

What You Should Know About Divine Healing

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CHAPTER ONE: SOME BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

As we begin our exploration of this very practical and personal subject, the first thing we must do is to define what is meant by "divine healing."

We start by eliminating what "divine healing" is not. Divine healing is not "faith healing." Faith is a condition of divine healing, but faith is not some mystical force that by itself heals people. For example, when Jesus said to the woman who had suffered for years from chronic bleeding, "Your faith has made you whole" (Matthew 9:22), He did not mean that her faith in itself did the healing. He only affirmed that her faith fulfilled a necessary condition on her part to receive her healing. *God* did the healing, in response to her faith.

Divine healing is also not "mind-over-matter." Mental health plays an important role in physical health and also in the natural healing process itself. The Bible has some pertinent things to say on that subject, as we shall see; nevertheless, divine healing in itself is a supernatural act of God that is distinct from the therapeutic benefits of any natural factors. It is not a mentally induced or enhanced state.

Also, divine healing is not "psychic" healing. It is not a mystical "field force" that a person taps into. It is not some human "magnetism" that is supposedly transmitted from some so-called "energy areas" of one person's body to another person's body.

Finally, divine healing is not cultic "spiritual" healing. Satan is a master counterfeiter. He is an expert at fabricating "lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9). He does this to deceive people and

lead them into error. Jesus said that people err because they do not know The Scriptures nor the power of God (Matthew 22:29).

Many people who are desperate for a cure will try anything that promises them hope. Satan takes advantage of this to ensnare and ultimately to destroy them. People are vulnerable to demonic deceptions unless they know God and His word.

Divine healing is exactly that. The term defines itself. It is a supernatural act of the loving, personal, self-revealing God that restores a person to health and wholeness. In some cases it is instantaneous; in others it is an accelerated process. Either way, God's power is directly present and active, working either independently of medical science and the body's natural healing processes or beyond the limits of those natural means.

For convenience, miracles of healing have been categorized as "class A" and "class B." Class A miracles are defined as direct and outside of natural causes and processes. The instantaneous healing of a physically handicapped person is an example of a class A miracle.

Class B miracles are the result of God's power working with but beyond medical science and the body's healing processes. An accelerated, highly unusual recovery in answer to prayer, one that amazes the medical personnel and has no scientific explanation (and perhaps even happens contrary to the way medical science functions), is an example of a class B miracle.

Four Views Of Divine Healing.

Popular thinking about divine healing falls into four general categories. At one end are those who reject divine healing altogether, either because they do not believe that God even exists as a personal being or because they believe that God acts exclusively through natural laws and processes.

Next are those who believe that God can heal and sometimes does, but it is unusual for Him to do so. They believe that supernatural divine healing is the exception, not the rule. These believers pray that God will heal the sick "if it is His will," but who in reality expect God to give the sick persons the grace to go through their sufferings in such a way that will strengthen their Christian character and glorify God. Theirs is a genuine though passive faith.

A third position is held by those who believe that it is God's will to heal, and they pray and believe for the healing of the sick on that premise. They believe that divine healing is the rule, not the exception. They pray and believe for healing until God either heals or in His loving and wise sovereignty does otherwise. This is active faith.

At the other end are those who believe that it is always God's will to heal. No exceptions. They take an absolute position when they pray for the healing of the sick. If and when the sick are not healed, either their faith is devastated or they blame themselves (and/or others) for what they perceive to be personal spiritual failure.

The third position is the one taken here as the most Biblical, reasonable, and realistic.

Divine Healing And Medical Science.

It is important to understand that no conflict exists between divine healing and medical science. The two are not antithetical. They just operate with different dynamics.

Some see a conflict between divine healing and medical science in 2 Chronicles 16:12, where it records that late in his reign king Asa "sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians" (KJV). Asa's error was not that he sought the help of the physicians, but the fact that he did not seek the Lord. King Asa rejected God's intervention because his heart had turned away from God. So this example would not apply to people who seek proper medical care, unless at the same they

refuse to believe God and seek His intervention. Some see in Asa's actions an embracing of some of the superstitious and perhaps even occult practices of the "physicians" of his day. Whatever the case, it has no applicability to modern medical science.

In the ultimate sense, whether natural or supernatural, all healing is from God. The Creator built into the biological organism the ability to heal itself. It has been said that doctors perform procedures, but God provides the healing (naturally and/or supernaturally).

Researchers develop pharmaceuticals; physicians prescribe them. The industry develops diagnostic and surgical equipment; technicians and surgeons learn how to use them. The ability of modern medical science and technology to make such amazing progress is a clear demonstration of the creative intelligence that God Almighty conferred on human beings when He created us in His image and after His likeness (Genesis 1:26).

The human beings thus created and endowed certainly ought to acknowledge their Creator and honor Him as the source of their own intelligence. To fail to do so is a most unreasonable and inexcusable violation of that God-given intelligence.

In the most productive arrangements God and human beings work together. In healing, this synergism of supernatural and natural, prayer and practice, faith and medicine, spirit and body, best serves the whole person.

The sick need a physician (Luke 5:31), and the physician needs God. Rare is the doctor who has practiced medicine for a length of time who does not have in his or her record cases of healing and recovery that could not be explained medically. And it is not coincidental that the recurring constant in these cases is that the patients were the subjects of earnest, believing prayer. A serious study of these cases should demonstrate a significant coefficient of correlation between prayer and dramatic and/or unexplainable recovery. "Spontaneous remission" or "cause of recovery unknown" in the medical records are oblique statements that mean nothing and do not address the issue properly.

The Basis Of Divine Healing.

The ultimate basis of the provision of divine healing and health is the very nature and character of God Himself. God revealed that a component of His self-revelatory Name is Jehovah-rapha, "the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26). That is, it is part of God's covenant name precisely because it is part of His immutable nature and character. God does not change. He is the God who by His very nature brings about wholeness.

Why is this so? Because God's moral character is summed up in the full meaning of one word--*love*. God loves people. God heals because it glorifies Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. He heals because it confirms His word, brings people to believe (Mark 16:20; John 20:30, 31), and establishes the faith of believers in His power and not in human wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:5). Still, the most direct and immediate reason that God heals is that He loves people. God the Father has provided healing through the stripes of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:4, 5 with Matthew 8:16, 17). He has literally a "God-size" compassion for the sick and suffering.

Oh, that humanity would grasp the breadth, length, and depth of the foundational motivation, the ultimate cause, of all that God does and allows to be done--His infinite love! God's infinite love directs His infinite power according to His infinite wisdom to secure the highest and greatest possible amount of good, all things being considered together. How wise, how great and wonderful, is our loving God!

CHAPTER TWO: CAUSES OF SICKNESS

It might seem to some that a consideration of the causes of illness is an unnecessary study of the obvious. But if we are going to be thorough, we must take into account this very pertinent part of the subject. A review of the causes of sickness and disease helps to give perspective to our understanding of the role of divine healing in physical wholeness.

Some people are asking God to heal them when in reality they just need to change their unhealthful physical and mental lifestyle. They need discipleship as much as deliverance.

I am very well aware that I am writing this chapter as a non-professional in the non-spiritual categories. But the concepts are not technical, and I believe that they can be addressed here adequately as they relate to our larger subject.

In the process of praying for the sick, it is not uncommon to oversimplify the cause of illness. Some blame it all on God. Others blame it all on the devil. Still others blame it all on personal sin or spiritual failure.

As we know, health problems have a variety of "causes." We will endeavor to place them into broad categories.

Poor Personal Habits.

The first category is poor personal habits, broadly defined. The word of God informs us that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and it commands us to glorify God in our bodies and in our human spirits (see 1 Corinthians 6:18-20). Our bodies and our spirits belong to God both by creation and by redemption. In that sense the human body is sacred. There is nothing secular about human health and healing. This implies that medical science is not strictly a secular

discipline. Health care professionals are working on and in God's temples. In that sense they are working together with God and under accountability to Him.

As an aside, think of the implications this has for euthanasia, so-called "doctor assisted suicide," and the other trite clichés that flow out of the totally erroneous premise that "it is *my* body." It has implications also for another practice that results from the same erroneous premise--abortion.

Our bodies are intended to be our servants, not our masters. We are to keep our bodies under discipline (see 1 Corinthians 9:27); to eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31); and to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1). We are commanded and also morally obligated to use the members of our bodies as "instruments of righteousness" instead of tools of sinful indulgence (Romans 6:12, 13).

If we recognize these established principles, we have a higher motive in caring for our bodies than merely enlightened self-interest. Realizing that our bodies are not toys, we avoid unnecessary physical risks and "dare-devil" practices. We reject the ascetic abuses of the human body that many have practiced on the erroneous Gnostic assumption that the human body is inherently evil (see Colossians 2:23).

Contagion comes under the broad category of poor personal habits. Contagion is a major source of sickness. We are surrounded by micro-organisms (germs). Infections are brought about by viruses, bacteria, parasites, and even yeast spores.

In the Bible, God gave ancient Israel a set of regulations concerning hygiene that were far beyond the scientific knowledge of the time. A major purpose of these regulations was to prevent the spread of contagious diseases.

Years ago I was the pastor of a church in rural southern Oregon. One of the families that included several children were ill and could not get well. Time after time they came forward during the church services for prayer for healing but did not get better. They were renting a house with a well and a large water storage tank. One time when they came forward for prayer God impressed us to ask them if they had tested their water supply and cleaned the tank. They

replied that they had not, but would do so right away. They drained the tank and discovered dead rats in the bottom (my apologies to you who are eating lunch while reading this). They cleaned the tank and almost immediately recovered from their illness.

Poor personal habits also includes improperly prepared and preserved foods. These can result in poor health. Some other poor personal habits include: not dressing properly for the weather, and unwise exposure to the weather; overexposure to the sun without sun-screen; handling public or other contaminated objects and then eating and/or touching the face without first washing and sanitizing the hands; neglecting to take care of cuts and scratches; sharing personal items, such as eating and drinking utensils; unnecessary public contact during cold and flu seasons; close personal contact with those with contagion; unsanitized day care centers and nurseries (including church nurseries!); lack of proper rest and/or exercise; careless physical stress and strain; poor posture; poorly fitting eyeglasses (some people get prayer for recurring headaches when what they need is new eyeglasses!); and eating disorders that require medical intervention.

No doubt you can add to the list.

Narcotics certainly come under the heading of poor personal habits, even destructive personal habits. These include a whole range of addictive substances, from "hard" drugs to alcohol, to tobacco, to diet pills, to improperly used prescription drugs (including reactions to prescription drugs).

Improper Nutrition.

Another underlying "cause" of poor health is improper nutrition. This includes everything from malnutrition to over-eating. Food fads and diet fads can take their toll on the body. Extremes are not healthy. It is said that some people "get religion," while others "get nutrition!" However, following sound nutritional practices is part of the believers' discipleship to the Lord.

Fat-loaded fast foods and sugar-saturated soft drinks are a significant part of the American and other western diet. Psalm 103:5 says that God fills our mouths with good things so that our youth is renewed as the eagle's. God has provided health-sustaining and health-renewing food sources. Filling our mouths and stomachs with "junk" food does not keep us young and healthy. Some people are truly "digging their graves with their teeth."

A minister was praying for a woman who was suffering from "nerves." He asked her how much caffeinated coffee she was drinking. Her reply indicated that she drank an excessive amount daily. The minister laid hands on her and prayed, "Dear Lord, save our sister from her drunkenness!"

Genetics.

Genetics, including birth defects, is another category. A favorite "trump card" of unbelievers is to point to imperfections in nature, especially sickness, disease, and birth defects, as evidence that God does not exist; or that He did not create everything good and perfect, and therefore He is not a good and loving God.

It is important to emphasize that the physical creation (including the human body and its genetic make-up) is *not* as God originally made it. Human sin has made it morally necessary for God to limit the human life-span so that individual sinners do not have the opportunity that an extremely long life-span would give them to progress in moral depravity. The entire creation (including our mortal bodies) is under the "curse" (see Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 8:19-23).

The exceptionally long life-span before the Flood was later shortened by divine decree to about 120 years (Genesis 6:3). This involved geophysical, environmental, climatological, and probably genetic changes that altered the operation of the laws of physics to fit the new physical conditions.

Later, this was shortened even further to about 70 years or so (Psalm 90:10).

So, instead of blaming the Creator, we should look at our own rebellion and disobedience as the ultimate reason for a cosmos that is characterized by entropy and decay.

Instead of progressive complexity, we have progressive randomness. This process operates in the physical body in the form of mutations--those genetic alterations that generally introduce disorder into the orderly biological system. These are often passed on to future generations.

This certainly does not mean that each individual who suffers from a genetic disorder or a degenerative disease is personally responsible. Of course not. It does mean that all of us share the human condition, specifically the results of the curse. Some of the most godly saints have suffered greatly and through no fault of their own (2 Corinthians 5:1-9 would be excellent reading right now).

Also, birth defects are certainly not the fault of the sufferer. Blaming the parents or even the victim was the error in the thinking of the disciples of Jesus concerning the man who was born blind. They asked Him, "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus said neither. It should be noted, however, that mothers can and some do greatly and even permanently impair their unborn children by drugs and other harmful actions.

The same is true of neural and mechanical malfunctions. For some reason the body mechanisms just do not function properly.

The "travail" of the creation will continue until the resurrection.

The Environment.

The environment is another source of human injury and illness, especially in industrialized societies. Pollution, radiation (including radon and other naturally occurring radiation), industrial and household chemicals and wastes (to name a few) negatively impact public health. Work hazards, travel risks, and other dangers are part of our fast-paced and highly mechanized lives.

Aging.

And, of course, the aging process itself brings with it a whole range of geriatric maladies. As we get older, we get the "B's": baldness, bifocals, bulges, and bunions. And these are merely the minor nuisances. The divine decree is: "Dust you are, and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19).

Psychological and Spiritual.

Many illnesses have their roots in psychological and even spiritual conditions. We all know what a toll stress can take on our bodies as well as on our minds. Stress-related illnesses are common. We can think and talk ourselves into a psychosomatic syndrome. The well-known story is told of the hypochondriac who had written on his tombstone: "I told you I was sick."

The problem takes on a spiritual component when the stress is the direct or indirect result of personal disobedience to God, or even a deviation from Biblical principles out of ignorance. If it

involves disobedience, the inner conflict between reason and rebellion results in the "wretched man" of Romans, Chapter 7.

Proverbs 14:30 reads, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but envy the rottenness of the bones" (KJV). Strife, anger, resentment and bitterness have much the same effect. By contrast, "pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24 KJV).

The connection between mental attitude and physical health is mentioned in The Scriptures. Proverbs 17:22 (NKJV) reads, "A merry heart does good like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones." And Proverbs 18:14 (KJV) declares, "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Many people who have physical ailments rise above them by the inner strength of their own human spirit. But if and when their spirit is "broken," many just give up. That is why believers must remain strong in their spirit through the word of God, prayer, and faith.

Because of the interaction among spirit, soul, and body, the disciplined and balanced emotional development of the inner person is essential to total health and well-being. This begins with a primary relationship with God. The worship of God is the highest human function. In the Magnificat, Mary declared, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46, 67 NKJV). From a personal and vital relationship with God through Jesus Christ flows a healthy relationship with one's self, with other individuals, and with one's social and physical environment.

Even many genuine Christians needlessly suffer from preventable stress because they do not think Biblically. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV). Jesus said to His disciples (and us), "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27 KJV). And look at Paul's inspired prescription for mental and spiritual health in Philippians 4:3-8. These are but a sample of the rich treasure of spiritual preventives of and antidotes to all kinds of inner stresses.

Let it be "shouted from the housetops": A BIBLICAL LIFESTYLE IS A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE!

Divine Chastening and Judgment.

Sin and sickness often go together in a cause and effect connection, none more so than in the violation of God's natural and therefore moral laws regarding human sexuality.

"Secularists" can arrogantly dismiss God's decrees setting the boundaries of human sexual behavior and His stern warnings about the consequences of transgressing those boundaries. But they cannot dismiss the inexorable laws of sowing and reaping. Reality refuses to be repealed. Romans 1:26 and 27 is rooted in the reality of human nature and relationships; therefore it will stand as long as human sexuality shall exist.

We must not overlook or dismiss divine chastisement and also divine judgment as a cause of some sickness. Some who have an incomplete and/or unbalanced view of the character and universal moral government of God will react against this. However, a review of Biblical history will bring out many examples of this very principle.

The sixth plague upon the ancient Egyptians consisted of "boils and blains" (Exodus 9:8-12). Miriam was stricken with "leprosy" temporarily because she rose up against her brother Moses (Numbers 12:10-16).

When king Herod Agrippa I killed the apostle James with the sword and later proudly accepted the adulation and even worship of the people of Tyre and Sidon, an angel of the Lord "smote him with worms and he died" (Acts 12:20-23). On Cyprus Elymas the sorcerer was stricken with temporary blindness when he interfered with Paul's presentation of the gospel to Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:11). Later, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth that many of them were sick and some had even died because they had profaned the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11:30-32). Read also Leviticus 26:14-16 and Deuteronomy 28:15-61).

Demonic Activity.

Satanic (demonic) activity is present in some physical ailments. Here again materialists will dismiss this as primitive and "pre-scientific." But those who have encountered demonic activity know that the Bible is "right on" here as well as elsewhere.

Demons often manifest themselves in human disorders, either as the primary cause or to a greater or lesser degree aggravating agents.

Job 2:7 records, "Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (NASB). It is important to know from Job 1:12 that Satan could not afflict Job beyond God's specific limits.

Luke 13:11 records that Jesus healed a woman who had a "spirit of infirmity." Jesus said that she had been "bound by Satan" for 18 years!

Acts 10:38 records Peter's familiar declaration that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (NKJV).

The apostle Paul had a "thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan" to buffet him. This was allowed by God to prevent Paul from becoming exalted within himself and by others because of the great and abundant revelations God was giving him (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Here again, Satan could do no more to a believer than God's specific and limiting permission would allow.

This review of the causes of human physical sickness and suffering is general and does not claim to be exhaustive. There is no doubt that health professionals can expand on what has been said here and add things that have been left out. However, it is hoped that it will serve the purposes of our exploration of the subject of divine healing.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PROMISES OF GOD

We start this chapter by reaffirming that the ultimate basis of the provision and therefore the promises of divine healing is the nature and character of God Himself. He declares, "I am the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26 NKJV). What God does is based on who He is.

Besides God's majestic announcement in Exodus 15:26 that embodies His very covenant name, God specifically promised "I will take sickness away from the midst of you" (Exodus 23:25 NKJV). This promise is conditioned upon obedience, of course, just as are the rest of His promises.

One of the blessings that God promised to those who obey Him is recorded in Deuteronomy 7:15. "And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all those who hate you" (NKJV).

Isaiah prophesied that "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing. . ." (KJV). This is a messianic prophecy, fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

And, of course, we know and love Isaiah's beautiful prophecy in Isaiah 53 concerning Jesus Christ, that our Lord fulfilled so completely and in such detail. Part of that prophecy says, "He

was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed" (verse 5 KJV).

Peter cites this prophecy and Christ's fulfillment of it in his first epistle (1 Peter 2:24).

Some assert that the passage in Isaiah 53 means spiritual healing only, not physical healing. Few if any would deny that spiritual healing is certainly included; nevertheless, Matthew 8:16 and 17 specifically states that this passage refers to physical healing. "And when the even was come, they brought unto him [Jesus] many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias [Isaiah] the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (KJV).

The psalmist stated, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction . . ." (NKJV). See also Jeremiah 30:17.

In the New Testament we have the risen Lord's promise: "These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17, 18 KJV). This quotation is cited without commenting now on its textual issues.

Just before His crucifixion Jesus assured those who believe on Him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14 NKJV). Accordingly, we find the gifts of healings listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the Church as a whole and individually to believers. (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30).

And so we read in James 5:14-16, "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed

sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess our faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed" (KJV).

According to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, the verb sozo, pronounced "sodzo," (save) and the cognate noun, soteria (salvation), include the ideas of saving, keeping safe and sound, rescuing, making well, healing, restoring to health; and (present and future) also making a person a sharer in salvation from sin and its consequences through Jesus Christ.

Closely associated with divine healing is what the Bible says also about what could be called "divine health." God not only heals; He also knows how to keep us well. Of course, there are conditions that God has laid down that we must follow. More about that in the next chapter. Here we call attention to the promises themselves.

Psalm 105:37 records this remarkable fact concerning the ancient Israelites who came out of Egypt: "He brought them forth also with silver and gold, and there was not one feeble person among their tribes" (KJV).

And in Deuteronomy 33:25 we read the familiar promise, "As your days, so shall your strength be" (NKJV).

These promises do not guarantee that believers will never get sick. Human experience demonstrates, and The Scriptures themselves indicate, otherwise. What they do assure us is that God is the sustainer of our health, and also our healer in times of sickness and suffering.

As was said before, there are conditions attached to these promises. These are the subject of our next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONDITIONS OF HEALTH AND HEALING

It is important to keep in mind that if we are going to enjoy God-given health, we must follow the God-given principles of health. We cannot violate those principles by poor personal habits and lifestyle choices and then expect God to keep us healthy in spite of our carelessness. That borders on tempting God. God's promises are not a guarantee of good health regardless of how we live.

Years ago a man asked me to pray that God would heal him of emphysema. He was an older man who had been smoking for many years. Before I prayed for him I urged him to quit smoking both as a matter of personal health and also as a matter of Christian discipleship. Immediately I sensed him "freezing up" on me and not receiving my counsel. Trying to be courteous and considerate, I went ahead and prayed for him, but I have to admit that my faith for his healing was about a one on a scale of ten. I almost felt as though God was saying to me, "You're asking for *what?*"

The apostle John wrote to Gaius, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2 NKJV). If some people prospered and were in health as their souls prospered, they would be broke and sick most of the time!

Still, God is a gracious and merciful God. Grace is getting what we do *not* deserve, and mercy is not getting what we *do* deserve. None of us has always made the best or even the right lifestyle choices. Many of us suffer the effects of our past unhealthy choices, effects that we cannot change now even though we have changed our lifestyle as believers. As we increase in light, we improve our behavior. Even some believers continue unwittingly in unhealthy behaviors. Honest ignorance is not a sin, but it can be very harmful nevertheless.

So, God's promises of healing are not just for those who have always done things right. If that were the case, who would ever receive divine healing? It is all by grace through faith.

However, faith is not presumptuous. Faith is honest. Faith obeys. Faith lives up to the light that the believer has. Obedience to the word of God from the heart is essential to health and healing. Proverbs 3:7 and 8 (NASB) says, "Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body and refreshment to your bones."

Psalm 41:1-3 (NKJV) reads, "Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth; You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed."

Do you want to get well? How are you treating the poor?

The prophet Isaiah echoes this same truth:

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen:

To loose the bonds of wickedness,

To undo the heavy burdens,

To let the oppressed go free,

And that you break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,

And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;

When you see the naked, that you cover him,

And not hide yourself from your own flesh?

Then your light shall break forth like the morning,

Your healing shall spring forth speedily . . ." (Isaiah 58:6-8 NKJV).

The Bible also makes it clear that when we pray for anything, including healing, we must pray in faith. Hebrews 11:6 states definitely, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (NKJV). Here we see two prayer principles working together--faith and diligence.

Unbelief blocks healing just as it blocks the blessing of God in other ways. Jesus went to His home town, "And he could there do no mighty work, save [except] that he laid his hands on a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief" (Mark 6:5, 6 KJV).

We must put our faith in the word of God. Psalm 107:20 says, "He sent his word, and healed them" (KJV).

Faith comes by hearing God's word (Romans 10:17). If our faith is going to grow, we must feed it on The Scriptures, not on all the "fluff and stuff" that bombards our ears and eyes through the media and other sources. A thorough "faith check-up" should start with an honest look at what we are feeding it.

Years ago I was driving up Washington Street in Oregon City, Oregon, when I noticed this sign on a restaurant: "Consume mass quantities." Now, that would be a good motto to put on our Bibles. I do not know of anyone who "overeats" on God's word! By contrast, most of the world is starving spiritually due to an acute lack of Biblical knowledge.

When we feed on God's word, we nourish not only our souls but also our bodies. Proverbs 4:20-22 says that the words of wisdom "are life unto those who find them, and health [medicine] to all their flesh" (KJV).

So, let us trust God fully for complete healing. Jeremiah prayed, "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved . . ." (Jeremiah 17:14 KJV).

And Hebrews 11:35 reminds us that through faith "women received their dead raised to life again" (KJV).

With God nothing is impossible. So let us put our full faith and trust in Him.

CHAPTER FIVE: MIRACULOUS HEALINGS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament records only a few occasions of miraculous healings. The people had the promises of God for physical healing and God's specific revelation of Himself as "the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26). How many were actually healed is not known. Jesus did say (Luke 4:27) that there were many lepers in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet, but none was healed except Naaman. Naaman the Syrian was the only one healed of leprosy in Elisha's time, and that was ultimately the result of the influence of a captive Israeli slave girl. The event is recorded in 2 Kings 5. We will consider this miracle in greater detail a little later.

From the record it seems that the people in general were at such a low spiritual level most of the time that few of them believed for healing. However, the occasions of miraculous healings that are recorded in the Old Testament, though few, were for the most part very dramatic, "class A" healings.

We have already noted the testimony of The Scriptures (Psalm 105:37) that when the Israelites came out of Egypt, "there was not one feeble person among their tribes." If this is indeed a statement of mass healings among the people, it would lead us to conclude that the Passover lamb provided not only deliverance from divine judgment but also physical healing for the covenant people of God. That would make it a significant type foreshadowing the fact that the

sacrifice of Christ provides not only forgiveness of sins but also physical healing for all who will believe.

Let us look at the Old Testament record of miraculous healings.

Miriam.

In Numbers chapter 12 we read the account of the insubordination of Moses's brother, Aaron, and sister, Miriam. As a result of their attitude and actions, the glory cloud lifted off from the tabernacle, and Miriam was stricken with advanced "leprosy" as a divine chastisement. Why Miriam was stricken but not Aaron is not explained. Perhaps Aaron was spared because he carried the office, vestments, and anointing of the high priesthood. Perhaps Miriam was the instigator of the murmuring and Aaron just went along with it (as he did in the outrageous incident involving the golden calf, in Exodus 32). Whatever was the reason, Miriam had a very serious illness.

Aaron immediately humbled himself and begged Moses for mercy. Aaron, the high priest, was acting in the role of an intercessor on behalf of his (their) sister. As with all the priests of the order of Aaron, he needed mercy for himself as well as for those for whom he made intercession (see Hebrews 7:27, 28).

As a result of this offense against Moses and also the divine authority that God had placed on him, God prescribed a seven-day exile for Miriam. This caused the entire nation a seven-day delay in their journey. All of this had the effect of making Miriam's offense a matter of public knowledge and concern, totally humbling her and impressing on the people the seriousness of sedition against God's appointed leader. Seven days gave the people a lot of time to think.

In reflecting on this incident we realize that the chastisement was comparatively light. God healed Miriam at the end of seven days, thus sparing her life and restoring her to full health. Truly, God is merciful, and He does not afflict beyond what is necessary (Job 37:23).

The Brazen Serpent.

We go to Numbers chapter 21 for the next recorded event of miraculous healing. Here the murmuring was widespread among the people. The "soul of the people" was much discouraged (which is much deeper than the passing discouragement of one's spirit).

Now they spoke not only against Moses but also against God Himself. As a judgment on this wicked endemic unbelief, God sent fiery serpents among the people, and many died. Judgment on some brought the rest to repentance. God directed Moses to make a serpent of "brass" (bronze) and set it on a pole. If anyone who had been bitten looked on it, he or she was healed.

Of course, there was no healing power in the metal snake. Later on the people made an idol out of it and began to worship it. So King Hezekiah had it destroyed, calling it "a piece of bronze" to remove all superstition attached to it (see 2 Kings 18:4). So often in religion, reality degenerates into ritual. When people lose the substance, they continue to hold on to the form because the form is all they have left. No matter how creatively decorated it might be, an empty milk carton will feed nobody. It does not contain what it claims.

The point in this event is that the people's only hope was to place their full trust in what God provided, and to do so immediately. Delay meant death. It was "look and live,"--or die! It was an act of faith alone, and this pointed to the gospel principle of justification by faith. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14, 15 KJV).

The Widow's Son.

The prophet Elijah raised to life the son of the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-23). Raising the dead is a miracle that, by itself, goes beyond divine healing; nevertheless, it involves healing in that it not only restores the entire biochemistry of the body but also heals the fatal condition that caused the death.

Some would claim that because Elijah "stretched himself upon the child three times" (verse 21), that this was merely a case of primitive CPR and therefore resuscitation. The Biblical account does not state specifically that the boy actually died, but that the illness was so severe that "there was no breath left in him" (verse 17). The mother certainly thought that her son was a "goner." So did Elijah; that is why he prayed as he did: "let this child's soul (Hebrew: "nephesh") come into him again" (verse 21).

The account does say that the soul (nephesh) of the child came into him again (verse 22). Nephesh does have a variety of applications in the Old Testament; however, its primary meaning is the core person [see What You Should Know About Yourself, by Dr. J. W. Jenson]. That indicates that the child had actually died, for the soul leaves the body only at death (see Genesis 35:18).

In any case, this event certainly involved the miraculous healing of the child's body.

The Shunamite's Son.

Next we go to 2 Kings 4:18-37. This event is similar to the previous one in some respects. The time was later, during the ministry of the prophet Elisha, the successor of Elijah. In this case, the Bible specifically states that the child died (verses 20 and 32). The record leads us to suspect a sunstroke and/or some kind of brain hemorrhage.

Here again, some would claim that because Elisha stretched himself upon the child and the flesh of the child became warm (verse 34), this also was a case of resuscitation. But the fact that the record states specifically that the child was dead should settle the question for all who accept the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.

Elisha's behavior was not the determining factor. His prayer and faith were. Stretching himself on the dead body of the child might have been Elisha's way of making a contact of faith, somewhat like the practice of laying on of hands in the healing of the sick.

Again, this event also involved the healing of the trauma that led to the boy's death.

Naaman.

I wrote an article on the healing of Naaman the Syrian that was published in the February, 1978, issue of The Pentecostal Evangel. With minor revisions, here is the article. The text is 2 Kings 5:1-14.

"THE GENERAL WAS DYING"

Leprosy!

Just the mention of the word stung people of the ancient world with terror. It still does in some cultures.

Incurable, terminal, it was a slow death that respected neither wealth nor position. Striking mercilessly, this dreaded plague ravaged its victims psychologically as well as physically, reducing them to social outcasts, leaving them in many cases to die without the comfort and companionship of family and friends.

One outstanding case involved a high-ranking Syrian military officer. Naaman was no ordinary general. On the contrary, he was a military genius whose successes God used providentially to maintain Syrian national security. Second Kings 5:1 indicates this.

As a result, Naaman rose to the top, becoming the military chief of staff.

But one day, perhaps at the height of his career, Naaman noticed in his body some foreboding symptoms. No doubt he had seen those ugly marks in others and perhaps had pitied the poor wretches who bore them to untimely graves.

Could it be possible that the same fearful disease had now seized upon his own flesh to consume it?

No human being can face such a verdict without getting a sick feeling in the pit of the stomach. Naaman must have felt it as the terrible truth sank down into his soul.

But Naaman was a military man. Discipline was his way of life. He did not rise to the top by surrendering to self-pity! National security was his responsibility. The morale of the armed forces was at stake. He had to be brave.

Still, brave or not, he was sick and getting sicker. His wife needed some help around the house. Some commando troops had just returned from a raid into Israel, bringing back a few captives for use as slaves. Perhaps a little Israeli girl would be just what his wife needed.

God is the Master at taking bad situations and bringing good out of them. And so, He who notices the fall of each sparrow saw that He could do something with this proud but hopeless Gentile militarist. A terminal illness has led more than one stubborn soul to listen to God!

A little maid. The Bible does not tell us her name. What it does tell us, though, reveals a lot about her character. She had every reason to sink into sullen, bitter silence. Why did God allow her to be snatched away from home and friends? Why had she been sentenced to the drudgery of doing chores for a Syrian woman and her leprosy-eaten husband?

She could have fed her spirit on the bitter-sweet flavor of revengeful, hateful thoughts, relishing each malignant morsel as it lingered in her mind. "Leprosy. Good enough for you, mister. *Just what you deserve.*"

Yes, she could have allowed herself to become bitter--miserably bitter. But she did not. Instead, she determined to serve God and others wherever God in His providence allowed her to be.

That is why God could use her. Full of faith and the love of God, she became a shining witness in a foreign land to the healing power of God.

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (2 Kings 5:3 KJV). What faith at a time when no lepers in Israel were getting healed!

Now, faith-talk like that soon gets around. When it reached Naaman, he was ready to listen--and act.

The wheels of diplomacy started turning. Soon Naaman was off to see the king of Israel, accompanied by his servants and carrying a load of costly gifts, plus an official letter.

Pathetic, isn't it? Here is a miserable man totally ignorant of God and of how God works, trying vainly through money and diplomatic channels to secure life and wholeness.

The king of Israel wasn't much better. He knew who the true and living God is, but he did not know Him personally. Having nothing spiritual to offer the man, the king panicked, reacting with fear and suspicion. The whole affair nearly provoked an international incident!

Poor Naaman. Like so many today, he had gone as far as material possessions and social position could take him; yet he was no nearer to the answer to the questions of life and death than he was when he started.

But the prophet of God knew the situation. Elisha knew God and he knew where he stood with God. He also knew that if Naaman was going to receive anything from the Lord, it would be by faith; and the test of faith is humble obedience.

"Let him come now to me," Elisha directed (verse 8). Now, Naaman's pride would have demanded that things be done on *his* terms. After all, should not this common prophet have been summoned to the royal palace as a matter of deference to Naaman's official position and dignity? Protocol would have so dictated.

But God is not the servant of the proud. He does not bow to the demands of the human ego. If we receive anything from Him, it is on His terms--the humble obedience of faith.

So it seemed like a real concession for this man of position, accustomed as he was to doing things the "acceptable" way, to act outside of his official "class" and go to the house of Elisha.

What a sight Naaman's entourage must have been as it pulled up in front of the prophet's dwelling. If only his peers and subordinates back in Syria could have seen him now! Certainly this was as far as he could reasonably be expected to go in accommodating his dignity to the prophet's requirements!

But what is this? Elisha declined even to come out and meet Naaman in person! Instead, he sent his servant out with this message: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you, and you shall be clean" (verse 10).

Elisha wasn't even interested in Naaman's rich gifts. Strange indeed!

It was all too much for Naaman. He got mad and went away. "I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?" he fumed (verse 11).

"I thought." Many people are like that. They have it all figured out in their own minds just how God ought to answer their prayers, how He ought to work things out for them.

It is important for us to understand that God is not a "genie" that we can train to be our personal servant and do magic tricks for us at our bidding or coaxing. God is our Sovereign and Lord, whom we are to love, trust, and obey.

Certainly, God loves us, and He is concerned about our well-being. For that reason He wants first and foremost to bring us into a right relationship with Himself. A personal relationship with God is far more important than anything temporal that we can receive from Him. In fact, receiving things *from* God is conditioned upon a right relationship *with* God in Jesus Christ. And that involves taking our proper place of humility and submission before Him.

It has been said that God does not want to hurt our pride; He wants to *kill* it! By pride is not meant self-respect, but rather our insistence on self-supremacy, autonomy, on the imagined "right" to rule our own lives, to be our own little "supreme being."

That attitude places self in direct competition with Almighty God for the place that is rightfully His alone. It is hostility toward God (Romans 8:7). God cannot tolerate it because it is an attitude not

only grossly dishonoring to Him but also totally ruinous to ourselves. It is the very attitude that changed Lucifer into Satan; and if pride will change an archangel into a devil, imagine what it does to people. No wonder God cannot allow it to remain in His universe.

God loved Naaman and wanted very much to heal him. But more important, God wanted to straighten out Naaman's heart and mind.

Naaman wanted ceremony befitting his position; the prophet prescribed humility to remedy his spiritual condition. Naaman wanted the benefits; God insisted on the prerequisites. Naaman wanted to be a passive recipient; God required that he be an active respondent. So, Naaman "turned and went away in a rage" (verse 12).

God always provides us with an occasion to reveal what is in our spirit. This was the general's moment of truth, and he reacted by exhibiting pride, national prejudice, and rejection.

Oh yes, he was willing to go part way--to wash, but in the rivers of his own choosing. He reminds us of people who are willing to be religious if they can dictate the terms. They want to play games with God, to bargain with Him. But God is not playing games, and He is not bargaining with human pride and rebellion. He loves us too much to toy with us.

Naaman went off in a rage, creating a spiritual deadlock that closed Heaven against him and left him on his course to certain death from leprosy. By his rebellious attitude Naaman did not put God in a bind, but he certainly put himself in one. We always do that when we disobey God.

It was a standoff. Both sides were waiting it out. But there was one big difference--God had plenty of time; Naaman did not. The general was dying, and a dying man is a desperate man.

Fortunate for him, Naaman had a realistic staff. His advisers mustered up enough courage to make this sensible suggestion: "If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (verse 13 NKJV).

"Do something great." Oh, how fond people are of "do-it-yourself " salvation schemes. They are willing to do "some great thing" to merit favor with God. They will make pilgrimages, climb stairs on their knees, donate money to religious and charitable causes, pile up "good" works--anything that will bring them a self-achieved sense of peace, rightness, and goodness.

That is, they will do anything except the one thing they must do--admit that they can do nothing to save themselves, surrender to God completely and place their trust in Jesus Christ alone. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from our sins. God's formula is always: "Wash and be clean."

So Naaman surrendered. "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean" (verse 14 KJV).

Full obedience. Seven dips; not five, not six. Anything other than full obedience is not obedience at all. Six dips would have been disobedience, not six-sevenths of obedience.

When Naaman met the conditions, he got what was promised. The same principle still holds true today.

Yes, Naaman received his healing. But what is even more important, he had a new heart. He met the true and living God. He was now a whole man, transformed in his soul as well as healed in his body. Instead of pride, pomp, and prejudice, he exhibited humility, obedience, and faith. Five times to Elisha he referred to himself as "your servant."

The prophet's benediction was, "Go in peace" (verse 29).

Peace. He had not even come for that. Many people who have healthy bodies do not have peace. Perhaps you are one of them. You yearn for peace, but it seems to elude you. Naaman found it by surrendering to God.

That is the way you will find it, too. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (KJV).

God is waiting for you. Surrender to Him now. Believe and be made whole.

Hezekiah's Prayer For The People.

Hezekiah was an outstanding king of Judah. He "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 29:2 KJV). One of the major events of his reign was the renewal of the celebration of the Passover (2 Chronicles 30). During the celebration, Hezekiah prayed to God to pardon and accept every one who had prepared his heart to seek God but who had not gone through the purification rituals "of the sanctuary" (verses 18, 19). Verse 20 reports that "the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people."

The statement is very brief and almost matter-of-fact; yet it records a powerful event. A "wave" of God's healing power swept through the people. It must have been a dramatic scene as people *en masse* experienced healing and wholeness. One can only imagine the joy and rejoicing. It all presaged the mighty healings that took place during the earthly ministry of Jesus, the ministry of the apostles and others during the early decades of the Church, and wherever people today exercise faith in God for healing.

Hezekiah.

In 2 Kings 20:1-7 the Bible records that Hezekiah himself was healed of a terminal illness. God sent the prophet Isaiah with the message that the king was going to die (verse 11). Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and poured out his heart to the Lord. God heard his prayer, healed him, and added 15 years to his life.

Why did God declare Hezekiah's death at that time? We acknowledge that God knows the future with absolute precision and certainty. God saw that Manasseh, Hezekiah's wicked son, would lead the nation into a depth of sin from which they would never recover short of the Babylonian captivity (see 2 Kings 23:26; 24:3, 4). Later, Manasseh humbled himself before the Lord; but the damage he had done to Judah was irreparable and had brought them past the point of no return.

Manasseh was *12 years old* when he began his wicked and destructive reign. It is not difficult to do the math.

Also, 2 Chronicles 32:25-31 records that king Hezekiah's heart became "lifted up" with pride. Later, he humbled himself, as did also the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, we cannot help but wonder if that spiritual lapse occurred when Manasseh was a child, and if it had a devastating effect on Manasseh during those crucial formative years. And even though the population of Jerusalem humbled themselves before the Lord, did that period of pride and rebellion sow its bitter seeds in the minds and hearts of those who would be part of Manasseh's future administration?

This is a sobering thought for those who recklessly forsake the Lord and go their own way during the precious period of time when their priceless children are growing up. And what a horrible price those children may have to pay both for time and for eternity.

Not only that, but it was during that 15 years of added life that Hezekiah committed the foolish blunder of showing all the royal treasury to the emissaries from Babylon (2 Kings 20:12-19 and 2 Chronicles 32:31). In that incident "God left him to try him." After all, he had turned to himself and thus away from God. He had left God; so God left him alone so that the king would expose

what was in his heart. That and Isaiah's rebuke (2 Kings 20:14-19) might have been the "wake up call" that led to Hezekiah's repentance.

What is remarkable is that, knowing ahead of time what extending Hezekiah's life would lead to, God still granted him healing. Such is the abundant grace of our loving God toward those who cry out to him from an earnest and sincere heart.

CHAPTER SIX: THE HEALING MIRACLES OF JESUS

This leads us into the heart of the subject of divine healing. The healing ministry of Jesus Christ while He was here on earth contains, embodies, and exemplifies the full range of the principles and conditions of divine healing. Jesus did what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19, 20). That showed the disciples what the Father is doing so that they could know and continue to do the same. And it is all recorded in The Scriptures for us so that we as believers can know and continue to do what the Father is doing, and to do so according to the word of God and in the name of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

For these reasons a serious exploration of the healing ministry of Jesus Christ while He was here on earth will comprise the largest portion of our study. Each occasion will be a sub-section of Chapter VI. Some sections will be articles that have been published, just as was the section on the healing of Naaman in the previous chapter.

"Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him . . ." (Acts 2:22 KJV).

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38 NKJV).

The ministry of Jesus included raising the dead and casting out demons. Although the raising of the dead certainly included the healing of the body of whatever sickness caused the death, and casting out demons removed the demonic factor in the organic and/or functional disorder, these events will not be included here. In cases where Jesus raised the dead, that act in itself is the main focus, and the concomitant healing is incidental. Regarding demonic activity, I address this in What You Should Know About The Spirit World. The healing of the woman with a spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:10-17) will be included because it tells how Jesus healed the effects of demonic activity rather than strictly the casting out of demons.

Let us follow the footprints of the Master as He brought healing and wholeness to the people by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The Healing Of The Nobleman's Son.

The following was first published in the March 11, 1990 issue of The Pentecostal Evangel. With minor revisions, it is reprinted here. The text is John 4:46-54.

"COME BEFORE MY LITTLE BOY DIES!"

His eyes were closed now, his breathing shallow. The young lad had fought bravely. The physicians had done their best. But raw courage and primitive medical knowledge were no match for this devastating sickness.

Helpless, his father stood nearby. Anxiety and frustration churned inside him as he stared at the prostrate form of his son. The furnishings of the room evidenced that he was a man of position and means. A royal official, he lived in one of the finest houses in Capernaum. He had worked hard and reached the top. But none of that mattered now. His son was dying, and influence and wealth were powerless to prevent it.

Meanwhile Jesus had just returned from Jerusalem. There at the Passover He had caused quite a stir, clearing the temple area of moneychangers and performing astonishing miracles.

But the Lord's heart was grieved. Like Nicodemus, the people believed on him as a "teacher come from God" because of His miracles (John 3:2). But they failed to recognize that His authority and miracles confirmed His deity. Yes, there had been that bright, joyous time in Samaria when the soul-weary woman He met at Jacob's well realized He was her Messiah, and her life was transformed (John 4). But most of the people regarded Him as nothing more than a miracle worker, seeing the display of His power but not realizing what it really said about His person.

Miracles should lead us to believe in Jesus for who He really is. But once established, such faith no longer depends on miracles. It is based instead on the eternal verities of His deity and redemptive work.

Back in Galilee, Jesus decided to visit Cana, where He had changed the water to wine. He had made it clear that a prophet has no honor in his own country. His being a "local" only added one more obstacle to their ever coming to real, saving faith in Him.

However, desperation has a way of driving people to Jesus. They might not have a correct understanding of Him. Their motive might not be any higher than their need of the moment. Their concern is not about Him as the Son of God, Savior, and Lord of life, but only about what He can do right now to solve the pressing problem. Jesus is valuable to them only so far as He

is useful. Although this grieves the Lord, it does provide a starting point, an opportunity for Him to lead us from where we are to where we ought to be.

Somehow in the dark hour of his despair this royal official at Capernaum learned that Jesus had returned from Jerusalem. Immediately he set out for Cana, a new flame of hope flickering within him. As soon as he arrived, he began begging the Master to come down to Capernaum and heal his son, by now near death.

Jesus saw in this court official the same attitude He had encountered in so many others. And so Jesus responded, "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders . . . you will never believe " (John 4:48 NIV). In essence the Lord was saying, "You believe in Me as a miracle worker, and then only because you see signs and wonders; but you are missing Me."

But the man was in no frame of mind right then to consider the truth about this Jesus of Nazareth. One desperate fact alone dominated his mind--his little boy was about to die.

"Come down," the father begged.

"Go your way; your son lives," Jesus replied.

Immediately this created a crisis in this man's soul. Imagine his agony as he struggled with the divine summons to true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The life-or-death issue was now totally in his hands, depending on his decision either to believe or not to believe.

He had two options. He could give up on this healer in bitter disappointment. Jesus had declined to come; so forget the whole thing. If this is religion, he could do without it. But what would that lead to? Grief and tears, a funeral, a little grave in Capernaum. No, that option is out. Unbelief is a dead end.

But what, then, was the alternative? Believe the word of Jesus and act on it. That meant putting his trust in Jesus' veracity and authority. And that in turn meant facing the issue of who Jesus really is.

We do not grow into faith. Although the process that leads to faith often takes time and involves a growing awareness of the truth, faith itself is a definite step, an act of the will, a decision.

And what was this desperate father's decision? Verse 50 reports the triumph: "The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he started off " (NASV). The father's faith went as far as it could go with the light he had, and that was far enough.

He received no word on his son's condition until the next day. Hour after hour he had absolutely nothing to hold on to but the word of Jesus. But that was enough.

The word of Jesus Christ is always enough. We have faith in His word because we have faith in His person. Because Jesus Christ is who He is, His word is true and trustworthy.

Somewhere along the road back to Capernaum the father saw his servants coming to meet him, and they seemed excited.

"Your boy lives!" they shouted.

"What time did he begin to get well?" the father asked joyfully.

"Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him," they replied.

The seventh hour! The exact time Jesus spoke the words, "Your son lives!" It happened when Jesus said it, and it was an accomplished fact from that moment on.

"So he and all his household believed" (vs. 53, NIV). This was a deeper, fuller faith. Our faith grows as we grow in the knowledge of Christ and His word.

"And all his household." We must not miss this result. It is beautiful to see entire families become believers. And this is most likely to happen when dad leads the way. Children and other family members have the best opportunity to make it to Heaven when the head of the household--whoever that might be--makes a total and permanent commitment to Jesus Christ. This is the most serious responsibility resting upon every father and/or mother.

God has ways of challenging us to believe. The crisis points of life become golden opportunities, priceless moments when Christ calls us to Himself. It is a life-or-death issue. Whatever the situation, it is urgent that we answer the Masters' call *now*.

The Healing of Peter's Mother-In-Law.

The following was first published in the September, 1990 issue of The Helping Hand. With minor revisions, it is reprinted here. The text is Matthew 8:14, 15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38, 39.

"HEALED TO SERVE"

This turned out to be one of Jesus' busiest days. It seems He had a number of such days. With so many people pressing upon Him with their needs, so much truth to be taught, and such an urgent necessity to spend much time with the Father in prayer, His days were usually filled to the limit.

Jesus Christ is God's fullest self-revelation. He is the Truth. All we need for faith and conduct are revealed in Him and His word. Most of that self-revelation was packed into the short time of His earthly ministry.

A major part of that revelation is about prayer, faith, and the power of God. And much of that came to us through the healing ministry of our Lord Himself. He taught us the principles by demonstrating them. The Biblical examples of Christ's healing ministry embody those principles.

That includes the events of this busy day in Capernaum, recorded for us in Luke 4:33-41 (also Matthew 8:14-17 and Mark 1:21-34).

By expelling a very vocal demon from a man, Jesus had just made the synagogue service that Sabbath morning one they would never forget. Afterward, along with James and John, He entered the house of Peter and Andrew. There lay Peter's mother-in-law, held in the grip of a high fever, caused no doubt by some stubborn infection.

Peter's wife and her mother are among the unnamed but nevertheless important women in the Bible. Peter's mother-in-law was important to her family and friends. Even more so, she was important in herself, a human being created in the image of God.

And she was sick, burning up with fever. Now, she was not a lazy, pampered person. On the contrary, from the picture we get, she was a busy lady, willing and eager to serve. It took more than a sniffle to put her down--or to keep her from the house of worship. So we know she was really sick.

Jesus saw her (Matthew 8:14). Let us not miss that fact. Jesus sees. Jesus knows. Jesus cares. Even if you are all alone and it seems that everyone has forgotten you, please remember this: Jesus sees you; He knows you; and He is right there with you.

Now here is a significant detail. We must not miss it. Jesus did not heal her until they asked Him to do so. True, there was no delay, for Mark informs us that they spoke to Jesus about her immediately (Mark 1:30). Still, asking came before receiving.

Jesus does what He is asked to do. Our Lord wants to do more for us than we realize, but He is waiting for us to ask Him. Certainly, God knows what we need before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). Nevertheless, asking is necessary, because it shows that we mean business, that we are in earnest. If God gave us everything without our asking, we would become lazy and selfish. We would stop caring about others. But if we really care, we will pray. And how we pray shows how we care. That is important to God. Just as we need people to speak to God on our behalf, there are others who desperately need us to speak to God on their behalf in earnest, intercessory prayer. We must not fail them--and God.

They cared enough to go to Jesus immediately, to urge him to heal her. This moved the Master to take direct and effective action. He stood over her and rebuked the fever (Luke), touched her hand (Matthew), then took her by the hand and lifted her up (Mark). At His word and at His touch the fever broke, indicating that the internal cause was healed immediately. Jesus Christ still heals by His word and by His touch.

Christ lifted; she arose. Here we have faith being induced to act, and responding vigorously. We find this interaction of inducement and response again in Acts 3:7 and 8. Peter took the hand of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple and lifted up. In response he leaped up, healed. Thus faith is encouraged, and acts in response to the encouragement.

"She got up at once and began to wait on them" (Luke 4:39 NIV). She wanted to serve. This reminds us of the importance of the right motive in asking for healing. Jesus heals us not only so we can enjoy life ourselves but also to give us the health, strength and opportunity to serve Him and others. This higher motive must be kept before us in all things.

That evening the whole town was at the door (Mark 1:33). Jesus laid His hands on all who were sick and healed them, and expelled many demons (Luke 4:40, 41). Matthew records the connection between this and Isaiah's prophecy. Quoting Isaiah 53:4 he writes, "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases'" (Matthew 8:17 NIV).

Some assert that the healing prophesied by Isaiah is spiritual healing only. But Matthew assures us by the Holy Spirit that it includes healing for our bodies. Christ bore our sicknesses as well as our sins. He is the Great Physician.

The healing of Peter's mother-in-law points us to another important truth. Usually, Jesus comes into people's lives because someone brings Him into their lives. It was Peter's and Andrew's discipleship that brought Jesus into her life. What would have happened to her if Peter and Andrew had refused to follow the Lord? What will happen to our children if we refuse to follow Him? What will happen to our parents, our spouse, our friends, our neighbors? We might be their only chance to meet Christ. We must not fail them--and Him.

Have you met the Master? If not, He is waiting now at the door of your heart, waiting for you to invite Him in. Receive Him. Trust Him. He is your Savior.

The Healing Of A Leper.

The following is from an unpublished manuscript. The text is Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5: 12, 13.

"JESUS SAID, I WILL"

In ancient times a number of skin disorders were classified together as "leprosy." Today the term is applied specifically to Hansen's Disease. Under modern medical science it is treatable, but in Biblical times it had no human cure.

And it was widespread. Many lepers were in Israel in the days of Elisha the prophet (Luke 4:27). The law of Moses spelled out in detail how leprosy and other symptomatically associated disorders were to be dealt with (see Leviticus 13 and 14). The most significant provision was the

social quarantine of lepers. They had to live outside the camp and to warn others away with their pitiful cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" (Leviticus 13:45, 46).

Besides its hygienic purpose, quarantine served also as an important object lesson. It represented separation from God because of sin. Thus leprosy itself became a type of sin and its consequences: corruption, separation; degradation, hopelessness, death. The Jews considered it to be a blow from God, and the resulting social ostracism gave them a vivid picture of what it is like to be cast out from His presence.

In this context a certain leper came to Jesus. Mark gives us the fullest account (Mark 1:40-45). The event was recorded also by Matthew (8:2-4) and Luke (5:13, 14).

Luke, a physician, reports that the man was "full of leprosy." The disease had become systemic, so advanced that the man and the malady were one. He reminds us of the wretched man who cried out, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). The religious system offered no hope. He was a doomed man.

But often a doomed man is a desperate man, and it is usually not difficult to persuade a desperate soul to come to Christ. One of the greatest needs today is for unbelievers to realize their lostness without Christ. They seem oblivious to their total moral depravity. Often when we urge people to come to the Lord, they seem to think we are asking them to do God a favor. But when the Holy Spirit's conviction grips the conscience, people will flee to Christ, as a man whose clothes are on fire runs to water.

Just so this man came to the Lord. Jesus was his only hope. It was a matter of life and death. So there he was, first on his knees and then on his face before the Master. It was in a city, a place where the law said he was not supposed to be. But he would not let anything or anybody stand in his way. He had made up his mind to get to Jesus, no matter what. He broke through his despair, broke through the barriers of religious rules and traditions, broke into faith, broke into the presence of Jesus Christ! There is where God met him and where His power operates.

"If you are willing, you can make me clean" (Mark 1;40). Christ's ability was not in doubt. That was settled in the man's soul. The issue was His willingness. Though the leper was exercising his faith to its limit, it was still a limited faith.

"If you will, you can." Right here faith stops short. Christ's ability is settled in the hearts of believers. But that is only the "50 yard line." The willingness of God is the higher summons to faith.

True, God is sovereign, and the Biblical promises concerning asking and receiving operate under His sovereignty. We pray in faith and trust God to answer according to His will. But we should not make the sovereignty of God an excuse for weak faith. Instead of assuming that God will not do it unless He wills, the position of faith should be that God will do it unless He indicates otherwise.

"I will." Moved with compassion, Jesus dealt with the leper's uncertainty by divine assurance. Just so He does today. Is your prayer in harmony with the Bible? Will the thing you desire glorify God, edify the church, bring people to Christ, and meet human need? Remember, these are God's objectives, too. Whatever is in harmony with His nature and His word is in harmony with His will.

"I will." Christ's will operates His power, releasing it to glorify God and meet human need. He touched the leper, taking the ceremonial uncleanness upon Himself and thus foreshadowing the cross. Then He spoke the word: "Be clean." Christ's power operates in His word. Immediately the leprosy vanished. Thus we have the divine order: compassion, contact, command, cleansing.

The "I WILL" of Jesus Christ is inherent in the "I AM" of Jesus Christ, expressing His nature, His purpose, His readiness to come into lives with His touch, His word and His power.

"Jesus, save me!" "I will!"

"Jesus, heal me!" "I will!"

"Jesus, fill me!" "I will!"

"Jesus, help me!" "I will!"

Turn your faith loose. Break through the obstacles; break through to Jesus! Lay hold of His willingness. Believe. Trust. Receive.

Jesus changed this man's life completely. In fact, He gave him back his life, restoring him to his family and friends, and also to his responsibilities. He told him to do something. "Go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them" (Matthew 8:4 NIV).

Give thanks to God and give testimony to man. What God does will stand the test of examination. Verified miracles glorify Him.

So, what is your need? Even if you feel cut off from God, flee to Christ. He will receive and restore you. He can do nothing for the self-sufficient and self-willed, for they refuse to come to Him. But to the humble and contrite He says, "I will!" Trust Him.

The Healing of The Paralytic.

The following was first published in the June 19, 1998 issue of The Church Herald And Holiness Banner. With minor revisions it is reprinted here. The text is Matthew 9:2-8; Mark 2:2-12; Luke 5:18-26.

"IN THROUGH THE ROOF AND OUT THROUGH THE DOOR"

Excitement ran high as the news spread quickly through Capernaum. Jesus is back in town! Immediately the house overflowed with people.

As the Master taught, "the power of the Lord was present to heal them" (Luke 5:17). How many received healing we do not know. Skepticism and outright unbelief must have kept some from experiencing God's power. Present that day were scribes and Pharisees from everywhere, including Jerusalem. Generally they were critical observers, and observers usually do not get much out of a church service.

However, outside a very different drama was unfolding. Five men were missing the meeting. One lay paralyzed on his mat. The other four were putting a plan into operation.

It must have been a curious sight--four men sizing up the house from different angles, calculating the exact spot where Jesus was standing.

We do not know how far they carried the paralyzed man. But here they were, and they could not get the man through the crowd around the door.

Now, many men would have said, "We got you here, but there's no way we can get you through that crowd. Sorry, fella, but we did the best we could."

But these men were on a mission, and God knew it. His power was present to heal, and their friend was going to receive his healing! They had a resolute faith, and a resolute faith means a resolute purpose. Nothing was going to stop them. When four men make up their mind to bring another man to Jesus, *they will do it!*

So the drama unfolds. Calculations completed, they climbed up onto the house and began tearing the roof off--not a little spot, but a hole big enough to let the man and his mat through!

Meanwhile, down below Jesus was teaching. Suddenly, over His head the roof started coming off and the sky opened up. Dust and debris descended. Imagine how difficult it must have been to hold the attention of the crowd with all that going on, especially when a man came down through the roof!

"When Jesus saw their faith. . ." (Mark 2:5). What did Jesus see? He saw action. Faith works by love (Galatians 5:6).

God does not want us to stand by as mere spectators while He blesses others. He calls us to be His fellow-workers, motivated by His love, active in faith, sharing His joy.

Somebody had to care enough to bring this man to Jesus. *Somebody* had to follow through in faith. Without this four-man team, he would have remained the way he was for life.

We see here the need for unity. The four men had to be in agreement. Dissension and division would have defeated them. If two of us agree about anything we ask for, it shall be done (Matthew 18:19). See what happened when *four* agreed!

Until now the paralyzed man was passive, at least outwardly. But Jesus must have sensed an inner despondency in him, due in part perhaps to the chronic nature of his illness but due even more to his felt need for forgiveness. He was being brought to Jesus for healing, but what about his sins? He was entering the presence of incarnate holiness, and he felt so unprepared.

Then Jesus spoke the words that awakened his faith. "Son, be of good cheer" (Matthew 9:2). Cheer up, son; your sins are forgiven!

As the man lay there, the scribes were mulling over their theological objections. "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:21). The statement was correct, but they missed its implications in view of what Jesus was about to do.

"Which is easier," Jesus challenged them, "to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" (Luke 5:23 NIV).

If Jesus falsely claimed to be able to forgive sins, He is not God and He could not heal the paralytic. But if He could heal the man after making such a claim, His deity is confirmed and every denial of His deity is wicked unbelief.

Jesus spoke both forgiveness and healing. Still, the man had to believe in order to rise up. If he had not believed Christ's words of forgiveness, he could not have believed His words of healing. The two correspond. He forgives all of our iniquities and heals all of our diseases (Psalm 103:3).

He believed; and because he believed, he acted. A so-called "faith" that refuses to obey is dead (James 2:26).

Get up and go home! The bed carried you; now you carry it. Don't ask the men who brought you here to carry it for you. You are healed--now accept the responsibilities that go with your healing.

And he did. He came in through the roof but walked out through the door!

Capernaum missed the point of this miracle. They neither repented nor recognized Christ's deity. We must not repeat their horrible mistake.

God's power and our faith operate in concert. This is one of the principles we see in operation in this miracle.

We see also that faith is not an exercise of our inner human strength, but the acknowledgement of our dependency on God. Jesus can help the humble, but not the self-sufficient.

We cannot bring a need to Jesus that is too big for Him to meet. He still has the power to forgive and to heal (Matthew 28:18). Come to Him now in complete confidence.

The Healing Of The Impotent Man At The Pool Of Bethesda.

The following was first published in the July 25, 1976 issue of The Pentecostal Evangel. With minor revisions, it is reprinted here. The text is John 5:2-9.

"DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?"

"Do you want to get well?" Jesus asked.

What a strange question to put to a man who had been crippled for 38 years!

The Lord was at a pool called Bethesda. There a helpless mass of sick and crippled human beings struggled and crawled toward the edge of the pool, desperately hoping to be the first into it the next time an angel stirred the waters. We read the whole story in John, chapter 5.

Probably nobody in that wretched assemblage noticed that the Son of God was moving among them. They had their eyes on the pool, not on Jesus. They were waiting for an angel, not for God.

However, Jesus picked one of the worst cases, made His way to the pitiful man, and asked, "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6 NIV).

How do you suppose most people in that condition would react to that question?

"Of course, I want to get well! Do you think I have enjoyed being crippled for 38 years, not knowing who would take care of me? Are you making fun of me? Is this some kind of a cruel joke?"

The fact is that there is a lot more in Jesus' question than one might suppose. Remember, healing brings responsibility. This man would have to take his place in society, go to work, and take care of himself from now on. No more sympathy. No more feeling sorry for himself. No more idly watching the world go by.

Do you really want to get well?

Years ago another minister told me about an unusual experience in his ministry. One night in a service, he said, the power of the Lord to heal was evident in an outstanding way. Among those prayed for was an older lady who had been confined to a wheelchair for years. Immediately she got up and began walking around the church, evidently healed. Then apparently she suddenly realized what it meant to be well. No longer would she be pushed from place to place. No longer

would she be waited on. She would have to accept the responsibilities that wholeness brings. So she walked back to the wheelchair, sat down in it, and remained there for the rest of her life.

Jesus mean it when He said, "Do you want to get well?"

Assuming that Jesus meant soundness of body only, the man replied, "I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool" (John 5:7).

"I have no man" Why doesn't somebody believe God for me? Why doesn't the pastor pray the prayer of faith for me? If I could just get to Brother or Sister So-and-So.

Let us be sure that we are looking for the *right* Man. Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). We must look beyond the human agency that God might use, and reach out in faith to Jesus. He is always with us.

Next we see the power of Jesus' spoken word. In this case He did not touch the man, but only offered the power of His spoken word. "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" (John 5:8 NIV). In other words, "Get out of here. Leave this place of sin, sickness, and despair." It was not a suggestion. It was a command.

Up until this point no faith was required of the man. But as soon as Jesus spoke the word, the man had to do something with it. He must either believe it and act upon it, or stay there in his condition. He could sink down in self-pity and remind Jesus that he was unable to walk. Instead, he chose to obey Christ's command.

All of this happened on the Sabbath day; and what a Sabbath this man had! He was carrying his little mat, but he had lost his real burden!

That is why Jesus told the religionists, when they objected to the man carrying his mat on the Sabbath day, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working" (John 5:17 NASB).

Those legalists were concerned about the external burdens the people carried, but they cared nothing about the burdens they carried in their bodies and souls. They failed to understand that God works all the time, even on the Sabbath, to bring people into His real Sabbath rest in Christ, the rest from sin, sickness, and defeat.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28 NIV).

John 5:14 tells us that later on Jesus found him in the temple. The work was not finished yet. It is not enough to receive healing for the body. The soul needs healing, too. Jesus heals the *whole* man.

"Sin no more," Jesus told him. Sin has to be dealt with. There must be repentance and forgiveness, so that a worse thing does not happen to us (John 5:14).

What could be worse than spending one's life physically helpless? *Spending eternity without God!*

Sin always brings the "worse thing." It ruins both body and soul.

After that encounter, the man was truly whole, complete. Yet there was one more thing he felt he must do. Something inside motivated him to confess Christ before the hostile authorities. True, it brought persecution to Jesus, just as obeying Jesus' word had brought censure upon himself. But the man took his stand. Regardless of the consequences, *he must confess Jesus Christ.*

And so must we.

Today Jesus still asks, "Do you want to get well?" Whole. Sound. Complete. If you do, "rise and walk." Obey the word of Jesus. Leave your sins behind. Sin no more, or the worse thing will surely come. Receive and confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, and follow Him as your Lord.

The Healing Of The Man With The Withered Hand.

Scripture text: Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11.

The account of the healing of the man with the withered hand is placed in the gospels next to the encounter Jesus had with the Pharisees over the issue of His disciples gleaning and eating a few heads of grain on the Sabbath.

Although Luke records that the miracle happened on another Sabbath, it is linked to the previous event because they deal with the common subject of Sabbath-keeping as it was practiced in those days. This miracle, like the healing of "the man sick of the palsy" (paralytic), involved a principle: love verses law; human beings verses rules and regulations that have no practical value.

Because Jesus lived in love (in contrast to the Pharisees, who were entrenched in dead, cold legalism) our Lord's actions put these two antithetical concepts on a collision course. The outcome was never in doubt. As one would expect, truth totally triumphed over tradition.

The questions that Jesus asked them had answers so obvious, pointed, and penetrating that His adversaries were put to silence. But it was not the silence of honest reflection and evaluation. Rather, it was the sullen silence of those who have been openly defeated but are determined nevertheless to hold on to their discredited ideas and beliefs. That kind of silence breeds an inner frustration and anger that produces hostility. Such hostility sometimes leads to violence. If the truth cannot be refuted, an effort is made to silence the person who speaks it, even if it means destroying the person.

This is all demonstrated in the reaction of the Pharisees to the healing of the man with the withered hand. It was the Sabbath day. A handicapped man was present, and the legalists were

watching to see if Jesus would heal him and thus "sin" by violating their notions and rules regarding Sabbath-keeping.

Jesus knew what was on their mind. Instead of avoiding conflict, He deliberately took an action that would face the issue head-on. Jesus did not do this merely to "pick a fight" with His adversaries. In this, as in everything else, our Lord was motivated by love--love for the handicapped man as well as love for the truth and for the honor of the Father.

So Jesus commanded the man to get up and step forward before the crowd. Tradition says he was a stone mason.

Immediately the man responded to Christ's command, got up, stepped out of the crowd and moved toward Jesus.

Anticipating what Jesus was about to do, His critics asked Him, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?" (Matthew 12:10).

With the man standing there, Jesus answered their question with a rapid-fire series of stinging questions of His own. "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matthew 12:11, 12a KJV). "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?" (Mark 3:4 KJV). Then He stated the obvious conclusion: "Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days" (Matthew 12:12b KJV).

When Jesus asked, "how much is a man better than a sheep?" He posed a question no one has been able to answer. He raised an issue that challenges the very premise of secular, materialistic anthropology.

If human beings are merely a higher development of the biological process of evolution, at some point one would have to arrive at an equation that says that X number of sheep are equal in

value to one human being. That point would vary according to the "quality of life" and the "practical value" of each individual human being.

On the other hand, if we are created in the image of God, human life is sacred and each human being is of an inestimable intrinsic value that transcends any and all materialistic values and comparisons. And so Jesus' question has no answer.

Mark records that Jesus "looked round about" on His adversaries with a holy anger, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (3:5). His eyes swept across the face of each Pharisee with a withering look of disgust mixed with deep sorrow.

Jesus proceeded with the healing. The man's faith had to be evoked by a challenge to action. First, Jesus commanded him to do something he *could* do--stand up, step out, and move forward. Hesitation and indecision at this point would have been evidence of a lack of faith; refusal would have been proof of unbelief. Nothing would have happened, and the man would never have been included in the gospel narrative.

Next, Jesus commanded the man to do something he could *not* do--stretch out his hand (Luke informs us that it was his right hand). The command is reported in the Greek aorist imperative: "have it done!" It is like commanding, "your right hand--out!"

The man's obedience to the command of Jesus was the real test of his faith. One can only wonder how often he had tried, how often others encouraged and even cajoled him to do so, but without success. How easily he could have responded with unbelief and resignation, perhaps even reproving Jesus for what he might have regarded as being cruel and insensitive to his plight. It was the crucial moment, the moment of truth--and faith--and miracle.

The moment of truth is the moment of faith, and the moment of faith is the moment of miracle.

Jesus commanded the man to use his strength and ability before he was told that he had it. Doubt dissolved in the act of faith. Obedience to the words of Christ released the power. The

two worked together: the obedient act of faith in the words of Christ, and the miracle working power of God in the arm of the man.

This divine principle still operates today.

The Healing Of The Centurion's Servant.

The following was first published in the October 22, 1978 issue of The Pentecostal Evangel.

With minor revisions, it is reprinted here. The text is Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10.

"THE GREATEST FAITH JESUS EVER MET"

He was a very unusual army officer, that Roman centurion in Capernaum. In fact, he was so remarkable that Jesus himself marveled at him.

Seeing his faith, the Master said to the people following Him, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

This disciplined, no-nonsense military man displayed a faith greater than any the Lord had found among the Jews. There is one account of him in Luke 7:1-10 and another in Matthew 8:5-13.

I had read these inspired accounts many times. Then one day the Holy Spirit focused my attention on what Jesus said about this man: "I have not found so great faith. . . ."

The words came alive. In essence, Jesus was saying, "If you want to see real faith in action, study this man." I decided to do so. I reasoned that since this was the greatest faith Jesus ever met, we need to examine it closely. Some of the characteristics of great faith are on exhibit right here. Let's take a good look at them.

One very important characteristic is right motivation. He had a genuine concern for others. His heart was right.

The Roman army had a vast supply of servants. Replacing one who had died would have been easy, but to this centurion the sick man was not just a replaceable subordinate. He was a suffering human being. That is what really mattered. It still does to people who have the love of God.

The Jews said. "He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." Even cold, hard legalists recognize love when they see it, especially when they are its beneficiaries.

Another quality of real faith so very evident in this man is humility. Although he was a Gentile exercising authority over Jews, his attitude was not warped by national pride or poisoned by ethnic prejudice.

He recognized and supported true religion in spite of the fact that there were hypocrites in it. He did not withdraw himself in self-righteous pride and say to himself, "I'm as good as they are. Those hypocrites aren't going to get one denarius of my money." Instead he looked beyond people, saw the truth, and gave his support to it.

Even though he had built a synagogue and had been pronounced "worthy" by the elders of the Jews, he considered himself unworthy to come to Jesus. He realized a truth that had escaped the best theologians of his day. He realized that no one can come to Jesus on the basis of his or her own works, but only on the basis of divine mercy.

Unlike Naaman centuries before, this officer displayed no superiority of position, no pride of rank. Certainly humility is the only appropriate setting for the beautiful gem of faith.

Then this disciplined centurion demonstrated another quality of real faith, a very vital one. He recognized the absolute authority of Jesus Christ.

As a Roman officer, he understood absolute authority. He knew that from the Caesar in Rome down to the lowliest foot soldier in the most remote province of the empire, there existed an unbreakable chain of command, and he was fully aware of its implications.

"For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it" (Luke 7:8 KJV). In other words, "When I give an order, all the authority of the Roman Empire, including the personal authority of the emperor himself, backs it up."

Now as a military man he realized that a like chain of command exists in the kingdom of God, and that Jesus stood in a position of absolute authority in that divine chain of command. He knew that if Jesus only spoke the word, it would be done. All the authority of heaven would back it up.

When Jesus saw that the centurion had grasped this truth, he marveled. No one had seen the analogy as clearly. No one had realized as fully the principle of spiritual authority that operates in the kingdom of God. No one had recognized in this context the position of Jesus and the ultimate source of His authority. Nothing less could have brought this loyal officer of Caesar to address Jesus as "Lord."

Certainly such understanding, such faith, comes not from flesh and blood but from the Father. No wonder that Jesus marveled. No wonder that the centurion received healing for his servant by just the spoken word of Jesus!

This principle still holds true today. Jesus is highly exalted at the right hand of the Father. The divine chain of command is firmly established and in full operation, and every true believer in Christ occupies a place of delegated authority in it.

Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore . . ." (Matthew 28:18,19 KJV). "In my name shall they cast out devils . . ." (Mark 16:17 KJV). "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matthew 17:20 KJV).

The centurion could speak with authority because he knew he was under authority. The same is true in the kingdom of God. They can speak with divine authority who recognize themselves to be under divine authority. To speak the word with authority, we must first submit ourselves to the authority of God's Word. Before we can speak that His will be done, we must know that will and submit ourselves to it. The only divine authority we can exercise is that to which we have submitted ourselves.

Christian, you are under the authority of the risen, reigning Christ. His name represents that authority. He has authorized you to ask in His name and to speak in His name. When you do, you are invoking His absolute divine authority. You activate the chain of command.

So, "speak the word only" (Matthew 8:8). Speak it in love, not for self-gratification. Speak it in humility, not for self-exaltation. Speak it with authority, without wavering. Speak it in faith, without doubting.

Jesus said, "The scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). God will always honor His Word.

The Healing Of The Woman With An Issue Of Blood.

The following was first published in the June 23, 1985 issue of The Pentecostal Evangel. With minor revisions, it is reprinted here. The text is Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48.

"THE DAY THE BLEEDING STOPPED"

She lay exhausted, tears of pain and frustration coursing across her face. The physician had just given her another "treatment" Her midsection still wrenched in spasm from the painful, primitive medical procedures of the day. The horrible aftertaste of the physician's nauseating potion lingered in her mouth.

We read about her in all three synoptic Gospels. Mark's account is the fullest (Mark 5:25-34).

For 12 long years she had suffered. Now her money was gone, and she was getting worse. Nothing seemed to help.

The cold, clammy fingers of despair tightened their icy grip on her frightened soul. *Would the bleeding ever stop?*

It was a lonely affliction. The Law of Moses classified her as unclean. Whom could she talk to? Who would be her friend? She felt the deep emotional wounds that went with her sickness.

Then one day she heard a commotion. Making her way outside, she saw a crowd moving by. Someone was at the center of the throng. Who could it be Then she heard the name--*Jesus*.

Jesus. She had heard so much about Him. He even healed the sick, they said. Well, she certainly needed healing; so if Jesus could heal the sick, He could heal her.

But how? The Law would not allow her to come openly. Twelve years of rejection had taken its toll on her spirit. Her self-esteem was all but gone.

Would Jesus accept her? Could she stand the hurt if He turned her away? She knew she was unworthy. No, she just couldn't bring herself to take the risk.

But she had no other hope. And neither do we. Someone has said that every sorrow, every problem, is a summons for us to go to Jesus.

"If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. That, too, violated the Mosaic law; but she had to get to Jesus, law or no law!

God had told the Israelites to make a blue border around the bottom of their garments to remind them to obey Him (see Numbers 15:37-41). By the time of Christ, the Pharisees had made it a religious status symbol. They enlarged the borders of their garments as a badge of increased righteousness (see Matthew 23:5).

The woman had picked up on this; so in her mind she associated the borders of the robe with spirituality, even though Jesus' peasant garb had no such border.

No doubt she had heard Malachi 4:2, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." Sometimes "wings" in the Old Testament meant the lower edge of the garment, and perhaps she saw that in the prophecy of Malachi. There would be healing in the hem of Messiah's garment!

Whatever her understanding of the matter, her faith was resolute. She had made up her mind. People, pain, the prohibitions of the Law--nothing would stop her. She had a goal, and she kept thinking through the obstacles all the way to her goal.

Finally she made it. She had struggled up from behind, pushing her way past people. *People*. More than one determined soul has had to get past people to reach Jesus. Lots of people stand in our way. If we allow them to block us, we will never reach Christ. But there is too much at stake. We have to get to Jesus, people or no people!

Resolutely she stretched out her arm, her fingers open, searching. *There!* She felt the cloth! Immediately she felt something else. It surged through her, sweeping away pain and weakness, bringing health, vigor, life!

Nobody had to tell her she was healed. She knew it! God honored her faith even though it came from an imperfect understanding. The release of faith brought the release of divine power.

Then it happened. Suddenly Jesus stopped and turned around. "Who touched my clothes?" The amused disciples asked, "You see the crowd bumping against You, and You want to know who touched You?"

Millions of people touch the Christian faith daily. But it is only an outward contact. They never experience real, inner contact with Jesus Christ.

But this was a special kind of touch, this touch of faith, because Jesus had felt something too. What the woman felt enter her body Jesus felt leave His--power. He knew there had been a dynamic transfer, and He wanted to identify the blessed recipient.

Whenever there is the living, personal contact of faith, Jesus knows it, and He acknowledges it.

Jesus wanted to set the dear woman free also from her fears. Fearfully she had tried to snatch up her blessing and be gone. But Jesus wanted her to experience the liberation of an open confession.

"But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth" (verse 33 KJV).

Why was she afraid? Did she think she had stolen something? Why was she afraid to be open, afraid to trust Jesus? She was healed, but still held in the grip of fear; and she would not be fully whole until she was released from that fear.

Then she broke. She fell down before Him.

That's it! Tell Jesus the whole truth. Open up. Pour it all out. Don't hold on to anything. Give it all to Christ and be totally free!

"Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague" (verse 34 KJV). Literally, "Go *into* peace." Peace was something she had not enjoyed for 12 long years. Jesus gave it to her in a moment just by His spoken word.

So come, friend. Come out of your shell, your prison. Do not let fear keep you from Christ. He wants to bless you. He wants to make you whole. He wants to set you free. Trust Him. He will do it right now.

The Healing Of Two Blind Men.

Nowhere in the Bible do we find two people as completely merged in one heart and one mind as the two blind men we meet in Matthew 9:27-31.

"When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!' And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.' And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, 'See that no one knows it.' But when they had departed, they spread the news about Him in all that country" (NKJV).

This happened in Capernaum during our Lord's great Galilean ministry. He had just healed the woman with the chronic bleeding and had raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead.

As Jesus left Jairus's house, these two blind men began following Him and calling out to Him to have mercy on them.

As we think about these two men, several questions come to mind. How long had they been blind? Did either man have a family, or at least one relative, to look after him? How did they find each other? How long had they been together? The Biblical record is silent on these questions.

Sometime, somewhere, these two blind men met each other, accepted each other, and formed a close bond of mutual dependency. Their words and actions are evidence that they had become so unified in their relationship that they thought together, spoke together, and acted together.

They were unified in their common need. In their miserable existence no doubt they had learned to share with each other what little they had. They gave each other companionship and did what they could to protect and defend each other. They existed together in their own little world of shared hopelessness and despair. Such an existence certainly could not be called living.

All that changed when Jesus returned to Capernaum. These nameless wretches had begun hearing reports about Jesus and His miracles. These reports must have ignited faith in their hearts and put a resolve in their souls to find Him. By hearing the noise of the crowd and asking a few questions, it did not take long for them to find where Jesus was and where He was going. Jairus's daughter was dead and Jesus was heading that way!

On the way a woman who was "unclean" according to the ceremonial law pressed her way through the crowd and managed to touch the hem of the Master's garment. Instantly she was healed. Jesus stopped and confirmed the healing. This further stimulated the blind men's faith.

Outside the ruler's house they waited with the others. Suddenly the crowd was electrified by the news that the daughter of Jairus was alive again. Jesus had just raised her from the dead!

That was all it took. These two men did not have to check with each other before deciding what to do. They were so accustomed to thinking and acting together that they burst out spontaneously, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" It was the united cry of a unified faith.

Now, even though their physical eyes were blind, they saw with the eyes of faith what most of the people had failed to see. They saw Jesus clearly as the Son of David. This was their unified confession that Jesus was the Messiah.

"Have mercy on us!" They were unified in their cry. This reminds us of what our Lord taught us about the power of agreement in prayer. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19 KJV).

They were unified in their faith. This was demonstrated by their common determination. Instead of acknowledging their persistent cries, Jesus went on into the house. This silence of Jesus tested their faith by giving them an opportunity to exercise it to the limit--together.

What if they had stopped at the door? We would not read about them in the word of God. They would merely have joined the ranks of the anonymous sufferers who fell short of full belief.

Not these two men! They were unified in their persistence. They knew exactly what they wanted; they knew that Jesus could provide it; and they were not going to stop short of getting it. They refused to allow natural timidity or politeness to stop them. Door or no door, house or no

house, they were not going to let Jesus get away from them. Their faith followed through--together!

"Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Jesus dealt with them together. He brought their faith to the point and called for a verbal confession. Faith expressed in their actions now had to be expressed in their words.

"Yes, Lord." They were unified in their confession.

Jesus took them at their word. He had heard their cries, seen their actions, and now heard the declaration of their faith. He honored their confession, touched their eyes, and commanded what they believed to become a reality.

The healing power was in Jesus' words and His touch. Their faith activated that power and made the word operative. What was true in faith now showed itself to be true in fact.

The solidarity of their faith resulted in a double miracle. They were unified in the blessing.

The first sight their eyes beheld was *Jesus!* What a marvelous, beautiful, unforgettable sight.

Jesus sternly ordered them to make sure that no one knew it. Our Lord did not want His miracles to ignite a wrong public response.

But these two men who had been so unified in everything else were unified also in their disobedience. They "spread the news about Him in all that country." They were unified also in declaring their testimony.

Jesus must have known that this command would be one of the most difficult for human nature to comply with. He did not censure or punish them. Neither will we.

The Deaf And Tongue-tied Man.

Jesus was into what is called His "year of opposition." He had been ministering in the outlying areas of the northern part of Palestine. After delivering the daughter of the Syrophenician woman from demons, the Lord chose to return to the Sea of Galilee through Decapolis.

Decapolis (meaning "ten cities") was a semi-pagan area identified by its free Greek cities. Politically it was subject only to the governor of Syria. In Old Testament times it was known as Gilead. By choosing this route Jesus avoided the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas.

The events recorded there happened just before the feeding of the 4,000. Matthew 15:29-31 records that Jesus went up into a mountain and sat there. Crowds of people came to Him bringing the lame, blind, maimed, "and many others." The climb was so exhausting for those who were helping the handicapped get up the mountain that when they reached Jesus, they "cast them down at Jesus' feet." There He healed them.

Why did Jesus make it so difficult for people to bring these sick, suffering, and handicapped friends and family members to Him? Why did He not stay down on level ground to make it easy for them?

No doubt one reason was to separate those of real love and determined faith from the ones whose commitment went only as far as the limit of convenience. Even then, the number of people whose faith followed through are spoken of as "great multitudes."

When they saw the miracles, they "glorified the God of Israel." These miracles were a witness to these semi-pagans that the God of Israel is the true and living God.

Mark records the details of one of the unusual healings that occurred during this time. We read about it in Mark 7:31-37.

"And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven he sighed, and saith unto him, *Ephphatha*, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man, but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it, and were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak" (KJV).

This was a Greek-speaking, semi-pagan man brought to Jesus by semi-pagans. The Biblical record does not give us any details of the man's life. Evidently, he had a family and/or friends who cared for him, watched out for him, and took him here and there. Some of these people brought him to Jesus.

From watching how Jesus healed the sick and infirm, they assumed that the proper way was for Jesus to put His hand on the person. Notice, they said "hand," not "hands." This suggests that so many were coming to Jesus that He was healing them two at a time, laying one hand on each person. So perhaps they assumed that this was the *modus operandi*.

So they asked Jesus to heal this man the way they expected Him to do it. This reminds us of Naaman's preconceived notions of how the prophet Elisha should heal him (see 2 Kings 5:11).

But Jesus' approach to this man was different. Perhaps that is why the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to include the event in his record of the gospel.

First, Jesus took him aside from the crowd. He dealt with him personally and in detail. This personal attention affirmed the man's human dignity. A man who had been marginalized by society, dependent on others to move him around here and there (largely at their will), locked into a low estimate of his own worth and uncertain of his future, was suddenly the object of the Master's special attention. He was alone with Jesus. Jesus cared for him, cared enough to treat him in such a way as to affirm him as a valuable human being.

If the man had been lame or suffering from any one of a variety of ailments, a hand laid on him would have been sufficient. But this man was deaf and could not respond with verbal clarity. He could not hear the faith-building word through Jesus' teachings. To stimulate his faith he needed special instruction communicated through meaningful gestures.

Faith rests on truth, and Jesus used gestures to give this man a basis of faith. No doubt the man had been passive for such a long time that he had lost his inner initiative. Jesus was getting ready to act--to heal him. He wanted to stir the man in his soul to expect something big to happen and to become an active participant.

By poking His fingers into the man's ears, Jesus was "saying" to him that He was going to "open" his ears to sound.

By spitting and touching the man's tongue with the saliva on His finger, Jesus was "saying" to him that He was going to correct his speech defect.

By looking up, Jesus was "saying" to the man that his healing will come from God in Heaven, and for him to look to God in faith.

By sighing deeply, Jesus was "saying" to the man that God loved him and so did He.

Then Jesus spoke the creative word--"*Ephphatha*"--the Aramaic word for "be opened." *And it was done!*

God the Father by His Holy Spirit honored the command spoken in absolute confidence and authority by His Son, Jesus Christ. The Father validated Christ's word and made it operative. What was spoken became a reality. So again we witness the power of the word of Jesus Christ.

Immediately the man could hear clearly and speak plainly. The organic and physiological correction liberated the whole personality.

He spoke plainly. How we wish we could have heard what he said!

For the same reasons that He ordered the two blind men not to tell anyone, Jesus commanded this man and those with him not to tell about the miracle. But again human nature did the predictable. Soon it was included among the other reports of the miracles Jesus was doing.

They "glorified the God of Israel." As for Jesus Himself, this did not lead them to believe on Him for who He is. All they saw in Him was a miracle worker doing a good job at making the deaf to hear and the mutes to speak. Such was the limit of these simple pagans' understanding and faith.

This reminds us how important it is for us to look beyond the miracles themselves and to focus on Him to Whom the miracles point, believing what those miracles declare about Who He is--the Son of God.

The Blind Man Of Bethsaida (Healed On The Installment Plan).

After the feeding of the 4,000, Jesus and His disciples sailed over the Sea of Galilee to the region of Dalmanutha. There He was confronted by some hostile Pharisees. Leaving that

negative spiritual environment, He went back into the ship and returned to the other side. What happened next is recorded in Mark 8:22-26.

"Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, 'I see men like trees, walking.' Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. And He sent him away to his house, saying, 'Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town'" (NKJV).

In describing this scene, Mark writes (as he often does) in what is called "the graphic present." He writes as though he is reporting the drama as it unfolds. Jesus "comes" to Bethsaida; they "are bringing" a blind man to Him; they "are begging Him" to touch him.

Now, the Biblical record gives us no personal background of this man. The fact that Jesus "restored" his sight implies that he had not been born blind. Also, the fact that at the first stage of his healing, he saw "men as trees, walking" suggests that he had some memory of these objects from past visual experience. And Jesus assumed that he had a place to stay, because He sent him away to his house (verse 26).

In this event we see some parallels to the healing of the deaf and tongue-tied man. Some people cared enough for this man to bring him to Jesus. They begged Him to touch him, assuming that Jesus' touch was a necessary part of the process of healing. Jesus led him away from the crowd. Also, Jesus again took the unusual step of using saliva as a communicative gesture.

By leading the man out of the town, Jesus accomplished two things: (1) he removed the man from the idle curiosity of the crowd, and (2) He put him in the position of having to exercise faith. The blind man had to choose to follow Jesus, to put himself into the hands of the unseen Savior and trust Him completely.

What a jolt it must have been to the blind man when suddenly Jesus spit on his eyes! The Lord would not allow him to be passive. This act of Jesus would bring a response, one way or

another. Either the blind man would react by stepping away, wiping the saliva from his eyes, and refusing to have anything more to do with Jesus; or he would hold steady in his confidence in Christ and trust that this unusual and unexplainable act was somehow associated with the healing of his eyes. He chose the latter.

So Jesus communicated with him through the physical sense that he had--feeling and hearing. Jesus spit on his eyes, put his hands on his eyes (the focal point of the healing action), and asked him if he saw anything.

"I see men as trees, walking." ("I see the men, because as trees I see them walking"). That is, he knew that trees do not walk; so he assumed them to be people. These would have been some of the Lord's disciples or some of the people who brought the man to Jesus and accompanied him as Jesus led him out of the town.

This gives us a fairly accurate idea of how much of his vision was restored in this first stage of his healing. He could see light and some upright objects moving around.

This incompleteness in the blind man's healing did not indicate that there was a limit on Jesus' power. The healing was progressive because the man's faith was progressive.

What even that partial healing must have done to this man's faith in Jesus! Just put yourself in his place. You cannot see. This unfamiliar man startles you by spitting on your eyes and putting His hands on them. Suddenly you see light and definite movement! That in itself elates you and makes you realize that this Jesus *is* someone special, and that there really *is* something to this "divine healing."

Nevertheless, you feel mixed emotions. You see *something*, and that excites you and raises an expectation for more. But why were you not completely healed? Could Jesus not fully restore your sight?

Feeling somewhat disappointed and perhaps even dejected, you drop your head and stare at the blurred ground. You hesitate to look up again. Jesus can do it, but will it *really* happen?

But Jesus does not allow you to lose faith and perhaps even the degree of healing you already received. He wastes no time and continues to press the initiative, not giving you time to linger in your self-defeating melancholy.

Jesus reaches down, puts His hands on your eyes again, pushes your head up and makes you look up (majority text).

Action prompts action. Jesus initiates the action, and you respond with corresponding action.

And you see clearly! Faces. Details. Colors. A whole new world opens up to you.

Jesus commanded the man to avoid Bethsaida completely and go straight home (evidently he lived somewhere else). We assume that he obeyed Christ's command, for The Scriptures do not indicate otherwise. So the crowd in town missed the miracle.

We hear nothing more about this man. So we can only wonder what impact this brief encounter with Jesus had on him--and on those who brought him. Faith had been awakened and rewarded. His life was changed--dramatically. Family and friends witnessed it, lived with it, and must have told others about it. Certainly a miracle like this must have become a major family event, recounted to children and grandchildren for generations.

Later, when the gospel spread across Palestine after the death and resurrection of Jesus, would this man have had any hesitation in believing and becoming a devout follower of the Christ, along with his family and acquaintances?

It is reasonable to hope that this encounter with Jesus brought about a profound change in the spiritual condition of this man and perhaps also in those around him. Perhaps we will meet him in Heaven, and then he will fill us in on the interesting details.

So, as this man did, let us trust "the unseen Savior." Let us not be among those who have eyes but no spiritual sight. Let us not allow "the god of this world" to blind our minds because of our unbelief (2 Corinthians 4:4).

And just as those who had sight brought this blind man to Jesus, so also let us whose spiritual eyes have been opened bring others to Him who opens the eyes of the mind and heart as well as the body.

The Man Born Blind.

In the Ninth chapter of the Gospel of John we read the fascinating account of Jesus' encounter with a man who had been born blind, and of His resulting encounter with the Pharisees.

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which is translated, Sent.) So he went and washed, and came back seeing" (John 9:1-7 NKJV).

To begin with, we notice that no one brought this man to Jesus, and he took no initiative to come to Jesus on his own or to find someone who would bring him to Jesus. He was just "there" as Jesus and His disciples walked by.

Somehow Jesus and His disciples knew that this man had been born blind. They must have been somewhat familiar with his life history to know that fact, or perhaps they had seen him before and had inquired about it.

Whatever the events were that preceded this encounter, we notice next the thoughtless insensitivity on the part of the disciples. The record seems to indicate that the disciples asked their question in the hearing of the blind man.

We do not know how often the man had heard this question and other similar thoughtless comments by acquaintances and passers-by alike. And how each time he must have felt the sting of the condemning implication.

In their preconceived idea of the cause, the disciples were merely expressing the theological assumptions of the time. They did not bother to question the assumption that his blindness was the result of his or his parents' sin. They wanted to know only whose sin it was. Furthermore, they assumed that Jesus would know that and would tell them. Then they would understand why this man "deserved" his "punishment."

The record does not tell us that the disciples expected Jesus to heal him. In their minds they probably concluded that since his blindness was a judgment for sin, divine justice would prevent his being healed.

This illustrates the importance of a correct theology. Wrong theology can be cruel if it distorts one's view of the character of God. Innocent people suffer as a result. Likewise, wrong theology can and does do immeasurable harm if it loses sight of the holiness of God.

Jesus dismissed all their notions and informed them that God had a purpose. That purpose was to show His mighty acts by healing the man of his blindness.

Jesus did not say that God had caused the man's congenital blindness. He said only that God would use the fact of his blindness to accomplish a purpose. God's purpose was not the *cause* of the man's blindness. God's purpose was the *solution* to his blindness.

Then, Jesus affirmed His mission--to work God's work while it was His "day." He must do God's work *now*, while He was the light of the world then present in the world. He warned that the "night" is coming when no one can work. And since He had already told His followers that they (and we) are also the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), He is affirming our mission to carry on God's work in the world to completion before the day of salvation is past and all opportunity for evangelism and ministry is gone.

We observe now the healing of the blind man. Through all of this the man had been a listener, passive on the outside but increasingly active on the inside as he heard Jesus speaking. What the Lord said must have awakened in him a sense of anticipation. His blindness was not merely a meaningless misfortune! It was not a punishment for his sins nor the sins of his parents! God was going to demonstrate what He could do--in him--right now!

Then came the test in the form of the actions and instructions of Jesus. Again Jesus used saliva. He spit on the ground, made a mud ball and spread it on his eyes.

This man, too, could have reacted negatively. He could have pulled back, voiced a strong protest, and immediately scraped off the mud.

But the words of Jesus had already awakened faith in him, and so he chose to trust the unseen Savior and Healer.

"Go, wash in the Pool Of Siloam."

The Pool Of Siloam has an interesting history. It was during the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians under Sennacherib in B.C. 701 (2 Chronicles 32) that king Hezekiah built a tunnel from the Gihon spring to bring water into the city (2 Kings 20:20. See also Nehemiah 3:15).

During the construction, workers started at both ends and finally met in the middle after cutting through 1, 750 feet of rock. In Jerusalem, the water was retained in a pool, the Pool Of Siloam.

"He went . . . he washed . . . he came seeing." A short, terse statement, but what a fascinating and deeply meaningful drama is packed into it.

First, think of the act of faith this meant for the blind man and how faith demonstrates itself in action. He chose to keep the mud on his eyes, resisting the natural impulse to get it off his face. This was an act of confident obedience to Christ. He believed the Person; therefore he believed His word. The Lord's specific instructions were to keep that mud on his eyes until he washed it off in the Pool Of Siloam.

Next, we imagine the scenario as he made his way to the pool. He starts out in a resolute determination born of sheer faith in Jesus Christ. We watch him as he gropes his way along, mud on his eyes. He must have attracted considerable attention. He keeps asking people along the way how to get to the pool. Curious, people ask questions. Some snicker and make remarks about the mud caked on his eyes. He stumbles now and then and bumps into things as he moves along.

But he was a purpose driven man. He was determined to obey what Jesus said, with full confidence in the anticipated results. At last his faith was fully rewarded.

In this man's attitudes and actions we see some of the characteristics of genuine faith: obedience, humility, perseverance.

In verses 27 and 28 we observe another essential component of genuine faith--discipleship. When the Pharisees repeatedly asked him how he was healed, he replied: "'I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?' Then they reviled him and said, 'You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples.'"

It is evident from the man's words that he assumed that the miraculous works of Jesus should lead people to become His disciples.

However, his faith was not yet a perfected faith. That happened when Jesus revealed Himself to him as the Son of God (see verses 35 - 38). Faith cannot go beyond light. Up until then the man believed on Jesus to the full extent of his knowledge of who Jesus is. Now the newly sighted man understood what the miracle of his healing proved about Jesus. Now he knew who Jesus really is; and the moment the man learned who Jesus is, his faith embraced the full truth and he worshiped Him.

Real faith in Jesus Christ produces true worship from a heart purified by faith. The man worshiped Jesus openly, right in front of the unbelieving Pharisees!

The man's stand for Christ had cost him something very important. It had brought about his excommunication. In Israel this was a very serious punishment and loss. But though he had lost his "religion," he found reality. He met the Messiah! He staked everything on Jesus--and won!

"And Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind'" (verse 39 NKJV).

This miracle was much more than a private encounter between the blind man and Jesus. It was a public testimony about Jesus that forced all who witnessed it to make a decision about Him. It forced judgment on them, that is, a crisis of faith. Each person had to choose. It was see and believe, or deliberately blind oneself to the truth.

To the Pharisees' question, "Are we blind also?" Jesus replied, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains" (verse 41 NKJV). To claim to see the truth while refusing to believe it is an admission of sin and guilt.

Even so today Jesus brings people to the issue of who He is. The decisive witness of God the Father to His Son, Jesus Christ, forces on us the cosmic crisis. We cannot face this witness and remain passive, detached observers.

Jesus said, "If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23 NKJV). Light rejected becomes darkness. Willful blindness leads to judicial blindness. Eventually God withholds light from those who persistently resist and reject it. No blindness is greater than the blindness of those who adamantly refuse to see. They stumble on in their darkness, unaware that in their self-confident delusions they are headed for the ditch--and taking others with them.

So the issue is before us: believe or not; accept or reject; see or be blind; be saved or be lost. This is truly a "no brainer." It is not "rocket science." It does not take a lot of intelligence. Any sane person knows what to do.

The Woman With The Spirit Of Infirmity (Doubled Over By The Devil).

The public ministry of Jesus was drawing to a close. It is thought that He was in the region of Perea, to the east of Judea, ready to begin His final journey westward to Jerusalem and His passion.

During that time an event took place that is recorded in Luke 13:10-17. It was a Sabbath day and Jesus was teaching in one of the local synagogues. He noticed a woman who was all bent over with a severe forward curvature of the spine and unable to straighten herself up. Luke informs us that she had been in that difficult position for eighteen long years.

Let us take time now to consider our Lord's analysis of her condition. He clearly stated that she had been bound by Satan "look, these eighteen years" (verse 16). Luke also pointed out that she had a spirit of infirmity during that time (verse 11).

Of course, her condition could be diagnosed medically and explained biologically. To the materialist, this is sufficient. To look beyond natural causes and postulate the presence of demonic activity is primitive, pre-scientific superstition not worthy even of notice by modern sophisticated people. Right?

Not so fast. Instead of forming quick conclusions on naturalistic presuppositions, we would be wiser to keep an open mind on the subject.

First, Jesus Himself declared that demonic activity was involved in this case. Jesus had numerous first-hand encounters with demons during His ministry. He talked to them and they talked back to Him. When He exorcised them (cast them out), the afflicted persons were healed instantly, dramatically and completely.

Also, Jesus arose from the dead to prove that He is who He said He is, and that what He said is the truth. His resurrection validated His claims and authenticated His words. We would do well to pause and think instead of arrogantly dismissing the words of the One who arose from the dead.

Second, many others throughout history and in modern times have confronted demonic activity and dealt with it the same way Jesus did, in His name and with the same results.

Now, if all of this has a natural explanation, then let science explain it. If these cures have a medical or other natural cause, then let medical science find it and put it to use for the good of humanity. Let them "cast out devils." If they can duplicate by natural means these instantaneous and dramatic results, they have an obligation to do so. If they cannot, honesty obligates everyone to be objective on the subject and to consider that perhaps something is involved beyond the limits that the scientific method imposes on itself.

So then, in what sense did the woman have "a spirit of infirmity" and was "bound by Satan"?

Demonic activity occurs in various forms and to various degrees. No one said that this "daughter of Abraham" was "demon possessed." She "had a spirit of infirmity" that in some way was involved in her condition, a condition that was a bondage ultimately attributable to Satan.

We do not know her history. We do not know if she was a passive victim in all of this, or if sometime in her past she had allowed Satan to gain an influence in her life. Since we have no evidence of the latter, we must assume the former.

The fact that Jesus did not drive out any demons from her strongly indicates that her condition was not the result of a demon residing in her. She was "demonized" in the sense that demonic activity was present, but not in the deeper sense of demonic control over the whole personality.

Also, it is possible that the demon had done its destructive work in her body eighteen years earlier and was now only perpetuating and aggravating its results.

No doubt today this woman would be greatly helped by medical science. Medication, therapy, perhaps even surgery would alleviate the condition. This tells us that at times demons take advantage of purely organic (and more often of psychological) conditions and exacerbate them. When the condition is relieved by professional or other natural means, an advantage is taken away from the demonic presence. King Saul was a good example of this phenomenon (see

1 Samuel 16:23 and context).

Even though there are primary and secondary causes at work, and even though human responsibility is often involved, in the ultimate sense all evil is the work of Satan. Peter declared that Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil (Acts 10:38).

Satan's rebellion and his agency in the fall of Adam (Genesis Chapter 3) brought about natural and judicial actions that triggered a whole chain of physical and moral events that have done immeasurable harm to the human race—including sickness, suffering, and even death itself. Jesus Christ is the victor over all of these, including ultimately death itself (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Jesus treated this woman with compassion. He saw her differently from the way others did. We become used to people as they are. Joe is blind. Sue is crippled. Jim is "retarded." So we categorize them and assume the categories to be their natural state.

Not so Jesus. Jesus was always alert to human need and sensitive to what people go through in life. So He spoke to the woman and called her to come to Him.

Now, why would Jesus ask her to get up and hobble over to where He was? Would it not have been more thoughtful and courteous for Jesus, an able-bodied young man, to go to her?

That would be so under natural circumstances. But Jesus operated at times beyond natural circumstances. In healing the sick He operated in the supernatural and therefore by supernatural principles, the principles of faith in God.

By calling the woman to come to Him, Jesus was testing her faith. And remember, obedience is the test of faith. He was giving her a very important opportunity to exercise and demonstrate faith in Him and His word. She could have chosen to sit there all doubled over, self-convinced that this Galilean could do nothing for her. But no. She had been listening to Him and the hearing of the word of God awakened faith (Romans 10:17).

Sound familiar? We have seen these principles working together so many times that the pattern has become clear to us: the word-> faith-> obedience-> blessing. First there was teaching, then healing.

"Woman, you are loosed." Perfect tense--"you stand loosed." It is done. Then He laid His hands on her. Christ's word is sufficient. At times He merely spoke the word and it was done. Nevertheless, the laying on of hands has its place as a point of contact where faith and healing meet in power.

"Immediately she was made straight and glorified God" (verse 13 KJV). She began to glorify God and kept it up. Jesus had a way of turning ordinary synagogue gatherings into dynamic praise celebrations!

"The ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation" (verse 14 KJV). The word means an inner feeling of pain (angst). He answered. Answered whom? Nobody had asked him anything. He just felt a sharp inner reaction to this dramatic interruption of his "order of service," and felt a compulsion to respond. After all, it was on the Sabbath day and in *his* synagogue. God Almighty in Jesus Christ had just visited his little synagogue and worked a mighty miracle!

And he was deeply upset. Doesn't God know that He cannot do anything on the Sabbath? It was against their religion (and also God's, they assumed).

Such is the result of starting from a wrong premise and thinking "logically" and consistently to a wrong conclusion. Such is the state of mind of most religion in today's world. Wrong assumptions about God lead necessarily to wrong conclusions on many subjects.

"There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day" the ruler exclaimed (verse 14 KJV). Come to *my* synagogue Sunday through Friday and be healed, but (horrors!) not on the Sabbath!

Well, this dear lady had been coming to his synagogue on the Sabbath perhaps for years, and she had not been healed. If the ruler of the synagogue and those who shared his theology thought that maybe Wednesday would be a good day to come and be healed, why had he not held healing services on that day?

Analogies are useful ways to put some things into proper perspective. First, Jesus told them that they were hypocrites and then proceeded by an analogy to demonstrate their hypocrisy.

"Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound--think of it--for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" (verses 15 and 16 NKJV).

That certainly put things into proper perspective. Abruptly, too. These religious people never would think of leaving their animals tied up all day long without food and water, not even on the Sabbath day. Now Jesus showed them that they valued their own animals above a human being.

Jesus had addressed her as a woman (verse 12). Now He refers to her as a daughter of Abraham. He goes beyond their demeaning attitude toward women in general by reminding them that she is a daughter of Abraham. Not only was she valuable as a human being. She was also under the Abrahamic Covenant and therefore a beneficiary of its blessings.

So Jesus was saying to them, "Your animals belong to you; this woman belongs to Abraham. What a "zinger"! While Christ's adversaries smarted in shame, the people rejoiced.

Believers, too, are children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ and therefore heirs of God (Galatians 3:29). All the covenant blessings belong to us through Christ: salvation, healing, the Holy Spirit, deliverance, abundant life now and forever.

The Man With Dropsy.

Not long after He healed the woman with the spirit of infirmity, Jesus was invited to a feast at the home of one of the leading Pharisees. We read about it in Luke 14:1-6.

The Bible does not say exactly where this took place. Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem and the cross. It might have happened in a community on the way westward from Perea, or it might have been in the same community where Jesus healed the infirm woman, perhaps a week after that event.

If it was the latter, the plot of the Pharisees and lawyers could well have been their response to the Lord's scathing denunciation of them at the synagogue. Remember, He had called them hypocrites in no uncertain terms and had openly put them to shame. Either way, the news of that event probably reached the people who were now hosting Jesus at this meal.

Even though the hostility of the religious establishment toward Jesus was increasing daily and had reached a high level, it was still "politically correct" for the leading religious figures in a community to host a prominent "rabbi."

So much for the setting. Now for the "set-up."

It was a Sabbath feast and Jesus had been invited. At such feasts it was common for individuals to wander in and join the guests. That is what happened at an earlier meal (see Luke 7:36-50).

Only this time they had gone out and brought in a man who had dropsy. Dropsy is an accumulation of fluid in the body tissues that causes the tissues to swell. It is often caused by heart failure or kidney disease. Today it is called edema. Being a physician, Luke had the technical term in his vocabulary and used it in this case.

Dropsy is a very noticeable disease due to the swelling it causes. For that reason the plotters chose this man and placed him strategically right in front of Jesus. Their evil intention was to "trap" Jesus into healing him so they could accuse Him of the sin of "breaking" the Sabbath. This shows how far from reason and the truth wrong thinking can lead people. So throughout the meal they kept watching Jesus with side looks to see what He would do.

Jesus sized up the situation at once, and at the appropriate moment He took action. It can be assumed logically that Jesus waited until the meal was almost over. We can assume that Jesus would not send this man away empty or deprive him of part of his food. Besides, Jesus probably finished His own meal, enjoying the occasion to the full--the food, probably a meaningful conversation with the edematous man in front of Him (including some faith-building words), and

just letting the plotters nervously wait and wonder. The Bible does not give us such details, but it is a logical scenario.

When He was ready, Jesus seized the moment and took complete control of the situation. He trumped them by bringing up the subject ahead of time.

"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" He asked.

No answer. Jesus had taken the initiative and brought up the subject before they did. By preempting them He threw off their timing and prevented them from putting their plan into action. He took command and beat them at their own game. Nonplused, they had nothing to say.

Then Jesus proceeded with power. "Having taken hold of him, He healed him," is the way it reads in the original. We do not know the exact way it happened. The cause of the edema was healed immediately, of course. Then one way or another the excess fluids left his body and his appearance changed visibly and dramatically.

Jesus let him go--dismissed him--got him out of there and away from these negative theological nit-pickers.

Jesus answered them. He did not answer their words because they had been put to silence. Instead, He answered their thoughts, their erroneous and twisted ideas and religious assumptions.

Jesus used the same general analogy here that He had used so recently. "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out [up] on the Sabbath day?" (verse 5, NKJV). Some manuscripts read "donkey" and some read "son." The abbreviations of the two words in the Greek uncial manuscripts look similar. Which scribe started copying it wrong we do not know. No matter. The point is the same. Truth is truth.

The Lord's response here was not as strong as on the earlier occasion. Nevertheless, it had the same effect. They had no answer.

And the man who was healed had a true Sabbath, the best he ever had.

The Healing Of The Ten Lepers (The Lifestyle Of Thanksgiving).

The following was first published in the November, 1993 issue of Advance magazine. With minor revisions it is reprinted here. The text is Luke 17:11-19.

It was a common sight--lepers wandering about together, little clusters of human rejection and hopelessness bound together by mutual misery and desperation, a subculture separated from society by the law.

One such group spotted Jesus traveling on His way to Jerusalem. We read the account in Luke 17:11-19.

These ten lepers kept their distance from Jesus, perhaps as much from uncertainty as from the requirements of the law. Would Jesus reject them? They had suffered so much rejection. To be rejected now would be especially painful. Would they be healed even if they asked? They were common men with common thoughts and feelings.

Whatever their thoughts, delay was dissipating their moment of opportunity. Jesus was about to enter a village, and they were not allowed to follow Him in. He would mingle with the crowd, and they might never see Him again. They had to act now. It was believe or die!

"Jesus, master, have mercy on us!"

There. It was done. They had thrown themselves on His mercy. It was all they could do. How would He respond?

"Go show yourselves to the priests."

Show ourselves to the priests? That is what lepers do after they get well. At this point the leprosy was still clearly visible. Jesus was directing them to take a step of sheer faith.

And that is exactly what they did. Furthermore, "as they went, they were cleansed." They all believed. They all obeyed. They all were healed. Let us not underrate these men. Their faith was remarkable. Of course, what did they have to lose? What was the alternative?

However, nine of the ten lacked one very important quality--thankfulness. Only one returned to give Him thanks, and he did it with all his heart.

Notice, he gave thanks to the right Person. When Jesus heals, all glory belongs to Him. Let no man touch it.

Also, Jesus did not have to check to verify that the others were healed. He knew that all ten had been healed. He knew what happens when people believe His Word and act upon it.

It is interesting to observe what happens to some people when God heals them or blesses them in some way. New possibilities open up, and it is easy to become taken up with the possibilities and forget the Lord. The nine lepers had a lot of catching up to do; so off to the priests to get that clean bill of health and get on with life. Jesus had served His purpose and was no longer going to be a part of their lives. They were on their way to their own concerns.

Yes, a selfish heart is an unthankful heart. Part of God's indictment of an unbelieving world is "when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful" (Romans 1:21 KJV).

Jesus gave these ten lepers freedom to go their way. The test was to see what way that would be. One man's way was right back to the feet of Jesus.

A right heart is a thankful heart. Thanksgiving is more than a holiday. It is an attitude that flows naturally out of love, humility, and trust.

So, for what should we give thanks? We are to give thanks for His indescribable gift

(2 Corinthians 9:15).

We should give thanks for fellow believers. In his epistles Paul repeatedly expressed his thanks to God for the believers--yes, even the problem ones at Corinth (although he thanked God that he had baptized none of the Corinthian believers except Crispus and Gaius).

We are to thank God for all men (1 Timothy 2:1). Practicing this will sweeten us and help us break the habit of griping and grumbling. We should express thanks for (and to) our spouse, our parents, our children, and in general to all who love us, serve us, and enrich our lives.

We give thanks to God because gives us the victory (1 Corinthians 15:57) and always leads us in triumph in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14). We give thanks to the Father, who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light (Colossians 1:12). These are sufficient reasons for us to break forth spontaneously and often in heartfelt thanksgiving.

Reaching out and encompassing all of life are the Biblical commands to give thanks for (in behalf of) all things (Ephesians 5:20) and in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Prayer and petition with thanksgiving is God's effective antidote to anxiety (Philippians 4:6).

We are to be rooted and built up in Christ, established in the faith, "abounding therein with thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:7).

Whatever we do, we are to do "all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

When the Biblical commands and examples of thanksgiving become our established attitude and lifestyle, we will rise above discouragement, complaining, self-pity, bitterness, and all the other negative attitudes that work to defeat us and rob us of the joy of living. Thanksgiving is the voice of faith, and faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

No, a person who gives thanks in all things is not out of touch with reality. On the contrary, that person has learned to live in the greater, higher reality of God's all-sufficient grace and His sovereignty over all things. Such believers live in liberating victory in the everyday world that grinds down the average person. They have discovered the grace of God in the adversities of life. They are living proof that Jesus Christ is real. Wherever they go, they rekindle hope where hope has flickered and died.

To such a lifestyle of thanksgiving God is calling us.

The Healing of Two Blind Men (Bartimaeus and his friend).

As Jesus left the old city of Jericho and was coming into the new city, two blind men were sitting by the side of the road, begging (Matthew 20:29-43). Both Mark (Mark 10:46-52) and Luke (Luke 18:35-43) focus on just one of them. After all, what one did they all did; what happened to one happened to both; and they both responded together. It has been said that they had a common need, a common cry, a common faith, a common miracle, and a common commitment.

Mark tells us that the name of one of the men was Bartimaeus. Perhaps he was the more forward and expressive of the two, both verbally and in his faith. If so, that would be a reason for Mark and Luke to focus on him.

In Bartimaeus and his friend we have yet another example of the characteristics of faith, common characteristics that we have observed in many others.

First, we observe the persistence of his faith. As soon as he heard that Jesus was passing by, he began to yell out, "Jesus! Son of David! Have mercy on me!" He confessed his faith in Jesus as the Son of David. At that time the people were deeply divided over who Jesus was, and the leaders of the nation had firmly taken their stand against Him. So for Bartimaeus to make such an open confession of Jesus as the Son of David, he must have settled the fact in his heart and counted the cost of discipleship. Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of David, and therefore the Son of God. *That* was what really mattered. *That* was the core of his faith.

As they walked by, the people kept reprimanding Bartimaeus and telling him to shut up. But that had no effect on him or his friend. He just sat there shouting. He knew what he wanted; he knew that Jesus could give it to him; this was his golden moment of opportunity; and he was not going to let anything or anyone stop him!

Suddenly Jesus came to a halt and commanded the people to bring him to Him. Just as suddenly the attitude of the people changed.

By commanding, "Bring him to me," Jesus addressed the attitude of the crowd. Up until then the blind man had been a nuisance to them. Now they were made participants in the scenario of his healing. The ones who had been telling him to "pipe down" now were ordered to call him and even to bring him.

We observe carefully the dramatic response of Bartimaeus. First, he threw away his outer garment. This in itself was a dramatic and meaningful act of faith. Was this his "beggar's cloak," that he knew absolutely he would never need again? Perhaps so. Whatever the case, he knew

beyond any doubt that he was going to receive his sight. Otherwise, how could a blind man find his way back into the crowd to retrieve an essential item of clothing? This was no yard-sale jacket. Bartimaeus was a blind beggar and this outer garment was one of his very few essential possessions. Flinging it aside was an expression of his firm confidence that he would never need it again. Better days were ahead! Off with the old!

Also, we notice that he did not wait for the people to bring him to Jesus. He literally jumped up and came to Jesus. That is real, dynamic faith in action. It would be wonderful if everyone would respond to Christ's call like this!

Let us now examine Christ's response to Bartimaeus.

"What do you want me to do to you?" In other words, make your request specific and verbalize it. Even though Jesus probably observed that Bartimaeus was blind, Bartimaeus himself needed to make a definite expression of his need.

Next, Jesus had compassion on him (Matthew 20:34). Everything Jesus did, does, and will do for humanity flows out of His genuine and limitless compassion.

Jesus "touched their eyes" (Matthew 20:34). Genuine compassion is more than a feeling. It motivates action. It reaches out. It touches people--people who believe--right at the point of their need.

Luke records our Lord's next words: "Receive your sight" (Luke 18:42). Christ speaks the creative word. He speaks it done. By the Holy Spirit, the Father acts in concert with the word of the Son, and *it is done!*

"Your faith has saved you" (Luke 18:42); that is, "made you whole" (Mark 10:52). This does not mean that "faith" is some mystical force that in itself has the power to perform miraculous healings. Faith is an act of the will, fulfilling a necessary condition that secures the answer from God.

Also, we notice Christ's release: "Go your way." What will the man do with his healing and his new freedom? Let's watch. He "followed Jesus in the way." His way was to follow Jesus. Oh yes, he had lots of things to do and people to see. But his first commitment was to Christ. Everything else was secondary to this primary relationship, this first obligation, this highest joy.

He followed Jesus, "glorifying God" (Luke 18:43). Things get exciting when the power of God goes into action. "And all the people when they saw it, gave praise unto God" (Luke 18:43 KJV). Jesus turned the parade into a praise celebration, and Bartimaeus was leading the worship! Jesus still knows how to turn problem situations into praise celebrations for people who put their faith in Him and His word.

Finally, one more thought. Jesus gave Bartimaeus the freedom to go his way. His way was to follow Jesus. Right choice. Is that your choice? Come, follow Him.

Jesus Heals A Serious "Ear Problem" (The restoration of Malchus' ear).

This was the last healing miracle of Jesus during His earthly ministry. All four gospels record the event, but Luke alone records the healing of the ear. John informs us that the name of the high priest's servant was Malchus. The occasion must have been widely known by the time John wrote the Fourth Gospel.

Although the miracle itself is remarkable, the situation was more about Peter and his attitude and actions than about the ear itself.

At the arrest of Jesus, impulsive Peter took it upon himself to defend Him and the "cause." He whipped out his sword and took a swipe at Malchus's neck. Malchus ducked to his left just in time to save his head, losing only his right ear.

After reprimanding Peter, Jesus touched Malchus's ear and healed him. Whether Jesus reached down, picked up the severed ear, and reattached it to Malchus's head, or touched the wound and created a new ear, is not stated. The former is commonly understood to be what happened. Either way, the healing was supernatural and instantaneous.

Our Lord's attitude and actions are the main points of interest in this event. Here again we see the selfless compassion of Jesus. He had just come through the agony of Gethsemane; He was facing imminent crucifixion; the mob had arrived to arrest Him; yet He takes time to heal the severed ear of one of His adversaries. Furthermore, He does it calmly and with perfect composure.

What love!

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8 KJV).

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE HEALINGS CONTINUE:

Healings In The Book Of The Acts Of The Apostles

Jesus had promised His disciples, "He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (John 14:12 NKJV).

Also, before His ascension, Jesus promised that certain signs would follow believers, including, "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18 KJV). Without going into the textual matters regarding Mark 16, let it be affirmed here that the weight of evidence supports the view that these are the genuine words of Jesus.

Even during His earthly ministry Jesus commissioned His disciples, both "the twelve" and "the seventy," to go out and heal the sick (Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:1, 17). So is it any wonder that after the Day Of Pentecost the apostles and other believers would continue to do so? They had both the promises and the power. "And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20 KJV).

The Lame Man At The Beautiful Gate.

In view of what has just been said, it was to be expected that when Peter and John went up into the temple to pray one afternoon, there would be a power encounter with a lame man at the gate called Beautiful. We read the account in Acts 3:1-10.

Let us consider this event for a moment. This man was born lame and had been lame all of his life. Day by day as he sat at the gate to beg, Jesus had passed by him several times but had never healed him. Why? Because there was a moment when his healing would have maximum impact as a divine confirmation of the gospel. That moment came the afternoon that Peter and John came by.

We do not know for sure, but could it be that every time Peter and John entered the temple with Jesus and watched the Master walk on by this man, they wondered why? Could it be that Peter and perhaps even John were incubating a desire to see this man healed? and now, after the Day Of Pentecost, they knew that their time had come to do what Jesus promised they could do? The possibility is intriguing.

We also notice that the lame man gave no evidence that he expected a miracle. On the contrary, he was merely asking for alms. When the apostles stopped, Peter said simply, "Look at us." At that point the man's expectation did not go beyond receiving a coin or two. If he had any faith at all, it was the result of his previous exposure to the teaching and ministry of Jesus in the temple and possibly by seeing and hearing the activities and witness of the early believers who "continued daily with one accord in the temple" since Pentecost (Acts 2:46, 47).

Peter knew what he had, and it was worth far more than silver or gold. He had: the promise of God; the delegated authority of the risen and glorified Jesus Christ of Nazareth; and the power of the Holy Spirit. He also had a simple yet resolute assurance of these absolute verities.

After commanding the lame man to walk, Peter assisted--even impelled--him to act. The apostle grabbed him by the right hand and pulled upward. This motion shifted the man out of the settled position he had been in all his life and forced him to react. In reacting to the apostle's upward pull, the lame man felt strength in his feet and ankles. Reaction led to volition; that is, he responded to this sensation by an act of the will. He chose to do what he had never done and never had been able to do--and to do so with vigor. At this point his faith in the name of Jesus Christ was so definite that instead of merely rising up and walking, he leaped up and kept leaping around as he went with the apostles into the temple.

How else would we expect him to act? He had a power encounter with Jesus Christ. The miraculous can change the monotonous into the tumultuous.

Early Apostolic Miracles.

In Acts 5:12 through 16 we read that many signs and wonders were done by the hands of the apostles, so that people laid the sick in the streets, hoping that the shadow of Peter would pass over them. "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about Jerusalem, bringing sick folks and them which were vexed with unclean spirits, and they were healed every one" (verse 16, KJV).

Of course, Peter's shadow had no miraculous healing power in itself. Coming under his shadow was an act of faith on the part of the people, and God honored that faith. However, most of the healing came by the laying on of the hands of the apostles.

Also, faith encourages faith. Faith receives what it believes for. This encourages others to believe--and to receive. Still others hear what God is doing, and they also believe and receive. This dynamic continues and expands, resulting in the mass miracles and mass evangelism we witness in this passage.

Deacons plus.

Stephen and Philip were among the first deacons. They soon graduated from that ministry into evangelism confirmed by miracles.

"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8 KJV).

In Samaria, the people all paid attention to what Philip preached, "hearing and seeing the miracles which he did" (Acts 8:5, 6 KJV).

In Acts, chapter 9, we read the account of the dramatic conversion of Saul of Tarsus (later known as Paul). This event included a Jewish believer by the name of Ananias who came to Saul by divine direction, put his hands on him, and declared him healed of his blindness. Paul later recounted this part of his experience (Acts 22:12, 13).

Now, Ananias was not an apostle. He is described only as "a certain disciple" (Acts 9:10), who was "a devout man according to the law" (Acts 22:12).

So, healing miracles were not given to apostles only. They were given to believers.

"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:14, 15 KJV).

". . . to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit " (see 1 Corinthians 12:9, 30).

Peter At Lydda (Lod).

In Acts 9:32-35 we read that as Peter traveled throughout Judea, he came to a city called Lydda to visit the believers there. When he arrived, he met a man named Aneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years.

By the same spiritual authority and resources that had healed the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple, Peter said, "Aneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed." He arose immediately and made his bed (Acts 9:34 NKJV).

Direct and simple. Peter simply declared that Jesus Christ was healing Aneas as he spoke. Peter and the Lord were acting in concert. God was ready to do it. It had been accomplished provisionally at the cross (by Christ's stripes we were healed--1 Peter 2:24). Peter knew that God acted when people believe, speak and act in Jesus' name. Peter knew that the Holy Spirit had filled him and was energizing in him to honor his faith, perform His own word and make it operative. So Peter simply declared it done.

On his part, Aneas had to accept the miracle. He had to believe, obey, and act. Had he objected on the grounds that he was paralyzed and could not get up, nothing would have happened.

But Aneas believed the authority of the name of Jesus Christ. He put his faith into action. By an obedient act of the will he got up immediately. The result? "All that dwelt at Lydda and Saron [Sharon] saw him and turned to the Lord" (verse 35 KJV).

Immediately following this, the disciples at Joppa sent for Peter. Tabitha (Dorcas) had just died. She had devoted herself to helping other people, and her good works and godly influence would be greatly missed.

Peter arrived, dismissed the weeping widows (they were grieving rather than believing), knelt down and prayed; then he told Tabitha to arise. She opened her eyes and sat up. Peter gave her his hand, lifted her up, and presented her alive to the waiting believers. Again at Joppa, many turned to the Lord.

Attention now turns to the ministry and miracles of Paul.

Paul and Barnabas In The Region of Lycaonia.

During his first missionary journey, Paul along with Barnabas came to Iconium (Acts 13:51). Paul and Barnabas remained there an extended period of time, "speaking boldly in the Lord, which [who] gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3 KJV).

Because of an impending assault against them, Paul and Barnabas fled to Lystra and Derbe, other cities of Lycaonia. In Acts 14:8 - 10 we read that at Lystra a man who from birth was unable to walk or even stand listened to Paul. Paul looked at him intently and recognized that he

had faith to be healed. Paul called out to him with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped up and began to walk.

As we examine this healing, we notice again the spoken word of the apostle and the active faith of the recipient.

How Paul perceived that the man had faith to believe we do not know for certain. Perhaps the fact was revealed to Paul by the Holy Spirit. Perhaps Paul noticed a responsiveness in the man's expressions and actions. Either way, Paul knew that the man believed and that God was ready to honor his faith. So Paul (like Peter in the previous event) simply commanded the man to act. Again, like the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple, the man responded beyond the command. Instead of just standing up straight on his feet, he leaped up and began walking.

Let's believe God for the full answer, the full miracle.

Handkerchiefs and Aprons: Special Miracles At Ephesus.

At Ephesus Paul had to work with his hands to support himself and his team. Paul was a tentmaker. On the job he wore an apron. Also, there was no air conditioning during hot weather; so he used a handkerchief to wipe off the perspiration.

During the hours that Paul was on the job he did not have the freedom to respond to requests to go and pray for people and heal them. So he did the best thing possible. He took off his apron or handkerchief and gave it to whoever came to him, to take back and lay it on the body of the sick person.

God honored faith and this became a special arrangement that God used to bring healing to people. No power resided in Paul's handkerchiefs or aprons. Accepting his handkerchiefs and

aprons was an act of faith on the part of the people, and God honored that faith. People were healed and demons were exorcised. This is somewhat amusing to think about. Imagine the demons seeing Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons, and fleeing. "That's Paul's hanky! Let's get out of here!"

Eutychus: Falling Asleep In Church Can Be Hazardous To Your Health.

Toward the end of his third missionary journey, Paul came to Troas (Acts 20:6-12). On a Sunday evening he met with the church. Paul had many important things to say to them and continued preaching until midnight.

Up in the third loft a young man by the name of Eutychus was sitting in an open window. The longer Paul preached, the more sleepy Eutychus became. Suddenly, he lost his balance and fell backward out of the window. The people rushed downstairs and found him dead. Paul fell on him and put his arms around him. In this Paul might have been following the example of Elisha (2 Kings 4:34). Eutychus was restored to life and healed of his injuries.

From Shipwreck To Revival: The Healing Of Publius's Father.

On his way to Rome as a prisoner, Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta. The father of Publius, the Roman official, contracted a severe intestinal disorder. We read the account in Acts 28:8 and 9.

The record does not say whether Paul was asked to come in and heal Publius's father or whether he did so on his own initiative. Either way, Paul went in, laid his hands on the man, and healed him. News of this healing quickly spread throughout the island, and other sick people living there came and were also healed. Many were converted.

Paul's Testimony.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4 KJV).

In his epistle to the Romans he testified that God "made the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Romans 15:18, 19 KJV).

That was God's *modus operandi*. It still is today.

"Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up" (James 5:14, 15 KJV).