I'm in sales, not in management.' " That's the way I feel sometimes. I'm in sales for divine healing, but I'm not in management, high enough to understand all I see happening or not happening.

I have seen God answer my prayers for healing, and I have seen God choose **not** to answer them. I remember the summer I turned thirteen, and a certain motel room on North Broadway in Wichita, where we had stopped for the night while moving. In those years my father's stomach was likely to erupt in periods of severe pain and abdominal pressure, during which all normal family activity came to a halt. Sometime after midnight I awoke because the bathroom light was on. I heard a low moaning—and my heart sank. Lying on my bed, I began to plead silently, *Please Lord, heal my dad...* A few moments later I fell asleep.

When I awoke, the sun was streaming through the window, the room was quiet, and both my parents were sleeping peacefully. I remember the surge of excitement: "This really works!" God had answered **my** prayer for healing—not a prayer I had prayed with others. The Lord had heard **me**, and the experience was a tremendous faith-builder.

That was thirty years ago. As an adult, I have prayed for the last twenty years for my father to be released from Parkinson's disease, a crippling malady that forced him to leave the pastorate at age 58. Yet neither my prayers nor those of my family nor anyone else's prayers have stopped the advance of this disease.

As I said, I believe in healing more than I understand it.

Meanwhile, I have observed in the church a shift in attitude since the 1950s. In those days healing was hotly debated between Pentecostals and other Christians. It wasn't a very sophisticated argument: Does God heal or does He not? Today we have moved past that to a consensus among people of all theologies that says, "Yes, God does heal bodies...sometimes." Now we can move the discussion from **whether** to **when and whom** He heals.

Whose Need?

To do this, we must turn first to the Scriptures, which are, after all, the basis for our understanding of divine healing. The approach we will take is that of content analysis, a research technique used in communications. A content analysis study lists all occurrences of the item in question and draws conclusions based on those findings.¹ Table I records the results of a content analysis of healings recorded in the history of the early church, principally from the Acts of the Apostles. An interesting fact emerges in the fourth column when we note whether the people healed were believers or not. Eleven out of sixteen of these healings had to do with unbelievers whom God sovereignly healed through the ministry of one of His leaders.

Perhaps we have not paid adequate attention to those God would **most** like to heal, namely those who need to be shocked into a demonstration of the power of God. I cannot prove that. But it is interesting that in 70 percent of the recorded cases, from the beggar at the Beautiful Gate to

¹To give a secular example: several years ago the *Chicago Sun-Times* was acquired by sensationalist publisher Rupert Murdoch. Some students at Northwestern University, applying a content analysis approach to the *Sun-Times*, discovered that during the first three months of Murdoch's ownership coverage of rape went up 93 percent, even though actual reported rape **declined** in the Chicago area during that period.

Aeneas, to the man at Lystra, to Publius' father, the people healed were not believers at the time. They were pagans whom God touched, shocking them and often bringing them into the kingdom through their healing.

Yes, God did heal Dorcas, Eutychus, Paul (of snakebite), and Epaphroditus. It is appropriate that believers seek the Lord for healing. James 5:14 says, "Is any one of you sick? He should call for the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord" (NIV). And we continue to follow this Scriptural instruction.

But the major emphasis in the Bible seems to be upon healing those who do not know the Lord.

This is true even in the Old Testament (see Table II). Although the Old Testament focuses on God's dealings with His chosen people, four times out of nine He administered healing to people who were obviously unbelievers. Some were even Gentiles (Naaman the Syrian and the widow at Zarephath). Yet they received the benefits of healing through the Lord's messenger.

When was the last time you or I, as Christian leaders, prayed for the healing of a non-Christian? It seems I pray only for people who know the Lord: my family, people in my church, people I work with in ministry. And that's appropriate, since James 5 invites us to pray for those people. But who really needs to see the power of God? Certainly, people who do not yet know Him.

Jerry Cook, Foursquare pastor in the Northwest, relates an amazing story in his book *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness*:

A young woman named Jackie, a fairly new Christian, walked into a major discount store in Portland. As she passed through the prescription area she noticed a woman leaning on the counter, obviously very sick. Jackie felt an impulse to stop and pray with the woman, but she did what 90 per cent of us would do and said to herself, "No, she would think I'm nuts."

Jackie did her shopping and on the way out passed the prescription counter again. The woman was now seated in a chair, still obviously very ill. And again Jackie was impressed, "Go, talk to her, pray with her."

Jackie started on out the door, but she just couldn't go. So she resigned herself to become the classic fool for Jesus. She went over, sat down beside the sick woman, took her by the hand and said, "I can see that you're quite sick and I don't want you to think I'm imposing, but I'm a Christian. Would you mind if I prayed for you?"

The woman began to weep. She said, "I've been sick for so long."

Jackie just held her hand and with eyes open said, "Lord Jesus, I know you love this lady, and I know you don't want her to be sick. Just because you love her, heal her and show her how much you care."

That was it. They exchanged phone numbers and Jackie went home.

The next day Jackie got a phone call from this woman asking her to come to the woman's house. Jackie went. The woman's husband had stayed home from work in order to meet Jackie. The prescription the woman got the day before was unopened on the kitchen table. The woman and her husband were both standing there weeping.

The woman said, "When I came home I went to bed

and slept all night. You know, I haven't slept all night for years." With her particular sickness she slept only for short periods and had to get up to take medication. Her husband thought she had died. He came in and awakened her to ask if she was OK. She said that she felt great.

He said, "Well, you haven't taken your medicine."

She said, "I know it, but I slept all night."

She then told her husband what happened at the shopping center. So he wanted to meet Jackie.

The people knew practically nothing about the gospel. Jackie explained to them the love of Jesus, how they could be free from their sin, how Jesus wants people well not only physically but on the inside. They both trusted in Jesus Christ.²

Cook then goes on to say:

I believe Jackie's experience was an example of the gift of healing operating in the marketplace (literally, since it was at a shopping center). The gifts of the Spirit, as I understand them, are God's means of getting to men and meeting their needs through believers.

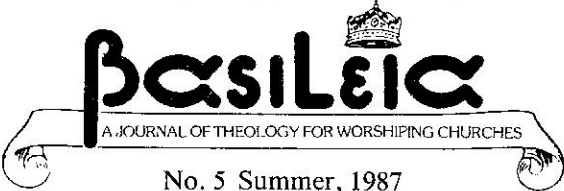
Here he goes out on a limb:

I do not believe that spiritual gifts were meant primarily for the sanctuary. Some of them can operate there, that's fine. But many of them were primarily designed for the street.³

A few years ago an article in *Commonlife* by Steve Nicholson, one of the pastors of Christ Church of the North Shore in Evanston, Ill., described their door-to-door calling teams. These are not standard "evangelism" teams but people who go from home to home in the community asking if anyone is ill and would be willing to have them come in and pray for healing. One group called on a high school

²Jerry Cook, *Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979), pp. 55-56.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.



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Basileia solicits well-written and pertinent articles of theological concern from readers sympathetic with our general purpose and philosophy. Articles accepted for publication are received on a voluntary basis.

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Table 1: Healings in the Early Church

Reference	Person(s)	Affliction	Believer?
Acts 3:1-10	Beggar at Beautiful Gate	Congenital Paralysis	No
Acts 5:12, 15	Crowds of "the people"	Various	No
Acts 6:8	"The people"	Various	No
Acts 8:6-7	Samaritans	Demons/paralysis/etc.	No
Acts 9:17-18	Saul of Tarsus	Blindness	Not yet?
Acts 9:32-35	Aeneas	Paralysis	No
Acts 9:36-42	Dorcas	Unknown, but fatal	Yes
Acts 14:3	People at Iconium	Various	No
Acts 14:8-10	Man at Lystra	Congenital paralysis	No
Acts 16:16-18	Fortunetellers' slave girl	Demon possession	No
Acts 19:11-12	People at Ephesus	Various, incl. demons	Unknown
Acts 20:7-12	Eutychus	Accident	Yes
Acts 28:3-6	Paul	Snakebite	Yes
Acts 28:7-8	Publius' father	Fever/dysentery	No
Acts 28:9	Other Maltese	Various	No
Phil. 2:25-30	Epaphroditus	Unknown, but serious	Yes

Totals: 11 times with unbelievers, 4 with believers, 1 unknown; 8 males, 2 females, 6 groups.

student with severe eye problems, unable to read without large print and heavy glasses. When they asked if they could pray for her, she said, "If you want." They prayed for a few minutes, laying their hands on her eyes, and then asked if she felt anything. She said she felt a slight warmth. The visitors prayed again, and after a few minutes she said, "It's not blurry any more!" They produced a Bible with small print, and the student read it without glasses. Two months later she remained healed.⁴

Perhaps we need to learn more about this kind of ministry, because it may indicate that God is interested in the connection between healing and evangelism. We might see more results from our evangelistic efforts if we thought a little more seriously about that connection. The Scriptures indeed make the link between preaching, particularly the preaching of salvation, and healing. Take, for example, the words of Jesus in Mark 16:15-17: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe..." Jesus goes on to mention the ministry of healing: "They will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (NIV).

The same link appears in Hebrews 2:3-4, another familiar passage: "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

Recall also Jesus' consternation with the people in Bethsaida and Korazin, where He had done many mighty miracles (Mt. 11: 20-24). Why was He disappointed with them? Because the miracles had not generated repentance. The demonstration of God's power was intended to lead to repentance, but the people of these cities had hardened their hearts and failed to respond.

Maybe the old-time healing evangelists had something. **Healing evangelists!** If you are a veteran of the revival movement, you may remember trying to defend someone like Oral Roberts by saying, "It's not just healing. He gives an invitation, he calls for people to come forward and find

Christ as Savior. There's an appeal for people to find the Lord in those tent meetings."

But maybe the invitations were in reverse order! Perhaps it should have been the healing line first, the salvation call second. The practice today in some churches may make more sense: we pray for the sick somewhere in the middle of the service and then offer people the opportunity to commit their lives to Christ at the end of the service. Perhaps that demonstrates that God is alive and can heal people, so that they respond, "I want to know that God; I want that God's power in my life."

A first-term missionary in Zimbabwe, a very sincere and humble young man, reported recently, "You know, you can stand up in my country and preach the gospel and talk about Jesus Who will save you from sin...and a few people will respond. But I have to tell you from experience, the meeting does not come alive until the miracles start happening. Now, when the miracles begin, pagan people sit up and take notice and say, 'Wow! This is different! That God is for real!' And then you draw the net evangelistically."

Missionary pastor Dave Sumrall tells of asking the Lord for finances for a billboard campaign in Manila. The Lord

"We might see more results from our evangelistic efforts if we thought a little more seriously about the connection between healing and evangelism."

stopped him: "Miracles are my advertising. You don't need the billboards. Let the power of God be displayed, and then it will affect people who do not know Me."

Whose Faith?

Notice what we have done. By these observations, we have just shifted the whole burden of faith away from the sick person onto all of us involved in healing ministry. The unsaved person frequently does not understand that God can heal and really has no faith to exert.

Yet in the ministry of healing, as most of us observe or practice it, there is tremendous emphasis upon **the sick person's** having faith for God to heal him. Sometimes, in fact,

⁴Steve Nicholson, "Why Aren't More People Healed When Prayed For?" *Commonlife*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 24-28.

it almost turns into a game of “blame the victim”: if you are not healed, that’s your problem! There must be something wrong in your life, you weren’t exercising faith, you weren’t reaching out, you weren’t believing, or whatever.

People who have this concept like to preach about the Syro-Phoenician woman pressing Jesus to cast the demon from her daughter, even though He was reluctant. Or they uphold the example of the centurion who said, “Just speak the word, and my servant will be healed.”

On the other hand, how much faith was there in the man at the pool of Bethesda, who had been waiting thirty-eight years? How much faith was there in the son of the widow at Nain, lying in his coffin? How much faith was there in the beggar at the Beautiful Gate? He did not even have healing in mind; he was just hoping for another shekel in the tin cup. Yet Peter and John walked up to him and said, “We don’t have money, but what we have **we** will give to you!”

Is healing, after all, something we pray for, or is it something that is imparted? After studying the results of his

perhaps see the origin of some of the eccentricities of our time.

Yet Wigglesworth was a man of great power in ministry. However, strangely enough, he was not a great man of prayer. Hibbert writes:

Someone once asked Wigglesworth if he regularly spent long seasons in prayer. He answered, “I don’t very often spend more than half an hour in prayer at one time, but I never go more than a half hour without praying.” Prayer was his life. It was what he liked best of all. It was one of the secrets of his power.

When people received healing under Wigglesworth’s ministry it was not merely a result of God’s answering prayer because often, instead of saying a prayer for the needy, Wigglesworth spoke the Word to them.⁶

Hibbert then discusses the ministry of impartation, as illustrated by Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate. Wigglesworth ministered at this level—“such as I have give I to thee”:

Table II: Healings in the Old Testament

Reference	Person(s)	Affliction	Believer?
Num. 12:10-15	Miriam	Skin disease (“leprosy”)	Yes
Num. 21:4-9	Desert complainers	Snakebite	Yes
1 Kgs. 13:1-6	King Jeroboam I	Sudden paralysis of hand	No
1 Kgs. 17:17-24	Widow’s son at Zarephath	Unknown, but fatal	No (see v. 24)
2 Kgs. 4:17-37	Shunammite’s son	Sunstroke?	Yes
2 Kgs. 5:1-19	Naaman	Skin disease (“leprosy”)	No
2 Kgs. 13:20-21	Israelite soldier	Fatal battle wound	No
2 Kgs. 20:1-11; Isa. 38:1-8	King Hezekiah	Severe carbuncle	Yes
-Job 2:1-8	Job	“Painful sores”	Yes

Each of the first 3 is a reprieve from divine judgment.

Totals: 4 times with unbelievers, 5 with believers; 7 males, 1 female, 1 group.

church’s door-to-door teams, Steve Nicholson reported:

The main burden of faith and activity seems to rest on those praying for others’ healing. When healing failed, it was usually the healer’s lack of faith or power which was the chief problem. Furthermore, in the New Testament I could not find one instance where the disciples or the apostles prayed to God and then **God** healed. James 5:15, though not clear, is the closest. I call this the intercessory model of healing. Instead, Scripture almost always says that the disciples or apostles themselves did the healing in the authority and power of Christ. Frequently prayer is not mentioned at all.⁵

Our reaction might be: “This is scary! Do I really have the confidence to walk up and declare healing to somebody?”

Not long ago I read a book entitled *Smith Wigglesworth—The Secret of His Power*. Written by Albert Hibbert, an ardent admirer of Wigglesworth, it is not what I would call a great biography. But it does provide some interesting insights into this British preacher-evangelist of the early twentieth century.

I must tell you that Wigglesworth was not a great intellect, nor highly educated. The truth of the matter is that he dropped out of school at an early age, and his wife taught him to read and write at age 26. In some of the unpolished and even corny ways in which he functioned in ministry, we

He once told me a wonderful experience he had while staying in the home of a curate of the Church of England. He and the curate were sitting together talking after supper. No doubt the subject of their conversation was that the poor fellow had no legs. Artificial limbs in those days were unlike the sophisticated limbs of today.

Wigglesworth said to the man quite suddenly (which he often did when ministering in cases like this), “Go and get a new pair of shoes in the morning.”

The poor fellow thought it was some kind of joke. However, after Wigglesworth and the curate had retired to their respective rooms for the night, God said to the curate, “Do as My servant hath said.”

There was no more sleep for the man that night. He rose up early, went downtown, and stood waiting for the shoe shop to open. The manager eventually arrived and opened the shop for business. The curate went in and sat down.

Presently an assistant came and said, “Good morning, Sir. Can I help you?”

The man said, “Yes, would you get me a pair of shoes please?”

“Yes, Sir. Size and color?” The man hesitated. The assistant then saw his condition and said, “Sorry, Sir.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Albert Hibbert, *Smith Wigglesworth—The Secret of His Power* (Tulsa: Harrison House, 1982). pp. 41-42.

We can't help you."

"It is all right, young man. But I do want a pair of shoes. Size 8, color black."

The assistant went to get the requested shoes. A few minutes later he returned and handed them to the man. The man put one stump into a shoe, and instantly a foot and leg formed! Then the same thing happened with the other leg!

He walked out of that shop, not only with a new pair of shoes, but also with a new pair of legs.

Wigglesworth was not surprised. He had expected this result. He often made remarks like this: "As far as God is concerned, there is no difference between forming a limb and healing a broken bone."

The point is this: Wigglesworth did **not** pray for the man; he told him what to do and the man did it.⁷

This author alleges that fourteen different times in Wigglesworth's ministry people were raised from the dead.

When I finished reading this book, I could not help noting the contrast between the unsophisticated Wigglesworth's ministry and that of most of us with our Bible college or even seminary training. Personally, I have never come anywhere **close** to Wigglesworth's ministry of impartation. In my contemplation of this contrast, however, the Lord

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44.

reminded me of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:29. "Are all apostles?" No. "Are all prophets?" No. "Are all administrators?" No. "Are all workers of miracles?" No. "Do all speak with tongues? (*i.e.*, publicly in the congregation)?" No.

Obviously special ministry gifts operate within the body of Christ, and evidently Wigglesworth was one who had the ministry of impartation in healing. Let us encourage and seek that gift, understanding that we may be chosen to exercise it or we may not. If we lacked the ministry of a pastor in our local body, we would go before the Lord and petition Him to raise up someone to exercise that gift. Or if we lacked the ministry gift of teaching, we would ask the Lord to provide it. Certainly we need to pray that the gifts of healing and the working of miracles be manifest in our own local assembly—not just in Tulsa or Korea or Zimbabwe.

Let us continue to offer healing to believer and unbeliever alike. Let us continue to practice James 5:15, but let us not make the sick person responsible for the results! Let us encourage the gifts of impartation of healing and the working of miracles through certain people within the body of Christ. And let us consider whether God, in fact, wants to heal **unbelievers** in particular as a way of demonstrating His power and evangelizing them. Indeed, that seems to have been the priority in the early church.

Some Missing Links In Healing

In a previous issue (No. 5 - Summer, 1987) Dean Merrill addressed the question of healing and moved the discussion from whether to when and whom God heals.

We now conclude that article. Dean Merrill analyzed "Healing in the Early Church" in which Table I demonstrated overwhelmingly that more unbelievers were healed than believers and more men received healing than women. Table II listed "Healings in the Old Testament" to analyze these factors. This article concludes Mr. Merrill's findings.

Which Gender?

Further content analysis may raise another point. Consider the ratio of men to women among those who request prayer for physical healing in our congregations. We would normally assume, since the population is about evenly divided, that illness and need for healing would be present among men and women in roughly equal proportions.

In my experience, however, when invitations are given for healing ministry, 60 to 65 percent of those who respond are women. This, in fact, corresponds to the reported experience of illness among our population. According to statistics compiled by the National Institutes of Health, 40 percent of the office visits to physicians in America are made by men, while 56 percent are made by women (excluding another 4 percent for pregnancy visits). Although men tend to be more reluctant to see a physician, this probably does not account for a 16-point differential; women seem to have greater need for healing than men. This is further suggested by a Department of Labor study on work hours lost for the normal work week. According to this survey, men call in sick 1.9 percent of the time and women 2.4 percent of the time.

But these figures are **not even close** to the illnesses treated in the early church. Table I lists **eight** men, only two women and six mixed groups. Is the Old Testament any different? No: five men, two boys, one woman, one group (see Table II). A tally of healings performed by Jesus is even more remarkable. When we consider only those healings Jesus Himself initiated (excluding healings someone else asked Him to perform), the male-female ratio is **nine to one** (see Table III.)

These findings require explanation. Could it be that Jesus and the apostles were insensitive to the needs of women? Or could the narrators have failed to record healings of women seeing them as being of lesser importance? Such superficial explanations malign the God who is the author of both healing and the Scriptures.

A better explanation emerges when we posit an important link between healing and evangelism. In a culture where family direction depends upon the orientation of the male head of the house, the conversion of a man is more likely to result in the conversion of many others. This holds true even in our society, which could hardly be considered patriarchal. When a tough, "macho," unbelieving man is humbled by illness and then converted through healing, his salvation has more of a "ripple effect"; the waves spread through the whole family, and more people are effected than would be the case through the healing of a woman or child.

I cannot offer this as more than a theory. Yet perhaps you in your pastoral ministry have known times when a whole family has been jarred from its complacency and brought into the kingdom because God touched a man and healed him.

Conclusion

Certainly the Scriptures suggest that the Lord really enjoys using healing evangelistically, as a way to extend the kingdom of light. Thus we might suggest to members of our congregation that when someone is ill who doesn't know the Lord, they could go ahead and mention the possibility for healing.

Because divine healing has been controversial within the **Christian** community, we have tended to avoid mentioning it to unbelievers. We have stayed with the supposedly "safe" truth that Jesus died for people and can forgive their sins. But maybe this controversial thing called healing was **meant** to be a part of evangelism!

When Paul began to preach in Lystra (Acts 14:8-18), a lame man was present who had never walked. Paul, seeing that the man had faith to be healed, said, "Rise up and walk!" The man did so—and the whole town went crazy, crying out that the Greek gods had come down among them. Paul's initial message to that pagan crowd must have included the fact that God has power to heal, because faith was quickened in that lame man, and he saw that there was hope for his condition. Recognizing this nascent faith, Paul imparted healing to him—with tremendous results in that pagan town.

I have called this article "Some Missing Links in Healing." Perhaps I should have entitled it "Some Missing Links in Evangelism." Divine healing is not a specialty unto itself; it is part of God's overall delivering action in the church and even more so in the world at large.

Dean Merrill, is Senior Editor of Christian Herald and a graduate of Chicago Bible College. He has authored many books and articles and has served as President of the Evangelical Press Association.

Table III: Healings Initiated by Jesus

Reference	Person(s)	Affliction
Mk. 1:21-28; Lk. 4:31-37	Man in Capernaum synagogue	Demon possession
John 5:1-9	Man at Pool of Bethesda	Long-term paralysis
Mt. 12; Lk. 6	Man in Synagogue	Withered hand
Mk. 7	Widow's son at Nain	Death
Mt. 8	Two men at Gadara	Demon possession
John 9	Man in Jerusalem	Congenital Blindness
Lk. 13:10-21	Woman in synagogue	Crippled (18 years) by demon
Lk. 22:49-51	Man in Pharisee's home	Dropsy
Totals: 9 males, 1 female	Malchus	Severed ear